

new covenant **Choice**

No man, however great his gifts and personal abilities, and however constant his following, and whatever his achievements has ever embraced Christ's cause until he has embraced His cross.

G.W.North

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to JESUS the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel See that ye refuse not him that speaketh

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THE AXE IS LAID - PART ONE

GEORGE W. NORTH

This article is based on the third and fourth chapters of the Gospel according to Matthew, and before proceeding any further, the whole of the third chapter and verses 1 to 11 of the fourth should be read.

What a tremendous man John Baptist was. Throughout history to the coming of Christ, few had equalled him and none had surpassed him. Christ said of him that among those born of women, no-one was greater than he. John Baptist was the forerunner of the Christ Himself, a man sent from God. John's virtues were so many that to list and comment on them all would fill a large amount of paper space. To note but one of these - precision; the prophet was very precise. There was only one crying in the wilderness, and it was he; there was not another voice crying in the wilderness but his. John alone was crying because no-one else knew the need of the people; only he, that is all. The rest of the preachers, prophets, priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees (some of these are mentioned here) were all coming out with trite little sermonettes, saying lovely things about God - nice things calculated to promote the national ego and make the people feel good.

THE VOICE

Only one voice was crying though, and he was out in the wilderness, away from civilization and the centres of religion. 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord', he said, 'make his paths straight'. All Judaea and all the region round about Jordan went out to hear the voice crying in the wilderness; it brought them to repentance and they confessed their sins and were baptized by John in Jordan. They had never seen or heard anybody like him before. John was utterly different, completely independent of this world, a man sent from God. People went out to a voice that cried like that - they responded to the man, the person and the voice and the message seemed right, they fitted together. The genuine people could see through all the facade of religion being practised in Jerusalem - the big names, the high places and all the mere ritual of it - they wanted something real. John's voice was genuine and authentic; he lived the way he preached. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, he said; he believed it, for obviously he had left the kingdoms of the world, he had put them behind him; the people listened to him.

One of the least recognizable dangers in any age is the human being's capacity to become part of it. Men and women absorb the world according to the fashion of the age in which they live. The tragedy is that they do not know they are doing so. We are needing a voice, someone like John Baptist, a man full of the Holy Ghost and fire. He said he was the friend of Jesus. He was, and if he had been other than he was, and preached other than he did, he would have been an enemy of Jesus. In the things of God there is no neutral ground, no fence-sitting. God sent out John Baptist to make this clear, and he did so in every way

possible, in his life-style, his clothing, his eating and drinking, his message - everything. People only needed to go out and observe this man and listen to him, that is all; they were immediately convicted of their sins, convinced they were wrong, and wanted to get right. Sadducees and Pharisees came to his baptism too, only to be told that they were a generation of vipers fitted for the wrath of God that was surely coming upon them. John demanded of them fruits meet for repentance, there was no baptism upon request for them. They were not to let their thoughts run away with them either, he said. He knew they were full of pride and would say 'We have Abraham to our father', as though that would cover up their sin; 'God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham', he said.

John was God's axeman; He swung the axe well and laid it to the root of the trees: every tree which did not bring forth good fruit of repentance was hewn down and cast into the fire. He was indeed a mighty man. This was powerful stuff, but if they thought this was powerful, how about what he told them next? There was one mightier than he coming, who was so great and mighty that he felt he was not worthy to bear or even unlatch His shoes. 'I baptize you with water', he said, 'but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire'. The voice of John Baptist has rung out down through the years, 'I baptize - He shall baptize'. Listening again to him, we learn that baptism in water is a step in the order of repentance, but it is only a step, just one, that is all; baptism in water is a step toward baptism in the Spirit. This does not mean, neither is it to say, that it is not possible to be baptized in Spirit before being baptized in water, many have been. John's preaching ministry was an introduction to a greater preaching and ministry, and was both intended and commanded by God to be a picture of it. John's baptism did not guarantee to anyone whom he baptized that he or she would automatically be baptized in the Spirit. Though there was promise of the superior baptism in his preaching, there was no guarantee in his practise.

THE AXE

It is important that we all understand what water baptism is, and what it means. In John's language it is a symbol meaning that the axe had been laid unto the root of the tree. This axe is hard and very sharp, and the command to be baptized is inescapable; it must happen to everyone. Baptism is the symbol chosen by God to signify what has happened to a man. No man may be baptized in water unless the axe has been laid to his roots and the tree of his life has been felled. The felling of the tree of his inner life means:

1. That a man has been cut off from his former means of living, and
2. That the former life is dead and buried.

Cut a tree down and it dies, it can no longer live because it is cut off from its roots. Unless a man is cut off from the means whereby his spiritual life has been sustained, that life will never cease. By all spiritual and commonsense law we must all be brought to death before we can live a new life. That old life must be understood for what it is and be so hated and loathed that there is no going back to it. How can a tree be put back on its old roots once it has been cut off?

It is very important for us all to hear this word of John's because we are living in days of much misunderstanding and great deception. We have learned that trees can be bent, or turned in any direction, yet still be on their same roots. Caught young enough, a sapling can be turned and bent according to the will of any person minded to try the experiment. Trees can be forced over by other trees, pushed in a certain direction by prevailing winds; they can be tied down, they can be cut, pruned, grafted, trimmed, shaped, stunted, even made to bear several different kinds of fruits and still be the same tree, standing on the same old roots. There are lots of people who have undergone that kind of change. Undoubtedly something has happened to them, they have changed direction, stopped some old habits, ceased from some of their old ways, parted with former companions, assumed a different life-style, but they are not new trees. These kinds of changes can be so real and become so permanent that it is possible for them to be mistaken for new trees, but they are not. People undergo conversions, adopt new beliefs, attend churches, do good works, say prayers, go to Bible College, become workers, leaders, teachers, preachers, missionaries - any or all of these things - and yet still be on their old roots.

BAPTISM IN WATER

To many people, one of the most offensive things about the gospel is its radicalism. John's gospel was not the gospel of Christ as known among us today; the full gospel was still in process of preparing in John's day. John was filling an important position during that period - his calling was to introduce Him in whom the gospel lay, in whose blood lay the covenant and about whom the full gospel speaks. The ultimate of John's baptism was to present Christ; that is why he was so radical. There were those listening to John who were thinking 'we are alright, Abraham is our father'. The logical end of such thinking is 'because Abraham is our father, we shall not need this Jesus, therefore we do not want Him'. Things have not changed much since then. All over the world people are relying on all kinds of things - on people, on states of blessing, or names or happenings or beliefs, but all must go, the tree must be cut off from all its roots. We must be prepared for a completely new beginning altogether.

Baptism in water is not an end in itself, nor can it of itself bestow any virtue on the person being baptized. It must not be regarded as some sort of mystical Christian symbol. It does not put right everything that is wrong in the life - God did not intend that it should. It may be your next step though, and if so should be taken with the full understanding of what you are doing. Baptism is important enough to be included in the gospel but it is not a superstitious rite; the critical thing is to be baptized in the Spirit. Do not think you should be baptized in water and yet never be baptized in the Spirit. Water baptism is not ALL that important, it is only a picture of baptism in Spirit - what is the

shadow to substance? Baptism in water is unto repentance, baptism in Spirit is unto sonship: the all important thing is to be made a child of God. What marvellous grace this is! Whatever your roots are, you must be cut off from them without more ado. 'The axe is laid to the root of the trees' in the glorious baptism in the Spirit.

THE SERPENT

The tragedy of it all is that some of those who came to John's baptism boasting that Abraham was their father were a 'generation of vipers'. We know exactly what John meant when he said that. Neither John's baptism or Jesus' baptism has anything to do with Abraham or his children, it has to do with Adam and his children, and satan and his children. Immediately this is recognized we see the significance of John's reference to vipers. That serpent the devil came into the garden and by his subtilty took Adam and his children AWAY from God. We are all victims of that which happened between Adam and satan in the beginning - we are a brood of vipers. One of the phenomenal abilities natural to snakes is their habit of changing their coats every year. They slip out of the old coat, leave it behind, and put on another; it is new, completely new, but it is the same, exactly the same. They change their coats, but they're still vipers, the same vipers. Small wonder then that John spoke as he did. A new coat? The same colours though, the same stripes, the same markings, and the same serpent.

No wonder then that God says there must be a complete cutting off - it's so easy to change clothes! John certainly made his conditions, didn't he? He did not make it easy for people - no fruit, no baptism. The move among the Jews under John was a move of the Spirit. He always makes the conditions hard for two-faced people: He intends to keep out all the snakes and the softies. Good axe-man though he was, John only laid the axe to the root of the tree, he did not cut the tree down. There was another axe-man coming, the real AXE-MAN. He it is who cuts down the tree. John was His fore-runner; he only came to prepare the way of the Lord. Water baptism at John's hand was only a preparation of mind and heart for, a picture of, Spirit baptism. John's full statement was even more drastic than we may suppose; he puts it like this 'Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, AND CAST INTO THE FIRE'. In God's view it is no good for anything. Make nothing from it, don't build with it, or turn it into tables or chairs, or pickaxe handles, or anything. Nothing. Burn it! 'Turn it to ash, I will not have it' - that's God. What an approach! Destroy it. Don't keep anything of it, not even mementoes of it, or plaques on which to carve texts. Nothing! Finished! This is drastic, absolutely sweeping!

Surely John wasn't expecting to win many converts that way, was he? Strangely enough he was, and he did. People know the truth when they hear it. God has made us that way. John told the truth and genuine people went out and listened to it. They knew the Sadducees and Pharisees and all the religious bigots - they had heard them long enough - now they listened to John and made their choice. Inside they said 'That's right John, that's right', and repented and were baptized. Let the sects have what they wanted if they wished, the majority of the people wanted God. They accepted the fact that the tree must be cut down, there were no arguments about it, the logic of the gospel is perfect. Even in the limited form in which John preached it,

the gospel was logical. Yet true and devastating though it was, what he said was only preparatory. That is why he constantly pointed to Him that was coming, the mightier one, his superior, the actual axeman.

THE FIG TREE

When He came, He told them a story; 'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?' And he answering said unto him, 'Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.' There it is, verbatim from the axe-man's mouth. John had come with his gospel to prepare the nation for the Lord Jesus and His gospel. The tree was the nation: the certain man is God (the word 'man' is not in the Greek, it would be better put as 'person'); the vine dresser is Jesus: the three years was the period of His ministry to the nation to date: the vine is the symbol of Israel's spiritual life: the fig tree is the symbol of Israel's civil life: the digging and dunging is an unusual figure of Christ's ministry to the nation; in the fourth year the Lord was cut off by the nation: the nation was eventually cut down as God commanded. This parable was one of many in the same vein in all of which the Lord forewarned the Jews of impending doom. This particular one is a succinct statement on that theme deliberately linked by Jesus with John Baptist's ministry. It is an extension of and sequel to the figure John used, and the amplification and verification of his prophecy. It shows who is the axe-man and by whose orders the tree is cut down. The felling of the tree was decreed by God and executed by God. John could not do it; mighty though he was, he was only a prophet. It is not given to prophets to execute judgement, that is God's prerogative only.

The baptism of John was not to knock the tree over, it was to call the nation to repentance so that it should not be cut down. For a while it may have looked as though it had achieved its purpose, but the revival in Jewry soon ground to a halt. John was killed, his disciples were dispersed, the movement faded away; but Christ had been presented and the movement continued. Attention focused on Him, and people flocked to Him as they had to John. He had the same message, John's cry became the basis of His call; 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand', the command continued. From that beginning, though, the Lord moved swiftly into the greater things He had come to declare. Adding to John's message (as we saw in the parable) He superseded John's ministry altogether. He gave over water baptism to His disciple's trust while He pressed on to the greater baptism, of which John had spoken. What a baptism that would be - with the Holy Ghost and with fire; that would not only burn up the tree, it would burn up all chaff as well.

'INTO THE WILDERNESS ...

As we have seen, John Baptist was baptizing in the wilderness; the voice of God was crying out in the land of desolation. Everyone was baptized there. To that wilderness then went Jesus, that He, in common with everyone else, should be baptized in the wilderness. He did not only identify with them in their experience, He identified with them also in their

situation. He was different from them, as they all realized and events proved, and through Him God intended to reveal what He expected and what He wanted us to understand by repentance and the fruits of it. For this 'Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness' - He was led even further into the wilderness, further than John was and the rest of the people were - to be tempted of the devil.

When the tree has been cut down and burned up and the new planting has taken place, a man becomes a son of God. He will then be subject to temptations from the devil, as was the Lord. These temptations may not be couched in the same words, nor the test be on exactly the same points, but they will lie in the same area. This is the reason why the Lord's temptations at that time are recorded. The first was an attack on His Sonship (in His case, His deity). 'If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread'. The devil very well knew that Jesus was the Son of God, he was trying to break the relationship between Him and His Father by making Him act independently from Him. Jesus had the power to do the devil's will - so have we, but we may not. Not one of us must believe that we have the power to do as we will. Power from on high is not given us for self-benefit, nor may it be used just to prove that the old tree has not been cut down. The old life is the self life, the self-first, self-important, self-satisfying life. No-one gets power from on high for a life of self-display. The devil doesn't live by bread, neither does God, neither does man live by bread alone. His body lives by bread, but if he wants his spirit to live he must be obedient to God's word. Had Jesus used His power just to prove His Sonship and made stones into bread, part of Him would have died. Couldn't He have done it because He was the Son of God and He needed bread? Yes, He could, but He wouldn't because it would have APPEARED that He had done so in obedience to satan. Every child of God must keep this example of Christ in his or her mind. We must abstain from every appearance of evil. Good, beneficial things become evil if done at the devil's suggestion. Power for self-benefit in the flesh is satan's power, not God's. In other words, it is folly to think that if we do things out of God's will, He will keep us from the consequences of our act. Specially you must not think that you can deliberately do some spectacular thing equivalent to casting yourself down from a pinnacle of the temple, believing that God will look after you; He will not. People think, 'Oh, God will look after me, I'm His child, He will keep me, I will do this or do that'. God will keep you all the time you walk in His ways, but the devil never once tempted a person to walk in God's ways. Do nothing at the devil's suggestion, nothing, except rebuke him, and disobey him. It was the devil who put Jesus on the pinnacle, not God; always remember this. Beware of pinnacles and if God places you there it is best to be unaware of it, certainly do not ever seek such places. Jesus saw satan as lightning fall from heaven, the devil wanted to see Jesus fall like a stone to the ground, but his desire was frustrated.

... TO BE TEMPTED'

Some time ago I met a precious brother whom I had known many years previously. This dear man had been through a most harrowing experience that nearly cost him his life. He was a missionary at the time, and was walking along the shore of a gulf or bay in America when it suddenly came to him that he could walk across the water, just as Peter had done. He had experienced something wonderful with God (so he said) and he

felt he had the power to do this thing. He believed God was expecting him, urging him to walk across the water - so he stepped out. And what do you think happened? He nearly drowned. Somebody just pulled him out in time. He thought HE could do this, but he could not. Who you are and what power you have must not go to your head. Stupid ideas do not come from God, neither do self-exalting displays. Spectaculars with you at the centre, or on the pinnacle are out when the tree has been cut down. The devil may not tempt you to do exactly the same things, but do not be deceived by him, or lulled into a false sense of security; though real, these are only illustrations of the type of thing the devil does. Satan's ways are as devious as they are many.

The thing that lies at the heart of the third temptation is worldliness. The devil takes a person up to the top of an exceeding high mountain for this; the peak of desire. Satan was playing upon Jesus' natural desires to regain that of which He had been robbed - the world. This is the most obvious of the temptations, but it is based upon the hidden desires in man to get

more, have all. The trouble lies here. Push-button worldliness is not recognizably sinful. Things in this world are not sinful of themselves - a washing machine for example, a car, a house, a dress, a suit, furniture, what's wrong with all these? Nothing! But God did not make them, the world made them. Perhaps this is the most subtle trap of all. 'I want a new washing machine - I must have a new car, I must have this, I must have that, I must have the other', when you really do not need it - you only want it. Sometimes we justify our actions by saying we NEED these things - it is necessary for me to have so and so - when it is not true. Of themselves, these things are perfectly innocent. But to the child of God there is nothing innocent in the world, the devil's designs lie behind everything. Behind many people's desire lies envy, discontent, greed, and many other related things, one leading to the other, and all of these are fruit of the old tree. But not if it is cut down and dead and burned up. We must all ensure that in our lives there can be no fruit or evidence of the old life. We can best ensure this by bringing forth the fruit of the new.

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THE CALL OF GOD

BERNARD HULL

To hear the Call of God is the most wonderful thing that can happen in our lives. This calling is beyond explanation; it defies any complete analysis. Once a heart has truly heard this personal, loving, commanding Call of God, it can never be the same again.

In these days, when so much of Gospel preaching seems to contain a mercenary element, it is good to contemplate the wonder of God calling a man and a woman to Himself. By mercenary we do not refer merely to a financial element. We speak of that merchandising of the message which seems to make everything a kind of bargain - 'I believe, God accepts me, and will have me in heaven for ever and ever'. Whilst this is true, it so easily becomes cheapened into a shabby element which defiles the marvel of God's gracious calling. It is much more than moral reinstatement fitting us for heaven. It is the throb of His loving nature reaching out to gather us into His heart to dwell in Him, one forever.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CALL

God's calling comes from the depths; it is profound: 'deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts' (Psalm 42:7). Waterspouts rise as fountains of the deep - God's calling is His deeps calling to ours. His word is the issuing up of the waterspouts, the fountaining forth of His pleading love. He or she who hears this sound cannot explain it, and neat phraseology, in fact any words are unable to capture its wonder. It is God, the wonderful person, drawing us personally to Himself. Spirit calling to spirit. It is at once an aching longing, yet an inexpressible optimism. It seems to partake of a note of possible grief lest it be rejected, but that is overridden by a magnificent

confidence that the hearing heart shall respond. It is heard intuitively, not primarily in words but by a tone, a note, the SOUND of His voice. John said that he 'turned to see the voice' and it was as 'the sound of many waters' (Revelation 1:15).

Taking this physical earth as an example, we know that in its depths are molten fires, exceedingly hot. They yearn to burst up through fissures in the earth's crust, that all the liquefied, burning heat may be seen and expressed. From the depths of God's heart His calling comes, the outpouring of the fires of His holy love. It is an engulfing flow - its sound may be utterly silent - but the heart that hears that sound is gathered into it, enthralled and possessed by it at the moment of hearing. The timbre of His voice is charged with such wonder that Stephen, referring to Abraham when first he heard the call, said that 'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham' (Acts 7:2). Nowhere else in scripture is this description mentioned concerning the call of Abraham, but Stephen knew that when Abraham heard the call of God, that calling was imbued with GLORY, with inexpressible wonder, for Stephen himself had heard the calling of the same God.

By the mystery of the Call we mean that it is known only to the initiated, it is private and imbued with a sense of secrecy. Yet each who has heard and responded to it recognizes others who have heard; the inexplicable is in this Call. No matter what words are used or how many, there is that that cannot be spoken, 'he who has heard it knows'. Incomprehensibility is part of the Calling - our minds cannot wrap themselves around it and neatly analyse its contents. By this Calling we, as little ones, are drawn into the infinite bosom of God, to which there is no end and no measure.

There is obscurity in this mystery, so much is hidden! Yet, the overwhelming sense is not darkness, but light. (Do we not speak in riddles?) The God of glory appears; all is bright with wonder. I hear His calling; I'm drawn by it from the empty void of self-pleasing into a deep sense of purpose, of belonging, of value. However, the details are tantalisingly obscure, all my inward senses witness that I am secure, yet what that means is mysterious!

Those who have heard and responded to this Call possess in their lives a quality, a mystique. In Christian circles today, it is usually frowned upon to use the word 'mystic' or 'mystical', but it is not possible to hear this Call of God and it not contain this mystical quality. The Call is essentially deeper than God addressing our consciousness. It includes the rational dimension of man's being but is far more profound, reaching into and engulfing all the fountains of the deep in man. When others look on at a life called and following this Call of God, there is a sense of bewilderment. They are puzzled and perplexed at the testimony they see and hear. They cannot hear the calling of the invisible God who has spoken but they behold a life lived in obedience to that mysterious call.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE CALL

God's Call is charged with a sense of the unknown. It bids the hearing heart leave its old haunts, its habits of thought and ways of life, and launch out in uncharted seas. Others have sailed those seas before, leaving encouragement to those who embark later, but all is new to the young spiritual mariner. An adventure is an enterprise; 'Wilt thou venture for My sake, apart from all reward?', said the Lord to a follower in the writings of Browning. Abraham forsook the well-trodden streets of his birthplace and went forth, he knew not where. There was risk involved, and the element of uncertainty is intrinsic to adventure. There may be hazards and difficult paths to negotiate, mountains to climb, privations to suffer - who knows what it all may mean? But the Call is so strong, He who called is so wonderful that where He leads must surely have wonders too. As we hear and begin to follow, we are endowed with a comprehension and steadfast will which will grow in us as we follow His Call.

The element of daring is included in venturing out in response to God's Call. How securely do our souls tend to rest in the well-tried and familiar! The Call of the Lord comes and bids us rise up and go with Him where He will. We speak not merely of geography - the genuine Call of God inspires deep drawings upon a heart, which are able to lift it from being earthbound. It is similar to that feeling that some of us have known as we have stood on the seashore and sensed the pull of the ocean, the call to places unknown. Others feel the draw of the mountain peaks, to climb high and higher, maybe to be the first to scale the mountain by that route. There was a famous newspaper headline concerning a lost mountaineer - LAST SEEN STILL CLIMBING! Applied spiritually, what a testimony that would be! God's Call bids us seek new heights which will give us new perspectives, and wondrous new sights will greet our eyes. He will be our guide and we shall not get lost nor be led beyond the strength He will supply.

Often, adventurers have simply been freebooters, for whom the thought of personal gain has been the sole motivation

for roving. However, there has been a more noble breed of adventurers who have penetrated unknown realms to discover and then to share their knowledge, that they might call back and dispel fears by that which they have found, and open up for all that which has been uncharted territory. The great realm for us to adventure into is God Himself. This cannot be accomplished, though, unless we respond to His drawings that bid us leave ourselves. The consciousness of personal limitations and weaknesses must not remain paramount. His calling must take their place, we must move on out of ourselves, and following Him we shall discover His heart and His ways.

The face of the world has been charted for all to see because of the adventuring few. It is likewise in the spiritual life. History has been shaped by God because He found men and women here and there who would follow Him whithersoever He went. Abraham was such a pioneer, one who went before 'not knowing whither' (Hebrews 11:8). He became father of all such who would live to disprove the lies based on ignorance of God, life and sin. Moses was an adventurer for God, a man of the mountains, climbing higher and higher. There are tracks in the trackless wastes of this world, for those who hear God's Call, which shine brighter as they journey. Each of us must adventure for His sake. Fear must be proven a lie by the going on and through with God who shall make Himself known. The misty peaks of the knowledge of Him shall be scaled, and we shall live to come back and tell others. Valleys, peaceful and serene, where the pastures are pleasant, will be found too. Still the call resounds in its profound simplicity 'get thee out ... and come' (Genesis 12:1).

There is no doubt that God's Calling contains a sense of the immeasurable, of vastness, of greatness and immensity. This is not a consciousness that terrifies. The sense of 'I can follow, I can respond and walk the way', also comes with His Call. God imparts to the hearing heart the ability. He who never felt the sense of wonder never heard the Calling of God - he only heard words. Wonder is fundamental to God's Call, it excites the heart and incites it to do exploits, to move up and out and after Him who calls. 'Follow the Gleam', is the exhortation of Merlin in Tennyson's poem:

Not of the sunlight,
Not of the moonlight,
Not of the starlight!
O Young Mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the Gleam.

THE COMMAND OF THE CALL

When God does any work at all, He begins with the calling of His voice. He 'commanded light to shine out of darkness' (2 Corinthians 4:6). There is a sense in which He called it out of the darkness. When God was beginning a new genesis in the history of the world, He appeared in glory to Abraham, who dwelt in heathen darkness, and called him forth.

His Call was also a command. It can be read as a wooing, winsome plea, an invitation. But it was far more. It was the command of a superior, disobedience would have had dire consequences.

The possibility of disobedience did not exist in the elements when God spoke light into being. Those atoms He rearranged, having no will of their own, moved at His behest. However, the heart of man has power to reject the command of God. If a man obeys the commanding Call of God, then order and beauty in the image of His Son will be the result. Chaos and ruin will be the outcome if the calling is rejected.

It is often the case that we emphasize the 'gospel invitation'. By that is meant God's plea with hearts 'to come to Him'. Hymn books often have a section devoted to the 'invitation'. The God who calls and invites is in fact cloaking His command with the gentleness of loving appeal. It is plain to any who know God that He does not delight in emphasizing the commandment aspect of things, preferring rather that hearts will respond to His loving Call, and in so doing fulfil His commandments, which are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

When God commanded Abraham to remove from all that was familiar, He also made promises, 'I will shew thee, I will make thee, I will bless thee, thou shalt be a blessing'. The command of the Call also contains sure promises. God's Calling to us is the expression of His will. It reaches us in our will. It does appeal to the emotional, affectional and desire realms of us. It may even be intellectually logical, but in the last analysis it comes to the will. It involves the meeting of two wills, and one must triumph and the other find its fulfilment by gladly functioning in the context of that greater will. God does not break man's will, but would bring it into glad subjection to His own.

The seat of human personality resides in the spirit of man. God is fathering spirits as men and women conceive children. When God fathers a spirit into the world, it comes direct from Him, with no tendency to disobey Him. This means that in the profoundest part of man's being, he loves God and will do His will. However, we know that because we are born of the flesh there is another terrible nature in man which objects utterly to the rule of God. Fathered by Satan, continued through the flesh, this force rises up to turn the heart from God's command. Stubbornness, obstinacy and rebellion are all elements of this sin-nature. But God is able to save - let a heart begin to obey His commanding Call and He will work to deal with the sin-nature.

Because God is the author of all things and of all relationships too, it is to be expected that there would be the relationship of Master and servant between He who calls and the called one. The Master is superior, having chosen His servant with precision and purpose. He expects His servant to obey His will. Pure beneficence underlies His commands. Perhaps evangelical Christianity has suffered from a lack of emphasis upon the true nature of God's Calling, having overstated the invitational element at the expense of the aspect of command. Certainly it is true that those who were brought up with a more reverential fear of God find it easier to obey His command in His Calling when they hear. Malachi 1:6 shows clearly God's own thoughts on the matter. 'If I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?'

It is written of Abraham that 'When he was called to go out ... he obeyed' (Hebrews 11:8). It is noteworthy that the word used is 'called' and not 'commanded'. It is also to the point that Abraham's response is described as 'obedience'. Sometimes we miss the obvious, it being too near at hand. Yet, let all be aware when they hear God's Call they dare not ignore and discard it. It is not the suggestion of an equal, or the advice of a contemporary; neither is it the plea of a suppliant. It is the direct command of the Father of our spirit, albeit clothed in terms of wooing love.

THE ROMANCE OF THE CALL

In earlier days, the word 'romance' carried the meaning of any wonderful or fictitious story, it even included the idea of extravagance and lies. Nowadays, the word more usually refers to the wonder of a love between a man and a woman. A romance to most people is the story of hearts being drawn together and falling in love to be 'happy ever after'. No-one loves a tale with a sad ending of unrequited love; such stories have a pathos which is saddening though true, though the touching sorrow of such stories is sometimes truer to life than the perfect fulfilment of love.

When we speak of 'the romance of the Call', we mean that it is the call of love. God the great eternal lover calling to Himself His beloved. Chivalry, feats of prowess on behalf of the beloved, are standard fare in romantic tales. The wonder of the extent to which love will go, its patience and princeliness are all extolled in a romance. With God and His chosen, beloved ones, we speak of the romance of romances, the original of which all others are pale reflections.

'Love makes the world go round' is a worldly-wise saying. 'Indeed' the thoughtful heart which knows God replies, not musing on human loves at all, but on the unfathomable love of God which reaches to lost human beings, and discovers them in their miseries and blood, and calls them to His breast to become His own dear love. The story of God's Son and His bride is the romance of the ages. The calling of the Lord is the great love-call.

The Old Testament speaks but infrequently in a direct way of God's love for His people. However, it was breathed through all He did. He did all for love's sake. Patient waiting, great deeds of war, all was for love of them. His prophets refer again and again to His workings of love, so clearly announced by Jeremiah, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee' (Jeremiah 31:3). How wonderful it is to examine scripture in the light of love and to behold the drawings of His love whilst His people were lost and alone. God found His loved one in the field, He says, lying in her blood. He took her in and made her His queen, bestowing upon her all that love could give. This is the way that Ezekiel describes the idyll of God's love for Israel (Ezekiel 16).

How love beautifies, all who have seen it can testify. To be loved and to love in return is the highest thing to which we can attain; it is rest indeed. To lie secure in the affections of the beloved brings tranquillity, rest from all that would disturb. Such love is not the passing kind but a state of being. God is love, and because there is no possibility of Him changing, then all He has done and will do is of that love. When His calling first

is heard by the ears of our hearts, there is that note of gentle, drawing love. Were we not dulled to distrustfulness by the workings of sin, we would recognize that content of love straight away. Usually we miss it though, and only as we respond and walk on with Him do we begin to discover that He is the lover of our souls.

There can be no doubt that we were made for love. We were structured for usefulness, too, but in God's purpose it is that the works rise from love. When God spoke to His Old Testament people, He told them that He called them because He loved them, not because of some function to which He could fashion them, though they had function. The underlying thing in the gospel-call is love. First ... love. When the call came to certain folk in scripture, we find that often the name of the person being called is repeated, for example, 'Moses, Moses', and 'Saul, Saul'. To the Hebrew mind, that repeated calling by name was a form of loving endearment, similar to phrases that lovers would use to their beloved.

The fact of God loving us, and it being the basis of His Call to us, does not strike the heart first. Often in human love it is likewise. Perhaps the young woman notices that a certain man is taking an interest in her, maybe there is a light in his eye when he looks upon her, she sees that he seems to afford her special attention, but only later does it dawn upon her that he loves her. He is bestowing his being upon her, for such is true love. It is not the casual casting of oneself upon another, it is the definite self-giving of the one to the other, the full force of one person being bestowed upon the other. Anything short of this is not truly love in the way that God loves us. He has bestowed all

that He is and has upon us, He has worked for us in His love and thrown the full powers of His being forth in His calling of us.

It is often true that hearts are so locked away and bowed down that God's wooing love comes repeatedly to draw out the prisoner. There is an unbelief based in a wrong sense of personal worthlessness. God draws us in His loving ways, woos us with His words and doings, and all the while is leading us to understand that we are destined for marriage to His Son. Permanent, eternal union in love with God. HE will speak and show to our hearts that we are of value, that we are wonderful to Him. He will tell us, we will not have to go through lessons to pump up some doctrine of self-esteem. It will surely be amazing to us that God loves thus, just the same as when love comes to a woman's heart for a man, and vice versa, they are amazed that they are loved by the other! Wonderful, transforming discovery! Making the face to shine and the feet to dance!

Love is jealous. God displays a valid jealousy and moves against our enemies. Noble feats of bravery and courage on behalf of His own have been performed for love's sake. All is done and settled so that we should be His own indeed. All begins in love and shall end there too. Thus the underlying chord of all history is this love of God for mankind. Other notes have been struck, and doubtless others too shall sound in future ages, but this note of love is the note of all notes, it is the song of all songs, there is none like it, nor shall be, and the person that walks with God shall hear its sound filling their heart more and more until the perfect day when every other sound is heard no more and love is all in all because God is all and in all.

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FAMILY QUESTIONS

GEORGE W. NORTH

Question: *Is 'romantic attraction' the sole basis for a successful Christian marriage?*

1 Cor. 11

Answer: It matters very much to God, that every man should be the head of his wife. It also matters very much to God that every married woman should regard herself as the body of her husband. 'I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man and the head of Christ is God', says Paul. Christ manifest in the flesh was the body of God; God was the head of Christ, He regarded Himself as God's body. In turn, Christ is the head of man, therefore every man should regard himself as the body of Christ. In turn, the man is the head of the woman, she must regard herself as his body, God took her from man's body originally. This is the revelation of truth given by God in this chapter, it is the order God has set for proper relationships and true headship in marriage. In 1 Peter 2, Sarah is commended because she called Abraham, 'lord', that is an indication of the love and respect in

which she held her husband, it is also part of the reason why that family was so precious in God's sight, the relationship between that man and his wife was right. No woman should have married the man she married unless she could have called him her 'lord'. By that God does not mean that any man should regard himself as God, or that anyone else should regard him as God either. Too many persons marry for romantic reasons only, their whole concept of marriage is based on feelings. This is a great mistake: there is a romantic side to marriage, but it is only a part of the whole desire and reason for marriage. One of the things I ask young ladies when they come to me for advice about engagement and marriage, is 'Now think my dear, consider this man, can you call him your lord, and will you make him your lord? Is he worthy of that, is he so great a lord to you that you can and will give him your all, and do as he wishes? If you cannot, do not marry him'. So many men are such soft spineless creatures, they just cannot be a woman's lord, they are not capable of it. To take hold of some men's hand is like taking hold of a wet fish! There is also the other kind of man, his hand is stiff and jerky, there is no grip there, just tension, that man really is in trouble.

His trouble may be his wife of course, that is unlikely, but whether tense or flabby, trouble there certainly is. God intends a man to be a man and a woman to be a woman. He wants him to be worth calling lord, and her to be worth calling princess.

God not only wants a man to be the head, He wants him to be the worthy head, he also wants a woman to be his worthy lady; that should be the basis of their relationship. Unless this can be so, no couple ought to think about marriage. If this is not the case, each should go to God about it and get it rectified, for to marry apart from this is to invite trouble. To attempt to reverse this relationship and these roles so that the woman is the head and the man is the body, is to defy God, act against natural order, betray the truth and destroy the very foundations of proper marriage. Many people have laid the foundations for a ruined marriage, and probable divorce, because they have departed from the conditions revealed in God's book. This is not to say that courtship and marriage does not or should not have its romantic side, it most definitely should, and may it remain all your life!

Question: *How can parents best show God and His love to their children?*

Answer: The relationship between Abraham and Sarah was such that if Abraham said anything, so did his wife. How few men are in control of their families: how few women know what submission is all about. How many husbands and wives and mothers and fathers understand how to bring up their sons and daughters? You men that have daughters - did you know that one of the prime obligations expected from you by God is to give them masculine love? Through the years many women, young and old and in between, have come in desperate need of counsel and help. Upon recognition of certain signs, the question has been asked, 'Tell me this my dear, did your dad love you? Did he every get hold of you, set you on his knee, give your cheek a tweak and say, 'I think you're the finest kid that ever walked'?''. 'Oh, no, we didn't do that in our family'. (How protective they are of their dads, how they shield them! I don't know that they deserve it). Sometimes the questions cause the tears to start - they hurt. The man who doesn't take his daughter on his knee and love and hug her and give her a kiss, is betraying her: man, unless you do that she will not know what true love is. Starved of the knowledge of true love as she develops, she will think that love is sexual experience, and you, father, will have been the main contributor to the error. You will have done the damage by neglecting to fulfil God's natural order for families. You should have loved your daughter, hugged her and kissed her in paternal love and taught her what true masculine love is in a father heart.

The same goes for you women also; if you have boys, you must get hold of them and love them for the same reasons, and with the same intentions. Boys need feminine love, girls need masculine love, and who first, or better, or more naturally should supply this kind of love than parents? This is God's intention, and we must not neglect to do His will; if we do we shall be helping produce a generation far worse than the present one - if you can imagine that. Sadly, parents bring their children to church, believing it to be their duty, and that is commendable, and yet they neglect to do their duty in the home. Men and women have no right to bring children into this world unless they intend to be to them what they need.

It is vitally important to realize that babies do not know God, the only gods they know are their parents. They do not think that god is sex, or their own body, or their own strength or prettiness, that kind of thing; that will come later, but not yet. Therefore it is the responsibility of parents to do their utmost to see that their children are shown God and His love from infancy. There must be no failure here. It is a sad thing to see a Christian man sobbing heartbrokenly because he has failed to bring up his children properly. Some parents have faced the situation honestly, and said, 'what can we expect with parents like us?'. Perhaps their children are on drugs or are involved in some equally obnoxious and destructive practice. Happy is the man that can give to the woman he takes to himself the love that perhaps she never received from her father, and can do it without trying to father her. Happy is that man also, if he finds a woman who reciprocates that love and does not try to mother him. To find true husbandly and wifely love is surely one of life's most wonderful blessings. Blessed indeed are they who find it.

A man must be a man and a husband to his wife, not her father or her little boy. The woman that does not let the one she marries be a man, a husband and a head will ruin her family if ever she has one. She will dominate them as well as her husband, worse still she will cause them serious psychological, moral and emotional problems also. On the other hand, if she will be a true wife and mother, she will have the joy of seeing her sons become true men.

Question: *By what authority do we say that divorce is not the highest standard in God?*

Answer: Many questions either refer to or else turn upon this chapter, and in general converge on the 14th verse! In verse 6 Paul makes clear that on this issue, he is speaking by permission, and not by commandment. He also uses the word 'suppose' in verse 26, 'I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress'. We should therefore admonish ourselves that none should think he has superior knowledge about this than Paul. The subject dealt with in these chapters are very important and very delicate, and God has not seen fit to speak with finality on the subject. Taking this yet further, we should notice that in verse 10 Paul is careful to join his own comments and the Lord's commandments, and says unto the married, 'I command, yet not I but the Lord. Let not the wife depart from her husband, but if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife'. Both Paul and the Lord are giving this commandment. We are all familiar, doubtless, with the Mosaic position on these matters. Like Paul, Moses does not say he was commanded of the Lord to write all he wrote so no assumptions may be made. It is possible that, like Paul, he might at times have been permitted to say what he felt was right as one who had found mercy of the Lord to be faithful. We do know that he allowed divorce, and directed that a Bill of Divorcement could be written to that effect. But reading the New Testament we discover that the Lord Jesus said Moses 'suffered' Israel to do so. We must also realize that the standards of Jesus and His interpretations of eternal principles are far higher than those of Moses. Never once did the Lord allow the children of God to believe that they should depart from the original intentions of God. God said 'thou shalt not commit adultery' - that was the original statement: Jesus took it further, 'I say unto you, if you look on a woman to lust after, you have

already committed adultery with her in your heart'. That is how Jesus interpreted the commandment. The standard was His own, that is for His people He set His own code of conduct as the norm and it is the law of Moses.

Notice again how Paul says 'To the rest speak I, not the Lord'; in this Paul is not speaking by commandment of God, but as his Lord before him was undoubtedly speaking from his own code of conduct. Who would challenge the fact that what he says is spoken with divine authority? 'If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him'. The marriage vow is to be regarded as sacred under all circumstances, it is not to be broken and certainly not because of spiritual division. How different is the covenant of grace from the covenant of law; law will not always, perhaps seldom, make a man gracious, but grace will always make a man lawful. The truth is that grace is not an adaptation of law, it is a higher law: the law was adapted from that.

On this subject, both Paul and the Lord Jesus spoke the same. When Paul gave a judgement, or an opinion, or a commandment, he always did so as an interpretation of, or a pronouncement upon what the Lord said about it. That is what Moses did. The great difference that lies between what Moses said of old, and what the Lord Jesus says now, is this - Moses made allowances in view of human weaknesses, but, gracious though He was, the Lord Jesus never did that. Paul too, not being God, and in view of the present distress, also made allowance for some things. Neither Moses or Paul condoned sin, but both allowed for the present - the Lord Jesus never did so. He went to that which was before Moses and looked on beyond Paul to that which was before Moses and Paul and to be after them. He pronounced on the eternal truth. The principles on which Christ's or anyone else's statements must be judged and understood are all bound up in this phrase; 'In the beginning'. In the matter under consideration here He said, 'Moses suffered', 'in the beginning it was not so'. As it was in the beginning was the paramount condition in the Lord's eyes, He could allow none other.

Question: *Does the saved partner sanctify his family and their home?*

1 Cor. 7:14

Answer: To return to our Corinthian consideration; there should be such love in the home that though one partner is saved and the other is not, the two should be able to live with each other and never seek divorce or separation. Whichever of the partnership it may be, husband or wife, he or she should be pleased to remain and live with the other because of the great work of regeneration that has gone on in the heart of the saint. If the woman, he should be so pleased to dwell with her that he does not want to go and live on his own and would certainly never think of going to live with somebody else, and vice versa. That is the Bible standard in this age of grace. Read verse 14 and see what wonderful results can come from submissive obedience, 'For the unbelieving husband is made holy by the wife', and again, vice versa. The unbelieving one is made holy by the believing one; how wonderful holiness is. Notice that the

unbelieving, unsanctified one does not de-sanctify the holy one - it is the other way round. Have no fear then - nobody has to leave the unsaved partner on that account - remain and sanctify him or her in the relationship. The children of such a relationship are holy.

In marital relationships the saint of God is the one who has the spiritual power, he or she sanctifies both the partner and the children of the marriage. This does not mean that they are regenerate, and filled with the Holy Ghost, or holy in spirit, soul and body from the womb. What it does mean is that he or she is sanctified for the purposes of God in the relationship, and that any child born of it is not the offspring of a sinful or unclean act. The Bible uses the word sanctification in several ways, 'Sanctify the Lord God in your heart', for instance. We may say 'but it is God that sanctifies us, not we who sanctify Him', and in that sense it is true. He can and does because He is greater in holiness than we, He is both Holy and Holiness, God sanctifies us BY His relationship with us, FOR His relationship with us. When two people are married and one is born of God and filled with the Spirit, and the other is not, the holy person will sanctify the unholy one for the purposes of all proper marital relationships, especially the most intimate ones. This is what it is all about; this means that there must be no perversions in any physical relationships.

To their shame, some men professing Christ expect their wives to do, or to allow them to do, things which ought not to be done. These things shall find no mention here, for it is a shame to speak of those things that are done of them in secret. All who profess Christ are to live together in grace and entire sanctification, in the knowledge that God made male and female according to His good pleasure and for His purposes. It is tragic that in the realm of sexual relationships, human beings generally behave worse than animals. You, man, are to live with your wife remembering that her body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; every woman also is to remember and to act in the knowledge that her husband's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. God created man male and female, and in marriage each should enjoy the other - but you must not, says the scripture, desecrate the temple of the Holy Ghost - you must not do it. God says that if you do He will destroy you. You must neither desecrate a male or a female temple of the Spirit or the temple He is creating of you. We must understand that marriage is a special sacred relationship created by God.

Nothing on this earth is holy of itself, nothing, not even marriage. When people marry, they enter into what is called holy matrimony, but it will only be holy if God is in it. It must be understood that the man standing at the front conducting the marriage service cannot make marriage holy. The marriage state is holy in that it was instituted by God, but it is not holy to those who come as sinners to it either. Marriage is called a 'holy estate' simply because it was so in the beginning, but now it is only as holy as the two partners in it. If God joints the two participants together it is holy, but two sinners cannot live together in 'holy estate'. How can they unless they live in a 'holy state'?

Nevertheless in these matters, though the yoke be unequal, sanctifying grace and power always flows from the greater to the lesser. Therefore precious sister, if your husband is an unsanctified man, you need not run away from him - your

very relationship with him will sanctify him. In the same way and to the same degree you will sanctify your children also. Whichever parent it is, whether believing mother or believing father, you have a right to expect that because you have dwelt in sanctification and honour with your partner, your child is given to you by God. The devil cannot triumph in this, you are in the greater, higher position and you can take that child to your bosom as from God. The mention of the 'unequal yoke' here is not to be interpreted as sanction to deliberately yoke yourself to an unbeliever. To do so in the belief that such a marriage would be approved of by God would be self-deception and disobedience. Paul was not encouraging persons to disobey God when he wrote about the sanctification of children of unequal marriages: he was comforting hearts of people within the marriage yoke who had been saved AFTER the marriage had taken place.

Now to comment on the Roman Catholic position referred to in some questions. This problem always arises when marriage is contracted between Catholic and Protestant. Everyone should know that if the Protestant cannot be made to change religion, according to the Roman law, the Romish local priest will claim that the children must be brought up Catholic. Under these conditions, and if the woman is a Catholic, the father generally says, 'you can have them, take them off to your church if you want'. Now you men - you are to read scripture aright; 'they brought young children to Jesus and He blessed them', it

says: the word 'they' used here is masculine. It was the men, the husbands, who brought the children to Jesus, not the women; this is not to say the women were not included, they were of course, but you my dear brother are the responsible one before God. In many things man and wife, being one, are equal, but before God, man, you are the head of your wife. Men are held responsible by God to present their children to Him and bring them up for His glory. Men may not foist the responsibility onto their wives, to do so is cowardly.

It has been said, and it is worth repeating, that when God made Eve, He did not take a piece of Adam's skull to make the woman, that she should be his head. Neither did He take a bone from Adam's feet that he should lord it over her and tread her down; He took her from his side, that they should be equal. What a relationship it is when a woman knows her place and keeps her position, and a man knows and keeps his. God made and ordered humanity and sexuality and everything that constitutes man a man and woman a woman, that it should be understood aright and kept holy according to His creating. There may be battles ahead for some because of this, but you can be more than a conqueror through Him that loves you. To add one more thing: the Roman hierarchy has no divine right to claim the children of mixed marriages: that they should do so is complete arrogance. The Protestant heritage is God-given and must not be sacrificed to marriage, or Rome, by any true child of God. **Copyright © 1989 G.W.North**

A - Z SMALL BIBLE WORDS

I = IDOL

Eidolon (Gk) primarily a phantom or likeness (from eidos an appearance, lit. that which is seen), or an idea, fancy, denotes in the New Testament a. an idol, an image to represent a false God, Acts 7:41; 1 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 9:20. b. the false god worshipped in an image Acts 15:20; Rom 2:22; 1 Cor. 8:4,7; 10:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 John 5:21.

'The corresponding Heb. word denotes 'vanity', Jer. 14:22; 18:15; 'thing of nought', Lev. 19:4, marg., cp. Eph. 4:17. Hence what represented a deity to the Gentiles, was to Paul a 'vain thing', Acts 14:15; 'nothing in the world,' 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19. Jeremiah calls the idol a 'scarecrow' (pillar in a garden', 10:5, marg.), and Isaiah, 44:9-20, etc. and Habakkuk, 2:18, 19 and the Psalmist, 115:4-8, etc., are all equally scathing. It is important to notice, however, that in each case the people of God

are addressed. When he speaks to idolaters, Paul, knowing that no man is won by ridicule, adopts a different line, Acts 14:15-18; 17:16,21-31' (Extract from Dr. W.E. Vine Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

To worship an idol was to the Hebrew an abomination, because it meant worshipping another god than Jehovah, who could not be represented by any image whatsoever (Exodus 20:4f). it continued in later Judaism, when idolatry had come to be regarded as the worst of sins. It involved worshipping the created thing instead, and this leads to every kind of corruption of religion and morals. In Rom. 1:20ff Paul is describing the Gentile world, and true rabbinic fashion finds the root of its evil in the most glaring of all the fruits of evil impulse, idolatry. So, in Gal. 5:20 Paul describes idolatry as one of the fruits of the flesh, and 1 Thess. 1:9, he speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles as 'a turning unto God from idols'. **Editor**

When a man is born again, he knows that it is because he has received something as a gift from Almighty God and not because of his own decision. People register their vows, and sign their pledges, and determine to go through, but none of this is salvation.

Oswald Chambers

THE TRUE VINE

GEORGE W. NORTH

Verse by verse meditation on John 15 vv 1-8

VERSE 1: *'I am the True Vine, and My Father is the husbandman'*.

To the listening apostles this statement by the Lord may have come as somewhat of a shock, certainly as a surprise. Not altogether though, for since the very beginning he had been making some very strange statements indeed; this was another of them! But this teaching was to prove surprisingly new, even to them. By tradition those men had been brought up to believe that Israel was the vine. God had redeemed the nation and brought them up out of Egypt and planted them in Canaan; their prophets had taught them so, it was true and they believed it. Now Jesus was claiming that He, not Israel, was the Vine; more, He was adding to it, 'I am the TRUE Vine'. Did He mean that Israel was not a true vine? He was using that word 'true' again. He had used it before: 'My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven' - true bread: true vine, 'My Father giveth', 'My Father is the husbandman' - there was continuity of teaching here surely! What they were hearing was absolutely true. He had been planted and was being cultivated by His Father.

RELATIONSHIPS

The Lord was teaching them a very important lesson about relationships: One, between Himself and His Father; Two, between Himself and the branches; Three, between Himself and the fruit. The first thing He establishes here is the relationship between Himself and His Father, that is the most important one. As everyone knows, the Vine exists for the one who plants it, that is the husbandman. No vine exists for, or is planted by, itself, and being the True Vine, He was existing for His Father not for Himself, as He goes on to show. Everything else He has to say is quite secondary to this and depends upon it. This and only this makes Jesus the TRUE Vine and for His Father's honour He had to establish this first. It was not for this reason alone though that He said these things, He had the events of the next few days in mind also. What He had to say was not only a statement of truth, it was a word of assurance to stabilise them. They needed to be kept during the awful temptations through which He and they had to pass during the next dark days leading up to and including His death. He was the True Vine and had to go this way. Most of all, He had to be that True Vine to His Father, there would be no fruit otherwise. His Father was true, He would not have planted any other than the True Vine; He had to be true to His Father, and the Husbandman had to be true to His Vine.

VERSE 2 *'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit'*.

A vine, to be a true vine, that is to be true to itself has to be true: One, to its own nature; Two, to the purpose for its

creation; Three, to the reason for its continued existence - it MUST bear fruit. That is commonsense; it is also the decision of the husbandman, and in this case the determination of the Vine. There is nothing said here about where the vine is planted - if the Lord had a vineyard in mind He did not mention it at that time. There is no talk here of 'a vineyard in a very fruitful hill', as Isaiah had said, nor of a vineyard being 'let out to others', as the Lord had previously said. The Lord is not going to speak to His men about becoming husbandmen, nor was He fostering any ideas they may have generated from listening to some of His parables in the past about vineyards; this was not a parable, it was parabolic teaching based on the figure of the vine, but it was not a parable. Why no vineyard though? Why did He not speak of that? Was not the land of Israel the vineyard? It always had been! No, the Lord was not the vineyard, neither were they: the 'vineyard' was death. He was planted in death and the branches to be branches in Him, had to be planted together with Him in the likeness of His death. He was not and is not the Vine of Israel, he is the True Vine. Planting Him in death, Father was true to Him and to all mankind, as well as to Himself. A handful of men called Jews could never have produced all the great abundance of fruit Father expected of His Son. Born in Palestine He was for the Jews, planted in death He was for the world.

BRING FORTH FRUIT

The vine that has no branches does not exist; there is no such vine in all creation. A vine and its branches are one; both to exist and to bear fruit it must remain one. A vine grows branches from itself - none are added, they are all grown. They must be, for the purpose of its existence a vine must grow branches. Except it does, it cannot bear fruit, for a vine only bears fruit on its branches. 'Every branch IN me', He says; to be a branch OF the Vine a man must be IN the Vine. To remove the branches is to remove all hope of fruit, for without them there is no possibility of fruitbearing.

In the True Vine, each branch bears fruit, it must, if not it is removed. The main trunk or stock does not bear the fruit; it bears the branches that bear the fruit, that is its function. Neither the stock nor just one branch can bear all the fruit of which the stock is capable. One branch can bear its share and contribute to the overall production of the Vine, but that is all; every branch must bear its share and produce its own quota of fruit. This quota is not known and cannot be estimated by the branch, it is known only to the husbandman. No branch can set its own target, it does not know its capabilities, nor can it calculate its potential, the potential is not in the branch but in the stock. The branch that does not bear fruit is 'taken away', says the Lord, it is behaving contrary to the nature of the Vine and the purpose of the husbandman; not only so, it is also belying the reason for its own existence and creating a shortfall in the overall production. Such a branch is letting itself down and letting down all the other branches also - that cannot be allowed,

it must be removed. The Husbandman knows that that kind of branch is not a true branch of the True Vine and He will not let it remain. The True Vine bears true branches, each one bearing true fruit.

The Lord is plainly teaching that His Father, the Husbandman, gives particular attention to every branch in the Vine, and says that each branch must be purged, even the fruitful ones. The object of this purging is twofold: One, to ensure the quantity of the product; Two, to improve the quality of fruit. The Husbandman knows both the kind and the amount of fruit He wants, He knows His Vine, He knows its species and its capabilities. Purging is for the improvement of the fruit and the increase of it. Neither the state nor the time can ever be reached when the Husbandman will say, 'I am content, I do not want any more fruit, that is sufficient', He always wants more. He is not greedy, He knows both the Vine's potential as a whole and what each branch is capable of individually. His purpose by de-branching and purging is to assist His Vine to more perfectly grow and more abundantly produce to its full potential. He removes the fruitless branch therefore; its continued existence in the Vine is not only hindering its full production, it is also preventing another branch from growing. The Husbandman knows that if He takes away the unproductive branch, another branch will grow in its place, a branch, hopefully, that will by purging make its own proper contribution to the whole.

VERSE 3: *'Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you'.*

When a branch has been purged, it is clean. Purging is an inward process, and may be thought of in much the same way as we think of a cathartic which cleanses out the inward parts. By saying this, the Lord introduced a revolutionary new idea to the concept of cleansing. Until then cleansing had been thought of and practised as an outward process, as demonstrated by the Lord when he washed His followers' feet prior to the communion He introduced in that upper room. That cleansing was not thought as purging; neither Christ nor they thought it was. He taught them that they should practise it among themselves saying 'Ye also ought to wash one another's feet ... I have given you an example'. For that cleansing, the Lord used water, but this cleansing was by the Word He spoke to them. Paul later speaks of this as 'the washing of water by the word' and so interprets the symbol for us, thereby clarifying what the Lord meant. It is to this mystical, spiritual washing that Christ was referring when He said 'Now ye are clean' (He had but a few minutes before washed their feet. They were on the way to Gethsemane across the Kidron when He taught them from the figure of the vine.) But they were not allowed to rest in that cleansing, nor in either of them in fact, for not all of them together were sufficient for God's requirements, or would guarantee them a place in the True Vine. To fit them or us for that prize position, the Father Himself, the Husbandman, has to do the purging.

COMPLETELY CLEAN

In the Gospel accounts there are records of another kind of miraculous cleansing; several instances of this are given, that by them we should be taught the most fundamental means and way of this most basic of all cleansings. In those days the land of Palestine was plagued by leprosy, and as may be anticipated,

some of the Lord's most wonderful miracles were wrought upon lepers. These poor people were outcasts of society and were so from the moment the symptoms of the disease became evident in them. They were cut off from everything, denied all human rights and regarded as dead. By law they all had to ring a bell and cry out 'Unclean, unclean', lest anyone should come near them; socially they were totally unproductive, cast out and unwanted. Presumably when they died their disease-ridden bodies were burned in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Lepers were unclean within and without; the disease that raged in their inward parts ravaged them outwardly also. Leprosy was total. When Christ cleansed them therefore, He both purged them and washed them; the cleansing was internal and external. Sometimes He did it by His word, at times by a touch, it mattered not how - a word or a touch from Him can do the work, and what a powerful work it is! Whenever He does it, it is done with an end in view; it is never an end in itself.

VERSE 4: *'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me'.*

This particular cleansing, as distinct from all others, was unto the direct end of making them fit to abide in Him and bear fruit. Because of this it is a pity that vv 3 and 4 are not one verse. The particular point He is making is somewhat obscured by the verse division: verse 3 leads uninterruptedly into verse 4; 'Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me'. Let us put the truth together in one! 'Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you abide in Me, and I in you'. What the Lord is saying here is, 'I make you clean so that you can abide in Me so that the Father may purge you'. The Lord Jesus makes us initially fit to abide, the Father makes us suitable to continue to abide subsequently.

OUR HUSBANDMAN

How wonderful our Lord is! By His many deeds and constant teachings during the closing hours of His earthly life, He drew His disciples' attention to the vital truth underlying all His words and works - they needed to know it. Cleansing, purging, fruitbearing, abiding - these desires for them filled His heart and mind as He approached the cross. If by His death He could make all this possible, all would be abundantly worthwhile. He knew His Father wanted, and was expecting, fullest returns from His Vine, so did He Himself, and He faithfully told His men so. They were not ignorant of the figure He was using, and understood perfectly that the husbandman must gather fruit from the branches, or He would have nothing of the vine. They were aware also of the lengths to which husbandmen went in order to get fruit, the figure was not new to them - what was so new was that He was the Vine in all truth, and that they no less true than He, were to be branches in Him, in fact part of Him. Something else was so wonderfully new to them too, they were to abide in Him WITHIN THEM - 'Abide in me and I in you', He said. At the time he spoke, He was not in them, but walking ahead of them, leading on, going to betrayal, imprisonment and crucifixion. 'I in you', He said, and He was not in them. Everything He had to say to His men and all His Father's hopes for fruit depended entirely on His death and resurrection, His return in the flesh to His Father in heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. He could come to them then, He had told them

in the upper room, 'I will come to you', He said, 'At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father and ye in Me and I in you'. So then, the Vine is in the Husbandman and the branches are in the Vine and the Vine is in the branches. This is an entirely new concept of eternal life and being, a revelation of a completely new relationship - an integration, an incorporation - what a marvel of divine love and power! These men must have been overwhelmed.

VERSE 5: *'I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing'.*

The Vine IS; in the Father, the Husbandman, the Vine IS. The Vine is also in the branches; in the branches the Vine IS. Without roots, the Vine is not; without branches the Vine is not. The vine without roots and branches does not exist, cannot exist. This is what these men had to see; they had been incorporated into a marvellous plan involving a personal spiritual miracle in each one of them; they had to dwell in the Christ dwelling in them. We must take very careful note that He did not say, 'Abide in Me and I will dwell in you'. His indwelling is neither consequent upon nor dependent upon us. On the contrary, the very opposite is true - the branch abides in the Vine. God's designs are so wonderful, His desires are so strong and His determination to have this thing as of nature and not by contrivance is so unshakable that everything has to be just right or not at all.

Till then these men had been with Him, following Him, utterly dependent upon Him, but not abiding in Him. Their confidence, like their faith, was in Him, but in Him outside them, not in Him in them: they had done much WITH Him and FOR Him and in His name, but they had not brought forth His fruit, that is the fruit the husbandman wanted, the fruit of His nature - the actual fullness of the life of the Vine and the reason why it existed. 'Abide in Me', He pleaded, 'Abide in Me, and I in you'.

ABIDING ...

No man is a true branch of the True Vine unless this glorious truth of the dual or twin abiding is known to him. There must be no misunderstanding about this; He only abides in a man as that man abides in Him, and a man can only abide in Him as He abides in that man. The understanding of this must be mutual between the Lord and each individual. He laboured the point. This is the only kind of abiding possible to man. He was attempting to correct any mistaken ideas they may have formed in their minds about where He would abide when He was risen from the dead. What He was concerned about (and the question concerned Him greatly) was where and in what they were going to abide. What were they thinking and how were they receiving His words? They believed, and He had taught them that He was going back to His Father, but He did not want them to think that they must abide in Him there far off in some distant heaven. The husbandman would never have any fruit from His Vine if that idea gained acceptance; in any case, if that were so, He would never be the True Vine and they could never be true branches.

The real truth of what He was saying is, 'I am going to be in you, abide in Me there inside yourself'. All the branches of the vine live in the vine that is in them, and by doing so abide

as part of that vine. Observed outwardly, the branches are in the vine, but inwardly the vine is in the branches. The branches may say 'We are the vine', the Vine says 'I am the Vine, branches and all'. No single branch, nor any select branch or mass of branches can say 'I am the vine', or 'We are the vine', though. A branch is ever only a branch and all the branches together are only branches. He alone is the Vine, He is all the branches. 'As the body is one and has many members', so is the Vine one and has many branches, so also is the flock one, even though it is comprised of many sheep. Each concept of truth Christ presents is based on reality and makes its own contribution to the whole truth revealed by all three together. The one truth they all teach in common is this - one in many and many in one. Yet, even so, all three together still fail to present the truth in all fullness - that is impossible.

The truth of the Vine is really a development of what the Lord had been teaching His men in the upper room about the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, 'I will come to you at that day', He said. Now He is saying, 'I will be in you, abide in me there, within yourselves; do not think you must try to abide in me in heaven, you cannot do that; I am coming to you, abide in me there, you can do that'. So important is it for hearts to understand this that the Lord said it twice - He that abideth in Me, and I IN Him'. This is the main emphasis; indeed it is the basic requirement - the open secret of fruitbearing. The branch is purged by the husbandman for two reasons: One, that it may continue to abide in the Vine; Two, that it may bring forth more fruit.

... IN THE VINE ...

Each branch must bear fruit OF ITSELF, He said, abiding in the Vine under the conditions stated, it has the life and strength IN ITSELF to do so. The branch does not bear fruit OF ITSELF - no branch has either life or strength OF ITSELF nor can bear fruit OF ITSELF unless it abides in the Vine. Abiding there, it has as much life and power and sustenance as it will ever need to bear fruit. Each branch must abide in Him with full knowledge that in doing so it is abiding in the Vine, only then can it bring forth fruit. A branch cannot bear another's fruit any more than it can bring forth another or different fruit, but the fruit it does bear is its own. The branch does not PRODUCE the fruit, the Vine does that - it is its nature to do so; the branch BEARS the fruit, that is all. It is a means to an end. The branch does not produce fruit FOR itself; it bears fruit from itself for the Husbandman, for the sake of the Vine and its own continued existence in the Vine.

When Christ represented Himself as the True Vine, He was near the end of His earthly life; within two or three days He would be home with His Father, the Husbandman. The Lord had never mentioned anything of this before - this was an entirely new revelation to His disciples. Everything He said during this period was new. Before this, in the course of His teaching He had at times repeated Himself as He deemed it necessary to do so but this was entirely new. He had not said these things at the beginning of His ministry because: One, they would not have understood Him if He had; Two, at the beginning they could not be branches of the True Vine. He refrained from speaking to them in this manner till the possibility of it was within their grasp. To have done so earlier would have brought them into utter confusion and they would not have been able to bear it.

Even though they understood the figure and accepted what He said, they could not have grasped all He meant. He had been talking to them about eternal life - they had no doubt about that - but He was now linking this with eternal fruitbearing. More than that, if they had ears to hear it, He was also telling them that eternal life depended upon whether or not they abode in the Vine, and that this in turn depended upon their fruitfulness. Further still, He was saying also that they themselves were not the ones who decided that, and perhaps more surprisingly still, neither was He.

... FOR HIS GLORY

The Husbandman decides who abides in the Vine and who does not, and He decides it upon one thing alone - fruitbearing, not, we must note, upon believing. If a branch bears some fruit (He does not say how much, it may be only a little for a start), the husbandman will allow it to stay where it is in the Vine. But no man must think he can continue in that state of minimal fruitbearing; minimal production then will allow him to stay in that POSITION, but he cannot hold that position if he continues to remain in that STATE of production. He MUST, he simply MUST bear MORE fruit. The man who believes that the Father will be satisfied with some amount of fruit - a little, perhaps - at the final harvest is deceived. Such an attitude toward fruitbearing is not permitted - it cannot be allowed among the branches. One, it is not natural; Two, it is not feasible; Three, it is contrary to all known natural law. The law of the Spirit of life in the True Vine prohibits equally both unproductive branches and unprofitable branches. The former are taken away, the latter must be purged. Every branch in the Vine must bear MUCH fruit, not just fruit, some fruit, a little fruit, but much. That is the purpose for the Vine, it is the determination of the Husbandman. The Father insists on it for the glory of the Son, and the Son insists on it for the glory of the Father; it is to the honour and glory of both that the branch bears much fruit. Is it not true also that, by much fruitbearing, the branch glorifies itself? Not purposely, but it does.

The Lord reminds them of the two most important things necessary to the life of every branch: 'He that abideth in Me and I in Him' (remember) 'the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing'. These two indispensable things are in their logical order; every branch must: One, abide in Him within himself; Two, bring forth much fruit of itself. The most important thing about fruitbearing is abiding - this is more important to fruitbearing than the fruitbearing itself. The husbandman is certainly seeking His fruit, but that is not His greatest concern; He knows He will get His fruit if the branch abides in the Vine and He attends to it. The fruit is the proof that the branch is abiding in the Vine, that is why the Husbandman examines every branch to see if it is bearing fruit. That is the Husbandman's concern, it is not the concern of the branch. The concern of the branch is to ensure that it abides in Christ - Christ in him. Every one of us who claims to be a branch of the Vine must give our attention to our union with Christ, for, as He says, without Him we can do nothing. Total union and complete dependence will bring abundant fruitfulness. Each branch may say of itself 'With Him I can bear fruit of myself, but without Him I can do nothing'. Whatever meaning we may put upon the word 'without' (whether 'outside of', or 'away', or 'apart from'), in view of the following verse the implication of it is serious indeed. It seems to deal a very powerful blow at the 'once saved, always saved' theory. It not being the purpose of this study to

examine various doctrines, we will continue with the Lord's plain statements. Each branch must say to itself 'if I do nothing and make no contribution to the overall fruitfulness of the Vine, the husbandman will take me away from the Vine'. In all His teaching throughout all His life the Lord emphasized nothing more plainly than this. The branch, One, MUST bear fruit, and Two, must bear it in the context of the other branches. Thereby comparisons can be made and the fellowship of life and fruitfulness is maintained.

VERSE 6: *'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned'.*

The Lord cannot leave the truth He has been emphasizing, they must abide in Him; they who do so can never, never be fruitless nor be cast forth and wither away and die. The thought of branches being taken away is terrible in contemplation to Him. What shocking waste of a life: what dreadful loss. He therefore returns to the subject. Earlier He has said that if a branch was fruitless the Husbandman would 'take it away'; now He speaks of it as being cast forth as a branch, that is, completely; the whole branch is 'taken away', 'cast forth' to wither and die; if there is no fruit then nothing is left. The fruitless branch is not cut back or pruned, that is, allowed to stay, nor severely shortened as when men prune other fruit trees, it is taken away entirely. The Husbandman does not like branches without fruit, He abhors them and throws them away to be burned; to Him they are useless, they have not fulfilled their promise, therefore they do not justify their existence. Such an end to one of His branches is hard for the Lord to bear; 'Abide in Me', He pleads, 'Abide in Me'.

A WARNING TO DISCIPLES

No man who is a branch need fear that the Lord will not abide in him, He is faithful, but there are two responsibilities to abiding, His and ours; He will abide, but will we? He puts forth His branches, he is prolific, but He does not put forth branches for the sake of it, He puts them forth for fruitbearing only. Every man, with Christ, must have one vision only, a shared heart, and one purpose, and remember that the Vine is not a decorative plant. Vines do not grow beautiful flowers; they may have pleasant smells, but that is not their purpose; they burst with miniature fruit almost as soon as the tender shoot appears. Vines may be put to other uses, such as providing shade for a man to sit under and enjoy at times, but that is not the real reason for their existence; like the fruitless fig tree in the parable, it 'cumbereth the ground' if it does not produce fruit. Unlike that fig tree this Vine is the True Vine, if it does not produce the fruit God wants, it will never be cut down, but that some of its branches may be cast away who can doubt? The Lord warned the disciples therefore. Most probably He was troubled in heart about Judas, and what was going to happen to him - there can be no question that he had been cast forth as a branch; what a tragic character that man was! He bore no fruit at all. He was an apostle, he followed the Lord, he did works, he held an important position among the apostles, but he bore no fruit. Judas was cast forth; 'he went to his place', as Peter says. Where precisely that is, no one knows.

If indeed that was the reason, or one of the reasons, why the Lord spoke as He did and introduced such a solemn note into an otherwise idyllic picture, then this lovely parabolic illustra-

tion is most instructive to everyone who would be taught of God. He is telling us that in God's eyes, natural fruit, not miraculous works, is the most important, He is looking for that - fruitbearing is the only qualification for remaining in the Vine. The Vine is judged by its branches and by its fruit; it has no works to commend itself, only fruit. The Lord Himself did not qualify to become our Saviour by His works, but by His fruit. When the Father said to Him at Jordan, 'Thou art My Beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased', He did not say so because of His son's miraculous works - He had not done any; the Father was praising Him for His fruitbearing. Jesus had been a loving, obedient boy and a faithful young man, perfect in all His ways with God and man, at thirty He was blameless and reproachless in all His life since birth, and would be till death. So must the branches be - it is not possible for them to be otherwise if they are to remain in Him. This is the verse which contains the ominous words 'cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned'. Paul's words about believer's works being burned up are less severe than this statement! Paul speaks of being saved as by fire, but the Lord holds out no hope of salvation here - the unproductive branch is cast out, withered and burned. He is speaking of, One, branches in Him that do not bear fruit; Two, branches that do not abide in Him.

VERSE 7: *'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you'.*

Now the Lord varies His phraseology and advances to further truth. Having established the fundamental position, namely, 'Abide in me and I in you', He changes it to 'Abide in Me and My words abide in you'. He has not changed the ground of truth, He has remained on it and from it advanced His teaching. This verse is development. This development is quite logical and absolutely necessary for us to know. What He has to say now is as vital as anything else He has said. Fruitbearing is as much dependent on this as it is on abiding; fruitbearing is as much the result of the communion of the grateful heart with the Lord as it is of abiding in Him. The Lord has brought the figure to life, He can no longer allow His men to imagine that the vine they know can properly illustrate the truth He is teaching. The idea of automation must be removed completely. Branches in Him do not bear fruit automatically, as do branches in natural vines, they are branches of Him, extensions of the kind of life He lived with His Father. Because a branch remains in a vine and bears fruit by virtue of that fact, in no way must we suppose that branches of the True Vine will do so for the same reason. Abiding is assuredly the basic necessity for fruitbearing, but we must understand what is comprehended within the meaning of spiritual abiding. In His mind though they may not be stated, many things are implicit in His words - in this instance, things that were not spoken of at first when He opened the subject. At the beginning He sought to get over to them the fact of being a branch and bearing fruit: that is what the husbandman wants and is determined upon. Then He stresses the absolute necessity of abiding, and defines what that abiding is, namely, abiding in Him within one's own self. Now He states the truth implicit in His words but as yet not stated explicitly, 'Ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you'. The prayer of the abiding heart is communion indeed, and unto a commonly desired end - fruit. Let us consider how the Lord approaches this further truth. 'If a man abide'. He had actually introduced the 'if' in the preceding verse, 'If a man abide not in Me'.

LIVING BY THE WORD

A host of questions arise: what is it to abide? How is it to be accomplished? Am I abiding? Who decides whether I am abiding or not abiding? If the question were asked, 'Who makes the final decision as to whether I abide or not?', the answer has already been given - the Husbandman. His decision is final and indisputable. It turns on whether or not I bring forth fruit, as Jesus said. The decision is not an arbitrary one, it is based upon both His knowledge of the branch and of His own relationship with the Vine. God is one. From all eternity God has been one. The mystery of God is that He has also lived as one Being in three Persons. The Lord's teaching of the Vine is based upon this same (kind of) eternal life - the True Vine lives in many branches - while He lived on earth as a man the Father lived in Him and He lived in the Father. Even so the Vine lives in the branches and the branches in Him.

By His own confession, the Lord Jesus lived by every word which proceeded out of the mouth of God. The Lord lived because He was life, He had life in Himself as the Father had, and He said, 'I am the life'. But though this was true, He lived a maintained life, He was completely dependent upon His Father, to the degree even that He depended on Him for the words to speak. He actually said things like this, 'The word which ye hear is not mine'. His Father's words abode in Him, therefore He brought forth much fruit. He asked what He would and it was done unto Him. He spoke to His Father, His Father spoke to Him. His requests to His Father arose out of His Father's communications to Him; Father and Son were in communion; it was quite impossible for the Father to dwell in the Son without the Father's words abiding in the Son and the Son's words abiding in the Father. By this interchange of mind, thought and word, and because of it, the Son was able to ask Father for what He would and it was done unto Him. He therefore discloses the secret to His disciples. If they were going to bring forth fruit they must do so the same way that He did. 'If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, YE shall ask what YE will and it shall be done unto YOU'. He could have added 'as it is being done to Me'. This is the implicit truth of abiding; there must be communion between the branch and the Husbandman. Communion takes place in communion, agreeable communication on agreed matters between hearts at one on everything. Martha paid wonderful tribute to the reality of this when she met Jesus following the death of her brother Lazarus: 'I know that ... whatsoever thou wilt ask of God He will give it thee'. Martha could have paid the Lord no greater compliment, she certainly spoke no truer word. As they walked together to the tomb later, she heard Him say, 'Father, I know that Thou hearest Me always' - 'Lazarus, come forth', and he came forth bound hand and foot with graveclothes. Jesus asked for him - it was done unto him. Lazarus was raised from the dead - the fruit of Jesus' abiding and asking. The communing prayers of God's people are as vital to fruitbearing as abiding. No man can commune unless he abides and no man can abide without communion. Abiding must come first in order of mention because it is obvious, but in order of thought it has no preference, for abiding and communion are synchronous - they are one. Communion is the interflow of ideas, the exchange of thought unto the perfecting of union. It is indeed the means of extending unification between two living hearts unto utmost possible fullness, and consequently fruitfulness.

VERSE 8: *'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples'*.

What an unfortunate mistake that the translators thought fit to insert a verse-break here, there is no break in the Lord's words; verses seven and eight are certainly one. The two verses put together form one statement about fruitbearing and a very important statement it is; let us read it as a whole: 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples'. Obviously verse eight is nothing other than the completion of the thought the Lord began to express in the preceding verse; the ultimate reason for this teaching around the figure of the Vine now emerges. The Lord states it in a threefold way which may be paraphrased thus: One, the Father must be glorified; Two, you must bear MUCH fruit; Three, this is what I mean by discipleship. We will consider those three points in the reverse order from which the Lord uttered them.

But first let us pause to notice that the opening phrase belongs as much to the final phrase of verse seven as to the phrases which follow. Let us regroup them then - 'It shall be done unto you, herein is my Father glorified'. It is a glorious thing for the Father of Jesus to do as much for us as for His Son - glorious, that is, in the sight of the Lord Jesus and the eyes of the angel hosts. This is how the Lord had prayed - or rather cried out - that day when the coming of the Greeks had flooded His mind with the necessity for His death - 'Father, glorify thy name'. In a wondrous voice that made the air to tremble as in a thunder-clap came the answer, 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again'. 'It's thundering', some said. 'This voice came for your sakes', Jesus said; the voice was for them, the words were for Him. Jesus sought glory for His Father and for His disciples, but none for Himself. He said He was glorified in His disciples. He also said He would be glorified in His Father; John said 'We beheld His (Jesus') glory'. He also knew that unless His disciples should be in the place where they could ask what they would and it should be done unto them, there could be no fruit - in which case (unthinkable thought), He would have failed. But, praise Him, He did not - He did not fail.

EVERY BRANCH MUST BEAR FRUIT

Now the concept of Father's glorification must be carried forward - we will consider the three points mentioned. The Lord first implanted the idea of discipleship in men's minds by calling them to follow Him, some had even started to follow Him before they were called. Naturally enough then, the concept of discipleship became bound up with the following, in fact in practice the two ideas almost became synonymous - if a disciple, then a follower - if a follower, then a disciple. But this was not the Lord's idea for His people, it was only embryonic of true discipleship, so with set purpose He set about changing their ideas. True to His intentions, the Lord chose the figure carefully and moved the whole concept of discipleship onto a higher plane altogether, almost redefining the meaning of the word in progress. His teaching here is without misunderstanding; disciples must: One, abide in Him; Two, His word must abide in them; Three, they must ask what they will; Four, they must glorify the Father; Five, they must bear much fruit.

There can be no doubting the force of the Lord's meaning; no other word than MUST can convey it. Gracious as

ever, He does not use the word, but if any man interprets it with less force to his own heart he has misinterpreted the Lord's heart. Every awakened heart must place itself within each of these points and say 'I must abide in Him; His word must abide in me; I must ask what I will; I must glorify the Father; I must bear much fruit; I must be His disciple'. It is not without significance to note that the Lord's first excursion into public ministry was with the same sense of 'I must' - 'I must be about my Father's business'. He used the word 'shall' instead of 'must' here, but who can doubt that His mood is imperative? He is not ASKING us to bear fruit, He is telling us we MUST do so or be removed from Him; we must be productive, because He is determined to produce all His Father wants. Without directly using the words, the Lord is saying, 'If you wish to be and to remain My disciples, bring forth fruit in abundance'. He is expressing His own desire, He is also informing us of His Father's determination. The Father is His Son's Husbandman, He knows the possibilities of His Vine, and is absolutely determined these shall be achieved. Each branch must make its own contribution to the total production; what that is is not disclosed. What is sure is that the total production of the Vine is the sum of the production of all the branches. Each branch must bear its own fruit within the context of all the other branches, bearing in mind the stated purpose and expectations of the Husbandman. Fruitbearing - progressive fruitbearing - fruit, more fruit, much fruit - how much He does not say. There cannot be the slightest doubt that, if asked, the Husbandman would say, 'As much as the branch is capable of bearing'. He always wants more - the most He can possibly get. The loving Father wants the Son to be glorified - the loving Son wants the Father to be glorified - so must every branch.

CONTINUING IN LOVE

The teaching of the Lord under the figure of the vine needs to be received by us all within the setting where it was placed by the Holy Spirit through John, namely the last verse of chapter 14 and the ninth verse of chapter 15. A glance at those two verses reveals at once that the whole tone of the Lord's teaching here is love: He introduces it to us with love and concludes it with love. The introductory word is, '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'. The concluding word is 'As THE FATHER HATH LOVED ME, so have I LOVED YOU, CONTINUE YE IN MY LOVE'. Breaking down the first verse we have, 'I love'; 'I am commanded'; 'I do'; 'I arise'; 'I GO'. Then comes the teaching, which virtually is, 'I am the True Vine, I must bring forth fruit'. Breaking down the second verse, coming as it does at the end of the teaching, we arrive at this conclusion: 'I am under commandment of the Father, I love Him, therefore I keep His commandment, for I want to continue in His love. His commandment to Me is to bring forth much fruit, so I am going to do it. Now if you love Me as I love My Father, you will continue in your determination to do what I want, I want much fruit from all of you for My Father'. Lower down chapter 15, verse 16 in fact, the Lord actually said the very thing He said of Himself in the introductory verse 'GO and bring forth fruit'. He wanted His disciples to continue in His love to the Father, that is, love the Father as He did and do His will as He did, bring forth fruit as He did. So selfishly we interpret the Lord's words to mean, 'I love you, and I love you so much that I want to keep on loving you, so abide in My great love for you and be loved'. But in view of the teaching derived from the figure of the Vine,

He is surely talking of His first love, that is, His love for His Father. Because of that love He went to the cross, 'Arise let us go hence', He said and into death He went, to plant Himself in death and plant us with Him there in the likeness of that death. Reading verse 10 there can be no mistaking His intention, 'If you keep My commandments ye shall continue in My love even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love'. There is no mistaking it, all the Lord has been saying about abiding in the Vine has been another way of saying 'Keep My commandments'. His teachings are His commandments - what else are they? We say a vine grows branches - is not that another way of saying the vine commands its branches into existence? 'Ah, but that is nature'. Exactly.

This is surely the reason why the Lord gave such solemn warnings in His teachings. He did not say they were warnings

in His teachings. He did not say they were warnings; 'He presented facts', we say. But what are they but warnings? He is determined at all costs to bring forth fruit. There is no power in heaven or earth so strong as love; no commandments so authoritative as love's commandments. Couched in gentler terms, the commandments fall more easily on our ears, but they are none the less powerful for that. He does not say you MUST bear fruit but you SHALL bear fruit. Though taking the obvious authoritativeness out of His voice, that word 'shall' shows the unbendable will, the unshakeable purpose, the sheer determination behind the statement. 'Shall' is promise, 'shall' is grace, 'shall' is love, but it is also utmost decision. We have to bear fruit, and love says 'Yes, Lord'. He communes with Father about it till He brings forth all the growth and glory of the Son in us and through us unto Himself.

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Extracts from the new publication entitled

'Apostleship' by G.W.North

'In an illuminative phrase to the Romans he says he was a slave of Jesus Christ, called an apostle. What a commentary on his attitude towards the 'top' calling; he might have written 'only a slave', for that is what he means. By the will of God and his own will also, he was a bondsman. To him that was the greatest of all privileges; that he was also called an apostle of Jesus Christ was a matter of his Master's choice, his choice was slavery. In his estimation apostleship is an appointment to a position of hard work among fellow-slaves. To him it was obvious that apostles cannot be selected by men from among themselves; he saw that to attempt that is an act of rebellion as preposterous as the belief that apostles are self-chosen. Anyone who is convinced that his own virtues and abilities commend him to God, or who requires recognition by Him or the Church on these grounds, is self-deceived. The true apostle is as much surprised by God's choice of him as are his companions; he is always convinced that he is not fit to be an apostle.'

'Many aspire to apostleship in these days, but there are few that rightly bear the title and fit and fulfil the calling in reality. The title is based upon a concept and bestowed with purpose by the sovereign will of God; other than that it is a false assumption. Because of His foreknowledge, and certainly by His grace, the title is sometimes bestowed by Him upon men who, among their contemporaries, appear to deserve it, but it cannot be earned; when given to a man it must be understood by all to be but a further grace of God to him. Born of a relationship, it is an award to a degree of devotion foreknown by the Lord, and not as a reward for the demonstration of that devotion. Paul said that God enabled him for that for which He counted him faithful. God gave Paul His trust, putting him into the ministry; apostleship is a mark of an addiction to Christ excelling all others. The concept is slavery, love's free-will addiction to Christ; the title is as much God's estimate of a man as it is of His choice of him. In His mind an apostle is the slave of slaves.'

Copies may be obtained from: Publications Secretary, The Old Chapel,
Bartholomew Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 3AJ, England.

BIBLE STUDY(6) THE DYNAMIC OF SERVICE

DERRICK HARRISON

THE MINIMUM OF WORKS

Acts 16:30

If 'what must I KNOW' to be saved was the content of our last chapter, 'what must I DO' will be the burden of this. We again assume that we are dealing with an awakened soul. Having given sufficient instruction on the four vital questions of God and His gifts, sin and its remedy, we may assume that the seeker turns to us with the question, 'What, then, must I do to be saved?'

In our reply, observe four duties to be performed.

I. THE CONFESSION OF SIN

1 John 1:9

When the jailer asked, 'What must I do to be saved?', Paul replies, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ'. It appears for the moment that confession of need and sin were unnecessary. But actually we read that, 'he spake unto him the Word of the Lord', and baptized him as an open confession that he was a repentant sinner.

Confession of sin on the part of the penitent is most important. Thereby, we take Christ as a Sin-bearer. The transfer of our iniquities upon Him, is thereby accepted by us. Subsequently, by an act of faith, we take Him as our Saviour.

We must insist on the seeker praying, however feeble the prayer appears to be, immediately confessing his sin and need - and God will certainly save without delay.

The Word says, 'If we confess our sins', not 'If we ask for forgiveness'. There is an immense moral difference between these two, whether we look at them in reference to (a) The Character of God: (b) The Sacrificial Work of Christ: (c) The Condition of the Soul.

a. The Character of God

He has been perfectly satisfied as to all our sins by the Cross of Christ. He needs no further propitiation. We need not to supplicate Him to be 'faithful and just', for these qualities have been displayed in the death of Christ. God does not need anything to draw his heart to the sinner.

b. The Sacrifice of Christ

Often, in praying for forgiveness, we lose sight of the perfect ground of forgiveness, the Cross.

Our prayer for pardon, however earnest, cannot form the basis of God's faithfulness and justice in forgiving us. Where there has been definite confession of sin, we can at once rest on the sacrifice of Christ.

c. The Condition of the Soul

Confession involves self-judgement. It is easier to confess in a general way, than to confess our sins in all their naked shame. It is easier to ask for forgiveness than to openly confess the wrong. Let us insist on this fundamental duty before we urge the exercise of faith in the promise of God.

2. TO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN THE PROMISE

2 Peter 1:4; Acts 2:41; James 1:21

The objective of soul-winning is to cause men to receive the gift of God, which is eternal life. The medium which God appointed is His own Word.

The Word of God not only enlightens and convicts, it is the means whereby life is conveyed to the spirit; it is the channel through which the living waters flow; it is the rope on which the drowning soul lays hold. So it is that the seeking heart rests upon the promise of God.

Exhort men to believe, but in the last analysis, we must 'implant the engrafted word' so that when men are tempted, they may rest on the Eternal Word of the Living God.

To get the seeker to receive God's gift, we shall need to present a definite promise and get the person to read it, and memorise it, so that when all else is forgotten, the Word of God will remain.

'What shall I do to be saved?' - reply, 'Receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save your soul'.

In the Parable of the Sower, we read, 'Then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved'.

The inference is that there can be no saving faith unless the Word of God is implanted within the soul.

3. THE EXERCISE OF FAITH IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Mark 9:23

Faith as an act, or definite exercise of the will, faith as a gift of assurance, and faith as a habit of the soul are three

entirely different things. The gift of assurance, 'having obtained precious faith' is bestowed of God. The habit of faith is that gracious state of heart maintained by the Holy Ghost, but faith as an act of exercise is the work of the penitent himself, and it is of this that we are speaking here.

Confession of sin and the implanting of the Word are necessary but, unless they lead to such an exercise of faith, the soul is not saved!

Such a faith presupposes several things: the ONE in whom the soul believes; the MEDIUM whereby he believes; the REASON for which he believes; the OBJECT he is seeking to obtain; and the GROUND-WORK, the foundation upon which he rests. The person whom he believes is the living God; the medium, the written word or promise; the reason, his own sin and need; the object for which he seeks, salvation; but the ground upon which he rests is the sacrifice of the Saviour. It is here, we need to direct his attention and insist by an act of will he rests and abides.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is in direct response to faith in the blood of Jesus.

How many people try to enter into these things by continual consecrations and repentances?

This exercise of faith is a single definite act of faith to be performed once and for all. We need to believe with him and for him, and thus help him into the Kingdom of God. We must present to him a promise concerning the sacrifice of Calvary. There has to be an appropriation of Christ's salvation. The exercise of faith has to be definite, simple and immediate. **INSIST UPON THIS.**

4. THE CONFESSION OF CHRIST WITH THE MOUTH

Romans 10:9

God always demands a simple act of obedience to test the reality of faith. Often the witness of the Spirit comes to a man as he testifies to his commitment to Christ.

Baptism in many countries is regarded as the sign of discipleship, but on the first day it is important to confess Christ.

The destruction of his idols, the observance of the Lord's Day, the confession of the Lord before friends and family. We need to insist on this strongly that it be immediate and thorough. 'Whosoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son the Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father'.

The Salvation Army insisted that from the beginning, the convert be instructed to be a winner of others.

The importance and value of testimony:

1. To strengthen the convert's faith, courage and character
2. To bring glory to Christ
3. To convey salvation and blessing to others

Such a confession sets a man on course and overcomes a real obstacle at the very beginning.

SALVATION

Acts 26:18

The supreme undertaking of the ministry of Jesus Christ is to be the means in God's hands of conveying Eternal Life to a dead soul. All that we have discussed is preliminary to the main objective, i.e., only a preparing of the soul to receive the gift of God.

Salvation of God is salvation from sin. We are using the word in four distinct senses - its guilt, its acts, its habits and its nature or in-being. From all these, the Lord provides a full deliverance.

The salvation of the soul means first a CONSCIENCE made void of offence toward God and men; secondly, a HEART renewed through the Holy Ghost. It means justification and sanctification; it means forgiveness of sins and the New Birth. These two gifts, though co-incident in experience, are entirely distinct in fact and meaning. The former deals with sins committed and their guilt; the latter with sin, its habit and its in-being.

I. SALVATION FROM THE GUILT OF SIN

Acts 24:16

Finney emphasized always that it was the conscience with which the preacher had to deal.

'A minister should address the feelings enough to secure attention and then deal with the conscience, and probe to the quick. Appeals to the feelings alone will never convert sinners. If the preacher deals too much in these, he may get up an excitement and have wave after wave of feeling flow over the congregation, and people may be carried away as with a flood, and rest in false hopes. The only way to secure SOUND conversions is to deal with the conscience. Do your WORK with the conscience'.

As this is true in the CONVICTION of the sinner, so it is true in dealing with his salvation. When awakened with conviction, it is the conscience we must set at rest. The heart has to be changed, but before this can be, the wounded conscience must find balm and healing.

It is easy to let the conscience be satisfied with works of repentance, restitution and reformation. These are necessary to render the conscience void of offence towards men, but they can never make it void of offence towards God.

That can only be secured by the blood of Christ. This is the only place where forgiveness can be found. our task is to bring men to a Christ who bids us come WITH our sin, i.e. in humble, straightforward confession, is what men hate above all things to do.

The great difficulty still is to get them to leave their sin with the Saviour. They come again and again, taking their sin back with them. They must leave it once and forever at His feet.

There is no harder task for the soul-winner to accomplish than to lead the sinner to a real believing confidence in the Blood of Christ. Until the HEART closes in with Christ, the gnawings of the conscience can only be numbed.

2. SALVATION FROM THE ACT OF SIN

Acts 24:16

The greatest pains must be taken in distinguishing between sinful habits and sinful acts. The former can only be taken away by an operation of the Holy Ghost in the New Birth. The latter MUST be dealt with by an act of repentance on the part of the sinner himself. For example, a young man wants to be free of evil habits of drink and lust etc. - he has tried every means to break his chains, only to fail. A further enquiry reveals that he is committing certain evil acts; we find dishonesty in business, association with evil companions, disobedience and ingratitude to parents, unfaithfulness to employer etc. These are not habits, they are definite acts of unrighteousness, which can and must be repented of. He must repent and there must be an immediate end to those things. There must be a conscience void of offence towards man, and such a conscience can only be produced through a practical repentance. It is futile to trust in the blood of Jesus, cry to God for mercy, or seek deliverance from the bondage of his evil passions, as long as he refuses to obey God and turn from these evil things. He has the power to do so.

Practical repentance does not merely consist of putting away all known sin, it generally involves certain acts of restitution and confession. Here we need much grace, wisdom and discretion. This is not generally revealed at the time of conversion. It is often a little later when the Holy Spirit begins to bring back to the memory matters that have to be confessed, money to be restored, bitternesses that have to be forgiven, reparation and restitutions that have to be made. Sometimes, these fruits, meet for repentance, are demanded at the hour of conversion, but in most cases not.

Sometimes, when a soul cannot find peace of conscience, the reason may well be found here. Get men to confess their sin, and not to you.

On the one hand, we have to beware of leading the soul to a supposed faith in the blood of Jesus without any practical repentance toward man; and on the other hand, we need to take heed lest the seeking soul rests satisfied with his repentance and never rests upon the sacrifice of Christ.

Forgiveness of sins, that is what we are called upon to cause men to receive.

The clear distinction regarding FORGIVENESS

a. The initial experience denoting an act, once and for all, consequent on us laying down our arms of rebellion - reconciliation with God. This wonderful gift need never be forfeited, yet it may be as the parable in Matthew 18:23-35 and many other scriptures plainly teach.

b. The subsequent forgiveness as a child of God, when and if he grieves Him by some act of sin or disobedience. The forgiveness of a rebel is one thing, the forgiveness of a child is another.

3. SALVATION FROM THE PRESENCE AND IN-BEING OF SIN

Romans 7:24,25

It is a wonderful thing to be brought out of bondage through God's justifying and regenerating grace. It is our duty to lead such souls into the fulness of salvation. They have entered in, so that they shall possess the land.

The guilt, the acts, the habits of sin have thus all been removed, and so must the in-being of sin be removed. It is the deliverance from the presence of sin in the heart that we need to present and offer to the hungry and seeking soul.

The old 'husband' of Romans 7 done away by the Cross. In His Cross is a perfect destruction of the body of sin.

This position and experience is taken up by faith.

CONCLUSION

Acts 6:3,5,8

We have considered some of the requisites necessary for success in leading souls to Christ - method and message, care in diagnosis, knowledge of men and things, acquaintance with the human heart through the Word and through inquiry of the soul, definiteness in dealing, concentration in presentation and appeal, assured conviction that a speedy harvest is possible, a knowledge of the minimum of truth required for an appeal to the heart and conscience.

The one supreme and all-absorbing essential for success in this work is the Holy Ghost. Without Him, we have nothing. He alone can convict of sin. He alone can reveal Christ and His atoning sacrifice. He alone is the mighty, converting power of God.

When Stephen and the other deacons were called to their office, the condition of their appointment was that they should be filled with the Holy Ghost - Full of Wisdom ... Full of Faith ... Full of Grace ... and Full of the Holy Ghost.

FULL OF WISDOM

Acts 6:3

When Solomon came to his throne, this is what he sought: 'A wise and understanding heart'.

1. It is a wisdom of CERTITUDE. The Holy Ghost seals to our consciousness the gracious things we read of and believe. We speak whereof we know.

2. The wisdom of DISCERNMENT. We are equipped to know the hearts of men. The biographer of William Bramwell says, 'I never met a man who had such deep and accurate knowledge of HUMAN NATURE and the operation of the Spirit of God'. And if there was a man filled with the Holy Spirit, and an almost unparalleled winner of souls, it was him. It is a wisdom that 'is justified of her children'. This is the wisdom that led Solomon to call for the sword that he might discern the whereabouts of love.

3. It is the wisdom of INSPIRATION that knows how to use the Word of God. Our language will be that of God's Book. They may rush from the heart like an artesian well. Words appear peculiarly appropriate and powerful when uttered by one filled with the Spirit.

4. It is the wisdom of WITNESS and testimony. 'A true witness delivereth souls'. Testimony is a powerful influence to convict and convert - as the woman of Samaria who, through her testimony, brought a town full of people to His feet.

FULL OF FAITH

Acts 6:5

'Fulness of faith only comes with the fulness of the Holy Spirit'. A conscious abiding in Christ. Such is the inward state, the fountain from which the prayer of faith springs forth. It means the power to believe for others, to secure results in one's ministry.

'He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water'. We have to exercise faith in Him as the mighty WORKER. Faith in the blood of Christ has to be exercised for others.

FULL OF GRACE

Acts 6:8

When Jesus spoke, it is said that the people were amazed at the gracious words that proceeded from His lips. He was full of grace. Fulness of grace is evident by graciousness of ADDRESS. Fulness of grace will further manifest itself in our MESSAGE. Grace always says NOW, grace always has hope for the vilest, and makes much of His willingness to save. Grace says that it is easy for God to forgive and to bless us. Grace cries, 'Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise'.

The fulness of grace relates to PURITY OF HEART. The insidious danger of being used to influence and bless others. As with Simon, the desire, not for the purifying presence of the Holy Ghost in the soul, but merely for power to communicate it to others, is a peril that lies nearer to the saint than he has any idea of.

'The man who is filled with the Holy Ghost will not be constantly talking about baptisms of power. Nay, rather, filled with grace that humbles him into the dust, he will be ever conscious that he is and has nothing'.

'A sense of the grace and the goodness of God in Christ will be so paramount, that priceless as the privilege is of helping others, THIS can never again become the place whereon we offer the sacrifice of our time and talents unto God'.

FULL OF POWER

Acts 6:8

Knowledge is power. Purity is power. Faith is power. Other forms of power - the power to endure (Col. 1:11), the power needed ere we can enthrone an indwelling Christ (Eph. 3:16).

The saint who intends to walk and work with God needs to be strengthened with might in the inner man.

There are other distinctive forms of power - that of healing, those who are able to pray the prayer of faith over the sick.

The power received in the early church was the power to move the hand of God in prayer, to continue in prayer and to PREVAIL. This is the surest evidence of a man filled with the Spirit.

Says William Bramwell, 'One thing is needful, which is continual prayer. All will fail unless you labour in this way. Let the time be frequent as possible and the manner as fervent as possible. Full of expectation, look for the promise and believe for the blessing. Be mighty in this duty, you will be strongly tempted to neglect prayer. Satan can continue his authority with all persons who do not give themselves to prayer'.

No one will be a soul-winner who is not full of power to pray, it is this power to pray that is at the bottom of every form of spiritual power at our disposal. More particularly, does it lie at the root of success in winning souls. There is no substitute for much wide-awake expectant, secret waiting on God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Only the man of prayer will be full of power. Only the man full of the Holy Ghost will be a man of prayer.

We end as we began, with the Word of God.

Acts 2:16-18 . . .

... But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my hand-maidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

SUMMER CONFERENCE



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1989**

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