

An EXPOSITION of the Gospel of JOHN

by A.W. Pink

Volume Two

John 8:1 – 15:1-6

Grace-eBooks.com

An EXPOSITION of the Gospel of JOHN

by A.W. Pink

Volume Two

John 8:1 – 15:1-6

Grace-eBooks.com

JOHN 8:1-11

CHRIST AND THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN

We begin with the customary Analysis: —

1. Jesus retires to the mount of Olives: verse 1.
2. Jesus teaching in the temple: verse 2.
3. The Pharisees confront Him with an adulterous woman: verses 3-6.
4. Christ turns the light upon them: verses 6-8.
5. The Pharisees overcome by the light: verse 9.
6. The woman left alone with Christ: verse 10.
7. The woman dismissed with a warning: verse 11.

In this series of expositions of John's Gospel we have sedulously avoided technical matters, preferring to confine ourselves to that which would provide food for the soul. But in the present instance we deem it necessary to make an exception. The passage which is to be before us has long been the subject of controversy. Its authenticity has been questioned even by godly men. John 7:53 to 8:11 inclusive is not found in a number of the most important of the ancient manuscripts. The R.V. places a question mark against this passage. Personally we have not the slightest doubt but that it forms a part of the inspired Word of God, and that for the following reasons:

First, if our passage be a spurious one then we should have to pass straight from John 7:52 to 8:12. Let the reader try this, and note the effect; and then let him go back to John 7:52 and read straight through to John 8:14. Which seems the more natural and reads the more smoothly?

Second, if we omit the first eleven verses of John 8, and start the chapter with verse 12, several questions will rise unavoidably and prove very difficult to answer satisfactorily. For example: “Then spake Jesus” — when? What simple and satisfactory answer can be found in the second

part of John 7? But give John 8:1-11 its proper place, and the answer is, Immediately after the interruption recorded in verse 3. “Then spake Jesus again unto them” (verse 12) — unto whom? Go back to the second half of John 7 and see if it furnishes any decisive answer. But give John 8:2 a place, and all is simple and plain. Again in verse 13 we read, “The Pharisees therefore said unto him”: this was in the temple (verse 20). But how came the Pharisees there? John 7:45 shows them elsewhere. But bring in John 8:1-11 and this difficulty vanishes, for John 8:2 shows that this was the day following.

In the third place, the contents of John 8:1-11 are in full accord with the evident design of this section of the Gospel. The method followed in these chapters is most significant. In each instance we find the Holy Spirit records some striking incident in our Lord’s life, which serves to introduce and illustrate the teaching which follows it. In chapter 5 Christ quickens the impotent man, and makes that miracle the text of the sermon He preached immediately after it. In John 6 He feeds the hungry multitude, and right after gives the two discourses concerning Himself as the Bread of life. In John 7 Christ’s refusal to go up to the Feast publicly and openly manifest His glory, is made the background for that wondrous word of the *future manifestation* of the Holy Spirit through believers — issuing from them as “rivers of living water.” *And the same principle may be observed here in John 8.* In John 8:12 Christ declares, “I am the light of the world,” and the first eleven verses supply us with a most striking illustration and solemn demonstration of the power of that “light.” Thus it may be seen that there is an indissoluble link between the incident recorded in John 8:1-11 and the teaching of our Lord immediately following.

Finally, as we shall examine these eleven verses and study their contents, endeavoring to sound their marvelous depths, it will be evident, we trust, to every spiritual intelligence, that no uninspired pen drew the picture therein described. The internal evidence, then,

and the spiritual indications (apprehended and appreciated only by those who enter into God's thoughts) are far more weighty than external considerations. The one who is led and taught by the Spirit of God need not waste valuable time examining ancient manuscripts for the purpose of discovering whether or not this portion of the Bible is really a part of God's own Word.

Our passage emphasizes once more the abject condition of Israel. Again and again does the Holy Spirit call our attention to the fearful state that Israel was in during the days of Christ's earthly ministry. In chapter 1 we see the ignorance of the Jews as to the identity of the Lord's forerunner (John 1:14), and blind to the Divine Presence in their midst (John 1:26). In chapter 2 we have illustrated the joyless state of the nation, and are shown their desecration of the Father's House. In chapter 3 we behold a member of the Sanhedrin dead in trespasses and sins, needing to be born again (John 3:7), and the Jews quibbling with John's disciples about purifying (John 3:25). In chapter 4 we discover the callous indifference of Israel toward their Gentile neighbors — "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). In chapter 5 we have a portrayal of God's covenant people in the great multitude of impotent folk, "blind, halt and withered." In chapter 6 they are represented as hungry, yet having no appetite for the Bread of life. In chapter 7 the leaders of the nation send officers to arrest Christ. And now in chapter 8 Israel is contemplated as Jehovah's unfaithful wife — "adulterous."

["Jesus went unto the mount of Olives" \(John 8:1\).](#)

This points a contrast from the closing verse of the previous chapter. There we read, Every man went unto his own house. Here we are told, "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." We believe that this contrast conveys a double thought, in harmony with the peculiar character of this fourth Gospel. All through John two things concerning Christ are made prominent: His essential glory and His voluntary humiliation. Here, the Holy Spirit presents Him to us as the eternal Son of God, but also as the Son come down from heaven, made flesh. Thus we are given to behold, on the one hand, His uniqueness, His peerless excellency; and on the other, the depths of shame into which He descended. Frequently these are placed almost side by side. Thus in chapter 4, we read of Him, "wearied with his

journey” (verse 6); and then in the verses that follow, His Divine glories shine forth. Other examples will recur to the reader. So here in the passage before us. “Jesus went unto the mount of Olives” (following John 7:53) suggests the elevation of Christ. But no doubt it also tells of the humiliation of the Savior. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head (Matthew 8:20): therefore, when “every man went unto his own house,” “Jesus went unto the mount of Olives,” for He “owned” no “house” down here. He who was rich for our sakes became poor.

“And early in the morning he came again into the temple”
(John 8:2).

There is nothing superfluous in Scripture. Each one of these scenes has been drawn by the Heavenly Artist, so we may be fully assured that every line, no matter how small, has a meaning and value. If we keep steadily before us the subject of this picture we shall be the better able to appreciate its varied tints. The theme of our chapter is the outshining of the Light of life. How appropriate then is this opening word: the early “morning” is the hour which introduces the daylight!

“And early in the morning he came again into the temple.” This word also conveys an important practical lesson for us, inasmuch as Christ here leaves an example that we should follow His steps. In the first sermon of our Lord’s recorded in the New Testament we find that He said,

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness”
(Matthew 6:33),

and He ever practiced what he preached. The lesson which our Redeemer here exemplified is, that we need to begin the day by seeking the face and blessing of God! The Divine promise is, “They that seek me early shall find me” (Proverbs 8:17). How different would be our lives if we really began each day with God! Thus only can we obtain that fresh supply of grace which will give the needed strength for the duties and conflicts of the hours that follow.

[“And all the people came unto him” \(John 8:2\).](#)

This is another instance where the word “all” must be understood in a modified sense. Again and again is it used relatively rather than absolutely. For example, in John 3:26 we read of the disciples of John coming to their master in complaint that Christ was attracting so many to Himself: “all come to him,” they said. Again, in John 6:45 the Lord Jesus declared, “They shall be all taught of God.” So here, “all the people came unto him.” These and many other passages which might be cited should prevent us from falling into the errors of Universalism. For example, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all unto me” (John 12:32), does not mean all without exception. It is a very patent fact that everybody is not “drawn” to Christ. The “all” in John 12:32 is *all without distinction*. So here “all the people came unto him” (John 8:2) signifies all that were in the temple, that is, all kinds and conditions of men, men of varied age and social standing, men from the different tribes.

[“And he sat down, and taught them” \(John 8:2\).](#)

Jesus *stood*; Jesus walked; Jesus sat. Each of these expressions in John’s Gospel conveys a distinctive moral truth. Jesus “stood” directs attention to the dignity and blessedness of His person, and it is very solemn to note that in no single instance (where this expression occurs) was the glory of His person recognized: cf. John 1:26; 7:37 and what follows; John 20:14, 19, 26; 21:4. Jesus “walked” refers to the public manifestation of Himself: see our notes on John 7:1. Jesus “sat” points to His condescending lowliness, meekness and grace: see John 4:6; 6:3; 12:15.

[“And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him” \(John 8:3-6\).](#)

Following the miscarriage of their plans on the previous day — through the failure of the officers to arrest Christ (John 7:45) — the

enemies of Christ hit upon a new scheme: they sought to impale Him on the horns of a dilemma. The roar of the “lion” had failed; now we are to behold the wiles of the “serpent.”

The awful malignity of the Lord’s enemies is evident on the surface. They brought this adulterous woman to Christ not because they were shocked at her conduct, still less because they were grieved that God’s holy law had been broken. Their object was to use this woman to exploit her sin and further their own evil designs. With coldblooded indelicacy they acted, employing the guilt of their captive to accomplish their evil intentions against Christ. Their motive cannot be misinterpreted. They were anxious to discredit our Lord before the people. They did not wait until they could interrogate Him in private, but, interrupting as He was teaching the people, they rudely challenged Him to solve what must have seemed to them an unsolvable enigma.

The problem by which they sought to defy Infinite Wisdom was this: A woman had been taken in the act of adultery, and the law required that she should be stoned. Of this there is no room for doubt, see Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. ¹⁸ “What sayest thou?” they asked. An insidious question, indeed. Had He said, “Let her go,” they could then accuse Him as being an enemy against the law of God, and His own word “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matthew verse 17) had been falsified. But if He answered, “Stone her,” they would have ridiculed the fact that He was the “friend of publicans and sinners.” No doubt they were satisfied that they had Him completely cornered. On the one hand, if He ignored the charge they brought against this guilty woman, they could accuse Him of compromising with sin; on the other hand, if He passed sentence on her, what became of His own word, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17)? Here, then, was the dilemma: if Christ palliated the wickedness of this woman, where was His respect for the holiness of God and the righteousness of His law; but if He condemned her, what became of His claim that He had come here to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10)? And yet of

what avail was their satanic subtlety in the presence of God manifest in flesh!

Ere passing on it may be well to notice how this incident furnishes an illustration of the fact that wicked men can quote the Scriptures when they imagine that it will further their evil designs: “Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned.” But what cared they for the law? They were seeking to turn the point of the Spirit’s “sword” against the One they hated; soon they were to feel its sharp edge of themselves. Let us not be deceived then and conclude that every one who quotes Scripture to us must, necessarily, be a God-fearing man. Those who quote the Scriptures to condemn others are frequently the guiltiest of all. Those who are so solicitous to point to the mote in another’s eye, generally have a beam in their own.

But there is far more here than meets the eye at first glance, or second too. The whole incident supplies a most striking portrayal of what is developed at length in the epistle to the Romans. It is not difficult to discern here (skulking behind the scenes) the hideous features of the great Enemy of God and His people. The hatred of these scribes and Pharisees was fanned by the inveterate enmity of the Serpent against the woman’s “Seed.” The subject is profoundly mysterious, but Scripture supplies more than one plain hint that Satan is permitted to challenge the very character of God — the book of Job, the third of Zechariah, and Revelation 12:10 are proofs of that. No doubt one reason why the Lord God suffers this is for the instruction of the unfallen angels — cf. Ephesians 3:10.

The problem presented to Christ by His enemies was no mere local one. So far as human reason can perceive it was the profoundest moral problem which ever could or can confront God Himself. That problem was how justice and mercy could be harmonized. The law of righteousness imperatively demands the punishment of its transgressor. To set aside that demand would be to introduce a reign of anarchy. Moreover, God is holy as well as righteous; and holiness burns against evil, and cannot allow that which is defiled to enter His presence. What, then, is to become of the poor sinner? A transgressor of the law he certainly is; and equally manifest is his moral pollution. His only hope lies in mercy; his salvation is

possible only by grace. But how can mercy be exercised when the sword of justice bars her way? How can grace flow forth except by slighting holiness? Ah, human wisdom could never have found an answer to such questions. It is evident that these scribes and Pharisees thought of none. And we are fully assured that at the beginning Satan himself could see no solution to this mighty problem. But blessed be His name, God has “found a way” whereby His banished ones may be restored (2 Samuel 14:13, 14). What this is we shall see hinted at in the remainder of our passage.

Let us observe how each of the essential elements in this problem of all problems is presented in the passage before us. We may summarize them thus: First, we have there the person of that blessed One who had come to seek and to save that which was lost. Second, we have a sinner, a guilty sinner, one who could by no means clear herself. Third, the law was against her: the law she had broken, and the declared penalty of it was death. Fourth, the guilty sinner was brought before the Savior Himself, and was indicted by His enemies. Such, then, was the problem now presented to Christ. Would grace stand helpless before law? If not, wherein lay the solution? Let us attend carefully to what follows.

“But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground” (John 8:6).

This was the first thing that He here did. That there was a symbolical significance to His action goes without saying, and what this is we are not left to guess. Scripture is its own interpreter. This was not the first time that the Lord had written “with his finger.” In Exodus 31:18 we read, “And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, *written with the finger of God.*” When, then, our Lord wrote on the ground (from the ground must the “tables of stone” have been taken), it was as though He had said, You remind Me of the law! Why, it was My finger which wrote that law! Thus did He show these Pharisees that He had come here, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. His writing on the ground, then, was (symbolically) a ratification of God’s righteous law. But so blind were His would-be accusers they discerned not the significance of His act.

“So when they continued asking him” (John 8:7).

It is evident that our Lord’s enemies mistook His silence for embarrassment. They no more grasped the force of His action of writing on the ground, than did Belshazzar understand the writing of that same Hand on the walls of his palace. Emboldened by His silence, and satisfied that they had Him cornered, they continued to press their question upon Him. O the persistency of evil-doers! How often they put to shame our lack of perseverance and importunity.

“So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7).

This, too, has a far deeper meaning than what appears on the surface. God’s Law was a holy and a righteous one, and here we find the Lawgiver Himself turning its white light upon these men who really had so little respect for it. Christ was here intimating that they, His would-be *accusers*, were no fit subjects to demand the enforcement of the law’s sentence. None but a holy hand should administer the perfect law. In principle, we may see here the great Adversary and Accuser *reprimanded*. Satan may stand before the angel of the Lord to resist “the high priest” (Zechariah 3:1), but, morally, he is the last one who should insist on the maintenance of righteousness. And how strikingly this reprimanding of the Pharisees by Christ adumbrated what we read of in Zechariah 3:2 (“The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan”) scarcely needs to be pointed out.

“And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground” (John 8:8).

Profoundly significant was this, and unspeakably blessed. The symbolic meaning of it is plainly hinted at in the word “again”: the Lord wrote on the ground *a second time*. And of what did that speak? Once more the Old Testament Scriptures supply the answer. The first “tables of stone” were dashed to the ground by Moses, and broken. A second set was therefore written by God. And what became of the second “tables of stone”? They were laid up in the ark (Exodus 40:20), and were covered by the blood- sprinkled mercy-seat! Here, then, Christ was giving more than a hint of how He

would save those who were, by the law, condemned to death. It was not that the law would be set aside: far from it. As His first stooping down and with His finger writing on the ground intimated, the law would be “established.” But as He stooped down and wrote the second time, He signified that the shed blood of an innocent substitute should come between the law and those it condemned!

“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last” (John 8:9).

Thus was “the strong man bound” (Matthew 12:29). Christ’s enemies had thought to ensnare Him by the law of Moses; instead, they had its searching light turned upon themselves. Grace had not defied, but had upheld the law! One sentence from the lips of Holiness incarnate and they were all silenced, all convicted, and all departed. At another time, a self- righteous Pharisee might boast of his lastings, his tithes and his prayers; but when God turns the light on a man’s heart, his moral and spiritual depravity become apparent even to himself, and shame shuts his lips. So it was here. Not a word had Christ uttered against the law; in nowise had He condoned the woman’s sin. Unable to find any ground for accusation against Him, completely baffled in their evil designs, convicted by their consciences, they slunk away: “beginning at the eldest,” because he had the most sin to hide and the most reputation to preserve. And in the conduct of these men we have a clear intimation of how the wicked will act in the last great Day. Now, they may proclaim their self-righteousness, and talk about the injustice of eternal punishment. But then, when the light of God flashes upon them, and their guilt and ruin are fully exposed, they shall, like these Pharisees, be speechless.

“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out.” There is a solemn warning here for sinners who may be exercised in mind over their condition. Here were men who were “convicted by their own conscience,” yet instead of this causing them to cast themselves at the feet of Christ, it resulted in them leaving Christ! Nothing short of the Holy Spirit’s quickening will ever bring a soul into saving contact with the Lord Jesus.

“And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst” (John 8:9).

This is exceedingly striking. These scribes and Pharisees had challenged Christ from the law. He met them on their own ground, and vanquished them by the law.

“When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath *no man* condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee” (John 8:10, 11).

The law required two witnesses before its sentence could be executed (Deuteronomy 19:15), yet, those witnesses must assist in the carrying out of the sentence (Deuteronomy 17:7). But here not a single witness was left to testify against this woman who had merely been indicted. Thus the law was powerless to touch her. What, then, remained? Why, the way was now clear for Christ to act in “*grace and truth*.”

“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

No doubt the question occurs to many of our readers, Was this woman saved at the time she left Christ? Personally, we believe that she was. We believe so because she did not leave Christ when she had opportunity to do so; because she addressed Him as “Lord” (contrast “Master” of the Pharisees in verse 4); and because Christ said to her, “Neither do I condemn thee.” But, as another has said, “In looking at these incidents of Scripture, we need not ask if the objects of the grace act in the intelligence of the story. It is enough for us that here was a sinner exposed in the presence of Him who came to meet sin and put it away. Whoever takes the place of this woman meets the word that clears of condemnation, just as the publicans and sinners with whom Christ eats in Luke 15, set forth this, that if one takes the place of the sinner and the outcast, he is at once received. So with the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver.

There is no intelligence of their condition, yet they set forth that which, if one take, it is representative. To make it clear, one might ask, 'Are you as sinful as this woman, as badly lost as that sheep or piece of silver?'" (Malachi Taylor)

"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." How striking and how blessed is this sequel to what has been before us! When Christ wrote on the ground the second time (not before), the "accusers" of the guilty departed! And then, after the last accuser had disappeared, the Lord said, "Neither do I condemn thee." How perfect the picture! And to complete it, Christ added, "Go, and sin no more," which is still His word to those who have been saved by grace. And the ground, the righteous ground, on which He pronounced this verdict "Neither do I condemn thee," was, that in a short time He was going to be "condemned" in her stead. Finally, note the order of these two words of Christ to this woman who owned Him as "Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). It was not, "Go and sin no more, and I will not condemn thee," for that would have been a death-knell rather than good news in her ears. Instead, the Savior said, "Neither do I condemn thee." And to every one who takes the place this woman was brought into, the word is, "There is therefore now *no condemnation*" (Romans 8:1). "And sin no more" placed her, as we are placed, under the *constraint* of His love.

This incident then contains far more than that which was of local and ephemeral significance. It, in fact, raises the basic question of, How can mercy and justice be harmonized? How can grace flow forth except by slighting holiness? In the scene here presented to our view we are shown, not by a closely reasoned out statement of doctrine, but in symbolic action, that this problem is not insoluble to Divine wisdom. Here was a concrete case of a guilty sinner leaving the presence of Christ un-condemned. And it was neither because the law had been slighted nor sin palliated. The

requirements of the law were strictly complied with, and her sin was openly condemned — “sin *no more*.” Yet, she herself, was not condemned. She was dealt with according to “*grace and truth*.” Mercy flowed out to her, yet not at the expense of justice. Such, in brief, is a summary, of this marvelous narrative; a narrative which, verily, no man ever invented and no uninspired pen ever recorded.

This blessed incident not only anticipated the epistle to the Romans, but it also outlines, by vivid symbols, the Gospel of the grace of God. The Gospel not only announces a Savior for sinners, but it also explains how God can save them consistently with the requirements of His character. As Romans 1:17 tells us, in the Gospel is “the righteousness of God revealed.” And this is precisely what is set forth here in John 8.

The entire incident is a most striking amplification and exemplification of John 1:17: “For the law was given by Moses, but *grace and truth* came by Jesus Christ.” The grace of God never conflicts with His law, but, on the contrary, upholds its authority,

“As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign *through righteousness* unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21).

But as to how grace might reign “through righteousness” was a problem which God alone could solve, and *Christ’s* solution of it here marks Him as none other than “God manifest in flesh.” With what blessed propriety, then, is this incident placed in the fourth Gospel, the special design of which is to display the Divine glory of the Lord Jesus!

Perhaps a separate word needs to be said on verse 7, in connection with which some have experienced a difficulty; and that is, Do these words of Christ enunciate a principle which we are justified in using? If so, under what circumstances? It is essential to bear in mind that Christ was not here speaking as Judge, but as One in the place of the Servant. The principle involved has been well stated thus,

“We have no right to say to an official who in condemning culprits or in prosecuting them is simply discharging a public duty, ‘See that your own hands be clean, and your own heart pure before you condemn another’; but we have a perfect right to silence a private individual who is officiously and not officially exposing another’s guilt, by bidding him remember that he has a beam in his own eye which he must first be rid of” (Dr. Dods).

The “scribes and Pharisees” who brought the guilty adulteress to Christ must be viewed as *representatives of their nation* (as Nicodemus in John 3 and the impotent man in John 5). What, then, was the spiritual condition of Israel at that time? It was precisely that of this guilty woman: an “evil and adulterous generation” (Matthew 12:37) Christ termed them. But they were blinded by self-righteousness: they discerned not their awful condition, and knew not that they, equally with the Gentiles, were under the curse that had descended upon all from our father, Adam. Moreover; they were under a deeper guilt than the Gentiles — they stood convicted of the additional crime of having broken their covenant with the Lord. They were, in fact, the unfaithful, the adulterous wife of Jehovah (see Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2, etc.). What, then, did Jehovah’s law call for in such a case? The answer to this question is furnished in Numbers 5, which sets forth “the law of jealousy,” and describes the Divinely-ordered procedure for establishing the guilt of an unfaithful wife.

We cannot here quote the whole of Numbers 5, but would ask the reader to turn to and read verses 11-31 of that chapter. We quote now verses 17, 24, 27: — “And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water... And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse: and the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter... And when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that, if she be defiled, *and have done trespass against her husband*, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot: and the woman shall be a curse among her people!”

What light these verses cast upon our Lord's dealings with the Pharisees (representatives of Israel) here in John 8. "Water" is the well-known emblem of the Word (Ephesians 5:26, etc.). This water is here termed "holy." It was to be in an earthen vessel (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7). This water was to be mixed with "the dust which is in the floor of the tabernacle." — Thus the water becomes "bitter water," and the woman was made to drink it. The result would be (in case she was guilty) that her guilt would be *outwardly evidenced* in the swelling of her belly (symbol of pride) and the rotting of her thigh — her strength turned to corruption. Now put these separate items together, and is it not precisely what we find here in John 8? The Son of God is there incarnate, "made flesh," an "earthen vessel." The "holy water" is seen in His holy words — "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." In stooping down and writing on the floor of the temple, He mingled "the dust" with it. As He did this it became "bitter" to the proud Pharisees. In the conviction of their consciences we see how "bitter," and in going out, one by one, abashed, we see the withering of their strength! And thus was the guilt of Jehovah's unfaithful wife made fully manifest!

The following questions bear upon the next chapter: —

1. What is meant by "the world" in verse 12? Do not jump to conclusions.
2. What kind of light does "the world" enjoy? verse 12
3. What is "the light of life"? verse 12.
4. To what "witness of the Father" was Christ referring? verse 18.
5. What does "die in your sins" (verse 21) prove concerning the Atonement?
6. What is the meaning of verse 31?
7. What does the truth make free from? verse 32.

JOHN 8:12-32

CHRIST, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The following is a Summary of the passage which is to be before us:

1. Christ the Light of the world: verse 12.
2. The Pharisees' denial: verse 13.
3. Christ enforces His claim to absolute Deity: verses 14-18.
4. The Pharisees' question and Christ's reply: verses 19, 20.
5. Christ's solemn warning to the Pharisees: verses 21-24.
6. The Pharisees' question and Christ's reply: verses 25-29.
7. The many who "believed" and Christ's warning to them; verses 30- 32.

The first division of John 8 forms a most striking and suitable introduction to the first verse of our present lesson, which, in turn, supplies the key to what follows in the remainder of the chapter. The Holy Spirit records here one of the precious discourses of "The Wonderful Counsellor," a discourse broken by the repeated interruptions of His enemies. Christ announces Himself as "the light of the world", but this is prefaced by an incident which gives wonderful force to that utterance.

As we saw in our last chapter, the first eleven verses of John 8 describe a venomous assault made upon the Savior by the scribes and Pharisees. A determined effort was made to discredit Him before the people. A woman taken in adultery was brought, the penalty of the Mosaic law was defined, and then the question was put to Christ, "But what sayest thou?" We are not left to speculate as to their motive: the passage tells us "This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him." Think of it! They imagined that they

could substantiate an accusation against the Lawgiver Himself! What perversity: what blindness: what depravity! Yet how effectively this serves as a dark back-ground on which to display the better, “the light”! Nor is that all that this introduction effected.

In our exposition of these verses we intimated that what was there presented to Christ was the problem — altogether too profound for creature wisdom — how to harmonize justice and mercy. The woman was guilty; of that there could be no doubt. The sentence of the law was plainly defined. What reply, then, could Christ make to the open challenge, “What sayest thou?” There is little need for us to repeat what was said in the previous chapter, though the theme is a most captivating one. By symbolic action our Lord showed that it was not the Divine intention for mercy to be exercised at the expense of justice. He intimated that the law would be enforced. But by writing on the ground the second time, He reminded His would-be accusers that a shelter from the exposed law was planned, and that a blood-sprinkled covering would protect the guilty one from its accusing voice. Thus did the Redeemer intimate that God’s righteousness would be magnified in the Divine method of saving sinners, and that His holiness would shine forth with unsullied splendor. And “light” is the emblem of holiness and righteousness! Fitting introduction, then, was this for our Lord’s announcement of Himself as “the light of the world.”

But not only did the malice of the Lord’s enemies supply a dark background to bring into welcome relief the outshining of the Divine Light; not only did their attack supply Christ with an opportunity for Him to manifest Himself as the Vindicator of God’s holiness and righteousness; but we may also discover a further reason for the Holy Spirit describing this incident at the beginning of our chapter. Following His symbolic action of writing on the ground, the Lord uttered one brief sentence, and one only, to His tempters, but that one was quite sufficient to rout them completely. “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” was what He said. The effect was startling: “Being convicted by their conscience” they “went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.” It was the holy “light” of God which smote

their sin-darkened understandings, and their departure demonstrated the power of that light! Observe, too, the words of Christ to the adulterous woman: “Go,” He said, not “in peace”; but “GO, and *sin no more*.” How that evidenced the spotless purity of “the light”! Thus we see, once more, the great importance of studying and weighing the context; for here, as everywhere, it gives meaning to what follows.

“Then spake Jesus again unto them” (John 8:12). “*Then*” signifies after the departure of the Pharisees and after the adulterous woman had gone. “Then spake Jesus again *unto them*.” This takes us back to the second verse of our chapter where we are told that in the early morning Christ entered the temple, and, as all the people came unto Him, He sat down and taught them. Now, after the rude interruption from certain of the scribes and Pharisees, He resumed His teaching of the people, and spake “again unto them.” And herein we may discover, once more, the perfections of the God-man. The disagreeable interruption had in no wise disturbed His composure. Though fully aware of the malignant design of the Pharisees, He possessed His soul in patience. Without exhibiting the slightest perturbation, refusing to be turned aside from the task He was engaged in, He returned at once to the teaching of the people. How differently we act under provocation! To us disturbances are only too frequently perturbances. If only we realized that everything which enters our life is ordered by God, and we acted in accord with this, then should we maintain our composure and conduct ourselves with unruffled serenity. But only one perfect life has been lived on this earth; and our innumerable imperfections only serve to emphasize the uniqueness of that life.

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

This is the second of the “I am” titles of Christ found in this fourth Gospel. It calls for most careful consideration. We may observe, in the first place, that this announcement by Christ was in full accord with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Through Isaiah God said concerning the Coming One,

“I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6).

And again,

“And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

And again, He was denominated “the sun of righteousness” who should arise “with healing in his wings” or “beams” (Malachi 4:2).

“I am the light of the world.” We may notice, in the second place, that “light” is one of the three things which God is said to be. In John 4:24 we are told, “God is spirit.” In 1 John 1:5, “God is light”; and in 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” These expressions relate to the nature of God, what He is in Himself. Hence, when Christ affirmed “I am the light of the world,” He announced His absolute Deity. Believers are said to be “light *in the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:8). But Christ Himself was “the light.”

But what is meant by “I am the light *of the world*”? Does this mean that Christ is the Light of the whole human race, of every man and woman? If so, does this prove that Universalism is true? Certainly not. The second part of our verse disproves Universalism: it is only the one who “follows” Christ that has “the light of life.” The one who does not “follow” Christ remains in darkness. The words of Christ in John 12:46 supply further repudiation of Universalism: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever *believeth on me* should not abide in darkness.” But if “I am the light of the world” does not teach Universalism, what does it mean? We believe that its force will best be ascertained by comparing John 1:4, 5, 9. As we have given an exposition of these verses in the second chapter of Vol. I, we would ask the reader to turn to it. Suffice it now to say we understand that “light” in these passages is not to be restricted to the spiritual illumination enjoyed by believers, but is to be taken in its widest signification. If John 1:4 be linked with the preceding verse

(as it should be), it will be seen that the reference is to the relation sustained by the *Creator* to “men.” The “light” which lightens every man that cometh into the world is that which constitutes him a responsible being. Every rational creature is morally enlightened. Christ is the Light of the world in the widest possible sense, inasmuch as all creature intelligence and all moral perception proceed from Him.

Perhaps it may be well to ask here, Why is it that “the world” is mentioned so frequently in this fourth Gospel? The “world” occurs only fifteen times in the first three Gospels added together; whereas in John it is found seventy-seven times! Why is this? The answer is not far to seek. In this fourth Gospel we have a presentation of what Christ is essentially in His own person, and not what He was in special relation to the Jews, as in the other Gospels. John treats of the Deity of Christ, and as God He is the Creator of all (John 1:3). and therefore the life and light of His creatures (John 1:4). It is true that in a number of instances “the world” has a restricted meaning, but these are not difficult to determine: either the context or parallel passages show us when the term is to be understood in its narrower sense. The principle of interpretation is not an arbitrary one. When something is predicated of “the world” which is true only of the redeemed, then we know it is only *the world of believers* which is in view: for instance, Christ giving (not proffering) life — here eternal life as the context shows — unto the world (John 6:33). But when there is nothing that is predicated of “the world” which is true only of believers, then it is “the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5) which is in view.

“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

At first glance this clause will seem, perhaps, to conflict with the definition we have given of “light” in the first part of the verse. “I am the light of the world” we understand to signify (in accord with John 1:4, 5, 9), I am the One who has bestowed intelligence and moral sensibility on all men. But now Christ says (by necessary implication) that unless a man “follows” Him he will “walk in darkness.” But instead of conflicting with what we have said above, the second part of verse 12 will be found, on careful reflection, to

confirm it. “He that followeth me” said our Lord, “shall not walk in darkness [Greek, “the darkness”], but shall,” shall what? “enjoy the light”? no, “shall have the light of life.” These words point a contrast. In the former sentence He spoke of Himself as the moral light of men; in the second He refers to the spiritual light which is possessed by believers only. This is clear from the expression used: he “shall have” not merely “light”—which all rational creatures possess; but “he shall have the light of life,” that is, of spiritual, Divine light, which is something possessed only by those who “follow” Christ.

“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” In these words, then, Christ defined the state of the natural man. The unregenerate have “light”: they are capable of weighing moral issues; they have a conscience which either “accuses or excuses them” (Romans 2:15); and they have the capacity to recognize the innumerable evidences which testify to the existence and natural attributes of the great Creator (Romans 1:19); so that “they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). But spiritual light they do not have. Consequently, though they are endowed with intelligence and moral discernment, spiritually, they are “in the darkness.” And it was because of this that the Savior said, “He that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The necessary implication of these words is that the world is in spiritual darkness. It was so two thousand years ago. The Greeks with all their wisdom and the Romans with all their laws were spiritually in the dark. And the world is the same today. Notwithstanding all the discoveries of science and all the efforts to educate, Europe and America are in the dark. The great crowds see not the true character of God, the worth of their souls, the reality of the world to come. And Christ is the only hope. He has risen like the sun, to diffuse life and light, salvation and peace, in the midst of a dark world.

“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” What is it to “follow” Christ? It is to commit ourselves unreservedly to Him as our only Lord and Savior in doctrine and conduct (see John 1:37 and contrast John 10:5). A beautiful

illustration (borrowed from Bishop Ryle) of this is to be found in the history of Israel in the wilderness as they followed the “cloud.” Just as the “cloud” led Israel from Egypt to Canaan, so the Lord Jesus leads the believer from this world to heaven. And to the one who really follows Christ the promise is, he shall not, like those all around him, walk in darkness. “Light,” in Scripture, is sometimes the emblem of true knowledge, true holiness, true happiness; while “darkness” is the figure for ignorance and error, guilt and depravity, privation and misery. Because the believer follows the One who is Light, he does not grope his way in doubt and uncertainty, but he sees where he is going, and not only so, he enjoys the light of God’s countenance. But this is his experience only so far as he really “follows” Christ. Just as if it were possible to follow the sun in its complete circuit, we should always be in broad daylight, so the one who is actually following Christ shall not walk in darkness.

“The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true” (John 8:13).

Christ had just made the fullest claim to Deity when He said “I am the light of the world” the Pharisees could not understand Him to mean anything less. Jehovah-Elohim was the God of light, as numerous passages in the Old Testament plainly taught. When Jesus made this asseveration the Pharisees therefore said, “Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.” The force of their objection seems to be this: That God is the Light of the world we fully allow, but when you avow this of yourself we cannot accredit it; what you say is false.

“The Pharisees therefore said unto him.” Evidently these were a different company of Pharisees than those who had brought in the adulteress. Enraged by the discomfiture of their brethren, their fellows insultingly said to the Lord, Thy record is not true. They shrank from the Light. They could not endure the holy purity of its beams. They desired only to extinguish it. How solemnly this illustrated John 1:5 — “The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not?”

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and

whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go;” (John 8:14).

Here the Lord tersely replies to the unbelieving denial of the Pharisees, and ratifies what He had said just previously. Though My Divine glory is now veiled, though at present I am not exercising My Divine prerogatives, though I stand before you in servant form, nevertheless, when I affirmed that I am the Light of the world I spoke the truth. My record is true because “I know whence I came and whither I go,” which is a knowledge possessed absolutely by none else. He had come from the Father in heaven, and thither He would return; and therefore, as the Son, He could not give a false witness. But as to His heavenly nature and character they were in complete ignorance, and therefore altogether incompetent to form, and still less to pass, a judgment.

“Though I bear record of myself yet my record is true.” Some have experienced a difficulty in harmonizing this with what we read of in verse 31 — “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.” But if each of these statements be interpreted in strict accord with the context the difficulty vanishes. In John 5 the Lord was proving that the witness or record He bore was not in independence of the Father, but in perfect accord therewith. The Father himself (John 5:37) and the Scriptures inspired by the Father (John 5:39) also testified to the absolute Deity of Christ. But here in John 8 the Lord Jesus is making direct reply to the Pharisees who had said that His witness was false. This He denies, and insists that it was true; and immediately after He appeals again to the confirmatory witness of the Father (see John 8:18).

“Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man” (John 8:15).

We believe that there is a double thought here. When Christ said “Ye judge after (according to) the flesh,” He meant, we think, first, You are deciding My claims according to what you see; you are judging according to outward appearances. Because I am in the likeness of sinful flesh you deem it impossible for Me to be “the light of the world.” But appearances are deceptive. I do not form My judgments thus: I look on the heart, and see things as they actually are. But again; when Christ said: “Ye judge after the flesh,” this was to

affirm that they were incapable of judging Him. They adopted the world's principles, and judged according to carnal reasoning. Because of this they were incapable of discerning the Divine nature of His mission and message.

"I judge no man" has been variously interpreted. Many understand it to signify that Christ here reminded His critics that He was not then exercising His judicial prerogatives. It is regarded as being parallel with the last clause of John 12:47. But we think it is more natural, and better suited to the context, to supply an ellipsis, and understand Christ here to mean, *I do not judge any man after the flesh*; when I judge, it is according to spiritual and Divine principles. The Greek word signifies "to determine, to form an estimate, to arrive at a decision," and here it has precisely the same force in each clause. When Christ said to these Pharisees, "Ye judge after the flesh," He did not refer to a judicial verdict, for He was not then replying to some formal pronouncement of the Sanhedrin. Instead, He meant, You have *formed your estimate* of Me after the flesh, but not so do I form My estimates.

["And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me" \(John 8:16\).](#)

This confirms what we have just said upon the last clause of the previous verse. "If I judge," or better "when I judge" My judgment is true. You may determine according to carnal principles; but I do not. I act on spiritual principles. I judge not according to appearances, but according to reality. My judgment is according to truth, for it is the judgment of God — "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me." This was a full claim to Deity. It affirmed the absolute oneness of the Son with the Father. This statement of Christ's is parallel with the one He made later: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). He speaks here in John 8 of the Divine wisdom which is common to the Father and the Son. This being so, how could His judgment be anything but true?

["It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me" \(John 8:17, 18\).](#)

Here Christ repeats in another form what He had just affirmed. HIS testimony was not unsupported. The Mosaic law required two witnesses to establish the truth. The present case was not one where this law was strictly applicable; nevertheless, the circumstances of it were in fullest accord therewith. Christ bore personal witness to His Divine person and mission, and the Father also bore witness thereto. How the Father bore witness to the Son was before us in the fifth chapter of this Gospel. He bore witness to Him in the prophecies of the Old Testament, which were now so gloriously fulfilled in His character, teaching, actions, and even in His very rejection by men. The Father had borne witness to the Son through the testimony of His servant, John the Baptist (see John 1). He had borne witness to Him at the Jordan, on the occasion of His baptism. Thus by the principles of their own law these Pharisees were condemned. Two witnesses established the truth, but here were two Witnesses, the Father and the Son, and yet they rejected the truth! It was not, as several of the commentators have thought, that Christ was here appealing to the law in order to vindicate Himself. His manifest purpose was to condemn them, and that is why He says, “*your law*” rather than “*the law*.”

“Then said they unto Him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (John 8:19).

How the Light revealed the hidden things of darkness! Christ had appealed to the testimony of the Father, but so obtuse were these Pharisees, they asked, “Where is thy Father?” In our Lord’s answer to them we are shown once more how that none can know the Father save through and by the Son. As He declared on another occasion,

“Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27).

“These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come” (John 8:20).

“The treasury ‘was in the forecourt of the women, in which were placed thirteen bronze chests, to receive the taxes and free-will offerings of the people. The mention of the treasury here would be quite in keeping with the genuineness of the history of the woman taken in adultery. To the court of the women only could she have been brought to meet the Lord. Of these chests, nine were for legal payment of the worshippers, and four for free-will offerings” (C.E.S. from Barclay’s Talmud).

“And no man laid hands on him: for his hour was not yet come.” This plainly intimates that the Pharisees were greatly incensed at what Christ had said, and had it been possible they would have at once subjected Him to violence. But it was not possible, and never would have been unless God had withdrawn His restraining hand. It is indeed striking to note how this feature is repeated again and again in the fourth Gospel, see John 7:30; 7:44; 8:59; and 10:39, etc. These passages show that men were unable to work out their evil designs until God permitted them to do so. They demonstrate that God is complete master of all; and they prove that the sufferings Christ did undergo were endured voluntarily.

“Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins” (John 8:21).

The word “again” looks back to John 7:33, 34, where on a previous occasion Christ had made a similar statement. “I go my way” signifies I shall very shortly leave you. It was a solemn word of warning. “And ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.” Christ here addressed these Pharisees as the representatives of the nation, and looked forward to the sore trials before it. In but a few years, Israel would suffer an affliction far heavier than any they had experienced before; and when that time came, they would seek the delivering help of their promised Messiah, but it would be in vain. Having refused the Light they would continue in the darkness. Having despised the Savior, they should “die in their sins.” Having rejected the Son of God, it would be impossible for them to come whither He had gone.

“Ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.” It is unspeakably solemn that these words have a present application. How dreadful!

that the Savior may be sought, but sought in vain. A man may have religious feelings about Christ, even weep at the thought of His Cross, and yet have no saving acquaintance with Him. Sickness, the fear of death, a serious financial reverse, the drying up of creature — sources of comfort — these frequently draw out much religiousness. Under a little pressure a man will say his prayers, read his Bible, become active in church work, profess to seek Christ, and become quite a different character; but only too often such an one is but reformed, and not transformed. And frequently this is made apparent in this world. Let the pressure be removed, let health return, let there be a change of circumstances, and how often we behold the zealous professor returning to his old ways. Such an one may have “sought” Christ, but because his motive was wrong, because it was not the effect of a deep conviction of being lost and undone, his seeking was in vain.

“Ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.” Far more solemn is the application of these words to a class of people today which we greatly fear is by no means a small one. How many there are who, under the superficial and temporary influence of the modern evangelistic meetings, come forward to the front seeking Christ. For the moment, many of them, no doubt, are in earnest; and yet the sequel proves that they sought in vain. Why is this? Two answers may be returned.

First, with some, it is because they were not in dead earnest. Of old God said,

“Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Second, with others, and with by far the greater number, it is because they do not seek *in the right place*. The seeker in the average meeting is exhorted to “lay his all upon the altar,” or is told that he must “pray through.” But Christ is not to be found by either of these means. “*Search the Scriptures*” was the word of the Savior Himself, and the reason given was, “they are they which testify of me.” In the volume of the book it is written of Christ. It is in the written Word that the incarnate Word is to be found.

“Ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.” These words will yet have a further application to a coming day, when it will be too late to find Christ. Then the “door” will be shut. Then sinners will call upon God but He will not answer; they shall seek the Lord, but they shall not find Him (Proverbs 1:28, etc.).

“Whither I go, ye cannot come” (John 8:21).

Not “ye shall not come,” but “ye cannot come.” Cannot because the holiness of God makes it impossible: that which is corrupt and vile cannot dwell with Him; there can be no communion between light and darkness. Cannot because the righteousness of God makes it impossible. Sin must be punished; the penalty of the broken law must be enforced; and for the reprobate “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” Cannot because they have no character suited to the place whither Christ has gone. In the very nature of the case every man must go to “his own place” (Acts 1:25), the place for which he is fitted. If, by grace, he has the nature of God, then later on he will go and dwell with Him (John 13:36); but if he passes out of this world “dead in sins” then, of necessity, he will yet be cast into the Lake of Fire, “which is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). If a man dies “in his sins” he cannot enter heaven. How completely this shatters the “Larger Hope”!

“Then said the jews, Will he kill Himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come?” (John 8:22).

The Pharisees replied with profane levity, and with an impious sneer. This is frequently the resort of a defeated opponent: when unable to refute solid argument, he will avail himself of ridicule. With what infinite grace did Our Lord forbear with His enemies!

“And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23).

There seems to be a double thought conveyed by these words. First, Christ pointed out the reason or cause why they understood not His words and received not His witness. There was an infinite gulf separating Him from them: they were from beneath, He was from

above. Second, Christ explained why it was that whither He was going they could not come. They belonged to two totally different spheres: they were of the world, He was not of the world. The friendship of the world is enmity against God, how then could they who were not only in the world, but of it, enter heaven, which was His home?

[“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” \(John 8:24\).](#)

How terrible is the end of unbelief! The one who persists in his rejection of the Christ of God will die in his sins, unpardoned, unfit for heaven, unprepared to meet God] How unspeakably solemn is this! How little are we impressed by these fearful words, “die in your sins” — true of the vast majority of our fellows as they pass out of this world into an hopeless eternity. And how sadly mistaken are they who say that it is harsh and uncharitable to speak of the future destiny of unbelievers. The example of Christ should teach us better. He did not hesitate to press this awful truth, nor should we. In the light of God’s Word it is criminal to remain silent. In the judgment of the writer this is the one truth which above all others needs to be pressed today. Men will not turn to Christ until they recognize their imminent danger of the wrath to come.

“Ye shall die in your sins.” This is one of many verses which exposes a modern error concerning the Atonement. There are some who teach that on the Cross Christ bore all the sins of all men. They insist that the entire question of sin was dealt with and settled at Calvary. They declare that the only thing which will now send any man to hell, is his rejection of Christ. But such teaching is entirely unscriptural. Christ bore all the sins of believers, but for the sins of unbelievers no atonement was made. And one of the many proofs of this is furnished by John 8:24: “Ye shall die in your sins” could never have been said if the Lord Jesus removed all sins from before God. ¹⁹

[“Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning” \(John 8:25\).](#)

We believe that this is given much more accurately in the R.V., especially the marginal rendering: "They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? Jesus said unto them, Altogether that which I also speak unto you." This was a remarkable utterance. The Pharisees had objected that Christ's witness of Himself was not true (verse 13). The Lord replied that His witness was true, and He proved it by an appeal to the corroborative witness of the Father. Now they ask, "Who art thou?" And the incarnate Son of God answered, I am essentially and absolutely that which I have declared myself to be. I have spoken of "light": I am that Light. I have spoken of "truth": I am that Truth. I am the very incarnation, personification, exemplification of them. Wondrous declaration is this! None but He could really say, I am Myself that of which I am speaking to you. The child of God may speak the truth and walk in the truth, but he is not the Truth itself. A Christian may let his light "shine," but he is not the Light itself. But Christ was, and therein we perceive His exalted uniqueness. As we read in 1 John 5:20, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true," not "him who taught the truth," but "him that is true."

["I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him" \(John 8:26\).](#)

As nearly as we can gather, the force of this verse is as follows: 'Your incredulity is very reprehensible, and your insulting sneers deserve the severest censure, but I forbear.' If Christ had dealt with these insulting opponents as they thoroughly merited, not only would He have upbraided them, but He would have passed an immediate sentence of condemnation upon them. Instead of doing so, He contented Himself by affirming once more that the witness He bore of Himself was true, because it was in the most perfect accord with what the Father Himself had said. Perfect example for us. Whenever the servant of Christ is criticized and challenged because of the message he brings, let him learn of his Master, who was meek and lowly in heart. Instead of passing sentence of condemnation on your detractors, simply press upon them the eternal veracity of Him in whose name you speak.

“They understood not that he spake to them of the Father”
(John 8:27)

O the blinding power of prejudice; the darkness of unbelief! How solemnly this reveals the woeful condition that the natural man is in. Unable to understand even when the Son of God was preaching to them! “Except a man be born again he cannot see.” And this is the condition of every man by nature. Spiritually, the unregenerate American is in precisely the same darkness that the heathen are in, for both are in the darkness of death. Men need something more than external light; they need inward illumination. One may sit all his life under the soundest Gospel ministry, and at the end, understand no more with the heart than those in Africa who have never heard the Gospel. Let these solemn words be duly weighed — “they understood not,” understood not the words which none other than the Son of God was saying to them! Then let every reader who knows that he is saved, praise God fervently because He “*hath given US in understanding*, that we may know him that is true” (1 John 5:20).

“Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28).

His “lifting up” referred to His approaching death and the manner of it, see John 12:32, 33. “Then shall ye know that I am he” intimated that the crucifixion would be accompanied and followed by such manifestations of His Divine glory that He would be fully vindicated, and many would be convinced that He was indeed the Messiah, and that He had done and said only what He had been commissioned by the Father to do and say. How strikingly was this word of Christ verified on the day of Pentecost! Thousands, then, of the very ones who had cried, “Crucify him”, were brought to believe on Him as “both Lord and Christ.”

“And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29).

“Whatever opinion men might form of His doctrines or conduct, He knew that in all He said, and in all He did, He was the Father’s elect servant upheld and delighted in by Him — His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased” (Dr. John Brown).

Men who were blinded by Satan might regard Him as an impostor, and as a blasphemer, but He knew that the Father approved and would yet vindicate Him fully. How could it be otherwise when He did always those things that pleased Him? — a claim none other could truthfully make.

“As he spake these words, many believed on him” (John 8:30).

This does not mean that they believed to the saving of their souls, the verses which follow evidence they had not. Probably nothing more is here signified than that they were momentarily impressed so that their enmity against Him was, temporarily, allayed. Many were evidently struck by what they observed in the demeanor of Christ-bearing the perverseness of His enemies so patiently, speaking of so ignominious a death with such holy composure, and expressing so positively His sense of the Father’s approbation. Nevertheless, the impression was but a fleeting one, and their believing on Him amounted to no more than asking,

“When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?” (John 7:31).

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31).

Our Lord here describes one of the marks of a genuine disciple of His. Continuance in His word is not a condition of discipleship, rather is it the manifestation of it. It is this, among other things, which distinguishes a true disciple from one who is merely a professor. These words of Christ supply us with a sure test. It is not how a man begins, but how he continues and ends. It is this which distinguishes the stony ground hearer from the goodground hearer — see Matthew 13:20, 23, and contrast Luke 8:15. To His apostles

Christ said “He that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22). Not, we repeat, that enduring to the end is a condition of salvation, it is an evidence or proof that we have already passed from death unto life. So writes the apostle John of some who had apostatized from the faith:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us,” etc. (1 John 2:19).

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” The word “indeed” signifies truly, really, genuinely so. By using this word Christ here intimated that those referred to in the previous verse, who are said to have “believed on him,” were not “genuine disciples.” The one who has been truly saved will not fall away and be lost; the one who does fall away and is lost, was never truly saved. To “continue” in Christ’s word is to “keep his word” (Revelation 3:8). It is to hold fast whatever Christ has said; it is to perseveringly follow out the faith we profess to its practical end.

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

“To know the truth is something more definite than to know what is true; it is to understand that revelation with regard to the salvation of men, through the mediation of the incarnate Son, which is so often in the New Testament called, by way of eminence, ‘the truth’, — the truth of truths, — the most important of all truths, — the truth of which He is full, — the truth that came by Him, as the law came by Moses, — the truth, the reality in opposition to the shadows, the emblems, of the introductory economy, — what Paul termed, ‘the word of the truth of the Gospel’, Colossians 1:5” (Dr. John Brown).

“The truth shall make you free.” Note the striking connection between these three things:

1. “continue in my word,” verse 31;
2. “ye shall know the truth,” verse 32;

3. “the truth shall make you free,” verse 32.

This order cannot be changed. The truth gives spiritual liberty; it frees from the blinding power of Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4). It delivers from the darkness of spiritual death (Ephesians 4:18). It emancipates from the prison-house of sin (Isaiah 61:1). Further enlargement upon the character and scope Of spiritual freedom will be given when we come to verse 36. Let the student first work on the following questions: —

4. To what extent is the sinner the “servant” (*bondsslave*) of sin? verse 34.
5. What does verse 36 teach about the will of the natural man?
6. What is the difference between Abraham’s “children” (verse 39), and his “seed” (verse 33)?
7. What is the meaning of verse 43?
8. What is the force of “of God” in verse 47?
9. What is the meaning of verse 51?
10. To what was Christ referring in verse 56?

JOHN 8:33-59

CHRIST, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (CONCLUDED)

The passage for our present consideration continues and completes the portion studied in our last chapter. It brings before us Christ as the Light revealing the hidden things of darkness, exposing the pretensions of religious professors, and making manifest the awful depths of human depravity. We shall miss that in it which is of most importance and value if we localize it, and see in these verses nothing more than the record of a conversation between the Lord and men long since past and gone. We need to remind ourselves constantly that the Word of God is a living Word, depicting things as they now are, describing the opposition and activities of the carnal mind as they obtain today, and giving counsel which is strictly pertinent to ourselves. It is from this viewpoint we shall discuss this closing section of John 8. Below we give a Summary of our passage:

1. Bondage and liberty: verses 33-36.
2. Abraham's seed and Abraham's children: verses 37-40.
3. Children of the Devil and children of God: verses 41-47.
4. Christ dishonored by men, the Father honored by Christ: verses 48- 50.
5. Life and death: verses 51-55.
6. Abraham and Christ: verses 56-58.
7. The Savior leaves the Temple: verse 59.

“They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” (John 8:33).

This was the reply made by the Jews to the words of the Lord recorded in the previous verses. There we find Him describing the fundamental characteristic of a genuine disciple of His: he is one who continues in Christ's word (verse 31, re-read our comments thereon). The one who continues in the Word shall know the truth, and the truth shall make him free (verse 32). But to be told about being made free is something the natural man does not like to hear. The plain implication is that before he knows the truth he is in bondage. And such indeed is the case, little as men realize or recognize the fact. There are four things about themselves which are particularly hateful, because so humbling, to the unregenerate.

First, that they are destitute of righteousness (Isaiah 64:6) and goodness (Romans 7:18), and therefore “unclean” (Isaiah 64:6) and “vile” (Job 40:4).

Second, that they are destitute of wisdom from John 3:11 and therefore full of “vanity” (Psalm 39:5) and “foolishness” (Proverbs 22:15).

Third, that they are destitute of “strength” from verse 6 and “power” (Isaiah 40:29), and therefore unable to do anything good of or from themselves (John 15:5).

Fourth, that they are destitute of freedom (Isaiah 61:1), and therefore in a state of bondage (2 Peter 2:19).

The condition of the natural man is far, far worse than he imagines, and far worse than the average preacher and Sunday school teacher supposes. Man is a fallen creature, totally depraved, with no soundness in him from the sole of his foot even unto the head (Isaiah 1:6). He is completely under the dominion of sin (John 8:34), a bond-slave to divers lusts (Titus 3:3), so that he “cannot cease from sin” (2 Peter 2:14). Moreover, the natural man is thoroughly under the dominion of it. He is taken captive by the Devil at his will (2 Timothy 2:26). He walks according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2). He fulfills the lusts of his father, the Devil (John 8:44). He is completely dominated by Satan's power (Colossians

1:13). And from this thralldom nothing but the truth of God can deliver.

Ye shall be made free (John 8:33). As already stated, this signifies that the natural man is in bondage. But this is a truth that the natural man cannot tolerate. The very announcement of it stirs up the enmity within him. Tell the sinner that there is no good thing in him, and he will not believe you; but tell him that he is completely the slave of sin and the captive of Satan, that he cannot think a godly thought of himself (2 Corinthians 3:5), that he cannot receive God's truth (1 Corinthians 2:14), that he cannot believe (John 12:39), that he cannot please God (Romans 8:8), that he cannot come to Christ (John 6:44), and he will indignantly deny your assertions. So it was here in the passage before us. When Christ said "the truth shall make you free", the Jews replied "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man."

The proud boast of these Jews was utterly unfounded; nothing could have been further from the truth. The very first view which Scripture gives us of Abraham's seed after they became a nation, is in bitter and cruel bondage (Exodus 2). Seven times over in the book of Judges we read of God delivering or selling Israel into the hands of the Canaanites. The seventy- years captivity in Babylon also gave the lie to the words of these Jews, and even at the time they spoke, the Romans were their masters. It was therefore the height of absurdity and a manifest departure from the truth for them to affirm that the seed of Abraham had never been in bondage. Yet no more untenable and erroneous was this than the assertions of present-day errorists who prate so loudly of the freedom of the natural man, and who so hotly deny that his will is enslaved by sin. "How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?": equally ignorant are thousands in the religious world today. Deliverance from the Law, emancipation from bad habits they have heard about, but real spiritual freedom they understand not, and cannot while they remain in ignorance about the universal bondage of sin.

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant [bond-slave] of sin" (John 8:34).

In saying “whosoever... is the bondslave” Christ was intimating to these Jews that they were no exception to the general rule, even though they belonged to the favored seed of Abraham. Christ was not speaking of a particular class of men more lawless than their fellows, but was affirming that which is true of every man in his natural condition. “Whosoever committeth sin,” refers to the regular practice, the habitual course of a man’s life. Here is one thing which distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian. The Christian sins, and sins daily; but the non-Christian does nothing but sin. The Christian sins, but he also repents; moreover, he does good works, and brings forth the fruit of the Spirit. But the life of the unregenerate man is one unbroken course of sin. Sin, we say, not crime. Water cannot rise above its own level. Being a sinner by nature, man is a sinner by practice, and cannot be anything else. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. A poisoned fountain cannot send forth sweet waters. Because the sinner has no spiritual nature within him, because he is totally depraved and in complete bondage to sin, because he does nothing for God’s glory, every action is polluted, every deed unacceptable to the Holy One.

“Whosoever committeth sin is the bond-slave of sin.” How different are God’s thoughts from ours! The man of the world imagines that to become a Christian means to forego his freedom. He supposes that he would be fettered with a lot of restrictions which nullified his liberty. But these very suppositions only evidence the fact that the god of this world (Satan) has blinded his mind (2 Corinthians 4:4). The very opposite from what he supposes is really the case. It is the one out of Christ, not the one in Christ, who is in bondage — in “the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23). He is impelled by the downward trend of his nature, and the very freedom which the sinner supposes he is exercising in the indulgence of his evil propensities is only additional proof that he is the “bond-slave of sin.” The love of self, the love of the world, the love of money, the love of pleasure—these are the tyrants which rule over all who are out of Christ. Happy the one who is conscious of such bondage, for this is the first step toward liberty.

“And the bond-slave abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever” (John 8:35).

The commentators are far from being in agreement in their interpretation of this verse, though we think there is little room for differences of opinion upon it. The “bond-slave” is the same character referred to in the previous verse — the one who makes a constant practice of sinning. Such an one abideth not in the house forever — the “house” signifies family, as in the House of Jacob, the House of Israel, the House of God (Hebrews 3:5, 6). We take it that our Lord was simply enunciating a general principle or stating a well-known fact, namely, that a slave has only a temporary place in a family. The application of this principle to those He was addressing is obvious. The Jews insisted that they were Abraham’s seed (verse 32), that they belonged to the favored family, whose were the covenants and promises. But, says our Lord, the mere fact that you are the natural descendants of Abraham, gives you no title to the blessings which belong to his spiritual children. This was impossible while they remained the bond- slaves of sin. Unless they were “made free” they would soon be cut off even from the temporary place of external privilege.

“But the Son abideth ever.” These words point a contrast. The slave’s place was uncertain, and at best temporary, but the Son’s place in the family is permanent — no doubt the word “abideth” here (as everywhere) suggests the additional thought of fellowship. The history of Abraham’s family well illustrated this fact, and probably Christ has the case of Ishmael and Isaac in mind when He uttered these words. “The Son abideth ever.” Though this statement enunciated a general principle — some-thing that is true of every member of God’s family — yet the direct reference was clearly to Christ Himself, as the next verse makes plain, for “the Son” of verse 36 is clearly restricted to the Lord Jesus.

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

The “therefore” here settles the application of the previous verse. “The Son” is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is able to make free the bond-slaves of sin because He is the Son. The Son is no bond-slave in the Father’s family, but He is one in purpose and power with the Father; He is in perfect fellowship with Him, and therefore He is fully competent to liberate those under the tyranny of

sin and the dominion of Satan. To make His people “free” was the central object in view in the Divine incarnation. The first ministerial utterance of Christ was to the effect that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed Him to preach “deliverance to the captives... to set at liberty them that are bruised” or “bound” (Luke 4:18). And so thoroughly are men under the thralldom of sin, so truly do they love darkness rather than light, they have to be made free. (cf. “maketh me to lie down” Psalm 23.)

“Ye shall be free indeed.” Free from what? This brings before us the truth of Christian freedom: a most important subject, but one too wide to discuss here at any length. [no](#) To sum up in the fewest possible words, we would say that Christian liberty, spiritual liberty, consists of this:

First, deliverance from the condemnation of sin, the penalty of the law, the wrath of God — Isaiah 42:7; 60:1; Romans 8:1.

Second, deliverance from the power of Satan — Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 2:14, 15.

Third, from the bondage of sin — Romans 6:14, 18.

Fourth, from the authority of man — Galatians 4:8, 9; 5:1; Colossians 2:20-22. So much for the negative side; now a word on the positive.

Christians are delivered from the things just mentioned that they may be free to serve God. The believer is “the Lord’s freeman” (1 Corinthians 7:22), not Christ’s freeman, observe, but “the Lord’s,” a Divine title which ever emphasizes our submission to His authority. When a sinner is saved he is not free to follow the bent of his old nature, for that would be lawlessness. Spiritual freedom is not license to do as I please, but emancipation from the bondage of sin and Satan that I may do as I ought: “that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74, 75). Romans 6:16-18 and 22 contains a Divine summary of the positive side of this subject: let the reader give it careful and prayerful study.

“I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you” (John 8:37).

Our Lord’s object in these words is evident. He was further emphasizing the fact that though these Jews were the seed of Abraham, they certainly were not the children of God. Proof of this was furnished by the awful enmity then at work in their hearts. They sought (earnestly desired) to kill Him who was the Son. Certainly then, they were not God’s children. Moreover, His word had no place in them — the Greek word translated “no place” signifies no entrance. They received it not (contrast 1 Thessalonians 2:13). They were merely wayside hearers. It is this which distinguishes, essentially, a saved man from a lost one. The former is one who receives with meekness the engrafted Word (James 1:21). He hides that Word in his heart (Psalm 119:11). The believer gives that Word the place of trust, of honor, of rule, of love. The man of the world gives the Word no place because it is too spiritual, too holy, too searching. He is filled with his own concerns, and is too busy and crowded to give the Word of God a real place of attention. Unspeakably solemn are those awful words of Christ to all such:

“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

“I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father” (John 8:38).

Christ further emphasizes the infinite gulf which separated these Jews from Himself. In the previous verse He had furnished proof that these men who were the seed of Abraham certainly were not the children of God. Here He leads up to their real parentage. In the first part of this verse our Lord insists that the doctrine He taught was what He had received from the Father, and its very nature and tendency clearly showed who His Father was. Its spirituality evidenced that it proceeded from the thrice Holy One: its unworldliness testified to the fact that it came from Him who is Spirit: its benignity showed it was from Him who is Love. Such was His Father.

“Ye do that which ye have seen with your father.’.... Your actions tell who your father is, as My doctrine tells who My Father is.’ In both cases ‘father’ here seems to mean spiritual model — the being after whom the character is fashioned — the being, under whose influences the moral and spiritual frame is formed. The thought that lies at the bottom of this representation is, ‘Men’s sentiments and conduct are things that are formed, and indicate the character of him who forms them. Your actions, which are characterized by falsehood and malignity, distinctly enough prove, that, in a moral and spiritual point of view, neither Abraham, nor the God of Abraham, is your father. The former of your spiritual character is not in heaven, wherever else he may be foundi” (Dr. J. Brown).

“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father” (John 8:39).

These Jews surely had a suspicion of whither our Lord’s remarks in the previous verse were pointing; but they pretended not to observe, and sought to represent Him as a calumniator of Abraham. When they said, “Abraham is our father,” it was but the self-righteousness of the natural man exhibiting itself. They were contrasting themselves from the heathen. ‘The heathen are in bondage we allow; but You are now talking to those who belong to the covenant people: we belong to the Jewish Church,’ this was the force of their remarks. It is not difficult to perceive how well this describes what is a matter of common observation today. Let the servant of God preach in the churches of this land on the ruined and lost condition of the natural man; let him faithfully apply his message to those present; and the result will be the same as here. The great mass of religious professors, who have a form of godliness but know nothing and manifest nothing of its power, will hotly resent being classed with those on the outside. They will tell you, We belong to the true Church, we are Christians, not infidels.

“Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39).

Very simple, yet very searching was this. The “seed” of Abraham Christ acknowledged them to be (verse 37), but the “children” of Abraham they certainly were not. Natural descent from their

illustrious progenitor did not bring them into the family of God. Abraham is “the father” only of “them that believe” (Romans 4:11). This distinction is specifically drawn in Romans 9:7: “Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children.” “Children” of Abraham refers to a spiritual relationship; “seed” of Abraham is only a fleshly tie, and “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” Here was and still is the decisive test. Natural descent counts for nothing, it is a spiritual relationship with God which is the great desideratum. The profession of our lips amounts to nothing at all if it be not confirmed by the character of our lives. Talk is cheap; it is our works, what we do, which evidences what we really are. A tree is known by its fruits. The “works of Abraham” were works of faith and obedience — faith in God and submission to His Word. But His Word had “no place in them.” Idle then was their boast. Equally so is that of multitudes today, who say Lord, Lord, but do not the things which He has commanded.

“But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham” (John 8:40).

“Abraham acted not thus. If ye were Abraham’s children in a spiritual sense — if you were conformed to his character — you would imitate his conduct. But your conduct is the very reverse of his. You are desiring and plotting the murder of a man who never injured you, whose only crime is that He has made known to you important and salutary, but unpalatable truth. Abraham never did anything like this. He readily received every communication made from heaven. He never inflicted injury on any man, far less on a Divine messenger, who was merely doing his duty. No, no! If children are like their parents, Abraham is not your father. He whose deeds you do, he is your father” (Dr. J. Brown).

“Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God” (John 8:41).

When the Jews replied, “We be not born of fornication,” we take it that they meant, ‘We are not bastard Jews, whose blood has been contaminated with idolatrous alliances, as is the case with the Samaritans.’ It seems likely that this word was provoked by what our Lord had said in verse 35 — “the bond-slave abideth not in the house,” which was an oblique reference to Ishmael. If so, their words signified, ‘We are genuine descendants of Abraham; we are children not of the concubine, but of the wife.’

“We have one Father, even God.” How this same claim is being made on every side today! Those in far-distant lands may be heathen; but America is a Christian country. Such is the view which is held by the great majority of church members. The universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man are the favorite dogmas of Christendom: “We have one Father, even God” is the belief and boast of the great religious masses. How this justifies our opening remark, that the passage before us is not to be limited to a conversation which took place nineteen hundred years ago, but also contains a representation of human nature as it exists today, manifesting the same spirit of self-righteousness, appealing to the same false ground of confidence, and displaying the same enmity against the Christ of God.

“Jesus said unto them, If God were your father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me” (John 8:42).

This was an indirect but plain denial that God was their Father. If they were the children of God they would *love* Him, and if they loved Him they would most certainly love His only begotten Son, for

“he that loveth him that begat, loveth him that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1).

But they did not love Christ. Though He was the image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, they despised and rejected Him. They were the bond-slaves of sin (verse 34); Christ’s Word had no place in them (verse

37); they sought to kill Him (verse 40). Their boast therefore was an empty one; their claim utterly unfounded.

“Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43).

Christ was here addressing Himself to their consciences. His question — no doubt there was a pause before He answered it — ought to have exercised their hearts. Why do you not understand My speech? You claim to be the children of the Father, why then are My words so obscure and mysterious to you? My language is that of the Father, surely then there is something wrong somewhere! The same question comes with equal pertinency to every one who hears the Word of God today. If that Word comes to me as that of an unknown tongue, then this shows I am a stranger to God. If I understand not His speech, I cannot be one of His children. That does not mean, of course, that I shall be able to fathom the infinite depths of His wonderful Word. But, speaking characteristically, if I understand not His speech — which is addressed not to the intellect but to the heart — then there is every reason why I should gravely inquire as to the cause of this.

“Even because ye cannot hear my word.” The word “hear” (an Hebrew idiom) signifies to receive and believe — compare John 9:27; 10:3; 12:47; Acts 3:22, 23, etc. And why was it that these Jews “could not hear” His Word? It was because they were children in whom was no faith (Deuteronomy 32:20). It was because they had no ear for God, no heart for His Word, no desire to learn His will. Proof positive was this that they were dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore not children of God. Unspeakably solemn is this. Hearing God’s Word is an attitude of heart. We speak now not of the Divine side, for true it is that the Lord Himself must prepare the heart (Proverbs 16:1) and give the hearing ear (Proverbs 20:12). But from the human side, man is fully responsible to hear. But he cannot hear the still small voice of God while his ears are filled with the siren songs of the world. That he has no desire to hear does not excuse him, rather does it the more condemn him. The Lord grant that the daily attitude of writer and reader may be that of little Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”

“Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

This was the prime point our Lord had been leading up to. First, He had repudiated their claim of being the children of Abraham. Second, He had demonstrated that God was not their Father. Now He tells them in plain language who their father really was, even the Devil. Their characters had been formed not under Divine influence, but under a diabolical influence. The moral likeness of that great Enemy of God was plainly stamped upon them. “Your inveterate opposition to the truth, shows your kinship to him who is the father of the Lie, and your desire to kill Me evidences that you are controlled by that one who was a murderer from the beginning.”

“Ye are of your father the Devil” is true of every unregenerate soul. Renouncing their dependency on God, denying His proprietorship, loving darkness rather than light, they fall an easy prey to the Prince of darkness. He blinds their minds; he directs their walk, and works in them both to will and to do of his evil pleasure (Ephesians 2:2). Nor can sinners turn round and cast the blame for this upon God. For as Christ here declares, the lusts of their father they will do, or they desire to do, which is the correct meaning of the word. They were cheerful servants; voluntary slaves.

“And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not” (John 8:45).

The human race is now reaping what was sown at the beginning. Our first parents rejected God’s truth and believed the Devil’s lie, and ever since then man has been completely under the power of falsehood and error. He will give credence to the most grotesque absurdities, but will regard with skepticism what comes to him with a thousand fully authenticated credentials. Some will believe that there are no such things as sin and death. Some will believe that instead of being the descendants of fallen Adam, they are the offspring of evolving apes. Some believe that they have no souls and that death ends all. Others imagine that they can purchase heaven

with their own works. O the blindness and madness of unbelief! But let the truth be presented; let men hear that God says they are lost, dead in trespasses and sins; that eternal life is a gift, and eternal torment is the portion of all who refuse that gift; and men believe them not. They believe not God's truth because their hearts love that which is false — "They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Psalm 58:3); they "delight in lies" (Psalm 62:4); they make lies their "refuge" (Isaiah 28:15), therefore it is that they "turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Timothy 4:4); and though they are ever learning, yet are they "never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). And therefore Christ is still saying to men, "because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not."

"Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John 8:46).

We take it Christ was here anticipating an objection. The charge He had just made against them was a very severe and piercing one, yet He openly challenges them to refute it. If you deny what I have said and charge Me with falsehood, how will you prove your charge? Which of you can fairly convince Me of that or of any other sin? But, on the other hand, if it be evident that I have told you the truth, then why do ye not believe Me? Such, in brief, we take to be our Lord's meaning here.

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47).

The force of this we understand as follows: Every member of God's family is in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit, and in virtue of this receives with affection, reverence, and obedient regard the words of his heavenly Father, by whomsoever they are brought; hence, the reason why you do not receive My words is because you are not His children. "He that is of God" carries a double thought.

First, it signifies, he that belongs to God by eternal election. A parallel to this is found in John 10:26, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." It is this which, in time, distinguished the elect from the non-elect. The former, in due time, hear or receive God's words; the latter do not.

Second, “He that is of God” signifies, he that has been born of God, he that is in the family of God. A parallel to this is found in John 18:37: “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

“Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon?” (John 8:48).

This was a plain admission that they were unable to answer the Lord. Completely vanquished in argument, they resort to vulgar and blasphemous declamation. But why should these Jews have called Christ these particular names at this time? We believe the answer is found in what Christ had just said to them. He had declared that they were not the true children of Abraham (verse 39); and He had affirmed that the Devil was their father (verse 44). In reply, they retorted, “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon.” The general meaning of these epithets is clear: by “a Samaritan” they meant one who was an enemy to their national faith; by “thou hast a demon” they intimated one obsessed by a proud and lying spirit. What frightful insults did the Lord of glory submit to!

“Jesus answered, I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me” (John 8:49).

To the first of their reproaches He made no reply. He passed it by as unworthy of notice, the irritated outburst of wanton malice. To the second He returns a blank denial, and then adds, “but I honor my Father.” One who is controlled by the Devil is a liar, but Christ had told them the truth. One who is prompted by the Devil flatters men, but Christ had depicted fallen human nature in the most humbling terms. One who is moved by the Devil is inflated with pride, seeks honor and fame; but Christ sought only the honor of Another, even the Father. Divinely calm, Divinely dignified. Divinely majestic was such an answer. How the longsufferance of Christ, His patient bearing with these villifiers, His unruffled spirit and calm bearing, evidenced Him to be none other than the Son of God.

“And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth” (John 8:50).

“If I did, I should not have told you the truth. Had My own aggrandizement been My object, I should have followed another course; and My not obtaining “glory” — a good opinion — from you, no way disheartens Me. There is One who seeketh, that is, who seeketh My glory. There is One who will look after My reputation. There is One who is pledged in holy covenant to make Me His firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. And He who seeketh My glory, judgeth. He will sit in judgment on your judgment.’ These words seem plainly intended to intimate, in a very impressive way, the fearful responsibility they had incurred. He was doing His Father’s will: they were treating Him with contumely. The Father was seeking the honor of His faithful Servant, His beloved Son; and dreadful would be the manifestation of His displeasure against those who, so far as lay in their power, had put to shame the God-man, whom He delighted to honor” (Dr. J. Brown).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.” (John 8:51).

Christ had just pointed out the fearful consequence of rejecting Him and His Word — there was One who would judge them. Locally this pointed to the awful visitation from God upon their nation in A.D. 70; but the ultimate reference is to eternal judgment, which is “the second death.” Now in sharp and blessed contrast from the doom awaiting those in whom the Word had “no place,” Christ now says, “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death”! Blessed promise was this for His own. But mark how human responsibility is here pressed — the promise is only to the one who keeps Christ’s Word. To “keep” the Word is to hide it in the heart (Psalm 119:11). It is to retain it in the memory (1 Corinthians 15:3). It is to be governed by it in our daily lives (Revelation 3:8). “He shall never see (know, experience) death” refers to penal death, the wages of sin, eternal separation from God in the torments of Hell. For the believer physical dissolution is not death (separation), but to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

“Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the

prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?” (John 8:52, 53).

What a striking exemplification was this of what our Lord had said in verse 43: they understood not His speech and heard not His words. Devoid of discernment, they had no capacity to perceive the spiritual import of what He said. Such is the awful condition of the natural man: the things of God are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14). What is revealed to babes in Christ is completely hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own estimation and in the judgment of the world (Matthew 11:25). No matter how simply and plainly the truths of Scripture may be expounded, the unregenerate are unable to understand them. Unable because their interests are elsewhere. Unable because they will not humble themselves and cry unto God for light. Unable because their hearts are estranged from Him. Christian reader, what abundant reason have you to thank God for giving you an understanding (1 John 5:20)!

“Jesus answered, if I honor myself, my honor is nothing; it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God” (John 8:54).

“It is my Father that honoureth me”: precious words are these and worthy of prolonged study and meditation. To “honor” is to do or speak that of a person which shall not only manifest our own esteem for him, but shall lead others to esteem him too. The Father’s esteem for the Son is evidenced by His love and admiration for Him, as well as His desire to make Him the loved and admired of others. God honored Him at His birth, by sending the angels to herald Him as Christ the Lord. He honored Him during the days of His infancy, by directing the wise men from the east to come and worship the young King. He honored Him at His baptism, by proclaiming Him His beloved Son. He honored Him in death, by not suffering His body to see corruption. He honored Him at His ascension, when He exalted Him to His own right hand. He will honor Him in the final judgment, when every knee shall be made to bow before Him and every tongue confess that He is Lord. And throughout eternity He shall be honored by a redeemed people who shall esteem Him the Fairest among ten thousand to their souls. Infinitely worthy is the Lamb to receive honor and glory. Let then the writer and reader see

to it that our daily lives honor Him who has so highly honored us as to call us “brethren.”

“Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying” (John 8:55).

The One who honored Him they knew not, despite their profession to be His children. But on the other hand, if He were to deny the knowledge He had of the Father, then He would be as false as they were in pretending to know Him. But He would not deny Him; nay more, He would continue to give evidence of His knowledge of the Father by keeping His Word. For Him that Word meant to finish the work which had been given Him to do, to become obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. A searching word is this for us. If we really know the Father it will be evidenced by our subjection to His Word!

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56).

More literally the Greek reads, “Abraham, your father, was transported with an exultant desire that he should see My day, and he saw it and rejoiced.” The Greek is much more expressive and emphatic than our English translation. It intimates that Abraham looked forward with joy to meet the Object of his desires, and exulted in a sight of it. But to what did our Lord refer when He said, Abraham saw “my day”? In the Greek the “day” is emphasized by putting it before the pronoun — “day, my.” We believe that “day” is here to be understood in its dispensational sense, as signifying the entire Dispensation of Christ, which embraces the two advents. Probably what Abraham saw and rejoiced in was, first, the humiliation of Christ, terminating in His death, which would occasion the patriarch great joy as he knew that death would blot out all his sins: second, the vindication and glorification of Christ.

But how did Abraham “see” Christ’s “day”? We believe that a threefold answer may be returned: First, Abraham saw the day of Christ by *faith* in the promises of God (Hebrews 11:13). Hebrews 11:10 and 16 intimate plainly that the Spirit of God made

discoveries to Abraham which are not recorded on the pages of the Old Testament. Second, Abraham saw the day of Christ in *type*. In offering Isaac on the altar and in receiving him back in figure from the dead, he received a marvelous foreshadowing of the Savior's death and resurrection. Third, by *special revelation*. The "secret of the Lord" is with them that fear Him, and there is no doubt in our mind but that God was pleased to show the Old Testament saints much more of His covenant than is commonly supposed among us (see Psalm 25:14).

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." The relevancy of this remark of Christ and its relation to what had gone before are easily perceived. More immediately, it was part of His answer to their last question in verse 53 — "Whom makest thou thyself?" More remotely, it furnished the final proof that they were not the children of Abraham, for they did not his work (verse 39). If these Jews rejoiced not at the appearing of Christ before them, then in no sense were they like Abraham.

"Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" (John 8:57).

How blind they were! How thoroughly incompetent to understand His speech. Christ had not spoken of seeing Abraham, but of Abraham seeing His "day." There was a vast difference between these two things, but they were incapable of perceiving it.

"Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

Here was the full disclosure of His glory; the affirmation that He was none other than the Eternal One. That they so understood Him is evident from what follows.

"Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by" (John 8:59).

"It is Immanuel: but there is no knee bent to Him, no loving homage tendered. They took up stones to stone Him, and He hiding Himself

for the moment from their sacrilegious violence, passes out of the temple” (F. W. Grant).

“Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” Fearfully solemn is this in its present-day application. The chief design of the whole chapter is to present Christ as the “light” and to show us what that Light revealed. Not by observation can we discover the full ruin which sin has wrought. It is only as the Light shines that man is fully exposed. And that which is particularly discovered here is the utter vanity of the religious pretensions of the natural man.

Apart from spiritual discernment, the religious professor presents before us a fair appearance. His evident sincerity, his punctiliousness, his unquestionable zeal, his warm devotion, his fidelity to the cause he has espoused, are frequently a mask which no human eye can penetrate. It is not until such professors are exposed to the searching *light of God* that their real characters are laid bare. It is only *as the Word* is faithfully applied to them that their awful depravity is revealed. It was not profligate outcasts, but orthodox Jews who are here seen taking up stones to cast at the Son of God, and they did this not on the public highway, but in the temple; Nor have things changed for the better. Were Christ here today in Servant-form, and were He to enter our churches and tell the great mass of religious professors that they were the bondslaves of sin, and that they were of their father the Devil and that his lusts they delighted in doing, they would conduct themselves exactly as their fellows did eighteen centuries ago. Terribly significant then is the final word of our chapter: the Savior “hid himself” from them, and went out of the temple. It is so still. From the self-righteous and self-sufficient but blinded religious formalists, Christ still hides Himself; those who deny that they need to be made free from the slavery of sin He still leaves to themselves. But thank God it is written,

“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15).

The following questions are to help the interested student on the next chapter, John 9:1-7: —

1. What is the great doctrinal teaching of this passage?
2. What typical picture does it contain?
3. Why does it open with the word “And”? verse 1.
4. To what was Christ referring in verse 4?
5. Why did Christ again say “I am the Light of the world” verse 5.
6. What was the symbolical meaning of verses 6 and 7?
7. What force has “therefore” in verse 7?

JOHN 9:1-7

CHRIST AND THE BLIND BEGGAR

Below will be found an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Jesus beholds the man born blind: verse 1.
2. The disciples' question: verse 2.
3. Christ's answer: verses 3-5.
4. Christ anoints the blind man: verse 6.
5. Christ sends the man to the Pool: verse 7.
6. The man's prompt obedience: verse 7.
7. The miracle completed: verse 7.

That there is an intimate connection between John 8 and John 9 is manifest from the first word of the latter, and when the Holy Spirit has thus linked two things together it behooves us to pay close attention to the law of comparison and contrast. The little conjunction at the opening of John 9 is very appropriate, for in the previous verse we read of Jesus hiding Himself from those who took up stones to cast at Him; while in John 9:1 we behold a man blind from his birth, unable to see the passing Savior. That these two chapters are closely related is further seen by a comparison of John 8:12 and John 9:5: in both Christ is revealed, specifically, as “the light of the world.” As we read carefully the opening verses of the chapter now before us and compare them with the contents of John 8 it will be found that they present to us a series of contrasts. For example, in John 8 we behold Christ as “the light” exposing the darkness, but in John 9 He communicates sight. In John 8 the Light is despised and rejected, in John 9 He is received and worshipped. In John 8 the Jews are seen stooping down — to pick up stones; in John 9 Christ is seen stooping down — to make anointing clay. In

John 8 Christ hides Himself from the Jews; in John 9 He reveals Himself to the blind beggar. In John 8 we have a company in whom the Word has no place (verse 37); in John 9 is one who responds promptly to the Word (verse 7). In John 8 Christ, inside the Temple, is called a demoniac (verse 48); in John 9, outside the Temple, He is owned as Lord (verse 36). The central truth of John 8 is the Light testing human responsibility; in John 9 the central truth is God acting in sovereign grace after human responsibility has failed. This last and most important contrast we must ponder at length.

In John 8 a saddening and humbling scene was before us. There Christ was manifested as “the light” and woeful were the objects that it shone upon. It reminds us very much of that which is presented right at the beginning of God’s Word. Genesis 1:2 introduces us to a ruined earth, with darkness enveloping it. The very first thing God said there was, “Let there be light,” and we are told, “There was light.” And upon what did the light shine? what did its beams reveal? It shone upon an earth that had become “without form and void”; its beams revealed a scene of desolation and death. There was no sun shining by day nor moon by night. There was no vegetation, no moving creature, no life. A pall of death hung over the earth. The light only made manifest the awful ruin which sin (here, the sin of Satan) had wrought, and the need for the sovereign goodness and almighty power of God to intervene and produce life and fertility.

So it was in John 8. Christ as the Light *of the world* discovers not only the state of Israel, but too, the common atheism of man. He affirmed His power to make free the bondslaves of sin (John 8:32): but His auditors denied that they were in bondage. He spoke the words of the Father (John 8:38): but they neither understood nor believed Him. He told them that their characters were formed under the influence of the Devil and that they desired it to be so (John 8:44): in reply they blasphemously charged Him with having a demon. He declared that He was the Object who had rejoiced the heart of Abraham (John 8:56): and they scoffed at Him. He told them He was the great and eternal “I am” (John 8:58): and they picked up stones to cast at Him. All of this furnishes us with a graphic but accurate picture of the character of the natural man the

world over. The mind of the sinner is enmity against God, and he hates the Christ of God. He may be very religious, and left to himself, he may appear to be quite pious. But let the light of God be turned upon him, let the bubble of his self-righteousness be punctured, let his awful depravity be exposed, let the claims of Christ be pressed upon him, and he is not only skeptical, but furious.

What, then, was Christ's response? Did He turn His back on the whole human race? Did He return at once to heaven, thoroughly disgusted at His reception in this world? What wonder if the Father had there and then called His Son back to the glory which He had left. Ah! but God is the God of all grace, and grace needed the dark background of sin so that its bright lustre might shine the more resplendently. Yet grace would be misunderstood and unappreciated were it shown to all alike, for in that case men would deem it a right to which they were entitled, a meet compensation for God allowing the race to fall into sin. O the folly of human reasoning! Grace would be no more grace if fallen men had any claims upon it. God is under no obligations to men: every title to His favor was forfeited forever when they, in the person of their representative, rebelled against Him. Therefore does He say, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Romans 9:15). It is this side of the truth which receives such striking illustration in the passage which is to be before us.

In John 8 we are shown the utter ruin of the natural man-despising God's goodness, hating His Christ. Here in John 9 we behold the Lord dealing in grace, acting according to His sovereign benignity. This, this is the central contrast pointed by these two chapters. In the former it is the Light testing human responsibility; in the latter, the Light acting in sovereign mercy after the failure of human responsibility had been demonstrated. In the one we see the sin of man exposed, in the other we behold the grace of God displayed.

["And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth" \(John 9:1\).](#)

That which is dominant in this passage is intimated in the opening verse. The sovereignty of Divine grace is exemplified at once in the actions of our Lord and in the character of the one upon whom His

favours were bestowed. The Savior saw a certain man; the man did not see Him, for he had no capacity to do so, being blind. Nor did the blind man call upon Christ to have mercy upon him. The Lord was the one to take the initiative. It is ever thus when sovereign grace acts. But let us admire separately each detail in the picture here.

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man.” How blessed. The Savior was not occupied with His own sorrows to the exclusion of those of others. The absence of appreciation and the presence of hatred in almost all around Him, did not check that blessed One in His unwearied service to others, still less did He abandon it. Love “suffereth long,” and “beareth all things” (1 Corinthians 13). And Christ was Love incarnate, therefore did the stream of Divine goodness flow on unhindered by all man’s wickedness. How this perfection of Christ rebukes our imperfections, our selfishness!

“He saw a man which was blind from his birth.” What a pitiable object! To lose an arm or a leg is a serious handicap, but the loss of sight is far more so. And this man had never seen. From how many enjoyments was he cut off! Into what a narrow world did his affliction confine him! And blindness, like all other bodily afflictions, is one of the effects of sin. Not always so directly, but always so remotely. Had Adam never disobeyed his Maker the human family had been free from disease and suffering. Let us learn then to hate sin with godly hatred as the cause of all our sorrows; and let the sight of suffering ones serve to remind us of what a horrible thing sin is. But let us also remind ourselves that there is something infinitely more awful than physical blindness and temporal suffering, namely, sickness of soul and a blinded heart.

“He saw a man which was blind from his birth.” Accurately did he portray the terrible condition of the natural man. The sinner is blind spiritually. His understanding is darkened and his heart is blinded (Ephesians 4:18). Because of this he cannot see the awfulness of his condition: he cannot see his imminent danger: he cannot see his need of a Savior —

“Except a man be born again he *cannot see*” (John 3:3).

Such an one needs more than light; he needs the capacity given him to see the light. It is not a matter of mending his glasses (reformation), or of correcting his vision (education and culture), or of eye ointment (religion). None of these reach, or can reach, the root of the trouble. The natural man is *born blind* spiritually, and a faculty missing at birth cannot be supplied by extra cultivation of the others. A “transgressor from the womb” (Isaiah 48:8). shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5), man needs a Savior from the time he draws his very first breath. Such is the condition of God’s elect in their unregenerate state — “by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3).

“He saw a man which was blind from his birth.” The late Bishop Ryle called attention to the significant fact that the Gospels record more cases of blindness healed than that of any other one affliction. There was one deaf and dumb healed, one sick of the palsy, one sick of a fever, two instances of lepers being healed, three dead raised, but five of the blind! How this emphasizes the fact that man is in the dark spiritually. Moreover, the man in our lesson was a beggar (verse 8) — another line in the picture which so accurately portrays our state by nature. A beggar the poor sinner is: possessing nothing of his own, dependent on charity. A blind beggar — what an object of need and helplessness! Blind from his birth — altogether beyond the reach of man!

“And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2).

How little pity these disciples seem to have had for this blind beggar, and how indifferent to the outflow of the Lord’s grace. Instead of humbly and trustfully waiting to see what Christ would do, they were philosophizing. The point over which they were reasoning concerned the problem of suffering and the inequalities in the lot of human existence — points which have engaged the minds of men in every clime and age, and which apart from the light of God’s Word are still unsolved. There are many who drift along unexercised by much of what goes on around them. That some should be born into this world to enter an environment of comfort and luxury, while others first see the light amid squalor and poverty; that some should start the race of mortality with a healthy body and

a goodly reserve of vitality, while others should be severely handicapped with an organism that is feeble or diseased, and still others should be crippled from the womb, are phenomena which affect different people in very different ways. Many are largely unconcerned. If all is well with them, they give very little thought to the troubles of their fellows. But there are others who cannot remain indifferent, and whose minds seek an explanation to these mysteries. Why is it that some are born blind? — a mere accident it cannot be. As a punishment for sin, is the most obvious explanation. But if this be the true answer, a punishment for *whose* sins?

“Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” Three theories were current among the philosophers and theologians of that day. The first obtained in some measure among the Babylonians, and more extensively amongst the Persians and Greeks, and that was the doctrine of reincarnation. This was the view of the Essenes and Gnostics. They held that the soul of man returned to this earth again and again, and that the law of retribution regulated its varied temporal circumstances. If in his previous earthly life a man had been guilty of grievous sins, special punishment was meted out to him in his next earthly sojourn. In this way philosophers sought to explain the glaring inequalities among men. Those who now lived in conditions of comfort and prosperity were reaping the reward of former merit; those who were born to a life of suffering and poverty were being punished for previous sins. That this theory of re-incarnation obtained in measure even among the Jews is clear from Matthew 16:13, 14. When Christ asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” they said, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets” which shows that some of them thought the soul of one of the prophets was now re-incarnated in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Further evidence that this view obtained to some extent among the Jews is supplied by the Apocrypha. In “The Wisdom of Solomon” — 8:19, 20 — are found these words, “Now I was a goodly child, and a goodly soul fell to my lot. Nay rather, *being good*, I came into a body undefiled”!

But among the rabbins this theory held no place. It was so completely without scriptural support, yea, it so obviously clashed

with the teaching of the Old Testament, *they* rejected it in toto. How then could they explain the problem of human suffering? The majority of them did so by the law of heredity. They considered that Exodus 20:5 supplied the key to the whole problem: all suffering was to be attributed to the sins of the parents. But the Old Testament ought to have warned them against such a sweeping application of Exodus 20:5. The case of Job should have at least modified their views. With some it did, and among the Pharisees a third theory, still more untenable, was formulated. Some held that a child could sin even in the womb, and Genesis 25:22 was quoted in support.

It was in view of these prevailing and conflicting theories and philosophies which then obtained that the disciples put their question to the Lord: “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” Evidently they desired to hear what He would say upon the matter. But what is the present-day application of this verse to us? Surely the reasoning of these disciples in the presence of the blind beggar points a solemn warning. Surely it tells of the danger there is of us theorizing and philosophizing while we remain indifferent to human needs. Let us beware of becoming so occupied with the problems of theology that we fail to preach the Gospel to lost souls!

“Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in Him” (John 9:3).

The Lord returned a double answer to the disciples’ inquiry: negatively, this man was not born blind because of sin. “*Neither did this man sin nor his parents*” must not be understood absolutely, but like many another sentence of Scripture has to be modified by its setting. Our Lord did not mean that this man’s parents had never sinned, but that their sin was not the reason why their son had been born blind. All suffering is remotely due to sin, for if sin had not entered the world there would have been no suffering among humankind. But there is much suffering which is not due immediately to sin. Indirectly the Lord here rebukes a spirit which all of us are prone to indulge. It is so easy to assume the role of judge and pass sentence upon another. This was the sin of Job’s friends, recorded for our learning and warning. The same spirit is

displayed among some of the “Faith-healing” sects of our day. With them the view largely obtains that sickness is due to some sin in the life, and that where healing is withheld it is because that sin is unconfessed. But this is a very harsh and censorious judgment, and must frequently be erroneous. Moreover, it tends strongly to foster pride. If I am enjoying better health than many of my fellows, the inference would be, it is because I am not so great a sinner as they! The Lord deliver us from such reprehensible Phariseeism.

“But that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” Here is the positive side of our Lord’s answer, and it throws some light upon the problem of suffering. God has His own wise reasons for permitting sickness and disease; oftentimes it is that He may be glorified thereby. It was so in the case of Lazarus (John 11:4). It was so in connection with the death of Peter (John 21:19). It was so in the affliction of the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9). It was so with this blind beggar: he was born blind that the power of God might be evidenced in the removal of it, and that Christ might be glorified thereby.

“But that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” Let us not miss the present application of this to suffering saints today. Surely this word of the Savior’s contains a message of consolation to afflicted ones among His people now. Not that they may expect to be relieved by a miracle, but that they may comfort themselves with the assurance that God has a wise (if hidden) purpose to be served by their affliction, and that is, that in some way He will be glorified thereby. That way may not be manifested at once; perhaps not for long years. At least thirty years (see verse 23) passed before God made it evident why this man had been born blind. As to what God’s purpose is in our affliction, as to how His purpose will be attained, and as to when it will be accomplished, these things are none of our affair. Our business is to meekly submit to His sovereign pleasure (1 Samuel 3:18), and to be duly “exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11). Of this we may be sure, that whatever is for God’s glory in us, will ultimately bring blessing to us. Then do not question God’s love, but seek grace to rest in sincere faith on Romans 11:36 and 8:28.

[“I must work the works of him that sent me” \(John 9:4\).](#)

And what were these works? To reveal the perfections of God and to minister to the needs of His creatures. Such “works” the Son must do because He was one both in will and in nature with the Father. But no doubt there is another meaning in these words. The “works of him” that sent Christ were not only works that were *pleasing* to God, but they were works which had been *predestinated* by God. These works *must* be done because God had eternally decreed them — cf, the “must” in John 4:4 and 10:16.

“The night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:4, 5).

More specifically this statement had reference to what Christ was about to do — give sight to the blind beggar. This is clear from the opening words of verse 6: “When he had thus spoken.” The miracle Christ was about to perform gave a striking illustration of the yet greater miracle of the Divine bestowment of spiritual vision upon an elect sinner. Such an one must be illumined for the eternal counsels of Deity so determined — compare the “must” in Acts 4:12. The saving of a sinner is not only entirely the “work” of God, but it is, pre-eminently, that in which He delights. This is what these words of Christ here plainly intimate. How blessed to know, then, that the most glorious of all God’s works is displayed in the saving of lost and hell-deserving sinners, and that the Persons of the Trinity cooperate in the outflow of grace.

“The night cometh, when no man can work.” Christ here teaches us both by word and example the importance of making the most of our present opportunities. His earthly ministry was completed in less than four years, and these were now rapidly drawing to a close. He must then be about His Father’s business. A Divine constraint was upon Him. May a like sense of urgency impel us to redeem the time, knowing the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16). What a solemn word is this for the sinner: “the night cometh, when no man can work”! This is life’s day for him; in front lies the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 1:13). Unsaved reader, your “night” hastens on. “*Today* if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts.” “Behold now is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Christ seems to be referring to the attempt which had just been made upon His life (John 8:59). Soon the appointed time would come for Him to leave the world, but until that time had arrived man could not get rid of Him. The light *would* shine despite all man’s efforts to put it out. The stones of these Jews could not intimidate or hinder this One from finishing the work which has been given Him to do. “Light of the world” He had just demonstrated Himself to be by exposing their wicked hearts. “Light of the world” He would now exhibit Himself by communicating sight and salvation to this poor blind beggar.

“When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay” (John 9:6).

This was a parable in action and deserves our closest attention. Christ’s mode of procedure here though extraordinarily peculiar was, nevertheless, profoundly significant. Peculiar it certainly was, for the surest way to blot out vision would be to plaster the eye with wet clay: and yet this was the only thing Christ did to this blind beggar. Equally sure is it that His mysterious action possessed some deep symbolic significance. What that was we shall now inquire.

“When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.” The first thing we must do is to study this care fully in the light of the context. What is before us in the context? This: the “light of the world” (John 8:12), the “sent one” (John 8:18), the “Son” (John 8:36) was despised and rejected of the Jews. And why was that? Because He appeared before them in such lowly guise. They judged Him “after the flesh” (John 8:15); they sought to kill Him because He was “a man that had told them the truth” (John 8:40). They had no eyes to discern His Divine glory and were stumbled by the fact that He stood before them in “the likeness of men.”

Now what do we have here in John 9? This: once more Christ affirms that He was “the light of the world” (John 9:5); then, immediately following, we read, “When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.” Surely the meaning of this is now

apparent. “As a figure, it pointed to the humanity of Christ in earthly humiliation and lowliness, presented to the eyes of men, but with Divine efficacy of life in Him” (J.N.D.). Christ had presented Himself before the Jews, but devoid of spiritual perception they recognized Him not. And did the blind beggar, who accurately represented the Jews, did he see when Christ applied the clay to his eyes? No; he did not. He was still as blind as ever, and even though he had not been blind he could not have seen now. What, then, must he do? He must obey Christ. And what did Christ tell him to do? Mark carefully what follows.

“And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent)” (John 9:7).

This, too, was a sermon in action. What the blind beggar needed was *water*. And of what did that speak? Clearly of the written Word (see our notes on John 3:5, and cf. Ephesians 5:26). It was just because the Jews failed to use the water of the Word that the eyes of their hearts remained closed. Turn to John 5, and what do we find there? We see the Jews seeking to kill Christ because He made Himself equal with God (verse 18). And what did He bid them do? This: “Search the Scriptures” (John 5:39). We have the same thing again in John 10: the Jews took up stones again to stone Him (verse 31). And the Lord asked them why they acted thus. Their answer was, “Because that thou, *being a man*, makest thyself God” (verse 33). What reply did Christ make, “Jesus answered them, Is it not written?” It was then, this very thing which (symbolically) the Lord commanded the blind beggar to do. He obeyed implicitly, and the result was that he obtained his sight. The difference between the Jews and the beggar was this: they thought they could see already, and so refused the testimony of the written Word; whereas the beggar knew that he was blind and therefore used the water to which Christ referred him. This supplies the key to the 39th verse of this chapter which sums up all that has gone before. “And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.”

We turn now to consider the doctrinal significance of what has just been before us. The blind beggar is to be viewed as a representative character, i.e., as standing for each of God’s elect. Blind from birth,

and therefore beyond the help of man; a beggar and therefore having nothing, he fitly portrays our condition by nature. Sought out by Christ and ministered to without a single cry or appeal from him, we have a beautiful illustration of the activities of sovereign grace reaching out to us in our unregenerate state. Our Lord's method of dealing with him, was also, in principle, the way in which He dealt with us, when Divine mercy came to our rescue.

"He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." This seems to have a double meaning. Dispensationally it symbolized Christ presenting Himself in the flesh before the eyes of Israel. Doctrinally it prefigured the Lord pressing upon the sinner his lost condition and need of a Savior. The placing of clay on his eyes emphasizes our blindness. "And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." This intimates our need of turning to the Word and applying it to ourselves, for it is the entrance of God's words which, alone, give light (<19B9130> Psalm 119:130).

The name of the Pool in which the blind beggar was commanded to wash is not without its significance, as is seen by the fact that the Holy Spirit was careful to interpret it to us. God incarnate is the Object presented to the needy sinner's view: the One who was "*anointed*" by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). How is He presented to us? Not as pure spirit, nor in the form of an angel; but as "*made flesh*." *Where* is He to be thus found? In the written Word. As we turn to that Word we shall learn that the man Christ Jesus is none other than the "*sent one*" of the Father. It is through the Word alone (as taught by the Holy Spirit) that we can come to know the Christ of God.

"He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing" (John 9:7). The simple obedience of the blind beggar is very beautiful. He did not stop to reason and ask questions, but promptly did what was told him. As the old Puritan, John Trapp (1647), quaintly puts it, "He obeyed Christ blindly.

He looked not upon Siloam with Syrian eyes as Naaman did upon Jordan; but, passing by the unlikelihood of a cure by such means, he believeth and doeth as he was bidden, without hesitation." Let the

interested student go over the whole chapter carefully and prayerfully, seeking the *personal* application of this passage. Let the following questions be studied: —

1. How do verses 8 and 9 apply to the history of a newly saved soul?
2. What do verses 10 and 11 teach us concerning the young convert?
3. How do verse 12 fit in with the application of this passage to a babe in Christ?
4. Study verses 13-16 from a similar viewpoint.
5. What do the beggar's words in verse 17 intimate? Cf. our remarks on John 4:19.
6. What does verse 18 teach the young believer to expect?
7. What do verses 20-23 teach the babe in Christ he must do?

JOHN 9:8-23

CHRIST AND THE BLIND BEGGAR (CONTINUED)

We begin with our usual Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:—

1. The uncertainty of the neighbors: verses 8, 9.
2. Their questioning of the beggar: verse 10.
3. The beggar's answers: verses 11, 12.
4. The Pharisees and the Sabbath: verses 13, 14.
5. The beggar before the Pharisees: verses 15-17.
6. The skepticism of the Jews: verse 18.
7. The beggar's parents interrogated: verses 19-23.

In our last chapter we pointed out how that the opening verses of John 9 supply us with a blessed illustration of the outflow of sovereign grace toward an elect sinner. Every detail in the picture contributes to its beauty and accuracy. Upon the dark background of the Jews' hatred of Christ (chapter 8) we are now shown the Savior ministering to one who strictly portrays the spiritual condition of each of God's elect when the Lord begins His distinguishing work of mercy upon him. Seven things are told us about the object of the Redeemer's compassion:

First, he was found outside the Temple, portraying the fact that, in his natural 'condition, the elect sinner is alienated from God.

Second, he was blind, and therefore unable to see the Savior when He approached him.

Third, he had been blind from birth: so, too, is the sinner — “estranged from the womb” (Psalm 58:3).

Fourth, he was therefore quite beyond the aid of man: helpless and hopeless unless God intervened.

Fifth, he was a beggar (verse 8), unable to purchase any remedy if remedy there was; completely dependent upon charity.

Sixth, he made no appeal to the Savior and uttered no cry for mercy; such is our condition before Divine grace begins to work within us.

Seventh, the reasoning of the disciples (verse 2) illustrates the sad fact that no human eye pities the sinner in his spiritual wretchedness.

Our Lord’s dealings with this poor fellow shadow forth His gracious work in us today. Note, again, seven things, in connection with Christ and the blind beggar. First, He looked in tender pity upon the one who so sorely needed His healing touch. Second, He declared that this man had been created to the end that the power and grace of God might be manifested in him (verse 3). Third, He intimated that necessity was laid upon Him (verse 4): the eternal counsels of grace “must” be accomplished in the one singled out by Divine favor. Fourth, He announced Himself as the One who had power to communicate light to those in darkness (verse 5). Fifth, He pressed upon the blind beggar his desperate need by emphasizing his sad condition (verse 6). Sixth, He pointed him to the means of blessing and put his faith to the test (verse 7). Seventh, the beggar obeyed, and in his obedience obtained evidence that a miracle of mercy had been wrought upon him. Each of these seven things has their counterpart in the realm of grace today.

As we follow the Divine narrative and note the experiences of the blind beggar after he had received his sight, we shall find that it continues to mirror forth that which has its analogy in the spiritual history of those who have been apprehended by Christ. What is before us here in John 9 is something more than an incident that happened in the long ago — it accurately depicts what is transpiring in our own day. The more the believer studies this passage in the

light of his own spiritual history, the more will he see how perfectly this narrative describes his own experiences.

“The neighbors therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?” (John 9:8).

When a genuine work of grace has been wrought in a soul it is impossible to conceal it from our neighbors and acquaintances. At first they will talk among themselves and discuss with a good deal of curiosity and speculation what has happened. The unsaved are always skeptical of God’s miracles. When one of their fellows is saved, they cannot deny that a radical change has taken place, though the nature of it they are completely at a loss to explain. They know not that the manifestation of Christ in the outward life of a quickened soul is due to Christ now dwelling within. Yet, even the unbelieving world is compelled to take note and indirectly acknowledge that regeneration is a real thing. Ah! dear reader, if the Lord Jesus has laid His wondrous hand on you, then those with whom you come into daily contact will recognize the fact. “They will see that it is not with thee as it used to be — that a real change has passed upon thee — that the tempers and lusts, habits and influences which once ruled thee with despotic power, now rule thee no longer — that though evil may occasionally break out, it does not habitually bear sway — that though it dwells within it does not reign — though it plagues it does not govern.”

“Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he” (John 9:9).

How marvellously accurate is this line in the picture! When one who is dead in trespasses and sins has been quickened into newness of life he becomes a new creature in Christ, but the old man still remains. Not yet has he been delivered from this body of death; for that, he must await the return of our Lord. In the one who has been born again there are, then, two natures: the old is not destroyed, but a new has been imparted. This is plainly foreshadowed in the verse before us: some recognized the one they had known before his eyes were opened; others saw a different personality. It is this which is so

puzzling in connection with regeneration. The individual is still the same, but a new principle and element have come into his life.

“Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?” (John 9:10).

How true to life again! The one who has found mercy with the Lord is now put to the proof: his faith, his loyalty, his courage must be tested. It is not long before the quickened soul discovers that he is living in a world that is unfriendly toward him. At first God may not permit that unfriendliness to take on a very aggressive form, for He deals very tenderly with the babes in His family. But as they grow in grace and become strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, He suffers them to be tested more severely and no longer shields them from the fiercer assaults of their great enemy. Nevertheless, testing they must have from the beginning, for it is thus that faith is developed by casting us upon the Lord and perfecting our weakness in His strength.

“Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?” Here was an opportunity afforded this one who had so wondrously received his sight to bear witness to His gracious Benefactor. To *confess* Christ, to tell of what great things the Lord hath done for him, is the first duty of the newly saved soul, and the promise is,

“Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8).

But this is the last thing which the world appreciates or desires: that blessed Name which is above every name is an offense to them. It is striking to observe how the neighbors of the beggar framed their question: “How were thine eyes opened?” not “*Who* opened thine eyes?” They wished to satisfy their curiosity, but they had no desire to hear about Christ!

“He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight” (John 9:11).

The witness borne by this man was simple and honest. As yet he did not have much light, but he was faithful to the light that he did have; and that is the way to obtain more. He did not speculate nor philosophize, but gave a straightforward account of what the Lord had done to him. Two things in this man's confession should be noted as accurately illustrating the witness of a newly saved soul today. First, it was the work of Christ rather than His person which had most impressed him; it was what Christ had done, rather than who He was that was emphasized in his testimony. It is so with us. The first thing we grasp is that it is the Cross-work of the Lord Jesus, His sacrificial death which put away our sins; the infinite value of His person we learn later, as the Spirit unfolds it to us through the Word. Second, in connection with the person of Christ it was His *humanity*, not His Deity that this man spoke of. And was it not so with us? "A man that is called Jesus" — was it not that aspect of His blessed person which first filled our vision! "A man that is called Jesus" speaks of His lowliness and humiliation. Later, as we study the Scriptures and grow in the knowledge of the Lord, we discover that the man Christ Jesus is none other than the Son of God.

"He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight." That precious name of "Jesus" was the most hated of all to those Jews; yet did the beggar boldly confess it. "It would manifestly have served the poor man's worldly interest to cushion the truth as to what had been done for him. He might have enjoyed the benefit of the work of Christ, and yet avoided the rough path of testimony for His name in the face of the world's hostility. He might have enjoyed his eyesight, and, at the same time, retained his place within the pale of respectable religious profession. He might have reaped the fruit of Christ's work and yet escaped the reproach of confessing His *name*."

"How often is this the case! Alas, how often! Thousands are very well pleased to hear of what Jesus has done; but they do not want to be identified with His outcast and rejected Name. In other words, to use a modern and very popular phrase, 'They want to make the best of both worlds' — a sentiment from which every true-hearted lover

of Christ must shrink with abhorrence — an idea of which genuine faith is wholly ignorant. It is obvious that the subject of our narrative knew nothing of any such maxim. He had had his eyes opened, and he could not but speak of it, and tell who did it, and how it was done. He was an honest man. He had no mixed motives. No sinister object, no undercurrent. Happy for him? (C.H.M.).

“He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash.” There is one little detail here which strikingly evidences the truthfulness of this narrative, and that is one little *omission* in this man’s description of what the Savior had done to him. It is to be noted that the beggar made no reference to Christ spitting on the ground and making clay of the spittle. Being blind he could not see what the Lord did, though he could feel what He *applied*! It is in just such little undesigned coincidences, such artless touches, as this, that makes the more apparent the genuineness of these Divine narratives.

“Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not”
(John 9:12).

Equally commendable was the modesty of this man here. He acted up to the light that he had, but he did not go beyond it. He pretended not to possess a knowledge not yet his. O that we were all as simple and honest. When the neighbors enquired, “Is not this he that sat and begged?”, he answered, “I am he” — though it is most unseemly for a Christian to advertise the sins of his unregenerate days, yet it is equally wrong for him to deny what he then was when plainly asked. Next, they had asked, “How were thine eyes opened?”, and he unhesitatingly told them, not forgetting to boldly confess the name of his Benefactor. Now they said, “Where is he?”, and he frankly replied, “I know not.” The babe in Christ is guileless and hesitates not to acknowledge that he is ignorant of much. But it is sad to observe how pride so often comes in and destroys this simplicity and honesty. Christian reader, and especially the babe in Christ, hesitate not to avow your ignorance; when asked a question that you cannot answer, honestly reply, “I know not.” Feign not a knowledge you do not possess, and have not recourse to speculation.

[“They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind”
\(John 9:13\).](#)

“Now the former blind beggar was to become an object of special notice by the Pharisees. Very likely many of them had passed him unheeded. A blind beggar! Which of them would bestow a thought on him whose condition they regarded as an evidence that he was born in sin? But the beggar, no longer blind, was quite a different matter. Were they anxious to learn of the favor he had received in order to honor his Benefactor, or to solicit in their turn favors from Him? Quite the contrary. Their efforts were directed to discredit the miracle as being wrought by One sent from God. He who had shortly before affirmed of Himself in the Temple court, that He was God, had now opened that man’s eyes. The insult to the Divine Majesty, as the Jews regarded it, in asserting His Deity, was followed by this miracle, of which the beggar in the Temple precincts was the subject. To discredit the Lord was their purpose. He was a Sabbath-breaker they declared; and therefore that miracle must be disowned as being any display of almighty power and benevolence” (C. E. Stuart).

“They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.” This was a much more severe trial for him than what he had just passed through at the hands of his neighbors. It was a real test of his faith. The opposition of the Pharisees against the Lord, and their desire to get rid of Him were well known: and their determination to excommunicate any one who confessed Him as the Christ was no secret (see verse 22). To face them, then, was indeed an ordeal. Alas that this part of the history is being repeated today. Repeated it certainly is, for the ones who will treat worst the young believer are not open infidels and atheists, but those who are loudest in their religious professions. These Pharisees have many successors: their tribe is far from being extinct, and their descendants will be found occupying the same position of religious leadership as did their fathers of old.

[“And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes” \(John 9:14\).](#)

There are two observations which we would make on this verse. First, our Lord here teaches us that the words of the fourth commandment “In it [the Sabbath] thou shalt not do any work,” are not to be taken absolutely, that is, without any modification. By His own example He has shown us that works of necessity and also works of mercy are permissible. This 14th verse therefore reflects the glory of Christ. It was the Sabbath day: how was He occupied? First, (and note the order) He had gone to the Temple, there to minister God’s Word; second, now He is seen ministering in mercy to one in need. Perfect example has He left us.

In the next place, we would call attention to the fact that our Lord knew full well that His performing of this miracle on the Sabbath would give offense to His enemies. He proceeded to its execution, nevertheless. We have another illustration of the same principle in Mark 7:2:

“When they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed hands, they found fault.”

Though rendering perfect obedience to all the laws of God, Christ paid no regard to the commandments of men. Here too He has left us a perfect example. Let not the believer be brought into bondage by heeding the mandates of religious legislators, when their rules and regulations have no support from the Holy Scriptures.

“Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and i washed, and do see” (John 9:15).

This was an honest effort on the part of these Pharisees to investigate the teaching of that blessed One whose voice they had recently heard and whose power had now been so signally displayed. They — or the influential among them at least, for in this Gospel “the Jews” ever refer to the religious leaders or their agents — had already agreed that if any did confess that Jesus was the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue (see verse 22). Thus had they deliberately closed their eyes against the truth, and therefore it was impossible that they should now discern it, blinded by prejudice as they were. Their object here was twofold: to

discredit the miracle, and to intimidate the one who had been the subject of it. Note the form of their question. They, too, asked the beggar *how* he had received his sight, not *who* was the one who had so graciously blest him.

“He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.” The enlightened beggar was not to be cowed. He had returned a straightforward answer to the inquiries of his neighbors, he is equally honest and bold now before the open enemies of Christ. His faithful testimony here teaches us an important lesson. Behind his human interrogators it is not difficult to discern the great Enemy of souls. Satan it is who hurls the fiery darts, even though he employs religious professors as his instruments. But they fall powerless upon the shield of faith, and it is this which is illustrated here. One may be the veriest babe in Christ, but so long as he walks according to the measure of light which God has granted, the Devil is powerless to harm him. It is when we quench that light, or when we are unfaithful to Christ, that we become powerless, and fall an easy prey to the Enemy. But the one before us was acting up to the light that he had, therefore the lion roared in vain against him.

“Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day” (John 9:16).

A striking contrast is this from what has just been before us. These Pharisees had turned their backs upon the Light, and therefore was their darkness now even more profound. Devoid of spiritual discernment they were altogether incapable of determining what was a right use and lawful employment of the Sabbath and what was not. They understood not that “The sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27), that is, for the benefit of his soul and the good of his body. True, the day which God blest at the beginning was to be kept holy, but it was never intended to bar out works of necessity and works of mercy, as they should have known from the Old Testament Scriptures. In thus finding fault with Christ because He had opened the eyes of this blind beggar on the Sabbath day, they did but expose their ignorance and exhibit their spiritual blindness.

“Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them” (John 9:16).

We wonder if one of those who spoke up thus was Nicodemus! The argument used here is strictly parallel with the words of that “Master in Israel” which we find in John 3:1, 2. That we are next told, “And there was a division among them” shows that the second speakers held their ground and refused to side-in with the open enemies of our Lord. On this verse the Puritan Bullinger remarked, “All *divisions* are not necessarily evil, nor all concord and unity necessarily good”!

“They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?” (John 9:17).

The Devil is powerless in his efforts to gain an advantage over the sheep of Christ. Repulsed for the moment by the unexpected friendliness toward Christ on the part of some of the Pharisees, the Enemy turned his attention once more to the beggar: “They say unto the blind man again”: note the frequency with which this word is used in this passage — verses 15, 17, 24, 26. The Devil’s perseverance frequently puts our instability to shame.

“What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?” A searching question was this. The faith of the beggar was now openly challenged: he must now either confess or deny his Benefactor. But he did not flinch or dissemble. Boldly he answered, “He is a prophet.” Divine grace did not fail him in the hour of need, but enabled him to stand firm and witness a good confession. Blessed be His name, the grace of God is as *sufficient* for the youngest and feeblest as for the most mature and established.

“He said. He is a prophet” (John 9:17). There is a decided advance here. When answering his neighbors, the beggar simply referred to Christ as, “A man that is called Jesus” (verse 11); but now he owns Him as One whose word is Divine, for a “prophet” was a mouthpiece of God. This was most blessed. At first he had been occupied solely with the work of Christ, now he is beginning to discern the glory of His person; increased intelligence was his. Nor

is God arbitrary in the bestowment of this. When the believer walks faithfully according to the light which he has, more is given to him. It was so here; it is so now. This is the meaning of that verse which has perplexed so many:

“Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:18):

the reference here being to light used and unused-note the “therefore” which looks back to verse 16. In Matthew’s account it reads, “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.” A striking illustration of this is furnished in John 9. Light the beggar now had; and that light he let shine forth, consequently more was given to him; later, we shall see how a more abundance” was vouchsafed to him.

“He said, He is a *prophet*.” This is not the first time we have had Christ owned as “prophet” in this Gospel. In John 4:19 we read that the woman of Samaria said to the Savior at the well, “I perceive that thou art a prophet.” In John 6:14 we are told, “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that *prophet* that should come into the world.” Once more, in John 7:40 we read,

“Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the *prophet*.”

These references are in striking accord with the character and theme of this fourth Gospel. A prophet was *the mouthpiece* of God, and the great purpose of John’s Gospel, as intimated in its opening verse, is to portray the Lord Jesus as “the Word”!

“But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight” (John 9:18).

How skeptical are the unregenerate! “Children in whom is *no faith* (Deuteronomy 32:20) is what the Scriptures term them. A wonderful miracle had been performed, but these Jews were determined not to

believe it. The simple but emphatic testimony of the one on whom it had been wrought went for nothing. What a lesson is this for the young convert. Marvelling at what the Savior has so graciously done for and in him, anxious that others should know Him for themselves, he goes forth testifying of His grace and power. Full of zeal and hope, he expects that it will be a simple matter to convince others of the reality of what the Lord has done for him. Ah! it will not be long before his bright expectations meet with disappointment. He will soon discover something of that dreadful and inveterate unbelief which fills the hearts of his unsaved fellows. He must be shown that he has no power to convince them; that nothing but a miracle of mercy, the putting forth of invincible power by God Himself, is sufficient to overcome the enmity of the carnal mind.

“And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?” (John 9:19).

This was a desperate move. They had been unable to intimidate the one who had been dealt with so graciously by Christ. They were unable to meet the arguments which had been made by some of the more friendly Pharisees. They now decide to summon the beggar's parents. It was their last hope. If they could succeed in getting them to deny that their son had been born blind, the miracle would be discredited. With this object in view they arraign the parents. And Satan still seeks to discredit the witness of the young Christian by getting his relatives to testify against him! This is an oft-used device of his. Let us daily seek grace from God that we may so act in the home that those nearest to us will have no just ground for condemning our profession.

“His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself” (John 9:20, 21).

How this serves to expose the folly of a wish we have often heard expressed. People say, “O that I had lived in Palestine during the days of Christ's public ministry; it had been so much easier to have believed in Him!” They suppose that if only they had witnessed

some of the wonderful works of our Lord, unbelief had been impossible. How little such people know about the real nature and seat of unbelief; and how little acquainted must they be with the four Gospels. These plainly record the fact (making no effort at all either to conceal or excuse it) that again and again the Lord Jesus put forth His supernatural power, producing the most amazing effects, and yet the great majority of those who stood by were nothing more than temporarily impressed. It was so here in the passage before us. Even the parents of this man born blind believed not on Christ. They were evidently afraid of their inquisitors; and yet their answer nonplussed the Pharisees.

“These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews” (John 9:22).

They represented a large class of religious professors who surround us on every side today — in such bondage are men and women, otherwise intelligent, to religious leaders and authorities. How true it is that “the fear of man bringeth a snare.” The only ones who are fearless before men are those who truly *fear* God. This is one of our daily needs: to cry earnestly unto the Lord that He will put *His* “fear” upon us.

“These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22).

Mark here the desperate lengths to which prejudice will carry men. They were determined not to believe. They had made up their minds that no evidence should change their opinions, that no testimony should have any weight with them. It reminds us very much of what we read of in Acts 7. At the close of Stephen’s address we read that his enemies “*stopped their ears*, and ran upon him with one accord” (verse 57). This is just what these Pharisees did, and it is what many are doing today. And this is the most dangerous attitude a sinner can assume. So long as a man is honest and open-minded, there is hope for him, no matter how ignorant or vicious he may be. But when a man has deliberately turned his back upon the truth, and refuses to

be influenced by any evidence, it is very rare indeed that such an one is ever brought into the light.

“Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him” (John 9:23).

Typically, this tells us that the young and tried believer must not look to man for help; his resources must be in God alone. This man might well have expected his parents to be filled with gratitude at their son’s eyes being opened, that they would perceive how God had wrought a miracle of mercy upon him, and that they would readily stand by and corroborate his witness before this unfriendly tribunal. But little help did he receive from them. The onus was thrown back upon himself. And this line in the picture is not without its due significance. The young believer might well expect his loved ones to appreciate and rejoice over the blessed change they must see in him; but oftentimes they are quite indifferent if not openly antagonistic. So too with our fellow-Christians. If we look to them for help when we get in a tight place, they will generally fail us. And it is perhaps well that it should be so. Anything that really casts us *upon God Himself* is a blessing, even though it be disguised and appear to us a calamity at the time. Let us learn then to “have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3), but let our expectation be in the Lord, who will fail us not.

Let the interested student ponder the following questions:

1. What is meant by “Give God the praise” (verse 24)? Cf. Joshua 7:19.
2. Explain the first half of verse 25 so as not to conflict with verse 33.
3. What other verse in John’s Gospel does the second half of verse 29 call to mind?
4. What connection is there between verse 31 and what has gone before?

5. Why did Christ wait till the beggar had been “east out” (verse 34) before He revealed Himself as the Son of God (verse 35)?
6. Why are we told nothing more about the beggar after what is said in verse 38?
7. What is the meaning of verse 39? Contrast John 3:17.

JOHN 9:24-41

CHRIST AND THE BLIND BEGGAR (CONCLUDED)

The following is offered as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The beggar challenged and his reply: verses 24, 25.
2. The beggar cross-examined and his response: verses 26, 27.
3. The beggar reviled: verses 28, 29.
4. The beggar defeats his judges: verses 30-33.
5. The beggar cast out by the Pharisees, sought out by Christ: verses 34, 35.
6. The beggar worships Christ as the Son of God: verses 36-38.
7. Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees: verses 39-41.

We arrive now at the closing scenes in this inspired narrative of the Lord's dealings with the blind beggar and the consequent hostility of the Pharisees. In it there is much that is reprehensible, but much too that is praiseworthy. The enmity of the carnal mind is again exhibited to our view; while the blessed fruit of Divine grace is presented for our admiration. The wickedness of the Pharisees finds its climax in their excommunication of the beggar; the workings of grace in his heart reaches its culmination by bringing him to the feet of the Savior as a devoted worshipper.

The passage before us records the persistent efforts of the Pharisees to shake the testimony of this one who had received his sight. Their blindness, their refusal to be influenced by the most convincing evidence, their enmity against the beggar's Benefactor, and their unjust and cruel treatment of him, vividly forecasted the treatment which the Lord Himself was shortly to receive at their hands. On the

other hand, the fidelity of the beggar, his refusal to be intimidated by those in authority, his Divinely-given power to non-plus his judges, his being cast out of Judaism, and his place as a worshipper at the feet of the Son of God *on the outside*, anticipated what was to be exemplified again and again in the history of the Lord's disciples following His own apprehension.

“Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner” (John 9:24).

The one to whom sight had been so marvelously imparted had been removed from the court of the Sanhedrin while the examination of his parents had been going on. But he is now brought in before his judges again. The examination of his parents had signally failed to either produce any discrepancy between the statements of the parents and that of their son, or to bring out any fact to the discredit of Christ. A final effort was therefore made now to shake the testimony of the man himself.

“Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.” These shameless inquisitors pretended that during his absence they had discovered something to the utter discredit of the Lord Jesus. Things had come to light, so they feigned, which proved Him to be more than an ordinary bad character — such is the force of the Greek word here for “sinner,” compare its usage in Luke 7:34, 37, 39; 15:2; 19:7. It is evident that the Sanhedrin would lead the beggar to believe that facts regarding his Benefactor had now come to their knowledge which showed He could not be the Divinely-directed author of his healing. Therefore, they now address him in a solemn formula, identical With that used by Joshua when arraigning Achan — see Joshua 7:19. They adjured him by the living God to tell the whole truth. They demanded that he forswear himself, and join with them in some formal statement which was dishonoring to Christ. It was a desperate and blasphemous effort at intimidation.

“He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

It is refreshing to turn for a moment from the unbelief and enmity of the Pharisees to mark the simplicity and honesty of this babe in Christ. The Latin Vulgate renders the first clause of this verse, "If he is a sinner I know not." The force of his utterance seems to be this: 'I do not believe that He is a sinner; I will not charge Him with being one; I refuse to unite with you in saying that He is.' Clear it is that the contents of this verse must not be explained in a way so as to clash with what we have in verse 33, where the beggar owned that Christ was "of God." The proper way is to view it in the light of the previous verse. There we find the Pharisees adjuring him to join with them in denouncing Christ as a sinner. This the beggar flatly refused to do, and refused in such a way as to show that he declined to enter into a controversy with his judges about the character of Christ.

"Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." This was tantamount to saying, 'Your charge against the person of Christ is altogether beside the point. You are examining me in connection with what Christ has done for me, therefore I refuse to turn aside and discuss His *person*.' The Pharisees were trying to change the issue, but the beggar would not be side-tracked. He held them to the indisputable fact that a miracle of mercy had been wrought upon him. Thereupon he boldly declared again what the Lord had done for him. That his eyes had been opened could not be gainsaid: all the argument and attacks of the Pharisees could not shake him. Let us not only admire his fearlessness and truthfulness, but seek grace to emulate him.

"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." These are words which every born-again person can apply to himself. There are many things of which the young believer has little knowledge: there are many points in theology and prophecy upon which he has no light: but "one thing" he *does* know — he knows that the eyes of his understanding have been opened. He knows this because he has seen himself as a lost sinner, seen his imminent danger, seen the Divinely-appointed refuge from the wrath to come, seen the sufficiency of Christ to save him. Can a man repent and not know it? can he believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to the saving of his soul and not know it? can he pass from death unto life, be delivered from the

power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and not know it? We do not believe it. The saints of God are a people that "know." They *know* Whom they have believed (2 Timothy 1:12). They *know* that their Redeemer liveth (Job 19:26). They know the), have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14). They know that all things work together for their good (Romans 8:28). They know that when the Lord Jesus shall appear they shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). Christianity treats not of theories and hypotheses, but of certainties and realities. Rest not, dear reader, till you can say, "One thing I *know*, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

"Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?" (John 9:26).

Unable to get this man to deny the miracle which had been wrought upon him, unable to bring him to entertain an evil opinion of Christ, his judges inquire once more about the manner in which he had been healed. This inquiry of theirs was merely a repetition of their former question — see verse 15. It is evident that their object in repeating this query was the hope that he would vary in his account and thus give them grounds for discrediting his testimony. They were seeking to "shake his evidence": they hoped he would contradict himself.

"Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?" This illustrates again how that unbelief is occupied with the *modus operandi* rather than with the result itself. How you were brought to Christ the secondary causes, where you were at the time, the instrument God employed — is of little moment. The one thing that matters is whether or not the Lord has opened the sin-blinded eyes of your heart. Whether you were saved in the fields or in a church, whether you were on your knees at a "mourner's bench" or upon your back in bed, is a detail of very little value. Faith is occupied not with the manner in which you held out your hand to receive God's gift, but with Christ Himself! But unbelief is occupied with the "how" rather than with the "whom."

"He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?" (John 9:27).

With honest indignation he turns upon his unscrupulous inquisitors and refuses to waste time in repeating what he had already told them so simply and plainly. It is quite useless to discuss the things of God with those whose hearts are manifestly closed against Him. When such people continue pressing their frivolous or blasphemous inquiries, only one course remains open, and that is

“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit” (Proverbs 26:5).

This Divine admonition,, has puzzled some, because in the preceding verse we are told, Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.” But the seeming contradiction is easily explained. When God says, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him,” the meaning is, I must not answer a fool in a foolish manner, for this would make me a sharer of his folly. But when God says, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit,” the meaning is, that I must answer him in a way to expose his folly, lest he imagine that he has succeeded in propounding a question which is unanswerable. This is exactly what the beggar did here in the lesson: he answered in such a way as to make evident the folly and unbelief of his judges.

“Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses’ disciples” (John 9:28).

The word “reviled” is hardly strong enough to express the original. The Greek word signifies that the Pharisees hurled their anathemas against him by pronouncing him an execrable fellow. How true to life! Unable to fairly meet his challenge, unable to justify their course, they resort to villification. To have recourse to invectives is ever the last resort of a defeated opponent. Whenever you find men calling their opponents hard names, it is a sure sign that their own cause has been defeated.

“They reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple.” The man of the world has little difficulty in locating a genuine “disciple” of Christ. This man had not formally avowed himself as such, yet the Pharisees had no difficulty in deciding that he was one. His whole demeanor was so different from the cringing servility which they

were accustomed to receive from their own followers, and the wisdom with which he had replied to all their questions, stamped him plainly as one who had *learned* of the God-man. So it is today. Real Christians need no placards on their backs or buttons on their coat lapels in order to inform their fellows that they belong to the Lord Jesus. If I am walking as a child of light, men will soon exclaim, "Thou art his disciple." The Lord enable writer and reader to give as clear and ringing a testimony in our lives as this beggar did.

"But we are Moses' disciples." A lofty boast was this, but as baseless as haughty. The Lord had already told them,

"Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me" (John 5:46).

This too has its present-day application. Multitudes are seeking shelter behind high pretensions and honored names. Many there are who term themselves Calvinists that Calvin would be ashamed to own. Many call themselves Lutherans who neither manifest the faith nor emulate the works of the great Reformer. Many go under the name of Baptists to whom our Lord's forerunner, were he here in the flesh, would say, "Flee from the wrath to come." And countless numbers claim to be Protestants who scarcely know what the term itself signifies. It is one thing to say "We are disciples," it is quite another to make demonstration of it.

"We know that God spake unto Moses" (John 9:29).

Such knowledge was purely intellectual, something which they venerated as a religious tradition handed down by their forebears; but it neither moved their hearts nor affected their lives. And that is the real test of a man's orthodoxy. An orthodox creed, intellectually apprehended, counts for nothing if it fails to mould the life of the one professing it. I may claim to regard the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God, yea, and be ready to defend this fundamental article of the faith; I may refuse to heed the infidelistic utterances of the higher critics, and pride myself on my doctrinal soundness — as did these Pharisees. But of what worth is this if I know not what it means to tremble at that Word, and if my walk is not regulated by its

precepts? None at all! Rather will such intellectual light serve only to increase my condemnation.

“As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is” (John 9:29).

Proofs went for nothing. The testimony of this man and the witness of his parents had been spread before these Pharisees, yet they believed not. Ah! faith does not come that way. Hearing the testimony of God’s saints will no more regenerate lost sinners than listening to the description of a dinner I ate will feed some other hungry man. That is one reason why the writer has no patience with “testimony meetings”: another is, because he finds no precedent for them in the Word of God. But this beggar had faith, and his faith came as the result of being made the personal subject of the mighty operation of God. Nothing short of this avails. Sinners may witness miracles as Pharaoh did; they may listen to the testimony of a believer as these Pharisees; they may be terrified by the convulsions of nature, but none of these things will ever lead a single sinner to believe in Christ.

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17)

by the Word applied in the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit.

“As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.” How inconsistent is unbelief! In the seventh chapter of this Gospel we find the Jews refusing to believe on Christ because they declared they *did* know whence He was. Hear them, Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is” (John 7:27). But now these Pharisees object against Christ, “We know not from whence he is.” Thus do those who reject the truth of God contradict themselves.

“The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes” (John 9:30).

Quick to seize the acknowledgement of the ignorance as to whence Christ came, the beggar turned it against them. Though he spoke in the mildest of terms yet the stinging import of his words is evident. It was as though he had said, “You who profess yourselves fully qualified to guide the people on all points, and yet in the dark on a matter like this!” A poor beggar he might be, and as such cut off from many of the advantages they had enjoyed, nevertheless, he knew what they did not — he knew that Christ was “of God” (verse 33)! How true it is that God reveals things to babes in Christ which He hides from the wise and prudent! hides because they are “wise” — wise in their own conceits. Nothing shuts out Divine illumination so effectively as prejudice and pride: nothing tends to blind the heart more than egotism. “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Corinthians 3:18); “Proud, knowing nothing” (1 Timothy 6:4).

“Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth” (John 9:31).

This verse like many another must not be divorced from its setting. Taken absolutely, these words “God heareth not sinners,” are not true. God “heard” the cry of Ishmael (Genesis 21:17); He “heard” the groanings of the children of Israel in Egypt, long before He redeemed them (Exodus 2:24); He “heard” and answered the prayer of the wicked Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10-13). But reading this verse in the light of its context its meaning is apparent. The Pharisees had said of Christ, “We know that this man is a sinner” (verse 24). Now says the beggar, “We know that God heareth not sinners,” which was one of their pet doctrines. Thus, once more, did the one on trial turn the word of his judges against themselves. If Christ were an impostor as they avowed, then how came it that God has assisted Him to work this miracle?

“Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind” (John 9:32).

This was his reply to their statement that they were Moses’ disciples. He reminds them that not even in Moses’ day, not from the beginning of the world had such a miracle been performed as had

been wrought on him. It is a significant fact that among all the miracles wrought by Moses, never did he give sight to a blind man, nor did any of the prophets ever open the eyes of one born blind. That was something that only Christ did!

“If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.” This beggar was now endowed with a wisdom to which these learned Pharisees were strangers. How often is this same principle illustrated in the Scriptures. The Hebrew lad from the dungeon, not the wise men of Egypt, was the one to interpret the dream of Pharaoh. Daniel, not the wise men of Babylon, deciphered the mysterious writing on the walls of Belshazzar’s palace. Unlettered fishermen, not the scribes, were taken into the confidences of the Savior. So here, a mouth and wisdom were given to this babe in Christ which the doctors of the Sanhedrin were unable to resist.

“If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.” What a beautiful illustration is this of Proverbs 4:18! — “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day.” First, this beggar had referred to his Benefactor as “a man that is called Jesus” (verse 11). Second, he had owned Him as “a prophet” (verse 17). And now he declares that Christ was a man of God.” There is also a lesson here pointed for us: as we walk according to the light we have, God gives us more. Here is the reason why so many of God’s children are in the dark concerning much of His truth — they are not faithful to the light they do have. May God exercise both writer and reader about this so that we may earnestly seek from Him the grace which we so sorely need to make us faithful and true to all we have received of Him.

“They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?” (John 9:34).

Alas, how tragically does history repeat itself. These men were too arrogant to receive anything from this poor beggar. They were graduates from honored seats of learning, therefore was it far too much beneath their dignity to be instructed by this unsophisticated disciple of Christ. And how many a preacher there is today, who in his fancied superiority, scorns the help which oftentimes a member of his congregation could give him. Glorifying in their seminary

education, they cannot allow that an ignorant layman has light on the Scriptures which they do not possess. Let a Spirit-taught layman seek to show the average preacher “the way of the Lord more perfectly,” and he must not be surprised if his pastor says — if not in so many words, plainly by his bearing and actions — “dost thou teach us?” How marvellously pertinent is this two-thousand-year-old Book to our own times!

“And they cast him out” (John 9:34).

“Happy man! He had followed the light, in simplicity and sincerity. He had borne an honest testimony to the truth. His eyes had been opened to see and his lips to testify. It was no matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, but simple truth, and for that they cast him out. He had never troubled them in the days of his blindness and beggary. Perhaps some of them may have proudly and ostentatiously tossed him a trifling alms as they walked past, thus getting a name amongst their fellows for benevolence; but now this blind beggar had become a powerful witness. Words of truth now flowed from his lips — truth far too powerful and piercing for them to stand, so they ‘thrust him out.’ Happy, thrice happy man! again we say, This was the brightest moment in his career. These men, though they knew it not, had done him a real service. They had thrust him out into the most honored position of identification with Christ as the despised and rejected One” (C.H.M.).

“And they cast him out.” How cruelly and unjustly will religious professors treat the real people of God! When these Pharisees failed to intimidate this man they excommunicated him from the Jewish church. To an Israelite the dread of excommunication was second only to the fear of death: it cut him off from all the outward privileges of the commonwealth of Israel, and made him an object of scorn and derision. But all through the ages some of the faithful witnesses of Christ have met with similar or even worse treatment. Excommunication, persecution, imprisonment, torture, death, are the favorite weapons of ecclesiastical tyrants. Thus were the Waldenses treated; so Luther, Bunyan, Ridley, the Huguenots; and so, in great probability, will it be again in the near future.

“And they cast him out.” Ah! Christian reader, if you did as this man you would know something of his experience. If you bore faithful testimony for Christ by lip and life; if you refused to walk arm-in-arm with the world, and lived here as a stranger and pilgrim; if you declined to follow the customs of the great religious crowd, and regulated your walk by the Word, you would be very unpopular — perhaps the very thing that you most fear! You would be cut off from your former circle of friends, as not wanted; cut off because your ways condemned theirs. Yea, if true to God’s Word you might be turned out of your church as an heretic or stirrer up of strife.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35).

This is indeed precious. No sooner had the Sanhedrin excommunicated the beggar than the Savior sought him out. How true it is that those who honor God are honored by Him. Faithfully had this man walked according to his measure of light, now more is to be given him. Great is the compassion of Christ. He knew full well the weight of the trial which had fallen upon this newly-born soul, and He proved Himself “a very present help in trouble.” He cheered this man with gracious words. Yea, He revealed Himself more fully to him than to any other individual, save the Samaritan adulteress. He plainly avowed His deity: He presented Himself in His highest glory as “the Son of God.”

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” The connection between this and the previous verse should be carefully noted: the beggar was “cast out” before he knew Christ as the Son of God. The Nation as such denied this truth, and only the despised few on the outside of organized Judaism had it revealed to them. There is a message here greatly needed by many of the Lord’s people today who are inside man-made systems where much of the truth of God is denied. True, if they are the Lord’s, they are saved; but not to them will Christ *reveal Himself*, while they continue in a position which is dishonoring to Him. It is the Holy Spirit’s office to take of the things of Christ and to show them unto us. But while we are identified with and lend our support to that which grieves Him, He will not delight

our souls with revelations of the excellencies of our Savior. Nowhere in Scripture has God promised to honor those who dishonor Him. God is very jealous of the honor of His Son and He withholds many spiritual blessings from those who fellowship that which is an offense to Him. On the outside *with Christ* is infinitely preferable to being on the inside with worldly professors who know Him not. The time is already arrived when many of God's people are compelled to choose between these two alternatives. Far better to be cast out because of faithfulness to Christ, or to "come out" (2 Corinthians 6:17) because of others' unfaithfulness to Christ, than to remain in the Laodicean system which is yet to be "spued out" by Christ (Revelation 3:16). Whatever loss may be entailed by leaving unscriptural and worldly churches, it will be more than compensated by the Lord. It was so with this beggar.

["He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" \(John 9:36\).](#)

It is indeed beautiful to mark the spirit of this man in the presence of Christ. Before the Sanhedrin he was bold as a lion, but before the Son of God he is meek and lowly. Here he is seen addressing Him as "Lord." These graces, seemingly so conflicting, are ever found together. Wherever there is uncompromising boldness toward men, there is humility before God: it is the God-fearing man who is fearless before the Lord's enemies.

["And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee" \(John 9:37\).](#)

This is one of the four instances in this Gospel where the Lord Jesus expressly declared His Divine Sonship. In verse 25 He foretold that "the dead shall hear the voice of the *Son of God*: and they that hear shall live." Here He says "Dost thou believe on the *Son of God*?... it is he that talketh with thee." In John 10:36 He asked "Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am *the Son of God*?" In John 11:4 He told His disciples "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Nowhere in the other Gospels does He explicitly affirm that He was the *Son of*

God. John's record of each of these four utterances of the Savior is in beautiful accord with the special theme and design of his Gospel.

“And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him”
(John 9:38).

What a lovely climax is this in the spiritual history of the blind beggar! How it illustrates the fact that when God begins a good work He continues and completes it. All through the sacred narrative here the experiences of this man exemplify the history of each soul that is saved by grace. At first, seen in his wretchedness and helplessness: sought out by the Lord: pointed to that which speaks of the Word: made the subject of the supernatural operation of God, sight imparted. Then given opportunity to testify to his acquaintances of the merciful work which had been wrought upon him. Severely tested by the Lord's enemies, he, nevertheless, witnessed a good confession. Denied the support of his parents, he is cast back the more upon God. Arraigned by the religious authorities, and boldly answering them according to the light he had, more was given him. Confounding his opponents, he is reviled by them. Confessing that Christ was of God, he is east out of the religious systems of his day. Now sought out by the Savior, he is taught the excellency of His person which results in him taking his place at the feet of the Son of God as a devoted worshipper. And here, most suitably, the Holy Spirit leaves him, for it is there he will be forever a worshipper in the presence of the One who did so much for him. Truly naught but Divine wisdom could have combined with this historical narrative an accurate portrayal of the representative experiences of an elect soul.

“And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39).

“This is deeply solemn! For judgment I am come into this world.’ How is this? Did He not come to seek and to save that which was lost? So He Himself tells us (Luke 19:10), why then speak of ‘judgment’? The meaning is simply this: the *object* of His mission was salvation; the moral *effect* of His life was judgment. He judged no one, and yet He judged every one.

“It is well to see this effect of the character and life of Christ down here. He was the light of the world, and this light acted in a double way. It convicted and converted, it judged and it saved. Furthermore it dazzled, by its heavenly brightness, all those who thought they saw; while, at the same time, it lightened all those who really felt their moral and spiritual blindness. He came not to judge, but to save; and yet when come, He judged every man, and put every man to the test. He was different from all around Him, as light in the midst of darkness; and yet He saved all who accepted the judgment and took their true place.

“The same thing is observed when we contemplate the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. ‘For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23, 24). Looked at from a human point of view, the cross presented a spectacle of weakness and foolishness. But, looked at from a Divine point of view, it was the exhibition of power and wisdom, ‘The Jew’, looking at the cross through the hazy medium of traditionary religion stumbled over it; and ‘the Greek’, looking at it from the fancied heights of philosophy, despised it as a contemptible thing. But the faith of a poor sinner, looking at the cross from the depths of conscious guilt and need, found in it a Divine answer to every question, a Divine supply for every need. The death of Christ, like His life, judged every man, and yet it saves all those who accept the judgment and take their true place before God” (C.H.M.).

This was all announced from the beginning:

“And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).

“And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now

ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:40, 41).

This receives explanation in John 15:22-24:

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak (excuse) for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.”

The simple meaning then of these words of Christ to the Pharisees is this: “If you were sensible of your blindness and really desired light, if you would take this place before Me, salvation would be yours and no condemnation would rest upon you. But because of your pride and self-sufficiency, because you refuse to acknowledge your undone condition, your guilt remaineth.” How strikingly this confirms our interpretation of verse 6 and the sequel. The blind man made to see illustrates those who accept God’s verdict of man’s lost condition; the self-righteous Pharisees who refused to bow to the Lord’s decision that they were “condemned already” (John 3:18), continued in their blindness and sin.

Let the interested student carefully ponder the following questions on John 10:1-10: —

1. What is the “sheepfold” of verse 1?
2. What is “the door” by which the shepherd enters the sheepfold? (verse 2).
3. Who is “the porter” of verse 3?
4. Leadeth the sheep “out of” what? (verse 3).
5. What is the meaning of “I am the door of the sheep” (verse 7)?
6. What entirely different line of thought does “I am the door” of verse 9 give us?

7. Who is “the thief” of verse 10?

JOHN 10:1-10.

CHRIST, THE DOOR

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. Entrance into the Sheepfold: lawful and unlawful: verses 1, 2.
2. The Shepherd admitted by the porter: verse 3.
3. The Shepherd leading His sheep out of the fold: verses 3, 4.
4. The attitude of the sheep toward strangers: verse 5.
5. Christ's proverb not understood: verse 6.
6. The true Shepherd and the false shepherds contrasted: verses 7-9.
7. Antichrist and Christ contrasted: verse 10.

As a personal aid to the study of this passage the writer drew up a list of questions, of which the following are samples: To whom is our Lord speaking? What was the immediate occasion of His address? Why does He make reference to a "sheepfold?" What is meant by "climbing up some other way" into it? What is signified by "the door"? *What* "sheepfold" is here in view? — note it is one into which thieves and robbers could climb; it was one entered by the shepherd; it was one out of which the shepherd led his sheep. Who does "the porter" bring before us? Such questions enable us to focalize our thoughts and approach this section with some degree of definiteness.

Our passage begins with "Verily, verily, I say unto you." The antecedent of the you is found in "the Pharisees" of the previous chapter. The occasion of this word from Christ was the excommunication of the beggar by the Pharisees (John 9:34). The mention of "the sheepfold" at once views these Pharisees in a pastoral relationship. The reference to "thieves and robbers"

climbing up some other way denounced the Pharisees as *False* shepherds, and rebuked them for their unlawful conduct. In the course of this “parable” or “proverb,” the Lord contrasts Himself from the Pharisees as the true Shepherd. These things are clear on the surface, and the confusion of some of the commentators can only be attributed to their failure to attend to these simple details.

There are two chief reasons why many have experienced difficulty in apprehending the Lord’s teaching in this passage: failure to consider the circumstances under which it was delivered, and failure to distinguish between the *three* “doors” here spoken of — there is the “door into the sheepfold” (verse 1); the “door of the sheep” (verse 7); and the “door” of salvation (verse 9). In the previous chapter we find our Lord had given sight to one born blind. This aroused the jealousy of the Pharisees, so that when the beggar faithfully confessed it was Jesus who had opened his eyes, they cast him out of the synagogue. When Christ heard of this He at once sought him out, and revealed Himself as the Son of God. This drew forth the confession, “Lord, I believe.” Thus did he evidence himself to be one of “the sheep,” responding to the Shepherd’s voice. Following this, our Lord announced,

“For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39).

Some of the Pharisees heard Him, and asked, “Are we blind also?” To which the Savior replied, “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” It was the self-confidence and self-complacency of these Pharisees which proved them to be blind, and therefore in their sins. Unto them, under these circumstances, did Christ deliver this memorable and searching proverb of the shepherd and his sheep.

It will probably be of some help to the reader if we describe briefly the character of the “sheepfold” which obtains in Eastern lands. In Palestine, which in the pastoral sections was infested with wild beasts, there was in each village a large sheepfold, which was the common property of the native farmers. This sheepfold was protected by a wall some ten or twelve feet high. When night fell, a

number of different shepherds would lead their flocks up to the door of the fold, through which they passed, leaving them in the care of the porter, while they went home or sought lodging. At the door, the porter lay on guard through the night, ready to protect the sheep against thieves and robbers, or against wild animals which might scale the walls. In the morning the different shepherds returned. The porter would allow each one to enter through the door, calling by name the sheep which belonged to his flock. The sheep would respond to his voice, and he would lead them out to pasture. In the lesson before us this is what the Lord uses as a figure or proverb.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep” (John 10:1, 2).

The “sheepfold” here is not Heaven, for thieves and robbers do not climb up into it. Nor is it “The Church” as some have strangely supposed, for the Shepherd does not lead His sheep out of that, as He does from this fold (see verse 3). No, the “sheepfold” is manifestly *Judaism* — in which some of God’s elect were then to be found — and the contrast pointed in these opening verses between the true Shepherd and the false ones, between Christ and the Pharisees. The “door” here must not be confused with “the Door” of verse 9. Here in verse 1 it is simply contrasted from the “climbing up some *other* way.” It signifies, then, the lawful “way” of entrance for the Shepherd, to those of His sheep then to be found in Judaism.

“But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” The simple meaning of this is, that Christ presented Himself to Israel in a lawful manner, that is, in strict accord with the Holy Scriptures. “He submitted Himself to all the conditions established by Him who built the house. Christ answered to all that was written of the Messiah, and took the path of God’s will in presenting Himself to the people” (Mr. Darby).

He had been born of a virgin, of the covenant people, of the Judaic stock, in the royal city — Bethlehem. He had conformed to everything which God required of an Israelite. He had been “born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). He was circumcised the eighth day

(Luke 2:21), and subsequently, at the purification of His mother, He was presented to God in the Temple (Luke 2:22).

“To him the porter openeth” (John 10:3). The word “porter” signifies door-keeper. The only other time the word occurs in John’s Gospel is in John 18:16, 17, and how strikingly these two references illustrate, once more, the law of contrast! “But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door (the porter), and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not.” In John 10 the “porter” refers, ultimately, to the Holy Spirit, while the door-keeper in John 18 is a woman that evidently had no sympathy with Christ. In John 10 the porter opens the door to give the Shepherd access to the sheep, whereas in John 18 the door is opened that a sheep might gain access to the Shepherd. In John 10 the sheep run to the Shepherd, but in John 18 the sheep is seen in the midst of wolves. In John 10 the sheep follow the Shepherd: in John 18 one of the sheep denies the Shepherd!

“To him the porter openeth.” The “porter” was the one who vouched for the shepherd and presented him to the sheep. As to the identity of the “porter” in this proverb there can be no doubt. The direct reference was to John the Baptist who “prepared the way of the Lord.” He it was who formally introduced the Shepherd to Israel:

“that he should be *made manifest* to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing” (John 1:31),

was his own confession. But, in the wider application, the “porter” here represented the Holy Spirit, who officially vouched for the credentials of the Messiah, and who now presents the Savior to each of God’s elect.

“To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out” (John 10:3).

Three things mark the genuine shepherd: first, he entered the fold by “the door,” and climbed not over the walls, as thieves and robbers

did. Second, he entered the door by “the porter” opening to him. Third, he proved himself, by “the sheep” recognizing and responding to his voice. Mark, then, how fully and perfectly these three requirements were met by Christ in His relation to Israel, thus evidencing Him to be the true Shepherd.

As we have seen, the “door” was the legitimate and appointed entrance into the fold, and this figure meant that the Messiah came by the road which Old Testament prophecy had marked out beforehand. The “porter” presented the shepherd to the sheep. Not only had the prophets borne witness to Christ, but, in addition, when He appeared, a forerunner heralded Him, introducing Him to the people. Besides this, when the true Shepherd of Israel was manifested, the sheep recognized His voice. The true sheep were known to Him, for He called them by name. The call was to follow Him, and to follow Him was to take their place with the despised and rejected One outside of Judaism. How beautifully this links up with what was before us in John 9 it is not difficult to perceive.

In John 9 Christ had shown how that He had entered the door into the sheepfold, for He had come working the works of God (John 9:4), and had thus shown Himself to be in the confidence of the Owner of the fold, and therefore the approved Shepherd of the flock. The Pharisees, on the contrary, were resisting Him and attacking the sheep; therefore they must needs be “thieves and robbers.” The blind beggar was a sample of the flock, for refusing to listen to the voice of strangers, he, nevertheless, knew the voice of the Shepherd, and drawn to Him, he found salvation, security, and sustenance.

All of this, strikingly illustrated in John 9, receives interpretation and amplification in chapter 10, where we have a blessed commentary on the condition of the excommunicated one. The Pharisees imagined they had cut him off from the place of safety and blessing, but the Lord had shown him that it was only then he had really entered the true place of blessing. Had he remained inside Judaism he would have been the constant object of the assaults of the “thieves and robbers”; but now he was in the care of the true Shepherd, the good Shepherd, who instead of killing him, would die for him! It is beautiful to compare John 10:3 with 9:34. The Pharisees’ “casting out” of the poor beggar was, in reality, the

Shepherd *leading him out* from the barren wilderness of Judaism to the green pastures of Christianity. Thus are we given to see the Lord Himself *behind* the human instruments — a marvellous example is this of how God oftentimes employs even His enemies to accomplish a good turn for His people.

“To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” Mark carefully the qualification here: it is not He calleth the sheep by name, but “he calleth his own sheep by name.” His “own sheep” were those who had been given to Him by the Father from all eternity; and when He calls, all of these “sheep” must come to Him, for it is written, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (John 6:37). These “sheep,” then, were the elect of God among Israel. Not to the Nation at large was Christ’s real ministry; rather did He come unto “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” That these “lost sheep” were not coextensive with the whole Nation is clear from the twenty-sixth verse of this chapter, for there we find the Shepherd saying to unbelieving Israelites, “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.” The sheep, then, whom Christ “called” during the days of His earthly ministry were the elect of God, whom He led out of Judaism. This was strikingly foreshadowed of old. Moses, while estranged from Israel, kept the flock of his father in other pastures, near “the mount of God” (Exodus 3:1).

“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (John 10:4).

Christ began His ministry inside the fold of Judaism, for it was there His Jewish sheep were to be found, though mixed with others: from these they needed to be separated when the true Shepherd appeared. Therefore does His voice sound, calling the lost sheep of the House of Israel unto Himself. As they responded, they were put forth outside the fold, to follow Him.

“And the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.” Link this up with the third clause in the previous verse. “He calleth his own sheep by name... and the sheep follow him: for they know his

voice.” A number of blessed illustrations of this are found scattered throughout the Gospels.

“And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him” (Matthew 9:9).

Here was a lone sheep of Christ. The Shepherd called him; he recognized His voice, and promptly *followed* Him.

“And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house” (Luke 19:5).

Here was one of the sheep, called *by name*. The response was prompt, for we are told, “And he made haste, *and came down*, and received him joyfully” (verse 6).

“The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me” (John 1:43).

This shows us the Shepherd *seeking* His sheep before He called him.

John 11 supplies us with a still more striking example of the drawing power of the Shepherd’s voice as He calleth His own sheep. There we read of Lazarus, in the grave; but when Christ calls His sheep by *name* — “Lazarus, come forth” — the sheep at once responded.

As a touching example of the sheep knowing His voice we refer the reader to John 20. Mary Magdalene visited the Savior’s sepulcher in the early morning hour. She finds the stone rolled away, and the body of the Lord gone. Disconsolate, she stands there weeping. Suddenly she sees the Lord Jesus standing by her, and “knew not that it was Jesus.” He speaks to her, but she supposed Him to be the gardener. A moment later she identified Him, and says, “Rabboni.” What had happened in the interval? What enabled her to identify Him? Just one word from Him”Mary”! The moment *He called His sheep by name* she “*knew* his voice”!

It has been thus with God's elect all down the ages. It is so today. There is a general "call" which goes forth to all who hear the Gospel, for "many are called," though few are chosen (Matthew 20:16). But to each of Christ's "sheep" there comes a particular, a special call. This call is inward and invincible, and therefore effectual. Proof of this is found in Romans 8:30 and many other scriptures: there we read, "Whom he called, *them he also justified.*" But all are not justified, therefore all are not "called." Who then are "the called"? The previous clause of Romans 8:30 tells us — "Whom he did *predestinate*, them he also called." And who were the ones "predestinated"? They were those whom God did "foreknow" (John 8:29). And who were they? The previous verse makes answer — they who were "the called according to his purpose." Called not because of anything in them, foreseen or actual, but solely by His own sovereign will or purpose.

This effectual call from God is heard by each of the "sheep" because they are given "ears to hear": "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them" (Proverbs 20:12). This effectual call comes to none but the sheep; the "goats" hear it not — "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (John 10:26).

There is, no doubt, a secondary application of these verses to the under-shepherds of Christ today, and considered thus they supply us with several important principles which enable us to identify them with certainty. First, a true under-shepherd of Christ is one who gains access to the sheep in the Divinely-appointed way: unlike the Pharisees, he does not intrude himself into this sacred office, but is called to it by God. Second, he is, in the real meaning of the word, a shepherd of the sheep: he has their welfare at heart, and ever concerns himself with their interests. Third, to such an one "the porter openeth": the Holy Spirit sets before him an "open door" for ministry and service. Fourth, the sheep hear his voice: the elect of God recognize him as a Divinely appointed pastor. Fifth, he calleth his own sheep by name: that portion of the flock over which God has made him overseer, are known to him individually: with a true pastor's heart he seeks them out in the home and acquaints himself with them personally. Sixth, he "leadeth them out" into the green pastures of God's Word where they may find food and rest. Seventh,

“he goeth before them”: he sets before them a godly example, asking them to do nothing which he is not doing himself; he seeks to be

“an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

May the Lord in His grace increase the number of such faithful undershepherds. Let the reader, especially the preacher, consult the following passages: Acts 20:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Peter 5:2-4.

“And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:5).

This is very important, for it describes a mark found on all of Christ’s sheep. A strange shepherd they will not heed. This can hardly mean that they will never respond to the call of the false shepherds, but that the redeemed of Christ will not absolutely, unreservedly, completely give themselves over to a false teacher. Instead, speaking characteristically, they will flee from such. It is not possible to deceive the elect (Matthew 24:24). Let a man of the world hear two preachers, one giving out the truth and the other error, and he can discern no difference between them. But it is far otherwise with a child of God. He may be but a babe in Christ, unskilled in theological controversies, but instinctively he will detect vital heresy as soon as he hears it. And why is this? Because he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and has received an “unction” from the Holy One (1 John 2:20). How thankful we should be for this. How gracious of the Lord to have given us this capacity to separate the precious from the vile!

“This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them” (John 10:6).

This points a contrast, bringing out as it does the very reverse of what was before us in the previous one. There we learn of the spirit of discernment possessed by all of Christ’s sheep; here we see illustrated the solemn fact that those who are not His sheep are quite unable to understand the truth even when it is plainly presented to

them. Blind indeed were these Pharisees, and therefore totally incapacitated to perceive our Lord's meaning. Equally blind are all the unsaved today. Well educated they may be, and theologically trained, but unless they are born again the Word of God is a sealed book to them.

[“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep” \(John 10:7\).](#)

The “door of the sheep” is to be distinguished from the “door of the sheepfold” in verse 1. The latter was the Divinely-appointed way by which Christ had entered Judaism, in contrast from the false pastors of Israel whose conduct evidenced plainly that they had thrust themselves into office. The “door of the sheep” was Christ Himself, by which the elect of Israel passed out of Judaism. The Lord had not come to restore Judaism, but to lead out His own unto Himself. A striking illustration of this is to be found in Exodus 33. At the time viewed there Judaism was in a state of unbelief and rebellion against God. Accordingly, Moses, the shepherd of Israel, “took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp” (verse 7). Those who really sought the Lord had to leave “the camp,” and go forth unto the shepherd on the outside. It is beautiful to note the sequel: “And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses” (verse 9). God was with His shepherd on the outside of the camp! So here in John 10, Christ, the antitype of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18), tabernacles outside Judaism, and those whose hearts sought the Lord went forth unto Him. And history has repeated itself. God is no longer with the great organized systems of Christendom, and those of His people whose hearts cleave to Him must go forth “outside the camp” if they would commune with Him! The “door” here then speaks of exit, not entrance.

[“All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them” \(John 10:8\).](#)

It is abundantly clear that here we have another instance in John's Gospel where the word "all" cannot be taken absolutely. The Lord had been speaking of shepherds, the shepherds of Israel; but not all of them had been "thieves and robbers." Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets, Nehemiah, and others who might be mentioned, certainly could not be included within this classification. The "all" here, as is usually the case in Scripture, must be restricted. But restricted to whom? Surely to the scribes and Pharisees, who were here being addressed by the Lord. Bishop Ryle has a helpful note on this verse: "Let it be noted," he says, "that these strong epithets show plainly that there are times when it is right to rebuke sharply. Flattering everybody, and complimenting all teachers who are zealous and earnest, without reference to their soundness in the faith, is not according to Scripture. Nothing seems so offensive to Christ as a false teacher of religion, a false prophet, or a false shepherd. Nothing ought to be so much dreaded in the Church, and if needful, be so plainly rebuked, opposed, and exposed. The strong language of our Reformers, when writing against Romish teachers, is often blamed more than it ought to be."

It is a notable fact that the severest denunciations which are to be found in the Scriptures are reserved for false teachers. Listen to these awful words of Christ:

"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel!... ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:14, 24, 33).

So, too, His forerunner:

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7).

So, too, the apostle Paul:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13).

So Peter: “These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with the tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever” (2 Peter 2:17). So Jude:

“clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (verses 12, 13).

Unspeakably solemn are these; would that their alarm might be sounded forth today, as a warning to those who are so careless whose ministry they sit under.

But *why* should our Lord term the Pharisees “thieves and robbers”? Wherein lay the propriety of such appellations? We believe that light is thrown on this question by such a scripture as Luke 11:52:

“Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.”

With this should be compared the parallel passage in Matthew 23:13. The Pharisees were *thieves* inasmuch as they seized positions which they had no right to occupy, exerted an authority which did not justly belong to them, and unlawfully demanded a submission and subjection to which they could establish no valid claim.

What, may be asked, is the distinction between “thieves” and “robbers”? The word for “thief” is “kleptes” and is always so rendered. It has reference to one who uses stealth. The word for “robbers” is “lestes,” and is wrongly translated “thief” in Matthew 21:13; Luke 10:30, 36, etc. It has reference to one who uses violence. The distinction between these two words is closely preserved all through the New Testament with the one exception of verse 10, where it seems as though the Lord uses the word “kleptes” to *combine* the two different thoughts, for there the “thief” is said not only to “steal,” but also to “kill and destroy.”

*“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved”
(John 10:9).*

Notice carefully the broader terms which Christ uses here. No longer does He say, as in verse 7, “I am the door of the sheep,” but “I am the door,” and this He follows at once with, “If any man enter in, he shall be saved.” Why this change of language? Because up to this point the Lord had been referring solely to elect Israelites, which He was leading out of Judaism. But now His heart reaches forth to the elect among the Gentiles, for not only was He “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers,” but He also came “that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy” (Romans 15:8, 9). The “door” in verse 1 was God’s appointed way for the shepherd into Judaism. The “door” in verse 7 was the Way out of Judaism, by Christ leading God’s elect in separation unto Himself. Here in verse 9 the “door” has to do with salvation, for elect Jew and Gentile alike.

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” This is the “door” into the presence of God. By nature we are separated, yea, “alienated” from God. Sin as a barrier comes in between and bars us out of His holy presence. This is one of the first things a convicted soul is made conscious of. I am defiled and condemned, how can I draw near to God? I am made to realize my guilty distance from Him who is Light, how then can I be reconciled to Him? Then, from God’s Word, I learn heaven’s answer to these solemn questions. The Lord Jesus has bridged that awful gulf which separated me from God. He bridged it by taking my place and being made a curse in my stead. And as the exercised soul bows to God’s sentence of condemnation, and receives by faith the marvelous provision which His grace has made, I, with all other believers, learn,

*“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off
are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13).*

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” This is one of the precious words of Christ which is well worthy of prolonged meditation. A “door” speaks of easy ingress and is contrasted from the high walls in which it is set. There are no

difficult walls which have to be scaled before the anxious sinner can obtain access to God. No, Christ is the “door” into His presence. A “door” may also be contrasted from a long, dreary, circuitous passage — just one step, and those on the outside are now within. The soul that believes God’s testimony to the truth of salvation by Christ alone, at once enters God’s presence. But mark the definite article: “I am the door.” There was only one door into the ark in which Noah and his family found shelter from the flood. There was only one door into the Tabernacle, which was Jehovah’s dwelling-place. So there is only one “door” into the presence of the Father —

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

And again,

“I am the way,” said Christ. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

Have you entered by this “door,” dear reader? Remember that a door is not to be looked at and admired, but to be used! Nor do you need to knock: the Door is open, and open for “any man” who will enter. Soon, though, the Door will be shut (see Luke 13:25), for the present Day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2) will be followed by the great Day of wrath (Revelation 6:17). Enter then while there is time.

Such are some of the simplest thoughts suggested by the figure of “the door.” What follows is an extract from an unknown writer who signed himself “J.B. Jr”: — “The door suggests the thought of the dwelling-place to which it is the means of entrance. Within we find the possession or portion of those who can by right enter by the door. Thus it is as a place set apart for its possessors from all that which is outside. In this way we may say it is a sanctuary. These things are rightly connected with a door, it being the only right way of entrance.”

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” Notice Christ did not say, “I am the door: if any man enter in, he shall be saved,” but, “by me if any man enter in.” Man cannot enter of

himself, for being by nature “dead in trespasses and sins” he is perfectly helpless. It is only by Divine aid, by the impartation to us of supernatural power, that any can enter in and be saved. Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Writing to the Philippians the apostle said,

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (John 1:29).

Not only is it a fact that no one can come to Christ except the Father draw him (John 6:44), but it is also true that none can come to the Father except Christ empowers. This is very clear from the sixteenth verse of our chapter: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring.” The “sheep” enter through the Door into God’s presence because Christ “brings” them. Beautifully is this portrayed in Luke 15:5, 6:

“And when he hath found it (the lost sheep), he *layeth it on his shoulders*, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me.”

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” To go “in and out” is a figurative way to express perfect freedom. This was something vastly different from the experiences of even saved Israelites under the law of Moses. One of the chief designs of the ceremonial law was to hedge Israelites around with ordinances which kept them separate from all other nations. But this was made an end of by Christ, for through His death the “middle wall of partition” was broken down. Thus were His sheep perfectly free to “go in and out.” It is indeed striking to discover in Nehemiah 3 that of the ten gates referred to there, of the sheep gate only are no “locks and bars” mentioned. This chapter concerns the remnant after their captivity, and clearly fore-shadows in a wonderful way the truth here taught by Christ.

“The fulness of this freedom is intercourse with other saints, and in deliverance from the yoke of the (ceremonial) laws (Acts 15:10), was only by degrees apprehended. That lesson, taught Peter on the

housetop at Joppa (Acts 10), was the first real step in the realization of that freedom” (Mr. C. E. Stuart).

“And find pasture.” This tells of the gracious provision made for the nourishment of the sheep. Our minds at once turn to that matchless Psalm which records the joyous testimony of the saints: “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green, pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.” The “pastures,” then, speak not only of food, but of rest as well. This too is a part of that wondrous portion which is ours in Christ. A beautiful type of this is found in Numbers 10:33:

“And they departed from the mount of the Lord three days’ journey: and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days’ journey, to search out *a resting place* for them.”

All through the Old Testament the “ark of the covenant” is a lovely figure of the Savior Himself, and here it is seen seeking out a resting place — the pastures — for Israel of old.

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” Seven things are enumerated in this precious verse. First, “I am the door”: Christ the only Way to God. Second “By me if any man enter”: Christ the Imparter of power to enter. Third, “If any man enter”: Christ the Savior for Jew and Gentile alike. Fourth, “If any man enter in”: Christ appropriated by a single act of faith. Fifth, “he shall be saved”: Christ the Deliverer from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Sixth, “he shall go in and out”: Christ the Emancipator from all bondage. Seventh, “and find pasture”: Christ the Sustainer of His people.

Finally, it is blessed to see how the contents of this precious verse present Christ to us as the Fulfiller of the prophetic prayer of Moses:

“And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord

be not as sheep which have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:15-17).

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10).

It will be observed that Christ here uses the singular number. In verse 8 He had spoken of “thieves and robbers” when referring to all who had come before Him; but here in verse 10 He has some particular individual in view—“the thief.” It should also be noted that in speaking of this particular “thief” our Lord combines in one the two distinct characters of thieves and robbers. As intimated in our comments on verse 8 the distinctive thought associated with the former is that of stealth; that of the latter, is violence. Here “the thief” cometh to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. Who then is the Lord referring to? Surely it is to the last false shepherd of Israel, the “idol shepherd,” the antichrist, of whom it is written,

“For lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened” (Zechariah 11:16).

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Why say this after having already declared that “By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved”? Mark this follows His reference to “the thief.” Here then our Lord seems to be looking forward to the Day of His second advent, as it relates to Israel. This indeed will be the time when abundant life will be theirs. As we read in Romans 11:15,

“If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but *life from the dead*?”

In striking accord with this it should be noted that the Lord's title "I am the door" (verse 9) is the third of His "I am" titles in this Gospel — the number which speaks of resurrection. Immediately following we find Christ saying here I am the good Shepherd" (verse 11). This is the fourth of His "I am" titles — the number of *the earth*.

As preparation for the next chapter let the interested student ponder carefully the following points:

1. Study the typical "shepherds" of the Old Testament.
2. Precisely what is the meaning of "for" in verse 11?
3. Did the Shepherd give His life for any besides "the sheep"?
4. What other adjectives besides "good" are applied to Christ as the "Shepherd"?
5. Who is referred to by "a hireling" (verse 12)?
6. Who are the "other sheep" of verse 16?
7. Look up proofs in the Gospels of the first part of verse 18.

JOHN 10:11-21

CHRIST, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The good Shepherd dies for His sheep: verse 11.
2. The character and conduct of hirelings: verses 12, 13.
3. The intimacy between the Shepherd and the sheep: verse 14.
4. The intimacy between the Father and the Son.' verse 15.
5. Gentile sheep saved by the Shepherd: verse 16.
6. The relation of the Shepherd to the Father: verses 17, 18.
7. The division among the Jews: verses 19-21.

The passage before us completes our Lord's discourse with the Pharisees, following their excommunication of the beggar to whom He had given sight. In this discourse, Christ does two things: first, He graphically depicts their unfaithfulness; second, He contrasts His own fidelity and goodness. They, as the religious leaders of the people, are depicted as "strangers" (verse 5), as "thieves and robbers" (verse 8), as "hirelings". (verses 12, 13). He stands revealed as "the door" (verses 9, 11), and as "the good Shepherd" (verse 11).

The Pharisees were the shepherds of Israel. In casting out of the synagogue this poor sheep, the man that was born blind, for doing what was right, and for refusing to do what was wrong, they had shown what manner of spirit they were of. And this was but a sample of their accustomed oppression and violence. In them, then, did the prophecy of Ezekiel receive a fulfillment, that prophecy in which He had testified of those shepherds of His people who resembled thieves and robbers. Ezekiel 34 (which like all prophecy

has a *double* fulfillment) supplies a sad commentary upon the selfish and cruel conduct of the scribes and Pharisees. The whole chapter should be read: we quote but a fragment —

“And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them” (verses 1-4).

The same prophecy of Ezekiel goes on to present the true Shepherd of Israel, the Good Shepherd:

“For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day... I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick... And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd... Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God” (verses 11, 12, 15, 16, 23, 30, 31).

Ezekiel is not the only prophet of the Old Testament who presents the Savior under the figure of a “shepherd.” Frequently do the Old

Testament Scriptures so picture Him. In His dying prediction, Jacob declared,

“From thence (the mighty God of Jacob) is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel” (Genesis 49:24).

The Psalmist declared, “The Lord is my Shepherd” (Psalm 23:1). Through Isaiah it was revealed,

“The Lord God will come with strong hand. and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Psalm 40:10, 11).

In Zechariah occurs that remarkable word

“Awake, O sword, against *my shepherd*, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones” (Psalm 13:7).

In addition to the prophecies, the Old Testament is particularly rich in the *types* which foreshadow Christ in the character of a “shepherd.” So far as we have been able to trace, there are five individual shepherds who pointed to Christ, and each of them supplies some distinctive line in the typical picture. First, Abel, for in Genesis 4:2 we are told that “Abel was a keeper of sheep.” The distinctive aspect of typical truth which he exemplifies is the death of the Shepherd — slain by wicked hands, by his brother according to the flesh. The second is Jacob, and a prominent thing in connection with him as a shepherd is his care for the sheep — see Genesis 30:31; Genesis 31:38-40; and note particularly Genesis 33:13, 14. The third is Joseph: the very first thing recorded in Scripture about this favorite son of Jacob is that he fed the flock (Genesis 37:2). The fourth is Moses. Three things are told us about him: he watered, protected and guided the sheep:

“Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helpeth them, and watered their flock... Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb” (Exodus 2:16, 17; 3:1).

The fifth is David, and he is presented as *jeopardizing his life* for the sheep—

“And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear” (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

There is one other individual “shepherd” referred to in the Old Testament and that is “the idol shepherd” (Zechariah 11:16, 17), and he is the Antichrist — how significant that he is the sixth! The only other individual “shepherd” mentioned in Scripture is the Lord Jesus, and He is the seventh! Seven is the number of perfection, and we do not reach perfection till we come to Christ, the Good Shepherd!

“I am the good shepherd.” The word for “good” is a very comprehensive one, and perhaps it is impossible to embrace in a brief definition all that it included within its scope. The Greek word is “kalos” and is translated “good” seventy-six times: it is also rendered “fair,” “meet,” “worthy,” etc. In order to discover the prime elements of the word we must have recourse to the law of first mention. Whenever we are studying any word or expression in Scripture, it is very important to pay special attention to the initial mention of it. The first time this word “good” occurs in the New Testament is in Matthew 3:10, where we read, “Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” The word “tree” is there used metaphorically. It is the unregenerate

who are in view. No unbeliever is able to bring forth “good fruit.” The “good fruit,” then, is what is produced in and through a Christian. What kind of “fruit” is it which a Christian bears? It is Divine fruit, spiritual fruit: it is the product of the new nature. It is Divine as contrasted from what is human; spiritual as contrasted from what is fleshly. Thus in the light of this first occurrence of the word “good” we learn that when Christ said, “I am the good shepherd” He signified, “I am the Divine and spiritual Shepherd.” All other shepherds were human; He was the Son of God. The “shepherds” from whom He is here contrasting Himself were the Pharisees, and they were carnal; but He was spiritual.

It will also repay us to note carefully the first occurrence of this word “good” in John’s Gospel. It is found in John 2:10. When the Lord Jesus had miraculously turned the water into wine, the servants bore it to the governor of the feast, and when he had tasted it, he exclaimed, “Every man at the beginning cloth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.” Here the meaning of the word “good” signifies choice, or excellent, yea, that which is pre-eminently excellent, for the “good wine” is here contrasted from the inferior. This usage of “kalos” helps us still further in ascertaining the force of this adjective in John 10:11. When Christ said, “I am the good shepherd,” He intimated that He was the pre-eminently excellent Shepherd, infinitely elevated above all who had gone before Him.

“I am the good *shepherd*.” This was clearly an affirmation of His absolute Deity. He was here addressing Israelites, and Israel’s “Shepherd” was none other than Jehovah (Psalm 23:1; 80:1). When then the Savior said, “I *am* the good shepherd.” He thus definitely identified Himself with the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

“I am the good shepherd.” This, like every other of our Lord’s titles, views Him in a distinctive relationship. He was, says Dr. John Gill, “a Shepherd of His Father’s appointing, calling, and sending, to whom the care of all His sheep, or chosen ones, was committed; who was set up as a Shepherd over them by Him, and was entrusted with them; and who being called, undertook to feed them.” In the

Greek it is more emphatic than in the English: literally it reads, “I am the shepherd, the good.”

“The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (verse 11). The word for “giveth” is usually translated “layeth down.” “For the sheep” signifies, on their behalf. The good Shepherd gave His life freely and voluntarily, in the room and stead of His people, as a ransom for them, that they might be delivered from death and have eternal life. The Ethiopic Version reads, “The good Shepherd gives His life *for the redemption* of the sheep.”

“The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” This is one of the many scriptures which clearly and definitely defines both the nature and extent of the Atonement. The Savior “gave his life” not as a martyr for the truth, not as a moral example of self-sacrifice, but for a people. He died that they might live. By nature His people are dead in trespasses and sins, and had not the Divinely-appointed and Divinely-provided Substitute died for them, there had been no spiritual and eternal life for them. Equally explicit is this verse concerning those for whom Christ laid down His life. It was not laid down for fallen angels, but for sinful men; and not for men in general, but for His own people in particular; for “the sheep,” and not for “the goats.” Such was the announcement of God through the prophets,

“For the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isaiah 53:8).

As said the angel to Mary,

“Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21);

and as said the angel to the shepherds,

“Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people” (Luke 2:10).

The same restriction to be observed in the words of Christ at the Supper:

“This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

(Cf. also Acts 20:28; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 2:17, etc.)

“But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep” (John 10:12).

It seems evident that our Lord is here pointing once more to the Pharisees, the unfaithful shepherds of Israel. The hireling shepherd is not the owner of the sheep — note “whose own the sheep are not”; he has neither a proprietorship over them nor affection for them. The “hireling” is paid to guard and watch them, and all such mind their own things, and not the things of the Lord. And yet in view of Luke 10:7 — “The laborer is worthy of his hire” — and other Scriptures, we must be careful not to interpret the use of this figure here out of harmony with its context. “It is not the bare receiving of hire which demonstrates a man to be a hireling (the Lord hath ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel); but the loving of hire; the loving the hire more than the work; the working for the sake of the hire. He is a hireling who would not work, were it not for the hire” (John Wesley). The “hireling” in a word is a professing servant of God who fills a position simply for the temporal advantages which it affords. A hireling is a mercenary: has no other impulse than the lust of lucre.

“But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.” We do not think that the “wolf” here has reference, directly, to Satan, for the false shepherds do not flee at his approach; rather does it seem to us that “the wolf” points to any enemy of the “sheep,” who approaches to attack them. Note in passing the care of Christ here in the selection of His words: “the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep,” not devoureth, for no “sheep” of Christ can ever perish.

“The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep” (John 10:13).

At first glance this saying of Christ's seems very trite, yet a little reflection will show that it enunciates a profound principle — a man does what he does because he is what he is. There is ever a rigid consistency between character and conduct. The drunkard drinks because he is a drunkard. But he is a drunkard before he drinks to excess. The liar lies because he is a liar; but he is a liar before he tells a lie. The thief steals because he is a thief. When the testing time comes each man reveals what he is by what he does. Conduct conforms to character as the stream does to the fountain. "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling": this is a philosophical explanation of the fugitive's deed. It was the flight which demonstrated the man.

The same principle holds good on the other side. The Christian acts christianly because he is a Christian; but a man must be a Christian before he can live a Christian life. Christian profession is no adequate test, nor is an orthodox creed. The demons have a creed, and it causes them to tremble, but it will not deliver them from Hell; It is by our fruit that we are known: it is deeds which make manifest the heart.

"The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling." Character is revealed by our conduct in the crises of life. When is it that the hireling fleeth? It is when he seeth "the wolf coming." Ah! it is the wolf that discovers the hireling! You might never have known what he was had not the wolf come. Very suggestive is this figure. It has passed into our common speech, as when poverty and starvation is represented by "the wolf is at the door." It suggests a crisis of trial or fierce testing. St. Paul made use of this simile when addressing the Ephesian elders:

"For I know this, that after my departing shall greivous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29).

This is all very searching. How do you act when you see "the wolf" coming! Are you terror stricken? Or, does approaching danger, temptation, or trial, cast you back the more upon the Lord?

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:14).

There seem to be three lines of thought suggested by this figure of the “shepherd” as applied to the Lord Jesus. First, it refers to His mediatorial office. The shepherd is not the owner of the flock, but the one to whom the care of the sheep is entrusted. So Christ as Mediator is the One appointed by the Father to act as shepherd, the One to whom He has committed the salvation of His elect — note how in the types, Joseph, Moses, and David tended not their own flock, but those of their fathers. Second, the figure speaks of fellowship, the Savior’s presence with His own. The shepherd never leaves his flock. There is only one exception to this, and that is when he commits them into the care of the “porter” of the sheepfold; and that is at night-fall. How suggestive is this! During the night of Christ’s absence, the Holy Spirit has charge of God’s elect! Finally; the shepherd-character speaks of Christ’s care, faithfulness, solicitude for His own.

In two other passages in the New Testament is Christ presented as “the shepherd,” and in each with a different descriptive adjective. In Hebrews 13:20 we read, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” Again in 1 Peter verse 4, we are told, “When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away.” There is a striking order to be observed in the three “shepherd” titles of our Lord. Here in John 10, the reference is plainly to the Cross, so that He is the “good” Shepherd in death, laying down His life for the sheep. In Hebrews 13 the reference is to the empty sepulcher, so that He is the “great” Shepherd in resurrection. While in 1 Peter 5:4 the reference is to His glorious return, so that He will be manifested as the “chief” Shepherd.

“I am the good shepherd, and know *my sheep*.” Why does the Lord refer to His people under the figure of “sheep”? The figure is very suggestive and full. We shall not attempt to be exhaustive but merely suggestive.

Under the Mosaic economy a sheep was one of the few *clean* animals: as such it suitably represents God's people, each of which has been cleansed from all sin. A sheep is a *harmless* animal: even children will approach them without fear. So God's people are exhorted to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Sheep are helpless: nature has endowed them neither with weapons of attack nor defense. Equally helpless is the believer in himself: "without me, says Christ, ye can do nothing. Sheep are gentle: what so tame and tractable as a lamb! This is ever a grace which ought to distinguish the followers of Christ: "gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits" (James 3:17). The sheep are entirely dependent upon the shepherd. This is noticeably the case in the Orient. Not only must the sheep look to the shepherd for protection against wild animals, but he must lead them to the pastures. May we be cast back more and more upon God. Sheep are preeminently characterized by a proneness to wander. Even when placed in a field with a fence all around it, yet if there be a gap anywhere, they will quickly get out and stray. Alas, that this is so true of us. Urgently do we all need to heed that admonition, "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation." A sheep is a useful animal. Each year it supplies a crop of wool. In this too it prefigures the Christian. The daily attitude of the believer should be, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?"

"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep." Very blessed is this. The Lord Jesus knows each one of those whom the Father has given to Him with a special knowledge of approbation, affection, and intimacy. Though unknown to the world "the world knoweth us not" (1 John 3:1) — we are known to Him. And Christ only knoweth all His sheep. Ofttimes we are deceived. Some whom we regard as "sheep" are really "goats"; and others whom we look upon as outside the flock of Christ, belong thereto notwithstanding. Whoever would have concluded that Lot was a "righteous man" had not the New Testament told us so! And who would have imagined that Judas was a devil when Christ sent him forth as one of the twelve! "And know my sheep": fearfully solemn is the contrast presented by Matthew 7:23 — "I never knew you"!

["And am known of mine" \(John 10:14\).](#)

Christ is known experientially; known personally. Each born-again person can say with Job,

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:6).

The believer knows Christ not merely as the outstanding Figure in history, but as the Savior of his soul. He has a heart knowledge of Him. He knows Him as the Rest-giver, as the Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, as the good Shepherd who ever ministereth to His own.

“As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father” (John 10:15).

The word “knoweth” here, as frequently in Scripture, signifies a knowledge of approbation: it is almost the equivalent of loveth. The first part of this verse should be linked on to the last clause of the previous one, where Christ says, I “know my sheep, and am known of mine.” The two clauses thus make a complete sentence, and a remarkable one it is. The mutual knowledge of Christ and His sheep, is like unto that which exists between the Father and the Son: it is a knowledge, an affection, so profound, so spiritual, so heavenly, so intimate, so blessed, that no other analogy was possible to do it justice: as the Father knoweth the Son, and as the Son knoweth the Father, so Christ knows His sheep, and so the sheep know Him.

“And I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15).

The precise significance of the preposition is unequivocally defined for us in Romans 5:6-8, where the same Greek term (“huper”) occurs: “For when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The word “for” here means not merely on the behalf of, but *in the stead* of: “the Greek expression for “dying for any one,” never has any signification other than that of rescuing the life of another at the expense of one’s own” (Parkhurst’s Lexicon).

“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold” (John 10:16).

It is clear that the Lord is here contemplating His elect among the Gentiles. Not only for the elect Jews would He “lay down his life,” but for “the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52) as well. But note Christ does not here say, “other sheep I shall have,” but “other sheep I have.” They were His even then; His, because given to Him by the Father from all eternity. A parallel passage is found in Acts 18. The apostle Paul had just arrived in Corinth, and the Lord spoke to him in a vision by night, and said unto him, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee, for I have much people in this city” (verses 9, 10). How positive, definite, and unequivocal these statements are! How they show that everything is to be traced back to the eternal counsels of the Godhead!

“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they, shall hear my voice” (John 10:16).

Equally positive is this. This is no uncertainty, no contingency. There is no they are willing to listen.” How miserably man perverts the truth of God, yea, how wickedly he denies it! It is not difficult to understand what is the cause of it; it is lack of faith to believe what the Scriptures so plainly teach. These “other sheep” Christ must bring because necessity was laid upon Him. He had covenanted with the Father to redeem them. And they would be brought, they would hear His voice, for there can be no failure with Him. The work which the Father gave His Son to do shall be perfectly performed and successfully accomplished. Neither man’s stubbornness nor the Devil’s malice can hinder Him. Not a single one of that favored company given to Christ by the Father shall perish. Each of these shall hear His voice, because they were predestinated so to do, and it is written,

“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

“They shall hear my voice” was both a promise and a prophecy. “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice.” Upon this verse the Puritan Trapp has some most suggestive thoughts in his excellent commentary — a commentary which, so far as we are aware, has been out of print for over two hundred years. “Other sheep — the elect Gentiles, whose conversion to Christ was, among other types, not obscurely foretold in Leviticus 19:23-25 — ‘And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised; three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the Lord withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the Lord your God’. The first three years *in Canaan*, the Israelites were to cast away the fruits of the trees as *uncircumcised*. So our Savior planted the Gospel in that land for the first ‘three years’ of His public ministry: but the uncircumcision was *cast away*; that is, to the uncircumcised Gentiles, the Gospel was not preached. The fruit of the fourth year was consecrated to God: that is, Christ in the fourth year from His baptism, laid down His life for His sheep, rose again, ascended, and sent His Holy Spirit; whereby His apostles, and others were consecrated as the firstfruits of the Promised Land. But in the fifth year, the fruit of the Gospel planted by Christ began to be common, for the Gospel was no longer shut up within the narrow bounds of Judaism, but began to be preached to all nations for the obedience of faith!” ¶1

“And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Everywhere else in the New Testament the Greek word for “fold” is translated “flock,” as it should be here, and as it is in the R. V. In the first part of this verse the Greek uses an entirely different word which is correctly rendered “fold” — “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold.” “This fold” referred to Judaism, and the elect Gentiles were outside of it, as we read in Ephesians 2:11, 12,

“Ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in

the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being *aliens from* the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers from* the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

But now the Lord tells us, “there shall be one flock, and one Shepherd.’ This has been already accomplished, though not yet is it fully manifested —

“For he is our peace, who hath made both (believing Jews and believing Gentiles) one, and hath *broken down* the middle wall of partition” (Ephesians 2:14).

The “one flock” comprehends, we believe, the whole *family* of God, made up of believers before the nation of Israel came into existence, of believing Israelites, of believing Gentiles, and of those who shall be saved. The “one flock” will have been gathered from various “folds.”

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (John 10:17).

Christ is here speaking as the Mediator, as the Word who had become flesh. As one of the Godhead, the Father had loved Him from all eternity. Beautifully is this brought out in Proverbs 8:30:

“Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him”

The previous verses make it plain that it is the Son who is in view, personified as “Wisdom.” But the Father also loved Christ in His incarnate form. At His baptism, the commencement of His mediatorial work, He declared, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” Here the Son declares, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again”, for the laying down of His life was the supreme example of His devotion to the Father as the next verse clearly shows — it was in obedience to the Father that He gave up His spirit.

“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself”
(John 10:18).

When Christ died, He did so of His own voluntary will. This is a point of vital importance. We must never give a place to the dishonoring thought that the Lord Jesus was powerless to prevent His sufferings, that when He endured such indignities and cruel treatment at the hands of His enemies, it was because He was unable to avoid them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The treachery of Judas, the arrest in the Garden, the arraignment before Caiaphas, the insults from the soldiers, the trial before Pilate, the submission to the unjust sentence, the journey to Calvary, the being nailed to the cruel tree — all of these were voluntarily endured. Without His own consent none could have harmed a hair of His head. A beautiful type of this is furnished in Genesis 22:13, where we read that the ram, which was placed on the altar as a substitute for Isaac, was “caught in a thicket by his *horns*.” The “horns” speak of strength and power (see Habakkuk 3:4, etc.). Typically they tell us that the Savior did not succumb to death through weakness, but that He gave up His life in the full vigor of His strength. It was not the nails, but the strength of His love to the Father and to His elect, which held Him to the Cross.

The pre-eminence of Christ was fully manifested at the Cross. In birth He was unique, in His life unique, and so in His death. Not yet have we read aright the inspired accounts of His death, if we suppose that on the Cross the Savior was a helpless victim of His enemies. At every point He demonstrated that no man took His life from Him, but rather that He laid it down of Himself. See the very ones sent to arrest Him in the Garden, there prostrate on the ground before Him (John 18:6): how easily could He have walked away unmolested had it so pleased Him! Hear Him before Pilate, as He reminds that Roman officer,

“Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).

Behold Him on the Cross itself, so superior to His sufferings that He makes intercession for the transgressors, saves the dying robber, and provides a home for His widowed mother. Listen to Him as He cries

with a loud voice (Matthew 27:46, 50) — no exhausted Sufferer was this! Mark how triumphantly He “gave up the ghost” (John 19:30). Verily “no man” took His life from Him. So evident was it that He triumphed in the hour of death itself, the Roman soldier was made to exclaim, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

“I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18).

Here our Lord ascribes His resurrection to His own power. He had done the same before, when, after cleansing the temple, the Pharisees had demanded from Him a sign:

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19)

was His response. In Romans 6:4 we are told that Christ was “raised from the dead by the glory of *the Father*.” In Romans 8:11 we read, “But if *the Spirit* of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” These passages are not contradictory, but complementary; they supplement one another; each contributing a separate ray of light on the glorious event of which they speak. Putting them together we learn that the resurrection of the Savior was an act in which each of the three Persons of the Trinity concurred and co-operated.

“This commandment have I received of my Father.” This is parallel with what we read of in Philippians 2:8,

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

It was to this our Lord referred in John 6:38,

“For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

“There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings” (John 10:19).

This had been foretold of old:

“He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone *of stumbling* and for a rock *of offense* to both the houses of Israel, for *a gin* and for *a snare* to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isaiah 8:14).

Similarly, Simeon announced in the temple, when the Savior was presented to God,

“Behold, this child is set (appointed) for the fall and rising again of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).

So had the Savior Himself declared.

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

From the Divine side this is a profound mystery to us. It had been an easy matter for God to have subdued the enmity in men’s hearts and brought them all as worshippers to the feet of Christ. But instead of this, He permitted His Son to be despised and rejected by the great majority, and He permitted this because He Himself eternally decreed it (see Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 2:8, etc).

“And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?” (John 10:20).

Terrible indeed was the condition of these men. The Son of God called a demoniac, Truth incarnate deemed insane! “Tigers rage,” says a Puritan, “at the fragrantcy of sweet spices: so did these monsters at the Savior’s sweet sayings.” How humbling to remember that the same corrupt heart indwells each of us! O what grace we daily need to keep down the iniquity which is to be found in every Christian. Not until we reach the glory shall we fully learn how deeply indebted we are to God’s wondrous grace.

“Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?” (John 10:21).

Notice it was the “many” who deemed Christ a madman. But there were *some* — “others” — even among the Pharisees who had, even then, a measure of light, and recognized that the Savior neither spake nor acted like a demoniac. This minority group was made up, no doubt, by such men as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. It is significant that they were impressed more with His “*words*” than they were with His miraculous works.

As a preparation for our exposition of the remainder of John 10, let the interested reader study the following points: —

1. What is the force of “it was winter” (verse 22) in the light of what follows?
2. Mark the contrasts between John 10:23 and Acts 3:11 and 5:12.
3. What verses in John 8 are parallel with John 10:26?
4. Enumerate the seven proofs of the believer’s security found in verses 27-29.
5. Trace out the seven things said about “the sheep” in John 10.
6. Trace out the seven things said about the “shepherd.”
7. What is the meaning of “sanctified” in verse 36?

JOHN 10:22-42

CHRIST, ONE WITH THE FATHER

It is by no means a simple task either to analyze or to summarize the second half of John 10. The twenty-second verse clearly begins a new section of the chapter, but it is equally clear that what follows is closely related to that which has gone before. The Lord is no longer talking to “the Pharisees,” but to “the Jews.” Nevertheless, it is in His shepherd character, as related to His own, that He is here viewed. Yet while there is this in common between the first and second halves of John 10, there is a notable difference between them. In the former, Christ is seen in His mediatorship; in the latter, it is His essential glories which are the more prominent.

In the first part of John 10 it is Christ in “the form of a servant” which is before us. He gains entrance to the sheepfold by “the porter opening to him” (verse 3). He is the “door” into God’s presence (verse 9), the Way unto the Father. There, He is seen as the One who was to “give his life for the sheep” (verse 11). There, we behold Him in the place of obedience, in subjection to the “commandment” of the father (verse 18). But mark the contrast in the second half of John 10. Here, He presents Himself as the One endowed with the sovereign right to “give eternal life” to His own (verse 28); as One possessed of almighty power, so that none can pluck them out of His hand (verse 28); as one with the Father (verse 30); as “the Son of God” (verse 36). It seems evident then that the central design of the passage before us is to display the essential glories of the person of the God-man. It is not so much the Godhood of Christ which is here in view, as it is the Deity of the One who humbled Himself to become man.

What is recorded in the latter half of John 10 provided a most pertinent, though tragic, conclusion to the first section of the Gospel. It was *winter-time* (verse 22); the season of ingathering was now over; the “sun of righteousness” had completed His official circuit, and the genial warmth of summer had now given place to the season of chilling frosts. The Jews were celebrating “the feast of the

dedication,” which commemorated the purification of the temple. But for the true Temple, the One to whom the temple had pointed — God tabernacling in their midst — they had no heart. The Lord Jesus is presented as walking in the temple, but it is to be carefully noted that He was “in Solomon’s porch” (verse 23). which means that He was on the outside of the sacred enclosure, Israel’s “house” was left unto them desolate (cf. Matthew 23:38)! While here in the porch, “the Jews” (the religious leaders) came to Christ with the demand that He tell them openly if He were “the Christ” (verse 24), saying, “How long dost thou make us to doubt?” This was the language of unbelief, and uttered at that late date, showed the hopelessness of their condition. Following this interview of the Jews with Christ, and their unsuccessful attempt to apprehend Him, the Lord retires beyond Jordan, “unto the place where John at first baptized” (verse 40). Thus did Israel’s Messiah return to the place where He had formally dedicated Himself to His mission. Further details will come before us in the course of the exposition. Below is an attempt to analyze our passage:

1. During the feast of dedication Jesus walks in Solomon’s porch: verses 22, 23.
2. The Jews demand an open proclamation of His Messiah-ship: verse 24.
3. The Lord explains why a granting of their request was useless: verses 25, 26.
4. The eternal security of His sheep: verses 27-30.
5. The Jews attempt to stone Him because of His avowal of Deity: verses 31-33.
6. Christ’s defense of His Deity: verses 34-38.
7. Christ leaves Jerusalem and goes beyond Jordan, where many believe on Him: 39, 42.

“And it was at Jerusalem the feast of dedication, and it was winter” (John 10:22).

The feast of dedication was observed at Jerusalem in memorial of the purification of the Temple after it had been polluted by the idolatries of Antiochus Epiphanes. Proof of this is to be found in the fact that we are here told the time was “winter.” Therefore the “feast” here mentioned could not be in remembrance of the dedication of Solomon’s temple, for this temple had been dedicated at harvest-time (1 Kings 8:2); nor was it to celebrate the building of Nehemiah’s temple, for that had been dedicated in the spring-time (Ezra 6:15, 16). The “feast” here referred to must be that which had been instituted by Judas Maccabaeus, on his having purified the temple after the pollution of it by Antiochus, about 165 B. C. This “feast” was celebrated every year for eight successive days in the month of December (1 Maccabees 4:52, 59), and is mentioned by Josephus (Antiq. 12:7, etc.). Thus the words, “and it was winter” enable us to identify this feast.

“And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.” Here, as always in Scripture, there is a deeper meaning than the mere historical. The mention of “winter” at this point is most significant and solemn. This tenth chapter of John closes the first main section of the fourth Gospel. From this point onwards the Lord Jesus discourses no more before the religious leaders. His public ministry was almost over. The Jews knew not their “day of visitation,” and henceforth the things which “belonged to their peace” were hidden from their eyes (Luke 19:42). So far as they were concerned the words of Jeremiah applied with direct and solemn force:

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (John 8:20).

For them there was nothing but an interminable “winter.” Significant and suitable then is this notice of the season of coldness and barrenness as an introduction to what follows.

What we have just pointed out in connection with the moral force of this reference to “winter” encourages us to look for a deeper significance in this mention here of “the feast of the dedication.” Nowhere else in Scripture is this particular feast referred to. This makes it the more difficult to ascertain its significance here. That

there is some definite reason for the Holy Spirit noticing it, and that there is a pertinent and profound meaning to it when contemplated in its connections, we are fully assured. What, then, is it?

As already pointed out, the last half of John 10 closes the first great section of John's Gospel, a section which has to do with the public ministry of Christ. The second section of this Gospel records His private ministry, concluding with His death and resurrection. The distinctive character of these two sections correspond exactly with the two chief purposes of our Lord's incarnation, which were to present Himself to Israel as their promised Messiah, and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. What, then, remained? Only the still more important work which was to be accomplished by His death and resurrection. He had presented Himself to Israel; now, shortly, He would offer Himself as a sacrifice to God. It is to this "the *dedication*" here points.

It is in this Gospel, alone of the four, that the Lord Jesus is hailed as "the *lamb* of God," and if the reader will turn back to Exodus 12 he will find that the "lamb" was to be separated from the flock some days before it was to be killed (see verses 3, 5, 6). In keeping with this, note how in this passage (and nowhere else) the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as the One whom the Father had "sanctified" (verse 36), and mark how at the end of the chapter He is seen *leaving* Jerusalem and going away "beyond Jordan" (verse 40)! That the Holy Spirit has here prefaced this final conversation between the Savior and the Jews by mentioning "the feast of the *dedication*" is in beautiful and striking accord with the fact that from this point onwards Christ was now dedicated to the Cross, as hitherto He had been engaged in manifesting Himself to Israel.

The interpretation suggested above is confirmed and established by two other passages in the New Testament. The Greek word rendered "dedication" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, but it is found twice in its verbal form. In Hebrews 9:18 we read,

"Whereupon neither the first testament was *dedicated* without blood" (Hebrews 9:18).

In Hebrews 10:19, 20 we are told, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated [*dedicated*] for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” In each of these instances “dedication” is connected with *blood-shedding*! And it was to this, the shedding of His precious blood, that the Lord Jesus was now (after His rejection by the Nation) dedicated! An additional item still further confirming our exposition is found in the fact that the historical reference in John 10:22 was to the dedication of the temple, and in John 2:19 the Savior refers to Himself as “this temple” — “destroy this *temple*, and in three days I will raise it up.” The antitypical *dedication of the temple* was the Savior offering Himself to God! Most fitting then was it that the Holy Spirit should here mention the typical dedication of the temple *immediately* after the Lord had thrice referred to His “laying down” His life (see verses 15, 17, 18)!

“And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch” (John 10:23).

Josephus informs us (Antiq. John 8:3) that Solomon, when he built the temple, filled up a part of the valley adjacent to mount Zion, and built a portico over it toward the East. This was a magnificent structure, supported by a wall four hundred cubits high, made out of stones of vast bulk. It continued to the time of Agrippa, which was several years after the death of Christ. Twice more is mention made of “Solomon’s porch” in the New Testament, and what is found in these passages points a sharp contrast from the one now before us. In Acts 3:11 we are told that, following the healing of the lame beggar by Peter and John, “all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.” But here in John 10:23, following our Lord’s healing of the blind beggar, there is no hint of any wonderment among the people! Again in Acts 5:12 we read, “And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch.” This is in evident contrast, designed contrast, from what is before us in our present passage. Here, immediately after the reference to our Lord walking in Solomon’s porch, we read, “then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt?” *They* were manifestly *out of accord* with Him. They were

opposed to Him, and like beasts of prey sought only His life. Thus we see once more the importance and value of comparing scripture with scripture. By thus linking together these three passages which make mention of “Solomon’s porch” we discern the more clearly how that the design of our passage is to present the God-man as “despised and rejected of men.”

“Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24).

The appropriateness of this incident at the close of John 10, and the force of this request of the Jews — obviously a disingenuous one — should now be apparent to the reader. Coming as it does right at the close of the first main section of this Gospel, a section which is concerned with the public ministry of Christ before Israel, this demand of the religious leaders makes it plain how useless it was for the Messiah to make any further advances toward the Nation at large, and how justly He might now abandon them to that darkness which they preferred to the light. By now, it was unmistakably plain that the religious leaders received him not, and this request of theirs for Him to tell them “plainly” or “openly” if He were the Messiah, was obviously made with no other purpose than to gain evidence that they might apprehend Him as a rebel against the Roman government. But, if such was their evil design, did they not already have the needed evidence to formulate the desired charge against Him? The answer is, No, not evidence sufficiently explicit.

“How long dost thou make us to doubt? if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.” It is a significant thing that the Lord Jesus *had not* declared, plainly and openly in public, that He was the Messiah. He had avowed His Messiahship to His disciples (John 1:41, 49, etc.); to the Samaritans (John 4:42), and to the blind beggar (John 9:37); but He had not done so before the multitudes or to the religious leaders. This designed omission accomplished a double purpose: it made it impossible for the authorities to lawfully seize Him before God’s appointed time, and it enforced the *responsibility* of the Nation at large. That the Lord Jesus was the One that the prophets announced should come, had been abundantly attested by His person, His life, and His works; yet the absence of any formal announcement in

public served as an admirable test of the people. His miraculous works — ever termed “signs” in John’s Gospel — were more than sufficient to prove Him to be the Messiah unto those who were open-minded; but yet they were not such as to make it possible for the prejudiced to refuse their assent. This is ever God’s way of dealing with moral agents. There are innumerable tokens for the existence of a Divine Creator, sufficient to render all men “without excuse”; yet are these tokens of such a nature as not to have banished atheism from the earth. There are a thousand evidences that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, yet are there multitudes who believe them not. There is a great host of unimpeachable witnesses who testify daily to the Saviourhood of the Lord Jesus, yet the great majority of men continue in their sins.

Before we pass from this verse a word should be said upon the turpitude of these Jews. “How. long dost thou make us to doubt?” was inexcusable wickedness. They were seeking to transfer to Him the onus of their unbelief. They argued that He was responsible for their unreasonable and God-dishonoring doubting. This is ever the way with the unregenerate. When God arraigned Adam, the guilty culprit answered, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12). So it is today. Instead of tracing the cause of unbelief to his own evil heart, the sinner blames God for the insufficiency of convincing evidence.

“Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me” (John 10:25).

The Lord had told them that He was “the Son of man,” and that as such the Father had “given him authority to execute judgment” (John 5:27). He had told them that He was the One of whom Moses wrote (John 5:46). He had told them that He was the “living bread” which had come down from heaven (John 6:51). He had told them that Abraham had rejoiced to see His day (John 8:56). All of these were statements which intimated plainly that He was the promised One of the Old Testament Scriptures.

In addition to what He had taught concerning His own person, His “works” bore conclusive witness to His Messianic office. His

“works” were an essential part of His credentials, as is clear from Luke 7:19-23:

“And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?... Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

These were the precise verifications as to what was to take place when the Messiah appeared — compare Isaiah 35:5, 6.

“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you” (John 10:26).

Unspeakably solemn was this word. They were reprobates, and now that their characters were fully manifested the Lord did not hesitate to tell them so. The force of this awful statement is definite and clear, though men in their unbelief have done their best to befog it. Almost all the commentators have expounded this verse as though its clauses had been reversed. They simply make Christ to say here to these Jews that they were unbelievers. But the truth is that the Lord said far more than that. The commentators understand “the sheep” to be nothing more than a synonym for born-again and justified persons, whereas in fact it is equivalent to God’s elect, as the sixteenth verse of this chapter clearly shows. The Lord did not say “Because ye are not of my sheep ye believe not,” but, “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.” Man always turns the things of God upside down. When he comes to something in the Word which is peculiarly distasteful, instead of meekly submitting to it and receiving it in simple faith because God says it, he resorts to every imaginable device to make it mean something else. Here Christ is not only charging these Jews with unbelief, but He also explains why faith had not been granted to them — they were not “of his sheep”: they were not among the favored number of God’s elect. If further proof be required for the correctness of this interpretation, it is furnished below. A man does not have to believe

to become one of Christ's "sheep": he "believes" because *he is one* of His sheep.

"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, *as I said unto you.*" To what is our Lord referring? When had He previously avowed that these Jews were not of God's elect? When had He formerly classed them among the reprobates? The answer is to be found in chapter eight of this same Gospel. There we find this same company — "the Jews" (see verse 48) — antagonizing Him, and to them He says, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word" (verse 43). This is strictly parallel with "ye believe not" in John 10:26. Then, in John 8, He explains why they could not "hear his word" — it was because they were "of their father the devil" (verse 44). Again, in the forty-seventh verse of the same chapter He said to the Jews, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." Strictly parallel is this with John 10:26. They "heard not" because they were not of God: they "believed not" because they were not of His sheep. In each instance He gives as the reason why they received Him not the solemn fact that they belonged not to God's elect: they were numbered among the reprobates.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

Here the Lord contrasts the elect from the non-elect. God's elect hear the voice of the Son: they hear the voice of the Shepherd because they belong to His sheep: they "hear" because a sovereign God imparts to them the capacity to hear, for "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them" (Proverbs 20:12). Each of the sheep "hear" when the irresistible call comes to them, just as Lazarus in the grave heard when Christ called him.

"And I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

Each of the sheep are known to Christ by a special knowledge, a knowledge of approbation. They are valued by Him because entrusted to Him by the Father. As the Father's love gift, He prizes them highly. The vast crowd of the nonelect He "never knew" (Matthew 7:23) with a knowledge of approbation; but each of the

elect are known affectionately, personally, eternally. “And they follow me.” They “follow” the example He has left them; they follow in holy obedience to His commandments; they follow from love, attracted by His excellent person; they follow on to know Him better.

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

The connection between this and what has gone before should not be lost sight of. Christ had been speaking about His approaching death, His laying down His life for the sheep (verse 15, etc.). Would this, then, imperil the sheep? No, the very reverse. He would lay down His life in order that it might be imparted to them. This “life,” Divine and eternal, would be given to them, not sold or bartered. Eternal life is neither earned as a wage, merited as a prize, nor won as a crown. It is a free gift, sovereignly bestowed. But, says the carping objector, All this may be true, but there are certain conditions which must be fulfilled if this valuable gift is to be retained, and if these conditions are not complied with the gift will be forfeited, and the one who receives it will be lost. To meet this legalistic skepticism, the Lord added, “and they shall never perish.” Not only is the life given “eternal,” but the ones on whom this precious gift is bestowed shall never perish: backslide they may, “perish” they shall not, and cannot, while the Shepherd lives! Hypocrites and false professors make shipwreck of the faith (not their faith, for they never had any), but no real saint of God did or will. There are numerous cases recorded in Scripture where individuals backslided, but never one of a real saint apostatizing. A believer may fall, but he shall not be utterly cast down (Psalm 37:24). Quite impossible is it for a sheep to become a goat, for a man who has been born again to be *unborn*.

“Neither shall any man (any one) pluck them out of my hand.” Here the Lord anticipates another objection, for the fertile mind of unbelief has rarely evidenced more ingenuity than it has at this point, in opposing the blessed truth of the eternal security of God’s children. When the objector has been forced to acknowledge that this passage teaches that the life given to the sheep is “eternal,” and

that those who receive it shall “never perish,” he will next make shift by replying, True, no believer will destroy himself, but what of his many enemies, what of Satan, ever going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour? Suppose a believer falls into the toils of the Devil, what then? This, assures our Lord, is equally impossible. The believer is in the hand of Christ, and none is able to pluck from thence one of His own. Tease and annoy him the Devil may, but seize the believer he cannot. Blessed, comforting, re-assuring truth is this! Weak and helpless in himself, nevertheless, the sheep is secure in the hand of the Shepherd.

“My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s band” (John 10:29).

Here the Lord anticipates one more objection. He knew full well that there would be some carping quibblers who would be foolish enough to say, True, the Devil is unable to pluck us from the hand of Christ, but we are still “free agents,” and therefore could jump out if we chose to do so. Christ now bars out this miserable perversion. He shows us how that it is impossible for a sheep to perish even if it desired to — as though one ever did! The “hand of Christ” (verse 28) is beneath us, and the “hand” of the Father is above us. Thus are we secured between the clasped hands of Omnipotence!

No stronger passage in all the Word of God can be found guaranteeing the absolute security of every child of God. Note the seven strands in the rope which binds them to God. First, they are Christ’s sheep, and it is the duty of the shepherd to care for each of his flock! To suggest that any of Christ’s sheep may be lost is to blaspheme the Shepherd Himself. Second, it is said “They follow” Christ, and no exceptions are made; the Lord does not say they ought to, but declares they do. If then the sheep “follow” Christ they must reach Heaven, for that is where the Shepherd is gone! Third, to the sheep is imparted “eternal life”: to speak of eternal life ending is a contradiction in terms. Fourth, this eternal life is “given” to them: they did nothing to merit it, consequently they can do nothing to demerit it. Fifth, the Lord Himself declares that His sheep “shall never perish,”

consequently the man who declares that it is possible for a child of God to go to Hell makes God a liar. Sixth, from the *Shepherd's* "hand" none is able to pluck them, hence the Devil is unable to encompass the destruction of a single one of them. Seventh, above them is the *Father's* "hand," hence it is impossible for them to jump out of the hand of Christ even if they tried to. It has been well said that if one soul who trusted in Christ should be missing in Heaven, there would be one vacant seat there, one crown unused, one harp unstrung; and this would grieve all Heaven and proclaim a disappointed God. But such a thing is utterly impossible.

["I and my Father are one" \(John 10:30\).](#)

The R.V. correctly renders this verse, "I and *the* Father are one." The difference between these two translations is an important one. Wherever the Lord Jesus says, my rather, He is speaking as the *Mediator*, but whenever He refers to "the Father," He speaks from the standpoint of His *absolute* Deity. Thus, "my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) contemplates Him in the *position* of inferiority. "I and the Father are one" affirms Their unity of nature or essence, one in every Divine perfection.

"I and the Father are one." There are those who would limit this oneness between the Father and Son to unity of will and design — the Unitarian interpretation of the passage. Dr. John Brown has refuted the error of this so ably and simply that we transcribe from his exposition: "Harmony of will and design, is not the thing spoken of here; but harmony or union of power and operation. Our Lord first says of Himself, 'I give unto my sheep eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of my hand.' He then says the same thing of the Father — 'None is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.' He plainly, then, ascribes the same thing to Himself that He does to the Father, not the same will, but the same work — the same work of power, therefore the same Power. He mentions the reason why none can pluck them out of the Father's hands, — because He is the Almighty, and no created Power is able to resist Him. The thing spoken of is *power*, — Power *irresistible*. And in order to prove that none can pluck them out of HIS hand, He adds, 'I and the Father are one.' One in what? unquestionably in the work of power whereby He protects His sheep and does not suffer them to be plucked out of

His hand. What the Father is, that the Son is. What the work of the Father is, that the work of the Son is. As the Father is almighty, so is the Son likewise. As nothing can resist the Father, so nothing can resist the Son. Whatsoever the Father hath, the Son hath likewise. The Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father. These two are one — in nature, perfection and glory.”

“I and the Father are one.” It is most blessed to observe the connection between this declaration and what had preceded it. All the diligent care and tender devotion of the Shepherd for the sheep but expresses the mind and heart of the Owner toward the flock. The Shepherd and the Owner are one, one in their relation and attitude toward the flock; one both in power and in Their loving care for the sheep. Immutably secure then is the believer. It was the laying hold of these precious truths which caused our fathers to sing,

How firm a foundation Ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your
faith, In His excellent Word.

What more can He say, Than to you He hath said, To you
who to Jesus For refuge have fled.

“*Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him*” (John 10:31).

This is quite sufficient to settle the meaning of the previous verse. These Jews had no difficulty in perceiving the force of what our Lord had just said to them. They instantly recognized that He had claimed absolute equality with the Father, and to their ears this was blasphemy. Instead of saying anything to correct their error, if error it was, Christ went on to say that which must have confirmed it.

“Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.” Fearful wickedness was this! Who could imagine that any heart would have been so base, or any hand so cruel, as to have armed themselves with instruments of death, against such a Person, while speaking such words! Yet we behold these Jews doing just this thing, and that within the sacred precincts of the Temple! A frightful exhibition of human depravity was this. Christ had done these Jews no wrong. They hated Him *without a cause*. They hated Him because of His

holiness; and this, because of their sinfulness. Why did Cain hate Abel?

“Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12).

Why did the Jews hate Christ? —

“But me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7).

And in that measure in which believers are like Christ, in the same proportion will they be hated by unbelievers:

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

“Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?” (John 10:32).

The word “works” is to be understood here in its widest sense. The Lord appeals to the whole course of His public ministry — His perfect life, His gracious deeds in ministering to the needs of others, His wondrous words, wherein He spake as never man had spoken. When He terms these works as “from the Father” He means not only that they met with the Father’s full approval, but that they had been done by His authority and command —

“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

“The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (John 10:33).

It was most appropriate for this to be recorded in John’s Gospel, the great design of which is to present the Deity of the Savior. The carnal mind is “enmity against God,” and never was this more fully evidenced than when God incarnate appeared in the midst of men.

During His infancy, an organized effort was made to slay Him (Matthew 2). In one of the Messianic Psalms there is more than a hint that during the years Christ spent in seclusion at Nazareth, repeated attempts were made upon His life

“I am afflicted and ready to *die from my youth up*” (Psalm 88:15). The very first word spoken by Him in the Nazareth synagogue after His public ministry began, was followed by an attempt to murder Him (Luke 4:29). And from that point onwards to the Cross, His steps were dogged by implacable foes who thirsted for His blood. Wonderful beyond comprehension was that grace of God which suffered His Son to sojourn in such a world of rebels. Divine was that infinite forbearance which led Christ to endure “the contradiction of sinners against himself.” Deep, fervent, and perpetual should be our praise for that love which saved us at such a cost!

“Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me and I in him” (John 10:34-38).

Upon these verses we cannot do better than quote from the excellent remarks of Dr. John Brown:

“Our Lord’s reply consists of two parts. In the first, He shows that the charge of blasphemy, which they founded on His calling Himself the Son of God, was a rash one, even though nothing more could have been said of Him, than that He had been ‘sanctified and sent by the Father’; and secondly, that His miracles were of such a kind, as that they rendered whatever He declared of Himself, as to His intimate connection with the Father, however extraordinary, worthy of credit.

“Our Lord’s argument in the first part of this answer is founded on a passage in the Psalm 82:6; ‘I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most high.’ These words are plainly addressed to the Jewish magistrates, commissioned by Jehovah to act as His vicegerents in administering justice to His people: who judged for God — in the room of God; whose sentences, when they agreed with the law, were God’s sentences; whose judgment, was God’s judgment, and rebels against whom, were rebels against God.

“The meaning and force of our Lord’s argument is obvious. If, in a book which you admit to be of Divine authority, and all whose expressions are perfectly faultless, men which have received a Divine communication to administer justice to the people of God are called ‘gods’ and sons of the Highest; is it not absurd to bring against One who has a higher commission than they (One who had been sanctified and sent by the Father), and who presented far more evidence of His commission, a charge of blasphemy, because He calls Himself ‘the Son of God’? You dare not charge blasphemy on the Psalmist; — why do you charge it on Me?... He reasoned with the Jews on their own principles. Were the Messiah nothing more than you expect Him to be, to charge One who claims Messiahship with blasphemy, because He calls Himself the Son of God, is plainly gross inconsistency. Your magistrates are called God’s sons, and may not your Messiah claim the same title?

“The second part of our Lord’s reply is contained in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth verses. It is equivalent to — I have declared that I and the Father are one — one in power and operation. I do not call on you to believe this merely because of My testimony, but I do call on you to believe on My testimony *supported* by the miracles I have performed, works which nothing but a Divine power could accomplish. These works are the voice of God, and its utterance is distinct: it speaks plainly, it utters no dark saying. You cannot refuse to receive the doctrine that I and the Father are one, that the Father is in Me, and I in Him, without contradicting His testimony and calling Him a liar.”

Let us notice one or two details in these verses before we turn to the conclusion of our chapter. The word “gods” in the eighty-second Psalm, quoted here by Christ, has occasioned difficulty to some. The

magistrates of Israel were so called because of their *authority* and *power*, and as representing the Divine majesty in government.

Mark how in verse 35 the Savior said, “The scripture cannot be broken.” What a high honor did He here place upon the written Word! In making use of this verse from the Psalmist against His enemies, the whole point of His argument lay in a single word — “gods” — and the fact that it occurred in the book Divinely inspired. The Scriptures were the final court of appeal, and here the Lord insists on their absolute authority and verbal inerrancy.

Observe here Christ’s use of the word “sanctified” in verse 36 refutes many modern heretics. There are those who teach that to be sanctified is to have the carnal nature eradicated. They insist that sanctification is moral purification. But how thoroughly untenable is such a definition in the light of what the Master says here. He declares that He was “sanctified.” Certainly that cannot mean that He was cleansed from sin, for He was the Holy One. Here, as everywhere in Scripture, the term sanctified can only mean *set apart*. Observe the order: Christ was first sanctified and then sent into the world. The reference is to the Father’s eternal appointment of the Son to be the Mediator.

“Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand” (John 10:39).

This signifies that these Jews sought to apprehend the Lord Jesus so that they might bring Him before the Sanhedrin, but they were unable to carry out their evil designs. Soon He would deliver Himself into their hands, but until the appointed hour arrived they might as well attempt to harness the wind as lay hands on the Almighty.

“And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things which John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there” (John 10:40-42).

We have already pointed out the significance of this move of Christ. In leaving Jerusalem — to which He did not return until the appointed “hour” for His death had arrived — and in going *beyond* Jordan to where His forerunner had been, the Lord gave plain intimation that His public ministry was now over. The Nation at large must be left to suffer the due reward of their iniquities. In what follows we have a beautiful illustration of this present dispensation: “Outside the camp” Christ now was, but in this place, as the despised and rejected One, many resorted to Him. God would not allow His beloved Son to be universally unappreciated, even though organized Judaism had turned its back upon Him. Here beyond Jordan He works no public miracle (as He does not today), but many believed on Him because of what John had *spoken*. So it is now. It is the Word which is the means God uses in bringing sinners to believe on the Savior. Happy for these men that they knew the day of their visitation, and improved the brief visit of Christ.

Let the interested student study the following questions on the first part of John 11: —

1. Why did not the sisters name the sick one? verse 3.
2. What is the force of the “therefore”? verse 6.
3. Why did not Christ hasten to Bethany at once? verse 6.
4. Why “into Judea” rather than “to Bethany”? verse 7.
5. Why did Christ refer to the “twelve hours in the day”? verse 9.
6. What is meant by the second half of verse 9?
7. What is meant by “walking in the night”? verse 10.

JOHN 11:1-10

CHRIST RAISING LAZARUS

Below is an Analysis of the first ten verses of John 11.

1. Lazarus and his sisters, verses 1, 2.
2. Their appeal to the Lord, verse 3.
3. God's design in Lazarus' sickness, verse 4.
4. The delay of love, verses 5, 6.
5. Christ testing His disciples, verse 7.
6. The disciples' trepidation, verse 8.
7. The Lord re-assuring the disciples, verses 9, 10.

Before taking up the details of the passage which is to be before us a few words need to be said concerning the principle design and character of John 11 and 12. In the preceding chapters we have witnessed the increasing enmity of Christ's enemies, an enmity which culminated in His crucifixion. But before God suffered His beloved Son to be put to death, He gave a most blessed and unmistakable witness to His glory. "We have seen, all through John, that no power of Satan could hinder the manifestation of the Person of Christ. He met with incessant opposition and undying hatred, the result, however, being that glory succeeds glory in manifestation, and God was fully revealed in Jesus. That was His purpose, and who could hinder its accomplishment? 'Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?' Man's rage against Christ, only served as an occasion for the manifestation of His glory. Here in John 11 the Son of God is glorified, the glory of God answering to the rejection of the Person of Christ in the preceding chapters" (R. Evans: Notes & Meditations on John's Gospel).

It is indeed a striking fact, and one to which we have not seen attention called, that the previous chapters show us Christ *rejected* in a threefold way, and then God answering by *glorifying* Christ in a threefold way. In verse 16 we read, “Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and *sought to slay him*, because he had done these things on the sabbath day”: this was because of His works. In John 8:58 we are told, “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am”; and immediately following, it is recorded, “Then took they up stones *to cast at him*”; this was because of His words. While in John 10:30 the Lord affirmed, “I and my Father are one,” which is at once followed by, “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him”: this was on account of the claim which He had made concerning His person.

The threefold witness which God caused to be borne to the glory of Christ in John 11 and 12 corresponds exactly with the threefold rejection above, though they are met in their inverse order. In John 10:31 it was Christ in His absolute Deity, as God the Son, who was rejected. Here in John 11 His Divine glory shines forth most manifestly in the raising of Lazarus. In John 8 He was rejected because He declared “Before Abraham was, I am.” There it was more in His Messianic character that He was despised. Corresponding to this, in John 12:12-15 we find Him in full Messianic glory entering Jerusalem as “King of Israel.” In John 5 Christ is seen more in His mediatorial character, in incarnation as “the Son of man” — note verse 27. Corresponding to this we find in the third section of John 12 the Gentiles seeking the Lord Jesus, and to them He answered:

“The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified”
(John 12:23)!

Man had fully manifested *himself*. The Light had shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. The deep guilt of men had been demonstrated by their refusing the sent One from the Father, and their deadness in trespasses and sins had been evidenced by the absence of the slightest response to the eternal Word then tabernacling in their midst. They had seen and hated both Him and His Father (John 15:24). The end of Christ’s public ministry was, therefore, well-nigh reached. But before He goes to the Cross, God

gave a final testimony to the glory of His beloved. Beautiful is it to behold the Father so jealously guarding the honor of His Son in this threefold way ere He left the stage of public action. And solemn was it for Israel to be shown so plainly and so fully WHO it was they had rejected and were about to crucify.

The darker the night, the more manifest the light which illumines it. The more the depravity and enmity of Israel were exhibited, the brighter the testimony which God caused to be borne to the glory of His Son. The end was almost reached, therefore did the Lord now perform His mightiest work of all — save only the laying down of His own life, which was the wonder of all wonders. Six miracles (or as John terms them, “signs”) had already been wrought by Him, but at Bethany He does that which displayed His Divine power in a superlative way. Previously we have seen Him turning water into wine, healing the nobleman’s son, restoring the impotent man, multiplying the loaves and fishes, walking on the sea, giving sight to the blind man; but here he raises the dead, yea, brings back to life one who had lain in the grave four days. Fitting climax was this, and most suitably is it the seventh “sign” in this Gospel.

It is true that Christ had raised the dead before, but even here the climax is again to be seen. Mark records the raising of Jairus’ daughter, but she had only just died. Luke tells of the raising of the widow’s son of Nain, but he had not been buried. But here, in the case of Lazarus, not only had the dead man been placed in the sepulcher, but corruption had already begun to consume the body. Supremely true was it of the just One (Acts 3:14) that His path was as the shining light, which shone “more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

The same climactic order is to be seen in connection with *the state of the natural man* which John’s “signs” typically portray. “They have no wine” (John 2:3), tells us that the sinner is a total stranger to Divine joy (Judges 9:13). “Sick” (John 4:46), announces the condition of the sinner’s soul, for sin is a disease which has robbed man of his original health. The “impotent man” (John 5:7), shows us that the poor sinner is “without strength” (Romans 5:6), completely helpless, unable to do a thing to better his condition. The multitude without any food of their own (John 6:5), witnesses to the fact that

man is destitute of that which imparts strength. The disciples on the storm-tossed sea (John 6:18), before the Savior came to them, pictures the dangerous position which the sinner occupies — already on the “broad road” which leadeth to destruction. The man blind from his birth (John 9:1), demonstrates the fact that the sinner is altogether incapable of perceiving either his own wretchedness and danger, or the One who alone can deliver him. But in John 11 we have that which is much more solemn and awful. Here we learn that the natural man is spiritually dead, “dead in trespasses and sins.”

Lower than this we cannot go. Anything more hopeless cannot be portrayed. In the presence of death, the wisest, the richest, the most mighty among men have to confess their utter helplessness. This, this is what is set before us in John 11. Most suitable background for Christ to display Himself as “the resurrection and the life.” And most striking is this climax of the “signs” recorded in the fourth Gospel, displaying both the power of Christ and the condition of the natural man.

“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha” (John 11:1).

The object of our Lord’s resurrection-power is first presented to our notice. His name was Lazarus. At once our minds revert back to Luke 16, where another “Lazarus” is seen. But how striking the contrast, a contrast most evidently designed by the Holy Spirit. There are only two mentioned in the New Testament which bear this name. Here again the ‘law of comparison and contrast’ helps us. The Lazarus of Luke 16 was a beggar, whereas everything goes to show that the Lazarus of John 11 (cf. John 12:2, 3) was a man of means. The Lazarus of Luke 16 was uncared for, for we read of how the dogs came and licked his sores; but the one in John 11 enjoyed the loving ministrations of his sisters. The Lazarus of Luke 16 was dependent upon the “crumbs” which fell from another’s table; whereas in John 12, after his resurrection, the Lazarus of Bethany is seen at “the table” where the Lord Jesus was. The one in Luke 16 died and remained in the grave, the one in John 11 was brought again from the dead.

The Holy Spirit has been careful to identify the Lazarus of John 11 as belonging to *Bethany* — a word that seems to have a double meaning: “House of Figs,” and “House of Affliction.” It was the “town” (more accurately “village”) of Mary and her sister Martha. Though not mentioned previously by John, this is not the first reference to these sisters in the Gospel records. They are brought before us at the close of Luke 10, and what is there recorded about them sheds not a little light upon some of the details of John 11.

Martha was evidently the senior, for we are told “Martha received him into her house” (Luke 10:38). This is most blessed. There were very few homes which were opened to the Lord Jesus. He was “despised and rejected of men.” Men hid as it were their faces from Him and “esteemed him not.” Not only was He unappreciated and unwelcome, but He was “hated.” But here was one who had “received him,” first into her heart, and then into her home. So far so good. Of her sister, it is said,

“And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard his word” (Luke 10:39).

It is indeed striking to note that each time Mary is mentioned in the Gospel, she is seen *at the feet* of Christ. She had the deeper apprehension of the glory of His person. She was the one who enjoyed the most intimacy with Him. Her’s was the keener spiritual discernment. We shall yet see how this is strongly confirmed in John 11 and 12.

Next we are told,

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10:40).

The word “cumbered” means “weighted down.” She was burdened by her “much serving.” Alas, how many there are like her among the Lord’s people to-day. It is largely due to the over-emphasis which has been placed upon “Christian service” — much of which is, we fear, but the feverish energy of the flesh. It is not that service is

wrong, but it becomes a snare and an evil if it be allowed to crowd out worship and the cultivation of one's own spiritual life: note the order in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Take heed unto thyself, and to thy teaching."

"And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41).

This is very solemn. The Lord did not commend Martha for her "much serving." Instead, He reproved her. He tells her she was distracted and worried because she had given her attention to "many things." She was attempting more than God had called her to do. This is very evident from the previous verse. Martha felt that her load was too heavy to carry alone, hence her "bid her therefore that she help me." Sure sign was this that she had run without being sent. When any Christian feels as Martha here felt, he may know that he has undertaken to do more than the Lord has appointed.

"But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

Though the Lord reproved Martha, He commended Mary. The "one thing needful" is "that good part" which Mary had chosen, and that is to receive from Christ. Mary sat at His feet "and heard his word." She was conscious of her deep need, and came to Him to be ministered unto. Later, we shall see how she ministered unto Christ, and ministered so as to receive His hearty commendation. But the great lesson for us here is, that we must first be ministered unto before we are qualified to minister unto others. We must be receivers, before we can give out. The vessel must be filled, before it can overflow. The difference then between Martha and Mary is this: the one ministered unto Christ, the other received from Him, and of the latter He declared, she "hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." This brief examination of Luke 10, with the information it gives about the characters of the two sisters of Lazarus will enable us to understand the better their respective actions and words in John 11.

“It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick” (John 11:2).

This explains why Mary is mentioned first in the previous verse — the only time that she is. The commentators have indulged in a variety of conjectures, but the reason is very obvious. John’s Gospel was written years after the first three, one evidence of which is supplied in the verses before us. The opening verse of our chapter clearly supposes that the reader is acquainted with the contents of the earlier Gospels. Bethany was “the town (village) of Mary and her sister Martha.” This Luke 10:38 had already intimated. But in addition, both Matthew and Mark record how that Mary had “anointed” the Lord with her costly ointment in the house of Simon the leper who also resided in Bethany. It is true her name is not given either by Matthew or Mark, [¶2](#) but it is very clear that her name must have been known, for how else could the Lord’s word have been carried out: “Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (Mark 14:9). It is this which explains why Mary is mentioned first in John 11:1 — she was the better known!

It was at Bethany that Lazarus lived with his sisters. Bethany was but a village, yet had it been marked out in the eternal counsels of God as the place which was to witness the greatest and most public miraculous attestation of the Deity of Christ.

“Let it be noted that the presence of God’s elect children is the one thing which makes towns and countries famous in God’s sight. The village of Martha and Mary is noticed, while Memphis and Thebes are not named in the New Testament. A cottage where there is grace, is more pleasant in God’s sight than a palace where there is none.” (Bishop Ryle).

It was at Bethany there was to be given the final and most conclusive proof that He who was on the point of surrendering Himself to death and the grave was none other than the resurrection and the life. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem (John

11:18), the headquarters of Judaism, so that the news of the raising of Lazarus would soon be common knowledge throughout all Judea.

“Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick” (John 11:3).

This must not be regarded as a protest; it was not that Martha and Mary were complaining against Christ because He suffered one whom He loved to fall sick. Instead, it was simply an appeal to the heart of One in whom they had implicit confidence. The more closely this brief message from the sisters is scrutinized, the more will their becoming modesty be apparent. Instead of prescribing to Christ what should be done in their brother’s case, they simply acquainted Him with his desperate condition. They did not request Him to hasten at once to Bethany, nor did they ask Him to heal their brother by a word from a distance, as once He had restored to health the nobleman’s son (John 4). Instead, they left it for Him to decide what should be done.

“Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” Each word in this touching message of Martha and Mary is worthy of separate consideration. “Lord” was the language of believers, for no unbeliever ever so addressed the despised Nazarene. “Lord” acknowledged His Deity, owned His authority, and expressed their humility. “Lord, behold”: this is a word which arrests attention, focalizes interest, and expressed their earnestness. “He whom thou lovest.” This is highly commendable. They did not say, “he who loves thee.” Christ’s fathomless love for us, and not our feeble love for Him, is what we ever need to keep steadily before our hearts. Our love varies; His knows no change. It is indeed striking to note the way in which the sisters refer to Lazarus. They did not blame him! They did not even say, “our brother,” or “thy disciple,” but simply “he whom thou lovest is sick.” They knew that nothing is so quick in discernment as love; hence their appeal to the omniscient love of Christ. “He whom thou lovest is sick.” There are two principle words in the Greek to express sickness: the one referring to the disease itself, the other pointing to its effects — weakness, exhaustion. It is the latter that was used here. As applied to individual cases in the N.T. the word here used implies deathly-sick — note its force in Acts 9:37 and Philippians 2:26, 27. In John 5:3

and 7 it is rendered “impotent.” It is not at all likely that Martha and Mary would have sent to Christ from such a distance had not their brother’s life been in danger. The force, then, of their message was, “He whom thou lovest is sinking.”

The verse now before us plainly teaches that sickness in a believer is by no means incompatible with the Lord’s love for such an one. There are some who teach that sickness in a saint is a sure evidence of the Lord’s displeasure. The case of Lazarus ought forever to silence such an error. Even the chosen friends of Christ sicken and die. How utterly incompetent then are we to estimate God’s love for us by our temporal condition or circumstances!

“No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them” (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

What then is the practical lesson for us in this? Surely this: “Therefore judge nothing before the time” (1 Corinthians 4:5). The Lord loves Christians as truly when they are sick as when they are well.

It is blessed to mark how Martha and Mary acted in the hour of their need. They sought the Lord, and unburdened their hearts to Him. Do we always act thus? It is written,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1);

yet, to our shame, how little we know Him as such. When the people murmured against Moses, we are told that, “he cried unto the Lord” (Exodus 15:25). When Hezekiah received the threatening letter from Rabshakeh, he “spread it before the Lord” (Isaiah 37:14). When John the Baptist was beheaded his disciples “went and told Jesus” (Matthew 14:12). What examples for us! We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. No, He is full of compassion, for when on earth He, too, was “acquainted with grief.” He sympathizes deeply with His suffering people, and invites them to pour out the anguish of their hearts before Him. What a blessed proof of this we find in John When He met the tearful Mary on the morn of His resurrection, He asked her, “Woman, why

weepest thou?" (John 20:15). Why ask here such a question? Did He not know the cause of her sorrowing? Certainly He did. Was it a reproach? We do not deem it such. Was it not rather because He wanted her to unburden her heart before Him! "Cast thy burden upon the Lord" is ever His word. This is what Martha and Mary were doing. The Lord grant that every tried and troubled reader of these lines may go and do likewise.

The action of these sisters and the wording of their appeal afford us a striking example of how we should present our petitions to the Lord. Much of the present-day teaching on the subject of prayer is grossly dishonoring to God. The Most High is not our servant to be brought into subjection to our will. Prayer was never designed to place us on the Throne, but to bring us to our knees before it. It is not for the creature to dictate to the Creator. It/s the happy privilege of the Christian to make known His requests with thanksgiving. But, "requests" are not commands. Petitioning is a very different matter from commanding. Yet we have heard men and women talk to God not only as if they were His equals, but as though they had the right to order Him about. Coming to the Throne of Grace with "boldness" does not mean with impious impudence. The Greek word signifies "freedom of speech." It means that we may tell out our hearts as God's children, never forgetting though, that He is our Father.

The sisters of Lazarus acquainted the Lord with the desperate condition of their brother, appealed to His love, and then left the case in His hands, to be dealt with as He saw best. They were not so irreverent as to tell Him what to do. In this they have left all praying souls a worthy example which we do well to follow. "Commit thy way unto the Lord": that is our responsibility. "Trust also in him"; that is our happy privilege. "Trust also in him," not dictate to Him, and not demand from Him. People talk of "claiming" from God. But grace cannot be "claimed," and all is of grace. The very "throne" we approach is one of grace. How utterly incongruous then to talk of "claiming" anything from the Sitter on such a throne. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." But it must ever be kept in mind that He will "bring it to pass" in His own sovereign way and in His own appointed time. And oftentimes, usually so in fact, His way and time will be different

from ours. He brought it to pass for Martha and Mary, though not in the time and way they probably expected. The Apostle Paul longed to preach the Gospel in Rome, but how slow he was in realizing his desire and in what an altogether unlooked-for manner went he there!

“When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God” (John 11:4).

We take it that this was our Lord’s answer to the messenger, rather than a private word to His disciples, though probably it was spoken in their hearing. And what a mysterious answer it was! How strangely worded! How cryptic! What did He mean? One thing was evident on its surface: Martha and Mary were given the assurance that both the sickness of Lazarus and its issue were perfectly known to Christ — how appropriately was the record of this reserved for *John’s Gospel*; how perfectly in accord with the whole tenor of it!

“This sickness is not unto death.” This declaration is similar in kind to what was before us in John 9:3, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” — compare our comments thereon. The sickness of Lazarus was “not unto death” in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, unto *abiding* death — death would not be the *final end* of this “sickness.” But why not have told the exercised sisters plainly that their brother would die, and that He would raise him from the dead? Ah! that is not God’s way; He would keep faith in exercise, have patience developed, and so order things that we are constantly driven to our knees! The Lord said sufficient On this occasion to encourage hope in Martha and Mary, but not enough to make them leave off seeking God’s help! Bishop Ryle has pointed out how that we encounter the same principle and difficulty in connection with much of unfulfilled prophecy: “There is sufficient for faith to rest upon and to enkindle hope, but sufficient also to make us cry unto God for light”!

“This sickness is not unto death, *but for the glory of God.*” What a word was this! How far, we wonder, had those two sisters entered into such a thought concerning the sickness of their brother. But now they were to learn that it was Divinely ordained, and from the sequel we are shown that Lazarus’ sickness, his death, the absence of Christ from Bethany, and the blessed issue, were all arranged by Him who

doeth all things well. Let us learn from this that God has a purpose in connection with every detail of our lives. Many are the scriptures which show this. The case of the man born blind provides a parallel to the sickness and death of Lazarus. When the disciples asked why he had been born blind, the Savior answered, "That the works of God should be manifest in him." This should teach us to look behind the outward sorrows and trials of life to the Divine purpose in sending them.

["This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" \(John 11:4\).](#)

How this shows that the glory of God is one with the glory of the Son! The two are inseparable. This comes out plainly, again, if we compare John 2:11 with John 11:40. In the former we are told, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested forth his glory." In the latter we find Him saying to Martha, as He was on the point of raising Lazarus, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." The same truth is taught once more in John 14:13, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." What then is the lesson for us? This: "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:23).

["Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" \(John 11:5\).](#)

Here the order of their names is reversed from what we have in verse 1. Martha is now mentioned first. Various conjectures have been made as to why this is. To us it appears the more natural to mention Mary first at the beginning of the narrative, for she would be the better known to the readers of the Gospel records. In John 11:5, and so afterwards, it was suitable to name Martha first, seeing that she was the senior. But in addition to this, may it not be the Holy Spirit's design to show us that each sister was equally dear to the Savior! It is true that Mary chose the better part, whilst Martha struggled with the needless unrest of her well-meaning mind. But though these sisters were of such widely dissimilar types, yet were they one in Christ! Diverse in disposition they might be, yet were they both loved with the same eternal, unchanging love!

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” A precious thought will be lost here unless we mark carefully the exact place in the narrative that this statement occupies. It is recorded not at the beginning of the chapter, but immediately before what we read of in verse 6, where we are told that the Lord Jesus “abode two days still in the place where he was.” Such a delay, under such circumstances, strikes us as strange. But, as we shall see, the delay only brought out the perfections of Christ — His absolute submission to the Father’s will. In addition to that, it is beautiful to behold that His delay was also in full keeping with His love for Martha and Mary. Among other things, Christ designed to strengthen the faith of these sisters by suffering it to endure the bitterness of death, in order to heighten its subsequent joy. “His love wittingly delays that it may more gloriously console them after their sufferings” (Stier). Let us learn from this that when God makes us wait, it is the sign that He purposes to bless, but in His own way — usually a way so different from what we desire and expect. What a word is that in Isaiah 30:18, “And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him”!

“When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was” (John 11:6).

The Lord knows best at what time to relieve His suffering people. There was no coldness in His affection for those tried sisters (as the sequel clearly shows), but the right moment for Him to act had not then come. Things were allowed to become more grievous: the sick one died, and still the Master tarried. Things had to get worse at Bethany before He intervened. Ofttimes God brings man to the end of himself before He comes to his relief. There is much truth in the old proverb that “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.” Frequently is this the Lord’s way; but how trying to flesh and blood! How often we ask, with the disciples, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” But how awful to question the tender compassion of such a One! And how foolish was the question of these disciples: how could they “perish” with Christ on board! What cause we have to hang our heads in shame!

“When circumstances look dark, our hearts begin to question the love of the One who permits such to befall us. Oh, let me press upon you this important truth: *the dealings of the Father’s hand must ever be looked at in the light of the Father’s heart*. Grasp this. Never try to interpret love by its manifestations. How often our Father sends chastisement, sorrow, bereavement, pressure! How well He could take me out of it all — in a moment — He has the power, but He leaves me there. Oh, may He help us to rest patiently in Himself at such times, not trying to read His love by circumstances, but them, whatever they may be, through the love of His heart. This gives wondrous strength — knowing that loving heart, and not questioning the dealings of His hand” (C.H.M.).

But why did Christ abide two days still in the same place where He was? To test the faith of the sisters, to develop their patience, to heighten their joy in the happy sequel. All true; but there was a much deeper reason than those. Christ had taken upon Him the form of a servant, and in perfect submission to the Father He awaits His orders from Him. Said He,

“I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38).

Most beautifully was this demonstrated here. Not even His love for Martha and Mary would move Him to act before the Father’s time had come. Blessedly does this show us the anti-typical fulfillment of one detail in a most wondrous type found in Leviticus 2. The meal offering plainly foreshadowed the incarnate Son of God. It displays the perfections of His Divine-human person. Two things were rigidly excluded from this offering:

“No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn *no leaven, nor any honey*, in any offering of the Lord made by fire” (Leviticus 2:11).

The leaven is the emblem of evil. “Honey” stands for the sweetness of natural affections, what men term “the milk of human kindness.” And how strikingly this comes out here.

How differently Christ acted from what you and I most probably would have done! If we had received a message that a loved one was desperately sick, would we not have hastened to his side without delay? And why would we? Because we sought *God's glory*? or because our natural affections impelled us? Ah! in this, as in everything, we behold the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus. The Father's glory was ever dearest to the heart of the Son. Here then is the force of the "therefore." "When therefore he heard that he is sick, then indeed he remained in which he was place two days" (Bagster's Interlinear-literal translation). The "therefore" and the "indeed" look back to verse 4 — "this sickness... is for the glory of God." And how what we read of in the intervening verse serves to emphasize this Christ's love for His own never interfered with His dependence on the Father. His first recorded utterance exhibited the same principle: to Mary and Joseph He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" The Father's claims were ever supreme.

["Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judea again" \(John 11:7\).](#)

Notice the manner in which the Lord expressed Himself. He did not say, Let us go to Lazarus, or to Bethany. Why not? We believe the key to the Lord's thought here lies in the word "again": note the disciples' use of the same word in the following verse. The Lord was trying the disciples: "Let us go into Judea again." If we refer back to the closing verses of John 10 the force of this will be more evident. In John 10:39 we read that His enemies in Judea "sought again to take him." Judea, then, was now the place of opposition and danger. When, then, the Lord said, "Let us go into Judea again," it was obviously a word of testing. And how this illustrates a common principle in the Lord's way of dealing with us! It is not the smooth and easy-going path which He selects for us. When we are led by Him it is usually into the place of testing and trial, the place which the flesh ever shrinks from.

["His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" \(John 11:8\).](#)

The Greek is more definite and specific than the A.V. rendering here. What the disciples said was, "Master, the Jews just now sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" The attempt of His enemies to stone Christ was still present before the eyes of the disciples, though they had now been some little time at Bethabara. The disciples could see neither the need nor the prudence of such a step. How strange the Lord's ways seem to His shortsighted people; how incapable is our natural intelligence to understand them! And how this manifests the folly of believers being guided by what men term "common sense." How much all of us need to heed constantly that word,

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

God often leads His own into places which are puzzling and perplexing and where we are quite unable to perceive His purpose and object. How often are the servants of Christ today called upon to fill positions from which they naturally shrink, and which they would never have chosen for themselves. Let us ever remember that the One who is our Lord and Master knows infinitely better than we the best road for us to travel.

"Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world" (John 11:9).

This verse has proved a puzzle to many, yet we believe its meaning can be definitely fixed. The first thing to bear in mind is that the Lord Jesus here was answering the timidity and unbelief of the disciples. They were apprehensive: to return to Judea, they supposed, was to invite certain death (cf. John 11:16). Christ's immediate design, then, was to rebuke their fears. "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" That is, Has not the "day" a definitely *allotted* time? The span of the day is *measured*, and expires not before the number of hours by which it is measured have completed their course. The night comes not until the clock has ticked off each of the hours assigned to the day. The application of this well-known fact to the Lord's situation at that time is obvious.

A work had been given Him to do by the Father (Luke 2:49), and that work He would finish (John 17:4), and it was impossible that His enemies should take His life before its completion. In John 10:39 we are told that His enemies “sought again to take him,” but “he went forth out of their hand” — not simply “escaped” as in the A.V. What the Lord here assures His disciples, is, that His death could not take place before the time appointed by the Father. The Lord had expressly affirmed the same thing on a previous occasion: “The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence; for Herod will kill thee.” And what was His reply? This,

“Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32)!

“As a traveler has twelve hours for his day’s journey, so also to Me there is a space of time appointed for My business” (Hess). What we have here in John 11:9 is parallel to His statement in John 9:4 — “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day” — “must” because the Father had decreed that He should!

This word of Christ to His disciples had more than a local significance: it enunciated a principle of general application. There is no need for us to enlarge upon it here, for we have already treated of it in our remarks upon John 7:30. God has allotted to each man a time to do his life’s work, and no calamity, no so-called accident can shorten it. Can man make the sun set one hour earlier? Neither can he shorten by an hour his life’s day.

In the second part of the ninth verse the Lord announced another reason why it was impossible for men to shorten His life: “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.” To walk in the day is to walk in the light of the sun, and such an one stumbleth not, for he is able to see the obstacles in his way and so circumvent them. Spiritually, this means, It is impossible that one should fall who is walking with God. To “walk in the day” signifies to walk in the presence of Him who is Light (1 John 1:5), to walk in communion with Him, to walk in obedience to His will. None such can stumble, for His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a

light unto our path. It is beautiful to see the application of this to the Lord Jesus in the present instance. When He got word that Lazarus was sick, He did not start at once for Bethany. Instead, He tarried where He was till the Father's time for Him to go had come. He waited for the "light" to guide Him — a true Israelite watching for the moving of the Cloud! Christ ever walked in the full light of God's known will. How impossible then for Him to "stumble."

[**"But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" \(John 11:10\).**](#)

Very solemn and searching is this in its immediate application to the disciples. It was a warning against their refusing to accompany Him. Christ was the true Light, and if they continued not with Him they would be in the dark, and then "stumbling" was inevitable. The thought here is different from what we get at the close of John 9:4. There Christ speaks of a "night" in which no man could "work"; here of a "night" in which no believer should "walk." The great lesson for us in these two verses is this, No fear of danger (or unpleasant consequences) must deter us from doing our duty. If the will of God clearly points in a certain direction our responsibility is to move in that direction unhesitatingly, and we may go with the double assurance that no power of the Enemy can shorten our life till the Divinely appointed task is done, and that such light will be vouchsafed us that no difficulties in the way will make us "stumble." What shall we say to such a blessed assurance? What but the words of the apostle Jude, "Now unto him that is able to *keep you from falling*, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (verses 24, 25).

The following questions are designed to help the interested student for our next lesson: —

1. Death is likened to "sleeping," verse 11: what thoughts are suggested by this figure?
2. Why did the disciples misunderstand Christ, verse 13?

3. Why was Christ “glad” for the disciples sake, verse 15?
4. What is signified by the “four days,” verse 17?
5. Why are we told of the nearness of Jerusalem to Bethany, verse 18?
6. Why “resurrection” before “life” in verse 25?
7. What is the force of “shall never die,” verse 26?

JOHN 11:11-27

CHRIST RAISING LAZARUS (CONTINUED)

The following is a suggested Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ announces Lazarus' death, but the disciples misunderstand Him, verses 11-13.
2. Christ rejoices for their sake that He had been absent from Bethany, verses 14, 15.
3. Thomas' melancholy devotion, verse 16.
4. Lazarus in the grave four days already, verse 17.
5. The nearness of Jerusalem to Bethany, verse 18.
6. Many Jews come to comfort the sisters, verse 19.

The conversation between Christ and Martha, verses 20-27. In the previous lesson we have seen how the Lord Jesus received a touching message that Lazarus was dying; in the passage now before us we behold Him making for Bethany, Lazarus having died and been buried in the interval. The central thing in John 11 is Christ made known as the resurrection and the life, and everything in it only serves to bring out by way of contrast the blessedness of this revelation. Resurrection can be displayed only where death has come in, and what is so much emphasized here is the desolation which death brings and man's helplessness in the presence of it. First, Lazarus himself is dead; then Thomas speaks of the disciples accompanying the Lord to Bethany that they may die with Him (John 11:16); then Martha comes before us; and though in the presence of Christ, she could think only of the death of her brother (John 11:21); it was the same with Mary (John 11:32); finally, the Jews who had come to comfort the bereaved sisters are seen "weeping" (John 11:33), and even as the Lord stands before the grave, they have no thought that He was about to release the tomb's

victim (John 11:37). What a background was all this for Christ to display His wondrous glory!

It is not difficult for us to discern here behind the dark shadows that which is far more solemn and tragic. Physical death is but the figure, as well as the effect, of another death infinitely more dreadful. The natural man is dead in trespasses and sins. The wages of sin is death, and when the first man sinned he received those fearful wages. In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he died, died spiritually, as a penal infliction. And Adam died spiritually not only as a private individual, but as the head and public representative of his race. Just as the severing of the trunk of a tree from its roots, means (in a short time) the death of each of its boughs, twigs and leaves, so the fall of Adam dragged down with him every member of the human race. It is for this reason that every one born into this world enters it “alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:18).

Yes, the natural man, the world over, is spiritually *dead*. He is alive worldwards, selfwards, sinwards, but dead Godwards. It is not that there is a spark of life within which by careful cultivation or religious exercises may be fanned into a flame; he is completely devoid of Divine life. He needs to be born again; an altogether new life, than the one he possesses by nature, must be imparted to him, if ever he is to enter the kingdom of God. The sinner’s condition is far, far worse than he has any idea of, or than the great majority of the doctors of divinity suppose. Of what use is a “remedy” to one who is *dead*? and yet the thoughts of very few rise any higher when they think and talk of the Gospel. Of what use is it to reason and argue with a corpse? and yet that is precisely what the sinner is from the standpoint of God. “Then, why preach the Word to sinners at all, if they are incapable of hearing it?” is the question which will naturally occur to the reader. Sad, sad indeed that such a question is asked at this late day — sad, because of the God-dishonoring ignorance which it displays.

No intelligent servant of God preaches the Word because he imagines that the will and mind of the sinner is capable of responding to it, any more than when God commanded Ezekiel to

“Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:4),

he supposed the objects of his message were capable of responding. “Well, why preach at all?” First, because God has commanded us to do so, and who are we to call into question His wisdom? Second, because the very words we are commanded to preach, “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The Word we are to “hold forth” is “the word of life” (Philippians 2:16). The new birth is “not of blood (by natural descent), nor of the will of the flesh (his own volition), nor of the will of man (the preacher’s persuasion), but OF GOD” (John 1:13), and the seed which God uses to produce the new birth is His own Word (James 1:18).

Now this is what is so strikingly and so perfectly illustrated here in John

11. Lazarus was dead, and that he had died was unmistakably evidenced by the fact that his body was already corrupting. In like manner, the spiritual death of the natural man is plainly manifested by the corruptions of his heart and life. In the opening paragraph we have sought to bring out how that which is emphasized here in John 11 is the utter helplessness of man in the presence of death. And this is what the servant of God needs to lay hold of in its spiritual application. If it was only a matter of stupidity in the sinner, we might overcome that by clearly reasoned statements of the truth. If it was simply a stubborn will that stood in the way of the sinner’s salvation, we could depend upon our powers of persuasion. If it was merely that the sinner’s soul was sick, we could induce him to accept some “remedy.” But in the presence of *death* we are impotent.

“All of this sounds very discouraging,” says the reader. So much the better if it results in bringing us upon our faces before God. Nothing is more healthful than to be emptied of self-sufficiency. The sooner we reach this place the better. “For we,” said Paul, “have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). The quicker we are made to realize our own helplessness, the more likely are we to seek help from God. The sooner we recognize that “the flesh profiteth *nothing*” (John 6:63), the readier shall we be to cry unto God for His

all-sufficient grace. It is not until we cease to depend upon ourselves that we begin to depend upon God.

“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26),

and this, be it remembered, was said by Christ in answer to the disciples’ query, “*Who* then can be saved?”

Here, then, is where light breaks in. Here is where the “glory of God” (John 11:4) shines forth. Man may be helpless before death, not so God. Lazarus could not raise himself, nor could his beloved sisters and sorrowing friends bring him back from the grave. Ah! but He who is, Himself, “the resurrection and the life” comes on the scene, and all is altered. And what does He do? Why, He did that which must have seemed surpassingly strange to all who beheld Him. He cried to the dead man, “Come forth.” But what was the use of doing that? Had Lazarus the power in himself to come forth? Most certainly not — had Mary or Martha, or any of the apostles cried, “Lazarus, come forth” that would have been unmistakably evidenced. No man’s voice is able to pierce the depths of the tomb. But it was One who was more than man, who now spake, and He said, “Come forth” not because Lazarus was capable of doing so, but because it was life-giving Voice which spake. The same omnipotent lips which called a world into existence by the mere fiat of His mouth, now commanded the grave to give up its victim. It was the Word of power which penetrated the dark portals of that sepulcher. And here, dear reader, is the comforting, inspiring, and satisfying truth for the Christian worker. We are sent forth to preach the Word to lost and dead sinners, because, under the sovereign application of the Holy Spirit, that Word is “the word of life.” Our duty is to cry unto God daily and mightily that He may be pleased to make it such to some, at least, of those to whom we speak.

Before we come to the actual raising of Lazarus, our chapter records many interesting and instructive details which serve to heighten the beauty of its central feature. The Lord Jesus was in no hurry; with perfect composure He moved along in Divine dignity and yet human compassion to the grief-stricken home at Bethany. At every point

two things are prominent: the imperfections of man and the perfections of Christ.

“These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth” (John 11:11).

The “these things” are the declaration that the sickness of Lazarus was for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby (John 11:4); His expressed intention of returning to Judea (John 11:7); and His avowed assurance that there could be no “stumbling” seeing that He ever walked in the unclouded light of the Father’s countenance (John 11:9). In these three things we learn the great principles which regulated the life of Christ — lowliness, dependence, obedience. He now announced that Lazarus was no longer in the land of the living, referring to his death under the figure of “sleep.” The figure is a very beautiful one, and a number of most blessed thoughts are suggested by it. It is a figure frequently employed in the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments: in the former it is applied to saved and unsaved: but in the N.T. it is used only of the Lord’s people. [¶3](#) In the N.T. it occurs in such well-known passages as 1 Corinthians 15:20, 51:

“Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that *sleep*... Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”;

and 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 5:10:

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.... Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

Below we give some of the leading thoughts suggested by this figure: —

First, sleep is perfectly harmless. In sleep there is nothing to fear, but, much to be thankful for. It is a friend and not a foe. So, for the Christian, is it with death. Said David, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.” Such ought to

be the triumphant language of every child of God. The “sting” has gone from death (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57), and has no more power to hurt one of Christ’s redeemed, than a hornet has after its sting has been extracted.

Second, sleep comes as a welcome relief after the sorrows and toils of the day. As the wise man declared, “The sleep of a laboring man is *sweet*” (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Death, for the believer, is simply the portal through which he passes from this scene of sin and turmoil to the paradise of bliss. As 1 Corinthians 3:22 tells us, “death” is ours. Sleep is a merciful provision, not appreciated nearly as much as it should be. The writer learned this lesson some years ago when he witnessed a close friend, who was suffering severely, seeking sleep in vain for over a week. Equally merciful is death for one who is prepared. Try to imagine David still alive on earth after three thousand years! Such a protracted existence in this world of sin and suffering would probably have driven him hopelessly crazy long ago. How thankful we ought to be that we have not the longevity of the antediluvians!

Third, in sleep we lie down to rise again. It is of but brief duration; a few hours snatched from our working time, then to awaken and rise to a new day. In like manner, death is but a sleep and resurrection, an awakening.

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

On the glorious resurrection morn the dead in Christ shall be awakened, to sleep no more, but live forever throughout the perfect Day of God.

Fourth, sleep is a time of rest. The work of the day is exchanged for sweet repose. This is what death means for the Christian:

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors” (Revelation 14:13).

This applies only to the “intermediate state,” between death and resurrection. When we receive our glorified bodies there will be new ministries for us to engage in, for it is written, “His servants shall serve him” (Revelation 22:3).

Fifth, sleep shuts out the sorrows of life. In sleep we are mercifully unconscious of the things which exercise us throughout the day. The repose of night affords us welcome relief from that which troubles us by day. It is so in death. Not that the believer is unconscious, but that those in paradise know nothing of the tears which are shed on earth. Scripture seems to indicate that there is one exception in their knowledge of what is transpiring down here: the salvation of sinners is heralded on high (Luke 15:7, 10).

Sixth, one reason perhaps why death is likened to a sleep is to emphasize the *ease* with which the Lord will quicken us. To raise the dead (impossible as it appears to the skeptic) will be simpler to Him than arousing a sleeper. It is a singular thing that nothing so quickly awakens one as being addressed by the voice. So we are told “the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice” (John 5:28).

Seventh, sleep is a time when the body is fitted for the duties of the morrow. When the awakened sleeper arises he is refreshed and invigorated, and ready for what lies before him. In like manner, the resurrected believer will be endued with a new power. The limitations of his mortal body will no longer exist. That which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power.

But O how vastly different is it for one who dies in his sins. The very reverse of what we have said above will be his portion. Instead of death delivering him from the sorrows of this life, it shall but introduce him to that fearful place whose air is filled with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It is true that sinners too shall be raised from the dead, but it will be unto “the resurrection of damnation.” It will be in order to receive bodies in which they will suffer still more acutely the eternal torments of the lake of fire. To all such, death will be far worse than the most frightful nightmare. And O unsaved reader, there is but a step between thee and death. Your life hangs by a slender thread, which may snap at any moment.

Be warned then, ere it is too late. Flee, even now, from the wrath to come. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, for there is no hope beyond the grave.

“After that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11).

What marvelous condescension was it for the Lord of glory to call a poor worm of the earth His “friend”? But note He said, “Our friend.” This, we believe, was a word of rebuke to His fearful and distrustful disciples; Our friend — yours, as well as Mine. He has also shown you kindness. You have professed to love him; will you now leave him to languish! His sisters are sorrowing, will you ignore them in their extremity! That is why He here says “I go” — contrast the “us” in verses 7 and 15. Our friend — I go. I to whom the danger is greatest. I am ready to go. It was both a rebuke and an appeal. He had told them that the sickness of Lazarus was in order that the Son of God might be glorified thereby (John 11:4), would they be indifferent as to how that glory would be displayed!

“I go that I may awaken” — go, even though to His own death. He “pleased not himself.” Thoughts of His own personal safety would no more retard Him than He had allowed personal affection to hasten Him. What is before Him was the Father’s glory, and no considerations of personal consequences would keep Him from being about His Father’s business. The moment had come for the Father’s glory to shine forth through the Son: therefore, His “I go,” sharply contrasted from the “he abode two days still” of John 11:6. He was going to awaken Lazarus:

“None can awaken Lazarus out of this sleep, but He who made Lazarus. Every mouse or gnat can raise us from that other sleep; none but an omnipotent power from this.” (R. Hall).

“Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep” (John 11:12, 13).

It is clear from their language that the disciples had not understood the Lord: they supposed He meant that Lazarus was recovering. Yet,

the figure He had used was not obscure; it was one which the Old Testament scriptures should have made them thoroughly familiar with. Why then, had they failed to perceive His meaning? The answer is not hard to find. They were still timid and hesitant of returning to Judea. But why should that have clouded their minds? Because they were occupied with temporal circumstances. It was “stoning” they were concerned about, the stoning of their beloved Lord — though if He was stoned, there was not much likelihood that they would escape. And when our thoughts are centered upon temporal things, or when selfish motives control us, our spiritual vision is eclipsed. It is only as our eye is single (to God’s glory) that our whole body is full of light. “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14). What a proof was this of the omniscience of Christ. He knew that Lazarus was already dead, though the disciples supposed he was recovering from his sickness. No second message had come from Bethany to announce the decease of the brother of Martha and Mary. And none was needed. Though in the form of a servant, in the likeness of man, Christ was none other than the Mighty God, and clear proof of this did He here furnish. How blessed to know that our Savior is none other than Immanuel!

“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him” (John 11:15).

But why should Christ be glad for the disciples’ sake that He was absent from Bethany at the time Lazarus was sinking? Because the disciples would now be able to witness a higher manifestation of His glory, than what they otherwise would had He been present while Lazarus was sick. But what difference would His presence there have made? This: it is impossible to escape the inference that had the Lord Jesus been there, Lazarus had not died — impossible not only because His words to the disciples plainly implied it, but also because of what other scriptures teach us on that point. The implication is plain: what the Lord unmistakably signified here was that it was inconsistent with His presence that one should die in it. It is a most striking thing that there is no trace of any one having died in the presence of the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15). And furthermore,

the Gospel records show that whenever Christ came into the presence of death, death at once fled before Him! As to the non-possibility of any one dying in the presence of Christ, we have an illustration in connection with what took place in Gethsemane. When the officers came to arrest the Savior, Peter drew his sword and smote the high priest's servant, with the obvious intention of slaying him. But in vain. Instead of cleaving his head asunder he simply severed an ear! More striking still is the case of the two thieves who were crucified with Him: They died after He had given up His spirit! As to death fleeing at the approach of Christ we have a most remarkable example in the case of the widow's son of Nain. Here it was different than in the instances of Jairus' daughter and the brother of Martha and Mary. Each of these had appealed to Him but here it was otherwise. A man was about to be buried, and as the funeral cortege was on the way to the cemetery, the Lord Jesus approached, and touching the bier He said to the young man, "Arise," and at once "the dead sat up, and began to speak" (Luke 7:14, 15)!

["And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe" \(John 11:15\).](#)

How perfect are the ways of God! If Martha and Mary had had their wish granted, not only would they (and Lazarus too) have been denied a far greater blessing, but the disciples would have missed that which must have strengthened their faith. And too, Christ would have been deprived of this opportunity which allowed Him to give the mightiest display of His power that He ever made prior to His own death; and the whole Church as well would have been the loser! How this should show us both the wisdom and goodness of God in thwarting our wishes, in order that His own infinitely better will may be done.

This verse also teaches a most important lesson as to how the Lord develops faith in His own. The hearts of the disciples were instructed and illuminated *gradually*. There was no sudden and violent action made upon them. They did not attain to their measure of grace all at once. Their eyes were slowly opened to perceive who and what Christ was; it was by repeated manifestations of Divine power and human compassion that they came to recognize in Him a

Messiah of a far higher order than what they had been taught to expect. John 2:11 illustrates the same principle: “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his *disciples believed* on him.” And God deals with us in the same way. There is, in the development of our faith, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Compare the development of Abraham’s faith through the increasingly severe trials through which God caused him to pass.

“Nevertheless let us go unto him” (John 11:15). Lazarus was *dead*, and yet the Lord speaks of going to *him*. “O love, stronger than death! The grave cannot separate Christ and His friends. Other friends accompany us to the brink of the grave, and then they leave us. ‘Neither life nor death can separate from the love of Christ’” (Burkitt). Lazarus could not come to Christ, but Christ would go to him.

“Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow- disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

No wonder that he said this to his fellow-disciples rather than to the Lord. Very melancholy was his utterance. Thomas was a man who looked on the dark side of things. Lazarus is dead, Christ is going to die, let us go and die too! And this, after the Lord had said, “I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep” (John 11:11)! How difficult is it for man to enter into the thoughts of God! Christ was going to Bethany to give life. Thomas speaks only of dying. Evident is it that he had quite failed to understand what Christ had said in John 11:9. How much of unbelief there is even in a believer! And yet we must not overlook the spirit of devotion which Thomas’ words breathed: Thomas had rather die than be separated from the Savior; Though he was lacking in intelligence, he was deeply attached to the person of the Lord Jesus.

“Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

“This was the language of a despairing and despondent mind, which could see nothing but dark clouds in the picture. The very man who afterwards could not believe that his Master had risen again, and

thought the news too good to be true, is just the one of the twelve who thinks that if they go back to Judea they must all die! Things such as these are deeply instructive, and are doubtless recorded for our learning. They show us that the grace of God in conversion does not so re-mold a man as to leave no trace of his natural bent of character. The sanguine do not altogether cease to be sanguine, nor the desponding to be despondent, when they pass from death to life, and become true Christians. This shows us that we must make large allowances for natural temperament in forming our estimate of individual Christians. We must not expect all God's children to be exactly one and the same. Each tree in a forest has its own peculiarities of shape and growth, and yet all at a distance look one mass of leaf and verdure. Each member of Christ's body has his own distinct bias, and yet all in the main are led by one Spirit and love one Lord. The two sisters Martha and Mary, the apostles Peter and John and Thomas, were certainly very unlike one another in many respects. But they all had one point in common: they loved Christ and were His friends" (Bishop Ryle).

["Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already" \(John 11:17\).](#)

Christ did not correct the error of Thomas, but calmly left the truth to do, in due time, its own work. The reference here to the "four days" makes it evident that in John 11 we have something more than a typical picture of the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. From a doctrinal viewpoint, the condition of Lazarus in the grave accurately portrayed the state of the natural man dead in trespasses and sins, a mass of corruption. It is true that Lazarus was a Jew, but "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Proverbs 27:19). The third chapter of Romans shows plainly that the state of Israel was also the state of the Gentiles. The "day" here, as usually in this Gospel, signifies (in its deeper meaning) a thousand years. "Four days," had man been in the place of death — alienation from God — for there were exactly four thousand years from the fall of Adam to the coming of Christ. God allowed the awful state of man to be completely manifested before He sent Christ to this earth.

“Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.” Note that this verse does not say “When Jesus came to *Bethany*, he found that Lazarus had lain in the grave four days already,” but instead, “When Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.” The Holy Spirit had a reason for putting it so indefinitely, and that reason we have sought to show above. When “Jesus came” to this earth, “he,” fallen man, had been “in the grave” — the place of death — “four days already” — four thousand years. O the minute and marvelous accuracy of Scripture!

“Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off” (John 11:18).

There seems to be a double reason why this topographical reference is made here. First, it explains why the “many Jews” had come to Bethany to comfort Martha and Mary (John 11:19). Second, it shows how very near to Jerusalem the raising of Lazarus occurred. It was less than two miles from the headquarters of Judaism, within walking distance, almost within sight of the Temple. All room for excuse was thereby removed for any ignorance in the leaders of the nation as to the identity of the person of Christ. His last and greatest “sign” was given before many eye-witnesses almost at the very doors of the Sanhedrin. Thus in this seemingly unimportant detail the Holy Spirit has emphasized the deep guilt of those who were most responsible for rejecting Christ.

“And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother” (John 11:19).

And poor comforters they must have made. They are in view again in John 11:37. When they witnessed the tears of the Lord Jesus by the grave-side of Lazarus, they said, “Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?” While no doubt they looked upon Christ as a miracle-worker, it is clear they had no apprehension of the glory of His person — “this man” shows that. Furthermore, it never seems to have entered their minds that He was capable of raising the dead. How then could they “comfort” the sorrowing sisters? It is impossible for an unbeliever to minister real comfort to a child of God. God alone can bind up the brokenhearted. Only the Divine

Comforter can speak peace to the troubled soul, and not knowing Him, an unsaved person is incapable of pointing another to the one Source of consolation and rest.

“And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.” Mark here the over-ruling wisdom of God. By waiting four days before raising Lazarus, a much greater number witnessed his resurrection, and thus the miracle of Christ was more decisively authenticated, for it would be given greater publicity. The Hand which controls all things so shaped events that it was impossible for the Sanhedrin to discredit this last great “sign” of Israel’s Messiah. Here then was a further reason for the “therefore” in John 11:6. God not only has a good reason for each of His delays, but generally a manifold reason. Many various ends are accomplished by each of His actions. Not only wicked but utterly senseless are our criticisms of His ways.

“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him” (John 11:20).

This action was thoroughly characteristic of Martha. Even though the Lord Jesus was not yet come into the village (John 11:30), she advances to meet Him. The verses that follow show us something of the condition of her mind at this time. “But Mary sat still in the house.” “It is impossible not to see the characteristic temperament of each sister coming out here. Martha — active, stirring, busy, demonstrative — cannot wait, but runs impulsively to meet Jesus. Mary — quiet, gentle, pensive, meditative, meek sits passively at home” (Bishop Ryle). What marks of truth are these minor details! How evident that the same One who inspired Luke 10 moved John to record these little marks of character here!

“Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:21).

There are some who think that Martha spoke in a spirit of petulancy, that she was reproaching the Lord for not having responded more promptly to the message sent Him while He was in Bethabara. But we think this is a mistake. Bather do we regard Martha’s words as a sorrowful lament, the telling out the grief of her heart. Martha’s

words show plainly what had been uppermost in the minds of the sisters during those trying four days — note that Mary says almost the same thing when she met Christ (John 11:32). There was a strange mingling of the natural and the spiritual, of faith and unbelief in this statement of Martha's. She had confidence in Christ, yet she limited His power. She believed that her brother had not died, no matter how low he were, had Christ only been present; yet the thought never seems to have entered her mind that He was able to raise Lazarus now that he was dead. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" would well have suited her condition at that time. And how often it is appropriate for us! Alas, that it should be so. The Christian is a strange paradox; a dual personality indeed.

"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." That which is reprehensible in this utterance of Martha is that she was making distance a limitation of Christ's power. And have not we often been guilty of the same thing? Have not we often envied those who were in Palestine during the time that the Word tabernacled among men? But now, alas, He is absent; and Heaven seems so far away! But it is not: it was not too far distant for Stephen to see right into it! But suppose it were; what then? Do we not have the precious promise of the Savior, "LO, I am *with you* alway, even unto the end of the age"! But, says the reader, Christ is *bodily* absent. True, and that was what had exercised Martha. Yet it ought not; had not the Lord healed both the centurion's servant and the nobleman's son *at a distance* by His word! He had; but memory failed Martha in the hour of trial and suffering. Alas, that this is so often the case with us.

["But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" \(John 11:22\).](#)

It is this additional word which indicates that there was a different meaning in Martha's words of John 11:21 from Mary's in John 11:32. Surely Martha must have said what she did here without any deliberation. With characteristic impulsiveness she most probably uttered the first thoughts which came into her mind. And yet we can hardly conceive of one making such a statement if she knew Christ as God the Son. The word she used for "ask God" indicates that she did not recognize that Christ was the One in whom dwelt all the

fulness of the Godhead bodily. In New Testament Greek there are two words for “ask.” The first, “aiteo,” signifies a familiar asking. The second, “eroteo,” means a supplicatory petitioning. The one is suited to express the favor asked of the Creator by the creature, the other for a son’s asking of the Father. The former is never used of Christ with the Father except here on the lips of Martha! It was a dragging down of Christ to the level of the prophets. It was the inevitable outcome of having sat so little at His feet listening to His words.

“Jesus said unto her, Thy brother shall rise again” (John 11:23).

These were the first words of the Lord Jesus now that He had arrived at the confines of Bethany. He was about to give

“beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3);

but not yet did He specifically announce His gracious purpose. Instead, He first gave the broad and general promise, “Thy brother shall rise again,” without announcing when or how. It is the Lord’s way to draw out by degrees His grace in the hearts of His own. He said enough to encourage hope and strengthen faith, but not sufficient to exclude exercise of heart. Light is given us upon the great mysteries of life gradually. “Here a *little* and there a *little*.” Faith has to be disciplined, and knowledge is imparted only as the heart is able to receive it.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12)

still holds good. Unto the Corinthians Paul had to say,

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2).

Alas that we are so dull and make such slow progress in the things of God.

“Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24).

Martha supposed that He was gently setting aside her implied request that He would “ask of God,” and that He was pointing her forward to a future and far-distant hope. Poor Martha! As yet she had learned little from the Lord Jesus. She had nothing better than the common hope of Jews — the resurrection of the dead “at the last day.” Does not this suggest another reason why the Holy Spirit tells us in John 11:18 that “Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem” — less than two miles away. Martha was still under the influence of Judaism! But these words of hers also contain a warning for us. Martha, like the woman at the well, understood not the nearness of the benefit. In each case, half despondingly, they put it into the future. To the Samaritan woman Christ said, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” To this she replied, “I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.” To Martha He had said, “Thy brother shall rise again,” and she replied: “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Each had only the vague, inoperative idea of a future and final good; whereas He spoke to each of a present blessing. It is easier to believe things which are in the far off (which occasion us no exercise of heart!) than it is to appropriate now that which ministers comfort and strength for the present trial. It makes less demand upon faith to believe that in a future day we shall receive glorified bodies, than to rest now on the heartening assurance that, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

“Jesus saith unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25).

This was like what the Lord said to the woman at the well. When she had, by her word, *postponed* the blessing, He answered at once, “I am that speaketh unto you”; so now He says to Martha, “I am the resurrection, and the life.” Here is something of vital importance for

our souls. It is not simply that He corrected the vision of these women by turning them from the distant future to the immediate present, but that He fixes their eyes upon Himself! It is not future events but the Person of the Lord, ever present with us, that we need most to be occupied with. Strength, blessing, comfort, are imparted just so far as we are taken up with Christ Himself.

“I am the resurrection, and the life.”

“See how the Lord proceeds to instruct and to elevate her mind; how graciously He bears with her passing fretfulness; how tenderly He touches the still open wounds; how He leads her from grieving over her brother to believe yet more fully in her Savior; how He raises her from dwelling on Lazarus dead, to repose implicitly in Him who is the Lord of life; how He diverts her from thinking only of a remote and general resurrection to confide in Him who is even at this present, the Resurrection and the Life” (Dr. G. Brown).

So too does He remove our ignorance, help our unbelief, and bear with our peevishness. Wondrous condescension, matchless patience, fathomless grace! And how the realization of these should humble us, and cause us to blush for very shame! “Lord, increase our faith” in Thyself.

“I am the resurrection, and the life.” This is what He is, in His own peerless Person. What He would here press upon Martha was that all power resided in Himself. Soon she would witness a display of this, but in the meantime the Lord would occupy her with what, or rather who He was in Himself. Blessed, thrice blessed is it for the soul to lay hold of this sustaining and satisfying truth. Infinitely better is it for us to be occupied with the Giver than His gifts.

But why this order: the resurrection *and* the life? For at least a threefold reason.

First, this is the *doctrinal* order. In spiritual experience Christ is to us the resurrection *before* He is the life. The sinner is dead in trespasses and sins, in the grave of guilt, separated from God. He has his dwelling “among the tombs” (Mark 5:3). His first need is to be brought out of this awful place, and this occurs at his regeneration.

The new birth is a passing from death unto life (John 5:24); it is the being brought on to resurrection ground. The same double thought of leaving the place of death and receiving resurrection life is found again in verse 25: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." Lazarus in the grave, raised to life by the word of Christ, gives us a perfect illustration of God's mighty work of grace in the hearts of His elect.

Second, This was the *dispensational* order. The Old Testament saints were all in the grave when He who is "The Life" came down to this earth. Therefore it is in resurrection power that they will know the Christ of God. But believers in Palestine at the time when the eternal Word tabernacled among men knew Him as the Living One, God manifest in the flesh. And yet it was not until after the Cross that they knew Him as such in the fullest sense of the word. It was not until the day of His own resurrection that He breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). It is the life of a risen and never-dying Savior which the believer now has as an inalienable and — eternal possession. Christ is the resurrection because He is the life, and He is the Life because He is the Resurrection.

Third, This will be the *prophetic* order. When the Lord Jesus leaves His Father's throne and descends into the air, His people will be found in two great companies; by far the greater part will be (as to their bodies) asleep in the grave; the others will be alive on the earth. But "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The living saints will need to be "changed," just as much as the sleeping saints will need raising. Therefore to the one Christ will be the resurrection, to the other the life. The two companies of believers are clearly distinguished in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." The "changing" of the living believers is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:51. It is to this "change" of believers who have not entered the grave that Romans 8:11 refers: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken (give life to) your mortal

bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Marvellously full were these words of Christ, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

This was brought in to show that what Christ had just spoken of was elective and not common to all men as such. He was referring to something peculiar to His own: “he that believeth” limits the first part of the verse to God’s elect. The resurrection of unbelievers, not to “life” but to the second death, where, however they shall exist in conscious torment forever and ever, is mentioned in other scriptures such as Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Revelation 20, etc.

“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” The Greek here is very explicit and impressive. The verb, “though he were dead,” is in the past tense, and with it is coupled a present participle, “yet shall he live,” *i.e.* continue to live; but this, be it noted, is predicated of one who believes. How this word of Christ tells of the indestructibility of faith its ever-living, never-dying character! Primarily, this was a message of comfort to Martha; it went beyond what He had said to her in John 11:23. First He said, “Thy brother shall rise again”; next He directed attention to Himself as “the resurrection and the life”; now He intimates that though Lazarus had died, yet, because he was a believer, he should live. “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19) we regard as a parallel promise.

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:26).

At the close of the previous verse Christ had referred to physical resurrection, bodily life; here, He speaks of death in its ultimate sense. Revelation 20:6 repeats the same blessed truth: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.” At the close of the previous verse the Lord Jesus had spoken of believers who had fallen asleep — they shall live. But here He speaks of living believers — they shall never die. The Lord had made the same assertion on a previous occasion: “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.”

“Believest thou this?” (John 11:26). Every Divine communication challenges the heart to which it is made. We understand Christ’s “this” to include all that He had said in John 11:25, 26. “Believest thou this?” Have you really laid hold of it? How little we grasp that which has been presented to us. How little we enter into what we believe in a half-*hearted* and general way! The sequel (John 11:39) clearly shows that Martha had not *really* “believed” what Christ here said to her — a most searching warning for us. Much of what we *thought* we held is found to have made no impression upon us when the hour of testing comes.

“She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (John 11:27).

Most of the commentators are quite astray here. They look upon this utterance of Martha’s as an evidence that the mists of doubt had now disappeared and that at last her faith had come out into the full sunlight. But what we read of in John 11:39 clearly refutes such a view, and what is before us here must be interpreted in harmony with her final words at the grave itself. How then are we to understand her utterance in John 11:27? Pressed as she was by the searching question in the previous verse, it seems to us that she fell back on a general answer, which affirmed her belief that the Lord Jesus was the promised Messiah. Having confessed Him as such, she at once went her way. She felt there was a depth to the Lord’s words which she was quite incapable of fathoming. And here we must stop.

Let the interested reader ponder the following questions to prepare him for the next lesson: —

1. Why did Martha leave Christ and seek out her sister, verse 28?
2. What does verse 30 reveal to us about Christ?
3. Why did Jesus weep, verse 35?
4. What is the meaning of the “therefore,” verse 38?

5. Why were they bidden to remove the stone, verse 39?
6. What is the spiritual significance of verse 44?

JOHN 11:28-44

CHRIST RAISING LAZARUS (CONCLUDED)

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Mary goes to meet Jesus, verses 28-30, 32.
2. The Jews follow her, verse 31.
3. Jesus groaning and weeping, verses 33-35.
4. The comments of the Jews, verses 36-38.
5. Martha's unbelief and Christ's rebuke, verses 39, 40.
6. Jesus praying and praising, verses 41, 42.
7. The raising of Lazarus, verses 43, 44.

The central design of John's Gospel is to present Christ to us as the Eternal Word become flesh, the Lord of glory in the likeness of men. Two things are made prominent throughout: His Divine dignity and His human perfections. Wonderfully perfect is the blending of these in the God-man: everything is there in Him to draw out our hearts in adoring love and reverent worship. Here we are shown His mighty power, and also His blessed tenderness. Here we behold not only His absolute authority, but also His entire dependency. It is not only that we gaze upon one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, come down from heaven to earth, but also on One who entered fully into the conditions and circumstances of men, sin only excepted. Strikingly do these two lines of truth meet in John 11. The very chapter which chronicles His mightiest "sign" reveals the principles by which He walked — submission, dependence, obedience. Side by side with the record of His omnipotent voice calling the dead to life again, do we read of Him groaning and weeping. Absolutely unique is this wondrous Person.

The blending of Christ's Divine glories and human perfections meet us at every turn in this fourth Gospel. If John is the only one of the four Evangelists who enters into the pre-incarnate dignities of Christ, showing Him to us as the One who subsisted in the beginning, both being with God, and God Himself: the Creator of all things; if John is the only one who contemplates Him as the great "I am," equal with the Father; he also brings before us details concerning His humanity which are not to be met with in the Synoptists. John is the only one who tells us of Christ being "wearied with his journey" (John 4:6), groaning as He beheld the tears of His own, and thirsting as He hung upon the Cross. Christ became Man in the fullest sense of the word, and nowhere do we behold His human sympathies and perfections more blessedly displayed than in this very Gospel which portrays Him as God manifest in flesh.

It is in John's Gospel, pre-eminently, that we see the antitype of the veil, which speaks so plainly of the Son of God incarnate.

["And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet,
and fine twined linen of cunning work" \(Exodus 26:31\).](#)

This order "blue, purple and scarlet" is repeated over twenty times in Exodus, and is never varied. The blue and scarlet are never placed in juxtaposition in any of the fabrics of the tabernacle. This of itself is sufficient to show that the Holy Spirit intimates there is an important truth here in connection with the person of Christ. The "blue" is the color of heaven, and speaks of Christ as the Son of God. The "scarlet" is both the color of sacrifice and human glory. The "purple" is a color produced by the mixing together of blue and scarlet. Without the purple, the blue and the scarlet would have presented too vivid a contrast to the eye; the purple coming in between them shaded off the one extreme from the other.

Now the antitype of these colors is found in the incarnate Christ. He was both God and man, and yet these two vastly dissimilar natures unite in one perfect Person. The "purple," then, coming in between the "blue" and the "scarlet" tells of the perfect blending or union of His two natures. The great marvel (as well as mystery) of His unique person is that in Him were combined all the fulness of the Godhead

with all the sinless feelings and affections of man. And it is just this which is so beautifully brought out in John's Gospel, and nowhere more strikingly than in John 11. When the sisters sent to Christ telling Him that their brother was sinking, instead of hastening at once to him, He remained two days where He was. Did this show that He was devoid of human feelings? No; His purpose was to manifest the Divine glory. But mark the sequel. When He arrives at Bethany, His heart is profoundly moved as He beholds the sorrowing sisters. And who but the God-man would have shed tears by the grave of Lazarus when He was on the very point of restoring the dead to life! Each of the three colors of the veil are clearly seen. The "blue" in the Divine power which raised the dead; the "scarlet" in the groans and tears. Now behold the "purple." When Lazarus came forth from the sepulcher he was still bound with the grave-clothes. The spectators were so amazed, so awed, so bewildered, they made no effort to remove them. "Loose him" were the words which proceeded from Christ. And who but the God-man would have been occupied with such a detail? We witness the same thing again at the Cross; "It is finished" exhibits the "blue"; "I thirst," the "scarlet"; and the "purple" is evidenced in His tender thought for His widowed mother, commending her to His beloved John!

In our previous lessons upon the first sections of John 11 we have seen the Lord at Bethabara with His disciples, and then on the confines of Bethany, whither Martha, Unbidden, with characteristic impatience rushed to meet Him. We sought to weigh her utterances as she gave expression to the first thoughts that entered her mind. We saw how that the responses made by Christ were quite beyond her depth, and how that in answer to His searching "Believest thou this?" she replied, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of God, which should come into the world." Immediately following this we read,

"And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (John 11:28).

In her impulsive hurry to meet the Lord (John 11:20) Martha, for the time, forgot all about her sister; but now she goes to call Mary. There is nothing in the narrative to show that Christ had *asked* for

Mary — if He had, John would surely have told us so. Was it then a fabrication on Martha's part? We do not so regard it: rather do we think she concluded that the profound words of Christ were more suited to her sister than herself. When Christ said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," she felt that Mary must hear this; *she* will be able to understand.

"And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (John 11:28).

The cryptic utterances of Christ Martha considered as a "call" for the more spiritual Mary. What a tribute this was to the discernment of the one whom she had formerly criticized! She called her "secretly" so as not to attract the attention of the many Jews who were with her in the house (John 11:19). These Jews had come from Jerusalem and Martha knew that most of the people there were antagonistic to the Savior.

"Christianity doth not bid us abate anything of our wariness and honest policy, yea, it requires us to have no less the wisdom of the serpent as the harmlessness of the dove" (R. Hall).

And, too, she probably felt that it was more fitting that Mary should enjoy an interview with Christ in undisturbed privacy. Mark that Martha terms Christ "Master" (the Teacher), not "Lord?"

"As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him" (John 11:29).

With characteristic quietness and calm Mary had remained seated in the house, but now she hears that the One at whose feet she had loved to sit, was here at hand, she rises and goes forth to meet Him at once, "quickly." The knowledge that He was "calling" her lent wings to her feet. She needed not to tarry and inquire who was meant by "the Master" — she had none other, and that one word was sufficient to identify the One who was the Fairest among ten thousand to her soul.

“Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him” (John 11:30).

Very striking indeed is this. He was still in the same place where Martha had talked with Him. In the interval she had returned to Bethany, entered the house and spoken to her sister, and Mary had herself traveled the same distance to meet Him in whom her soul delighted. And when she completed the journey — how long a one it was we do not know — she found her Beloved awaiting her. How this brings out the calmness of Christ: there was no undue haste to perform the miracle! And how blessedly it illustrates the fact that He never hides Himself from a seeking soul. He would not disappoint this one who so valued His presence. If she “arose quickly” to go to Him, He waited patiently for her arrival!

“The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out followed, her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there” (John 11:31).

This too is striking. Man proposes but God disposes. Martha’s secrecy came to nothing. God had purposed that the last great “sign” of Israel’s Messiah should be given before many eye-witnesses. The Jews followed Mary because they supposed she had gone to the grave to weep in private, but He who doeth all things according to the counsel of His own will, drew them there, that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus should be done in public. Doubtless their intention was to “comfort” her, and for their kindness God would not let them be the losers. Has He not said,

“whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42)?

Beautifully was that verified on this occasion.

The Jews who had journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethany had felt for Martha and Mary in their heavy bereavement, and came to offer what comfort they could. By so doing they reaped a rich and

unexpected reward. They beheld the greatest miracle which Christ ever wrought, and as the result many believed on Him (John 11:45).

“We need not doubt that these things were written for our learning. To show sympathy and kindness to the sorrowful is good for our souls. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to weep with them that weep, to try and bear one another’s burdens and lighten one another’s cares, — all of this will make no atonement for sin and will not take us to Heaven. Yet it is healthy employment for our hearts, and employment which we ought not to despise. Few persons are aware that one secret of being miserable is to live only for ourselves, and one secret of being happy is to try to make others happy. In an age of peculiar selfishness and self-indulgence it would be well that we took this to heart” (Bishop Ryle).

It is significant that these Jews did not leave the house when Martha left it!

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:32).

This was the language of perplexity and grief. Like Martha, Mary was thinking of what might have happened. How often we look back on the past with an “if” in our minds! How often in our sore trials we lash ourselves with an “if.” And small comfort does it bring! How often we complain “it might have been” (Mark 14:5). As Whittier says, “Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, ‘It might have been.’” Only too often these words express the inveterate sadness of one who is swallowed up with sorrow. Ofttimes it issues from forgetfulness of the Lord: He permitted it, so it must be for the best. It may not appear so to our dim vision; but so it is. It was so with Martha and Mary, as they were soon to behold.

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” While this was the language of grief and perplexity, it certainly was not a reproachful murmur, as her casting herself at the feet of Christ clearly shows. Nor does Mary here add an apologetic reflection as had her sister (John 11:22). Her words

had quite a different meaning from the very similar language of Martha. We say very similar, for their utterances were not identical, as a reference to the Greek will show. They each used the same words, but the order of them varied, and in this may be seen what was uppermost in each of their minds. The A.V. gives a literal rendering of the original language of Martha (John 11:21); but what Mary said was, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, had not died my brother.” That which was uppermost in the thoughts of Martha, was her brother’s death; that which was discerned by Mary was that none *could* die in the presence of Christ. Her words then were an expression of worship, as the casting of herself at Christ’s feet was an act of adoring homage.

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet.” This was ever her place. It is beautiful to observe that each time the New Testament presents Mary to us, she is seen “at the feet of Jesus” — expressive of her worshipful spirit. But there is no mere repetition. In Luke 10, at Christ’s feet she owned Him as Prophet, hearing His word (verse 39). Here in John 11 she approaches Christ as Priest — that great High Priest that can be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” who shares our sorrows, and ministers grace in every time of need. In John 12:3 Mary, at His feet acknowledged Him as “King” — this will appear if we compare Matthew 26:7, from which we learn that she also anointed “the head” of the rejected King of the Jews!

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled” (John 11:33).

The Greek word here for “groaned” is expressive of deep feeling, sometimes of sorrow, more often of indignation. In this instance the Holy Spirit has recorded the cause of Christ’s groaning — it was the sight of Mary and her comforters weeping. He was here in the midst of a groaning creation, which sighed and travailed over that which sin had brought in. And this He felt acutely. The original suggests that He was distressed to the extremest degree: moved to a holy indignation and sorrow at the terrific brood which sin had borne. Agitated by a righteous detestation of what evil had wrought in the world. “And was troubled” is, more literally, “he troubled himself”;

He caused Himself to be troubled by what made others weep and wail. And how this “groaning” and “troubling of himself” brings out the perfections of the incarnate Son! He would not raise Lazarus until He had entered in spirit into the solemnity of the awfulness of death. Mark 8:12 intimates that the miracles which He performed *cost Him something*. Plainer still is the testimony of Matthew 8:17: “himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” — He felt the *burden* of sickness before He removed it.

“And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see” (John 11:34).

What a mark of genuineness is this line in the picture! Who that was inventing a fictitious story would have introduced such a detail in a scene like this! But how thoroughly in keeping with everything else which the Gospels record about Christ. There was no ostentation about Him. He never used His Omniscience for the mere sake of display. He wished to be invited to the sepulcher.

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

The shortest verse in the Bible, yet what volumes it contains. The Son of God weeping, and weeping on the very eve of raising the dead man! Who can fathom it? Three times in the New Testament we read of the Lord Jesus weeping: here, over Jerusalem, (Luke 19:41), and in Gethsemane (Hebrews 5:7). Each time His tears were connected with the effects or consequences of sin. By the grave-side of Lazarus these tears expressed the fulness of the grief which His heart felt. They manifested the perfectness of His love and the strength of His sympathy. He was the Man of sorrows and “acquainted with grief.” Yet, here too was more than an expression of human sympathy. Here were souls upon which rested the weight of the dark shadow of death, and they were souls which He loved, and He felt it.

“Jesus wept”:

“The consciousness that He carried resurrection-virtue in Him, and was about to fill the house at Bethany with the joy of restored life, did not stay the current of natural affections. ‘Jesus wept.’ His heart

was still alive to the sorrow, as to the degradation of death. His calmness throughout this exquisite scene was not indifference, but elevation. His soul was in the sunshine of those deathless regions which lay far away and beyond the tomb of Lazarus, but He could visit that valley of tears, and weep with those that wept” (J. Bellett).

“Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!” (John 11:36).

How these tears demonstrated

“the profound sympathy of the heart of Jesus with us in all the sorrows and trials through which we pass. Had those sisters for a moment questioned the love of Jesus for them and His sympathy with them in their sorrow, how they would be rebuked by these groans and tears! ‘Jesus wept.’ What tender sympathy and grace! And He is the same today. It is true the surroundings are different, but His heart is the same: ‘Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.*’ He ‘wept.’ How we see the reality of His human nature! Yes; it was a perfect human heart. He wept for the sorrow and desolation which sin has brought into the world; and He entered into it as no other could. Oh! what groans and tears! How they tell out the heart of our precious Lord Jesus! He truly loved these tried ones, and they proved it. So shall we if we rest in the same tender, gracious, sympathizing Lord” (C.H.M.).

“And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?” (John 11:37).

This sounds very much like the language of men determined to believe nothing good of our Lord, insistent on picking a hole or finding a fault, if possible, in any thing that He did. Their words have a sarcastic ring about them. Some have wondered why these carping critics did not mention the raising of Jairus’ daughter or the widow’s son. But it should be remembered that both of these miracles had been performed in Galilee. Moreover, the healing of the blind man in Jerusalem was much more recent. It is clear that they had no thought of help being available now that Lazarus was dead, and so they openly reproach Christ for allowing him to die.

And men in their petulance and unbelief, especially at funerals, still ask much the same questions: ‘Why should the Almighty have permitted this?’ They forget that

“He giveth not account of any of his matters” (Job 33:13).
“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7)

is sufficient for faith.

“Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it” (John 11:38).

This time, as the “therefore” indicates, the *groaning* was occasioned by the carping unbelief of those mentioned in the previous verse. Here it was a matter of Christ “enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself” (Hebrews 12:3). It shows how He felt the antagonism of those who knew Him not. It was not as a stoic that He passed through these scenes. Everything that was contrary to His holy nature, moved Him deeply. How blessed it is for us to remember this as we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,

“groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).

How comforting to know that our Redeemer felt the same thing which the new nature within us feels; only felt it a thousand times more acutely. Not for nothing was He termed “a man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). In us there is ever a conflict; one nature feeding on, the other repelled by, the things of this world. But with the Holy One of God there was nothing to neutralize, nothing to modify, the anguish which His spirit felt from His daily contact with evil and corruption. As Hebrews tells us, “He suffered being tempted.” It is true there was nothing in Him to which Satan could appeal, and therefore there was no possibility of Him yielding. But nevertheless the temptation was a fearful reality. His holy nature recoiled from the very presence of the Evil One, as His “get thee hence, Satan” plainly intimates. His spotless purity was sickened by the vile solicitations of the tempter. Yes, He suffered to a degree we do not and cannot. Suffered not only from the temptation of Satan, but from

the evil which surrounded Him on every side. The “groaning” which the Holy Spirit has here recorded gives us a glimpse of what must have gone on constantly in the spirit of that blessed One so deeply “acquainted with grief.”

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone” (John 11:39).

“What majestic *composure* in the midst of this mighty emotion!” (Stier).

Though weeping outwardly and groaning inwardly, the Lord Jesus was complete master of Himself. He acts and speaks with quiet dignity. The miracles of God avoid with the supremest propriety all that is superfluous. So often in the mighty works of God we may observe, an economy of Divine power. What man could do, he is required to do. We have little use for the hackneyed saying that “God helps those who help themselves,” for God very often helps those who are unable to help themselves. Yet, on the other hand, it remains true that it is not God’s general way to do for us what we are responsible and capable of doing for ourselves. God is pleased to bless our use of the means which are at hand. If I am a farmer, I shall harvest no crops unless I plow and sow and care for my fields. Just as in the first miracle of this Gospel Christ ordered men to fill the jars with water, so here He ordered men to roll away the stone.

“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.” There is another lesson for us to learn here. He might have commanded the stone to roll itself away, or He might have bidden Lazarus to come forth through the impediment of the stone. Instead, He bade the bystanders remove it. Christ modestly avoided all pomp and parade and mingled the utmost simplicity with the most amazing displays of power. What an example He thus set us to avoid all ostentation!

“Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days” (John 11:39).

What a characteristic word was this from one who was “careful about many things,” ever anxious about circumstances. Did Martha suppose that Christ only desired to view the body? It would seem so.

And yet how sad is the unbelief which her utterance expressed. Lazarus' own sister would put an obstacle in the way of the manifestation of Christ's glow! She supposed it was useless to remove the stone. How solemnly this warns us that natural affections can never rise to the thoughts of God, and that only too frequently we are opposed to His workings even where it is for the blessing of those whom we love most tenderly! How often has a husband, a wife, a parent, sought to resist the Word or providences of God, as they were operating in or on the object of their affection! Let us take to heart this lamentable resistance of Martha.

“Jesus said unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

There is considerable difference of opinion as to what our Lord referred to when He declared, “Said I not unto thee?” etc. Many suppose He was reminding her of some word of His spoken just before, when she had met Him alone, and which is not recorded in the context. This is mere supposition, and an unlikely one at that. It seems more natural to regard it as pointing back to the answer Christ had sent her from Bethabara:

“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby” (John 11:4).

Others think it was as though He said, “Martha, thou art forgetting the great doctrines of faith which I have ever taught thee. How often you have heard Me say, All things are possible to him that believeth.” There may be a measure of truth in this as well.

“Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” Profound word was this. “The glory of God”! That which rejoices the soul when seen and known; that, without which we must forever remain unsatisfied and unblest; that, in comparison with which all sights are as nothing, — is “the glory of God.” This was what Moses prayed to see: “I beseech thee, show me thy glory” (Exodus 33:18). The glory of God is the revelation of His excellencies, the visible display of His invisible perfections. It was the glory of God which Christ came

here to make manifest, for He is the outshining of God's glory (Hebrews 1:3). But the one special point to which our Lord here referred, was His own glory as the Bringer of life out of death. It was this which He came to reveal, both in His own person, by dying and rising again, and in the works of His hands — here in the raising of Lazarus. To remove the wages of death, to undo the work which sin had wrought, to conquer him that had the power of death, to swallow up death in victory — this was indeed a special manifestation of glory.

“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Now it is unbelief which hinders our seeing the glory of God. It is not our unworthiness, our ignorance, nor our feebleness, that stand in the way, but our unbelief, for there is far more of unbelief than faith in us, as well as in Martha. Those searching words, “Said I not unto thee” apply to writer and reader. He was reminding Martha of a word given her before, but which had not been “mixed with faith.” Alas, how often His words to us have fallen on unresponsive hearts. Mark the order of the two verbs here: “Believe” comes before “see,” and compare our remarks on John 6:69.

“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid” (John 11:41).

As pointed out previously, two things stand out conspicuously all through this chapter: the glory of Christ and the failure of men; His perfections and their imperfections confront us at every point. Christ had bidden the bystanders “Take ye away the stone” — doubtless a heavy one (cf. Matthew 27:60) which would require several men to move. But they had not responded. They paused to listen to Martha's objection. It was not until He had replied to her, not until He had spoken of the glory of God being seen, that they obeyed. “Then they took away the stone.” How slow is man to obey the Word of God! What trifles are allowed to hinder!

“And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me” (John 11:41).

Very beautiful is this. It manifested Christ as the dependent One. Perfectly did He fulfill Proverbs 3:5, 6:

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him.”

But more: it was the Son giving the Father the honor for the miracle which was about to be performed. He directed attention away from Himself to One in heaven. Well might He say, “learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). And too, there is another thing here. In view of His words in the next verse it seems clear that He also lifted up His eyes for the sake of those standing around. His miracles had been blasphemously attributed to Satan and Hell; He would here show the true Source from which they proceeded — “Jesus lifted up his eyes.” Note also His, “Father, I thank thee.” He began with this. Christ has left us a perfect example, not only of prayerfulness but of thankfulness as well. We are always more ready to ask than thank: but see Philippians 4:6.

“And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” “We now reach a point of thrilling and breathless interest. The stone had been removed from the mouth of the cave. Our Lord stands before the open grave, and the crowd stands around, awaiting anxiously to see what would happen next. Nothing appears from the tomb. There is no sign of life at present; but while all are eagerly looking and listening, our Lord addresses His Father in Heaven in a most solemn manner, lifting up His eyes, and speaking audibly to Him in the hearing of all the crowd. The reason He explains in the next verse. Now, for the last time, about to work His mightiest miracle, He once more makes a public declaration that He did nothing separate from His Father in heaven, and that in this and all His work there is a mysterious and intimate union between Himself and the Father” (Bishop Ryle).

“And I knew that thou hearest me always” (John 11:42).

What perfect confidence in the Father had this One here in servant form! And what was the ground of His confidence? Has He not Himself told us in John 8:29? — “He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; For I do always those things that please him”! The Lord Jesus never had a thought which was out of harmony with the Father’s will, and never did a thing which in the slightest degree deviated from His Father’s word. He always did those things which pleased Him (Psalm 16:8); therefore did the Father always hear Him. What light this throws on our un-answered prayers! There is an intimate relation between our conduct and the response which we receive to our supplications:

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”
(Psalm 66:18).

Equally clear is the New Testament.

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

Very searching is this. It is not what men term “legalism” but the Father maintaining the demands of holiness. For God to answer the prayers of one who had no concern for His glory and no respect to His commandments, would be to place a premium upon sin.

“And I knew that thou hearest me always.” Very, very blessed is this. Unspeakable comfort does it minister to the heart that rests upon it. Christ did not cease to pray when He left this earth: He still prays, prays for us, His people:

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

How much we owe to His intercession eternity will reveal — far, far more than we now realize. Read through John 17 and note the different things He has asked (and possibly, still asks) the Father for us. He asks that His joy may be fulfilled in us (verse 13), that we may be kept from evil in the world (verse 15), that we may be

sanctified through the truth John 4:17), that we may be one (21), that we may be made perfect in one (verse 23), that we may be with Him where He is (verse 24), that we may behold His glory (verse 24). None of these things are yet ours in their fulness; but how unspeakably blessed to know that the time is coming when all of them will be! The Father hears Christ “always,” therefore these things must be made good to us?

“But because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 11:43).

How this reminds us of Elijah on mount Carmel!

“Elijah the prophet came near and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God” (1 Kings 18:36, 37)!

This scripture supplies the key to the meaning of the Lord’s words beside the tomb of Lazarus. Like Elijah’s, Christ’s mission was unto Israel, and like Elijah, He here prayed that God would authenticate His mission. If the Father had not sent Him, He would not have heard Him in anything; the Father hearing Him here at the graveside of Lazarus was therefore a clear proof and full evidence of His Divine mission.

“And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43).

This “loud voice” was also for the people’s sake, that all might hear. Lazarus was addressed personally for, as it has been well remarked, had Christ simply cried “come forth” Hades would have been emptied and every tenant of the grave would have been raised from the dead. We have here, in miniature, what will take place on the resurrection morn.

“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

So, too, will it be when the wicked dead shall be resurrected:

“Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice” (John 5:28).

It is striking to note that Christ here did nothing except to say, “Lazarus, come forth.” It was the last great public witness to Christ as the incarnate Word. And, too, it perfectly illustrated the means which God employs in regeneration. Men are raised spiritually, pass from death unto life, by means of the written Word, and by that alone. Providences, personal testimonies, loss of loved ones, deeply as these sometimes may stir the natural man, they never “quicken” a soul into newness of life. We are born again,

“not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:23).

“Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth” (John 11:44).

At the sound of that Voice the king of terrors at once yielded up his lawful captive, and the insatiable grave gave up its prey. Captivity was led captive and Christ stood forth as the Conqueror of sin, death and Satan. There it was demonstrated that He who was in the form of a Servant, nevertheless, held in His own hand “the keys of death and hades.” Here was public proof that the Lord Jesus had absolute power over the material world and over the realm of spirits. At His bidding a soul that had left its earthly tenement was called back from the unseen to dwell once more in the body. What a demonstration was this that He who could work such astounding miracles must be none other than one “who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Romans 9:5). Thank God for an all-mighty Savior. How can any sheep of His ever perish when held in such a hand!

“And he that was dead came forth” (John 11:44).

“This shows us what the energy, the utmost energy, of evil can do over those who are the beloved of the Lord; but it also shows us how the Lord Jesus sets it altogether aside in the energy and in the strength of His own power. We have here the full result of Satan’s

power, and the perfect triumphing of the Lord over that power. Death is the result of the power of Satan. By bringing in sin, he brought in death: 'the wages of sin'; this is the utmost of Satan's power. He brought in this at the commencement, he brought it in by deceit; for 'he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.' Such has he been ever since; he is called the old Serpent and the Deceiver; and having deceived, he became the murderer of the first Adam, and in one sense, of the last Adam. He was and is a liar; that is his character, as exactly opposed to Christ, who is the truth. In like manner all the variations of his character are set in opposition to that of Christ. He is the destroyer, and Christ is the Giver of life; He is the accuser of the brethren, and Christ the Mediator for them; Christ the Truth of God, and Satan the father of lies. In this character he is first brought before us. By misrepresenting the truth and character of God, he became the murderer of the souls of men, and brought in death — this was his power. Christ came to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the Devil by bringing souls from the power of Satan to the power of the living God. This is what is so strikingly illustrated here in John 11" (Mr. J. N. Darby).

There are two ways in which the Lord Jesus has become the resurrection and the life of His people: First, in purchasing their redemption from the wages of sin, by paying Himself the full price which Divine justice demanded for their transgressions. This He did by His own voluntary and vicarious sufferings; being made a curse for us. Second, by making us one with Himself who is the very life of all being: "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17). It was this He prayed for in John 17: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (verse 21). This is made good by the Holy Spirit: "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The believer is "in Christ" not only by the eternal choice of the Father (Ephesians 1:4), not only by His being constituted our federal Head (1 Corinthians 15:22), but also by vital union. In this double way then is Christ unto us "the resurrection and the life," and thus has He completely triumphed over him (the Devil) who had (no longer "has") the power of death. A most striking figure of this was

Lazarus. Dead, in the grave, his body already gone to corruption. At the almighty word of Christ “he that was dead came forth.” The children of God are the children of the resurrection. Where Christ is made the life of the soul, there is the certainty of a resurrection to life eternal in Christ’s life: when His life is communicated to us, we have that within us over which the power of Satan is unable to prevail. Dimly, but beautifully, was this foreshadowed of old in the case of Job. Afflict him Satan might, destroy his possessions he was permitted to do, but touch his *life* he could not!

The picture presented here in John 11 is Divinely perfect. It was during the bodily absence of Christ from Bethany that death exercised its power over Lazarus. It is so with us now. What we have in John 11 is not merely an individual, but a family — a family beloved of the Lord. How clearly this prefigured the family of God now upon earth! While Christ was bodily absent, the power of death was felt, and sorrow and grief came in. But tears gave place to rejoicing. After abiding “two days” where He was, Christ came to that afflicted family, and His very presence manifested the power of life. So, when Christ returns for His people, it will be in this same twofold character: as the Resurrection and the Life. Then will He put away not only the grief of His people, but that which has caused it. In the interval, His “tears” (before He raised Lazarus) assure us of His deep sympathy!

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin” (John 11:44).

This line in the picture in nowise mars its accuracy, rather does it intensify it. Whether we view the raising of Lazarus as a figure of the regeneration of a sinner, or the glorification of the believer, the “graveclothes” here and the removal of them, are equally significant. When a sinner is born again, God’s work of grace in his soul is not perfected, rather has it just commenced. The old nature still remains and the marks of the grave are still upon him. There is much to impede the movements of the “new man,” much from which he needs to be “loosed,” and which his spiritual resurrection did not of itself effect. The language of such a soul was expressed by the apostle Paul when he said,

“to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not... For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:18, 22, 23).

It was so here with Lazarus when the Lord called him from the tomb; he did not leave the hampering graveclothes behind him, but came forth “bound hand and foot.”

“Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44).

How this brings out the moral glory of Christ. The fact that He had to ask the bystanders to liberate the risen man shows that the spectators were all overcome with amazement and awe. The Lord alone remained serene and collected. That the Lord invited them to “loose him” (rather than, by a miracle, cause the clothes to fall from him) points a beautiful lesson. In gracious condescension the Lord of glory links human instruments with Himself in the work which He is now doing in the world. Again and again is this seen in John’s Gospel. He used the servants at the wedding-feast, when He turned the water into wine. He fed the hungry multitude through the hands of His disciples. He bade the spectators of this last public miracle roll the stone away from the grave; and now He asks them to free Lazarus from the graveclothes. And this is still His blessed way. He alone can speak the word which quickens dead sinners; but He permits us to carry that word to them. What an inestimable privilege — an honor not given even to the angels! O that we might esteem it more highly. There is no higher privilege this side of Heaven than for us to be used of the Lord in rolling away gravestones and removing graveclothes.

“Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” But there is a yet deeper and even more blessed truth taught us here. In its ultimate application the raising of Lazarus points, as we have seen, to the full manifestation of Christ as the resurrection and the life at the time when He returns to His sorrowing “family.” Then will God’s wondrous work of sovereign grace be perfected. No longer shall we

be left in a groaning creation, but removed to His own place on high. No longer shall we be imprisoned in these tabernacles of clay, for we shall be “delivered from the bondage of corruption” and enter into “the glorious liberty of the children of God.” No more shall our face be “bound about with a napkin,” which now causes us to see “through a glass darkly,” but in that glad day we shall see “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Then shall this corruptible put on incorruption and mortality shall be “swallowed up of life” (2 Corinthians 5:4). It is of *this* that the “Loose him” speaks. No more shall we wear the habiliments of death, but then shall we rejoice in that One who has forever set us free that we might walk with Him in newness of life. Then, ah, then, shall we obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

“Loose him.” This was to satisfy the onlookers that they had not been deceived by any optical delusion. With their own hands they were permitted to handle his body. It is very striking to observe that in this final “sign” of Christ, conclusive evidence was offered to three of their senses nostrils, eyes, and hands: the “stink” must have been apparent when the stone was removed from the cave; they saw Lazarus come forth a living man; they were suffered to trench and handle him. All possible deception was therefore out of question.

“And let him go.” The spectators were not allowed to satisfy an idle curiosity. Lazarus was to retire to the privacy of home. Those who had witnessed the miracle of his resurrection, were not suffered to pry into the secrets of the grave or ask him curious questions. “Let him go” was the authoritative word of Christ, and there the curtain falls. And fitly so. When the Lord Jesus leaves His Father’s throne on high and descends into the air, we too shall go — go from these scenes of sin and suffering, go to be “forever with the Lord.” Glorious prospect! Blessed climax! Blissful goal! May our eyes be steadily fixed upon it, running with perseverance the race set before us, looking off unto Him who “*for the joy that was set before him*, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

The following questions are to prepare the student for the closing section of John 11: —

1. How explain the different actions of the spectators, verses 45, 46?
2. What important truth is illustrated in verse 50?
3. What is meant by “this spake he not of himself,” verse 51?
4. What do verses 51, 52 teach about the Atonement?
5. “Gather together” in one what, verse 52?
6. Why did Jesus “walk no more openly among the Jews,” verse 54?
7. What is meant by “to purify themselves,” verse 55?

JOHN 11:45-57

CHRIST FEARED BY THE SANHEDRIN

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The effects of Christ's great miracle, verses 45, 46.
2. The Council and their predicament, verses 47, 48.
3. Caiaphas and his counsel: verses 49, 50.
4. The Holy Spirit's interpretation, verses 51, 52.
5. The Council's decision and Christ's response, verses 53, 54.
6. The Feast of the Passover and the purification of the Jews, verses 55, 56.
7. The commandment of the Council, verse 57.

In the closing section of John 11 we are shown the effects of the awe-inspiring miracle recorded in the earlier part of the chapter. And we are at once struck with what is here omitted. The Holy Spirit has told us of the varying impressions made upon the "many Jews" who witnessed the raising of Lazarus, but nothing whatever is said of the feelings of either Lazarus or his sisters! Several reasons may be suggested for this. In the first place, the Bible is not written to satisfy an idle curiosity. It would not have suited the ways of God for us to know now what was retained by the memory of Lazarus as he returned from the Unseen to this world. It is not God who moves Spiritualists to pry into that which lies behind the veil. In the second place, there is a beautiful delicacy in concealing from us the emotions of Martha and Mary. We are not allowed to obtrude into the privacy of their home after their loved one had been restored to them! In the third place, may we not reverently say, the joy of the sisters was too great for utterance. An impostor inventing this story would have made this item very prominent, supposing that it would

furnish a suitable and appropriate climax to the narrative. But the spiritual mind discerns that its very omission is an evidence of the Divine perfections of this inspired record.

“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him” (John 11:45).

Though John says nothing about the effects which the raising of Lazarus had upon any of the members of the Bethany family, it is striking to observe how the Holy Spirit here adheres to His unity of purpose. All through this Gospel He has shown us the growing enmity of the “Jews,” an enmity which was now so swiftly to culminate in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. So now, without stopping to draw any moral from the great “sign” which the Messiah had just given, without so much as making a single comment upon it He at once tells us how it was regarded by the Jews! They, as ever, were divided about the Lord Jesus (cf. John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). A goodly number of those who had witnessed the coming forth of Lazarus from the tomb “believed on him.” Without attempting to analyze their faith, this we may safely say: their enmity was subdued, their hostility was discarded, temporarily at least.

“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.” “It is remarkable that our Evangelist speaks of them as those who had come to Mary. Their regard for her led them to have regard to Him whom she so deeply loved. Perhaps too they had conversed with her about Him, and she had borne testimony unto Him, and impressed them favorably concerning Him, and prepared them for their faith in Him” (Dr. John Brown).

The wording of this 45th verse is most significant. It does not say, “Then many of the Jews came to Mary, who, seeing the things which Jesus did, believed on him,” but “Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.” The two things are linked together — the coming to Mary and the seeing the things which He did — as explaining why they “believed on him.” It reminds us of what we read of in John 4:39, 41, 42:

“And many of the Samaritans believed on him *for the saying of the woman*, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.... And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman,

Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

“But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done” (John 11:46).

“But”: ominous word is this. Solemn is the contrast now presented. Some of those who had witnessed the miracle went at once to the Pharisees and told them of what Christ had done. Most probably they were their spies. Their motive in reporting to these inveterate enemies of our Lord cannot be misunderstood; they went not to modify but to inflame their wrath. What an example of incorrigible hardness of heart! Alas, what is man! Even miracles were to some “a savor of death unto death”!

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council” (John 11:47).

The “chief priests” were, in all probability, Sadducees; we know that the high priest was, see Acts 5:17. The “Pharisees” were their theological opponents. These two rival sects hated each other most bitterly, yet, in this evil work of persecuting the Lord Jesus, they buried their differences, and eagerly joined together in the common crime. The same thing is witnessed in connection with Herod and Pilate:

“And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves” (Luke 23:11, 12)!

Each of these cases was a fulfillment of the prophecy which the Holy Spirit had given through David long before:

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Christ” (Psalm 2:2).

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles” (John 11:47).

The “council” was deeply stirred by the evidence before them. Jesus had clearly demonstrated that he was the Christ, and they ought forthwith to have acknowledged Him. Instead of doing so they chided themselves for their delay at not having apprehended and silenced Him before. “What do we?” they asked. Why are we so dilatory? On a previous occasion, these same men had sent officers to arrest Christ (John 7:32), but instead of doing so they returned to their masters saying, “Never man spake like this man,” and then, in the providence of God, Nicodemus objected,

“Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (John 7:51),

and this broke up their conference. But now things had come to a head. They did know what He was doing. “For this man doeth many miracles.” This they could not deny. Very solemn was it. They owned the genuineness of His miracles, yet were their consciences unmoved. How this exposes the uselessness of much that is being done today. Some think they have accomplished much if they demonstrate to the intellect the truth of Christ’s miracles. We often wonder if such men really believe in the total depravity of human nature. Souls are not brought into the presence of God, or saved, by such means. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Nothing but omnipotent and sovereign grace is of any avail for those who are lost. And the only thing God uses to quicken the dead is His own Word. One who has really passed from death unto life has no need for so-called “Christian Evidences” to buttress his faith: one who is yet dead in trespasses and sins has *no capacity* of heart to appreciate them. Preach the Word, not argue and reason about the miracles of the Bible, is our business!

“If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him” (John 11:48).

How these words reveal the awful enmity of their hearts: no matter what others did, they were determined not to believe. In our first chapter on John 11 we called attention to the link between this chapter and Luke 16. In each instance there was a “Lazarus.” The very name, then, of the one whom Christ had just raised at Bethany, should have served to remind them of His warning words at the close of Luke 16. Well did Christ say of them, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they *be persuaded*, though one rose from the dead” (verse 31). What a proof that witnessing miracles will not bring dead sinners to the feet of Christ!

“We must never wonder if we see abounding unbelief in our own times, and around our own homes. It may seem at first inexplicable to us, how men cannot see the truth which seems so clear to ourselves, and do not receive the Gospel which appears so worthy of acceptance. But the plain truth is, that man’s unbelief is a far more deeply-seated disease than is generally reckoned. It is proof against the logic of facts, against reasoning, against moral suasion. Nothing can melt it down but the grace of God. If we ourselves believe, we can never be too thankful. But we must never count it a strange thing, if we see many of our fellow men as hardened and unbelieving as the Jews” (Bishop Ryle).

“If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:48).

It was only to be expected that the resurrection of Lazarus would raise a wave of popular excitement. Any stir among the common people the leaders considered would be dangerous, especially at passover time, then nigh at hand, when Jerusalem would be filled with crowds of Israelites, ready to take fire from any spark which might fall among them (cf. John 12:12, 13). The Council therefore deemed it wisest to concert measures at once for repressing the nascent enthusiasm. Something must be done, but what they hardly knew. They feared that a disturbance would bring Rome’s heavy hand down upon them and lead to the loss of what national life still

remained to them. But their fears were not from any concern which they had for God's glory, nor were they even moved by patriotic instinct. It was sordid self-interest. "They will take away our place," the temple (Greek "topos" used in Acts 6:13, 14; Acts 21:28, 29, where, plainly, the temple is in view), which was the center and source of all their influence and power. They claimed for themselves what belonged to God. The holy things were, in their eyes, their special property.

Palestine had been annexed as a province to the Roman Empire, and as was customary with that people, they allowed those whom they conquered a considerable measure of self-government. The Jews were permitted to continue the temple services and to hold their ecclesiastical court. It was those who were in position of power who here took the lead against Christ. They imagined that if they continued to leave Him alone, His following would increase, and the people set Him up as their King. It mattered not that He had taught, "My kingdom is not of this world" (18.36); it mattered not that He retired when the people *had* desired to take Him by force and make Him their King (John 6:15). Enough that they supposed His claims threatened to interfere with their schemes of worldly prosperity and self-aggrandizement.

It is indeed striking to see the utter blindness of these men. They imagined that if they stopped short the career of Christ they would protect themselves from the Romans. But the very things they feared came to pass. They crucified Christ. And what was the sequel? Less than forty years afterward the Roman army did come, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple and carried away the whole nation into captivity. A thoughtful writer has remarked on this point: "The well-read Christian need hardly be reminded of many like things in the history of Christ's Church. The Roman emperors persecuted the Christians in the first three centuries, and thought it a positive duty not to let them alone. But the more they persecuted them the more they increased. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. So, too, the English Papists, in the days of Queen Mary persecuted the Protestants and thought that truth was in danger if they left them alone. But the more they burned our forefathers, the more they confirmed men's minds in steadfast attachment to the

doctrines of the Reformation. In short, the words of the second Psalm are continually verified in this world. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel against the Lord. But ‘He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.’ God can make the designs of His enemies work together for the good of His people, and cause the wrath of men to praise Him. In days of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy, believers may rest patiently in the Lord. The very things that at one time seem likely to hurt them, shall prove in the end to be for their gain.”

“And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:49, 50).

The Council was puzzled. They saw in Christ, as they thought, a menace to their interests, but what course to follow they scarcely knew. Up to this point they had simply asked one another questions. Impatient at the vacillations of the priests and Pharisees, the high priest brusquely and contemptuously swept aside their deliberations with, “Ye know nothing at all.” “The one point to keep before us is our own interests. Let that be clearly understood. When we once ask, What is expedient for us, there can be no doubt about the answer. This Man must die! Never mind about His miracles, or His teachings, or the beauty of His character, His life is a perpetual danger to our prerogatives. I vote for death.” As John 11:53 shows us, the evil motion of Caiaphas was carried. The Council regarded it as a brilliant solution to their difficulty. “If this popular Nazarene be slain not only will suspicion be removed from us, but our loyalty to the Roman Empire will be unmistakably established. The execution of Jesus will not only show that we have no intention of revolting, but rather will the slaying of this Man, who is seeking to establish an independent kingdom, plainly evidence our desire and purpose to remain the faithful subjects of Caesar. Thus our watchful zeal for the integrity of the Empire will not only establish confidence but win the applause of the jealous power of Rome? Caiaphas spoke as an unscrupulous politician who sacrifices righteousness and truth for party interests. So too in accepting his policy, the Council persuaded

themselves that political prudence required the carrying out of his counsel rather than that the Romans should be provoked.

“*Our* place” was what *they* considered. It was precisely what the Lord had foretold:

“But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours” (Luke 20:14).

Favor from Caesar rather than from God, was what their hearts desired. “Unlike Abraham they took riches from the king of Sodom instead of blessings from the hands of Melchizedek. They chose the patronage of Rome rather than know the resurrection-power of the Son of God” (Mr. Bellett).

Solemn warning is this for us to be governed by higher principles than “expediency.”

“And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation” (John 11:51).

“There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand” (Proverbs 19:21).

Strikingly was this illustrated here. Caiaphas was actuated by political expediency: the Lord Jesus was to be a State victim. Little did he know of the deep meaning of the words that he uttered, “It is expedient that one man die for the people”: little did he realize that he had been moved of God to utter a prophecy to the honor of Him whom he despised. What we have in this verse and in the one following is the Holy Spirit’s parenthetical explanation and amplification upon this saying of the high priest’s. Altogether unconscious of the fact, Caiaphas had “prophesied,” and as 2 Peter 1:20, 21 tells us,

“No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation *i.e.* human origination, for the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man.”

The instance before us is closely parallel with the case of Balaam in the O.T., who also “prophesied” against his will.

The subject is indeed a profound one, and one which human wisdom has stumbled over in every age, nevertheless the teaching of Scripture is very clear upon the point: all things, in the final analysis, are of God. Nowhere is this more evident than in connection with the treatment which the Lord Jesus received at the hands of wicked men. Referring to this very decision of the Council (among other things) Acts 4:26-28 tells us,

“The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do *whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*”

It had been decreed in the eternal counsels of the Godhead that Christ should die, and die for Israel, and when Caiaphas advanced his proposal he was but a link in the chain which brought that decree to pass. This was not his intention, of course. His motive was evil only, and therein was he justly guilty. What we have here is the antitype of that which had been foreshadowed long centuries before. The brethren of Joseph by their cruel counsels thought to defeat the purpose of God, who had made it known that they should yet pay homage to their younger brother. Yet in delivering him up to the Ishmaelites, though their intention was evil only, nevertheless, they did but bring to pass the purpose of God. So Caiaphas fulfilled the very counsel of God concerning Christ, which he meant to bring to nothing, by prophesying that He should die for the people. Well may Christ have said to Caiaphas, as Joseph had said to his brethren,

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but *God* meant it unto *good*, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to *save* much people alive” (Genesis 50:20)!

“And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation” (John 11:51).

What light this throws on the *nature* of Christ’s death! It brings out its twofold aspect. From the human side it was a brutal murder for political ends: Caiaphas and the priests slaying Him to avoid an unpopular tumult that might threaten their prerogatives; Pilate consenting to His death to avoid the unpopularity which might follow a refusal. But from the Divine side, the death of Christ was a vicarious sacrifice for sinners. It was God making the wrath of man to praise Him.

“The greatest crime ever done in the world is the greatest blessing ever given to the world. Man’s sin works out the loftiest Divine purpose, even as the coral insects blindly building up the reef that keeps back the waters or, as the sea in its wild, impotent rage, seeking to overwhelm the land, only throws upon the beach a barrier that confines its waves and curbs its fury” (Dr. MacLaren).

“And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52).

As the previous verse gives us the Holy Spirit’s explanation of the words of Caiaphas, this one contains His amplification: as verse 51 informs us of the nature of Christ’s death, verse 52 tells us of the *power* and *scope* of it. The great Sacrifice was not offered to God at random. The redemption- price which was paid at the Cross was not offered without definite design. Christ died not simply to make salvation possible, but to make it certain. Nowhere in Scripture is there a more emphatic and explicit statement concerning the objects for which the Atonement was made. No excuse whatever is there for the vague (we should say, unscriptural) views, now so sadly prevalent in Christendom, concerning the ones for whom Christ died. To say that He died for the human race is not only to fly in the face of this plain scripture, but it is grossly dishonoring to the sacrifice of Christ. A large portion of the human race die un-saved, and if Christ died for them, then was His death largely in vain. This means that the greatest of all the works of God is comparatively a

failure. How horrible! What a reflection upon the Divine character! Surely men do not stop to examine whither their premises lead them. But how blessed to turn away from man's perversions to the Truth itself. Scripture tells us that Christ "shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." No sophistry can evade the fact that these words give positive assurance that every one for whom Christ died will, most certainly, be saved.

Christ died for sinners. But everything turns on the significance of the preposition. What is meant by "Christ died for sinners"? To answer that Christ died in order to make it possible for God to righteously receive sinners who come to Him through Christ, is only saying what many a Socinian has affirmed. The testing of a man's orthodoxy on this vital truth of the Atonement requires something far more definite than this. The saving efficacy of the Atonement lies in the vicarious nature of Christ's death, in His representing certain persons, in His bearing their sins, in His being made a curse for them, in His purchasing them, spirit and soul and body. It will not do to evade this by saying, "There is such a fulness in the satisfaction of Christ, as is sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to believe in Him." Scripture always ascribes the salvation of a sinner, not to any abstract "sufficiency," but to the vicarious nature, the substitutional character of the death of Christ. The Atonement, therefore, is in no sense sufficient for a man, unless the Lord Jesus died for that man:

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10).

"If the nature of this 'sufficiency' for all men be sifted, it will appear to be nothing more than a conditional 'sufficiency,' such as the Arminians attribute to their universal redemption — the condition is: were the whole world to believe on Him. The condition, however, is not so easily performed. Many professors speak of faith in Christ as comparatively an easy matter, as though it were within the sinner's power; but the Scriptures teach a different thing. They represent men by nature as spiritually bound with chains, shut up in darkness, in a prison-house. So then all their boasted 'sufficiency' of the Atonement is only an empty offer of salvation on certain terms and

conditions; and such an Atonement is much too weak to meet the desperate case of a lost sinner” (Wm. Rushton).

Whenever the Holy Scriptures speak of the sufficiency of redemption, they always place it in the *certain efficacy* of redemption. The Atonement of Christ is sufficient because it is absolutely efficacious, and because it effects the salvation of *all for whom* it was made. Its sufficiency lies not in affording man a possibility of salvation, but in accomplishing their salvation with invincible power. Hence the Word of God never represents the sufficiency of the Atonement as wider than the design of the Atonement. How different is the salvation of God from the ideas now popularly entertained of it!

“As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth *thy prisoners* out of the pit wherein is no water” (Zechariah 9:11).

Christ, by His death paid the ransom, and made sin’s captives His own. He has a *legal right* to all of the persons for whom He paid that ransom price, and therefore with God’s own right arm they are brought forth.

For whom did Christ die?

“For the transgression of *my people* was he stricken” (Isaiah 53:8).

“Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save *his people* from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

“The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

“The good Shepherd giveth his life *for the sheep*” (John 10:11). “Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it”

(Ephesians 5:25).

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself *a peculiar people*” (Titus 2:14).

“To make propitiation for the sins *of the people*” (Hebrews 2:17).

Here are seven passages which gave a clear and simple answer to our question, and their testimony, both singly and collectively, declare plainly that the death of Christ was not an atonement for sin abstractedly, nor a mere expression of Divine displeasure against iniquity, nor an indefinite satisfaction of Divine justice, but instead, a ransom-price paid for the eternal redemption of a certain number of sinners, and a plenary satisfaction for their particular sins. It is the glory of redemption that it does not merely render God placable and man pardonable, but that it has reconciled sinners to God, put away their sins, and forever perfected His set-apart ones.

“He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation” (verse 51). The *nature* of Christ’s death is here intimated in the word “for”: it was *in the stead* of others. Christ died for “that nation,” (*i.e.* that “holy nation,” 1 Peter 2:9). Mark here the striking accuracy of Scripture. Caiaphas did not say that Christ should die for “this nation,” (namely, the Jewish nation); but for “that nation.” Isaiah 53 will be the confession of that “holy nation,” as the beginning of Isaiah 54 plainly shows. Then shall it be said,

“Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified” (Isaiah 60:21).

“And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52).

Here the Holy Spirit tells us that the scope of Christ’s death also includes God’s elect from among the Gentiles. As the Savior had announced on a former occasion,

“I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd” (John 10:15, 16).

Here then are the “other sheep,” namely, God’s elect scattered throughout the world. They are here called “the children of God” because they were such in His eternal purpose. Just as Christ said “other sheep I have,” and just as God said to the Apostle, “I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10), so in the mind of God these were children, though “scattered abroad,” when Christ died. There is a most striking correspond-ency between John 11:51, 52 and 1 John 2:2: the one explains the other. Note carefully the threefold parallelism between them. Christ died with a definite end in view, and the Father had an express purpose before Him in giving up His Son to death. That end and that purpose was that “Israel” should be redeemed, and that “the children of God,” scattered abroad, should be gathered together in one — not “one body,” for the Church is nowhere contemplated (corporeately) in John’s writings; but one family. It shall yet be fully demonstrated that Christ did not die in vain. The prayer of our great High Priest will be fully answered:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one” (John 17:20,21).

Then shall He “see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11).

“Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death” (John 11:53).

What a fearful climax was this to all that had gone before! Again and again we have noted the incorrigible wickedness of the Jews. Not only was He not “received” by His own, but they cast Him out. Not only was He despised and rejected by men, but they thirsted for His blood. The religious head of the Nation, the high priest, moved for His death, and the Council passed and ratified his motion. Nothing now remained but the actual execution of their awful decision. Their only consideration now was how and when His death

could best be accomplished without creating a tumult among the people. No doubt they concluded that the raising of Lazarus would result in a considerable increase in the number of the Lord's followers, hence they deemed it wise to use caution in carrying out their murderous plan.

“Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews”
(John 11:54).

How quietly, with what an entire absence of parade, does the Holy Spirit introduce some of the most striking points in Scripture! How much there is in this word “therefore.” It shows plainly that God would have us meditate on every jot and tittle of His matchless Word. The force of the “therefore” here is this: the Lord Jesus knew of the decision at which the Council had arrived. He knew they had decreed that He should die. It is another of the many inconspicuous proofs of His Deity, which are scattered throughout this Gospel. It witnessed to His omniscience. The Holy Spirit has shown us that He knew what took place in that Council, for He has recorded the very words that were uttered there. And now Christ shows us by His action here that *He* also knew. We may add that the word for “no more” signifies “not yet,” or “no more at present”; “openly” signifies “publicly.”

“Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples”
(11:54).

Though near at hand, His “hour” had not yet come: Christ therefore retired into a place about which nothing is now known, there to enjoy quiet fellowship with His disciples.

“Like the former cases of retirement, this place is significant. Ephraim means ‘fruitlessness’: it is the name given to the tribes in apostasy, in the Prophets, *forecasting* thus what was in God’s heart about them, even though they were in rebellion and ruin. Can anything exceed the grace of God, or anything but man’s depravity and obduracy bring it into action and display, and be a fitting cause and occasion for all its riches and wonders! Ah they who have been

met by God in that grace, are yet to meet Him in the glory of it, to know as all through the history of their sad failures they have been known. Thus we have in chapter ten the Church gathered to the Son of God, here (anticipatively) Israel; but He must die for this” (Malachi Taylor).

“And the Jews’ passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves” (John 11:55).

Here was man’s religiousness, punctilious about ceremonial ablutions, but with no heart for inward purity. The very ones who were so careful about ordinances, were, in a few days, willing to shed innocent blood! What a commentary upon human nature! According to the Mosaic law no Israelite who was ceremonially, defiled could keep the passover at the regular time, though he was allowed to keep it one month later (Numbers 9:10, 11). It was to avoid this delay, that many Jews here came up to Jerusalem before the passover that they might be “purified,” and hence entitled to keep it in the month Nisan.

“Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?” (John 11:56).

Two things gave rise to this questioning among those who had come up to Jerusalem from all sections of Palestine. Each of the two previous years Christ had been present at the Feast. In John 2:13 we read, “And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” It was at this season the Lord had manifested Himself as the Vindicator of the honor of His Father’s House, and a deep impression had been made on those who had witnessed it. A year later, during the course of the Feast He had fed the hungry multitude on the Mount. This so stirred the people that they wanted, by force, to make Him their king (John 6:14, 15). But now the leaders of the nation were incensed against Him. They had decreed that Jesus must die, and their decree was now public knowledge. Hence the one topic of interest among the crowds of Jews in Jerusalem was, would this miracle worker who claimed to be not only the Messiah but the

Son of God, enter the danger zone, or would He be afraid to expose Himself?

“Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man know where he were, he should show it that they might take him” (John 11:57).

Behind the edict of the Council we may discover the enmity of the Serpent working against the woman’s Seed. This verse supplies the climax to the chapter, showing the full effect of the Divine testimony which had been borne in the raising of Lazarus. The resurrection-power of the Son of God had brought to a head the hatred of him who had the power of death. It is true that Christ had raised the dead on other occasions, but here He had given a public display of His mighty power on the very outskirts of Jerusalem, and this was an open affront to Satan and his earthly instruments. The glory of the Lord Jesus shone out so brightly that it seriously threatened the dominion of “the prince of this world,” and consequently there was no longer a concealment of the resolution which he had moved the religious world to make — Jesus must die. But how blessed to know that the very enmity of the Devil himself is overruled by God to the outworking of His eternal purpose!

Let the student give careful attention to the following questions on our next section, John 12:1-11 —

1. In whose house was the “supper” made, verse 2?
2. What do verses 2 and 3 hint at about the eternal state?
3. What is intimated by Mary wiping Christ’s feet with her “hair,” verse 3?
4. What spiritual truth is suggested by the last clause of verse 3?
5. How many contrasts are there here between Mary and Judas?
6. What blessed truth is suggested by “Let her alone,” verse 7?

7. Why were the “chief priests” so anxious to get rid of Lazarus, verse 10?

JOHN 12:1-11

CHRIST ANOINTED AT BETHANY

Below is an Analysis of the passage which we are about to study: —

1. Jesus at Bethany again, verse 1.
2. The supper, verse 2.
3. Mary's devotion, verse 3.
4. Judas' criticism, verses 4-6.
5. Christ's vindication of Mary, verses 7, 8.
6. The curiosity of the crowd, verse 9.
7. The enmity of the priests, verses 10, 11.

What is recorded in John 12 occurred during the last week before our Lord's death. In it are gathered up what men would term the "results" of His public ministry. For three years the unvarying and manifold perfections of His blessed Person had been manifested both in public and in private. Two things are here emphasized: there was a deepening appreciation on the part of His own; but a steady hardening of unbelief and increasing hostility in His enemies. Three most striking incidents in the chapter illustrate the former: first, Christ is seen in the midst of a circle of His most intimate friends in whose love He was permanently embalmed; second, we behold how that a striking, if transient, effect, had been made on the popular mind: the multitude hailed Him as "king"; third, a hint is given of the wider influence He was yet to wield, even then at work, beyond the bounds of Judaism: illustrated by the "Greeks" coming and saying,

"We would see Jesus." But on the other hand, we also behold in this same chapter the workings of that awful enmity which would not be appeased until He had been put to death. The hatred of Christ's

enemies had even penetrated the inner circle of His chosen apostles, for one of them was so utterly lacking in appreciation of His person that he openly expressed his resentment against the attribute of love which Mary paid to his Master. And at the close of the first section of this chapter we are told, "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death." "In this hour there meet a ripeness of love which Jesus has won for Himself in the hearts of men, and a maturity of alienation which forebodes that His end cannot be far distant" (Dr. Dods).

In a most remarkable way and in numerous details John 12 abounds in contrasts. What could be more exquisitely blessed than its opening scene: Love preparing a feast for its Beloved; Martha serving, now in His presence; Lazarus seated with perfect composure and in joyous fellowship with the One who had called him out of the grave; Mary freely pouring out her affection by anointing with costly spikenard Him at whose feet she had learned so much. And yet what can be more solemn than the death-shades which fall across this very scene: the Lord Himself saying,

"Against the day of my burying hath she kept this," so soon to be followed by those heart-moving words, Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27).

His own death was now in full view, present, no doubt, to His heart as He had walked with Mary to the tomb of Lazarus. As we have seen in John 11, He felt deeply the groaning and travailing of that creation which once had come so fair from His own hands. It was sin which had brought in desolation and death, and soon He was to be "made sin" and endure in infinite depths of anguish the judgment of God which was due it. He was about to yield Himself up to death for the glory of God (John 12:27, 28), for only in the Cross could be laid that foundation for the accomplishment of God's eternal counsels.

Christ had ever been the Object of the Father's complacency.

"When he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him and I was daily his delight" (Proverbs 8:29, 30).

So too at the beginning of His public ministry, the Father had declared,

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”
(Matthew 3:17).

But now He was about to give the Father new ground for delight:

“*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again*” (John 10:17).

Here then was the deepest character of His glory, and the Father saw to it that a fitting testimony should be borne to this very fact. His grace prepared one to enter, in some measure at least, into what was on the eve of transpiring. Mary’s heart anticipated what lay deepest in His, even before it found expression in words (John 13:31). She not only knew that He would die, but she apprehended the infinite preciousness and value of that death. And how more fittingly could she have expressed this than by anointing His body “to the burying” (Mark 14:8)!

The link between John 11 and 12 is very precious. There we have, in figure, one of God’s elect passing from death unto life; here we are shown that into which the new birth introduces us: Lazarus sitting at meat with the Lord Jesus.

“But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who some times were far off,
are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13).

This is the marvel of grace. Redemption brings the sinner into the presence of the Lord, not as a trembling culprit, but as one who is at perfect ease in that Presence, yea, as a joyful worshipper. It is this which Lazarus sitting at “the table” with Christ so sweetly speaks of. And yet the opening scene of John 12 looks forward to that which is still more blessed.

The opening verses of John 12 give us *the sequel* to what is central in the preceding chapter. Here we are upon resurrection ground. That which is foreshadowed in this happy gathering at Bethany is what awaits believers in the Glory. It is that which shall follow the

complete manifestation of Christ as the resurrection and the life. Three aspects of our glorified state and our future activities in Heaven are here made known. First, in Lazarus seated at the table with Christ we learn of both our future position and portion. To be where Christ is, will be the place we shall occupy: "That where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). To share with Christ His inherited reward will be our portion. And how blessedly this comes out here: "They made him a supper... Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." This will find its realization when Christ shall say,

"The glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22)!

"And Martha served." As to our future occupation in the endless ages yet to come Scripture says very little, yet this we do know, "his servants shall serve him" (Revelation 22:4). Finally, in Mary's loving devotion, we behold the unstinted worship which we shall then render unto Him who sought and bought and brought us to Himself.

"Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead" (John 12:1).

This verse has long presented a difficulty to the commentators. A few have demurred, but by far the greater number in each age have considered that Matthew (Matthew 26) and Mark (Mark 14) record the same incident that is found in John 12. But both Matthew and Mark introduce the anointing at Bethany by a brief mention of that which occurred only "two days" before the passover; whereas John tells us it transpired "six days" before the passover (see Matthew 26:2; Mark 14:1; John 12:1). But the difficulty is self created, and there is no need whatever to imagine, as a few have done, that Christ was anointed twice at Bethany, with costly ointment, by a different woman during His last week. The fact is, that, excepting the order of events, there is nothing whatever in the Synoptists which in any wise conflicts with what John tells us. How could there be when the Holy Spirit inspired every word in each narrative? Both Matthew and Mark begin by telling us of the decision of the Sanhedrin to

have Christ put to death, and then follows the account of His anointing at Bethany. But it is to be carefully noted that after recording the decision of the Council “two days” before the passover, Matthew does not use his characteristic term and say “Then when Jesus was in Bethany, he was anointed”; nor does Mark employ his customary word and say, “And *immediately*” or “*straightway* Jesus was anointed.” But how are we to explain Matthew’s and Mark’s description of the “anointing” *out of its chronological order*?

We believe the answer is as follows: The conspiracy of Israel’s leaders to seize the Lord Jesus is followed by a *retrospective* glance at the “anointing” because what happened at Bethany *provided them with an instrument* which thus enabled them to carry out their vile desires. The plot of the priests was successful through the instrumentality of Judas, and that which followed Mary’s expression of love shows us what immediately occasioned the treachery of the betrayer. Judas protested against Mary’s extravagance, and the Lord rebuked him, and it was immediately afterward that the traitor went and made his awful pact with the priests. Both Matthew and Mark are very definite on this point. The one tells us that immediately following the Lord’s reply

“Then one of the twelve called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests” (Matthew 26:14);

Mark linking together without a break, the rebuke of Christ and the betrayer’s act by the word “and” (Mark 14:10). John mentions the “supper” at Bethany in its historical order, Matthew and Mark treat of the events rising out of the supper, bringing it in to show us that the rebuke of Christ rankled in the mind of Judas and caused him to go at once and bargain with the priests.

But how are we to explain the discrepancies in the different accounts? We answer, There are none. Variations there are, but nothing is inconsistent. The one supplements the other, not contradicts. When John describes any event recorded in the Synoptists, he rarely repeats all the circumstances and details specified by his predecessors, rather does he dwell upon other features not mentioned by them. Much has been made of the fact

that both Matthew and Mark tell us that the anointing took place in the house of Simon the leper, whereas John is silent on the point. To this it is sufficient to reply, the fact that the supper was in Simon's house explains why Jesus tells us Lazarus "sat at the table with him": if the supper had been in Lazarus' house, such a notice would have been superfluous. Admire then the silent harmony of the Gospel narratives. f14

"Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany"
(John 12:1).

The R.V. more correctly renders this, "Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany." But what is the force of the "therefore"? with what in the context is it connected? We believe the answer is found in John 11:51: Caiaphas "prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation" etc. — "Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany." He was the true paschal Lamb that was to be sacrificed for His people, therefore did He come to Bethany, which was within easy walking distance of Jerusalem, where He was to be slain. It is very striking to note that the very ones who thirsted so greedily for His blood said, "Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (Matthew 26:5 — repeated by Mark 14:2). But God's counsels could not be thwarted, and at the very hour the lambs were being slain, the true passover was sacrificed. But why "six days before the passover"? Perhaps God designed that in this interval man should fully show forth what he was.

"Then Jesus six days before the passover *came to Bethany*." The memories of Bethany cannot fail to touch a chord in the heart of any one who loves the Lord Jesus. His blood-bought people delight to dwell upon anything which is associated with His blessed name. But what makes Bethany so attractive is that He seemed to find in the little company there a resting- place in His toilsome path. It is blessed to know that there was one oasis in the desert, one little spot where He who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" could retire from the hatred and antagonism of His enemies. There was one sheltered nook where He could find those who, although they knew but little, were truly attracted to Him. It

was to this “Elim” in the wilderness (Exodus 15:27) that the Savior now turned on His last journey to Jerusalem.

“Where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.” This is very blessed as an introduction to what follows. The Lord Jesus interpreted the devotion of Mary as “against the day of *my burying* hath she kept this” (John 12:7). The Father ordered it that His beloved Son should be “anointed” here in this home at Bethany in the presence of Lazarus whom Christ had raised from the dead: it attested the power of His own resurrection!

“There they made him a supper” (John 12:2).

This evening meal took place not at the home of Martha, but, as we learn from the other Evangelists, in the house of Simon, who also dwelt at Bethany. He is called “the leper” (as Matthew is still named the “tax- gatherer” after Christ had called him) in remembrance of that fearful disease from which the Lord, most probably, had healed him. It is quite likely that he was a relative or an intimate friend of Martha and Mary, for the elder sister is here seen ministering to his guests as her own, superintending the entertainment, doing the honors, for so the original word may here imply — compare the conduct of the mother of Jesus at the marriage in Cana: John 2. It is blessed to observe that this “supper” was made *for Christ*, not in honor of Lazarus!

“There they made him a supper.” Note the use of the plural pronoun. Though this supper was held in the house of “Simon the leper” it is evident that Martha and Mary had no small part in the arranging of it. This, together with the whole context, leads us to the conclusion that a feast was here made as an expression of deep gratitude and praise for the raising of Lazarus. Christ was there to share their happiness. In the previous chapter we have seen Him weeping with those who wept, here we behold Him rejoicing with those who rejoice! When He restored to life the daughter of Jairus, He gave the child to her parents and then withdrew. When He raised the widow’s son at Nain, He restored him to his mother and then retired. And why? because so far as the record informs us He was a stranger to them. But here, after He had raised Lazarus, He returned to Bethany and partook of their loving hospitality. It was His joy to behold their

joy, and share in the delight which His restoration of the link which death had severed, had naturally produced. That is His “recompense”: to rejoice in the joy of His people. Mark another contrast: when He raised Jairus’ daughter He said “Give *her to eat*”; here after the raising of Lazarus, they *gave Him* to eat!

“There they made him a supper.” This points another of the numerous contrasts in which our passage abounds. Almost at the very beginning of His ministry, just before He performed His first public “sign,” we see the Lord Jesus invited to a marriage-feast; here, almost at the very close of His public ministry, just after His last public “sign,” a supper is made for Him. But how marked the antithesis! At Cana He turned the water into wine- emblem of the joy of life; here at Bethany He is anointed in view of His own burial!

“And Martha *served*.” This is most blessed. This was her characteristic method of showing her affection. On a former occasion the Lord had gently reproved her for being “cumbered with much serving,” and because she was anxious and troubled about many things. But she did not peevishly leave off serving altogether. No; she still served: served not the less attentively, but more wisely. Love is unselfish. We are not to feast on our own blessings in the midst of a groaning creation, rather are we to be channels of blessing to those around: John 7:38, 39. But mark here that Martha’s service is connected with the Lord: “They made him a supper and Martha served.” This alone is true service. We must not seek to imitate others, still less, work for the sake of building up a reputation for zeal. It must be done to and for Christ:

[“Always abounding in the work of the Lord” \(1 Corinthians 15:58\).](#)

“And Martha served”: no longer outside the presence of Christ, as on a former occasion — note her “serve alone” in Luke 10:40.

“In Martha’s ‘serving’ now we do not find her being ‘cumbered’, but something that is acceptable, as in the joy of resurrection, the new life, unto Him who has given it. Service is in its true place when we

have first received all from Him, and the joy of it as begotten by Himself sweetly ministers to Him” (Malachi Taylor).

“But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him”
(John 12:2).

This illustrated the true Christian position. Lazarus had been dead, but now alive from the dead, he is seated in the company of the Savior. So it is (positionally) with the believer: “when we are dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ... And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5, 6). We have been “made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). Such is our perfect standing before God, and there can be no lasting peace of heart until it be apprehended by faith.

“But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.” This supplies more than a vague hint of our condition in the resurrected state. In this age of rationalism the vaguest views are entertained on this subject. Many seem to imagine that Christians will be little better than disembodied ghosts throughout eternity. Much is made of the fact that Scripture tells us “flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” and the expression “spiritual body” is regarded as little more than a phantasm. While no doubt the Scriptures leave much unsaid on the subject, yet they reveal not a little about the nature of our future bodies. The body of the saint will be “fashioned like unto” the glorious body of the resurrected Christ (Philippians 3:21). It will therefore be a glorified body, yet not a non- material one. There was no blood in Christ’s body after He rose from the dead, but He had “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). True, our bodies will not be subject to their present limitations: sown in weakness, they shall be “raised in power.” A “spiritual body” we understand (in part) to signify a body controlled by the spirit — the highest part of our beings. In our glorified bodies we shall eat. The daughter of Jairus needed food after she was restored to life. Lazarus is here seen at the table. The Lord Jesus ate food after He had risen from the dead.

“But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.”

“A happy company it must have been. For if Simon was healed by the Lord at some previous time, as has been supposed, full to overflowing must his heart have been for the mercy vouchsafed. And Lazarus, there raised from the dead, what proofs were two of that company of the Lord’s power and goodness! God only could heal the leper; God only could raise the dead. A leper healed, a dead man raised, and the Son of God who had healed the one, and had raised the other, here also at the table — never before we may say without fear of contradiction had a supper taken place under such circumstances” (C. E. Stuart).

“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus” (John 12:3).

Mary had often heard the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth: the Lord of glory had sat at their humble board in Bethany, and she had sat at His feet to be instructed. In the hour of her deep sorrow He had wept with her, and then had He delivered her brother from the dead, crowning them with lovingkindness and tender mercy. And how could she show some token of her love to Him who had first loved her? She had by her a cruse of precious ointment, too costly for her own use, but not too costly for Him. She took and broke it and poured it on Him as a testimony of her deep affection, her unutterable attachment, her worshipful devotion. We learn from John 12:5 that the value of her ointment was the equivalent of a *whole year’s wages* of a laboring man (cf. Matthew 20:2)! And let it be carefully noted, this devotion of Mary was prompted by no sudden impulse: “against the day of my burying hath she kept this” (John 12:7) — the word means “diligently preserved,” used in John 17:12, 15!

“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus.” Mary’s act occupies the central place in this happy scene. The ointment was “very costly,” but not too costly to lavish upon the Son of God. Not only did Mary here express her own love, but she bore witness to the inestimable value of the person of Christ. She entered into what was about to be done to and by Him: she anointed Him for burial. He was despised and rejected of men, and they were about to put Him to a most ignominious death. But before any enemy’s hand is laid upon Him, love’s hands first

anoint Him! Thus another striking and beautiful contrast is here suggested.

“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus.” Mark tells us she “broke the box” before she poured it on the Savior. This, in figure, spoke of the breaking of His body, of which the broken bread in the Lord’s Supper is the lasting memorial. Both Matthew and Mark tell us that she anointed the *head* of Christ. This is no discrepancy. Evidently, Mary anointed both His head and feet, but most appropriately was John led to notice only the latter, for as the Son of God it was fitting that this disciple should take her place in the dust before Him!

“And wiped his feet with her hair” (John 12:3).

How the Holy Spirit delights in recording that which is done out of love to and for the glory of Christ! How many little details has He preserved for us in connection with Mary’s devotion. He has told us of the kind of ointment it was, the box in which it was contained, the weight of it, and its value; and now He tells us something which brings out, most blessedly, Mary’s discernment of the glory of Christ. She recognized something of what was due Him, therefore after anointing Him she wiped His feet with her “hair”—her “glory” (1 Corinthians 11:15)! Her silent act spread around the savor of Christ as One infinitely precious. Before the treachery of Judas, Christ receives the testimony of Mary’s affection. It was the Father putting this seal of deepest devotion upon the One who was about to be betrayed.

“And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” (John 12:3).

This is most significant, a detail not supplied in the Synoptics, but most appropriate here. Matthew and Mark tell us how Christ gave orders that “Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (Mark 14:9). This John omits. In its place he tells us, “And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” In the other Gospels the “memorial” goes forth: here the fragrance of Christ’s person abides in “the house.” There is much suggested here:

not simply the “room” but “the house” was filled with the sweet fragrance of the person of Christ anointed by the spikenard. Sooner or later, all would know what had been done to the Lord. The people on the housetop would perceive that something sweet had been offered below. And do not the angels above know what we below are now rendering unto Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:10, etc.)!

“Mary came not to hear a sermon, although the first of Teachers was there; to sit at His feet and hear His word, was not now her purpose, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to make known her requests to Him. Time was when in deepest submission to His will she had fallen at His feet, saying, ‘Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died’; but to pour out her supplications to Him as her only resource was not now her thought, for her brother was seated at the table. She came not to meet the saints, though precious saints were there, for it says ‘Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.’ Fellowship with them was blessed likewise and doubtless of frequent occurrence; but fellowship was not her object now. She came not after the weariness and toil of a week’s battling with the world, to be refreshed from Him, though surely she, like every saint, had learned the trials of the wilderness; and none more than she, probably, knew the blessed springs of refreshment that were in Him. But she came, and that too at the moment when the world was expressing its deepest hatred of Him, to pour out what she had long treasured up (John 12:7), that which was most valuable to her, all she had upon earth, upon the person of the One who had made her heart captive, and absorbed her affections. She thought not of Simon the leper — she passed the disciples by — her brother and her sister in the flesh and in the Lord engaged not her attention then — ‘Jesus only’ filled her soul— her eyes were upon Him. Adoration, homage, worship, blessing, was her one thought, and that in honor of the One who was ‘all in all’ to her, and surely such worship was most refreshing to Him” (Simple Testimony).

“Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:4, 5).

What a contrast was this from the affectionate homage of Mary! But how could he who had no heart for Christ appreciate her devotion!

There is a most striking series of contrasts here between these two characters. She gave freely what was worth three hundred pence; right afterwards Judas sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver. She was in a “Simon’s” house; He was a “Simon’s son.” Her “box” (Mark 14:3); his “bag” (John 12:6). She a worshipper; he a thief. Mary drew the attention of all to the Lord; Judas would turn away the thoughts of all from Christ to “the poor.” At the very time Satan was goading on the heart of Judas to do the worst against Christ, the Holy Spirit mightily moved the heart of Mary to pour out her love for Him. Mary’s devotion has given her a place in the hearts of all who have received the Gospel; Judas by his act of perfidy went to “his own place” — the Pit!

Everything is traced to its source in this Gospel. Matthew 26:8 tells us that “When his disciples saw it [Mary’s tribute of love], they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?” But John shows us who was the one that had injected the poison into their minds. *Judas* was the original protester, and his evil example affected the other apostles. What a solemn case is this of evil communications corrupting good manners (1 Corinthians 15:33)! Everything comes out into the light here. Just as John is the only one who gives us the name of the woman who anointed the Lord, so he alone tells us who it was that started the criticising of Mary.

In John 12:3 we have witnessed the devotedness of faith and love never surpassed in a believer. But behind the rosebush lurked the serpent. It reminds us very much of Psalm 23:5:

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil”!

The murmuring of Judas right after the worship of Mary is most solemnly significant. True valuation of Christ always brings out the hatred of those who are of Satan. No sooner was He worshiped as an infant by the wise men from the East, then Herod sought to slay Him. Immediately after the Father proclaimed Him as His “beloved Son,” the Devil assailed Him for forty days. The apostles were seized and thrown into prison because the leaders of Israel were incensed that they

“taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2, 3).

So in a coming day many will be beheaded “for the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 20:4).

“Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:5).

This was the criticism of a covetous soul. How petty his range of vision! How sordid his conception! He argued that the precious unguent which had been lavished upon Christ ought to have been sold. He considered it had been wasted (Mark 14:4). His notion of “waste” was crude and material in the extreme. Love is never “wasted.” Generosity is never “wasted.” Sacrifice is never “wasted.” Love grudges nothing to the Lord of love! Love esteems its costliest nard all inferior to His worth. Love cannot give Him too much. And where it is given out of love to Christ we cannot give too much for His servants and His people. How beautifully this is expressed in Philippians 4:18: “having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smelt, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.”

Judas had no love for Christ, hence it was impossible that he should appreciate what had been done for Him. Very solemn is this: he had been in the closest contact with the redeemed for three years, and yet the love of money still ruled his heart. Cold-heartedness toward Christ and stinginess toward His cause always go together. “To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little” (Luke 7:47). There are many professing Christians today infested with a Judas-like spirit. They are quite unable to understand true zeal and devotedness to the Lord. They look upon it all as fanaticism. Worst of all, such people seek to cloak their miserliness in giving to Christian objects by a pretended love for the poor: ‘charity begins at home’ expresses the same spirit. The truth is, and it had been abundantly demonstrated all through these centuries, that those who do the most for the poor are the very ones who are most liberal in supporting the cause of Christ. Let not Christians be moved from a patient continuance in well doing by harsh criticisms from those who

understand not. We must not expect professors to do anything for Christ when they have no sense of indebtedness to Christ.

“Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?” These are the *first* words of Judas recorded in the Gospels; and how they reveal his heart! He sought to conceal his base covetousness under the guise of benevolence. He posed as a friend of the poor, when in reality his soul was dominated by cupidity. It reminds us of his hypocritical “kiss.” It is solemn to contrast his *last* words, “I have betrayed innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4).

“This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein”

(John 12:6).

It is good to care for the root, but at that moment the whole mind of God was centered on the Person and work of His Son, evidenced by His moving Mary to anoint the Savior for His burial. Opportunities for relieving the poor they always had, and it was right to do so. But to put them in comparison with the Lord Jesus at such a time, was to put them out of their place, and to lose sight of Him who was supremely precious to God.

Judas evidently acted as treasurer for the apostolic company (cf. John 13:29), having charge of the gifts which the Lord and His disciples received: Luke 8:2, 3. But the Holy Spirit here tells us that he was a “thief.” We believe this intimates that the “field” (or “estate”) which he purchased (Acts 1:18) “with the reward of iniquity” (or, “price of wrong doing”) had been obtained by the money which he pilfered from the same “bag.” Usually this “field” is confounded with the “field” that was bought with the thirty pieces of silver which he received for the betrayal of His Master. But *that* money he *returned* to the chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:3, 5), and with it they bought “the potter’s field to bury strangers in” (Matthew 27:7).

“Then said Jesus, Let her alone” (John 12:7).

How blessed! Christ is ever ready to defend His own! It was the Good Shepherd protecting His sheep from the wolf. Judas condemned Mary, and others of the apostles echoed his criticism. But the Lord approved of her gift. Probably others of the guests misunderstood her action: it would seem an extravagance, and a neglect of duty towards the needy. But Christ knew her motive and commended her deed. So in a coming day He will reward even a cup of water which has been given in His name. “Let her alone”: did not this foreshadow His work on high as our Advocate repelling the attacks of the enemy, who accuses the brethren before God day and night (Revelation 12:10)!

“Against the day of my burying hath she kept this” (John 12:7).

This points still another contrast. Other women “brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him” (Mark 16:1), after He was dead; Mary *anointed* Him “for his burial” (Matthew 26:12) six days before He died! Her faith had laid hold of the fact that He was going to die — the apostles did not believe this (see Luke 24:21 etc.). She had learned much at His feet! How much we miss through our failure at this point!

Matthew and Mark add a word here which is appropriately omitted by John.

“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (Mark 14:9).

He whose Name is “as ointment poured forth” (Song of Solomon 1:3), commended her who, all unconsciously, fulfilled the prophecy,

“While the king sitteth at his table my spikenard sendeth forth the sweet smell thereof” (Song of Solomon 1:12).

In embalming Him, she embalmed herself: her love being the marble on which her name and deed were sculptured. Note another contrast: Mary gave Christ a momentary embalming; He embalmed her memory forever in the sweet incense of His praise. What a witness

is this that Christ will never forget that deed, however small, which is done wholeheartedly in His name and for Himself!

“Hereupon we would further remark that while this can not diminish the sin of Judas, by making his covetousness any thing but covetousness, yet but for his mean remonstrance, we might not have known the prodigality of her love. But for the objection of Judas, we might not have had the commendation of Mary. But for his evil eye, we should have been without the full instruction of her lavish hand. Surely ‘The wrath of man shall praise thee!’” (Dr. John Brown).

“For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always” (verse 8).

There is a little point here in the Greek which is most significant, bringing out, as it does, the minute accuracy of Scripture. In the previous verse “Let alone (aphes) her” is in the singular number, whereas, “The poor always ye have (exete) with you” is in the plural number. Let her alone was Christ’s rebuke to Judas, who was the first to condemn Mary; here in verse 8 the Lord addresses Himself to the Twelve, a number of whom had been influenced by the traitor’s words. Remarkably does this show the entire consistency and supplementary character of the several narratives of this incident. Let us admire the silent *harmonies* of Scripture!

“For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always” (John 12:8).

There is a very searching message for our hearts in these words. Mary had *fellowship* with His sufferings, and her *opportunity* for this was brief and soon passed. If Mary had failed to seize her chance to render love’s adoring testimony to the preciousness of Christ’s person at that time, she could never have recalled it throughout eternity. How exquisitely suited to the moment was her witness to the fragrance of Christ’s death before God, when men deemed Him worthy only of a malefactor’s cross. She came beforehand to anoint Him “for his burial.” But how soon would such an opportunity pass! In like manner we are privileged today to render a testimony to Him in this scene of His rejection. We too are permitted to have fellowship with His sufferings. But soon this

opportunity will pass from us forever! There is a real sense in which these words of Christ to Mary, “me ye have not always” apply to us. Soon shall we enter into the fellowship of His glory. O that we may be constrained by His love to deeper devotedness, a more faithful testimony to His infinite worth, and a fuller entering into His sufferings in the present hour of His rejection by the world.

“For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always.” One other thought on this verse before we leave it. These words of our Lord’s “*me ye have not always*” completely overthrow the Papist figment of transubstantiation. If language means anything, this explicit statement of Christ’s positively repudiates the dogma of His “real presence,” under the forms of bread and wine at the Lord’s Supper. It is impossible to harmonize that blasphemous Romish doctrine with this clear-cut utterance of the Savior. The “poor always ye have with you” in like manner disposes of an idle dream of Socialism.

“Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there; and they came not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead” (John 12:9).

“This sentence is a genuine exhibition of human nature. Curiosity is one of the most common and powerful motives in man. The love of seeing something sensational and out of the ordinary is almost universal. When people could see at once both the subject of the miracle and Him that worked the miracle we need not wonder that they resorted in crowds to Bethany” (Bishop Ryle).

“But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus” (John 12:10, 11).

“Lazarus is mentioned throughout this incident as forming an element in the unfolding of the hatred of the Jews which issued in the Lord’s death: notice the climax, from the mere connecting mention in verse 1, then nearer connection in verse 2, — to his being the cause of the Jews flocking to Bethany in verse 9, — and the joint

object with Jesus of the enmity of the chief priests in verse 10” (Alford).

Mark it was not the Pharisees but the “chief priests,” who were Sadducees, (cf. Acts 5:17), that “consulted that they might also put *Lazarus* to death”: They would, if possible, kill him, because he was a striking witness against them, denying as they did the truth of resurrection. But how fearful the state of their hearts: they had rather commit murder than acknowledge they were wrong.

Let the thoughtful student ponder carefully the following questions:
—

1. What does verse 13 teach us about prophecy?
2. Why a “young ass,” verse 14?
3. Verse 15 (cf. Zechariah 9:9); why are some of its words omitted here?
4. In what sense did Christ then “come” as King, verse 15?
5. Why did not the disciples “understand,” verse 16?
6. Why does verse 17 come in just here?

JOHN 12:12-20

CHRIST'S ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

The following is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. The crowd going forth to meet Jesus, verse 12.
2. The joyous acclamations of the people, verse 13.
3. The Savior mounted on an ass, verse 14.
4. The king's presentation of Himself to Israel, verse 15.
5. The dullness of the disciples, verse 16.
6. The cause why the people sought Jesus, verses 17, 18.
7. The chagrin of the Pharisees, verse 19.

The passage which is to be before us brings to our notice one of the most remarkable events in our Lord's earthly career. The very fact that it is recorded by all the four Evangelists at once indicates something of uncommon moment. The incident here treated of is remarkable because of its unusual character. It; is quite unlike anything else recorded of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. Hitherto we have seen Him withdrawing Himself as much as possible from public notice, retiring into the wilderness, avoiding anything that savoured of display. He did not court attraction: He did not

“cry nor strive, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets”
(Matthew 12:19).

He charged His disciples they should “tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ” (Matthew 16:20). When He raised the daughter of Jairus, He “straitly charged them that no man should know of it” (Mark 5:43). When He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration He gave orders to His disciples that

“they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man was risen from the dead” (Mark 9:9).

We wish to press upon the reader the *uniqueness* of this action of Christ entering Jerusalem in the way that He did, for the more this arrests us the more shall we appreciate the motive which prompted Him.

“When Jesus therefore perceived that they (the multitude which He had fed) would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he *departed* again into a mount himself alone” (John 6:15).

When His brethren urged, “show thyself to the world” (John 7:4), He answered, “My time is not yet come.” Here, on the contrary, we see Him making a public entry into Jerusalem, attended by an immense crowd of people, causing even the Pharisees to say, “Behold, the world has gone after him.” And let it be carefully noted that Christ Himself took the initiative here at every point. It was not the multitude who brought to Him an animal richly caparisoned, nor did the disciples furnish the colt and ask Him to mount it. It was the Lord who sent two of the disciples to the entrance of Bethphage to get it, and the Lord moved the owner of the ass to give it up (Luke 19:33). And when some of the Pharisees asked Him to rebuke His disciples, He replied,

“I tell you, that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40).

How, then, are we to account for this startling change of policy on the part of Christ? What is the true explanation of His conduct? In seeking an answer to this question, men have indulged in the wildest conjectures, most of which have been grossly dishonoring to our Lord. The best of the commentators see in the joyous acclamations of the crowds an evidence of the power of Christ. He moved them to own Him as their “king,” though as to why He should here do so they are not at all clear, nor do they explain why His moving their hearts produced such a transient effect, for four days later the same crowds shouted “Crucify him.” We are therefore obliged to look elsewhere for the key to this incident.

We need hardly say that here, as everywhere, the perfections of the Lord Jesus are blessedly displayed. Two things are incontrovertible: the Lord Jesus ever acted with the Father's glory before Him, and ever walked in full accord with His Father's Word. "In the volume of the book" it was written of Him, and when He became incarnate He declared "I come to do thy will, O God." These important considerations must be kept in mind as we seek a solution to the difficulty before us. Furthermore, we need to remember that the counsel of the Father always had in view *the glory of the Son*. It is by the application of these fundamental principles to the remarkable entry into Jerusalem that light will be shed upon its interpretation.

Why, then, did the Lord Jesus send for the ass, mount it, and ride into the royal city? Why did He suffer the crowds, unrebuked, to hail Him with their "Hosannas"? Why did He permit them to proclaim Him their king, when in less than a week He was to lay down His life as a sacrifice for sin? The answer, in a word, is, *because the Scriptures so required!* Here, as ever, it was submission to His Father's Word that prompted Him. Loving obedience to the One who sent Him was always the spring of His actions. His cleansing of the temple was the fulfillment of Psalm 69:9. The testimony which He bore to Himself was the same as the Old Testament Scriptures announced (John 5:39). When on the cruel Cross He cried, "I thirst," it was not in order for His sufferings to be alleviated, but "that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 19:28). So here, He entered Jerusalem in the way that He did in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

What scriptures? The answer to this question takes us back, first of all, to the prophecy which dying Jacob made, a prophecy which related what was to befall his descendants in "the last days" — an Old Testament expression referring to the times of the Messiah: begun at His first advent, completed at His second. In the course of His Divine pronouncement, the aged patriarch declared, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine" (Genesis 49:9-11). The word "scepter" here signifies *tribal rod*. Judah was to preserve the separate independency of his tribe

until the Messiah came. The fulfillment of this is seen in the Gospels. Though the ten tribes had long before been carried into captivity, from which they never returned, Judah (the “Jews”), were still in Palestine when the Son of God became incarnate and tabernacled among men. Continuing his prophecy, Jacob announced, “And unto him [Shiloh — the *Peacemaker* — cf. ‘thy peace’ in Luke 19:42], shall the gathering of the people be.” This received its first fulfillment at Christ’s official entry into Jerusalem. But mark the next words, “Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine.” The “vine” was Israel (Isaiah 5, etc); the “choice vine” was Christ Himself (John 15:1). Here, then, *was the fact itself* prophetically announced. But this by no means exhausts the scriptural answer to our question.

We turn next to that remarkable prophecy given through Daniel respecting the “seventy weeks.” This prophecy is found in Daniel 9:24-27. We cannot now attempt an exposition of it, [as](#) though it is needful to make reference to it. This prophecy was given while Israel were captives in Babylon. In it God made known the length of time which was to elapse from then till the day when Israel’s transgressions should be finished, and everlasting righteousness be brought in. “Seventy weeks” were to span this interval. The Hebrew word for “weeks” is “hebdomads,” and simply means *septenaries*; “Seventy sevens” gives the true meaning. Each of the “hebdomads” equals seven years. The “seventy sevens,” therefore, stood for four hundred and ninety years.

The “seventy sevens” are divided into three unequal parts. Seven “sevens” were to be spent in the rebuilding of Jerusalem: the books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the fulfillment of this. After Jerusalem had been restored, sixty-two more “sevens” were to run their course “unto the Messiah the Prince.” And then we are told, “After-threescore and two sevens (added to the previous seven ‘sevens’, making sixty-nine in all), shall Messiah be cut off.” Here, then, is a definite computation, and a remarkable and most important Messianic prophecy. “Messiah *the Prince*” (cf. Revelation 1:5), was to present Himself to Jerusalem (note “thy holy city” in Daniel 9:24), after the expiration of the sixty-ninth “seven,” or more

specifically, precisely four hundred and eighty-three years after God gave this prophecy to His beloved servant.

Now, it is this prophecy which received its fulfillment and supplies the needed key to what is before us in John 12. The entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem in such an auspicious manner, was the Messiah *formally and officially presenting Himself to Israel as their "Prince."* In his most excellent book "The Coming Prince," the late Sir Robert Anderson marshalled conclusive proofs to show that our Savior entered Jerusalem on *the very day* which marked the completion of the sixty-ninth "hebdomad" of Daniel 9. We make here a brief quotation from his masterly work.

"No student of the Gospel-narrative can fail to see that the Lord's last visit to Jerusalem was not only in fact, but in the purpose of it, the crisis of His ministry, the goal towards which it had been directed. After the first tokens had been given that the Nation would reject His Messianic claims, He had shunned all public recognition of them. But now the twofold testimony of His words and works had been fully tendered. His entrance into the Holy City was to proclaim His Messiah-ship, and to receive His doom. Again and again His apostles even had been charged that they should not make Him known. But now He accepted the acclamations of 'the whole multitude of the disciples,' and silenced the remonstrance of the Pharisees with indignation.

"The full significance of the words which follow in the Gospel of Luke is concealed by a slight interpolation in the text. As the shouts broke forth from His disciples, 'Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord,' He looketh off toward the Holy City and exclaimed, 'If thou also hadst known, even *on this day*, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes' (Luke 19:42). The time of Jerusalem's visit had come, and she knew it not. Long ere this, the Nation had rejected Him, but this was the predestined day when their choice must be irrevocable."

One other prophecy remains to be considered, in some respects the most wonderful of the three. If God announced through Jacob the simple fact of the gathering of the people unto the Peacemaker, if by

Daniel He made known the very year and day when Israel's Messiah should officially present himself as their Prince, through Zechariah He also made known the very manner of His entry into Jerusalem. In Zechariah 9:9 we read: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy king cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass." As we shall see, several words in this prophecy are not quoted in the Gospels, therefore this prediction (like all prophecy) will receive another fulfillment; it will be completely realized when the Lord Jesus returns to this earth.

Before we come to the detailed exposition, let us offer a brief comment upon what has just been before us. At least three prophecies were fulfilled by Christ on His official entry into Jerusalem, prophecies which had been given hundreds of years before, prophecies which entered into such minute details that only one explanation of them is possible, and that is *God Himself* must have given them. This is the most incontrovertible and conclusive of all the proofs for *the Divine inspiration* of the Scriptures.

Only He who knows the end from the beginning is capable of making accurate forecasts of what shall happen many generations afterwards. How the recorded accomplishment of these (and many other) prophecies *guarantees* the fulfillment of those which are still future!

"On the next day much people that were to come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried: 'Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord'" (John 12:12, 13).

It is important to note the opening words of this quotation. What we have here is the sequel to the first verse of our chapter. "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany." During the week preceding the passover Jerusalem was crowded with Jews, who came in companies from every section of Palestine. They came early in order that they might be ceremonially qualified to partake of the feast (John 11:55). Already we have learned that the main topic of conversation among those who thronged the temple at this time was

whether or not Jesus would come up to the feast (John 11:56). Now, when the tidings reached them that He was on the way to Jerusalem, they at once set out to meet Him.

In view of what we read of in John 11:57, some have experienced a difficulty here. “Both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him.” How came it then that we now read of “much people... took palm branches and went forth to meet him?” The difficulty is quickly removed if only close attention be paid to what the Holy Spirit has said.

First, note that in John 11:57 the past tense is used, “had given commandment”: this was before the Lord Jesus retired to Ephraim (John 11:54).

Second, observe that John 11:55 tells us “many went *out of the country up* to Jerusalem” (John 11:55). It is evident therefore that many (if not all) of those who now sallied forth with palm branches to greet the Lord were men of Galilee, pilgrims, who had come up to the metropolis from the places where most of His mighty works were done. It was the Galileans who on a previous occasion sought to make Him “a king” (John 6:15, cf. 7:1). They were not only far less prejudiced against Him than were those of Judea, but they were also much less under the influence of the chief priests and Pharisees of Jerusalem. Marvelously accurate is Scripture. The more minutely it is examined the more will its flawless perfections be uncovered to us. How this instance shows us, once more, that our ‘difficulties’ in the Word are due to our negligence in carefully noting exactly what it says, and all it says on any given subject!

“Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him”
(verse 13).

This was a sign of joy, a festival token. In connection with the feast of tabernacles God instructed Moses to tell Israel,

“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees... and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God” (Leviticus 23:40).

In Revelation 7:9, where we behold the “innumerable multitude before the throne and before the Lamb,” they have “palms in their hands.”

“And cried, Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” The word Hosanna means “Save now!” It is a cry of triumph, not of petition. As to how far these people entered into the meaning of the words which they here uttered, perhaps it is not for us to say. The sequel would indicate they were only said under the excitement of the moment. But looking beyond their intelligent design, to Him whose overruling hand directs everything, we see here the Father causing a public testimony to be borne to the glory of His Son. At His birth He sent the angels to say to the Bethlehem shepherds, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord,” and now He suffered this multitude to hail Him as the Blessed One come in the Name of the Lord. Again; before the public ministry of Christ commenced, the wise men from the East were led to Jerusalem to announce that the king of the Jews had been born; and now that His public ministry was over, it is again testified to that He is “the King of Israel.”

“And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written” (John 12:14).

This is simply a comprehensive statement, gathering up in a word the results of the details supplied by the other Evangelists, and which John takes for granted we are familiar with. The fullest account of the obtaining of the young ass is furnished by Luke, and very striking is it to note what occurred — see Luke 19:29-35. There is nothing in his account which conflicts with the shorter statement which John has given us. “And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon.” He “found” it because He directed the disciples where to find it! It is another of those incidental allusions to the Deity of Christ, for in an unmistakable way it evidenced His omniscience; He knew the precise spot where the ass was tethered!

“Fear not, daughter of Sion; behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt” (John 12:15).

Emphasis is here laid on the age of the animal which Christ rode. It was a “young” one; Luke tells us that it was one “whereon yet never man sat” (John 19:30). This is not without deep significance. Under the Mosaic economy only those beasts which had never been worked were to be used for sacrificial purposes (see Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3). Very striking is this. Like His birth of a virgin, like His burial in a new sepulcher, “wherein was never man yet laid” (John 19:41); so here, on the only occasion when He assumed anything like majesty, He selected a colt which had never previously been ridden. How blessedly this points to the dignity, yea, the uniqueness of His person hardly needs to be dwelt upon.

“Sat thereon, *as it is written.*” How this confirms what we said at the beginning. It was in order to fulfill the prophetic Word that the Lord Jesus here acted as He did. That which was “written” was what ever controlled Him. He lived by every word which proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord. The incarnate Word and the written Word never conflicted. What ground then had He to say, “I do *always* those things that please him”? O that we might have more of His spirit!

“Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt.” Momentous hour was this. Israel’s true king, David’s Son and Lord, now officially presented Himself to the nation. Various have been the attempts made to interpret this. In recent years the view which has had most prominence among students of prophetic truth is, that Christ was here offering the kingdom to Israel, and that had Israel received Him the millennial reign would have been speedily inaugurated. It is worse than idle to speculate about what would have happened if the nation had acted differently from what they did; idle, because “secret things belong unto the Lord.” Our duty is to search diligently and study prayerfully “those things which are revealed” (Deuteronomy 29:29), knowing that whatever difficulties may be presented, Israel’s rejection and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus were according to what God’s hand and counsel “*determined before* to be done” (Acts 4:28).

What then was Christ’s purpose in presenting Himself to Israel as their King? The immediate answer is, To meet the requirements of God’s prophetic Word. But this only takes the inquiry back another step. What was *God’s purpose* in requiring Israel’s Messiah to so act

on this occasion? In seeking an answer to this, careful attention must be paid to the setting. As we turn to the context we are at once impressed by the fact that one thing there is made unmistakably prominent — the death of Christ looms forward with tragic vividness. At the close of John 11 we find the leaders of the nation “took counsel together for to put him to death” and the Council issued a decree that,

“If any man knew where he was, he should show it, that they might take him” (John 11:53, 57).

The 12th chapter opens with the solemn intimation that it now lacked but six days to the passover. The all-important “hour” for the slaying of the true Lamb drew on apace. Then we have the anointing of Christ by Mary, and the Savior interpreted her act by saying, “Against the day of my *burying* hath she kept this.”

Here, then, is the key, hanging, as usual, right on the door. The Lord of glory was about to lay down His life, but before doing so the dignity of His person must first be publicly manifested. Moreover, wicked hands were about to be laid on Him, therefore the guilt of Israel must be rendered the more inexcusable by them now learning who it was they would shortly crucify. The Lord therefore purposely drew the attention of the great crowds to Himself by placing Himself prominently before the eyes of the nation. What we have here is, Christ pressing Himself upon *the responsibility* of the Jews. None could now complain that they knew not who He was. On a former occasion they had said to Him,

“How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24).

But now all ground for ignorance was removed; by fulfilling the prophecies of Jacob, of Daniel, and of Zechariah, the Lord Jesus demonstrated that He was none other than Israel’s true king. It was His last public testimony to the nation! He was their “King,” and in fulfillment of the plain declarations of their own Scriptures He here presented Himself before them.

The prophecy of Zechariah is not quoted in its entirety by any of the Evangelists, and it is most significant to mark the different words in it which they omit. First of all, none record the opening words, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem.” The reason for this is obvious; Israel could not be called upon to “rejoice” while she was rejecting her King! That part of the prophecy awaits its realization in a future day. Not until she has first “mourned” as one mourneth for his only son (Zechariah 12:10), not until Israel “acknowledge their offense” (Hosea 5:15), not until they “repent” (Acts 3:19), not until they say, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up” (Hosea 6:1); in short, not until their sins are put away, will the spirit of joy and gladness be given unto them.

In the second place, the words “just and having salvation” are omitted from each of the Gospels. This also is noteworthy, and is a striking proof of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. It was not in justice, but in grace, that the Lord Jesus came to Israel the first time. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” He appeared “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” But when He comes the second time, God’s word through Jeremiah shall receive its fulfillment — “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.” But why the omission of “having salvation?” Because Israel as a nation would not have salvation. Ofttimes would He have gathered her children together, but they “would not.”

One other omission remains to be noticed: the smallest, but by no means the least significant. Zechariah foretold that Israel’s king should come “lowly, and riding upon an ass.” Matthew mentions the lowliness of Christ, though in the A. V. it is rendered “meek” (John 21:5). But this word is *left out by John*. And why? Because it is the central design of the fourth Gospel to emphasize the glory of Christ. (See John 1:14; 2:11; 11:4, etc.)

“Fear not, daughter of Sion; behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt” (John 12:15).

The fact that the Lord Jesus was seated upon “an ass” brings out His mortal glory. As the Son of David according to the flesh, He was “made under the law” (Galatians 4:4), and perfectly did He fulfill it at every point. Now, one thing that marked out Israel as God’s peculiar people was the absence of the horse, in their midst. The “ox” was used in plowing, and the “ass” for riding upon, or carrying burdens. An express decree was made forbidding the king to multiply horses to himself:

“But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses” (Deuteronomy 17:16).

Thus the king of God’s separated people was to be sharply distinguished from the monarchs of the Gentiles — note how Pharaoh (Exodus 14:23; 15:1), the kings of Canaan (Joshua 11:4), Naaman (2 Kings 5:9), the king of Assyria (Isaiah 37:8), are each mentioned as the possessors of many horses and chariots. But the true Israelites could say,

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).

It is remarkable that the first recorded sin of Solomon was concerning this very thing:

“And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen” (1 Kings 4:26).

It was, therefore, as One *obedient* to the Law, that Christ purposely selected an “ass”!

“Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt.” How evident it is that Christ had laid aside His glory (John 17:5). He who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made Himself of no reputation,” and took upon Him the form of a servant. Not only does this action of our wonderful Savior mark His perfect subjection to the law of Moses, but it also brings out His gracious lowliness. When He formally presented Himself to Israel as their king, He rode not in a

golden chariot, drawn by powerful stallions, but instead He came seated upon the colt of an ass. Neither was the beast harnessed with any goodlier trappings than the garments which His disciples had spread thereon. And even the ass was not His own, but borrowed! Truly the things which are “highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

“No Roman soldier in the garrison of Jerusalem, who, standing at his post or sitting in his barrack-window, saw our Lord riding on an ass, could report to his centurion that He looked like one who came to wrest the kingdom of Judea out of the hands of the Romans, drive out Pontius Pilate and his legions from the tower of Antonia, and achieve independence for the Jews with the sword” (Bishop Ryle).

How evident it was that His kingdom was “not of this world!” What an example for us to “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2)!

Perhaps some may be inclined to object: But does not Revelation 19:11 *conflict* with what has just been said? In no wise. It is true that there we read, “And I saw heaven open, and behold a white horse; and he that *sat upon him* was called Faithful and True.” There is no room to doubt that the Rider of this “white horse” is any other than the Lord Jesus Christ. But He will appear thus at His second advent. Then everything shall be changed. He who came before in humiliation and shame shall return in power and majesty. He who once had not where to lay His head shall then sit on the throne of His glory (Matthew 25:31). He who was nailed to a malefactor’s Cross shall, in that day, wield the scepter of imperial dominion. Just as the “ass” was well suited to the One who had laid aside His glory, so the white “war-horse” of Revelation 19 is in perfect keeping with the fact that He is now “crowned with glory and honor.”

“These things understood not his disciples” (John 12:16).

How ingenuous such a confession by one of their number! No impostor would have deprecated himself like this. How confidently may we depend upon the veracity of such honest chroniclers! Like us, the apostles apprehended Divine things but slowly. Like us, they had to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior

jesus Christ.” But mark, it does not say “these things *believed not* his disciples.” It is our privilege, as well as our bounden duty, to believe all God has said, whether we “understand” it or not. The more implicitly we believe, the more likely will God be pleased to honor our faith by giving us understanding (Hebrews 11:3).

“But when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him” (John 12:16).

From the fact that the plural number is twice used here — “these things”—and from the very similar statement in John 2:22 we believe that the entire incident of our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem, with all its various accompaniments, are here included. Probably that which most puzzled the disciples is what Luke has recorded:

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and *wept over it*” (John 19:41).

In view of this verse it would be more accurate to speak of our Lord’s tearful entry into Jerusalem, rather than His triumphant entry. Christ was not misled by the exalted cries of the people. He knew that the hour of His crucifixion, rather than His coronation, was near at hand. He knew that in only a few days’ time the “Hosannas” of the multitudes would give place to their “Away with him?” He knew that the nation would shortly consummate its guilt by giving Him a convict’s gibbet instead of David’s throne.

But why should the disciples have been so puzzled and unable to understand “these things?” It was because they were so reluctant to think that this One who had power to Work such mighty miracles should be put to a shameful death. To the very end, they had hoped He would restore the kingdom and establish His throne at Jerusalem. The honors of the kingdom attracted, the shame of the Cross repelled them: It was because of this that on the resurrection-morning He said to the two disciples,

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25, 26).

Yes, there had to be the sufferings before the glory, the Cross before the Crown (cf. 1 Peter 1:11). But when Jesus was “glorified,” that is, when He had ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit had been given to guide them into all truth, then “remembered they that these things were written of him.”

“The people therefore that were with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle” (John 12:17, 18).

This line in the picture is supplied only by John, and suitably so, for it was in the raising of Lazarus that the glory of the *Son of God* had been manifested (John 11:4). They who had witnessed that notable miracle had reported it in Jerusalem, and now it was known that He who had power to restore the dead to life was nearing the Capital, many came forth to meet Him. Doubtless one reason why this is brought in here is to emphasize the deep guilt of the nation for rejecting Him whose credentials were so unimpeachable.

“The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him” (John 12:19).

Here is one of the many evidences of the truthful consistency of the independent accounts which the different Evange lists have given us of this incident. Luke tells us:

“And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples” (John 19:39),

and the Lord had answered them, “I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.” Here we are shown their chagrin. They were envious of His popularity; they feared for their own hold over the people.

But here a difficulty confronts us, and one which we have seen no real effort to solve. The majority of the commentators suppose that the joyous greetings which the Lord Jesus received from the crowds on this occasion were the result of a secret putting forth of His

Divine power, attracting their hearts to Himself. But how shall we explain the evanescent effect which it had upon them? how account for the fact that less than a week later the same crowds cried, "Crucify him"? To affirm that this only illustrates the fickleness of human nature is no doubt to say what is sadly too true. But if both of their cries were simply expressions of "human nature," where does the influencing of their heart by Divine power come in? We believe the difficulty is self-created, made by attributing the first cry to a wrong cause.

Two things are very conspicuous in God's dealings with men: His *constraining* power and His *restraining* power. As illustrations of the former, take the following examples. It was God who gave Joseph favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison (Genesis 39:22), who moved Balaam to bless Israel when he was hired to curse them (Numbers 23:20), who stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to make a proclamation giving the Jews the right to return to Palestine (Ezra 1:1, 2). As illustrations of the latter, mark the following cases. It was God who "withheld" Abimelech from sinning (Genesis 20:6); the brethren of Joseph "conspired against him to slay him" (Genesis 37:18), but God did not allow them to carry out their evil intentions.

Now, these same two things are given a prominent place in the Gospels in connection with the Lord Jesus. At His bidding the leper was cleansed, the blind saw, the dead were raised. At His word the disciples forsook their nets, Matthew left the seat of custom, Zaccheus came down from his leafy perch and received Him into his house. At His command the apostles went forth without bread or money (Luke 9:3); made the hungry multitudes sit down for a meal, when all that was in sight were five small loaves and two little fishes. Yes, a mighty constraining power did He wield. But equally mighty, if not so evident, was the restraining power that He exerted. At Nazareth His rejectors "led him into the brow of the hill... that they might cast him down headlong. But he, *passing through the midst of them*, went his way" (Luke 4:29, 30). In John 10:39 we are told "They sought again to take him, but *he went forth out of their hands*." When the officers came to arrest Him in the Garden, and He said, "I am," they "went backward and fell to the ground" (John 18:6)!

But the restraining power of Christ was exercised in another way than in the above instances. He also checked the fleshly enthusiasm of those who were ready to welcome Him as an Emancipator from the Roman yoke. When they would

“come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed” (John 6:15).

All through His ministry He discouraged all public tokens of honor from the people, lest (humanly speaking) the envy of His enemies should bring His preaching to an untimely end. But His public ministry was over, so He now *removes the restraint* and allows the multitudes to hail Him with their glad Hosannas, and this, not that He now craved pomp, but in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. These transports of joy from the Galileans were raised because they imagined that He would there and then set up His temporal kingdom. Hence, when their hopes were disappointed, their transports were turned into rage and therefore did they join in the cry of “crucify him”!

Ponder the following questions as a preparation for our next chapter:

1. Why did the Greeks seek out Philip, verse 21?
2. Why did Philip first tell Andrew, not Christ, verse 22?
3. What is meant by “glorified” in verse 23?
4. Why did Christ say verse 24 at this time?
5. What is meant by verse 31?
6. What is meant by “draw,” verse 32?
7. Why did Jesus “hide” Himself, verse 36?

JOHN 12:20-36

CHRIST SOUGHT BY GENTILES

The following is a suggested Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The desire of the Greeks to see Jesus, verses 20-23.
2. Christ's response, verses 24-26.
3. Christ's prayer and the Father's answer, verses 27, 28.
4. The people's dullness, verses 29, 30.
5. Christ's prediction, verses 31-33.
6. The people's query, verse 34.
7. Christ's warning, verses 35, 36.

The end of our Lord's public ministry had almost been reached. Less than a week remained till He should be crucified. But before He lays down His life His varied glories must be witnessed to. In John 11 we have seen a remarkable proof that He was the *Son of God*: evidenced by His raising of Lazarus. Next, we beheld a signal acknowledgment of Him as the *Son of David*: testified to by the jubilant Hosannas of the multitudes as the king of Israel rode into Jerusalem. What is before us now concerns Him more especially as the *Son of man*. As the Son of David He is related only to Israel, but His Son of man title brings in a wider connection. It is as "the Son of man" He comes to the Ancient of days, and as such there is

"given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him" (Daniel 7:14).

In perfect keeping with this, our present passage shows us Gentiles seeking Him, saying, "We would see," not "the Christ," but "Jesus."

Thus the Father saw to it that His blessed Son should receive this threefold witness ere He suffered the ignominy of the Cross.

It is both instructive and blessed to trace the links which unite passage to passage. There is an intimate connection between this third section of John 12 and what has preceded it. Again and again in the course of these expositions we have called attention to the *progressive unfolding* of truth in this Gospel, and here, too, we would observe, briefly, the striking order followed by Christ in His several references to His own death and resurrection. In John 10 the Lord Jesus is before us as the Shepherd, leading God's elect out of Judaism and bringing them into the place of liberty, and in order to do this He *lays down His life* that He may possess these sheep (verses 11, 15, 17, 18). In John 11 He is seen as the resurrection and the life, as the *Conqueror of death*, with power in Himself to raise His own — a decided advance on the subject of the previous chapter. But in John 12 He speaks of Himself as “the corn of wheat” that falls into the ground and dies, that it may bear “much fruit.” This speaks both of *union and communion*, blessedly illustrated in the first section of the chapter, where we have the happy gathering at Bethany suppling with Him.

If the Lord Jesus is to be to others the “resurrection” and the “life”, we now learn what this involved for Him. He should be glorified by being the firstborn among many brethren. But how? Through death:

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24).

Life could not come to us but through His death; resurrection — life out of death accomplished. Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God; and except Christ had died none could be born again. The new birth is the impartation of a new life, and that life none other than the life of a resurrected Savior, a life which has passed through death, and, therefore, forever beyond the reach of judgment.

“The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23 Greek).

Some have experienced a difficulty here: If the Divine life in the believer is the life of the risen Christ, then what of the Old Testament saints. But the difficulty is more fanciful than real. It is equally true that there could be no salvation for any one, no putting away of sins, until the great Sacrifice had been offered to God. But surely none will infer from this that no one was saved before the Cross. The fact is that both life and salvation flowed backwards as well as forwards from the Cross and the empty sepulcher. It is a significant thing, however, that nowhere in the Old Testament are we expressly told of believers then possessing “eternal life,” and no doubt the reason for this is stated in 2 Timothy 1:10,

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and *hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*”

It is very striking to observe that our Lord did not speak of the union and communion of believers with Himself until the Gentiles here sought Him. It is a higher truth altogether than any which He ever addressed to Israel. His Messiahship resulted from a fleshly relationship, the being “Son of David,” and it is on this ground that He was to sit upon the throne of His father David and “reign over the house of Jacob” (Luke 1:32, 33). But this was not the goal before Him when He came to earth the first time: to bring a people to His own place in the glory was the set purpose of His heart (John 14:2, 3). But a heavenly people must be related to Him by something higher than fleshly ties: they must be joined to Him in spirit, and this is possible only on the resurrection side of death. Hence that word;

“Wherefore henceforth know we no man *after the flesh*: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more” (2 Corinthians 5:16).

It is the One who has been “lifted up” (above this earth) that now draws all elect Gentiles as well as Jews — unto Himself.

“And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: — The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:20, 21).

This is very striking. The rejection of Christ by Israel was soon to be publicly evidenced by them delivering Him up to the Romans. As Daniel had announced centuries before, after sixty-nine weeks “shall Messiah be cut off” (John 9:26). Following His rejection by the Jews, God would visit the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). This is what was here foreshadowed by “the Greeks” supplicating Him. The connection is very striking: in verse 19 we find the envious Pharisees saying, “The world is gone after him,” here, “And... certain Greeks... saying, We would see Jesus.” It was a “first-fruit,” as it were, of a coming harvest. It was the pledge of the

“gathering together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52).

It was another evidence of the fields being “white already to harvest” (John 4:35). These “Greeks” pointed in the direction of those other “sheep” which the Good Shepherd must also bring. It is also significant to note that just as Gentiles (the wise men from the East) had sought Him soon after His birth, so now these “Greeks” came to Him shortly before His death.

Exactly who these “Greeks” were we cannot say for certain. But there are two things which incline us to think that very likely they were Syro-Phoenicians.

First, in Mark 7:26, we are told that the woman who came to Christ on behalf of her obsessed daughter, was “a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by nation.”

Second, the fact that these men sought out Philip, of whom it is expressly said that he “was of Bethsaida of Galilee” — a city on the borders of Syro-Phoenicia. The fact that Philip sought the counsel of Andrew, who also came from Bethsaida in Galilee (see John 1:44), and who would therefore be the one most likely to know most about these neighboring people, provides further confirmation. That these “Greeks” were not idolatrous heathen is evidenced by the fact that they “came up to worship at the feast,” the verb showing they were in the habit of so doing!

These “Greeks” took a lowly place. They “desired” Philip: the Greek word is variously rendered “asked,” “besought,” “prayed.” They supplicated Philip, making known their wish, and asking if it were possible to have it granted; saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” or more literally, “Jesus, we desire to see.” At the very time the leaders of Israel sought to *kill* Him, the Greeks desired to see Him. This was the first voice from the outside world which gave a hint of the awakening consciousness that Jesus was about to be the Savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Of old it had been said, “And the Desire of all nations shall come” (Haggai 2:7). That it was more than an idle curiosity which prompted these Greeks we cannot doubt, for if it were only a physical sight of Him which they desired, that could have been easily obtained as He passed in and out of the temple or along the street of Jerusalem, without them interviewing Philip. It was a *personal* and *intimate* acquaintance with Him that their souls craved. The form in which they stated their request was prophetically significant. It was not “We would hear him,” or “We desire to witness one of his mighty works,” but “We would see Jesus.” It is so to-day. He is no longer here in the flesh: He can no longer be handled or heard. But He can be seen, seen by the eye of faith!

“Philip cometh and telleth Andrew” (John 12:22).

At first sight this may strike us as strange. Why did not Philip go at once and present this request of the Greeks to the Savior? Is his tardiness to be attributed to a lack of love for souls? We do not think so. The first reference to him in this Gospel pictures a man of true evangelical zeal. No sooner did Philip become a follower of Christ than he

“findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:45).

How, then, shall we account for his now seeking out Andrew instead of the Lord? Does not Matthew 10:5 help us? When Christ had sent forth the Twelve on their first preaching tour, He expressly commanded them, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into

any city of the Samaritans enter ye not.” Furthermore, the disciples had heard Him say to the Canaanitish woman,

“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”
(Matthew 15:24).

Most probably it was because these definite statements were in Philip’s mind that he now sought out Andrew and asked his advice.

“And again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus” (John 12:22).

In the light of what has just been before us, how are we to explain this action of the two disciples? Why did they not go to the “Greeks” and politely tell them that it was impossible to grant their request? Why not have said plainly to them, Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and has no dealings with the Gentiles? We believe that what had happened just before, had made a deep impression upon the apostles. The Savior mounting the ass, the acclamations of the multitudes which He had accepted without a protest, His auspicious entrance into Jerusalem, His cleansing of the temple immediately afterwards (Matthew 21:12, 13), no doubt raised their hopes to the highest point. Was the hour of His ardently desired exaltation really at hand? Would “the world” now go after Him (John 12:19) in very truth? Was this request of the “Greeks” a further indication that He was about to take the kingdom and be “a light to lighten the Gentiles” as well as “the glory of his people Israel?” In all probability these were the very thoughts which filled the minds of Andrew and Philip as they came and told Jesus.

“And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that
the Son of man should be glorified” (John 12:23).

Now, for the first time, the Lord declared that His “hour” had come. At Cana He had said to His mother, “Mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:5), and about the midst of His public ministry we read, “No man laid hands on him because his hour was not yet come” (John 7:30). But here He announced that His hour had arrived, the hour when He, as Son of man, would be “glorified.” But what is here meant by Him being “glorified?” We believe there is a double reference. In view of the connection here, the occasion when the

Lord Jesus uttered these words, their first meaning evidently was: the time has arrived when the Son of man should be glorified by receiving the worshipful homage of the Gentiles. He intimated that the hour was ripe for the blessing of all the families of the earth through Abraham's seed. But, linking this verse with the one that immediately follows, it is equally clear that He referred to His approaching death. To His followers, the Cross must appear as the lowest depths of humiliation, but the Savior regarded it (also) as His glorification. John 13:30, 31 fully bears this out: "He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night. *Therefore*, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man *glorified*, and God is glorified in him." The two things are intimately related: salvation could not come to the Gentiles except through His death.

[*"And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified" \(John 12:23\).*](#)

It is by no means easy to determine to whom Christ uttered these words. We strongly incline to the view that they were said to the disciples. The record is silent as to whether or not the Lord here granted these "Greeks"

an interview; that is, whether He left the temple-enclosure where He then was, and went into the outer court, beyond which Gentiles were not permitted to pass. Personally, we think, everything considered, it is most unlikely that He suffered them to enter His presence. If the wish of these "Greeks" was not granted, it would teach them that salvation was not through His perfect life or His wondrous works, but by faith in Him as the crucified One. They must be taught to look upon Him not as the Messiah of Israel, but as "the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of *the world*."

[*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" \(John 12:24\).*](#)

Very different were the thoughts of Christ from those which, most probably, filled the minds of His disciples on this occasion. He looked, no doubt, to the distant future, but He also contemplated the near future. Death lay in His path, and this engaged His attention at

the very time when His disciples were most jubilant and hopeful. There must be the suffering before the glory: the Cross before the Crown. Outwardly all was ready for His earthly glory. The multitudes had proclaimed Him king; the Romans were silent, offering no opposition (a thing most remarkable); the Greeks sought Him. But the Savior knew that before He could set up His royal kingdom He must first accomplish the work of God. None could be with Him in glory except He died.

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”! “Nature is summoned here to show the law of increase which is stamped upon her; and that creative law is made an argument for the necessity of the death that is before Him. What an exaltation of the analogies in Nature to exhibit and use them in such a way as this! And what a means of interpreting Nature itself is here given us! How it shows that Christ, ignored by the so-called ‘natural’ theology, is the true key to the interpretation of Nature, and that the Cross is stamped ineffacably upon it! Nature is thus invested with the robe of a primeval prophet, and that the Word, who is God, the Creator of all things, becomes not merely the announcement of Scripture, but a plainly demonstrated fact before our eyes today.

“The grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies: it has life in it, and carries it with it through death itself. The death which it undergoes is in the interest even of the life, which it sets free from its encasement — from the limitations which hedge it in — to lay hold of and assimilate the surrounding material, by which it expands into the plant which is its resurrection, and thus at last into the many grains which are its resurrection-fruit. How plain it is that this is no accidental likeness which the Lord here seizes for illustration of His point. It is as real a prediction as ever came from the lips of an Old Testament prophet: every seed sown in the ground to produce a harvest is a positive prediction that the Giver of life must die. The union of Christ with men is not in incarnation, though that, of course, was a necessary step towards it. But the blessed man, so come into the world, was a new, a Second Man, who could not unite with the old race, and the life was the light of men; but if that were all, the history would be summed up in the words that follow: ‘And

the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. He was in the world... and the world knew him not.' To the dead, life must be communicated that there may be eyes to see. Men can only be born again into the family of God, of which the Son of God as Man is the beginning.

“Yet the life cannot simply communicate the life. Around Him are the bands of eternal righteousness, which has pronounced condemnation upon the guilty, and only by the satisfaction of righteousness in the penalty incurred can these bands be removed. Death — death as He endured it — alone can set Him free from these limitations: He is ‘straitened till it be accomplished.’ In resurrection He is enlarged and becomes the Head of a new creation; and ‘if any man be in Christ, it is new creation’ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In those redeemed by His blood the tree of life has come to its precious fruitage” (Numerical Bible).

“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25).

First of all, this was a word of warning for the beloved disciples. They had just witnessed the palms of victory waving in His path: soon they should see Him numbered with the transgressors. The echoes of the people’s “Hosannas” were still sounding in their ears: in four days’ time they should hear them cry, “Crucify him.” Then they would enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. But these things must not move them. They must not, any more than He, count their life dear unto them. He warns them against selfishness, against cowardice, against shrinking from a martyr’s cross. But the principle here is of wider application.

There is no link of connection between the natural man and God. In the man Christ Jesus there was a life in perfect harmony with God, but because of the condition of those He came to save He must lay it down. And He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. If we would save our natural life, we must lay it down: the one who loves his life in this world must necessarily lose it, for it is “*alienated*” from God; but if by the grace of God a man *separates himself in heart* from that which is at enmity with God (James 4:4),

and devotes all his energies to God, then shall he have it again in the eternal state.

“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor” (John 12:26).

If the previous verse was a *warning* to the disciples, this was spoken for their *encouragement*.

“Each grain of wheat that is found on the parent stem follows of necessity by the law of its own nature the pattern of the grain from which it came. His people, too, must be prepared to follow Him upon the road on which He was going. Here is the rule, here is the reward of service: to be with Christ where He is, is such reward as love itself would seek, crowned with the honor which the Father puts upon such loving service. The way of attainment is by the path which He had trodden, and what that was, in its general character at least, is unmistakably plain” (Mr. F. W. Grant).

“Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say?” (John 12:27).

That was the beginning of the Savior’s travail ere the new creation could be born. He was seized by an affrighting apprehension of that dying of which He had just spoken. His holy soul was moved to its very depths by the horror of that coming “hour.” It was the prelude to Gethsemane. It reveals to us something of His inward sufferings. His anguish was extreme; His heart was suffering torture — horror, grief, dejection, are all included in the word “troubled.” And what occasioned this? The insults and sufferings which He was to receive at the hands of men? The wounding of His heel by the Serpent.> No, indeed. It was the prospect of being “made a curse for us,” of suffering the righteous wrath of a sin-hating God. “What shall I say?” He asks, not “What shall I choose?” There was no wavering in purpose, no indecision of will. Though His holy nature shrank from being “made sin,” it only marked His perfections to ask that such a cup might pass from Him. Nevertheless, He bowed, unhesitatingly, to the Father’s will, saying, “But for this cause came I unto this hour.” The bitter cup was accepted.

“Father, glorify thy name” (John 12:28).

Christ had just looked death, in all its awfulness as the wages of sin, fully in the face, and He had bowed to it, and that, that the Father might be glorified. This it was which was ever before Him. Prompt was the Father’s response.

“Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified, and will glorify again” (John 12:28).

The Son of God had been glorified at the grave of Lazarus as Quickener of the dead, and now He is glorified as Son of man by this voice from heaven. But there is more than this here: the Father uses the future tense — “I will glorify again.” This He would do in bringing again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep: “raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Romans 6:4).

“The people therefore, that stood by, and heard, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him” (John 12:29).

What a proof was this that the natural man is incapable of entering into Divine things. A similar instance is furnished in the Lord speaking from heaven to Saul of Tarsus at the time of his conversion. In Acts 9:4 we read that a voice spoke unto him, saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” In Acts 22:9 we are told by Paul, “They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” They perceived not what He said. As the Savior had declared on a former occasion,

“Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43).

How the failure of these Jews to recognize the Father’s voice emphasized the absolute necessity of the Cross!

“Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes” (John 12:30).

Three times the Father spoke audibly unto the Son: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of His Messianic career, and in each case it was in view of His death. At the Jordan Christ went down, symbolically, into the place of death; on the Holy Mount Moses and Elijah had talked with Him “of his decease” (Luke 9:31); and here, Christ had just announced that His “hour” was at hand. It is also to be observed that the first time the Father’s voice was heard was at Christ’s consecration to His prophetic office; the second time it was in connection with His forthcoming decease, His priestly work, the offering Himself as a Sacrifice for sin; here, it followed right on His being hailed as king, and who was about to be invested (though in mockery) with all the insignia of royalty, and wear His title, “The king of the Jews,” even upon the Cross itself. Mark also the increasing publicity of these three audible speakings of the Father. The first was heard, we believe, only by John the Baptist; the second by three of His disciples; but the third by those who thronged the temple. “For your sakes”: to strengthen the faith to the disciples; to remove all excuse from unbelievers.

[“Now is the judgment of this world” \(John 12:31\).](#)

How this brings out the importance and the value of the great work which He was about to do! In this and the following verse, three consequences of His death are stated. First, the world was “judged”: its crisis had come: its probation was over: its doom was sealed by the casting forth of the Son of God. Henceforth, God would save His people from the world. Second, the world’s Prince here received his sentence, though its complete execution is yet future. Third. God’s elect would be drawn by irresistible power to the One whom the world rejected.

[“Now shall the prince of this world be cast out” \(John 12:31\).](#)

The tense of the verb here denotes that the “casting out” of Satan would be as gradual as the “drawing” in the next verse (Alford). The Lord here anticipates His victory, and points out the way in which it should be accomplished: a way that would have never entered into the heart of men to conceive, for it should be by shame and pain and death; a way that seemed an actual triumph for the enemy. Not only

was life to come out of death, but victory out of apparent defeat. The Savior crucified is, in fact, the Savior glorified!

“Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” As pointed out above, the casting out of Satan was to be a gradual process. In the light of this verse, and other passages (e.g., Hebrews 2:14, 15), we believe that Satan’s hold over this world was broken at the Cross. The apostle tells us that Christ

“spoiled principalities and powers, having made a show of them openly; triumphing over them” (Colossians 2:15),

and this statement, be it noted, is linked with His Cross! We believe, then, the first stage in the “casting out” of Satan occurred at the Cross, the next will be when he is “cast out” of heaven into the earth (Revelation 12:10); the next, when he is “cast into the bottomless pit” (Revelation 20:3); the final when he is “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Revelation 20:10).

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die” (John 12:32, 33).

A truly wonderful and precious word is this. It is Christ’s own declaration concerning His death and resurrection. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth” referred to His crucifixion; but “will draw all unto me” looked to the resurrection-side of the Cross, for a dead Savior could “draw” nobody. Yet the two things are most intimately connected. It is not simply that Christ is the magnet; it is the crucified Christ.

“It is crucifixion which has imparted to Him His attractive power; just as it is death which has given Him His life-giving power. It is not Christ without the Cross; nor is it the Cross without Christ; it is both of them together” (H. Bonar).

And wherein lies the attraction?

“Because of the love which it embodies. Herein is love — the love that passeth knowledge! What so magnetic as love? Because of the

righteousness which it exhibits. It is the Cross of righteousness. It is righteousness combining with love taking the sinner's side against law and judgment. How attractive is righteousness like this! Because of the truth which it proclaims. All God's truth is connected with the Cross. Divine wisdom is concentrated there. How can it but be magnetic? *Because of the reconciliation which it publishes.* It proclaims peace to the sinner, for it has made peace. Here is the meeting-place between men and God" (Ibid).

But what is meant by "I will draw"? Ah, notice the sentence does not end there! "I will draw all unto me." The word "men" is not in the original. The "all" plainly refers to all of God's elect. The scope of the word "all" here is precisely the same as in John 6:45 — "And they shall be all taught of God." It is the same "all" as that which the Father has given to Christ (John 6:37).

"The promise, 'I will draw all unto me must, I think, mean that our Lord after His crucifixion would draw men of all nations and kindreds and tongues to Himself, to believe in Him and be His disciples. Once crucified, He would become a great center of attraction, and draw to Himself; releasing from the Devil's usurped power, vast multitudes of all peoples and countries, to be His servants and followers. Up to this time all the world had blindly hastened after Satan and followed him. After Christ's crucifixion great numbers would turn away from the power of Satan and become Christians" (Bishop Ryle).

Christ's design was to show that His grace would not be confined to Israel. The Greek word here used for "draw" is a very striking one. Its first occurrence is in John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Here it is the power of God overcoming the enmity of the carnal mind. It occurs again in John 18:10,

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant."

Here the term signifies that Peter laid firm hold of his sword and *pulled it out* of its sheath. It is found again in John 21:6, 11, "Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes." Here it

signifies the putting forth of strength so as to drag an inanimate and heavy object. It is used (in a slightly different form) in James 2:6,

“Do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats?”

Here it has reference to the *impelling of unwilling* subjects. From its usage in the New Testament we are therefore obliged to understand Christ here intimated that, following His crucifixion, He would put forth an invincible power so as to effectually draw unto Himself all of God’s elect, which His omniscient foresight then saw scattered among the Gentiles. A very striking example of the Divine drawing-power is found in Judges 4:7,

“And *I will draw* unto thee to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hands.”

In like manner Christ draws us unto Himself.

“Thus it is His heart relieves itself. The glory of God, the overthrow of evil, the redemption and reconciliation of men is to be accomplished by that, the cost of which is to be for Him so much. He weighs the gain against the purchase-price for him, and is content” (Mr. Grant).

“The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?” (John 12:34).

It seems exceedingly strange that men acquainted with the Old Testament should have been stumbled when their Messiah announced that He must die. Isaiah 53, Daniel’s prophecy that He should be “cut off” (Daniel 9:26), and that solemn word through Zechariah, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zechariah 13:7), should have shown them that His exaltation could be only after His sufferings.

“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth” (John 12:35).

His questioners, most probably, in their malignant self-conceit, flattered themselves that they had completely puzzled Him. But He next spoke as though He had not heard their cavil. They were not seeking the truth, and He knew it. Instead of answering directly, He therefore gave them a solemn warning, reminding them that only for a short space longer would they enjoy the great privilege then theirs, and stating what would be the inevitable consequence if they continued to despise it.

“While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them” (John 12:36).

“Christ had spoken. Introduced at the commencement of the Gospel as the Light of men (John 1:4), He had proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world, that whosoever should follow Him should not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (John 8:12). He had also said that, as long as He was in the world, He was the light of it (John 9:5). Soon would the Light be withdrawn, His death being near at hand. Is there not, then, something awfully solemn in these few words of our chapter (John 12:35, 36)? He had preached among them. He had wrought miracles among them. He had kept, too, in His ministry to the land which God had promised to Abraham. He had never ministered outside of it. The people in it had enjoyed opportunities granted to none others. What, now, was the result, as His public ministry was thus terminating? ‘He departed, and did hide himself from them.’ Who of them all mourned over His departure? or sought where to find Him?” (Mr. C. E. Stuart)

Study the following questions on our next lesson: —

1. What is the central design of this passage, John 12:37-50?
2. Why is Isaiah 53 quoted here, verse 38?

3. Why was it “they could not believe” verse 39?
4. Whose “glory” is referred to in verse 41?
5. Had those mentioned in verse 42 saving faith?
6. When and where did Jesus say what is found in verses 44-50?
7. What is the “commandment” of verses 49, 50?

JOHN 12:37-50

CHRIST'S MINISTRY REVIEWED

The following is an Analysis of the closing section of John 12: —

1. The nation's response to Christ's ministry, verse 37.
2. The forecast of Israel's unbelief by Isaiah, verses 38-41.
3. The condition of those who had been impressed by Christ, verses 42, 43.
4. Christ's teaching about His relation to the Father, verses 44, 45.
5. Christ's teaching concerning the design of His ministry, verses 46, 47.
6. Christ's teaching concerning the doom of all who despised Him, verses 48, 49.
7. Christ's teaching concerning the way of life, verse 50.

The passage before us is by no means an easy one to understand. The previous section closes as follows:

“These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them” (John 12:36).

Many have thought, and we believe rightly so, that this statement brings the public ministry of Christ to a close in this Gospel. When we enter the thirteenth chapter it is very evident that a new section there begins, for from the beginning of 13 to the end of 17 the Lord is alone with His apostles; while in the 18th He is arrested and led to judgment. But if John 12:36 marks the ending of Christ's public ministry, how are we to understand the verses which follow to the end of the chapter? especially in view of what is said in verse 44: “Jesus cried and said,” etc.

Now, we believe the answer to this question has been well stated by Dr. John Brown: "The paragraph itself (John 12:37-50) is of a peculiar, I had almost said unique, structure and character. The history of our Lord's public ministry is closed. It terminates in the verse immediately preceding. The account of His private interview with His friends, previous to His passion, is about to commence. It begins with the first verse of the following chapter. One scene in the eventful history is closed; another is about to open. The curtain is, as it were, falling upon the theater in which the public acts of Jesus were performed, and the Evangelist is about to conduct us into the sacred circle of His disciples, and communicate to us the sublime and consoling conversations which the Redeemer, full of love, had with them before His final departure. But before He does this he makes a pause in the narrative, and, as it were, looks back and around; and, in the paragraph before us, presents us in a few sentences with a brief but comprehensive view of all the Lord had taught and done during the course of His public ministry, and of the effects which His discourses and miracles had produced on the great body of His countrymen.

John here gives us a resume of Christ's public ministry, mentioning His miracles and recapitulating His teaching. The closing section of John 12 forms an epilogue to that chapter of our Lord's life which had just been brought to a close in John 12:36. Four vital truths which had occupied a prominent place in Christ's oral ministry are here singled out: His appeal to the Father which sent Him (John 12:44, 45, 49); Himself the Light of the world (John 12:46); the danger of unbelief (John 12:47-49); the end of faith (John 12:50). The Holy Spirit's design in moving John to pen this section was, we believe, at least two-fold: to explain the seeming failure of Christ's public ministry, and to show that the guilt of unbelief rested inexcusably upon Israel.

"The rejection of Jesus Christ by the great body of His fellow-countrymen, the Jews, is a fact which, at first view, may seem to throw suspicion on the greatness of His claims to a Divine mission, as indicating the evidence adduced in their support did not serve its purpose with those to whom it was originally presented, and who, in some points of view, were placed in circumstances peculiarly

favorable for forming a correct estimate of its validity. It may be supposed that had the proofs of His Divine mission and Messiahship been as strong and striking as the friends of Christianity represent them, the prejudices of the Jews, powerful as they unquestionably were, must have given way before them; and the believers of His doctrine must have been as numerous as the witnesses of His miracles. Such a supposition, though plausible, argues on the part of its supporters, imperfect and incorrect views of the human constitution, intellectually and morally” (Ibid).

In other words, it ignores the *total depravity* of man!

Now, in the closing section of John 12 the Holy Spirit has most effectively disposed of the above objection. He has done so by directing our attention to Old Testament predictions which accurately forecast the very reception which the Messiah met with from the Jews. First, Isaiah 53 is referred to, for in this chapter it was plainly foretold that He should be “despised and rejected of men.” And then Isaiah 6 is quoted, a passage which tells of God judicially blinding His people because of their inveterate unbelief. Thus the very objection made against Christianity is turned into a most conclusive argument in its favor. The very fact that the Lord Jesus was put to death by His countrymen demonstrates that He *is* their Messiah! Thus has God, once more, made “the wrath of man to praise him.”

“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him” (John 12:37).

Fearful proof was this of the depravity of the human heart. The miracles of Christ were neither few in number nor unimpressive in nature. The Lord Jesus performed prodigies of power of almost every conceivable kind. He healed the sick, expelled demons, controlled the winds, walked on the sea, turned water into wine, revealed to men their secret thoughts, raised the dead. His miracles were wrought openly, in the light of day, before numerous witnesses. Nevertheless “they” — the nation at large — “believed not on him.” Altogether inexcusable was their hardness of heart. All who heard His teaching and witnessed His works, ought, without doubt, to have received Him as their Divinely-accredited Messiah and Savior. But

the great majority of His countrymen refused to acknowledge His claims.

“The prevalence of unbelief and indifference in the present day ought not to surprise us. It is just one of the evidences of that mighty foundation-doctrine, the total corruption and fall of man. How feebly we grasp and realize that doctrine is proved by our surprise at human incredulity. We only half believe the heart’s deceitfulness. Let us read our Bibles more attentively, and search their contents more carefully. Even when Christ wrought miracles and preached sermons there were numbers of His hearers who remained utterly unmoved. What right have we to wonder if the hearers of modern sermons in countless instances remain unbelieving? ‘The disciple is not greater than his Master.’ If even the hearers of Christ did not believe, how much more should we expect to find unbelief among the hearers of His ministers? Let the truth be spoken and confessed: man’s obstinate unbelief is one among many of the indirect proofs that the Bible is true” (Bishop Ryle).

“That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:38).

This does not mean that the Jews continued in unbelief with the conscious design of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Nor does the Holy Spirit here teach that God exercised a secret influence upon the hearts of the Jews, which prevented them from believing, in order that the prophecy of Isaiah might not fail of accomplishment. The Jews did fulfill the predictions of Isaiah, but it was ignorantly and unwittingly. As one able expositor has well said, “The true interpretation here depends on the fact, that the participle rendered that, in the sense of in order that, sometimes signifies so that, pointing out, not the connection of cause and effect, but that of antecedent and consequence, prediction and accomplishment. For example, in the question of the disciples, ‘Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ the meaning plainly is, ‘Is this man’s blindness the consequence of his parents’ sin, or of his own in some preexistent state?’” “We believe it had been better to render it thus: “They believed not, consequently the saying of Isaiah was

fulfilled.” God does not have to put forth any power to cause any sinner not to believe: if He leaves him to himself, he never will believe.

It is highly significant that Isaiah 53 opens in the way it does. That remarkable chapter tells of the treatment which the Savior met with from Israel when He was here the first time. As is well known, the Jews will not own it as a prophecy concerning the Messiah: some of them have attempted to apply it to Jeremiah, others to the nation. How striking then that the Triune-God has opened it with the question, “Who hath believed our report?” Most suitably does John apply it to the unbelieving nation in his day. “And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” The “arm of the Lord” signifies the power of God as it had been manifested by the Messiah. There are therefore two things here: “Who hath believed our report?” points to Christ’s oral ministry; “to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” to His miracles.

“Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again” (John 12:39).

This is exceedingly solemn. It is explained in the next verse. In consequence of their rejection of Christ, the nation as a whole was judicially blinded of God, that is, they were left to the darkness and hardness of their own evil hearts. But it is most important to mark the order of these two statements: in John 12:37 they did not believe; here in John 12:39, they could not believe. The most attractive appeals had been made: the most indubitable evidence had been presented: yet they despised and rejected the Redeemer. They would not believe; in consequence, God gave them up, and now they could not believe. The harvest was vast, the summer was ended, and they were not saved. But the fault was entirely theirs, and now they must suffer the just consequences of their wickedness.

“He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:40).

This was God's response to the wicked treatment which Israel had meted out to His beloved Son. They had refused the light, now darkness shall be their dreadful portion. They had rejected the truth, now a heart which loved error should be the terrible harvest. Blinded eyes and a hardened heart have belonged to Israel ever since; only thus can we account for their continued unbelief all through these nineteen centuries; only thus can we explain Israel's attitude toward Christ to-day.

"All through His Divine ministry in this Gospel, the Lord had been acting in grace, as the 'son of the Father' and as 'the light of the world.' His presence was day-time in the land of Israel. He had been shining there, if haply the darkness might comprehend Him, and here, at the close of His ministry (John 12:35, 36) we see Him still as the light casting forth His last beams upon the land and the people. He can but shine, whether they will comprehend Him or not. While His presence is there it is still day-time. The night cannot come till He is gone. 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world'! But here, He 'departed and did hide himself from them' (John 12:36); and then God, by His prophet, brings the night upon the land: John 12:40" (Mr. J. G. Bellett).

Fearfully solemn is it to remember that what God did here unto Israel He will shortly do with the whole of unbelieving Christendom:

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

Just as in the days of Nimrod God "gave up" the entire Gentile world because they despised and rejected the revelation which He had given them (Romans 1); just as He abandoned Israel to their unbelief, through the rejection of His Son; so in a soon-coming day He will cause unfaithful Christendom to receive the Antichrist because

"they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

Oh, dear reader, be warned by this. It is an unspeakably solemn thing to trifle with the overtures of God's grace. It is written,

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3).

Then

"Seek ye the Lord *while he may be found*, call ye upon him *while he is near*" (Isaiah 55:6).

"These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him" (John 12:41).

A striking testimony is this to the absolute Deity of Christ. The prediction quoted in the previous verse is found in Isaiah 6. At the beginning of that chapter the prophet sees "Jehovah sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Above the throne stood the seraphim, with veiled face, crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." The sight was too much for Isaiah, and he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone." Then a live coal was taken from off the altar and laid upon his mouth, and thus cleansed, he is commissioned to go forth as God's messenger. And here the Holy Spirit tells us in John 12, "These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him" — the context makes it unmistakably plain that the reference is to the Lord Jesus. One of the sublimest descriptions of the manifested Deity found in all the Old Testament is here applied to Christ. That One born in Bethlehem's manger was none other than the Throne-Sitter before whom the seraphim worship.

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42).

Here is a statement which affords help on such verses as John 2:23; John 7:31; John 8:30; John 10:42; John 11:45; John 12:11.

In each of these passages we read of many "believing" on the Lord Jesus, concerning whom there is nothing to show that they had

saving faith. In the light of the verse now before us it would seem that John, all through his Gospel, divides the unbelieving into two classes: the hardened mass who were altogether unmoved by the wondrous works of Christ; and a company, evidently by no means small, upon whom a temporary impression was made, but yet who failed to yield their hearts captive to the Savior — the fear of man, and loving the praise of man, holding them back. And do we not find the same two classes in Christendom to-day? By far the greater number of those who come under the sound of the Gospel remain unmoved, heeding neither its imperative authority nor being touched by its winsome tidings. They are impervious to every appeal. But there is another class, and its representatives are to be found, perhaps, in every congregation; a class who are affected in some measure by the Word of the Cross. They do not despise its contents, yet, neither are their hearts won by it. On the one hand, they are not openly antagonistic; on the other, they are not out and out Christians.

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” This points a most solemn warning to the class we have just mentioned above. A faith which does not confess Christ is not a saving faith. The New Testament is very explicit on this. Said the Lord Jesus,

“Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8, 9).

And in the Epistle to the Romans we are told,

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (John 10:9).

These Jews referred to in our text were satisfied that Christ was neither an impostor nor a fanatic, yet were they not prepared to forsake all and follow Him. They feared the consequences of such a course, for the Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (John

9:22). These men then deemed it wisest to conceal their convictions and wait until the Messiah should place Himself in such a position that it would be safe and advantageous for them to avow themselves His disciples. They were governed by self-interest, and they have had many successors. If any should read these lines who are attempting to be secret disciples of the Lord Jesus, fearing to come out into the open and acknowledge by lip and life that He is their Lord and Savior, let them beware. Remember that the first of the eight classes mentioned in Revelation 21:8 who are cast into the lake of fire are the “*fearful*”!

“For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43).

These men, whose minds were convinced but whose hearts remained unmoved, not only feared the religious authorities, but they also *desired* the approbation of their fellows. They were determined to retain their good opinion, even though at the expense of an uneasy conscience. They preferred the good will of other sinners above the approval of God. O the shortsighted folly of these wretched men! O the madness of their miserable choice! Of what avail would the good opinion of the Pharisees be when the hour of death overtook them? In what stead will it stand them when they appear before the judgment-throne of God? “What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” How we are reminded of our Savior’s words,

“How can ye believe which receive honor *one of another*, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?” (John 5:44).

Let us remember that we cannot have both the good-will of sinners and the good-will of God:

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

“Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me” (John 12:44).

Notice that nothing whatever is said about either the time or the place where the Savior made this utterance. We believe that John still continues his epilogue, giving us in John 12:44-50 a summary, of Christ's teaching. The substance of what he here says plainly indicates this.

"How strange that this supposed discourse of Jesus should to an extent of which there is no previous example, consist of repetitions alone, and, moreover, of only such words as are already found in John's Gospel. Did the Lord ever recapitulate in this style, uttering connectedly so long a discourse without any new thoughts and distinct sayings? but, when for once St. John recapitulates, seeming (though only seeming) to put his words into the Lord's lips, what an instructive example he gives us, not venturing to add anything of his own! Yea, verily, all this the Lord had said, each saying in its season; but St John unites them all retrospectively together" (Stier).

The tense of the verbs here, "Jesus cried and said," signify, as Stier and Alford have pointed out, that Christ was wont to, that it was His customary course of repeated action.

["And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me" \(John 12:45\).](#)

That John is giving us in these verses a summary of the teachings of Christ is evidenced by a comparison of them with earlier statements in this Gospel. For example: compare

["He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, *but on him that sent me*" \(John 12:44\)](#)

with John 5:24 — "He that *heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me.*" So here: "He that seeth me seeth him that sent me." Compare with this John 8:19, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also;" and John 10:38, "That ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him." This was one of the vital truths which occupied a prominent place in our Lord's teachings. No man had seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son had come here to "declare" Him (John 1:18). What we have here in John 12:45 is a reference to the frequent mention made by

Christ to that mysterious and Divine union which existed between Himself and the Father.

“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46).

Clearly this is parallel with John 8:12 and John 9:5:

“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness... As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” “I am come a light into the world”:

upon this verse Dr. John Brown has the following helpful comments: “This proves, first, that Christ existed before His incarnation, even as the sun exists before it appears above the eastern hills; second, it is implied that He is the one Savior of the world, as there is but one sun; third, that He came, not for one nation only, but for all; even as the sun’s going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.”

This verse continues John’s reference to the general teaching of Christ concerning the character and tendency of His mission. He had come here into this world as a light-revealing God and exposing man — and this, in order that all who believed on Him should be delivered from the darkness, that is, from the power of Satan (Colossians 1:13) and the ruin of sin (Ephesians 4:18).

“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:47).

Here the Evangelist calls attention to another truth which had held a prominent place in our Lord’s teachings. It respected His repeated announcement concerning the character and design of His mission and ministry. It tells of the lowly place which He had taken, and of the patient grace which marked Him during the time that He tabernacled among men.

It brings into sharp contrast the purpose and nature of His two advents. When He returns to this earth it will be in another character

and with a different object from what was true of Him when He was here the first time. Before, He was here as a lowly servant; then, He shall appear as the exalted Sovereign. Before, He came to woo and win men; then, He shall rule over them with a rod of iron.

“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not.” With this compare verse 45, “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world,” compare with this John 3:17, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved,” and note our original comments upon John 3:17.

“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

This solemn utterance of Christ corrects an erroneous conclusion which has been drawn by some Calvinists, who deny the responsibility of unregenerate souls in connection with the Gospel. They argue that because the natural man is devoid of spiritual life, he cannot believe; a dead man, they say, cannot receive Christ. To this it might be replied, A dead man cannot reject Christ. But many do! It is true that a dead man cannot believe, yet he ought to. His inability lies not in the absence of necessary faculties, but in the wilful perversion of his faculties. When Adam died spiritually, nothing in him was annihilated; instead, he became “alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:18). Every man who hears the Gospel ought to believe in Christ, and those who do not will yet be punished for this unbelief, see 2 Thessalonians 1:7. As Christ here teaches, the rejector of Him will be judged for his sin. Let any unsaved one who reads these lines thoughtfully ponder this solemn word of the Lord. Jesus.

“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him.” The first part of this verse is almost identical with what we read of in John 3:18: “But he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” “The words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last. day.” This takes us back to Deuteronomy 18:19, where, of the great Prophet God promised to raise up unto

Israel He declared, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will *require it of him*.”

“The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” Very solemn indeed is this, for its application is to all who have heard the Gospel. It tells us three things.

First, there is to be a “last day.” This world will not remain forever. The bounds of its history, the length of its existence are Divinely determined, and when the appointed limit is reached,

“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

Second, this last day will be one of judgment:

“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31).

Then shall hidden things be brought to light: the righteous vindicated, and the unrighteous sentenced. Then shall God’s broken law be magnified, and His holy justice honored. Then shall all His enemies be subjugated and God shall demonstrate that He *is* GOD. Then shall every proud rebel be made to bow in subjection before that Name which is above every name, and confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Third, *Christ’s Word* will judge sinners in that Day. His Word was a true Word, a Divine Word, a Word suited to men. Yet men have slighted it, attacked it, denied it, made its holy contents the subject of blasphemous jesting. But in the last great Day it shall judge them. First and foremost among the “books” which shall be opened and out of which sinners shall be “judged” (Revelation 20:12) will be, we believe, the written Word of God —

“In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ *according to my gospel*” (Romans 2:16).

“For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49).

This was something which Christ had affirmed repeatedly, see John 5:30; 7:16; 8:26-28, etc. It expressed that intimate and mysterious union which existed between the Father and Himself. His purpose was to impress upon the Jews the awfulness of their sin in refusing His words: in so doing, they affronted *the Father Himself*, for His were the very words which the Son had spoken to them. In like manner, to-day,

“he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave *of his Son*” (1 John 5:10).

How terrible then is the sin of despising the testimony of Christ!

“And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 12:50).

This is an abstract of what we read of in John 3:11; 5:32; 8:55. It brings out once more the perfections of the incarnate Son. He acted not in independency, but in perfect oneness of heart, mind, and will, with the Father. Whether the Jews believed them or not, the messages which Christ had delivered were Divinely true, and therefore were they words of life to all who receive them by simple faith. This closing sentence in John’s summary of Christ’s teachings is very comprehensive: “whatsoever” He had spoken, was that which He had received of the Father. Therefore in refusing to heed the teaching of Christ, the Jews had despised the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

“And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 12:50).

Once more we have a declaration which is not confined to its local application. This verse speaks in clarion tones to all who come under the sound of the Gospel to-day. God has given not an “invitation” for men to act on at their pleasure, but a “commandment” which they disobey at their imminent peril. That commandment is “that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23), hence at the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul refers to the Gospel of God, he says,

“By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for faith — obedience among all nations” (John 1:5).

This commandment is “life everlasting” to all who receive it by the obedience of faith. Adam brought death upon him by disobeying God’s commandment: we receive life by obeying God’s commandment. Then

“see that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Hebrews 12:25).

Study the following questions in view of our next lesson: —

1. What is meant by the last clause of verse 1?
2. What “supper” is referred to in verse 2?
3. What is the symbolic significance of Christ’s actions in verse 4?
4. What is signified by the washing of the disciples’ feet, verse 5?
5. Why is Peter so prominent in verses 6-9?
6. What is meant by “no part with Me” verse 8?
7. What is the meaning of verse 10?

JOHN 13:1-11

CHRIST WASHING HIS DISCIPLES' FEET

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ's unchanging love, verse 1.
2. Judas's inveterate hatred, verse 2.
3. Christ's return to the Father, verse 3.
4. Christ performing a slave's work, verses 4, 5.
5. Peter's blundering ignorance, verses 6-9.
6. Bathing and cleansing, verse 10.
7. The traitor excepted, verse 11.

We are now to enter upon what many believers in each age have regarded as the most precious portion of this Gospel, yea, as one of the most blessed passages in all the Word of God. John 13 begins a new section, a section clearly distinguished and separated from what has gone before. At the beginning of the Gospel two things were stated in connection with the outcome of Christ's mission and ministry: the nation, as such, "received him not": this has been fully demonstrated, especially in chapters 5 to 12; second, those who did "receive him" were to be brought into the place of children of God. In chapters 13 to 17 we see Christ alone with His own, separated from the world, telling them of their peculiar portion and privileges.

At the close of Christ's public ministry, we are told "He departed and did hide himself from them"; that is, from the nation (John 12:36). In 13 to 17 we find the Savior, in most intimate fellowship with His disciples, revealing to them the wondrous place which they had in His love, and how that love would be continually exercised on their behalf now that He was about to leave them and go to the Father. He had told them that,

“the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

All through His career Christ had “ministered” to His own, but now, His public ministry was over and He was on the eve of giving His life a ransom for them, to be followed by Him taking His place on high. It would, therefore, be natural for the disciples to conclude that His “ministry” unto them was also ended. But not so. It would continue, and that is what this blessed section of John’s Gospel is primarily designed to show us. He loved these disciples (and us) not only unto the Cross, but “unto the end.” His return to the Father would neither terminate nor diminish the activities of His love for His own: in Heaven He is still occupied with the interest of His people.

The central design of the “Paschal Discourse” of Christ was to lead His own into a spiritual understanding of their new place before the Father, and their new position in the world, as distinguished from the portion and place which they had had in Judaism. What we have in John 13 to 17 takes the place of the long Olivet discourse recorded by each of the Synoptists. Here, instead of taking His seat upon the Mount, He brings the disciples, in spirit, into Heaven, and reveals the glories, blessedness, and holiness of the Sanctuary there. Instead of treating of the horrors of the Tribulation, He discloses to the family of God the activities of their great High Priest, as well as their own sorrows and joys during the time of their journey through this wilderness.

While there is a marked contrast between what we have at the close of John 12 and the beginning of 13, there is also a close link of connection between them, a link which further develops the progressive unfolding of truth in this wondrous Gospel. In chapter 12 Christ had spoken of Himself as “the corn of wheat” which had to die in order that it might bring forth “much fruit.” As we have seen, this speaks of *union and communion* — blessedly illustrated in the opening scene, the “supper” in Bethany. But here in chapter 13 and onwards, He makes known His own most gracious work for maintaining believers in fellowship with Himself. Two things, each most blessed and evidencing His perfections, are to be noted. First,

His eye is on the heavenly sanctuary (John 13:1); second, His eye is upon His own (John 13:4). He guards the holy requirements of God, and He cares for and ministers to His people. We are left here in this world, and its dust is defiling, unfitting us for entrance into the Holiest.

Here in John 13 we see Christ fitting us for that place. It is important for us to recognize, though, that it is God's interests which He has at heart in washing our feet! Christ is here seen as the Laver which stood between the brazen altar and the sanctuary, and which was approached only after the brazen altar had done its work.

There is a further link between John 12 and 13 which brings out a most blessed contrast — let the student be constantly on the lookout for these. At the beginning of John 12 we behold the feet of the Lord; in John 13 we see the feet of the disciples. The “feet” of Christ were anointed, those of the disciples were washed. As the Savior passed through this sinful world He contracted no defilement. He left it as He came: “holy, harmless, and undefiled.” The “feet” speak of the walk, and the fact that Christ's feet were anointed with the fragrant spikenard tells of the sweet savor which ever ascended from Him to the Father, perfectly glorifying Him as He did in every step of His path. But in sharp contrast from Him, the walk of the disciples was defiled, and the grime of the way must be removed. Note, also, that the anointing of the Savior's feet is given before the washing of the disciples' feet — in all things He must have “the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18)!

That which opens this section and introduces the “Paschal Discourse” is the Lord washing the feet of His disciples. The first thing to observe, particularly, is that it was water and not blood which was used for their cleansing. It is deeply important to note this, for many of the Lord's own people seem to be entirely ignorant about the distinction. Their speaking of a re-application of the blood, of coming anew to “the fountain” which has been opened for sin and uncleanness when they have transgressed, proves that this is only too sadly true. The New Testament knows nothing whatever of a re-application of the blood, or of sinning Christians needing to be washed in it again. To speak of such things is to grossly dishonor the

all-efficacious sacrifice of the Cross. The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7). By

“one offering he hath *perfected forever* them that are set apart” (Hebrews 10:14).

This being so, what provision, we may ask, has been made for the removal of the defilements which the Christian contracts by the way? The answer is “water.”

A careful study will show that in the Old and New Testaments alike the “blood” is *Godward*, the “water” is *saintward*, to remove impurity in practice: the one affects our standing, the other our state; the former is for judicial cleansing, the latter is for practical purification. In the types, Leviticus 16 makes known God's requirements for the making of atonement; Numbers 19 tells of God's provision for the defilements of the way, as Israel journeyed through the wilderness. The latter was met not by blood, but by “the water of purification.” Judicial cleansing from the guilt of all sin is the inalienable portion of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moral cleansing, the practical purification of the heart and ways from all that defiles and hinders our communion with God is by *water*, that is, the *Word*, applied to us in power by the Holy Spirit.

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

This opening verse supplies us with the first key to what follows. What we have here anticipates that which was in view in Christ's return to the Father. He graciously affords us a symbolic representation of His present service for us in Heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, but He is there in our interests, ever living to make intercession for us, ever there as our Advocate with the Father, ever maintaining and succouring us by the way.

“Now before the feast of the passover,” immediately before, for on the morrow Christ was to die as the true Lamb. The “passover” itself

was eaten at the close of the fourteenth day of Nisan (Exodus 12:6, 8); but “the feast,” which lasted seven days, began on the fifteenth (Numbers 28:17). What we have here, then, transpired on the eve before our Lord’s death.

When Jesus knew that his hour was come.” Christ is the only One who has ever trod this earth that was never taken by surprise. All was known and felt in the Father’s presence. “That he should depart out of this world”: note “this world,” not “the world.” It is striking to see how frequently this term occurs at the close of His life:

“And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world” (John 9:39);

“He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25);

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the Prince of this world be cast out” (John 12:31).

“This world” was evidently a terrible place in the Lord’s mind! He could not stay here. He had made the world (John 1:10), but sin has made this world what it is. Note “that he should depart out of this world unto the Father,” not unto heaven! How blessed! It was the Father’s presence His heart desired!

“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” “His own”! After all the previous conflicts with an unbelieving world, after all His unavailing appeals to Israel, Christ now comforts His heart by lavishing His love upon the few who despised Him not. What a blessed expression “his own”! “Ye are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19); we belong to Christ. We all know the delight which comes from being able to call something our own. It is not so much the value of what is possessed which constitutes this satisfaction, as it is the simple consciousness that it is mine. It is the Holy Spirit here declaring the heart of the Savior in the terms of love. It is not with our poor estimate of Him, still less with our wretched selves, that He would occupy us. He would have us taken up with Christ’s thoughts about us! We belong to the Lord Jesus in a threefold way. First, by the *Father’s eternal election*. We are the

Father's love-gift to the Son: "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world." Second, we are His by *His own redemptive rights*. He paid the purchase price. He bought us for Himself: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Third, we are His by the *effectual call of the Holy Spirit*. If any one be in Christ, he is a new creation, and we are created anew by the Third Person of the Holy Trinity: "born of the Spirit."

"He loved them unto the end." Here is the care of the Good Shepherd for the sheep. Unto "the end" of what? Who can define it? First, unto the end of our earthly pilgrimage. We need the assurance of His love as we pass through this wilderness. We shall not need it when we see Him face to face and know as we are known. But we do need the full assurance of it now. And what a resting-place for the poor heart amid all the buffetings of this life — the bosom of the Savior! It is here that John turned (John 13:23), and it is blessedly accessible to us, in spirit. Yea, it is to maintain us in the unending enjoyment of our place there, that the Lord Jesus is here seen washing the disciples' feet before He begins the long discourse which follows to the end of chapter 16. The love of Christ must be occupied about its objects, and this is what we see here. God is "light" (1 John 1:5), and God is "love" (1 John 4:16). In the first twelve chapters of this Gospel Christ is seen as light, revealing the Father, exposing men (John 1:7; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5). But now we behold Him (with "his own") as love (cf. John 13:34; 14:12; 15:9; 17:26, etc.). But mark it, it is a holy love. Divine love cannot allow that which is unclean. Therefore does the holy love of Christ begin by removing defilement from the feet of His disciples! Most blessed is this. We delight to contemplate the love which caused Him to lay down His life for us, but let us never lose sight of the present activities of it.

"He loved them unto the end? Not only unto the last, but to the *farthest extent* of their need and of His grace. He knew that Philip would misunderstand Him, that three of them would sleep while He prayed and agonized, that Peter would deny Him, that Thomas would doubt Him, that all would "forsake him" — yet He "loved them unto the end"! And so it is with us, dear Christian reader. "His own" are the objects of HIS love; "unto the end" is the extent of His

love. He loves us unto “the end” of our miserable failures, unto the “end” of our wanderings and backslidings, unto the “end” of our unworthiness, unto the “end” of our deep need.

His love no end or measure knows, No change can turn its
course; Eternally the same it flows From one eternal Source.

The first part of our verse intimates two things about the Lord Jesus at this time: the Cross was before Him with all its horrors; the joy of returning to the Father was before Him with all its bliss; yet neither the fearful prospect of woe nor the hope of unspeakable rest and gladness shook His love for His own. He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever, therefore His love never varies. He is eternal, therefore has He loved us with an everlasting love. He is Divine, therefore is His love different from all others, passing human knowledge.

“And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him” (John 13:2).

What a fearful contrast! From love to hate; from the Savior to Satan; from “his own” to the traitor! The mention of Judas here seems to be for the purpose of enhancing the beauty of what follows. The Devil had full mastery over the heart of the betrayer: thus in figure the Cross was passed Satan had accomplished his design.

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God” (John 13:3)

“These statements of Christ’s Divine origin, authority, and coming glory, are made so as to emphasize the amazing condescension of the service to which He humbled Himself to do the office of a bonds slave” (Companion Bible).

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself” (John 13:3, 4).

“It was not in forgetfulness of His Divine origin, but in full consciousness of it, He discharged this menial function. As He had divested Himself of the ‘form of God’ at the first, stripping Himself of the outward glory attendant on recognized Deity; and had taken upon Himself ‘the form of a servant,’ so now He laid aside His garment and girded Himself; assuming the guise of a household slave. For a fisherman to pour water over a fisherman’s feet was no great condescension; but that He, in whose hands are all human affairs and whose nearest relation is the Father, should thus condescend, is of unparalleled significance. It is this kind of action that is suitable to One whose consciousness is Divine. Not only does the dignity of Jesus vastly augment the beauty of the action, but it also sheds new light on the Divine character” (Dr. Dods).

Three things are to be carefully noted here as reasons why He washed His disciples’ feet on this occasion. First, He knew that His hour was come when He should depart out of this world (John 13:1); second, He loved His own unto the end (John 13:1); third, because all things had been given into His hands, and He that had come from God was returning to God — for these reasons He arose from the table and girded Himself with a towel. As we shall see, all of this finds its explanation in the Lord’s words to Peter,

“If I wash thee not, thou hast *no part with me*” (John 13:8).

For three years the disciples had had “a part” with Him. But now He was about to leave them; but before doing so He would assure them (and us) that His wondrous love continues undiminished and unchanged after His return to the Father. Christ began a service in the Glory which, in another manner, He will continue forever. The service in which He is now engaged is to maintain our “part” with Him.

There has been much controversy as to what “supper” is referred to here in John 13. Most assuredly it was not the “Lord’s Supper,” for in John 13:26 we find Christ giving the “sop” to Judas, and the Synoptists make it unmistakably plain that this was at the paschal supper. The Lord’s Supper receives no mention in the fourth Gospel. On this fact Bishop Ryle strikingly says, “I think it was specially intended to be a witness forever against the growing tendency of

Christians to make an idol out of the sacraments. Even from the beginning there seems to have been a disposition in the Church to make a religion of forms and ceremonies rather than of heart, and to exalt outward ordinances to a place which God never meant them to fill. Against this teaching St. John was raised up to testify. The mere fact that in his Gospel he leaves out the Lord's Supper altogether, and does not even name it, is strong proof that the Lord's Supper cannot be, as many tell us, the first, chief, and principle thing in Christianity. His perfect silence about it can never be reconciled with this favorite theory. It is a most conspicuous silence, I can only see one answer: it is because it is not a primary, but a secondary thing in Christ's religion."

"He riseth from supper." In the order of events this comes right after what we read of in John 13:1: the time-mark there being connected with Christ's action here. Evidently it was just before the beginning of the meal that the Lord Jesus rose from the table — the meal being the paschal one. It is important to note that John's narrative carries everything on in strict connection from this point to John 14:31, and then on to John 18:1: therefore this "supper" and Christ's discourse to His disciples was at once followed by the going forth to Gethsemane. The question of Peter in John 13:24 is inexplicable if the paschal supper had already taken place (as quite a number have insisted), for the Synoptists are explicit that our Lord named the betrayer during this meal. Most of the difficulty has been created by the first clause of John 13:2, which should be rendered,

"when the supper arrived," i.e., was ready. Mark how that 13:12 shows us Christ *resuming* His place at the table.

["He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments: and took a towel, and girded himself" \(John 13:4\).](#)

Everything here, we doubt not, has a deep symbolical meaning. The "supper" was the paschal one, and clearly spoke of Christ's death. The rising from supper and the laying aside of His garments (cf. John 20:6) pictured our Lord on the resurrection-side of the grave. The girding Himself speaks of service, the heavenly service in which He is now engaged on behalf of His people. It is a wonderful thing that the Lord never relinquished His servant character. Even

which the modern advocates of the so-called sacramental system can never get over, or explain away. If the sacrament of the Lord's Supper really is the first and chief thing in Christianity, why does St. John tell us nothing about it? To that question after His return to the Glory He still ministers to us. Beautifully was this typified of old in connection with the Hebrew servant in Exodus 21.

“If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free.... If the servant shall plainly say I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, and unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him forever” (verses 2-5, 6).

This has been expounded at length in our “Gleanings in Exodus.” Suffice it now to say that it affords us a most blessed foreshadowment of the perfect Servant. Christ will “serve forever.” To-day He is serving us, applying the Word (by His Spirit) to our practical state, dealing with what unfits us for fellowship with Himself on high. Luke 12:37 gives us a precious word upon His future service: “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” And how will He “serve” us then? By ministering to our happiness and enjoyment as “His guests”!

“After that he poureth water into a basin,” etc. (John 13:5).

Everything here is Divinely perfect. Seven distinct actions are attributed to the Savior: He

1. “riseth from supper, and
2. laid aside his garments, and
3. took a towel, and
4. girded himself. After that he

5. Poureth water into a basin, and
6. began to wash the disciples' feet, and
7. to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."

It was their feet which He here proceeded to wash. Their persons were already cleansed. They had been brought out of Judaism, and a heavenly portion was now theirs — a place in the Father's House. But their conduct must be suited to that House. Their walk must be in accord with their heavenly calling. They must be kept clean in their ways.

The water with which the Savior here cleansed the soiled feet of His disciples was an emblem of the Word:

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9).

Fully and blessedly is this brought out in Ephesians 5:25, 26:

“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”

“Every clause of this passage is found here in John 13. He ‘loved’ them, the Church. He ‘gave himself’ for them, the ‘supper’ setting forth that: that He might ‘sanctify,’ separate to Himself, thus they were ‘his own’; and ‘cleanse’ it with the washing of water by the Word. It is complete; His constant, perfect provision for our being kept clean” (Mr. Malachi Taylor).

It is to be particularly observed that the Lord did not leave this work unfinished or half done: like a perfect servant, our Lord not only “washed” their feet, but He “wiped” them as well!

“Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” (John 13:6).

Simon was ever blundering, and his sad faults and failings are recorded for our learning. “In Divine things the wisdom of the

believer is subjection to Christ and confidence in Him. What He does we are called on to accept with thankfulness of heart, and as Mary said to the servants at the marriage-feast, 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.' This Simon Peter did not, for when the Lord approached him in the form of a servant or bond-man, he demurred. Was there not faith 'working by love' in Peter's heart? Both, undoubtedly, yet not then in action, but buried under superabundant feeling of a human order, else he had not allowed his mind to question what the Lord saw fit to do. He had rather bowed to Christ's love and sought to learn, as He might teach, what deep need must be in him and his fellows to draw forth such a lowly yet requisite service from his Master... Too self-confident and indeed ignorant not only of himself and the defiling scene around, but of the depths and constancy of Christ's love, Peter says to Him, 'Lord, dost thou wash my feet?' Granting that he could not know what was not yet revealed, but was it comely of him, was it reverent, to question what the Lord was doing? He may have thought it humility in himself, and honor to the Lord, to decline a service so menial at His hands. But Peter should never have forgotten that as Jesus never said a word, so He never did an act save worthy of God and demonstrative of the Father; and now more than ever were His words and ways an exhibition of Divine grace, as human evil set on by Satan, not only in those outside, but within the innermost circle of His own, called for increased distinctness and intensity.

"The truth is we need to learn from God how to honor Him, and learn to love *according to His mind*. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know; this, too, was Peter's mistake. He should have suspected his thoughts, and waited in all submissiveness on Him who, as many confessed that knew far less than he did, 'hath done all things well,' and was absolutely what He was saying, truth and love in the same blessed Person. The thoughts of God are never as ours, and saints slip into those of man, unless they are taught of God, by faith, in detail, too, as well as in the main; for we cannot, ought not, to trust ourselves in anything. God the Father will have the Son honored; and He is honored most when believed in and followed in His humiliation. Peter therefore was equally astray when he once

ventured to rebuke the Lord for speaking of His suffering and death, as now when he asks, ‘Dost thou wash my feet?’ (Bible Treasury).

“Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7).

We take it that the force of this is, briefly, as follows: Peter, this gives a picture, a sample, of the work which I shall perform for My people when I return to the Father. You do not see the significance of it now, but you will later, when the Holy Spirit has come. This was really a rebuke; but given tenderly. Peter ought to have known that in his Lord’s mysterious action there must be a purpose and a meaning in it worthy of His subjection to the Father and expressive of His love for His own. But like us, Peter was dull of discernment, slow to learn. Instead of gladly submitting to the most high Sovereign now performing the service of a slave, he plunges still further into worse error: “Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.” It was ignorance, yea, affection, which prompted him; but that did not excuse him. But how blessed that he had, and that we have, to do with One who bears with us in our dullness, and whose grace corrects our faults!

“Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet” (John 13:8).

We are all ready to censure Peter for not complying immediately with the Lord’s will when he knew it. But let us beware lest we be guilty of something more inexcusable than what we condemn in the apostle. Peter said he would not submit, yet he did, and that very quickly. Is it not sadly true of us, that we often say we will submit, and yet remain obstinately disobedient? As another has said, “We do not use Peter’s words, but we act them, which he durst not do. What, then, is the difference between us and him? Is it not just the difference between the two sons in the parable the one of whom said, ‘I go, and went not,’ the other of whom said, ‘I will not go, and afterwards repented and went?’ Which of these did the will of the father? Whether do you think Peter’s refractory expression, or our disobedient conduct, most deserving of censure?”

“Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (John 13:8).

“If I wash thee not”: we cannot wash our own feet; we are totally incompetent, not only for the saving of our souls, but also for the cleansing of our defiled walk. Nor has even the Word *apart from His living presence* any efficacy. Our feet must be in His hands, that is to say, we must completely yield to Him. It is not simply that we are to judge our ways according to our apprehension of the Word, and its requirements, but He must interpret and apply it, and for this we must be in His presence.

But what is meant by “no part with me?” Ah, here is the key that unlocks the chamber that conducts us to the very center of this incident. The word “part” has reference to fellowship. This is seen from our Lord’s words concerning the sister of Martha: “Mary hath chosen that good part” (Luke 10:42). The meaning of this word “part” is clearly defined again in 2 Corinthians 6:15, “What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”

What is the “washing”? “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” It is something which is needed by all believers. We say “believers,” for though all such have a portion in Christ, how often they fail to enjoy their “part” with Him. This “washing” is something more than confession of sin and the consequent forgiveness. It is the searching out of the Word, in the presence of God, of that which led me into evil; it is judging the root, of which sins are the fruit. Yet this “washing” must not be limited to God’s remedy for our declension and failure, rather should we view it as His gracious provision for our daily need, as a preservative and preventative against outward failures. We need to get alone with our Lord each day, opening our hearts to the light as the flower does its petals to the sun. Alas! that we have so little consciousness of our deep need for this, and that there is so little retirement and examination of our ways before God. To really place our feet for washing in the blessed hands of Christ is to come before Him in the attitude of the Psalmist:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

This is imperatively necessary if, while in such a defiling place as this world, we are to have a “part” with Him.

“Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:9).

Here, with characteristic impulsiveness, Peter rushes to the opposite extreme. As he hears that he could have no part with Christ except the Lord wash him, he is ready now to be washed all over. It was the passionate outburst of a warm-hearted if dull-minded disciple. Nevertheless, his ignorance voiced another error. He needed not now to be washed all over. The sinner does, but the saint does not. It is only our walk which needs cleansing.

“Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit” (John 13:10).

The distinction which our Lord here drew is of vital importance. “He that is washed,” better, “He who has been bathed,” that is, his whole person cleansed: “needeth not save to wash his feet,” then is he completely fit for communion with the Lord. There is a washing which believers have in Christ that needs not to be ever repeated. In Him there is to be found a cleansing which is never lost.

“By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are set apart” (Hebrews 10:14).

The believer has been purged from all sin, and made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light (Colossians 1:12). This purging needs no repetition. It is of first moment that the Christian should be dear upon this basic truth. The benefits which Christ confers upon the believer are never recalled; the efficacy of His precious blood abides upon him eternally. The moment a sinner, drawn by the Holy Spirit, comes to Christ, he is completely and finally cleansed. It is the apprehension of this which gives a firm rock for my feet to rest upon. It assures me that my hope is a stable

one; that my standing before God is immutable. It banishes doubt and uncertainty. It gives the heart and mind abiding peace to know that the benefits I have found in Christ are never to be recalled. I am brought out from under condemnation and placed in a state of everlasting acceptance. All this, and more, is included in the “bathing” which Christ has declared needs not to be repeated. I stand resplendent in the sight of God in all the Savior’s beauty and perfections. God looks upon believers not merely as forgiven, but as righteous: as truly as Christ was “made sin” for us, so have we been “made the righteousness of God in him.”

But side by side with this blessed truth of a bathing in Christ which needs not, and cannot be, repeated, stands another truth of great practical importance: “He that is bathed needeth not save to *wash his feet*, but is clean every whit.” There is a partial cleansing which the believer still needs, a daily washing to counteract the defiling effects of this world. Our daily contact with the evil all around causes the dust of defilement to settle upon us so that the mirror of our conscience is dimmed and the spiritual affections of our heart are dulled. We need to come afresh into the presence of Christ in order to learn what things really are, surrendering ourselves to His judgment in everything, and submitting to His purging Word. And who is there that, even for a single day, lives without sin? Who is there that does not need to daily pray, “Forgive us our trespasses”? Only One has ever walked here and been unsoiled by the dust of earth. He went as He came, unstained, uncontaminated. But who is there among His people that does not find much in his daily walk that makes him blush for shame! How much unfaithfulness we all have to deplore! Let me but compare my walk with Christ’s, and, unless I am blinded by conceit or deceived by Satan, I shall at once see that I come infinitely short of Him, and though “following his steps” (not “in his steps” as it is so often misquoted), it is but “afar off.” So often my acts are un-Christlike in character, so often my disposition and ways have “the flesh” stamped upon them. Even when evil does not break out in open forms, we are conscious of much hidden wrong, of sins of thought, of vile desires. How real, then, how deep, is our daily need of putting our feet in the hands of Christ for cleansing, that everything which hinders communion with Him may be removed, and that He can say of us, “Ye are clean”!

Is it not most significant that nothing is said in this chapter about the washing of the disciples' hands? Does it not point a leading contrast between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations? Under the law, where there was so much of doing, the priests were required to wash both their hands and their feet (Exodus 30:19); but under grace all has been done for us, and if the walk be right, the work will be acceptable!

“And ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean” (John 13:10, 11).

Christ here referred to Judas, though He did not name the Traitor. Judas must have known what He meant, but his conscience was seared as with a red-hot iron, and his heart was harder than the nether mill-stone. Even this touching exhibition of the condescending love and grace of Christ toward His disciples made no impression upon him. In less than one hour he went forth to sell his Master. In his case it was not a matter of losing spiritual life, but of manifesting the fact that he never had it. It was not a sheep of Christ becoming unclean, but of a dog returning to his vomit. Unspeakably solemn warning is this for those who, for a time, maintain an outward form of godliness, but are strangers to its inward power.

The following questions are to help the student prepare for the next lesson:—

1. What is the typical teaching of verse 12?
2. What is the important lesson on reverence in verse 13?
3. How are we to obey, verses 14, 15?
4. What is the thought suggested by verse 16 coming right after verses 14, 15?
5. What lessons are to be learned from verse 17?
6. What is the meaning of verse 19?

7. What blessed truth is expressed in verse 20?

JOHN 13:12-20

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE FOR US

The following is given as an Analysis of the second section of John 13: —

1. Christ's searching question, verse 12.
2. Christ's dignity and authority, verse 13.
3. Christ's example for us to follow, verses 14, 15.
4. Christ's warning against pride, verse 16.
5. Christ's approval of practical godliness, verse 17.
6. Christ's word about the Traitor, verses 18, 19.
7. Christ's encouragement to His servants, verse 20.

The opening portion of John 13 makes known the provision which Divine love has made for failure in our walk as we journey through this world- wilderness, and the means which are used to maintain us in fellowship with Christ. Its central design is stated by the Lord when He said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." The washing of our feet is imperative if we are to enjoy fellowship with the Holy One of God. "Grace" has given us a place in Christ, now "truth" operates to maintain our place with Christ. The effect of this ministry is stated in verse 10: "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit."

There is a double washing for the believer: the one of his entire person, the other of his feet; the former is once for all, the latter needs repeating daily. In both instances the "washing" is by the Word. Of the former we read,

“Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:10, 11).

And again,

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:5).

The “washing of regeneration” is not by blood, though it is inseparable from redemption by blood; and neither the one nor the other is ever repeated. Of the latter we read, “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it: That he might sanctify and cleanse it *with the washing of water* BY THE WORD. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). This same distinction was plainly marked in the Old Testament. When Aaron and his sons were consecrated, they were bathed all over (Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 8:6): but at the “laver” it was only their hands and feet which were daily cleansed (Exodus 30:19, 21).

In our last chapter we pointed out how that the “blood” is *Godward*, the “water” *saintwards*. The one is for legal expiation, the other for moral purification. Now, while both the “bathing” (Titus 3:5) and the “washing” of the saints’ feet is by the “water of the word,” there is a “cleansing” by blood — “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). But this “cleansing” is judicial, not experiential. The precious blood has not been applied to my heart, but it has cancelled my guilt. It has washed out the heavy and black account which was once against me on high. A “book of remembrance” is written before God (Malachi 3:16), but in it there is not left on record a single sin against any believer. Just as a damp sponge passed over a slate removes every chalk mark upon it, so the blood of Christ has blotted out every transgression which once was marked up against me. How deeply significant, then, to read that when the Roman soldier pierced the side of the dead Savior that

“forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34)! The blood for penal expiation, the water for moral purification. But mark the order: first, the “blood” to satisfy the demands of a holy God, then the “water” to meet the needs of His defiled people!

The distinction between the bathing of the entire body and the washing of the feet was aptly illustrated by the ancient custom of bathers. A person returning from the public baths, was, of course, dean, and needed not to be re-bathed. But wearing only sandals, which covered but part of the feet, he quickly needed the foot-bath to cleanse himself from the dust of travel encountered on his way from the baths to his home. Even to-day bathers in the sea are often seen going to their dressing-room with a pail of water to cleanse their soiled feet. This may be regarded as a parable of the spiritual life. Believers were bathed, completely cleansed, at the new birth. The “dressing-room” is Heaven, where we shall be robed in white raiment and garments of glory. But the pail of water is needed for our present use in connection with the daily walk.

In the second section of John 13 the Lord Jesus makes a practical application to the disciples of what He had just done for them. He intimates very plainly that, there was a spiritual meaning in His washing of their feet: Know ye not what I have done to you?” He tells them expressly that they ought to wash one another’s feet. If they shrank from such lowly service, He reminds them that none other than He, their Master and Lord, had done so much for them. He warns them that a theoretical knowledge of these things was of no value, unless it resulted in an actual carrying out of them: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” Then He recurs again to the fact that one of their number must be excepted. The presence of the traitor seems to have cast a shadow upon Him, but He tells them beforehand that the Scriptures had predicted his defection, so that when the betrayer delivered up their Master into the hands of His enemies the faith of the other disciples might not falter. Finally, He encourages them with the assurance that whosoever received His servants received Himself, yea, received the One who had sent Him. What dignity that gave to their calling!

“So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?” (John 13:12).

It is important to note that it was from the “supper” that the Lord arose when He girded Himself for the washing of His disciples’ feet; to it He now returns. Typically, it was Christ’s

“leaving the place of communion, as if this were interrupted, until His necessary work for them should renew it once more. He rises, therefore, from supper, and girded Himself for a fresh service. His sacrificial work is over, the shedding of blood is no more needed, but only the washing of water; and here also not the ‘bath of regeneration’ (Titus 3:5 Gk.), but simply as He pointed out to Peter, the washing of the feet. It is defilement contracted in the walk that is in question; and He puts Himself at their feet to wash them. As of old, Jehovah could say to Israel, ‘Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins’ (Isaiah 43:24), so may He still say to us; but His unchanging love is equal to all possible demands upon it. Notice here that all the disciples need it, and that thus He invites us all to-day to put our feet into His hands continually, that they may be cleansed according to His thought of what is cleanness, who alone is capable of judging according to the perfect standard of the Sanctuary of which He is indeed Himself the Light” (Numerical Bible).

“So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?” This is the sequel to what we read of in John 13:4. There He had lain aside His outer garments, here He resumes them. We believe that the former act had a double symbolical meaning. First, we are told, “he riseth from supper”: what supper is not here specified. Now, “supping” speaks of communion, therefore when we are told “he riseth from supper and laid aside his garments and took a towel and girded himself,” the first and deepest meaning would be, He left His place on high, where from all eternity He had been the Father’s delight, and with whom He had enjoyed perfect communion as the Son, but now divested Himself of His outward glory and took upon Him the form of a servant. But the “supper” is also the memorial of His death, hence the rising from it and the laying aside

of His garments would suggest the additional thought of His resurrection. Now, we believe that the Lord's action here in John 13:12 connects with and is the sequel to the first thing pointed out above. The putting on of His garments and the sitting down again would typify His return to the Father's presence, the resumption of His original glory (John 17:5), and His resting on high.

The Lord was about to explain (in part) and enforce what He had done unto the disciples. Before pondering what He had to say, let us first admire the calmness and deliberation which marked His actions. He quietly resumed His garments (there is no hint of the apostles offering to assist Him!) ere He seated Himself upon the couch or cushion, in His character of Teacher and Lord, thus giving His disciples time to recover from their surprise, collect their thoughts, and prepare themselves for what He was about to say. This gives additional meaning to His posture. Note that ere He began the "Sermon on the Mount" He first seated Himself (Matthew 5:1); so it was while seated in a ship (Matthew 13:2) He delivered the seven parables of the kingdom; so while He "sat upon the mount of Olives" (Matthew 24:3), He gave His longest prophetic announcement; so here He seated Himself before giving the great Paschal Discourse. The force of these notices is seen by comparing them with Luke 5:3: "He sat down and taught the people." Study the passages in John's Gospel where Jesus "stood," and then where He "walked" — see John 7:1 and our remarks.

"So after he had washed their feet," that is, the feet of each of the twelve. "We may learn an important lesson here as to dealing with offenders in the assembly. The Lord knew all about Judas, and all he was doing, but treated him as one of the apostles, till he displayed himself. There may be suspicion about some individual, that all is not right with him; but mere suspicion will not suffice to act on. The matter must come clearly out, ere it can be rightly dealt with. Were this remembered, cases of discipline, instead of causing trouble in the assembly through lack of common judgment, would be clear to all unprejudiced persons, and the judgments of the assembly be accepted as correct. Has it not at times been the reverse?" (Mr. C. E. Stuart).

“He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?” Very searching was this. In washing the feet of His disciples He had not only displayed a marvellous humility, which He would have them take to heart, but He had eared for them in holy love. Not only had He saved them, but He was concerned about their fellowship with Himself, and for this, strict attention must be paid to the walk. For when the feet are soiled, the dust of this world must be removed. In His question the Lord illustrates how that it is His way to teach us afterwards the good which He has already done for us; as we grow up in Him in the truth, we are enabled to enter into and appreciate more deeply what at first we understood but slightly. The same grace which brought salvation teaches us, that

“denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:11, 12).

Deeply humbling is it to discover how little we understood the love and the grace which *had been* acting on our behalf.

“Know ye what I have done to you?” “This is a question which we should often put to ourselves respecting what our Lord says, and what He does to us. None of His works are ‘the unfruitful works of darkness.’ They are all full of meaning. They are all intended to serve a purpose, and a good one; and it is of importance, in most cases, that we should be aware of it. If we look at His work in the light of His Word, and seek the guidance of His good Spirit, we shall generally be able to discern His wise and benign purpose, even in dispensations at first sight very strange and mysterious. He only can explain His intentions, and He will not suffer His humble, enquiring disciples to remain ignorant of them, if it be for their real benefit to know them” (Dr. John Brown).

“Ye call me Master and Lord: and)re say well; for so I am” (John 13:13).

Beautifully does this bring out the fact that the Lord Jesus is “full of grace and truth.” Though He had lust fulfilled for His disciples the most menial office of a slave, yet He had not abandoned the place of authority and supremacy. He reminds them that He is still their

“Master and Lord,” and that, by their own confession, for the word “call” here signifies address — “Ye address Me as Master and Lord.” In thus owning the incarnate Son of God they “did well.” Alas! that so many of His professing followers now treat Him with so much less respect than that which He here commended in the Twelve. Alas! that so many who owe their all for time and eternity to that peerless One who was “God manifest in flesh,” speak of Him simply as “Jesus.” Jesus is the Lord of glory, and surely it is due the dignity and majesty of His person that this should be recognized and owned, even in our very references to Him. We do not expect that those who despise and reject Him should speak of Him in any more exalting terms than “The Nazarene,” or “Jesus”; but those who have been, by amazing grace, given “an understanding, that we may know him that is true” (1 John 5:20) ought gladly to confess Him as “The Lord Jesus Christ”!

“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” Surely this is sufficient for any humble-minded Christian. If our blessed Redeemer says we “say well” when we address Him as “Master and Lord,” how can we afford to speak of Him in terms upon which His approval is not stamped? Never once do we find the apostles addressing Him as “Jesus” while He was with them on earth. When He exhorted them to make request of Him for an increase of laborers He bade them, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest” (Matthew 9:38). When He sent forth the disciples to secure the ass on which He was to ride into Jerusalem, He ordered them to say, “The Lord hath need of him” (Luke 19:31). When He required the use of the upper room, it was

“The Lord saith, My time is at hand; I will therefore keep the passover at thy house” (Matthew 26:18).

Above, we have said that the apostles never once addressed our Lord simply as “Jesus.” Mark, now, *how they did refer* to the Blessed One.

“And Peter answered him and said, LORD, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water” (Matthew 14:28).

“And when his disciples James and John, saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?” (Luke 9:54).

“And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:22).

“And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed” (Luke 24:33, 34).

“Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest” (John 14:5).

“That disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord” (John 21:7).

It may be objected that the Gospel narratives commonly refer to the Lord as “Jesus.” It was Jesus who was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. It was Jesus who was moved with compassion as He beheld the sufferings and sorrows of humanity. It was Jesus who taught the people, etc. This is true, and the explanation is not far to seek. It was the *Holy Spirit of God* who, through the pens of the Evangelists, thus referred to Him, and this makes all the difference. What would be thought of one of the subjects of king George referring to the reigning monarch of Great Britain and saying, “I saw George pass through the city this morning”? If, then, it would be utterly incongruous for one of his subjects to speak thus of the king of England, how much more so is it to refer to the *King of kings simply as Jesus! But now, king George’s wife might refer to and speak of her husband as “George” with perfect propriety. Thus it is that the Holy Spirit refers to our Lord by His personal name in the Gospel narratives.*

Our modern hymns are largely responsible for the dishonor that is now so generally cast upon that “worthy name” (James 2:7), and we cannot but raise our voice in indignant protest against much of the trash (for such it is) that masquerades under the name of “hymns” and religious “songs.” It is sad and shocking to hear Christians sing

“There’s not a friend like the lowly Jesus.” There is no “lowly Jesus” to-day. The One who once passed through unparalleled humiliation has been “made both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), and is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. If the earnest student will turn to the four Gospels and note how different ones addressed the Son of God he will be well repaid. The enemies of Christ constantly referred to Him as Jesus (Matthew 26:71, etc.), and so did the demons (Mark 1:23, 24). Let us pray God to deliver us from this flippant, careless, and irreverent manner of speaking of His Blessed Son. Let us gladly own our Savior as “Lord” during the time of His rejection by the world. Let us remember His own words:

“All should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23).

This is no trivial or trifling matter, for it stands written,

“By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet” (verse 14).

“Master” means teacher. The “teacher” is believed; the “Lord” is obeyed. Here Christ proceeded to enforce and apply what He had just done unto them. The connection is obvious, not only with what precedes, but also with that which follows. If the Greatest could minister to the least, how much more should the lesser minister to his equal! If the Superior waited upon His admitted inferiors, much less should that inferior wait upon his fellows. And mark the premise from which He draws this conclusion. He did not say, “I am your teacher and Lord,” but “Ye call me teacher and Lord.” It was from the confession of their own lips that He now proceeds to instruct them. The order in which these titles occur is significant. First, these disciples had heard Christ as “teacher,” and later they had come to know Him as their “Lord.” But now Christ reverses the order: “If I then, your Lord and teacher.” Why is this? Because this is the experimental order now. We must surrender to Him as “Lord,”

bowing to His authority, submitting to His yoke, before He will teach us!

“Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).

So they ought, and why had they not already done so? The supper-room here was already supplied with water, pail, and towel. Why had not they used them? Luke 22:24 tells us,

“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”

This occurred, be it noted, at this very time. It was then that the Savior shamed them by saying,

“For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as He that serveth” (Luke 22:27).

“Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.” Let us consider the application of these words to ourselves:

“In discovering any stain that may be resting on the feet of our brethren, we are not to blind ourselves to its presence, or to hide from ourselves its character by calling evil good. If we are to be honest and faithful in respect of ourselves, we shall be equally honest and truthful in respect of others. On the other hand, we have to beware of looking on the sins and failures of our brethren with Pharisaic complacency and cold indifference. What condition is more awful than that one who finds his joy in searching out iniquities, and exulting in exposing and magnifying them when discovered? Such, indeed, have reason to remember that with whatsoever judgment they judge, they shall be judged; and that the measure they mete out to others shall be meted out to themselves again. How continually should we remind ourselves that the love of the same gracious Lord that is toward us is toward our brethren likewise, and that one of our chief privileges is the title to appeal to it and intercede on their behalf, asking that sins, even of deepest dye, may be removed; and that the deserved results of chastisement and sorrow might be averted. So we should not be as those who ‘bite and

devour one another,’ but be as those who ‘wash one another’s feet’” (Mr. B. W. Newton).

Yes, a most needful word is this for us all, ever ready as we are to lift up the skirts of a brother and say, “See how soiled his feet are”! But much exercise of soul, much judging of ourselves, is needed for such lowly work as this. I have to get down to my brother’s feet if I am to wash them! That means that “the flesh” in me must be subdued. Let us not forget that searching word in Galatians 6:1, 2:

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

I must be emptied of all sense of self-superiority before I can restore one who is “out of the way.” It is the love of Christ which must constrain me as I seek to be of help to one of those for whom He died. It is as “dear children” (Ephesians 5:1) that we are called upon to be “imitators of God”! Very wonderful and blessed is what is here before us: when the Lord appoints on earth a witness of His ways in Heaven, He tells us to wash one another’s feet, and to love one another (John 13:34). There must be a patient forbearing with our brother’s faults, a faithful but tender applying of the Word to his particular case, and an earnest and daily intercession for him: these are the main things included in this figure of “washing.” But let us not stop short at the “washing”: there must be the “drying,” too! The service when done must be regarded as a service of the Fast. The failure which called for it, is now removed, and therefore is to be buried in the depths of oblivion. It ought never to be cast against the individual in the future.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

It is well known that not a few have regarded this as a command from Christ for His followers now to practice literal foot-washing, yea, some have exalted it into a “Church ordinance.” While we cannot but respect and admire their desire to obey Christ, especially in a day when laxity and self-pleasing is so rife, yet we are fully

satisfied that they have mistaken our Lord's meaning here. Surely to insist upon literal foot-washing from this verse is to miss the meaning as well as the spirit of the whole passage. It is not with literal water (any more than the "water" is literal in John 3:5; 4:14; 7:38) that the Lord would have us wash one another. It is the Word (of which "water" is the emblem) He would have us apply to our fellow- disciples' walk. This should not need arguing, but for the benefit of those who think that the Lord here instituted an ordinance which He would have practiced today, we would ask them to please weigh carefully the following points:

That that which the Lord Jesus here did to His disciples looked beyond the literal act to its deep symbolic significance is clear from these facts:

First, the Lord's word to Peter, "What I do thou *knowest not* now" (John 13:7): certainly Peter knew that his feet had been literally washed!

Second, the further words of Christ to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8): certainly there are multitudes of believers that have a part with Christ who have never practiced foot- washing as a religious ordinance.

Third, His words, "Ye are clean, but not all" (John 13:10): Judas could never have been thus excepted if only literal foot-washing was here in view.

Fourth, His question, "Know ye what I have done to you?" clearly intimates that the Lord's act in washing the feet of the disciples had a profound spiritual meaning.

Fifth, note that here in John 13:15 the Lord does not say "Ye should do what I have done unto you," but "as I have done to you!" Add to these considerations the fact that this incident is found in John's Gospel, which is, pre-eminently, the one which treats of spiritual relationships under various figures — bread, water, Shepherd and sheep, vine and the branches, etc., and surely all difficulty disappears.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” We take it that the force of these words of Christ is this: I have just shown you how spiritual love operates: it ever seeks the good of its objects, and esteems no service too lowly to secure that good. It reminds us very much of the Lord’s words following His matchless picture of the Good Samaritan who had compassion on the wounded traveler, dismounting, binding up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, setting him on His own beast, bringing him to the inn and taking care of him — “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:33-37). When real love is in exercise it will perform with readiness difficult, despised, and even loathsome offices. There are some services which are even more menial and repulsive than the washing of feet, yet, on occasion, the service of love may call for them. It should hardly be necessary to add, that Christians living in Oriental lands, where sandals are worn, should be ready to wash literally the feet of a weary brother, not simply as an act of courtesy, but as a service of love.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” We believe that one thing included in this comparative “as” is that it looks back to a detail in John 13:4 which is usually overlooked: it was *as girded with a towel* that Christ washed the feet of His disciples, and that which was signified by the “towel” applies to us. The “towel” was that with which Christ was girded: it bespoke the servant’s attitude. Then the Lord used that with which He was girded upon their feet: emblematically, this was applying to them the humility which marked Him. Mr. Darby tells us that it was a linen towel which was employed, and in the New Testament “linen” signifies “the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8, R.V.). It was His own spotless love which fitted Him to approach His disciples and apply the Word to them. How searching is all of this for us! If we would imitate Him in this labor of love we must ourselves be clothed with humility, we must employ nothing but the Word, and we must have on the linen towel of practical righteousness to dry with.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (John 13:16).

The Lord acts as His own interpreter. He here gives plain intimation of the meaning of His symbolic action. He draws an important lesson from what He had just done, the more needful because He was about to withdraw from them. It would fare ill with His people if their leaders were found disputing among themselves, devouring one another. Surrounded as they were by Judaism and Paganism, lambs in the midst of wolves, much depended upon their humility and mutual helpfulness. Much needed by every Christian, and especially by those engaged in Christian service, is that word of Christ's, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." That this is of more than ordinary importance is evidenced by the solemn and emphatic "Verily, verily" with which the Lord prefaced it. Moreover, the fact that at a later point in this same discourse the Lord said to His apostles,

["Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord" \(John 15:20\),](#)

shows that it is one which is specially needed by his ambassadors. How many a dark page of "Church History" had never been written if the ministers of Christ had heeded this admonition! How vain the pretensions of those who have lorded it over God's heritage in the light of this searching word! Sad indeed have been the manifestations of Nicolaitanism in every age. Even before the last of the apostles left this world he had to say, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre- eminence among them, receiveth us not" (3 John 9); and the same spirit is far from being dead today.

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). If ye know what "things"?

First, the vital need of placing our feet in the hands of Christ for cleansing (John 13:8).

Second, the owning of Christ as “Master and Lord” (John 13:13). **Third**, the need of washing one another’s feet (John 13:14). **Fourth**, the performing of this ministry as Christ performed it — in lowly love (John 13:15). Now, said our Savior, If ye know “these things,” happy or blessed are ye if ye do them. A mere speculative knowledge of such things is of no value. An intellectual apprehension, without the embodiment of them in our daily lives, is worse than useless. It is both significant and solemn to note that the one Christ termed a wise man that built his house upon the rock is, “Whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them” (Matthew 7:24). No one knows more truth than the Devil, and yet none works more evil!

“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

“It has been well remarked that our Lord does not say, ‘Happy are ye if these things be done to you,’ but ‘Happy are ye if ye do them.’ We are apt to suppose that we should be happy if men loved us, and were ready on every occasion to serve us. But, in the judgment of Christ, it would more conduce to our happiness that our hearts were like His, full of love to all our brethren, and our hands like His, ever ready to perform to them even the humblest offices of kindness. We often make ourselves unhappy by thinking that we are not treated with the deference and kindness to which we consider ourselves entitled. If we would be really happy, we must think more of others and less of ourselves. True happiness dwells within; and one of its leading elements is the disinterested self-sacrificing love which made the bosom of Jesus its constant dwelling-place” (Dr. John Brown).

“I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen” (John 13:18).

The immediate reference is to what the Lord had said in the previous verse. Just as in John 13:10 He had said to the twelve, “Ye are dean,” and then added, “but not all,” so after saying, “Happy are ye if ye do them,” He at once says, “I speak not of you all.” Faithfulness required Him to make an exception. There was no happiness for Judas; before him lay “the blackness of darkness for ever.” When Christ said, “I know whom I have chosen” it is evident

that He was not speaking of election to salvation, but to the apostolate. Where *eternal election* is in view the Scriptures uniformly ascribe it to God the Father. But where it is a question of ministry or service, in the New Testament, the choice and the call usually proceed from the Lord Jesus — see Matthew 9:30; Matthew 20:1; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:24; Acts 26:16; Ephesians 4:11, etc. His words here in John 13:18 are parallel with those in John 6:70: “Have not I chosen you twelve? and one of you is a devil?”

“But that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me” (John 13:18).

As to why the Lord Jesus chose Judas to be one of the twelve, see our remarks on John 6:70, 71. Very remarkable is this statement here in the light of the context. Christ had washed the feet of the very one whose heel was raised against Himself! Into what depths of humiliation did the Son of God deign to descend! He now foretells the defection of Judas, and announces that this was but the fulfillment of the prophetic Word. The reference is to the 41st Psalm, which exposes the awful character of the betrayer; the 109th Psalm makes known the outcome of his treachery. Christ then had suffered the traitor to remain with Him that the Scriptures might be fulfilled; but as soon as the “sop” had been given to Him, Christ would say, “That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27).

“How wondrous the patience which, knowing all from the beginning, bore all to the end, without a frown or sign of shrinking from the traitor! But so much the more withering must be the sentence of judgment when it comes from His lips, the Lord of glory, the hated and despised of men” (Mr. W. Kelly).

“He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me.” The local reference in Psalm 41 is to what David suffered at the hands of Ahithophel, but that was but a foreshadowing and type of what the Savior suffered from Judas. In now quoting from this prophetic Psalm the Lord Jesus evidenced His Divine knowledge of what lay before Him, and testified to the inestimable value of the Scriptures. Nothing proves more conclusively their Divine origin than the accurate and literal fulfillment of their prophecies. Predictions were made of events which were not to transpire till

hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years afterwards, minute details are furnished, and the specific accomplishment of them can only be accounted for on the one ground that He who knows the end from the beginning was their Author.

The wording of this prophecy about Judas is very striking.

“His heel! the most contemptible rejection possible: was it not such to sell the Lord of glory for the price of a slave? It was as if he would inflict upon Christ the Serpent’s predicted wound (Genesis 3:15)? (F. W. Grant.)

“Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am” (John 13:19).

What care did He evince for His own! What blessed proof was this of His loving them “unto the end”! Christ would here assure the disciples that everything which befell Him, even that which was most staggering to faith, was but the strict fulfillment of what had long ago been recorded. He was the great One typified and prophesied throughout the Old Testament, and He now assures the apostles of Judas’ perfidy before he went forth to bargain with the priests, that they might know He had not trusted in him, nor had He been deceived by him, as had David by Ahithophel! Thus, instead of the apostles being stumbled by the apostasy of one of their number, it should strengthen their faith in every written word of God to know that that very Word had long before announced what they were on the eve of witnessing. Moreover, their faith in Christ should be strengthened, too. By calling their attention to the fulfillment of Psalm 41 He showed them that He was the Person there marked out; that He was a true Prophet, announcing the certain accomplishment of David’s prediction before it came to pass; and that He was the great “I am” who “searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men,” being fully acquainted with their secret thoughts and most carefully concealed designs.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (John 13:20).

At first sight there appears to be no connection between this verse and the ones preceding, yet a little thought will soon discover the link between them. The Lord had been exhorting His disciples to follow the example which He had given, assuring them they would be happy if they did so.

Then He announced the apostasy of Judas. Now He informs them that their vocation was by no means affected by the defection of the betrayer.

“The whole circle of the apostles seemed to be disorganized by the treachery of Judas; and therefore the Lord confirms the faithful in their election, and that very fittingly by a repetition of that earlier promise (Matthew 10:42) on which all depended” (Stier).

It was the Lord comforting His own and most graciously establishing their hearts by turning their attention away from the traitor to their Master, who abides forever the same, as does the Father.

Judas had been one of the twelve whom the Lord had sent forth to preach the Gospel and to work miraculous signs in His name (Matthew 10). Would then all that he had done as an apostle be discredited, when his real character became known? This important question here receives answer from our Lord: “He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me.” The Lord knew how apt His people are to despise the work done if the worker proves to be unworthy; therefore does He teach us to look beyond the instrument to the One who sent him. The Lord has the right to appoint whom He pleases. If, then, the message is from God’s Word, reject it not because the messenger proves a fraud. What matters it to me whether the postman be black or white, pleasant or unpleasant, so long as he hands me the right letter?

“He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” There is another important principle here. The apostles were the ambassadors of the Lord, and in the person of an ambassador the sovereign himself is received or set at naught. As His ambassadors, how circumspectly ought each of His servants to walk! And as His ambassadors, how dutiful and

respectful in its reception should the Church be of them! As He was sent from the Father, so they were sent from Him. By this gracious analogy He arms them with authority and inspires them with courage. Thus the Lord fully identifies them with Himself.

The following questions need studying to prepare for our next lesson: —

1. What three things are dearly implied in verse 22?
2. Why did not Peter ask the Lord directly, verse 24?
3. Why did Jesus say to Judas, verse 27?
4. In how many respects was the Son of man glorified at the Cross, verse 31?
5. What attributes of God were glorified at the Cross, verse 31?
6. In what sense was it a “new commandment,” verse 34?
7. What is the meaning of verse 36?

JOHN 13:21-38

CHRIST'S WARNINGS

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The betrayer and his identification, verses 21-26.
2. The departure of Judas and the thoughts of the Eleven, verses 27-30.
3. A threefold glorification, verses 31-32.
4. The new commandment, verse 34.
5. The badge of Christian discipleship, verse 35.
6. Peter's questions, verses 36-37.
7. Christ's warning prediction, verse 38.

We have entitled this chapter Christ's Warnings: it scarcely covers everything in the passage, yet it emphasizes that which is most prominent in it. At the beginning of our present section Christ warns Judas; at the close, He warns Peter. In between, there are some gracious and tender instructions for the beloved disciples, and these too partake very largely of the nature of warnings. He warns them against misinterpreting the nature of His death, John 13:31-32. He warns them of His approaching departure, John 13:33. He warns them of their need of a commandment that they should "love one another", John 13:34. He warns them that only by the exercise of *love* toward each other would it be made manifest that they were His disciples, John 13:35.

Our passage opens with a solemn word identifying the Savior's betrayer. This betrayer had been plainly announced in Old Testament prophecy:

“He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9).

“A man’s foes,” said the Lord, “are they of his own household” (Matthew 10:36), and fearfully was this verified in His own case. A “familiar friend” became a *familiar fiend*. How this exposes the error of those who suppose that all that fallen man needs is example and instruction. Judas enjoyed both, yet was not his evil heart moved. For three years had he been not only in the closest possible contact, but in the nearest intimacy with the Savior. His had been a favored place in the innermost circle of the Twelve. Not only had he listened to the daily preaching of Christ as He taught the people, not only had he witnessed most, at least, of His wondrous miracles, but he had also gazed upon the perfections of Christ in His private life. And yet, after all this, Judas was unmoved and unchanged. Nothing could more forcefully demonstrate our Lord’s utterance, “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”! So near to Christ, yet unsaved! What a challenge for every heart!

The case of Peter points a most solemn warning of quite another character. Outwardly Judas posed as a disciple of Christ; inwardly Simon was a believer in Him. The one exhibits the sin and madness of hypocrisy; the other the danger and sad results of self-confidence. It was to Peter that the Lord said, “The spirit (the new nature) indeed is willing, but the flesh (the natural man) is weak.” But this utterance was never intended as an excuse, behind which we might take refuge when we fail and fall; but was given as a lasting warning to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). The Holy Spirit has faithfully recorded the sad defection of one who was especially dear to the heart of the Savior, that all Christians who follow Him might seek grace from God to avoid the snare into which he fell.

From a human view, Peter failed at his strongest point. By nature he was bold and courageous. Probably there was not a stouter heart among the apostles. He quailed not before the marvellous scene on the Mount of Transfiguration. He it was who stepped out of the ship and started to walk across the waves to Christ. And he it was who drew his sword in the Garden, and smote the high priest’s servant as the officers arrested his beloved Master. No coward was Peter. And

yet he trembled in the presence of a maid, and when taxed with being a disciple of Christ, denied it with an oath! How is this to be explained?

Only on the ground that in order to teach him and us the all-important lesson, that if left to ourselves, the strongest is as weak as water. It is in conscious weakness that our strength lies (2 Corinthians 12:10). Peter was fully assured that though all should be offended yet would not he (Mark 14:29). And, without a doubt, he fully meant what he said. But he did not know himself; he had not learned, experientially, the exceeding deceitfulness of the human heart; he knew not as yet that without the upholding power and sustaining grace of the Lord he could do nothing (John 15:5). O that we might learn from him.

“We fancy sometimes, like Peter, that there are some things we could not possibly do. We look pityingly upon others who fall, and plume ourselves in the thought that at any rate we should not have done so. We know nothing at all. The seeds of every sin are latent in our hearts, even when renewed, and they only need occasion, or carelessness, or the withdrawal of God’s grace for a season, to put forth an abundant crop. Like Peter, we think we can do wonders for Christ, and like Peter, we learn by bitter experience that we have no might and power at all. A humble sense of our own innate weakness, a constant dependency on the Strong for strength, a daily prayer to be held up, because we cannot hold up ourselves — these are the true secrets of safety” (Bishop Ryle).

Surely the outstanding lesson for us in connection with the fall of Peter is this:

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

“When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me” (John 13:21).

The Lord had been ministering to His disciples, teaching and comforting them. He had spoken of their future, but in the midst of

these anticipations a dark shadow falls upon Him, troubling Him. Already had He hinted at it, now He proceeds to testify more plainly to the traitor who was among the Twelve. The Lord was “troubled in spirit.” It is remarkable that this is mentioned most frequently by the very Evangelist whose special design it was to portray the Lord Jesus as God manifest in flesh — cf. John 11:33, 38; 12:27. These statements prove the reality of His humanity, showing that He had a real human soul as well as body. They also prove that it is no infirmity or imperfection to be troubled by the presence of evil. Christ was no stoic: He felt keenly all that was contrary to God. Really, none was so truly and so completely sensitive as He. He was the Man of sorrows, and it is just because He has Himself passed through this scene,

suffering within at every step of the way, that He is able to be touched with “the feeling of our infirmities.”

“When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” It is well to remind ourselves that what the Lord Jesus endured upon the Cross was but the climax and completion of His sufferings. Throughout His life He suffered at the hands of Satan, His enemies, and His friends. He felt acutely the unbelief and hostility of the scribes and Pharisees. His tearful lament over Jerusalem evidences the depths of His anguish over Israel’s rejection. Here it was the bitter sorrow of seeing one of the apostles deliberately becoming an apostate. Nothing wounds more deeply than ingratitude; and that one, who had been a constant companion with Him for three years, should now raise his heel against Him, was a sore trial. If Judas was unmoved, the Lord was not. Seeing no beauty in Christ after all he had heard and witnessed during years of closest contact with Him, unaffected by His marvellous grace to sinners, caring only for paltry gain, dominated by self, and the rebuke he had received in Simon’s house rankling within, he turned against his Master and arranged to sell Him to His enemies. No wonder the Lord was “troubled” as He thought of such deceit, treachery, and cupidity. He had said “Ye are clean, but not all,” and still Judas retained his place, and gave no sign of retiring.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” There is a melancholy emphasis on the pronoun here: one of you at the table with Me; one of you whose feet I have just washed; one of you who have had the high honor of being My first ambassadors, shall take advantage of your intimacy with Me and knowledge of My ways, to guide the enemy to My place of retirement, and deliver Me into the hands of those who seek My life. He was “troubled” by the enormity of the crime, and no doubt, too, over the awful doom which lay before Judas.

How deeply “troubled” the Savior was we may learn from His words in Psalm 55: “Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets. For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together and walked unto the house of God in company” (verses 11-14). How vividly this brings out before us the grief with which the Man of sorrows was “acquainted”! How deeply His holy soul was stirred, we may learn from the solemn but righteous imprecations which He called down upon the base ingrate in Psalm 109:

“Let his days be few; and let another take his office; let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow” (verses 8, 9), etc.

“Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake” (John 13:22).

Three things are made very evident by this verse: one thing about the disciples, one about Judas, and one about the Lord Himself.

First, it is plain that what Christ had said in John 13:18 had made no impression upon the Eleven. And this was the most natural. No doubt their minds were so occupied with what the Savior had just done for them that they had scarcely recovered from their surprise. They were so impressed by His amazing condescension that His statement “He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me” fell upon ears that heeded Him not. But now He speaks

more plainly and directly, and they exchanged puzzled glances with each other, wondering which of them it was to whom He had referred.

Second, the fact that “The disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake” is proof positive that Judas had succeeded in concealing his turpitude from his fellows. His outward conduct had given the other apostles no occasion to suspect him. To what lengths cannot hypocrisy go! Matthew tells us that when Christ announced to the Twelve that one of them should betray Him,

“They were exceedingly sorrowful, and began every one of them to say, Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:22),

upon which Matthew Henry says:

“They are to be commended for their charity, in that they are more jealous of themselves than of each other. It is the law of charity to hope the best, because we assuredly know, therefore we may justly expect, more evil of ourselves than of our brethren. They are also to be commended for their acquiescence in what Christ said. They trusted, as we would do well to do, more to His words, than to their own hearts, and therefore do not say, ‘It is not — it cannot be— I’; but ‘Lord, is it I?’ See if there be such a way of wickedness, such a root of bitterness in me, and discover it to me, that I may pluck up the root, and stop up that way.”

Boldly playing his role of duplicity to the last, Judas dares to ask, “Master, is it I?” (Matthew 26:25) — a clear proof, though, that he was unsaved, for no man can say *Lord* Jesus but by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Third, the fact that the apostles were perplexed, wondering to whom the Lord had referred, brings out most blessedly the infinite patience with which Christ had borne with the son of perdition. Throughout His ministerial life He must have treated Judas with the same condescending grace, gentleness, kindness, as the Eleven. He could not have exhibited any aversion against him, or the others would have noticed it, and known now of whom He spake. How this tells of the perfections of our Savior! His kindness ill-requited, His

favours unappreciated, His holy soul loathing such a sink of iniquity so near to Him — yet He bowed to the sovereign will and authoritative word of the Father, and patiently bore this trial.

“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23).

Here is one of those striking contrasts in which this Gospel abounds, and a most blessed one it is. Our attention is diverted for a moment from the base treachery and horrible hatred of Judas to one whom Christ had attracted, whose heart had been won by His beauty, and who now affectionately reposed on the Savior’s breast. It is blessed, and an evident mark of the Holy Spirit’s guidance to see how John here refers to himself. It was not “one who loved Jesus,” though truly he did; but “one of his disciples whom Jesus loved.” Nor does he mention his own name — love never advertises itself.

“Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake” (John 13:24).

This is one of many statements in the New Testament which effectually disposes of the Roman Catholic figment that Peter was the pope of the apostolate. As one of the older Protestant writers well said, “So far from Peter having any primacy among the apostles, he here uses the intercession of John.” There was no doubt a moral reason why Peter put his question through John, instead of asking it direct. Is it not clear from John 13:6, 8, 37 that Peter’s state of soul was not altogether right before God? And, does not his fearful fall, that very evening, supply still further proof? Matthew tells us that after the arrest of the Savior, Peter “followed him afar off unto the high priests’ palace” (Matthew 26:38), and a sense of distance began to make itself felt in Peter’s soul even here — there was a measure of reserve between himself and the Lord.

“He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?” (John 13:25).

The contrast here between John and Peter is very noticeable. John was close to the Lord: affection had drawn him there. He was so near to Christ and his spirit so unclouded, he could look up into the

face of the Savior and ask Him any question. This is the blessed portion and privilege of every Christian. Alas! that so many are like Peter on this occasion — ready to turn to a brother, rather than to the Lord Himself. Why is it that when the average Christian meets with some difficulty in his reading of the Word, or some problem in his spiritual life, he says, “I will ask or write brother so-and-so?” Why not enjoy the blessed privilege of referring directly to the Lord Jesus? It is a question of intimacy with Him, and that is very searching. While there is any self-confidence, as in Peter’s ease, or any known hindrance in my spiritual life, that at once places me at a moral distance from Christ. But is it not blessed to see that, at the end, Peter came to the same place which John is seen occupying here?

“And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (John 21:17).

He threw open his heart. What was it but saying, Lord, there was a time when I would not ask You questions, but now I can invite You to look into my heart! Let us then come before Him now, asking Him to search our hearts and put His finger on anything that hinders us from having direct access to Him in everything. Let us ever be on the watch that we do not enjoy a greater intimacy with some brother than with the Lord Himself.

“Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it” (John 13:26).

It seems clear from what follows that these words of Christ must have been whispered to John or spoken in such a low tone that the other disciples were unable to catch them. At last the Lord Jesus identified the betrayer. The mask of hypocrisy which he had worn had thoroughly deceived the apostles, but He with whom “all things are naked and open” cannot be imposed upon. While man looked on the outward appearance, He looks upon the heart; so He now unmask the false disciple, and shows him to be what He always knew, though none else suspected that he was — a traitor.

“And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon” (John 13:26).

The sign given by Christ to identify the betrayer was suggestive and solemn. "It was a mark of honor for the host to give a Portion to one of the guests. The Lord had appealed to the conscience of Judas in John 13:21, now He appeals to his heart" (Companion Bible). The "sop" was, most probably, a piece of unleavened bread, now dipped in the sauce prepared for the eating of the paschal lamb. That Judas accepted it shows the unthinkable lengths to which he carried his hypocrisy. Determined as he was to perpetrate the foulest treachery, yet he hereby renews his pledge of friendship. It makes us think of the "Hail Master" and the "kiss" when he was in the act of delivering Him to His enemies. But how wonderful, how blessed, the meekness of our Lord; surely none but He could have acted thus. In complete command of Himself, no sign of ill-will toward the one who had already taken counsel with the chief priests, He gives him the sop. Closely did this correspond with the prophetic declaration already referred to, "He that eateth with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

["And after the sop Satan entered into him" \(John 13:27\).](#)

The receiving of the sop, expressive of friendship, ought to have broken him down in an agony of repentance; but it did not. He was like those mentioned in Hebrews 6:8: ground on which the rain came oft, but which instead of bringing forth herbs, bore only thorns and briars, whose end is to be burned. It is remarkable to note that not until now are we told of Satan's entrance into him. Equally striking is it to observe that as soon as he had received the "sop" the Enemy took full possession of his only too willing victim.

["Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly" \(John 13:27\).](#)

Fearful words were these. Space for repentance had now passed forever. His doom was sealed. But what else lay behind these words of Christ? We believe it was the formal announcement of the Savior surrendering Himself to the Father's will. It was as though He said, I am ready to be led as a lamb to the slaughter; go, Judas, and do that which you are so anxious to do; I will not withstand thee! But again; may we not regard this word of Christ as in one sense parallel with the one He had addressed to the Devil at the close of the great

temptation. There was a needs-be for Him to be tempted of the Devil for forty days; but when that needs-be was fully met, He said, "Get thee hence, Satan" (Matthew 4:10). So, in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, it was necessary for there to be a Judas in the apostolate, so that he could eat with Christ. But now that prophecy had been accomplished, now that the traitor's heel had been lifted against his Master, Christ says, "Depart"! Moreover, was not this the formal dismissal of Judas from the Lord's service? Christ had called him to a place in the apostolate: for three years He had used him: now He announces his discharge; later, another shall "take his bishoprick." Finally, we believe it can be established from the other Gospels that it was right after this that the Lord instituted His own "supper" as a lasting memorial of Himself; but before doing so He first banishes the traitor, for that "supper" is for His own only.

["Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him" \(John 13:28\).](#)

At this point John, at least, and most probably Peter also, knew who it was who should betray their beloved Master, yet in the light of this verse it is evident that none of them suspected that the act of treachery was so soon to be perpetrated. None of them perceived the awfulness of the issues then pending.

["For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor" \(John 13:29\).](#)

"These thoughts of the disciples were mistaken ones, but they do them no discredit. They are excusable and even praiseworthy. They indicate the operation of the charity which thinketh no evil, but is ever disposed to put on words and actions the most favorable construction they will reasonably admit. The mistakes of charity are wiser and better than the surmises of censoriousness, even when they turn out to be according to the truth. Judas had all along been a bad man; but hitherto he had given no such evidence of his unprincipled character as would have warned his fellow-disciples to entertain suspicions of him. Knowing that he was the treasurer and steward of this little society, they supposed that the words of the

Master might refer to his speedily obtaining something which would be requisite for the feast of the passover, which lasted for a week; that he should immediately give some alms to the poor.

“It is plain from these words that our Lord and His disciples were in the habit of giving, especially at the time of the great festivals, out of their scanty pittance, something to those more destitute than themselves. Their ‘deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality’: and by His example He has taught us not merely that it is the duty of those who may have but little to spare to give of that little to those who have still less, but that religious observances are gracefully connected with deeds of mercy and alms-giving. He joined humility with piety in His practice as well as in His doctrine; and in this He hath left us an example that we should follow His steps” (Dr. John Brown).

To these remarks we may add that the fact the disciples had supposed Judas had gone to purchase things for “the feast” is clear proof that the Lord did not work miracles in order to procure the food needed by Himself and His apostles. It also shows that they did not beg, but managed their temporal affairs with prudence and economy (cf. John 4:8).

But far different were the base designs of Judas from what the apostles had charitably supposed.

“It was not to buy things needful, but to sell the Lord and Master; it was no preparation for the feast, but that to which it, not they, had ever looked onward — the fulfillment of God’s mind and purpose in it, though it were the Jews crucifying their own Messiah, by the hands of lawless men; it was not that Judas should give to the poor, but that He should who was rich yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich” (Bible Treasury).

“He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night” (John 13:30).

There is something more here, something deeper, than a mere reference to the time of the day. As Judas went forth on his dastardly errand, there then began that “hour” of the Power of darkness (Luke

22:53), when God suffered His enemies to put out the Light of life. So, too, it was “night” in the soul of Judas, for he had turned his back on “the light.” Like Cain he went out from the “presence of the Lord”; like Baalim he loved “the wages of unrighteousness”; like Ahithophel he went to betray his “familiar friend.” It was night: “Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil”: fitting time was it, then, for the son of perdition to perpetrate his dark deed! “Immediately” he went: his feet were “swift to shed blood”!

“Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified” (John 13:31).

A most remarkable word was this. The Lord Jesus spoke of His death, but He regarded it neither as a martyrdom nor as a disgrace. There is nothing quite like this in the other Gospels. Here, as ever, John gives us the highest, the Divine viewpoint of things. The Savior contemplates His death on the shameful tree as His glorification.

“It seems very strange that, in these circumstances, Jesus should say, ‘Now — now is the Son of man glorified.’ It would not have been wonderful if, on the banks of Jordan after His baptism, with the mystic dove descending and abiding on Him, and the voice of the Eternal pealing from the open heaven, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’; or, on the summit of the Mount of Transfiguration, when ‘His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light,’ and Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in glory, and a voice came forth from the cloud of glory. ‘This is my beloved Son, hear him,’ our Lord had said, in holy exaltation, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified’! But, when these words were spoken, what was before the Redeemer but the deepest abasement, and the severest sufferings — heavy accusations — a condemnatory sentence — insults — infamy — the fellowship of thieves — the agonies of death — the lonely sepulcher! How does He, in these circumstances, say, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified’” (Dr. John Brown).

But wherein was Christ’s death on the Cross His glorification? Notice, first, that He said, “Now is the Son of man glorified.” It was

the Son of God as incarnate who was “glorified” on the Cross. But how? Wherein?

First, in that He there performed the greatest work which the whole history of the entire universe ever witnessed, or ever will witness. For it the centuries waited; to it the centuries look back.

Second, because there He reversed the conduct of the first man. The first Adam was disobedient unto death, the last Adam was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. The glory of man is to glorify God; and never was God more glorified than when His own incarnate Son laid down His life in submission to His command (John 10:18); and never was human nature so glorified as when the Son of man thus glorified God. Third, because through death He destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil (Hebrews 2:14). What a notable achievement was this, that One made in the likeness of sin’s flesh should accomplish the utter defeat of the arch-enemy of God and man! Fourth, because at the Cross was paid the ransom-price which purchased for Himself all the elect of God. What glory for the Son of man was this, that He should do what none other in all the realm of creation could do (through immeasurable suffering and shame)—“bring many sons unto glory.” The manner in which He wrought this work also glorified Him: He was a willing sufferer; the price was cheerfully paid; He was led, not driven, as a lamb to the slaughter; He endured the Cross, despising the shame; and not until offended justice and a broken law were fully satisfied did He cry, “It is finished.” Finally, by virtue of His Cross-work, a glory was acquired by the Mediator: there is now a glorified Man at God’s right hand (John 17:22).

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:10).

“And God is glorified in him” (John 13:31).

What a theme! One which no human pen can begin to do justice to. The Cross-work of Christ was not only the basis of our salvation, and the glorification of the Son of man Himself, but it was also the brightest manifestation of the glory of God. Every attribute of Deity was superlatively magnified at Calvary.

The *power* of God was exceedingly glorified at the Cross. There the kings of the earth and the rulers took counsel together against God and against His Christ; there the terrible enmity of the carnal mind and the desperate wickedness of the human heart did their worst; there the fiendish malignity of Satan was put forth to its fullest extent. But God had laid help upon One that is mighty (Psalm 89:19). None was able to take His life from the Savior (John 10:18). After man and Satan had done their worst, the Lord Jesus remained complete master of Himself, and not until He saw fit did He lay down His life of Himself: never was the power of God more illustriously displayed. Christ was crucified “through weakness” (2 Corinthians 13:4), offering no resistance to His enemies: but it is written, “The weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:25), and gloriously was that demonstrated at the Cross, when the power of God sustained the humanity of Christ as He endured His outpoured wrath.

The *justice* of God was exceedingly glorified at the Cross. Of old He declared that He “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:7), and when the Lord laid on our blessed Substitute “the iniquities of us all” He hung there as the Guilty One. And God is so strictly and immutably just that He would not spare His own Son when He had made Him to be sin for us. He would not abate the least mite of that debt which righteousness demanded. The penalty of the broken law must be enforced, even though it meant the slaying of His well Beloved. Therefore did the cry go forth,

“Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd” (Zechariah 13:7).

The justice of God was more illustriously glorified by the propitiation which was made by the Lord Jesus than if every member of the human race were to suffer in Hell forever.

The *holiness* of God was exceedingly glorified at the Cross. He is

“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13),

and when Christ was “made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13) the thrice Holy One turned away from Him. It was this which caused the agonizing Savior to cry, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Never did God so manifest His hatred of sin as in the sufferings and death of His Only-begotten. There He showed it was impossible for Him to be at peace with that which had raised its defiant head against Him. All the honor due to the holiness of God by all the holy angels, and all the cheerful obedience and patient suffering of all the holy men who have ever existed, or ever will exist, are nothing in comparison with the offering of Christ Himself in order that every demand of God’s holiness, which sin had outraged, might be fully met.

The *faithfulness* of God was exceedingly glorified at the Cross. God had sworn, “The soul that sinneth it shall die,” and when the Sinless One offered to receive the full and fearful wages of sin, God showed to all heaven and earth that He had rather that the blood of His Fellow be spilt than that one tittle of the Word should fail. In the Scriptures He had made it known that His Son should be led as a lamb to the slaughter, that His hands and His feet should be pierced, that He should be numbered with transgressors, that He should be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. These and many other predictions received their exact fulfillment at Calvary, and their accomplishment there supplied the greatest proof of all that God cannot lie.

The *love* of God was exceedingly glorified at the Cross.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

“The light of the sun is always the same, but it shines brightest at noon. The Cross of Christ was the noon-tide of everlasting love — the meridian-splendor of eternal mercy. There were many bright manifestations of the same love before; but they were like the light of the morning that shines more and more unto the perfect day; and

that perfect day was when Christ was on the Cross, and darkness covered all the land” (McLaurin).

O when we view God’s grand design,
To save rebellious worms,
How vengeance and compassion join
In their sublimest forms!
Our thoughts are lost in rev’rent awe —
We love and we adore;
The first archangel never saw
So much of God before!
Here each Divine perfection joins,
And thought can never trace,
Which of the glories brightest shines —
The justice or the grace.

“If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him” (John 13:32).

“This verse may be paraphrased as follows: ‘If God the Father be specially glorified in all His attributes by My death, He shall proceed at once to place special glory on Me, for My personal work, and shall do it without delay, by raising Me from the dead, and placing Me at His right hand.’ It is the same idea that we have in the seventeenth chapter more fully. ‘I have glorified thee on the earth; now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self’” (Bishop Ryle).

“Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you” (John 13:33).

Here for the first time the Lord Jesus addressed His disciples by this special term of endearment, “little children.” It is striking to observe that the Lord waited until after Judas had gone out before using it: teaching us that unbelievers must not be addressed as God’s “children”! “Ye shall seek Me” tells of their love for Him, as the “little children” had expressed His love for them. “Whither I go, ye cannot come” seems to have a different force from what it signified when addressed to the unbelieving Jews in John 7:33. He declared to them, “I go unto him that sent me.... and where I am, thither ye cannot come.” The reference is the same in John 8:21. But here the Savior was not speaking of His return to the Father, but of His going to the Cross — thither “they” could not come. In His great work of redemption He was alone. Just as in the type,

“There shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he (the high priest) goeth in to make an atonement” (Leviticus 16:17),

so in the antitype.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

“The immense importance of Christian love cannot possibly be shown more strikingly than the way that it is urged on the disciples in this place. Here is our Lord leaving the world, speaking for the last time, and giving His last charge to the disciples. The very first subject He takes up and presses on them is the great duty of loving one another, and that with no common love; but after the same patient, tender, unwearied manner that He had loved them. Love must needs be a very rare and important grace to be so spoken of! The want of it must needs be plain proof that a man is no true disciple of Christ. How vast the extent of Christian love ought to be” (Bishop Ryle).

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” The nation now disappears. It is no question of loving one’s neighbor, but of Christ’s disciples, and their mutual love according to His love. Nor is it here

activity of zeal, in quest of sinners, blessed as that is; but the unselfish seeking of the good of saints, as such, in lowliness of mind. The Law required love of one's neighbor, which was a fleshly relationship; Christ enjoins love to our brethren, which is a spiritual relationship. Here, then, is the first sense in which this "commandment" was a new one. But there is a further sense brought out by John in his Epistle:

["A new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you" \(1 John 2:8\).](#)

Love had now been manifested, yea, personified, as never before. Christ had displayed a love superior to the faults of its objects, a love which never varied, a love which deemed no sacrifice too great. Scott has well observed on this new commandment, "Love was now to be explained with new clearness, enforced by new motives and obligations, illustrated by a new example, and obeyed in a new manner."

["By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" \(John 13:35\).](#)

Love is the badge of Christian discipleship. It is not knowledge, nor orthodoxy, nor fleshly activities, but (supremely) love which identifies a follower of the Lord Jesus. As the disciples of the Pharisees were known by their phylacteries, as the disciples of John were known by their baptism, and every school by its particular shibboleth, so the mark of a true Christian is love; and that, a genuine, active love, not in words but in deeds. 1 Corinthians 13 gives a full exposition of this verse.

["Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards" \(John 13:36\).](#)

How evident it is that even the Eleven had not grasped the fact that their beloved Master was going to be taken from them! Often as He had spoken to them of His death, it seems to have made no lasting impression upon them. This illustrates the fact that men may receive much religious instruction, and yet take in very little of it, the more

so when it clashes with their preconceptions. The Christian teacher needs much patience, and the less he expects from his work, the less will he be disappointed. Christ's words here, "Whither I go" had a different meaning than in John 13:33. There He had spoken of taking His place alone in death: here He refers to His return to the Father, therefore is He careful to add, "thou shalt follow me afterwards."

["Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake" \(John 13:37\).](#)

Peter knew and really loved the Lord, but how little he as yet knew himself! It was right to feel the Lord's absence; but he should have heeded better the mild, but grave, admonition that where Christ was going he was not able to follow Him now; he should have valued the comforting assurance that he should follow Him later. Alas! how much we lose now, how much we suffer afterwards, through *not* laying to heart the deep truth of Christ's words! We soon see the bitter consequences in Peter's history; but we know, from the future words of our Lord in the close of this Gospel, how grace would ensure in the end the favor, compromised by that self-confidence at the beginning, which He here warned against.

"But we are apt to think most highly of ourselves, of our love, wisdom, moral courage, and every other good quality, when we least know and judge ourselves in God's presence, as here we see in Peter; who, impatient of the hint already given, breaks forth into the self-confident question, 'Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.' Peter therefore must learn, as we also, by painful experience, what he might have understood even better by subjection of heart, in faith, to the Lord's words. When He warns, it is rash and wrong for us to question; and rashness of spirit is but the precursor of a fall in fact, whereby we must be taught, if we refuse otherwise" (Bible Treasury).

["Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice" \(John 13:38\).](#)

Once more the Lord manifests His omniscience, this time by foretelling the fall of one of His own. Utterly unlikely did it seem that a real believer would deny his Lord, and not only so, but at once follow it up with further denials. Little likelihood did there appear that one who was so devoted to Christ, who had enjoyed such unspeakable privileges, and who was expressly warned that he should “watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation,” should prove so unworthy. Yet incredible as it might appear to the Eleven the Lord foresaw it all, and here definitely announces the fearful sin of Peter. He knew that so far from Peter laying down his life for His sake, he would that very night try to save his own life, by a cowardly denial that he was His disciple. And yet the Lord did not cast him off. He loved even Peter “unto the end,” and after His resurrection sought him out and restored him to fellowship again. Truly such love passeth knowledge. O that we were so fully absorbed with it that, for very shame, we might be withheld from doing anything that would grieve it.

The following questions are to help the student to prepare for the lesson on the first section of John 14: —

1. What is meant by “*believe* also in me,” verse 1?
2. What is meant by the “Father’s House,” verse 2?
3. How is Christ “preparing a place for us,” verse 3?
4. What is meant by “the way,” verse 4?
5. What did Philip mean, verse 8?
6. How did the disciples see the Father in Christ, verse 9?
7. What “works’ sake” did Christ refer to in verse 11?

JOHN 14:1-11

CHRIST COMFORTING HIS DISCIPLES

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ's call to faith in Himself, verse 1.
2. Christ's teaching about Heaven, verse 2.
3. Christ's precious promises, verses 3, 4.
4. Thomas' question, verse 5.
5. Christ perfectly suited to us, verses 6, 7.
6. Philip's ignorance, verse 8.
7. Christ's reproof, verses 9-11.

It is in the fourteenth chapter of John that the Lord Jesus really begins the Paschal Discourse, a discourse which for tenderness, depth, and comprehensiveness is unsurpassed in all the Scriptures. The circumstances under which it was delivered need to be steadily borne in mind. This heart-melting Address of Christ was given to the Eleven on the last night before He died, affording a manifestation of Him which has been strikingly likened to the “glorious radiance of the setting sun, surrounded with dark clouds, and about to plunge into darker, which, fraught with lightning, thunder, and tempest, wait on the horizon to receive him.” Most blessedly do His words here bring out the perfections of the God-man. Any other man, even a man of superior strength of mind and kindliness of heart, placed, so far as he could be placed in our Lord's circumstances, would have had his mind thrown into such a state of uncontrollable agitation, and most certainly would have been too entirely occupied with his own sufferings and anxieties to have any power or disposition to enter into and soothe the sorrows of others. But though completely aware of all that awaited Him, though feeling the weight of the awful load laid upon Him, though tasting the bitter

cup which He must drain, He not only retained full self- possession, but took as deep an interest in the fears and sorrows of the apostles as if He Himself had not been a sufferer. Instead of being occupied with what lay before Himself, He spent the time in comforting His disciples: He “loved them unto the end.”

During His public ministry and in His private intercourse with them, the apostles had heard repeated statements from His lips concerning His approaching sufferings and death, statements which appear to us simple and plain, but which perplexed and amazed them. It is most charitable, and perhaps most reasonable, to conclude that His disciples regarded His references to His coming passion as parables, which were not to be understood literally; and that, at any rate, He could not mean anything inconsistent with His immediately restoring the kingdom to Israel. They were fully convinced that He was the Messiah, and their only idea in connection with the Messiah was that of an illustrious Conqueror, a prosperous king; therefore, whatever was obscure in their Master’s sayings, must be understood in the light of these principles. And it is probable that their hopes had never risen higher than when they had seen Him ride into Jerusalem amid the joyous acclamations of the multitudes hailing Him as the Son of David.

But right after His entry into Jerusalem they had heard Him speak of Himself as the “corn of wheat” which must fall into the ground and die, and this,, at least, must have awakened dark forebodings. And, too, His conduct and sayings during the pass-over-supper, and what followed, must have deeply perplexed and distressed them. “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?” must have filled them with painful misgivings. He had said, “Yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.” This was, indeed, sufficient to fill them with anxiety and sorrow. They dearly loved Him. The thought of Him dying, and of their parting with Him, was unbearable. Moreover, they must have asked themselves, How can this be reconciled with His Messiah-ship? Are we, after all, to give up our hope that this is He who would redeem Israel? And what is to become of us! We have forsaken all to follow Him, will He now forsake us, leaving us amid enemies, as sheep in

the midst of wolves, to suffer the fierce malignity of His triumphant foes!

“Our Lord, who knew what was in man, was well aware of what was passing in the minds of His disciples. He knew how they were troubled, and what anxious, desponding, and despairing thoughts were arising in their hearts, and He could not but be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. There lay on His own mind a weight of anguish which no being in the universe could bear along with Him. He could not have the alleviation of sympathy. He must tread the winepress alone. They could not enter into His feelings; but He, the magnanimous One, could enter into theirs. There was room in His large heart for their sorrows, as well as His own. He feels their griefs, as if they were His own; and kindly comforts those whom He knew were soon to desert Him in the hour of His deepest sorrows! ‘In all their afflictions, He was afflicted;’ and He shows in the address which He made to them that ‘the Lord who anointed Him to comfort those who mourn,’ and to bind up the brokenhearted, had indeed ‘given to Him the tongue of the learned that He might speak a word in season to them who were weary’ (Isaiah 61:1; 50:4)”. (Dr. John Brown).

[“Let not your heart be troubled” \(John 14:1\).](#)

It was the sorrows of their hearts which now occupied the great heart of love. “Troubled” they were; deeply so. They were troubled at hearing that one of their number should betray Him (John 13:21). They were troubled at seeing their Master “troubled in spirit” (John 13:21); troubled because He would remain with them only a “little while” (John 13:33); troubled over the warning He had given to Peter, that he would deny His Lord thrice. Thus this little company of believers were disquieted and cast down. Wherefore the Savior proceeded to comfort them.

[“Ye believe in God, believe also in me” \(John 14:1\).](#)

Commentators have differed widely as to the precise meaning of these words. The difficulty arises from the Greek. Both verbs are exactly the same, and may be translated (with equal accuracy) either in the imperative or the indicative mood. Either will make good

sense, and possibly each is to be kept in mind. The R.V. reads: "Believe in God, believe also in me." Thus translated, it is a *double exhortation*. The force of it would then be: Your perturbation of spirit arises from not believing what God has spoken by His prophets concerning My sufferings and the glory which is to follow. God has announced in plain terms that I was to be despised and rejected of men, that I am to be wounded for your transgressions and bruised for your iniquities. These are the words of Jehovah Himself; then doubt them not. "Believe also in me." I too have warned you what to expect. I have told you that I am to suffer many things at the hands of the chief priests and scribes and be killed. These things must be. Then hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end: be not "offended" in Me, even though I go to a criminal's cross.

But it should be remembered that the Lord was speaking not only to the Eleven, but to us as well. Even so, the above interpretation supplies an exhortation which we constantly need. "Believe in God," O Christian. Let not your heart be troubled, for thy Father is possessed of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He knows what is best for thee, and He makes all things work together for thy good. He is on the Throne, ruling amid the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand. Why, then, art thou cast down, O my soul? God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swellings thereof. What though trials come thick and fast, what though I am misunderstood and unappreciated, what though Satan roar and rage against me? "If God be for us who can be against us?" Believe in God. Believe in His absolute sovereignty, His infinite wisdom, His unchanging faithfulness, His wondrous love. "Believe also in me." I am the One who died for thy sins and rose again for thy justification; I am the One who ever liveth to make intercession for thee. I am the same, yesterday, and to-day, and forever. I am the One who shall come again to receive you unto Myself, and ye shall be forever with Me. Yes, "*believe also in me!*"

While the above interpretation is fully justified by the Greek, while the double exhortation was truly needed both by the Eleven and by us to-day, and while many able expositors have advanced it, yet we cannot but think that the A.V. gives the truer force of our Lord's words here, rendering the first verb in the indicative and the second in the imperative. "Believe also in me." What, then, did Christ mean? The apostles had already, by Divine illumination, recognized Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. It is clear, then, that He was not here challenging their faith. We take it that what the Lord had in view was this: the apostles already believed in Him as the Messiah, and as the Savior, but their confidence reposed in One who dwelt in their midst, who went in and out among them in the sensible relationship of daily companionship. But He was about to be removed from them, and He whom they had seen with their eyes and had handled with their hands (1 John 1:1) was to be invisible to the outward eye. Now, says He, "Ye believe in God," *who is invisible*; you believe in His love, though you have never seen His form; you are conscious of His care, though you have never touched the Hand that guides and protects you. "Believe, also, in me"; that is to say, In like manner you must have full confidence in My existence, love, and care, even though I am no longer present to sight. This comfort remains for us; this is the faith in which we are now to live: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

"Believe also in me." The "also" here brings out the absolute Deity of Christ in a most unmistakable manner. "Here thou seest plainly that Christ Himself testifies that He is equal with God Almighty; because we must believe in Him even as we believe in God. If He were not true God with the Father, this faith would be false and idolatrous" (Dr. Martin Luther).

["In my Father's house are many mansions" \(John 14:2\).](#)

The Father's "house" is His dwelling-place. It is noteworthy that the Lord Jesus is the only one who ever referred to the "Father's house," and He did so on three occasions. First, He had said of the temple in Jerusalem, "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:16). Then He had mentioned it in connection with the

“prodigal son” and his elder brother: “As he came and drew nigh to the house (the ‘father’s’) he heard music and dancing”; here it is presented as the place of joy and gladness. In John 14 Christ mentions it as the final abode of the saints.

The glories and blessedness of Heaven are brought before us in the New Testament under a variety of representations. Heaven is called a “country” (Luke 19:12; Hebrews 11:16); this tells of its vastness. It is called a “city” (Hebrews 11:10; Revelation 21; this intimates the large number of its inhabitants. It is called a “kingdom” (2 Peter 1:11); this suggests its orderliness. It is called “paradise” (Luke 23:43; Revelation 2:7); this emphasizes its delights. It is called the “Father’s house,” which bespeaks its permanency.

The temple at Jerusalem had been called the Father’s “house” because it was there that the symbol of His presence abode, because it was there He was worshipped, and because it was there His people communed with Him.

But before the Lord Jesus closed His public ministry He disowned the temple, saying, “Behold your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:38). Therefore does the Savior now transfer this term to the Father’s dwelling-place on High, where He will grant to His redeemed a more glorious revelation of Himself, and where they shall worship Him, uninterruptedly, in the beauty of holiness.

The “Father’s house” has been the favourite term for Heaven with most Christians. It speaks of Home, the Home of God and His people. Sad it is that in this present evil age one of the most precious words in the English language has lost much of its fragrance. Our fathers used to sing, “There is no place like home.” To-day the average “home” is little more than a boarding-house — a place to eat and sleep in. But “home” used to mean, and still means to a few, the place where we are loved for our own sakes; the place where we are always welcome; the place whither we can retire from the strife of the world and enjoy rest and peace, the place where loved ones are together. Such will Heaven be. Believers are now in a strange country, yea, in an enemy’s land; in the life to come, they will be at Home!

“In my Father’s house are many mansions.” The many rooms in the temple prefigured these (see 1 Kings 6:5, 6; Jeremiah 35:1-4, etc.). The word for “mansions” signifies “abiding-places” — a most comforting term, assuring us of the permanency of our future home in contrast from the “tents” of our present pilgrimage. Blessed, too, is the word “many”; there will be ample room for the redeemed of the past, present, and future ages; and for the unfallen angels as well.

“If it were not so, I would have told you” (John 14:2).

Had there been no room for believers in the many mansions of the Father’s House, Christ would have said so. He had never deceived them; truth was His only object —

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37).

It was because full provision had been made for their complete and eternal happiness that He encouraged them to entertain such high hopes. He would never have brought them into such an intimacy with Himself if that was now to end forever.

“I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

“He does not explain how the place in the Father’s House should be prepared for them; nor were they yet, perhaps, able to understand. The Epistle to the Hebrews will show us, if we turn to it, that the heavenly places had to be purified by the better sacrifices which He was to offer, in which all the sacrifices of the law would find their fulfillment. Ephesians speaks similarly of the ‘redemption of the purchased possession’; and Colossians of the ‘reconciliation of things in heaven’ (Hebrews 9:23; Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 1:20). Such thoughts are even now strange to many Christians; for we are slow to realize the extent of the injury that sin has inflicted, and equally, therefore, the breadth of the application of the work of Christ. This is not the place to enlarge upon it; but it is not difficult to understand that wherever sin has raised question of God — and it has done so, as we know, in Heaven itself — the work of Christ as bringing out in full His whole character in love and righteousness

regarding that which had raised the question, has enabled Him to come in and restore, consistently with all that He is, what had been defiled with evil. Thus our High Priest, to use as the apostle does, the figure of Israel's day of atonement, has entered into the Sanctuary to reconcile with the virtues of His sacrifice the holy places themselves, and make them accessible to us" (Numerical Bible).

"I go to prepare a place for you." We also understand this to mean that the Lord Jesus has procured the right — by His death on the Cross — for every believing sinner to enter Heaven. He has "prepared" for us a place there by entering Heaven as our Representative and taking possession of it on behalf of His people. As our Forerunner He marched in, leading captivity captive, and there planted His banner in the land of glory. He has "prepared" for us a place there by entering the "holy of holies" on High as our great High Priest, carrying our names in with Him. Christ would do all that was necessary to secure for His people a welcome and a permanent place in Heaven. Beyond this we cannot go with any degree of certainty. The fact that Christ has promised to "prepare a place" for us — which repudiates the vague and visionary ideas of those who would reduce Heaven to an intangible nebula — guarantee that it will far surpass anything down here.

"I go to prepare a place for you." God never has, and never will, take His people into a place un-prepared for them. In Eden God first "planted a garden," and then placed Adam in it. It was the same with Israel when they entered Canaan:

"And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swear unto thy father, to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, to give them great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees which thou plantedst not" (Deuteronomy 6:10, 11).

And what can we say of the grace manifested by the Lord of glory going to prepare a place for us? He will not entrust such a task to the angels. Proof, indeed, is this that He loves us "unto the end."

“And if I go and prepare a place for you” (John 14:3).

“A special people taken from the earth in a risen Christ must have a special place. A new thing was to take place, *men brought into Heaven!* Man was not made for Heaven, but for the earth, and so placed here to till the earth and live upon it. By sinning he lost the earth and the earth shared his ruin. But by sinning he brought down the Son of God from Heaven, who by His descent opened Heaven as the normal place for those believing on Christ, and so in Him” (Mr. Malachi Taylor).

“I will come again.” The Lord will not send for us, but come in person to conduct us into the Father’s House. How precious we must be to Him!

“The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

“And receive you unto myself.” Notice, not “take” but receive. The Holy Spirit has charge of us during the time of our absence from the Savior; but when the mystical body of Christ is complete then is His work clone here, and He hands us over to the One who died to save us. “And receive you unto myself.” To have us with Himself is His heart’s desire. To the dying thief He said, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” To the Church it is promised that we shall “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

“That where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

The place which was due the Son is the place which grace has given to the sons. This is the blessed sequel to what was before us in John 13. There Christ said, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” There, it is the Savior maintaining His own on earth in communion with Himself. Here, in due time, we shall be with Him, to enjoy unbroken fellowship forever. This had been promised before:

“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am there shall also my servant be” (John 12:26).

Here it is formally declared. In John 17:24 it is prayed for: “Father I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.”

Here then, is the Divine specific for heart-trouble; here, indeed, is precious consolation for one groaning in a world of sin. First, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, the assurance that the Father’s House on high will be our eternal Home. Third, the realization that the Savior has done and is doing everything necessary to secure us a welcome there and fit that Home for our reception. Fourth, the blessed hope that He is coming in person to receive us unto Himself. Finally, the precious promise that we are to be with Him forever. But, and mark it well, it is only in proportion as we are “troubled” by our absence from Him, that we shall be comforted and cheered by these precious words! Here is solid ground for consolation, conclusive arguments against despondency and disquietude in the present path of service and suffering, the Savior lives and loves and cares for us! He is active, promoting our interests, and when God’s time arrives He shall come and receive us unto Himself.

“And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:4).

To understand this verse it is necessary to keep in mind the connection. Only a very short time before, Peter had asked, “Lord whither goest thou?” (John 13:36), and when He replied, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards,” he rejoined, “Why cannot I follow thee now?” Both of these questions of Peter, and they probably expressed the thoughts of all the apostles, were answered by our Lord in the verses which have just been before us. “It is as if He had said,

You are troubled in spirit because you know not whither I go; and because I have said, ye cannot follow Me now. I am going to My Father; to His House of many mansions; let not, therefore, these fears about Me distress you; and as to your following Me — as to the reason why you cannot follow Me now — and as to the way in

which you are to follow Me hereafter, know that arrangements must be made for your coming to where I am going. I go to make these arrangements, and when they are completed I will come and take you to Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. That is whither I am going — that is the reason why you do not go with Me, or follow Me now — that is the way in which you are afterwards to come where I am going: and, *i.e.* thus ‘ye know’, for I have plainly told you ‘whither I go’ and the ‘way’ in which you are to come whither I shall have gone” (Dr. John Brown). The “whither” was *unto the Father*; the “way” was the *process* by which they would arrive there. It was not simply the goal, but the path to it; not simply the *whither* but the *how* which Christ had just revealed to them.

“Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5).

Our Lord had spoken very simply and plainly, yet was He misunderstood. The Father, His House, its many mansions, Christ going there to prepare a place and His promise to come and receive His people unto Himself and share His place with us — these things were dim and unreal to the materialistic and rationalistic Thomas. His mind was on earthly things. Did the “father’s house” mean some palace situated outside Palestine, and did Christ’s “going away” signify His removing to that palace? He was not sure, and tells the Lord so. Well, if we brought our difficulties unto Him. But let us not forget that the Spirit of truth had not yet been given to the disciples to show them “things to come” (John 16:13). He has been given to us, therefore is our ignorance the more excuseless.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Before sin entered the world Adam enjoyed a threefold privilege in relation to God; he was in communion with his Maker; he knew Him, and he possessed spiritual life. But when he disobeyed and fell, this threefold relationship was severed. He became alienated from God, as the hiding of himself painfully demonstrated; having believed the Devil’s lie, he was no longer capable of perceiving the truth, as the making of fig-leaf aprons clearly evidenced; and he no longer had spiritual life, for God’s threat “In the day thou eatest

thereof thou shalt surely die” was strictly enforced. In this same awful condition has each of Adam’s descendants entered this world, for “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” — a fallen parent can beget nought but a fallen child. Every sinner, therefore, has a threefold need — reconciliation, illumination, regeneration. This threefold need is perfectly met by the Savior. He is the Way to the Father; He is the Truth incarnate; He is the Life to all who believe in Him. Let us briefly consider each of these separately.

“I am the way.” Christ spans the distance between God and the sinner. Man would fain manufacture a ladder of his own, and by means of his resolutions and reformatations, his prayers and his tears, climb up to God. But that is impossible. That is the way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12). It is Satan who would keep the exercised sinner on his self-imposed journey to God. What faith needs to lay hold of is the glorious truth that Christ has come all the way down to sinners. The sinner could not come in to God, but God in the person of His Son has come out to sinners. He is the Way, the Way to the Father, the Way to Heaven, the Way to eternal blessedness.

“I am the truth.” Christ is the full and final revelation of God. Adam believed the Devil’s lie, and ever since then man has been groping amid ignorance and error.

“The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19).

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:18).

A thousand systems has the mind devised.

“God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

“There is none that understandeth” (Romans 3:11).

Pilate voiced the perplexity of multitudes when he asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Truth is not to be found in a system of philosophy, but in a Person-Christ is "the truth": He reveals God and exposes man. In Him are hid "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). What tremendous folly to ignore Him! What will it avail you in Hell, dear reader, even though you have mastered all the sciences of men, were acquainted with all the events of history, were versed in all the languages of mankind, were thoroughly acquainted with the politics of your day? O, how you will wish then that you had read your newspapers less and your Bible more; that with all your getting you had got understanding; that with all your learning you had bowed before Him who is the Truth!

"I am the life." Christ is the Emancipator from death. The whole Bible bears solemn witness to the fact that the natural man is spiritually lifeless. He walks according to the course of this world; he has no love for the things of God. The fear of God is not upon him, nor has he any concern for His glory. *Self* is the center and circumference of his existence. He is alive to the things of the world, but is dead to heavenly things. The one who is out of Christ exists, but he has no spiritual life. When the prodigal son returned from the far country the father said,\

["This, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" \(Luke 15:24\).](#)

The one who believes in Christ has passed out of death into life (John 5:24). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). Then turn to Him who is *the Life*.

"I am the way." Without Christ men are Cains-wanderers. "They are all gone out of the way" (Romans 3:12). Christ is not merely a Guide who came to show men the path in which they ought to walk: He is Himself the Way to the Father. "I am the truth." Without Christ men are *under the power of the Devil*, the father of lies. Christ is not merely a Teacher who came to reveal to men a doctrine regarding God: He is Himself the Truth about God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "I am the life." Without Christ men are dead in

trespasses and sins. Christ is not merely a Physician who came to invigorate the old nature, to refine its grossness, or repair its defects.

“I am come,” said He, “that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

“No man cometh unto the Father but by me” (verse 6). Christ is the only way to God. It is utterly impossible to win God’s favor by any efforts of our own.

“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

“Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:6).

Let every Christian reader praise God for His unspeakable Gift, and

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath newly- made for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (verse 7).

This is intimately connected with the whole of the immediate context. The reason why the apostles found it so hard to understand the Lord’s references to the Father, the Father’s House, and His and their way there, was because their views respecting Himself were so defective and deficient. The true knowledge of the Father cannot be obtained but by the true knowledge of the Son; and if the Son be really known, the Father is known also. The Father is known just so

far as the Son is known; no farther. Christ was more than a manifestation of God; He was “God manifest in flesh.” He was the Only-begotten, who fully declared Him.

“From henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.” “These words of our Lord are a prediction, which, like many predictions, is uttered in the present tense — the event not only being as certain as if it had already taken place, but appearing as accomplished to the mind of the prophet, rapt into the future by the inspiring impulse. It is equivalent to, ‘yet a very little while and ye shall know Him — know Him so clearly that it may be said you see Him? The prediction was accomplished on the day of Pentecost. From the time these words were uttered, a series of events took place, in close succession, in which through the atoning sufferings, and death, and glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the character of God the Father, was gloriously illustrated. But, till after the resurrection, the disciples saw only the dark side of the cloud in which Jehovah was; and even till ‘the Spirit was poured out from on High,’ they but indistinctly discerned the true meaning of these events. Then, indeed, ‘the darkness was passed, and the true light shone.’ The Holy Spirit took of the things of Christ and showed them unto them” (Dr. John Brown).

“Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8).

What the Lord had just said to Thomas, Philip was unable to thoroughly grasp. With that strange faculty of the human mind to pass over the most prominent and important points of a subject and to seize only on that on which our own mind had been running, this disciple can think only of “seeing” the Father, not how He is to be seen. Possibly Philip’s mind reverted to the experience of Moses on the Mount, when, in answer to earnest prayer, he was placed in a cleft of the rock and permitted to see the retiring glory of Jehovah as He passed by; or, he may have remembered what Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel were permitted to witness when

“they saw the God of Israel, and under his feet, as it were, a paved work of a sapphire stone, and, as it were the body of heaven in his clearness” (Exodus 24:10).

He may have recalled that prophecy,

“The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:5).

“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” (John 14:9).

This was a rebuke, the more forceful by being addressed to Philip individually. He had said, “Show us the Father.” Christ replied, “Hast thou not known me, Philip?” The force of this was: Have you never yet apprehended who I am? The corporeal representation of God, such as Philip desired, was unnecessary; unnecessary because a far more glorious revelation of Deity was there right before him. The Word, made flesh, was tabernacling among men, and His glory was “the glory of the only-begotten of the Father.” He was the visible Image of the invisible God. He was the “brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me he doeth the works” (John 14:10).

Christ was in the Father and the Father was in Him. There was the most perfect and intimate union between Them. Both His words and His works were a perfect revelation of Deity. It is very striking to note here that the Son refers to His “words” as the Father’s “works.” His words were works, for they were words of power. “He spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast”! He said “Lazarus, come forth”; and he that was dead came forth.

“Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake” (John 14:11).

This is solemn. The Lord has to descend to the level that He took when speaking to His enemies —

“Though ye believe not me believe the works that ye may know, and believe that the Father is in me and I in him” (John 10:38).

So now He says to Philip, If ye will not, on My bare word, believe that I am One with the Father, at least acknowledge the proof of it in My works. How thankful we should be that the Holy Spirit has been given to us, to make clear what was so dark to the disciples. Let us praise God that

“we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true” (1 John 5:20).

Let the interested student carefully ponder the following questions:
—

1. For whom are the promises in verse 12 intended?
2. Who has ever done anything “greater” than Christ did, verse 12?
3. What does it mean to ask “in the name of” Christ, verse 13?
4. How is verse 14 to be qualified?
5. Is obeying God’s commandments “legalism,” verse 15?
6. Why cannot “the world” receive the Holy Spirit, verse 17?
7. What is the meaning of verse 20?

JOHN 14:12-20

CHRIST COMFORTING HIS DISCIPLES (CONTINUED)

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ's cause furthered by His return to the Father, verse 12.
2. Praying in the name of Christ, verses 13, 14.
3. Love evidenced by obedience, verse 15.
4. The coming of the Comforter, verses 16, 17.
5. Christians not left orphans, verse 18.
6. Our life secured by Christ's, verse 19.
7. Knowledge of Divine life in believers, verse 20.

At first reading there does not appear to be much direct connection between the several verses of our present passage. This second section of John 14 seems to lack a central unity. Yet, as we read it more attentively, we notice that both John 14:13 and John 14:16 open with the word "And," which at once makes us suspect that our first hasty impression needs correcting. The fact is that the more closely this Paschal Discourse of Christ be studied, the more shall we perceive the close connection which one part of it sustains to another, and many important lessons will be learned by noting the *relation* which verse has to verse.

The first verse of our passage opens with the remarkable promise that the apostles of Christ should do even greater works than their Master had done. Then, in the next two verses reference is made to prayer, and the fact that these are prefaced with the word "And" at once indicates that there is an intimate relation between the doing of these works and the supplicating of God. This is the more striking if we recall the central thing in the former section. The opening verse

of John 14 is a call to faith in Christ, and the closing verse (11) repeats it. Following the word upon prayer, the Lord next said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Here we seem to lose the thread again, for apparently a new subject is most abruptly introduced. But only seemingly so, for, in truth, it is just here that we discover the progress of thought. The faith and the praying (the two essential pre-requisites for the doing of the "greater works") have their root in an already existing love, which is now to be evidenced by pleasing its Object. What comes next? The promise of "another Comforter." Surely this is most suggestive. It was only by the coming of the Holy Spirit that the apostles' faith in Christ was established, that power was communicated for the performing of mighty works, and that their love was purified and deepened. Thus we have a most striking example of the importance and value of studying closely the connection of a passage and noting the relation of one verse to another.

Having remarked upon the relation between the verses of our present passage, let a brief word be said upon the connection which exists between it as a whole and the first section of John 14. The Lord began by saying, "Let not your heart be troubled." All that followed was the assigning of various reasons why the apostles should not be so excessively perturbed at the prospect of His approaching departure. He began, by setting before them three chief grounds of comfort: He was going to the Father's House of many mansions. He was going there to prepare a place for them. When His preparations were complete, He would come for them in person to conduct them to Heaven, so that His place might be theirs forever. Then He had been interrupted by the question of Thomas and the request of Philip, and in response He had stated with great plainness the truth concerning both His person and His mission. Now, in the section before us, the Lord brings forward further reasons why the sorrowing disciples should not let their hearts be troubled. These additional grounds of consolation will come before us in the course of our exposition.

Though the Lord continues in this second section of His Discourse what He began in the first, yet there is a striking advance to be noted. At the beginning of John 14, Christ had referred to what the

apostles should have known, namely, that the Son on earth had perfectly declared the Father, and this ought to have been the means of their apprehending whither He was going. This they knew (John 14:4), however dull they might be in perceiving the consequences. But now the Lord discloses to them that which they could not understand till the Holy Spirit was given. It was by the descent of the Comforter that they would be guided into all truth. It was by the Holy Spirit that Christ would come to them (John 14:18). And it was by the Spirit they would know that Christ was in the Father, and they in Him and He in them. The Lord did not say that they ought to have understood, even then, these things: the apprehension of them would not be until the day of Pentecost.

[“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also” \(John 14:12\).](#)

The “works” of which Christ here spake were His miraculous works, the same as those mentioned in the two preceding verses, works to which He appealed as proofs of His Divine person and mission. The one to whom Christ promised this was “He that believeth on me.” Some have understood this to refer to all the genuine followers of Christ. But this is manifestly wrong, for there is no Christian on earth today who can do the miracles which Christ did — cleanse the leper, give sight to the blind, raise the dead. To meet this difficulty it has been replied, This is due to a deficiency in the Christian’s faith. But, this is simply a begging of the question. Our Lord did not say, “He that believeth on me may do the works that I do, but shall do!” But of whom, then, was Christ speaking?

We submit that “He that believeth on me,” like the expression “them that believe” in Mark 16:17, of whom it was said certain miraculous signs should follow them, refers to a particular class of persons, and that these expressions must be modified by their reference and setting. In each case the promise was limited to those whom our Lord was addressing. “The only safe way of interpreting the whole of this Discourse, and many other passages in the Gospels, is to remember that it was addressed to the apostles — that everything in it has a direct reference to them — that much that is said of them, and to them, may be said of, and to, all Christian ministers, all Christian men — but that much that is said of them and to them,

cannot be truly said either of the one or the other of these classes, and that the propriety of applying what is applicable to them, must be grounded on some other foundation than its being found in this Discourse.

“It is plain from the New Testament that there was a faith which was specially connected with miraculous powers. This faith was that Christ is possessed of omnipotence, and that He intends, through my instrumentality, to manifest His omnipotence in the performance of a miracle. But, this faith, like all faith, must rest on a Divine revelation made to the individual; where this is not the case, there can be no faith — there may be fancy, there may be presumption, but there can be no faith. Such a revelation Christ made to the apostles and to the seventy disciples, when He said ‘Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you’ (Luke 10:19). No man, to whom such a revelation has not been made, can work such miracles, and it would seem that even in the case of those to whom such a revelation was made, a firm belief of the revelation and reliance on the power and faithfulness of Him who made it, was necessary to the miracles being effectively produced in any particular instance.

“Keeping these undoubted facts in view, there is little difficulty in interpreting Christ’s words here. The disciples had derived great advantage of various kinds from the exercise of their Master’s power to work miracles. They were quite aware that if He should *leave them*, not only would they be deprived of the advantage of His superior powers, but that their own, which were entirely dependent on Him, would be withdrawn also. Now our Lord assures them in the most emphatic manner, by a repetition of the formula of affirmation, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you,’ that His miraculous power was to continue to be exercised through them as a medium, and that, to its being exercised henceforth, as hitherto, faith in Him, on their part, would be at once necessary and effectual. Such a statement was obviously calculated to reassure their shaken minds, and comfort their sorrowing hearts. And we find the declaration was filled to the letter. They, believing on Him, did the works which He did. We find them, like Him, instantaneously healing the sick,

casting out demons, and raising the dead” (Dr. John Brown). Hebrews 2:4 records the fulfillment of Christ’s promise: “God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

“And greater than these shall he do” (John 14:12).

It is important to note that the word “works” in the second clause is not found in the original. We do not think Christ was now referring to miracles in the technical sense of that term, but to something else which, in magnitude and importance, would exceed t, he miracle done by Himself and the apostles. “Greater things would be better. What these greater things were it is not difficult to determine. The preaching of a risen and exalted Savior, the proclaiming of the Gospel to “every creature,” the turning of souls from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the service of the living God, the causing of heathen to demolish with their own hands the temples of idolatry, the building of that temple of living stones of which Christ is both the foundation and the chief-corner, and which far surpassed the temple at Jerusalem — these things were far greater than any interferences with the course of nature’s laws. Thus did the Father honor His Son, owning the perfect work which He had done, by the greater wonders which the Holy Spirit effected through the disciples.

“Because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12).

It is important to note how that in this “because” the Lord Jesus has Himself given us a partial explanation here of how His promise would be made good, though it is largely lost by placing a full stop at the end of John 14:12. If we read straight on through John 14:13 the Savior’s explanation is the more apparent: “Greater things than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father, And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.” Christ would henceforth give to their prayers power from on high, so that what they did, He would do in and through them. Thus, in His “seed” was the pleasure of the Lord to prosper (Isaiah 53:10). If the full stop be insisted on and its force rigidly pressed, John 14:12 would then teach that, the disciples must now continue to work in the place of their Lord the still greater things, because *He Himself was no longer there*. But this is

obviously wrong. He left them, it is true; but He also returned to indwell them (John 14:18), and in this way came the harvest of His own seed-sowing. “And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor” (4:37, 38). Link John 14:13 with John 14:12 and all is plain and simple: thus connected we are taught that the greater things done by the apostles were, in reality, done by Christ Himself! As Mark 16:20 tells us, “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them.” But what He did was in answer to their believing prayers!

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13).

The connection of this with the whole context is very precious. Let it be kept steadily in mind that Christ was here comforting His disciples, who were troubled at the prospect of His leaving them, and that He was calling them to an increased confidence in Himself. In the previous verse He had just assured them that His cause would not suffer by His return to the Father, for even greater things should be done through and by them as a testimony of His glory. Now He reminds them that His corporeal absence would only unite these apostles to Him more intimately and more effectually in a spiritual way. True, He would be in Heaven, and they on earth, but prayer could remove all sense of distance, prayer could bring them into His very presence at any time, yea, prayer was all-essential if they were to do these “greater” things. And had he not already given them a perfect example? Had He not shown them that there was an intimate connection between the great works which He had done and the prayers which He had offered to the Father? Had they not heard Him repeatedly “ask” the Father (see John 6:11; 11:41; 12:28, etc.)? Then let them do likewise. He was interpreting His own words at the beginning of this Discourse: “Believe also in me.” Faith in His person was now to be manifested by prayer in His name!

“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

Very blessed is this. The disciples were invited to count upon a power that could not fail, if sought aright. Christ was no mere man

whose departure must necessarily bring to an end what He was wont to do upon earth. Though absent, He would manifest His Deity by granting their petitions: whatsoever they asked He would do. All power in Heaven is His. The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22) and in the exercise of this power He gives His own whatsoever they need.

“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” What is meant by asking in the name of Christ? Certainly it is much more than the mere putting of His name at the end of our prayers, or simply saying, “Hear me for Jesus’ sake.”

First, it means that we pray in His person, that is, as standing in His place, as fully identified with Him, asking by virtue of our very union with Himself. When we truly ask in the name of Christ, He is the real petitioner.

Second, it means, therefore, that we plead before God the merits of His blessed Son. When men use another’s name as the authority of their approach or the ground of their appeal, the one of whom the request is made looks beyond him who presented the petition to the one for whose sake he grants the request. So, in all reverence we may say, when we truly ask in the name of Christ, the Father looks past us, and sees the Son as the real suppliant.

Third, it means that we pray only for that which is according to His perfections and what will be for His glory. When we do anything in another’s name, it is for him we do it. When we take possession of a property in the name of some society, it is not for any private advantage, but for the society’s good. When an officer collects taxes in the name of the government, it is not in order to fill his own pockets. Yet how constantly do we overlook this principle as an obvious condition of acceptable prayer! To pray in Christ’s name is to seek what He seeks, to promote what He has at heart!

“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” From what has been said above it will be seen that Christ was very far from handing His disciples a ‘blank check’ (as some have expressed it), leaving them to fill it in and assuring them that God would honor it because it bore His Son’s signature. Equally so is it a carnal delusion to

suppose that a Christian has only to work himself up to an expectation to suppose that God will hear his prayer, in order to obtain what he asks for. To apply to God for any thing in the name of Christ, the petition must be in keeping with what Christ is. We can only rightly ask God for that which will magnify His Son. To ask in the name of Christ is, therefore, to set aside our own will, and bow to the perfect will of God. If only we realized this more, what a check it would be on our oftentimes rash and illconsidered requests! How many of our prayers would never be offered did we but pause to inquire, Can I present this in that Name which is above every name?

Not what I wish, but what I want,

O let Thy grace supply;

The good unasked, in mercy grant,

The ill, though asked, deny. — Cowper.

[“If ye love me, keep my commandments” \(John 14:15\).](#)

There seems to be a most abrupt change of subject here, and many have been puzzled in finding the connection. Let us first go back to the opening verse of our chapter. The apostles were troubled at heart at the prospect of their Master’s departure, and this evidenced, unmistakably, their deep affection for Him. Here, with tender faithfulness, He directs their affection.

Your love for Me is to be manifested not by inconsolable regrets, but by a glad and prompt compliance with My commandments. So much is clear; but what of the link with the more immediate context? In seeking the answer to this, let us ask, “What is the leading subject of the context?” This, as we have seen, is a call to faith in an ascended Christ: in the previous verse, a faith evidenced by praying in His name. Now He says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Surely then the answer is plain: love is the spring of true faith and the goal of real prayer. “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” He had just said, and this that the Father might be glorified in the Son. For what, then, shall we ask? is the

natural inquiry which is now suggested? Here then is our Lord's response: an increase of/ore (in myself and in all who are Christ's) which will evidence itself by doing His will. Unless this be the first and foremost desire of our hearts, all other petitions will remain unanswered.

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

“All sentimental talking and singing about love are vain. Unless, by grace, we show a truthful obedience, the profession of affection is worse than affectation. There is more hypocrisy than we suppose. Love is practical, or it is not love at all” (Mr. P. W. Heward).

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” How this verse rebukes the increasing Antinomianism of our day! In some circles one cannot use the word “commandments” without being frowned upon as a “legalist.” Multitudes are now being taught that Law is the enemy of Grace, and that the God of Sinai is a stern and forbidding Deity, laying upon His creatures a yoke grievous to be borne. Terrible travesty of the truth is this. The One who wrote upon the tables of stone is none other than the One who died on Calvary's Cross; and He who here says “If ye love me, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS” also said at Sinai that He would show mercy unto thousands of them “that love me and KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS”! It is indeed striking to note that this tender Savior, who was here comforting His sorrowing disciples, also maintained His Divine majesty and insisted upon the recognition of His Divine authority. Mark how His Deity appears here: “Keep *my* commandments”: we never read of Moses or any of the prophets speaking of *their* commandments!

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” What are Christ's commandments? We will let another answer:

“The whole revelation of the Divine will, respecting what I am to believe and feel and do and suffer, contained in the Holy Scriptures is the law of Christ. Both volumes of Christ are the work of the Spirit of Christ. His first and great commandment is: ‘Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength'; and the second great commandment is like unto the first: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' The commandments of Christ include whatever is good and whatever God hath required of us" (Dr. John Brown)

That the One who brought Israel out of Egypt, led them across the wilderness, and gave them the Law, was Christ Himself, is clear from 1 Corinthians 10:9: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents" (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4).

"Obedience to the commandments of Christ is the test of love to Him, and there will be no difficulty in applying the test, if there be only an honest desire to have the question fairly settled; for there are certain qualities of obedience, which are to be found in every lover of Christ, and which are never found in any one else, and it is to these we must attend, if we would know what is our character. Every lover of Christ keeps His commandments implicitly: that is, he does what he does because Christ bids him. The doing what Christ commands may be agreeable to my inclinations or conducive to my interest; and if it is on these grounds I do it, I serve myself, not the Lord Jesus Christ. What Christ commands may be commanded by those whose authority I acknowledge and whose favor I wish to secure; if I do it on these grounds, I keep man's commandments, not Christ's. I keep Christ's commandments only when I do what He bids me because He bids me. If I love Christ, I shall keep His commandments impartially. If I do anything because Christ commands me to do it, I shall do whatever He commands. I shall not 'pick and choose.' If I love Christ, I shall keep His commandments cheerfully. I shall esteem it a privilege to obey His law. The thought that they are the commandments of Him whom I love, because of His excellency and kindness, makes me love His law, for it must be excellent because it is His, and it must be fitted to promote my happiness for the same reason. If I love Christ I shall keep His commandments perseveringly. If I really love Him I can never cease to love Him, and if I never cease to love Him, I shall never cease to obey Him" (Condensed from Dr. John Brown).

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (John 14:16).

Note that this verse begins with “And.” In the previous one the Lord had been speaking of the disciples’ love for Him, marked by an obedient walk. Here He reveals His love for them, evidenced by His asking for One who should shed abroad the love of God in their hearts (Romans 5:5) and thus empower them to keep His commandments! Until now Christ had been their Comforter, but He was going to leave them; therefore does He ask the Father that another Comforter should be given to them. Here, again, we behold the Savior loving them “unto the end”! There is also a blessed link of connection between this verse and verses 13, 14. There the Lord had taught them to “ask in His name,” and in Luke 11:13, He had told them that the Father would give the Holy Spirit if they “asked for him.” But here Christ is before them: His prayer precedes theirs — He would “ask” the Father for the Comforter to be sent unto them.

There has been a great deal of learned jargon written on the precise meaning of the Greek word here rendered “Comforter.” Personally, we believe that no better term can be found, providing the original meaning of our English word be kept in mind. Comforter means more than Consoler. It is derived from two Latin words, *com* “along side of” and *fortis* “strong.” A comforter is one who stands alongside of one in need, to strengthen. The reference here is, of course, to the Holy Spirit, and the fact that He is termed “another Comforter” signifies that He was to fill the place of Christ, doing for His disciples all that He had done for them while He was with them on earth, only that the Holy Spirit would minister from within as Christ had from without. The Holy Spirit would comfort, or strengthen in a variety of respects: consolation when they were cast down, grace when they were weak or timid, guidance when they were perplexed, etc. The fact that the Lord here called the Holy Spirit “another Comforter” also proves Him to be a person, and a Divine person. It is striking to observe that in this verse we have mentioned each of the three Persons of the blessed Trinity: “I will pray the Father, and

he shall give you another Comforter"! One other thought suggested by the "another Comforter."

The believer has two Comforters, Helpers or Strengtheners: the Holy Spirit on earth, and Christ in Heaven, for the same Greek word here rendered "Comforter" is translated "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1, — an "advocate" is one who aids, pleads the cause of his client. Christ "maketh intercession" for us on High (Hebrews 7:25), the Holy Spirit within us (Romans 8:26)! And this other "Comforter," be it noted, was to abide with them not just so long as they grieved Him not, but "for ever." Thus is the eternal preservation of every believer Divinely assured.

[**"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him" \(John 14:17\).**](#)

The Lord had just promised the apostles "another Comforter," that is, One like unto Himself and in addition to Himself. Here He warns them against expecting a visible Person. The One who should come is "the Spirit." Two thoughts are suggested by the title here given Him: "the Spirit of truth," or more literally, "the Spirit of the truth." The "truth" is used both of the incarnate and the written Word. Christ had said to the disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; a little later He would say to the Father, in their hearing, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). The Spirit, then, is the Spirit of Christ, because sent by Him (John 16:7), and because He is here to glorify Christ (John 16:14). The Spirit is also the Spirit of the written Word, because He moved men to write it (2 Peter 1:21), and because He now interprets it (John 16:13). Hitherto Christ had been their Teacher; henceforth the Holy Spirit should take His place (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit works not independently of the written Word, but through and by means of it.

"Whom the world cannot receive." Very solemn is this. It is not "will not," but cap, not receive. Unable to receive the Spirit "the world" demonstrates its real character — opposed to the Father (1 John 2:16). The whole world lieth in the wicked one (1 John 5:19), and he is a liar from the beginning: how then could the world receive "the Spirit of truth"? Our Lord adds another reason, "because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him." But what did the

Lord mean? How can the invisible Spirit be seen? 1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” It is spiritual “seeing” which is in view, as in John 6:40. And why cannot those who are of the “world” see Him? Because they have never been born again: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And why should the Lord have made this statement here? Surely for the comfort of the disciples. “Another Comforter” had been promised them; One who should abide with them for ever, even the Spirit of Truth. What glorious conquests might they now expect to make for Christ! Ah! the Lord warns them of what would really take place: “the world” would not, could not, receive Him.

“But ye know him: for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17).

“But” points a contrast: indicating at once that the work of the Spirit would be to separate the people of Christ from the world. “He dwelleth with you”: He did, even then, for Christ was full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1; John 3:34). “And shall be in you” was future. The Lord Jesus here promised that the Third Person of the Holy Trinity should take up His abode within believers, making their bodies His temple. Marvellous grace was this. But, on what ground does the Holy Spirit enter and indwell the Christian? Not because of any personal fitness which He discovers there, for the old evil nature still remains in the believer. How, then, is it possible for the Holy Spirit to dwell where sin is still present? It is of the first moment that we obtain the correct answer to this, for multitudes are confused thereon: yet there is no excuse for this; the teaching of Scripture is abundantly clear. Jehovah of old, dwelt in the midst of Israel, even when they were stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart. He did so *on the ground of atoning blood* (see Leviticus 16:16). In like manner, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer now, as the witness to the excellency and sufficiency of that one offering of Christ’s which has “perfected for ever them that are set apart” (Hebrews 10:14). Strikingly was this foreshadowed in the types. The “oil” (emblem of the Holy Spirit) was placed upon the blood — see Leviticus 8:24, 30; Leviticus 14:14, 17, etc.

“I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you” (John 14:18).

“The marginal rendering here is to be preferred: “I will not leave you orphans.” It looks back to John 13:33 where the Lord had addressed them as “little children”. They were not to be like sheep without a shepherd, helpless believers in a hostile world, without a defender, forsaken orphans incapable of providing for themselves, left to the mercy of strangers. “I will come to you”: how precious is this! Before we go to His place to be with Him (John 14:2, 3), He comes to be with us! But what is meant by “I will come to you”? We believe that these words are to be understood in their widest latitude. He came to them corporeally, immediately after His resurrection. He came to them in spirit after His ascension. He will come to them in glory at His second advent. The present application of this promise to believers finds its fulfillment in the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling us individually, present in the midst of the assembly collectively. And yet we must not limit the coming of Christ to His children to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is altogether beyond the grasp of our finite minds. Yet the New Testament makes it clear that in the unity of the Godhead, the advent of the Holy Spirit was also Christ coming, invisibly, to be really present with His own.

“Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

“Christ liveth in me,” said the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:20). “Christ among you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). How unspeakably blessed is this! Friends, relatives, yea, professing Christians may turn against us, but He has promised, “*I will never* leave thee nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

“Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more” (John 14:19).

The last time “the world” saw the Lord of glory was as He hung upon the Cross of shame. After His resurrection He appeared unto none but His own. “The world seeth me no more” is not an accurate translation, nor is it true. “The world” shall see Him again. “Yet a

little while and the world me no longer sees” is what the original says, “Every eye shall see him” (Revelation 1:7). When? When He is seated upon the Great White Throne to judge the wicked. Then shall they be punished with “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

“But ye see me” (John 14:19). They saw Him then, while He was speaking to them. They saw Him, again and again, after He had risen from the dead. They saw Him, as He went up to Heaven, till a cloud received Him out of their sight. They saw Him, by faith, after He had taken His seat at the right hand of God, for it is written, “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:9). They see Him now, for they are *present with the Lord*. They shall see Him at His second coming:

“When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

They shall see Him for ever and ever throughout the Perfect Day: for it is written,

“And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4).

“Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19).

“Your spiritual life now, and your eternal life hereafter, are both secured by My life. I live, have life in Myself, can never die, can never have My life destroyed by My enemies, and shall live on to all eternity. Therefore: ye shall live also — your life is secured forever, and can never be destroyed; you have everlasting life now, and shall have everlasting glory hereafter” (Bishop Ryle).

The blessed truth here expressed by Christ is developed at length in the Epistles: there the Holy Spirit shows us, believers are so absolutely one with Christ that they partake with Him of that holy happy life into which, in the complete enjoyment of it, Christ entered, when He rose again and sat down on the Father’s Throne.

“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:20). The first reference in “that day” is to Pentecost, when Christ came, spiritually, to His disciples; came not merely to visit, but to abide with and in them. Then were they brought into the consciousness of their oneness of life with Him. The ultimate reference, no doubt, is to the Day of His glorious manifestation: then shall we know even as we are known.

The following questions are on the closing section of John 14: —

1. How does Christ “manifest” Himself to us, verse 21?
2. What is the difference between “commandments” in verse 21 and “words” in verse 23?
3. What is the double “peace” of verse 27?
4. How is the Father “greater” than Christ, verse 28?
5. “Believe” what, verse 29?
6. What is the meaning of verse 30?
7. What is the spiritual significance of the last clause in verse 31?

JOHN 14:21-31

CHRIST COMFORTING HIS DISCIPLES (CONCLUDED)

The following is an Analysis of the closing section of John 14:

1. Christ manifested to the believer, verse 21.
2. The quandary of Judas, verse 22.
3. Christ's explanation, verses 23-25.
4. The ministry of the Spirit, verse 26.
5. The gift of Christ's peace, verse 27.
6. The failure in the disciples' love, verses 28-29.
7. The coming conflict, verses 30-31.

That the central design of Christ in the first main section of this Paschal Discourse was to comfort His sorrowing disciples, and that this section does not close until we reach the end of John 14 is clear from verse 27: "Let not your heart be troubled." The Lord here repeats what He had said in the first verse, and then adds, "neither let it be afraid." That the first section of the Discourse does terminate at the close of the chapter, is obvious from its final words: "Arise, let us go hence."

Many and varied were the grounds of comfort which the Lord had laid before the apostles. First, He assured them that He was going to the Father's House. Second, that He would make provision for their coming there. Third, that when the necessary preparations were completed, He would come and conduct them thither. Fourth, that He had opened the way for them, had made them acquainted with the way, and would give them the energy necessary to go along that way. Fifth, that He would not withdraw from them the miraculous powers which He had conferred upon them, but would enable them

to do still greater things. Sixth, that whatever they needed for the discharge of the work to which He had called them, on asking in His name, they should assuredly obtain. Seventh, that a Divine Person should be sent to supply His place, acting as their instructor, guide, protector and consoler. Eighth, that they should not be “left orphans,” but He would return to them in possession of an endless life, of which they should be partakers. Ninth, that in a soon-coming day they should apprehend the oneness of life, shared by the Father and the Son and the sons.

In the passage which is to be before us we find the Lord adding to these grounds of comfort. Tenth, He would manifest Himself to those who kept His commandments. Eleventh, those who kept His Word should be loved by the Father. Twelfth, the Holy Spirit would bring back to their remembrance all things Christ had said unto them. Thirteenth, Peace He left with them. Fourteenth, His own peace He bequeathed unto them. No wonder that He said, “*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*”!

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

In this instance we shall depart from our customary method of expounding the different clauses of a verse in the order in which they occur; instead, we shall treat this verse more or less topically. That in it which is of such vital importance is the final clause, where the Savior promised to manifest Himself to the obedient believer. Now there is nothing the real Christian desires so much as a personal manifestation of the Lord Jesus. In comparison with this all other blessings are quite secondary. In order to simplify, let us ask and attempt to answer three questions: How does the Savior now “manifest” Himself? What are the effects of such manifestation? What are the conditions which I have to meet?

In what way does the Lord Jesus now manifest Himself? It is hardly necessary to say, not corporeally. No longer is the Word, made flesh, tabernacling among men. No more does He say, as He said to Thomas,

“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side” (John 20:27).

No longer may He be seen by our physical eyes (1 John 1:1). Nor is the promise of Christ which we are now considering made good through visions. We recall the vision which Jacob had at Bethel, when a ladder was set upon earth, whose top reached unto heaven, upon which the angels of God ascended and descended. We think of that wondrous vision given to Isaiah, when he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, before which the seraphim cried, “holy, holy, holy.” No, it is not in visions or in dreams that the Lord promises to come to His people. What then? It is a spiritual revelation of Himself to the soul! It is a vivid realization of the Savior’s being and nearness, in a deep and abiding sense of His favor and love. “By the power of the Spirit, He makes His Word so luminous, that as we read it, He Himself seems to draw near. The whole biography of Jesus becomes in this way a precious reality. We see His form. We hear His words.” It is through the written Word that the incarnate Word “manifests” Himself to the heart!

And what are the effects upon the soul of such a manifestation of Christ. First and foremost, He Himself is made a blessed and glorious reality to us. The one who has been granted such an experience can say with Job,

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye (the eye of the heart) seeth thee” (Job 42:5).

Such a one now discerns the surpassing beauty and glory of His person and exclaims, “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” Again: such a manifestation of Christ to the soul assures us of His favor. Now we hear Him saying (through the Scriptures) “As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you.” And now I can respond, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” Another consequence of this manifestation of Christ is “*comfort and support* in trials, especially in those trials, which, on account of their Personal nature, are beyond the reach of human sympathy and love — the trials of desertion and loneliness, from which Jesus Himself suffered so keenly; heart trials, domestic trials, secret griefs, too sacred to be breathed in the ears of men — all these trials in which nothing can

sustain us but the sympathy which His own presence gives.” Just as the Son of God appeared to the three faithful Hebrews in the fiery furnace, so does He now come to those in the place of trial and anguish. So too in the last great trial, should we be called upon to pass through it ere the Savior comes. Then to earthly friends we can turn no longer. But we may say with the Psalmist, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

Now, let us inquire, What are the terms on which the Savior thus draws near? Surely every Christian reader is most anxious to secure the key to an

experience so elevating, so blessed. Listen now to the Savior’s words, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” The faith by which we are saved does not destroy the necessity for an obedient walk. “Faith is the root of which obedience is the beautiful flower and fruit. And it is only when faith has issued in obedience, in an obedience which stumbles not at sacrifices, and halts not when the way is rough and dark; in an obedience that cheerfully bears the cross and shame — it is only then that this highest promise of the Gospel is fulfilled... When love for the Savior shall lead us to keep His holy Word — lead us to an immediate, unreserved, unhesitating obedience — lead us to say, in the spirit of entire self-surrender and sacrifice, ‘Thy will, not mine, be done,’ then, farewell to doubt and darkness, to loneliness and sorrow! Then shall we mourn no more an absent Lord. Then shall we walk as seeing Him who is invisible, triumphant over every fear, victorious over every foe.” ¶16

This manifestation of Christ is made only to the one who really loves Him, and the proof of love to Him is not by emotional displays but by submission to His will. There is a vast difference between sentiment and practical reality. The Lord will give no direct and special revelation of Himself to those who are in the path of disobedience. “He that hath my commandments,” means, hath them at heart. “And keepeth them,” that is the real test. We hear, but do we heed? We know, but are we doing His will?

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18)!

“And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father.” There are three different senses in which Christians may be considered as objects of the loving favor of the Father and of the Son: as persons elected in sovereign grace to eternal life; as persons actually united to Christ by believing; and as persons transformed by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. It is in this last sense that Christ here speaks. Just as the Father is said to love the Son because of His obedience (John 10:17, 18), so is He said to love the believer for the same reason. It is the love of complacency, as distinguished from the love of compassion. The Father was well pleased with His incarnate Son, and He is well pleased with us when we honor and glorify His Son by obeying His commandments.

“Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (John 14:22).

This question had in view the Lord’s words when He had just said, “The world seeth me no more” (John 14:19), and that He would “manifest” Himself to him who kept His commandments. This conflicted sharply with the Jewish ideas of the Messiah and His kingdom. As yet Judas had failed to perceive that the truth of God must sever between those who receive it and those who reject it, and that therefore His kingdom was “not of this world” (John 18:36). And why was it that Judas understood this not? 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11 tells us — the Spirit had not yet been given.

“Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot.” “There is something very affecting in this brief parenthesis; the short, sad sentence which our Evangelist throws in — ‘Judas, not Iscariot.’ The one is not for a moment to be confounded with the other; the true apostle with the traitor. How widely different may men be who yet bear the same name! How many have but the name in common!” (Dr. John Brown.) The Judas who asked this question was the brother of James, the son of Alphaeus, see Luke 6:16.

“Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” How many there are to-day who, by means of legislation and social amelioration, wish to press on the world those teachings of Christ which are only for His own! Judas did not go quite so far as the unbelieving brethren of Christ according to the flesh — “Go show thyself to the world” (John 7:4); but he was sorely puzzled at this breach between the world and them. Dull indeed was Judas, for the Lord had just said, “Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him” (John 14:17). But equally dull, most of the time, are all of us.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

“If Judas had known what the world is, and what every human heart is by nature, instead of being puzzled at the Lord’s withdrawal from the world, he would have wondered how Jesus could reveal Himself to any man” (Stier).

The Lord here repeats that God has fellowship only with those whose hearts welcome Him, who love Him, and whose love is manifested by submission to His Word. Then He loves in return. The Old Testament taught precisely the same thing. “I love them that love me” (Proverbs 8:17). “If a man love me he will keep my word.” Let not renewed souls torture themselves by attempting to define too nicely the extent of their “keeping.” Let those who are tempted to do so meditate upon John 17:6 — “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy Word.” Mark it well that this was said by the Savior in full view of all the infirmities and failures of the disciples, and said prior to the day of Pentecost!

To “keep” God’s commandments is to obey them, and the primary, the fundamental thing in obedience, is the desire of the heart, and it is on the heart that God ever looks. Two things are true of every Christian: deep down in his heart there is an intense, steady longing and yearning to please God, to do His will, to walk in full accord with His Word. This yearning may be stronger in some than in

others, and in each of us it is stronger at some times than at others; nevertheless, it is there! But in the second place, no real Christian *fully realizes* this desire. Every genuine Christian has to say with the apostle Paul,

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but *I follow after*, if that I may lay hold of that for which I am laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12).

Now we believe that it is this heart-obedience, this inward longing to be fully conformed to His will, this burning desire of the renewed soul, of which Christ here speaks. “If a man love me, he will keep my word.” Every true believer loves Christ; therefore every true believer “keeps” His Word, keeps it in the sense thus defined. Let it be repeated, God looks at the heart; whereas we are constantly occupied with the outward appearance. As we scrutinize our deeds, if we are honest, we have to acknowledge that we have “kept his word” very imperfectly; yea, it seems to us, that we are not entitled to say that we have “kept” it at all. But the Lord looks behind the deeds, and knows the longings within us. The case of Peter in John 21 is a pertinent illustration. When Christ asked him a third time, “Lovest thou me?” His disciple answered,

“Lord, thou knowest all things; THOU knowest that I love thee” (John 21:17).

My disgraceful actions contradicted my love; my fellow-disciples have good reason to doubt it, but Thou who searchest the heart knowest better. In one sense it is an intensely solemn and searching thing to remember that nothing can be hidden from Him before whom all things are open and naked; but in another sense it is most blessed and comforting to realize that He can see in my heart what I cannot often discover in my ways, and what my fellow-believers cannot — a real love for Him, a genuine longing to please and glorify Him.

Let not the conclusion be drawn that we are here lapsing into Antinomian laxity, or making it a matter of no moment what our outward lives are like. To borrow words which treat of another subject,

“As there was a readiness to will so there should be a performance also” (2 Corinthians 8:11).

Though the apostle acknowledged that he had not “already attained,” yet he continued to “follow after.” Where there is love for Christ, there cannot but be bitter sorrow (as with Peter) when we know that we have grieved Him. And more; there will be a sincere confession of our sins, and confession will be followed by earnest supplication for grace to enable us to do what He has bidden. Nevertheless, it is blessed to know that He who is the Truth declares, positively and without qualification, “If a man love me, he will keep my word;” and in the light of John 17:6, this must mean: first and absolutely, in the desire of his heart; secondly and relatively, in his walk.

It is to be noted that the Lord here makes a change of terms from what He had said in John 14:21; a slight change, but an important one. There He had said, “He that hath my *commandments*, keepeth them;” here, “If a man love me, he will keep my *word*” — in the Greek the singular number is used.

“This is a beautiful difference, and of great practical value, being bound up with the measure of our attentiveness of heart. Where obedience lies comparatively on the surface, and self-will or worldliness is not judged, a ‘commandment’ is always necessary to enforce it. People ask, ‘Must I do this? Is there any harm in that?’ To such the Lord’s will is solely a question of commandment. Now there are commandments, the expression of His authority, and they are not grievous. But, besides, where the heart loves Him deeply, His ‘word’ will give enough expression of His will. Even in nature a parent’s look will do it. As we well know, an obedient child catches the mother’s desire before the mother has uttered a word. So, whatever might be the word of Jesus, it would be heeded, and thus the heart and life be formed in obedience” (Mr. W. Kelly).

“True also it is that something of both characters of love, as Christ affirms them, will be found in all true Christians over-borne by so much contrary influence that, like Peter in the high priest’s palace, only He who knoweth all things can detect the true disciple beneath the false. There is the false within us all, as well as the true, Alas, in

many, so often uppermost. The results cannot fail to follow: the blessing of which the Lord speaks attaches to that with which He here connects it. We find it in proportion as we answer to the character.

“Looked at in this way, there is no difficulty in seeing the deeper nature of a love that keeps Christ’s ‘word’, as compared with that which keeps ‘commandments’ only. Not to keep a positive command is simple, rank rebellion, nothing less. His ‘word’ is wider, while it addresses itself with less positiveness of authority to the one whose heart and conscience is less prompt to the appeal of love” (Numerical Bible). I do not “command” a friend: my mind is made known to him by my words, and he acts accordingly. One word has greater weight with him than a hundred commands have on one at a distance? A servant receives my commands and obeys them, but he knows not my heart; but my friend walks with me in the intelligence of my deepest thoughts. Ah! is this so with us? Are we really walking with Him who calls us not servants, but friends — see John 15:15!

“And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” Just as there is a marked advance from His “commandments” in John 14:21 to His “word” in John 14:23, so there is in the blessings respectively attached to the keeping of the one and the other. In the former He promises to manifest Himself to the heart, in the latter He speaks of both the Father and Himself coming to make Their abode with such a soul. “Abiding” speaks of fellowship all through John’s writings. Not only is our fellowship with the Father and His Son (1 John 1:3), but to the one who truly heeds the Word, They will come and have fellowship with him. This is the reward of loving obedience. The “result will be to manifest the competency of Scripture for the ‘man of God’ to whom alone it is pledged as competent, able to furnish thoroughly unto all good works.’ Who is the man of God, but he who is out and out for God, and who else can expect to be furnished in this way, but he who is honestly intentioned to use his knowledge as before Him who gave it? The very passage which we are quoting here reminds us of where the profit is to be found: ‘All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.’ If we do not

mean to accept the reproof and the correction, where is the use of talking about the rest?" (Numerical Bible).

["He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" \(John 14:24\).](#)

Here was the final word to Judas: the line between "the world" and "his own" is clearly drawn by the "whoso loveth me, whoso loveth me not." Not to love the Loveliest is because of hatred. There is no other alternative. Of old Jehovah had declared that He would visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hated Him, but that He would show mercy unto thousands of them that loved Him and kept His commandments (Exodus 20:6). What seems to be indifference is really enmity. All who are not with Christ are against Him (Luke 11:23).

"He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." Observe the change. In the previous verse the one who loves Christ keeps His Word; here the one who loves Him not, His sayings or words. Why this variation? Because unbelief does not combine *in their unity* the individual sayings, but dismisses them as they are isolated. The true believer hears in all God's words one Word — Him, the unbeliever heeds not! An unbeliever may observe some of Christ's words as a matter of policy and prudence, because they commend themselves to his reason; but others, which to him are distasteful, which appear impracticable or severe, he esteems not. If he loved Christ he would value His Word as a whole; but he does not; therefore he keeps not His words.

["And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" \(John 14:24\).](#)

Thus the Lord concludes this point by magnifying the Word. Here, we say again, was the final answer to the question, "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Does the world believe on Me? Does it love Me? Does it keep My commandments? How, then, can I manifest Myself to it?

“Thus did the Lord dispose of the three main stumbling blocks which hindered these disciples: the offense of Thomas, who would know all with his natural understanding; the offense of Philip, who was eager for visible manifestations to the outward senses; the offense of Judas, who would too readily receive the whole world into the kingdom of God” (Lange).

“These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you” (John 14:25).

In the light of the verse which immediately follows we understand this to mean: I said what I have in view of My near departure. Because I am yet with you, these things make little impression upon your hearts, but when the Holy Spirit has come you will be able to enter the better into their meaning and blessedness.

“But the comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26).

This is one of many verses which contains clear proof of the Divine personality of the Holy Spirit. A mere abstract influence could not teach. Moreover, “he shall teach you,” being a masculine pronoun, could not be applied to any but a real person. The Comforter would be sent by the Father, but in the name of Christ. The significance of this can best be ascertained by a reference to John 5:43: just as the Savior had come in the Father’s name, so the Holy Spirit would be sent in the Son’s name: that is to say, in His stead, for His interests, with His authority. Just as the Son had made known the Father, so the Spirit would take of the things of Christ and show them to His people. Just as the Son had glorified the Father, so the Spirit would glorify Christ. Just as, hitherto, the Savior had supplied all the needs of His own, henceforth the Comforter should fully provide for them.

“He shall teach you all things.” Here is another instance where the words of Scripture are not to be taken in their absolute sense. If the apostles were to be taught all things without any qualification, they would be omniscient. Nor did Christ mean that the Holy Spirit would teach them all that it was possible for finite creatures to know: He would not make known to them the secrets of futurity, or

the occult workings of nature. Rather would He teach them all that it was necessary for them to know for their spiritual well-being, and this, particularly, in connection with what Christ had taught them, either fully or in germ form. He would make clear to them that which, as yet, was mysterious in their Master's sayings.

[“He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” \(John 14:26\).](#)

Two striking examples of that are recorded in this very Gospel. In John 2:22 we are told, “When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them.” Again, in John 12:16 we read, “These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him.” No doubt this promise of Christ applies in a general way to all real Christians. Hundreds of times has the writer prayed to God, just before entering the pulpit, that He would be pleased to strengthen his memory and enable him to recall the exact words of Scripture as he quoted them; and graciously has He answered us. We would confidently urge our fellow-believers to plead this verse before God on sleepless nights, or when on a bed of sickness, as well as before going to teach a Sunday School class, asking Him to bring back to your remembrance the comforting promises of His Word; or, when tempted, that His precepts might flash upon you.

[“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” \(John 14:27\).](#)

Without being dogmatic, we believe that there is a double “peace” spoken of here: a peace left and a peace given. In the New Testament “peace” is spoken of in a twofold sense: as signifying reconciliation, contrasted from alienation: and a state of tranquillity as contrasted from a state of tumult. The one is objective, the other subjective. The former is referred to in Romans 5:1: “Being justified by faith we have peace with God.” His holy wrath against us and our vile opposition against Him are ended forever. The latter is mentioned in Philippians 4:7:

[“The peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”](#)

The one who fully unbosoms himself before the throne of grace enjoys rest within. The one then is judicial, the other, experiential. “Peace I leave with you” would be the result of the Atonement. “My peace I give unto you,” would be enjoyed through the indwelling Spirit. The one was for the conscience; the other for the heart.

“My peace I give unto you.” This was the personal peace which He had enjoyed here on earth. He was never ruffled by circumstances, and never resisted the will of the Father. He was ever in a state of most perfect amity with God. The peace He here promised His disciples was the peace which filled His own heart, as the result of His unbroken communion with the Father.

“For us it is restlessness of will which disturbs this — the strife with His will which this means, and the dissatisfaction of soul which follows every gain that may seem to make in that direction. Doing only His will, there can be no proper doubt as to the issue” (Numerical Bible).

[“Not as the world giveth, give I unto you” \(John 14:27\).](#)

The peace which the worldling has is shallow, unstable, unsatisfying, false. It talks much about peace, but knows little of the thing itself. We have peace-societies, peace-programmes, a peace-palace, and a League of Nations to promote peace; yet all the great powers are armed to the teeth!

[“When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them” \(1 Thessalonians 5:3\).](#)

The world’s peace is a chimera: it fails under trial. When the world gives, it is to the ungodly, not to the godly, whom they hate. When the world gives, it gives away, and has no longer. But Christ gives by bringing us into what is eternally His own. When Christ gives He gives forever, and never takes away.

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Here the Lord concludes that section of His discourse which had been devoted to the comforting of His sorrowing disciples. Abundant had been the consolation He had proffered them. Their hearts ought now to have been at perfect peace, their minds being stayed upon God. And yet while this verse terminated the first section of the address, it is closely connected with the verses which follow where the Lord proceeded to make application of what He had been saying.

“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come unto you. If ye love me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

Connecting this verse with the one immediately preceding, the force of our Lord’s words is this: If you only believed what I have been saying to you, your cares and fears would vanish, and joy would take the place of sorrow. But what did the Lord mean by “If ye loved me?” Was He not instructing and directing their love, in order to purify it? He knew that they loved Him, and what He had said in John 14:15, 21, 23, assumed it. But their love was not yet sufficiently dis-interested: they were occupied too much with the thought of their own bereavement, instead of the heavenly joy into which the Redeemer was about to enter. If they had loved Him with a pure love, they would have been happy at His exaltation and forgotten themselves.

“My Father is greater than I.” This is the favourite verse with Unitarians, who deny the absolute Deity of Christ and His perfect equality with the Father — a truth which is clearly taught in many scriptures. Those who use these words of our Lord in support of their blasphemous heresy, wrest them from their context, ignoring altogether the connection in which they are found. The Savior had just told the apostles that they ought to rejoice because He was going to the Father, and then advances this reason, “For my Father is greater than I.” Let this be kept definitely before us and all difficulty vanishes. The Father’s being greater than Christ was the reason

assigned why the disciples should rejoice at their Master's going to the Father. This at once fixes the meaning of the disputed "greater," and shows us the sense in which it was here used. The contrast which the Savior drew between the Father and Himself was not concerning nature, but official character and position.

Christ was not speaking of Himself in His essential Being. The One who thought it not robbery to be "equal with God" had taken the servant form, and not only so, had been made in the likeness of men. In both these senses, namely, in His official status (as Mediator) and in His assumption of human nature, He was inferior to the Father. Throughout this discourse and in the Prayer which follows in chapter 17, the Lord Jesus is represented as the Father's Servant, from whom He had received a commission, and to whom He was to render an account; for whose glory He acted, and under whose authority He spake. But there is another sense,--more pertinent, in which the Son was inferior to the Father. In becoming incarnate and tabernacling among men, He had greatly humiliated Himself, by choosing to descend into shame and suffering in their acutest forms. He was now the Son of man that had not where to lay His head. He who was rich had for our sakes become poor. He was the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. In view of this, Christ was now contrasting His situation with that of the Father in the heavenly Sanctuary. The Father was seated upon the throne of highest majesty; the brightness of His glory was uneclipsed; He was surrounded by hosts of holy beings, who worshipped Him with uninterrupted praise. Far different was it with His incarnate Son despised and rejected of men, surrounded by implacable enemies, soon to be nailed to a criminal's cross. In this sense, too, He was inferior to the Father. Now in going to the Father, the Son would enjoy a vast improvement of situation. It would be a gain unspeakable. The contrast then was between His present state of humiliation and His coming state of exaltation to the Father! Therefore, those who really loved Him should have rejoiced at the tidings that He would go to the Father, because the Father was greater than He — greater both in official status and in surrounding circumstances. It was Christ owning His place as Servant, and magnifying the One who had sent Him.

“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe” (John 14:29).

“The question naturally occurs, Believe what? That question is answered by referring to the parallel statement in reference to the treachery of Judas: ‘Now I tell you, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe that I am’ (John 13:19) — that I am the Messiah, the Divinely appointed, qualified, promised, accredited Savior: and of course, that all that I have taught you is indubitably true; and all I have promised is absolutely certain. The disciples did believe this, but their faith was feeble; it required confirmation. It was to be exposed to severe trials, and needed support: and the declaration by Him of these events before they took place was of all things the best fitted for giving their faith that required confirmation and support” (Dr. John Brown).

“Hereafter I will not talk much with you” (John 14:30).

In a very short time He would be cut off from them, while He undertook His greatest work of all. In reminding them that it would be impossible for Him to say much more to them, He hinted at the deep importance of them pondering over and over what He had just said, and what He was on the point of saying to them. This was to be His last address in His humbled state, and during the next few hours they would sorely need the sustaining and comforting power of these precious promises if they were not to faint.

“For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30).

The awful enmity of the Serpent was now to be fully vented upon the woman’s Seed: he was to be allowed to bruise the Savior’s heel. All that this meant we are incapable of entering into. It would seem that Satan began his assault in the Garden, and ceased not till he had moved Pilate to seal the sepulcher and place a guard about it. The words “and hath nothing in me” refer to His inherent holiness. As the sinless One there was nothing within to which the Devil could appeal. How completely different is it with us! Throw a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder, and there is a fearful explosion; cast it into a barrel of water and it is quenched!

“For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” This too was said for the consolation of the apostles: the Savior would assure them beforehand that the issue of the approaching conflict was not left in any doubt. There was no weak point in Him for Satan to find; therefore He must come forth more than Conqueror. Satan could find something in Noah, Abraham, David, Peter. but Christ was the Lamb “without blemish.”

“But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence” (John 14:31).

Most blessed is this. The last words of this sentence look back to the end of the previous verse. The prince of this world cometh — but, nevertheless, I suffer him to come against Me, and I go to meet Him. Christ’s love to the Father was thus evidenced by His willingness to allow the dragon to lay hold upon Him. He went forth to meet Satan because He had received “commandment” from the Father to do so. It is remarkable that this is the only time that Christ ever spoke of His love to the Father; it was now that He was to give the supreme proof of it. How this rebukes those who are ever talking and singing of their love for the Lord! In the words “Arise, let us go hence,” the Lord must have got up from the supper-table, and apparently was followed by His apostles into the outer room, where they remained until they left for Gethsemane, cf. John 18:1.

The following questions are to help the student on the first section of John 15: —

1. What is meant by “the true vine,” verse 1?
2. In what sense is the Father the husbandman, verse 1?
3. What is meant by “He taketh away,” verse 2?
4. What is meant by “purgeth,” verse 2?
5. What is meant by “abide in Me,” verse 4?
6. What is meant by the last clause of verse 5?

7. Who is in view in verse 6?

JOHN 15:1-6

CHRIST THE TRUE VINE

The following is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. The vine and the husbandman, verse 1.
2. The fruitless branch cared for, verse 2.
3. The purging of fruitless branches, verse 2.
4. Clean through the Word, verse 3.
5. Conditions of fruit-bearing, verse 4.
6. The absolute dependency of Christians, verse 5.
7. The consequences of severed fellowship, verse 6.

The passage which is to engage our attention is one that is, most probably, familiar to all of our readers. It is read as frequently, perhaps, as any chapter in the New Testament. Yet how far do we really understand its teachings? Why does Christ here liken Himself to a “vine”? What are the leading thoughts suggested by the figure? What does He mean when He says, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away”? What is the “fruit” here referred to? And what is the force of “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them, and cast into the fire, and they are burned”? Now as we approach any portion of Scripture for the purpose of studying it, it is essential to keep in mind several elementary but important principles: Who are the persons addressed? In what connection are they addressed? What is the central topic of address? We are not ready to take up the details of any passage until we have first settled these preparatory questions.

The persons addressed in John 15 were the eleven apostles. It was not to unsaved people, not to a mixed audience that Christ was speaking; but to believers only. The remote context takes us back to John 13:1. In chapters 13 and 14 we are taught what Christ is doing for us while He is away — maintaining us in communion with Himself, preparing a place for us, manifesting Himself to us, supplying our every need through the Holy Spirit. In John 15, it is the other side of the truth which is before us. Here we learn what we are to be and do for Him during the interval of His absence. In 13 and 14 it is the freeness and fulness of Divine grace; in 15 it is our responsibility to bear fruit.

The immediate context is the closing sentence of chapter 14: “Arise, let us go hence. Christ had just said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” He had said this while seated at the supper-table, where the emblems of His death — the basis of our peace — were spread. Now He gets up from the table, which prefigured His resurrection from the dead. Right afterwards He says, I am the true vine. Christ’s symbolic action at the close of 14, views Him on resurrection-ground, and what we have here in 15 is in perfect accord with this. There must be resurrection-life before there can be resurrection-fruit. The central theme then is not salvation, how it is to be obtained or the danger of losing it. Instead, the great theme here is fruit-bearing, and the conditions of fertility. The word “fruit” occurs eight times in the chapter, and in Scripture eight is the resurrection- number. It is associated with a new beginning. It is the number of the new creation. If these facts be kept in mind, there should be little difficulty in arriving at the general meaning of our passage.

The figure used by our Savior on this occasion was one with which the apostles must have been quite familiar. Israel had been likened unto a “vine” again and again in the Old Testament. The chief value of the vine lies in its fruit. It really serves no other purpose. The vine is a thing of the earth, and in John 15, it is used to set forth the relation which exists between Christ and His people *while they are on earth*. A vine whose branches bear fruit is a living thing, therefore the Savior here had in view those who had a living connection with Himself. The vine and its branches in John 15 does

not represent what men term “the visible Church,” nor does it embrace the whole sphere of Christian profession, as so many have contended. Only true believers are contemplated, those who have passed from death unto life. What we have in John 15:2 and 6 in nowise conflicts with this statement, as we shall seek to show in the course of our exposition.

The word which occurs most frequently in John 15 is “abide,” being found no less than fifteen times in the first ten verses. Now “abiding” always has reference to fellowship, and only those who have been born again are capable of having fellowship with the Father and His Son. The vine and its branches express oneness, a common life, shared by all, with the complete dependency of the branches upon the vine, resulting in fruit-bearing. The relationship portrayed is that of which this world is the sphere and this life the period. It is here and now that we are to glorify the Father by bearing much fruit. Our salvation, our essential oneness with Christ, our standing before God, our heavenly calling, are neither brought into view nor called into question by anything that is said here. It is by dragging in these truths that some expositors have created their own difficulties in the passage.

A few words should now be said concerning the place which our present section occupies in this Paschal Discourse of our Lord. In the previous chapter we have seen the apostles troubled at the prospect of their Master’s departure. In ministering to their fearful and sorrowing hearts, He had assured them that His cause in this world would not suffer by His going away: He had promised that, ultimately, He would return for them; in the meantime, He would manifest Himself to them, and He and the Father would abide in them. Now He further assures them that their connection with Him and their connection with each other, should not be dissolved. The outward bond which had united them was to be severed; the Shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep scattered (Zechariah 13:7). But there was a deeper, a more intimate bond, between them and Him, and between themselves, a spiritual bond, and while this remained, increasing fruitfulness would be the result.

The link of connection between the first two main sections of the discourse, where Christ is first comforting and then instructing and

warning His disciples, is found in the closing verses of chapter 14. There He had said, Hereafter, I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.” In the light of this, chapter 15 intimates: Let My Father now (when the prince of this world cometh, but only as an instrument in the hands of His government) do with Me as He will. It will only issue in the bringing forth of that which will glorify the Father, if the corn of wheat died it would bring forth “much fruit” (John 12:24). Fruit was the end in view of the Father’s commandment and the Son’s obedience. Thus the transition is natural and logical.

“I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

This word “true” is found in several other designations and descriptions of the Lord Jesus. He is the “true Light” (John 1:9). He is the “true bread” (John 6:32). He is “a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle” (Hebrews 8:2). The usage of this adjective in the verses just quoted help to determine its force. It is not true in opposition to that which is false; but Christ was the perfect, essential, and enduring reality, of which other lights were but faint reflections, and of which other bread and another tabernacle,, were but the types and shadows. More specifically, Christ was the true light in contrast from His forerunner, John, who was but a “lamp” (John 5:35 R.V.), or light-bearer. Christ was “the true bread” as contrasted from the manna, which the fathers did eat in the wilderness and died. He was a minister of “the true tabernacle” in contrast from the one Moses made, which was “the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5).

But in addition to these instituted types of the Old Testament, there are types in nature. When our Lord used this figure of the “vine,” He did not arbitrarily select it out of the multitude of objects from which an ordinary teacher might have drawn illustrations for his subject. Rather was the vine created and constituted as it is, that it might be a fit representation of Christ and His people bringing forth fruit to God.

“There is a double type here, just as we find a double type in the ‘bread,’ a reference to the manna in the wilderness, and behind that, a reference to bread in general, as the staff of human life. The vine itself is indeed constituted to be an earthly type of a spiritual truth, but we find a previous appropriation of it to that which is itself a type of the perfect reality which the Lord at length presents to us. We refer to the passages in Psalms and prophets where Israel is thus spoken of” (Waymarks in the Wilderness).

In Psalm 80:8-9 we read,

“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.”

Again, in Isaiah we are told

“Now will I sing to my well-beloved, a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes and it brought forth wild grapes.... For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the *house of Israel*, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant” (Isaiah 5:1, 2, 7).

These passages in the Old Testament throw further light on the declaration of Christ that He was “the true vine.” Israel, as the type, had proved to be a failure.

“I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (Jeremiah 2:21):

“Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself” (Hosea 10:1).

In contrast from this failure and degeneracy of the typical people, Christ says “I am the true vine” — the antitype which fulfills all the

expectations of the Heavenly Husbandman. Many are the thoughts suggested by this figure: ‘to barely mention them must suffice. The beauty of the vine; its exuberant fertility; its dependency — clinging for support to that on which and around which it grows; its spreading branches; its lovely fruit; the juice from which maketh glad the heart of God and man (Judges 9:13; Psalm 104:15), were each perfectly exemplified in the incarnate Son of God.

“And my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1).

In the Old Testament the Father is represented as the Proprietor of the vine, but here He is called the Husbandman, that is the Cultivator, the One who cares for it. The figure speaks of His love for Christ and His people: Christ as the One who was made in the form of a servant and took the place of dependency. How jealously did He watch over Him who

“grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2)!

Before His birth, the Father prevented Joseph from putting away his wife (Matthew 1:18-20). Soon after His birth the Father bade Joseph to flee into Egypt, for Herod would seek the young Child to destroy Him (Matthew 2:13). What proofs were these of the Husbandman’s care for the true Vine!

“And my Father is the husbandman.” The Father has the same loving solicitude for “the branches” of the vine. Three principal thoughts are suggested. His protecting care: His eye is upon and His hand tends to the weakest tendril and tenderest shoot. Then it suggests His watchfulness. Nothing escapes His eye. Just as the gardener notices daily the condition of each branch of the vine, watering, training, pruning as occasion arises; so the Divine Husbandman is constantly occupied with the need and welfare of those who are joined to Christ. It also denoted His faithfulness. No branch is allowed to run to waste. He spares neither the spray nor the pruning knife. When a branch is fruitless He tends to it; if it is bearing fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. “My Father is the husbandman.” This is very blessed. He does not allot to others the task of caring for the vine and its branches, and this

assures us of the widest, most tender, and most faithful care of it. But though this verse has a comforting and assuring voice, it also has a searching one, as has just been pointed out.

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away”
(John 15:2).

This has been appealed to by Arminians in proof of their view that it is possible for a true Christian to perish, for they argue that the words “taketh away” signify eternal destruction. But this is manifestly erroneous, for such an interpretation would flatly contradict such explicit and positive declarations as are to be found in John 4:14; John 10:28; John 18:9; Romans 5:9-10; Romans 8:35-39, etc. Let us repeat what we said in the opening paragraph: Christ was not here addressing a mixed audience, in which were true believers and those who were merely professors. Nor was He speaking to the twelve — Judas had already gone out! Had Judas been present when Christ spoke these words there might be reason to suppose that He had him in mind. But what the Lord here said was addressed to the eleven, that is, to believers only! This is the first key to its significance.

Very frequently the true interpretation of a message is discovered by attending to the character of those addressed. A striking example of this is found in Luke 15 — where a case the very opposite of what we have here is in view. There the Lord speaks of the lost sheep and the lost coin being found, and the wayward son coming to the Father. Many have supposed that the Lord was speaking (in a parable) of the restoration of a backslidden believer. But the Lord was not addressing His disciples and warning them of the danger of getting out of communion with God. Instead He was speaking to His enemies (Luke 15:2) who criticised Him because He received sinners. Therefore, in what follows He proceeded to describe how a sinner is saved, first from the Divine side and then from the human. Here the case is otherwise. The Lord was not speaking to professors, and warning them that God requires truth in the inward parts; but He is talking to genuine believers, instructing, admonishing and warning them.

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” Many Calvinists have swung to the other extreme, erring in the opposite direction. We greatly fear that their principal aim was to overthrow the reasoning of their theological opponents, rather than to study carefully this verse in the light of its setting. They have argued that Christ was not speaking of a real believer at all. They insist that the words “beareth not fruit” described one who is within the “visible Church” but who has not vital union with Christ. But we are quite satisfied that this too is a mistake. The fact is, that we are so accustomed to concentrate everything on our own salvation and so little accustomed to dwell upon God’s glory in the saved, that there is a lamentable tendency in all of us to apply many of the most Pointed rebukes and warnings found in the Scriptures (which are declared to be “profitable for reproof and correction,” as well as “for instruction in righteousness”) to those who are not saved, thus losing their salutary effects on ourselves.

The words of our Lord leave us no choice in our application of this passage — as a whole and in its details — no matter what the conclusions be to which it leads us. Surely none will deny that they are believers to whom He says “Ye are the branches” (John 15:5). Very well then; observe that Christ employs the same term in this needed word in John 15:2: “Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit.” To make it doubly clear as to whom He was referring, He added, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit.” Now if there is one form of expression, which, by invariable and unexceptional use, indicates a believer more emphatically and explicitly than another, it is this: — “in me,” “in him,” “in Christ.” Never are these expressions used loosely; never are they applied to any but the children of God:

“If any one be in Christ (he is) a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” If then, it is a real believer who is in view here, and if the “taketh away” does not refer to perishing, then what is the force and meaning of our Lord’s words? First of all, notice the tense of the first verb: “Every branch in me not bearing fruit he taketh away” is the literal translation. It is not of a branch which never bore fruit that the Lord

is here speaking, but of one who is no longer “bearing fruit.” Now there are three things which cause the branches of the natural vine to become fruitless: either through running to leaf, or through disease (a blight), or through old age, when they wither and die. The same holds good in the spiritual application. In 2 Peter 1:8, we read:

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The unescapable inference from this is that, if the “these things” (mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-7) do not abound in us, we shall be “barren and unfruitful” — compare Titus 3:14. In such a case we bring forth nothing but leaves — the works of the flesh. Unspeakably solemn is this: one who has been bought at such infinite cost, saved by such wondrous grace, may yet, in this world, fall into a barren and unprofitable state, and thus fail to glorify God.

“He taketh away.” Who does? The “husbandman,” the Father. This is conclusive proof that an unregenerate sinner is not in view.

“The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

It is Christ who will say, “Depart from me” (Matthew 25). It is Christ who shall sit upon the Great White Throne to judge the wicked (Revelation 20). Therefore it cannot be a mere professor who is here in view — taken away unto judgment. Again a difficulty has been needlessly created here by the English rendering of the Greek verb. “Airo” is frequently translated in the A.V. “lifted up.” For example: “And they lifted up their voices” (Luke 17:13, so also in Acts 4:24). “And Jesus lifted up his eyes” (John 11:41). “Lifted up his hand” (Revelation 10:5), etc. In none of these places could the verb be rendered “taken away.” Therefore, we are satisfied that it would be more accurate and more in accord with “the analogy of faith” to translate, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he *lifteth up*” — from trailing on the ground. Compare with this Daniel 7:4: “I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon the feet like a man.”

“And every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2).

The words “branch in me,” though dearly understood, are not expressed in the Greek. Literally, it is “And every one that fruit bears,” that is, every one of the class of persons mentioned in the previous clause. How this confirms the conclusion that if believers are intended in the one case, they must be in the other also! The care and method used by the Husbandman are told out in the words: “He purgeth it.” The majority of people imagine that “purgeth” here is the equivalent of “pruning,” and understand the reference is to affliction, chastisement, and painful discipline. But the word “purgeth” here does not mean “pruning,” it would be better rendered, “cleanseth,” as it is in the very next verse. It may strike some of us as rather incongruous to speak of cleansing a branch of a vine. It would not be so if we were familiar with the Palestinian vineyards. The reference is to the washing off of the deposits of insects, of moss, and other parasites which infest the plant. Now the “water” which the Husbandman uses in cleansing the branches is the Word, as John 15:3 tells us. The thought, then, is the removal by the Word of what would obstruct the flow of the life and fatness of the vine through the branches. Let it be clearly understood that this “purging” is not to fit the believer for Heaven (that was accomplished, once for all, the first moment that faith rested upon the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ), but is designed to make us more fruitful, while we are here in this world.

“And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

“It is that action of the Father by which He brings the believer more fully under the operation of the ‘quick and powerful’ Word. The Word is that by which the believer is born, with that new birth to which no uncleanness attaches (1 Peter 1:23). But while by second birth he is ‘clean,’ and in relation to his former condition is ‘cleansed,’ he is ever viewed as exposed to defilement, and consequently as needing to be ‘cleansed.’ And as the Word was, through the energy of the Spirit, effectual in the complete cleansing, so in regard to defilement by the way and in regard to the husbandman’s purging to obtain more fruit, the purging is ever to be

traced up to the operation of the Word (Psalm 119:9; 2 Corinthians 7:1). Whatever other means may be employed, and there are many, they must be viewed as subordinate to the action of the 'truth,' or as making room for its purging process. Thus when affliction as a part of the process is brought into view, it is only as a means to the end of the soul's subjection and obedience to the Word. So the Psalmist said, 'Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes' (Psalm 119:67, 71). It will, we think, be apparent, that all means which Divine wisdom employs to bring to real subjection to the Word, must be regarded as belonging to the process of 'purging' that we may bring forth more fruit.

"It would be interesting to pursue our inquiry into the course of our purging but our present limits forbid this. We may just remark that much that may be learned on this point from such passages as those of which, without any extended remark, we cite one or two. Here is one which suggests a loving rebuke of all impatience under the operations of the Husbandman's hand: 'For a season if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold trials' (1 Peter 1:7). Then we have a text in James, which calls for joy under the Father's faithful purging: 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing,' (James 1:2-4). Once more, we take the words of Christian exultation which declare our fellowship with God in the whole process and fruit of our purging: 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us' (Romans 5:3-5). O that we might learn from these revelations of the Father's work, upon us and in us, quietly and joyfully to endure; and rightly to interpret all that befalls us, only desiring that He may fulfill in us all the good pleasure of His will, that we may be fruitful in every good work" (Mr. C. Campbell).

"Now (better, 'already') ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," (John 15:3).

The purging or cleansing of the previous verse refers to the believer's state; the cleanness here describes his standing before God. The one is progressive, the other absolute. The two things are carefully distinguished all through. We have purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit (1 Peter 1:22), yet we need to be purifying ourselves, even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3). We are washed" (1 Corinthians 6:11), yet there is constant need that He who washed us from our sins at first should daily wash our feet (John 13:10). The Lord, having had occasion to speak here of a purging which is constantly in process, graciously stopped to assure the disciples that they were already clean. Note He makes no exception — "ye": the branches spoken of in the previous verses. If the Lord had had in mind two entirely different classes in John 15:2 (as almost all of the best commentators argue), namely, formal professors in the former part of the verse and genuine believers in the latter, He would necessarily have qualified His statement here. This is the more conclusive if we contrast His words in John 13:10: "Ye are clean, but not all"! Let the reader refer back to our remarks upon John 13:10 for a fuller treatment of this cleanness.

"Abide in me" (John 15:4). The force of this cannot be appreciated till faith has laid firm hold of the previous verse: "Already ye are clean." "Brethren in Christ, what a testimony is this: He who speaks what he knows and testifies what He has seen, declares us 'clean every whit.' Yea, and He thus testifies in the very same moment as when He asserts that we had need to have our feet washed; in the very same breath in which He reveals our need of cleansing in order to further fruit-bearing. He would thus assure us that the defilement which we contract in our walk as pilgrims, and the impurity which we contract as branches do in nowise, nor in the least degree, affect the absolute spotless purity which is ours in Him.

"Now in all study of the Word this should be a starting-point, the acknowledgement of our real oneness with Christ, and our cleanness in Him by His Word. It may be observed that He cannot 'wash our feet' till we know that we are cleansed 'every whit'; and we cannot go on to learn of Him what is needful fruit-bearing unless we first drink in the Word, 'Ye are already clean.' We can only receive His further instruction when we have well learned and are holding fast

the first lesson of His love — our completeness in Him” (Mr. C. Campbell).

“Clean every whit,” Thou saidst it, Lord!

Shall one suspicion lurk?

Thine surely is a faithful Word,

And Thine a finished Work.

“Abide in me,” “To be” in Christ and “to abide” in Him are two different things which must not be confounded. One must first be “in him” before he can “abide in him.” The former respects a union effected by the creating- power of God, and which can neither be dissolved nor suspended. Believers are never exhorted to be “in Christ” — they are in Him by new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10). But Christians are frequently exhorted to abide in Christ, because this privilege and experience may be interrupted. “To ‘abide,’ ‘continue,’ ‘dwell,’ ‘remain’ in Christ — by all these terms is this one word translated — has always reference to the maintenance of fellowship with God in Christ. The word ‘abide’ calls us to vigilance, lest at any time the experimental realization of our union with Christ should be interrupted. To abide in Him, then, is to have sustained conscious communion with Him” (Mr. Campbell). To abide in Christ signifies the constant occupation of the heart with Him — a daily active faith in Him which, so to speak, maintains the dependency of the branch upon the vine, and the circulation of life and fatness of the vine in the branch. What we have here is parallel with that other figurative expression used by our Lord in John 6:56: He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth (abideth) in me, and I in him.” This is but another way of insisting upon the continuous exercise of faith in a crucified and living Savior, deriving life and the sustenance of life from Him. As the initial act of believing in Him is described as “coming” to Him, (“He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst”: John 6:35), so the continued activity of faith is described as “abiding in him.” “Abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:4). The two things are quite distinct, though closely connected. Just as it is one thing to be “in Christ,” and

another to “abide in him,” so there is a real difference between His being in us, and His abiding in us. The one is a matter of His grace; the other of our responsibility. The one is perpetual, the other may be interrupted. By our abiding in Him is meant the happy conscious fellowship of our union with Him, in the discernment of what He is for us; so by His abiding in us is meant the happy conscious recognition of His presence, the assurance of His goodness, grace and power — Himself the recourse of our soul in everything.

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abides in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me (John 15:4).

“Thus our Lord enforces the necessity of maintaining fellowship. He is not only the source of all fruit, but He also puts forth His power while there is personal appropriation of what He is for us, and in us. And this, if we receive it, will lead us to a right judgment of ourselves and our service. In the eyes of our own brethren, and in our own esteem, we may maintain a goodly appearance as fruitbearing branches. But whatever our own judgment or that of others, unless the apparent springs from ‘innermost fellowship and communion’ the true Vine will never own it as His fruit.

“Moreover, all this may, by His blessing, bring us to *see the cause* of our imperfect or sparse fruit bearing. Thousands of Christians are complaining of barrenness; but they fail to trace their barrenness to its right source — the meagerness of their communion with Christ. Consequently, they seek fruitfulness in activities, often right in themselves, but which, while He is unrecognized, can never yield any fruit. In such condition, they ought rather to cry, ‘Our leanness! Our leanness’; and they ought to know that leanness can only be remedied by that abiding in Christ, and He in them, which ‘fills the soul with marrow and its fatness.’ ‘Those that be planted in the house of the Lord (an Old Testament form for “abiding in Him”) shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing’ (Psalm 92:13, 14). We are surely warranted to say, Take heed to the fellowship, and the fruit will spring forth” (Mr. C. Campbell).

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5).

This is very blessed, coming in just here. It is a word of assurance. As we contemplate the failure of Israel as God’s vine of old, and as we review our own past resolutions and attempts, we are discouraged and despondent.

This is met by the announcement, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” It is not a question of your sufficiency; yea, let your insufficiency be admitted, as settled once for all. In your self you are no better than a branch severed from the vine-dry, dead. But “he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.”

“No figure could more forcibly express the complete dependence of the believer on Christ for all fruit-bearing than this. A branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine. In itself it has no resources though in union with vine it is provided with life. This is precisely the believer’s condition: ‘Christ liveth in me.’ The branch bears the clusters, but it does not produce them. It bears what the vine produces; and so the result is expressed by the Apostle, ‘to me to live is Christ.’ It is important that in this respect, as well as with reference to righteousness before God, we should be brought to the end of self with all its vain efforts and strivings. And then there comes to us the assurance of unfailing resources in Another” (“Waymarks in the Wilderness”) —

“For without me (better ‘severed from me’) ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Clearly this refers not to the vital union existing between Christ and the believer, which shall never be broken, either by his own volition or the will of God, through all eternity (Romans 8:38-39); but to the interruption of fellowship and dependency upon Him, mentioned in the immediate context. This searching word is introduced here to enforce our need of heeding what had just been said in the previous verse and repeated at the beginning of this.

“Severed from me ye can do nothing.” There are many who believe this in a general way, but who fail to apply it in detail. They know that they cannot do the important things without Christ’s aid, but how many of the little things we attempt in our own strength! No wonder we fail so often. “Without me ye can do nothing”.

“Nothing that is spiritually good; no, not any thing at all, be it little or great, easy or difficult to be performed; cannot think a good thought, speak a good word, or do a good action; can neither begin one, nor when it is begun, perfect it” (Dr. John Gill).

But mark it well, the Lord did not say, “Without you I can do nothing.” In gathering out His elect, and in building up His Church, He employs human instrumentality; but that is not a matter of necessity, but of choice, with Him; He could “do” without them, just as well as with them.

“Severed from me ye can do nothing.” Urgently do we need this warning. Not only will the allowance of any known sin break our fellowship with Him, but concentration on any thing but Himself will also surely do it. Satan is very subtle. If only he can get us occupied with ourselves, our fruit-bearing, or our fruit, his purpose is accomplished. Faith is nothing apart from its object, and is no longer in operation when it becomes occupied with itself. Love, too, is in exercise only while it is occupied with its beloved.

“There is a disastrous delusion in this matter when, under the plea of witnessing for Christ and relating their experience, men are tempted to parade their own attainments: their love, joy and peace, their zeal in service, their victory in conflict. And Satan has no more effectual method of severing the soul from Christ, and arresting the bringing forth of fruit to the glory of God, than when he can persuade Christians to feast upon their own fruit, instead of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of man. But shall we not bear witness for Christ? Yes, verily, but let your testimony be of Him, not of yourself” (“Waymarks in the Wilderness”).

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6).

This is another verse which has been much misunderstood, and it is really surprising to discover how many able commentators have entirely missed its meaning. With scarcely an exception, Calvinistic expositors suppose that Christ here referred to a different class from what had been before Him in the three previous verses. Attention is called to the fact that Christ did not say, "If a branch abide not in me he is cast forth," but "If a man abide not in me." But really this is inexcusable in those who are able, in any measure, to consult the Greek. The word "man" is not found in the original at all! Literally rendered it is, "unless any one abide in me he is cast out as the branch" (Bagster's Interlinear). The simple and obvious meaning of these words of Christ is this: If any one of the branches, any believer, continues out of fellowship with Me, he is "cast forth." It could not be said of any one who had never "come" to Christ that He does not abide in Him. This is made the more apparent by the limitation in this very verse: "he is cast forth as a branch." Let it be remembered that the central figure here employed by the Lord has reference to our sojourn in this world, and the bringing forth of fruit to the glory of the Father. The "casting forth" is done by the Husbandman, and evidently had in view the stripping of the believer of the gifts and opportunities which he failed to improve. It is similar to the salt "losing its savor" (Matthew 5:13). It is parallel with Luke 8:18: "And whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." [17](#) It is analogous to that admonition in 2 John 8: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

But what is meant by, "Men gather them, and cast into the fire, and they are burned"? Observe, first, the plural pronouns. It is not "men gather him and cast into the fire, and he is burned," as it would most certainly have been had an unbeliever, a mere professor, been in view. The change of number here is very striking, and evidences, once more, the minute accuracy of Scripture. "Unless any one abide in me, he is east forth as a branch, and men gather them and cast into the fire and they are burned." The "them" and the "they" are what issues from the one who has been cast forth "as a branch." And what is it that issues from such a one — what but dead works: "wood, hay, stubble"! and what is to become of his "dead works." 1 Corinthians 3:15 tells us: "If any man's work shall be burned (the

very word used in John 15:6!), he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” Lot is a pertinent example: he was out of fellowship with the Lord, he ceased to bear fruit to His glory, and his dead works were all burned up in Sodom; yet he himself was saved!

One other detail should be noticed. In the original it is not “men gather them,” but “they gather them.” Light is thrown on this by Matthew 13:41, 42:

“The Son of man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity: And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Note the two distinct items here: the angels gather “all things that offend” and “them which do iniquity.” In the light of John 15:6 the first of these actions will be fulfilled at the session of the judgment-seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10), the second when He returns to the earth.

Here then is a most solemn warning and heart-searching prospect for every Christian. Either your life and my life is, as the result of continuous fellowship with Christ, bringing forth fruit to the glory of the Father, fruit which will remain; or, because of neglect of communion with Him, we are in immense danger of being set aside as His witnesses on earth, to bring forth only that which the fire will consume in a coming Day. May the Holy Spirit apply the words of the Lord Jesus to each conscience and heart.

Studying the following questions will prepare for our next lesson:

1. What is the connection between verse 7 and the context?
2. How is “ye shall ask what ye will” in verse 7 to be qualified?
3. What is meant by “so shall ye be my disciples,” verse 8?
4. What is the relation between verses 9-12 and the subject of fruit-bearing?

5. What constituted Christ's "joy," verse 11?
6. What is suggested by "friends," verses 13-15?
7. Why does Christ bring in election in verse 16?

FOOTNOTES

[fn8](#) Where the form of death was not specified, it was by stoning.

[fn9](#) See the author's booklet, "The Atonement," also his "The Sovereignty of God." Both are obtainable from the publishers of this book.

[fn10](#) See the author's booklet, "Christian Liberty," obtainable from the publishers, 10 cents. (In 1945, - Ages ed.)

[fn11](#) Let the reader carefully re-read this paragraph.

[fn12](#) It Is characteristic of John to give us her name. for he presents Christ as God manifest in the flesh, therefore everything comes out into the light: cf. the fact that John alone tells us the name of the priest's servant, whose ear the Savior healed (John 18:10).

[fn13](#) The only apparent exception is the case of Jairus' daughter.

[fn14](#) Other points which have occasioned difficulty to some will be dealt with in the course of this exposition.

[fn15](#) This wonderful and Important prophecy is carefully, interestingly, and most helpfully dealt with in The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation by Mr. Philip Mauro. New, revised edition now available (\$2.50) from the Bible Truth Depot, Swengel, Pa. Don't fail to secure a copy. (I.C.H.)

[fn16](#) The above quotations are from an article by the late Mr. Inglis. in "Waymarks in the Wilderness."

[fn17](#) See our comments on this verse under John 9:17.