

new covenant Voice

*Jesu, the very
thought of thee
With sweetness fills
the breast;
But sweeter far thy
face to see,
And in thy presence
rest.*

*Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux
(1090-1153)*

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

HEBREWS 12:22-25

MADE FLESH

GEORGE W. NORTH

It is possibly true to say that the statements with which John opened his Gospel are as profound as anyone on this earth shall ever read. The very first words plunge us straight into mystery: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.' Was any piece of sacred literature written with such simplicity, or more calculatedly composed to compel man's attention? Except perhaps for the opening words John wrote to his own first epistle, there is nothing like this to be found in Scripture. In childlike profundity, John begins at the beginning. Where better to start? But where is the beginning? We need to know. John knew and knew that he knew, so he wrote, taking us back beyond events of earth and time, beyond things that happen, or even had to happen or there would have been no gospel into mystery. In the purpose and election of God, John had to do this. For his own sake, as well as for the sake of the churches, he had to do it, for man as well as God is a mystery. Man's beginning is still unknown. Which takes place first, is it the heartbeat which causes brain and subconscious mind to function, or is it an impulse of mind which causes the heart to commence beating? We do not know. Man by searching cannot know himself, nor can he find out God. He is Mystery of mysteries, and except He reveal Himself, he cannot be found. Led by God, John started out to unfold the mystery, beginning at the beginning and finishing in his Gospel at the unending ending - 'If he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' Spoken to Peter by the Lord, John wrote that of himself. John was chosen to be the man of mysteries. The gospel of which John writes is not something that happened, neither is it something which was spoken or anything that was written. Events and words are necessary to it (and the gospel embraces both) but it is neither. This gospel is the Word unspoken and unwritten; it is a Person.

THE WORD WAS GOD

John does not immediately reveal His human identity though. There are other things to reveal first, all of them bound up with the mystery of the Person of the Word. He was God, all God. He was not ALL of God, but He was all God. John does not go on to explain or make any mention of the other two Persons together with whom He was God. Like Him, each of these is ALL GOD, but none of the three is ALL OF GOD. Together with the WORD the other two comprise ALL OF GOD, and in trinity are THE GOD. Later, John introduces the other two, but not here; instead, he pursues his way with purpose to reveal the One who he discovered to be ALL God, and through whom he discovered each of the other two. The Word was necessary to creation, says John.

He was not the sole Creator - each of them was equally necessary to creation - but John, not meaning to ignore the others, marks out the Person and work of God the Word. Without the Word, nothing would be; nothing of creation - man would not be. All men owe their existence to Him. In Him was life.

John is moving swiftly, explaining nothing, making statements. He was the Word, the Creator, the Life. Now he adds a fourth: He was the Light of man. He came into the world to be all these to men. John allowed Him to be light to him. It was by the steady shining of the Light that he came to an understanding of all the other things. Toward the end of his Gospel, he wrote that he 'saw and believed' - it can almost be said that he was writing his epitaph. He was very grateful to God that in His mercy He first sent an ordinary man, a lesser light, into the world. He was not THE Word, he was A word; he was not THAT Light, he was A light sent into the world to introduce to men the mysterious One who was coming, and prepare men for the greater Light - the greater Word.

THE LAMB OF GOD

He was already in the world but the world did not know Him, or that He was present. He had been made flesh some thirty years earlier, and had lived a life as ordinarily and as anonymously as any other man. John still does not reveal the name of the Word; instead, he draws attention to the unusual activities of his namesake, the baptist John. He was a most unusual person, born of aged parents in the hill country of Judea, a miracle child. His mother had been barren all her life, but following the mysterious visitation of an angel to her husband in the temple, the latter returned home to his wife, who then conceived and eventually gave birth to John, as the angel had said.

At first, there was an argument about what the boy's name should be, but when at last his father was consulted, he wrote down the name the angel had said he should be called - John. Immediately, speech returned to his father (he had been dumb ever since the angel had spoken to him), who then prophesied over him, saying marvellous things. All hearts were filled with joy and wonder - the babe was to be the prophet of the Highest. When John grew to manhood, strangely enough he left home and family and went into the desert to live a hermit's life, shut away from everybody. Not until this John began to act strangely - seemingly anti-establishment - did the other John include him in his Gospel. He seemed to be drawing men unto him - everyone was going out to him on the edge of the desert by Jordan. Something new was

happening - this prophet of the Highest was baptizing. One day, in the course of his ministrations, the baptist lifted up his eyes and saw someone approaching him. He was a stranger - he had never seen Him before - yet he knew Him at once. 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world', he said, and it is at this point that for the first time John introduces the name of the Word - Jesus. Jesus was the Lamb who was going to take away the sin of the world! Mystery! Light! Though more within the realm of human knowledge, to John this was as inconceivable as any of the other things he had written or which later were to be made known to him about Jesus.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

It is apparent that before all else John wanted his readers to be taken up with the unending wonders of this Eternal Life. It is Jesus' life, the life of the eternal BEING. There is nothing here about 'where' or 'what' or even 'when'; 'why' becomes more and more apparent as the record unfolds. John's real concern, though, is with 'who', and he proceeds to introduce to men's minds - God. By giving details of Christ's birth, other Gospel writers were seeking to ground their testimonies in Scripture and time and history and quite rightly so. They therefore speak of events and places and conversations and persons - Mary and Joseph, Zacharias and Elizabeth, Hannah, Simeon, the Magi, a star, angels, shepherds, a manger, the temple - but John mentions none of these things. He gives no human details, yet in few words he tells us precisely what happened in those days, namely, 'The Word was made flesh.'

John was dealing with facts, speaking as one possessed of secrets unknown to others, and he wrote from a different standpoint altogether. It is as though the earthly and human details had never been, and that the Word stepped out of eternity into time. It could be thought that John did not want us to know anything about Jesus' birth, babyhood and boyhood, or His youth either - Jesus suddenly appears on the pages of his Gospel as a man. God wanted man to know the kind of being He is and was and shall forever be. He is the unborn one. He was never a babe, nor was He ever a boy or a youth. God was never young, nor is He old: John presents Him as the Word made flesh. By this man, who in His day was seen and heard and handled, God said what He was. Jesus was sent that He should show forth on earth in the flesh the eternity and the glory of the invisible God. Later, John balances this revelation by quoting Jesus as saying, 'God is Spirit.'

That was the most important thing for man to know and God became man in order to say it. When this had dawned on John, it had overwhelmed him, and when he wrote it many years later, he did so in order that it should overwhelm us. From the moment he left his father's fishing boat and set out with James, his brother, to follow Jesus, John had Jesus under observation. He watched Him closely, listened to Him attentively, observed Him in all situations. The details of His daily living - His behaviour, His actions, His reactions, His habits, His attitude to life, the way He handled other people - all was open to John's inspection, nothing was

hidden, and John became a convinced man: Jesus was unique. John watched Him die also, saw Him after He had risen from His tomb, heard Him say, 'Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have', witnessed the utter capitulation of Thomas and heard the adoration in his voice when he cried out, 'My Lord and my God'. The Word had been made flesh, and it was still flesh, even after that which was made of woman had been put to death and laid in a tomb. He that came into the world by Mary never came into that room via Mary. John was more convinced than ever - Jesus was God.

JESUS WAS LIFE

Writing later of all these things, John said in his first epistle: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life. For the life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us.' With the hand of God upon him, John bore witness out of experience - he had to, he just had to show it to others. Beyond speaking and writing about the Lord he loved and the life He lived, John knew he had to show this life unto men. John perfectly understood what that meant; beyond speaking about it and writing about it, he had to live it. He had not realized this at first; in fact, it had taken him years to learn this. At the beginning, if he thought anything about it at all, he had not thought this, but quite differently. Being quite natural, he would have believed that to be one of the selected apostles, and to follow the Lord, and to be sent out by Him on special service to talk about Him to people and to do miracles was what it was all about, but not now - he knew better now.

New understanding had dawned on John; the Spirit of Him who is the Way and the Truth and the Life had come to him, he could see it all, and he understood perfectly. When he heard Jesus say it, 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life', he had not understood what He meant by it. It was true, of course, but neither he nor any of the apostles who heard Him at the time had been able to grasp what He meant. How could he have been so blind and so deaf and dead? All of them had been dead. It was incredible. They had been walking, following, listening, seeing, having conversation with Him and others and they had not even been alive! Jesus was the only living Person on earth. John could see it all now - JESUS was Life, everyone else was dead. JESUS was the truth about life. JESUS had come that THEY might have life. He was the only way for all men to live. It comes as great light as well as a great shock to a person to suddenly realize that he is not alive and that he is a dead person existing in a world of dead men. Jesus had come into the world from the Father to show men THAT Word and THAT Light and THAT Life which was with the Father, and He did it by the only means possible to Him - BEING it to men among men.

ABUNDANT LIFE

Jesus had come to MANIFEST life unto the world. He made it plain by His words, by His works - His habits - and He

made it understandable by humanizing it. He said He was going to lay down that life so that we might have it. He said this and did this because He knew He would HAVE to do so if He wanted anyone else to have it. Jesus had the monopoly of it - no-one had it nor could have it till He laid it down. But how could a man have another person's life? That was not possible, was it? One could try and copy it, but HAVE it - actually HAVE that VERY same life - surely that could not be, could it? Yet He had said, 'I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it MORE ABUNDANTLY.' More abundantly than who? More abundantly than what? John collected his beliefs gradually, sorting them out of great confusion of mind; he kept listening, little thinking that one day they would become the substance of a Gospel. 'I lay down my life ... Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life that I might take it again. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again.' Some things Jesus said had gone straight into John's heart and had stayed with him.

John had never heard anyone talk like that and he did not understand what Jesus was saying, but of this he was certain: he wanted that life. He enjoyed being with Jesus and had followed Him throughout the whole period of His ministry here; what an experience it had been! It had happened to him exactly as Jesus had said. Jesus had showed the life to him, and what He had showed him he had believed and had received as much as he was able, and had followed it out. He had listened and learned and had loved and copied Jesus as best he could and had probably succeeded in this more than any other man, but oh, he wanted more. Had he been asked, 'More of what?' he would have said, 'More of Him, more of this truth - this life'! He had so often been amazed in His presence, his soul filled with the wonder of Him, but oh his capacity was so small; there was an abundance in Jesus that as yet John did not have and could not reach. But even as he longed, he knew that even if he could have reached that vastness, he could not have contained it. It was on occasions when Jesus said such things as, 'Out of his (the believer's) belly shall flow rivers of living water' that the great yearnings gripped him; John caught glimpses of this abundant life then.

When he saw how Jesus coped with such emergencies as that of feeding multitudes of people under impossible circumstances, he was amazed. There were no visible means of meeting the need (except five loaves and two small fishes, but they were hardly worth mentioning - what were they among so many?), but Jesus took these in His hands, and kept breaking them up till He had fed everybody there. There were thousands of them; it was staggering, and there were also twelve basketsful of pieces left over! More than that with which He had commenced. What abundance of life and power and grace was in Him - it flowed out of Him. John wanted that flowing abundance, he longed for it all, he could not let go. The great longings kept him flowing even to the point of trailing after the Lord along the sea shore when He had indicated He wished to be left alone with Peter. Both John and Jesus knew he would never give up - he couldn't. If perseverance would achieve anything, if pressing on timelessly would do it, he would have that life.

BORN FROM ABOVE

'Of His fulness have all we received', he wrote afterwards. That is what he had been after all along. When it came, it was beyond all measure and description, vast as the oceans encompassing the earth and the skies embracing all - earth, oceans, everything. It came engulfing, springing, flooding and flowing, a fulness he had never imagined - abundance! He was born into it. It had always been - Jesus had spoken of it. This, too, He had told them, but they just could not grasp it: 'Ye MUST be born'. Jesus had said it: how gladly John recorded it! He had been born - so had an age, the age of the 'more', the 'much, much, more' abundance of God - John lived to prove it. As though somewhere an unimaginably vast storehouse had suddenly been opened up, and everything within was pouring out and into him. The fulness reached him, reached them all, rushing upon them like a mighty wind, the sound of its coming seemed to fill the room, everything, everywhere, everyone - and filling him. That which he had seen and heard and handled of Jesus in the flesh, and was His alone, had come to John.

It looked as though they were all burning, fire appeared to be flaming upon their heads, they were being consumed. Surely they were being consumed - they were living sacrifices. This was an entirely new realm they had entered into. This was not of earth - they had been born from above. John was purged, filled, empowered, carried away - how could he describe it? He was alive. Understanding came, though not immediately. This was that abundant life Jesus had spoken of; the 'who?' and the 'what?' had been answered - it was the abundance of the life of Jesus they had had in measure when He had lived among them. It was confined to Him then, but now! He had laid it down, taken it again and had baptized them into it, and it into them.

SONS OF GOD

Later, in much clearer light and understanding, John wrote, 'Beloved, now are WE the sons of God'. They had not been sons before. What he was going to be in the future he was not sure - no-one was sure, nor could be - but he did know that he was now a son of God and that when the Lord Jesus chose to appear, he would be like Him. Already he had begun to be like Him, and he determined that while life should last he would keep himself and grow more like Him. 'As He is, so are we in this world', he wrote, his heart singing. He was full of it, absolutely certain. The life, the substance, the abundance of it all had come and was still coming; John knew that he could now show the life unto others - he had it.

By the time John commenced his ministry of writing he was full of confidence that that life which had been manifested to him in Jesus was actually in him also. He was absolutely sure, he was living it, and he confessed it. He found it difficult to say what he meant and explain, though: how could he put into words what had happened to him? It was so wonderful. How could he make others see it, hear it, handle it? He put it this way: God has given us a spirit and by this spirit we know that God abides in us; without this spirit, no-one can possibly know this life or what he was talking about.

He so much wanted to avoid giving the false impression that this is just something he believed. He no longer said, 'I believe' - he had passed beyond that - belief is the gateway to knowledge. 'I know', he said. He applied this test to everybody, especially to those who claimed to be speaking for God in the world. The spirits of people who prophesy must be tested - we must know who is speaking to us. John knew the test and did not hesitate to use it whenever it was necessary to do so. There must not be any abuse, though. God does not intend us to spend our lives going about everywhere challenging every prophet and preacher. John did not write this with the intention of laying down a law, or of supplying a formula of speech which must be applied to every man. The important thing to know is that we are not only to listen to what a man says, but to know the spirit of him. Everyone must know who and what is talking to him, for that spirit is seeking to affect our lives.

John knew he was virtually inviting others to put him to the test. He knew it would be inevitable; to him it was desirable. He therefore supplies the facts about himself which qualify him to be a spokesman for God to mankind. When he wrote his later book about the self-revelation of Jesus Christ to him, he said the same kind of thing. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.' He was writing what Jesus told him to say. The Lord always makes His men preach or prophesy or write things by which they themselves can be tested. John accepted this and wrote down the basic thing by which he and every other person should be tried. 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.' Nothing could be stated more plainly or be more straightforwardly declared; John is speaking from his own experience. Writing in the present tense, he says, 'Jesus Christ IS come in the flesh'. It was his personal realization; he thrilled to it. Jesus was in him, in his flesh.

CONTINUOUS SANCTIFICATION

Not for him to write the details of the past incarnation. It was true of course, but when he thought and spoke of that, he said that the Word was made flesh; now the Word was made flesh in him. This was typical of him - he speaks differently from everyone else on practically everything. His spirit moved with the Spirit of God in the mysteries of the kingdom of God - he wrote of them by inspiration with understanding. To him the thought that others would enter with him into the fellowship of knowledge of the mystery of life was wonderful. Personal knowledge that Jesus Christ is come in his or her own flesh is the most wonderful knowledge anyone can have about his life. John's desire for all mankind so blessed is that they should walk in this light with him and each other. In this, as always, his thought and teaching was founded upon his observation of Jesus. He had always walked in light with His Father. 'As He is', 'As He did', 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God' - these thoughts standardized all John's teachings. Every beloved son of God should glory in this revelation.

The word that once was uniquely made flesh by the

Spirit comes into flesh again by the same Spirit, though not in the same manner, nor for the same unique reasons, nor yet to accomplish the same work. John was not speaking of exclusive incarnation, or of reincarnation but of all-inclusive regeneration. On God's part, and with intention, regeneration is the immediate sanctification of the whole man - spirit, soul and body - unto continuous sanctification of the whole life - entire sanctification of the whole man for the whole of eternity. 'We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.' By moving those last two phrases around, without doing either harm to the text or despite to the Spirit of truth, we shall come to a clearer understanding of John's own position and the more really hear his precious testimony. Rearranged, it reads like this, 'We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may KNOW Him that is true - IN His Son Jesus Christ; we are IN Him that is true.' Blessed indeed are all they who have this understanding, for the clarification of these things to the mind is for us to understand the mystery of Christ's words to His own in the upper room. 'At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father and ye in me, and I in you.'

THE TRUE LIGHT WAS SHINING

This had greatly puzzled John when Jesus said it, and not only him - all of them had been puzzled. John had believed his Lord, though. Now, though the puzzlement had gone, 'that day' had come, and, exactly as Jesus had said, he knew. What a day that was, and it has not ended. It has continued on through the centuries until now - we are still in that day. 'The darkness is gone', he wrote, 'the true light now shineth'; his ready pen flew in his hand - he was in the kingdom of God. What was true in Christ was true also in himself, and he said so for all of us to read and to enter in. 'The thing which is true in Him is true in us', he insists. John commenced his Gospel with the light coming into the world, shining in the darkness. It shone FOR him; it shone ON him, it shone INTO his darkness, (Oh how dark it had been!) and now it was shining IN him and from him; John had become a light.

It was probably the most wonderful experience of John's life to date when he ran to the tomb with Peter that early morning, and, after a slight hesitation, had followed him inside. Despite the light of the morning without, all was darkness within. There were no angel lights shining now. They had been shining - the women had seen them - but they had departed now: save where the early morning light penetrated the gloom, the furthest recesses of the cave lay in shadow. John stood at the entrance, his eyes gradually adjusting to the dark, waiting for Peter, wanting him to have the honour of being first. Breathless from running, Peter arrived and went straight in. John followed him, looking for evidence; of what, they were not sure. All they found were traces of Him - graveclothes, the napkin that had been wrapped about His head and that was all: they took everything in at a glance. He was not there. Peter peered about, searching, he saw what was to be seen, and he left the tomb 'greatly wondering', John saw all that Peter saw, but

with different eyes. He saw and believed. Suddenly it was as if light flooded the place and with it sight came; faith also - all seemed to spring up together in him; the empty tomb said it all. John knew Jesus was alive. That day did not pass before many others believed also, and hastened to add their testimonies. Soon they were all to share their infallible proofs. The hours were filled with wonder - it was ceaseless. Eyes were glowing, the true light was shining. What now?

THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT

'Wait!'. It was the Lord's word to them. What use light and sight without power? John joined the rest of them in prayer. When would it happen, and what was this power He was promising? John could remember the day when Jesus had given him and his fellow apostles power and authority over sickness and devils, and to tread on scorpions and become impervious to poison - 'Tarry till ye be endued with power from on high'? What new power was this?! It was to come from on high. They had received earthly power - He had given them that and they had performed miracles by it. They had power to work, had had it for some while. This was something vastly more - incomparably greater. When it came, understanding came too. John began to grasp what it was, for it sprang up in him; it was the power of an endless life! On the day of Pentecost, John was flooded with new light from that Light of which he first wrote; not till then did it fully happen. When it did, he saw and understood, and wrote of it, 'the true light now shineth.' It was shining, burning in him; his friend Peter called it 'marvellous light'. They revelled in it, not knowing then that it was yet to shine far more widely and fully, as Jesus had said.

Not all the revelation God had for him was given him at Pentecost. Only as he went on with God in the life and the light he now had would he receive more of both. When he wrote his epistle, he knew that the light was true, but he also knew that the light he had was not yet full. Whether or not he knew that full light was coming to him, he does not say - most probably not ... but perhaps hopefully, yes. It did. It began with yet another new self-revelation of Jesus to him. The sight of Him was overwhelming, He was light, the Life was the Light yet again to him, all light. John fell down at His feet as though the vision had slain him; John was back in (or was it carried forward into?) mystery.

Though so different, everything was the same. The order of revelation and communication was identical - in the beginning was the Word. First, John heard the voice and the word - 'I am'. John turned to see the voice - the scene had changed entirely. The voice was no longer crying in the wilderness, neither was it the voice of John Baptist. It was the

voice of one 'like unto the Son of Man'. He was standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks (light-bearers, lamp-stands, churches); the whole was light. John gazed at the one in the midst. He looked so like the Son of Man he had seen and known on earth. Was he? Could he be? He looked different, but He did not say. Snow-whiteness, flames, fire, gold, burning, sunshine, a sword, a face, a garment, feet, hands, stars, a head and the sound of many waters he could not see. It was altogether too much. John's strength drained from him, as though he was dead. He fell at His burning feet. The Lord touched him and laid on him that same right hand in which He held the seven stars. 'Fear not', He said, 'Write.' Be my pen - I want to write with you; write for me; write what you see and hear.

ETERNAL LIGHT

Those burning feet did not trample on him: John wrote - of mysteries, visions, revelations; new light was pouring in, shining on the past, into the present and on to the future. Things of earth and things of heaven, some ugly and frightening, some beautiful and comforting, the present, the future, the whole of creation - the vision and revelation covered everything. Everything followed in quick succession till John stood on the brink of eternal ages, looking unto the blazing light where there was no need of the sun. John's eyes were attracted to a light which was descending - out of heaven - from God. It shone 'like a stone most precious ... clear as crystal'. It was a city full of the glory of God; its light was internal and most precious.

John was transfixed. The city kept descending; lower and lower it came till he could see into it. Things came into focus and became clear - the main street, the city centre, a flowing river flanked by trees, with a throne at the head of it standing over the eternal spring. John's gaze riveted on the throne - he had found the source of the amazing light. The Lord God Almighty was sitting there with His Lamb - all was glory and light. John understood - 'the glory as of an only begotten with a father' - he was looking at the glory which the Father gave to Jesus before the world began. The mystery he had been called to unfold was finished - a new age was about to begin.

John was sent back to earth - his third sending from the Lord. He had to write the mystery and none but he could: John did, first and last; disburdening his soul, catching up others with him into the mystery, carrying them across time, through events and ages, and out of history to Him who was and is and is to come, the Alpha and Omega; He is the beginning and the end.

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Comment on front cover quote: Bernard of Clairvaux was the most influential Christian of his age. He bridged two worlds: the ages of feudal values and of the rise of towns and universities. He was the first of the great medieval mystics, and a leader of a new spirit of ascetic simplicity and personal devotion.

BROWSINGS

GEORGE W. NORTH

God is so great and wonderful a being that no language on earth can properly describe Him, the words do not exist. Such is our dilemma. Even if they did, man's knowledge of God is so limited that to attempt a description would be to demean Him, it is beyond anyone's power.

In the book of the Revelation, John twice attempts the impossible, and only succeeds in giving us impressions of grandeur, awesomeness and inscrutability. In his Gospel, he says, 'No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten son which is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him' (Gr. 'Led Him out'). Jesus brought God into view - into focus - so that God could be seen - it may be said that Jesus came for that purpose. But He who was seen was not the whole of God, He was not God the Father, nor was He God the Holy Spirit, He was God the Son. 'All the fulness (that is the sum total and worth) of the (whole) Godhead bodily dwelleth in Him', says Paul, and adds, 'Ye are complete in Him': he also defines the mystery of godliness for us - 'He who was manifest in the flesh'. The Lord Jesus was Fulness of God and completeness of man, godliness manifest in flesh and received up into glory. Between them, these two great men, John and Paul, define the mystery of godliness, but do not attempt to define the mystery of God; that was beyond even them. God is undefinable.

TRIUNE BEING

What is true of Jesus is also true of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. As in Jesus dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, so in each of them does all that same fulness of Godhead dwell individually and indivisibly. In our believing therefore, we must guard against the very human mistake of thinking and speaking of Father Son and Holy Spirit as though they are three separate beings. They are not, nor do any of them have separate existences. The agreement and arrangement whereby they can each act as though they are separate beings are beyond the understanding of mortals. Explanation of the phenomenon may be attempted and found acceptable by some, but in the end, beyond the fact that God is God and that He is this kind of God, little more can be said. God does not have to explain Himself; that He has both announced and manifested Himself to man at all is of His grace. Once we come to know Him we realize that it is typical of Him that He should have done this, learning further we discover that it was in His thoughts from the very beginning. But He has gone beyond that - in greater love, by a unique birth, He has manifested Himself to man as a man. In still greater love He has manifested Himself in other men also to whom in great grace He has given a special birth, that being His he should do with them as He please.

By becoming a man, God was able to display to man what He would be if He was (a) soul living on earth among man in a human body. When He made man of dust He breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living soul, and immediately the body of dust commenced living. By the breath of the living God man was made a living soul in a living body, as God imparted to shapened dust a spirit of its own. The soul of man is like the spirit that is in him, and is the direct product of that spirit. Through His soul the Lord Jesus revealed both the Spirit He was of and the spirit He WAS. This is true of every other person on the earth, everything of mansoul is determined by the spirit of man, the soul partakes of and is the manifestation of the spirit. In turn the body is the amphitheatre of the soul, the sphere in and through which it displays itself. These three can only exist as one on the earth; if one should be absent from the earth then all are absent, for man is one spirit-soul-body, if one be here then all are here. So is it with God; if one person be received then are all received, for they are inseparable, God is one. It is not possible to receive a third or two thirds of God, He is one whole being.

SOUL AND SPIRIT

Seeing that it was God who devised a simple yet threefold existence for the human being, it may be permissible to think of Him in terms of Spirit, Soul and Body. This may be done with deepest reverence and without diminishing or demeaning Him one iota. Man, is the highest form of God's creational art, the most refined demonstration of God's powers in this universe, it may well be that He therefore wants us to think of Him as from ourselves. (Not that we are to attempt this unaided, as though God had done nothing else to reveal Himself than to create man. Besides this and precisely because the revelation had been distorted and had become untrue, He gave His Son to be a human being on this earth. More than this, He has also given us the scripture of truth, of which Peter says that we have the more sure word of prophecy unto which we do well to take heed. Placed at its lowest value, the Bible is a collection of works representing the consensus of the opinion of many men writing over a period of thousands of years, and in this very fact alone is quite unique.) We are triune beings and God has revealed Himself to be a triune Being. We may ask therefore, is there a correspondence between each part of our triune human being and each individual person of the triune Godhead? May we think of Them as we think of ourselves, and if so how may this be done without doing mischief to the knowledge of God (if that were possible)?

We know that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define the difference between soul and spirit - yet from

Scripture we also know that there is definition between them and a sword that divides them. Commencing with this scarcely definable difference, we find Jesus saying things almost comparable; 'I and my Father are one', and, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father'. The Lord said these kinds of things repeatedly. He would do a thing and then declare that it was not He but His Father that did it, and likewise he would say something and then tell his hearers that it was His Father who was saying them. Yet on the Mount of Transfiguration the voice that spoke out from the cloud of glory said, 'This is My beloved Son, hear Him', it was His Father speaking. They heard His voice quite distinctly, it was not Jesus speaking. Father said, 'Listen to My Son', yet Jesus would speak and say, 'This is My Father speaking' - 'Not I, but My Father', He would say - 'I am come in my Father's name'. Not once did He say, 'I and the Holy Spirit are one', or such things as 'I am come in the Holy Spirit's name'; quite the opposite to it, He said the Holy Spirit would come in His name. Jesus did not relate Himself with the Holy Spirit in quite the same way as he did with His Father. The Son came into the world from the Father through the Holy Spirit; Jesus was given human form and existence by the Holy Spirit through the bodily abilities of Mary, which were originally created by God.

We therefore see:

1. that in the close relationship, amounting almost to identity, which existed between the Father and the Son, there is a hint of the same relationship-almost-identity between soul and spirit in man.
2. that in the not so strongly emphasized relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit there is perhaps more than an indication of the lesser integration of the spirit and soul of man with the body.

THE BODY

Taking this whole thought further back into the reality of God in relationship with man, it is possible to project this idea and use of the pattern of trinity into another important realm also, namely the Church. The Church is an entirely spiritual company having bodily (physical) manifestation on earth: it consists solely of God and man in unity. It is referred to in scripture as the body of Christ of which He Himself is the Head. Being comprised wholly of humans, this body, though not of flesh and blood, is therefore a human body - this being so its Head is human also. Seeing that every 'human' body has both a spirit and a soul, this Body must have a Spirit and a Soul too. In creating the Body, God has not overlooked the fact that these are not so clearly defined in scripture as is the Body, nevertheless clues are there for the finding.

The only person of God who came down to earth to be a soul among souls, was Jesus. Logically enough then, He is the Soul of the Body. Paul's exhortation is that we grow up into Christ in all things: like our Head we have to develop our own souls. Growth in grace is growth in soul-stature, that is in Christlikeness. In the Body there is but one spirit, and that spirit is God.

1. 'God', said Jesus, 'is spirit', and did not go on to say,
2. 'I AM God'.

Whenever He spake on earth, Jesus never once called Himself God, but was always referring to the Father.

ONE LORD

In a memorable passage of the Ephesian epistle, Paul writes of the unity of the Spirit which all God's children must endeavour to keep. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all. He then states three positions the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ holds in relationship to this body; above all, through all, in all (the members of the body). This passage is absolutely unique - there is no other passage like it, or even relatively like it, in the whole of scripture - it is also most astonishing in its absolutism and utterly self-revealing. The Spirit here referred to is the Spirit of the body: the Lord referred to is the Lord of the body, the God referred to is the God of the body, and the Father referred to is the Father of the body. The body therefore is the body of God the Father, the Spirit of the body is the Spirit of God the Father, the Lord of the body is the Lord God the Father. Realization of this may at first be very baffling almost, for the scripture, even this very epistle, so clearly states that the Church is Christ's body, and Jesus said, 'the Scripture cannot be broken'.

This is soon resolved when we take into account the equally true and important scriptures which state that 'the head of Christ is God' and 'ye are Christ's and Christ is God's'. In Christ, who emptied Himself of so much to become (a) man, there now 'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily'. The Godhead (that is the headship of God is the Father) is not the Son, the Lord Jesus is the head of the body only because the Father raised Him from the dead and gave Him (to be) the head over all things to the Church which is His body. In turn the body is become the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. To whom the pronoun 'Him' refers in this instance is not clear, it could be the Father, it could be the Son, it could be both. This latter conclusion is the likeliest, for when speaking to the Father of the foundational members of the Church, Christ said, 'all mine are thine and thine are mine'. Father to whom He had previously said 'now come I to thee, the only true God'. The Church is the body of Christ, by a double giving, God (the Father) gave the Church to Christ and Christ to the Church. This was done by the consensus of opinion and concerted decision of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Understanding of these things is vital to those who love 'the truth for the truth's sake', however shattering it may be to firmly held and long cherished ideas. It is very easy to form and hold and distribute beliefs that when properly investigated by a fearless heart are found to be untrue. Relevant to our subject, one such idea is that when Father raised the Son from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies (heavenly places, things, persons, activities etc.) far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come, and set all things

under His feet, Father meant that He set Christ above Himself and the Holy Spirit. Allied to this idea are two other ideas. Jesus' own statement that 'all power is given unto me in heaven and earth', and Paul's word that 'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow'. When Christ said the former thing he did not mean that He and He alone had ALL power to the exclusion of everyone else. Neither did Paul mean that both Father and the Holy Spirit were going to bow the knee and confess that Christ is Lord of all. He was speaking comparatively. He had been through a period of voluntary acceptance of limited power.

HIS NAME

This whole matter is set in true perspective for us by Paul. When he wrote that Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father and shall be subject unto Him, that God (not Jesus note) shall be all in all. In His wisdom and knowledge, Paul says it is manifest (that is quite obvious) that He who put all things under Christ's feet did not put Himself there. Whatever name the Christ bears and whichever office He holds, it was given Him by the Father. The Lord inherited the name Jesus from His Father, the one who is the God-head. Jesus came in His Father's name, but that does not mean that the Father's name is Jesus. When David said that God was his Saviour, he did not mean that God's name was Jesus; similarly when Jacob said that his redeemer was an angel he did not mean that the angel's name was Jesus. The angel was simply the instrument of redemption to Jacob in God's hand. The name Jesus can be translated as 'Jehovah's Saviour'. As He said, he was sent from and by the Father, and that He came out from God, and He is now in the bosom of the Father. He bore the name Jesus because His Father chose it for Him as being His heir, but He did not come in that (His own) name, He came in the undisclosed name of His Father.

It should be realized by all that each person of the trinity has multiple names and that the use of any one of these names, though it be selective and specific, implies the meaning and function of all the others. God is that and does that because He is and does all the things implied by His other names, known and unknown. The fact that our triune God bears names that are as yet unknown to us is perhaps the most intriguing thing about Him. John and Paul perhaps refer to these other names, kept secret from us at present, perhaps for ever, who knows? What we do know is that throughout the ages of the ages God shall be all in all. Having established that the Spirit of the body is God the Father and that the soul of the body is Christ, and knowing that God is triune, we may well be ready to accept that the creation of the body itself is in the hands of and under the auspices of the Holy Spirit. With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost the great age of regeneration by new birth was inaugurated - the Church was born, the formation of the body began, the foundations of God's house were laid among man, other sons were added to THE SON, Father's family grew. Although not in these words, all this is recorded by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. He wrote what he heard and saw, his book is factual not doctrinal. Paul, his great travelling companion over a number of years, was the chief theologian and teacher of the churches in those days. Even so Paul wrote nothing of a systematic nature; reading his epistles it is apparent that his doctrine was delivered as from a pastoral heart always with a view to spiritual perfection and never for attainment to mere intellectual acceptance and excellence. The Holy Spirit came to make us all witnesses unto Jesus Christ that in our measure, to the degree possible to us, we, as our Lord, may be bodily indwelt by all the fulness of the Godhead. We witness to Christ when our souls are like His.

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A - Z SMALL BIBLE WORDS

EDITOR

Q = QUENCH

A. Verb - SBENNUMI (σβεννυμι) is used (a) of quenching fire or things on fire, Matt.12:20, quoted from Is.42:3, figurative of the condition of the feeble; Heb. 11:34; in the Passive Voice, Matt.25:8, of torches, RV 'are going out', lit., 'are being quenched'; of the retributive doom hereafter of sin unrepented of and unremitted in this life, Mark 9:48 (in some mss. in vv.44,46); (b) metaphorically, of quenching the fire-tipped darts of the evil one, Eph.6:16; of quenching the Spirit, by hindering His operations in oral testimony in the church gatherings of believers, 1 Thess.5:19. 'The peace, order, and edification of the saints were evidence of the ministry of the Spirit among them, 1 Cor.14:26,32,33,40, but if, through ignorance of His ways, or through failure to recognize, or refusal to submit to, them, or through impatience with the ignorance or self-will of others, the Spirit were quenched, these happy results would be absent. For there was always the danger that the impulses of the flesh might usurp the place of the energy of the Spirit in the assembly, and the endeavour to restrain this

evil by natural means would have the effect of hindering His ministry also. Apparently then, this injunction was intended to warn believers against the substitution of a mechanical order for the restraints of the Spirit.' Cp. S. of Sol. 8:7.

B. Adjective - ASBESTOS (ασβεστοξ), not quenched (a, negative, and A), is used of the doom or persons described figuratively as 'chaff', Matt. 3:12 and Luke 3:17, 'unquenchable', of the fire of Gehenna, Mark 9:43, RV, 'unquenchable fire' (in some mss. ver. 45). In the Sept., Job 20:26

This information is copied directly from the Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, by W.E. Vine, M.A. For the serious Bible student, if one does not have a knowledge of New Testament Greek, Vine's Expository Dictionary, being used alongside either Young's Concordance or Strong's Concordance, will give a background to word meanings of the Bible. Vine's Expository Dictionary Handbook of Old and New Testament Words, published by McDonald's, is obtainable from Christian Bookshops at £11.99.

THE LAID DOWN LIFE

GEORGE W. NORTH

When the Lord said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends', He stated the highest thing about the life He gives to His own. He had said many things prior to this, all of them vital revelations; sensible, scientific statements of factual truth as absolutely necessary to the life as is air to breathing. He had also unfolded the principles and secrets of His own life with the Father among men: how He lived and spoke and worked. But with this word He crowns all else; the life, to reach its fulness, must be laid down for others.

He had revealed the truth earlier with regard Himself. Speaking in the context of the relationship between Shepherd and Sheep in chapter 10, He said that His Father loved Him because He would lay down His life for the sheep, adding that He had power to lay it down and power to take it again. 'No man taketh it from me', He said, 'I have power to lay it down and power to take it again'; He makes it quite clear also that He lay down His life upon:

1) the simple conviction of his Father's knowledge of Him and His knowledge of the Father:

2) the straightforward commandment of His Father to do so.

It is also quite clear that the bringing in of the 'other sheep' which were not of 'this fold' depended upon Him laying down His life. There was to be one flock and one shepherd and to accomplish this He must lay down His life in order that the sheep may have it; each sheep of His flock must have the life of the Shepherd of the flock. Except they have it they cannot be His sheep, and in His flock.

ABUNDANT LIFE

This supreme love is the crowning glory of the life. We only have life because in this great love He laid His down. The greatness of the act was the direct result of the greatness of the love, which love made His life so great. He said, 'I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly'. Earlier, in another place, He had said, 'he that seeketh his own life shall lose it'. All the while a man seeks his own life he is not seeking the life Christ gives. We must not do that, but seek His life and lay down our own life that others may have it; love never seeks her own. No-one can take another's life unless he voluntarily lays it down of himself, laying it down with the purpose of giving it to others in abundance.

By this the Lord does not refer to heroics such as Peter mistakenly thought and said, 'Lord, why? Cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake'. The Lord's

answer to that was, 'Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Thou shalt deny me thrice'. To lay down the life is something entirely different from one heroic act. Peter's idea of laying down his life was really to sell it, and sell it for Christ's sake hoping to prevent Him from being 'captured', for not long after this statement we find him drawing his sword in defence of his Lord and cutting off the ear of Malchus. Physical death following resistance is not what Jesus means by laying down one's life, for obviously the fight to avoid death is the contradiction and exact opposite of laying down the life in love. That physical death may ultimately be required of us, as an act of faithfulness to Christ is revealed by the fact that the Lord actually died in this manner Himself; but if this is to be so with any of us, it must be as the final outward act of a life which has been constantly laid down for others.

THE YIELDED LIFE

A vital thing for us to notice is that he was led as a lamb to the slaughter and except when truth demanded, was as a sheep dumb before His shearer when standing before Herod and Pilate. Furthermore when hanging on the cross He finalized everything by yielding up His spirit; everything was purely voluntary, even in the act of physical death. Paul also had this spirit about him, for he said upon one occasion, 'I refuse not to die'. What a wonder of love is hereby revealed. Laying down the life is not necessarily an heroic death, but a spiritual attitude which makes a man self-sacrificially available throughout the entire span of earth-life.

This is quite impossible unless the Lord has come by the Spirit into us. He says in chapter 14, 'I will come to you ... because I live you shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me and I in you ... we will come unto (you) and make our abode with (you)'. Such an experience will befit and enable us to produce the fruit He spoke of in chapter 15. As much as any other factor, this will depend upon a man's personal determination to lay down his own independent life. Until he sees that independence is another word for self-defendance, and self-ambition, he will not do this. Only as a man abides in Him and He in him will he abide in the vine and love the life of this vine. The fruit of that life glorifies the Father. With those words the Lord leads us up in an abundance of love to the crowning remark, 'I have loved you ... abide in my love ... love one another as I have loved you: greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. He had been doing this all the time, to Him, living was laying down His life; He had loved them. To Him, loving is laying down the life: to lay down the life is truest love. All self-seeking, self-centredness, self-interest, self-pursuit, self-development gone, lost in seeking to advance, build up, bless, minister to others.

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UNITY

GEORGE W. NORTH

Everything of Church truth and doctrine is conceived and presented in Scripture in terms of the unity of the Spirit. This itself is written of in the context of 'there is one body and one Spirit', which is introduced to our thinking in relationship to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Jesus Christ our Lord. When God took His decision, He had all time and eternity in view, and fitted the ages together to introduce, produce and then contain and display His choice. He constructed all time and contrived all work to this end, choosing, creating and calling whom and what He would. This He did with complete foreknowledge of all things, events and people - their emergence and responses or reactions throughout all time and eternity - and perfect wisdom as to the timing of His actions. The presentation of the gospel was all done in the profound and natural love of His heart in sheerest grace.

In all He has done and is now doing and shall ever do, there is only one Spirit working, producing both unity of life and uniformity of privilege, purpose and performance in the sense of function. Grace is exercised, shown and given to all the faithful in Christ to be received and utilized by them so that each may keep this unity of the Spirit, thus allowing and promoting God's plan to reach fulfilment. There is unity in everything God does. Nothing is disjointed in occurrence, nor of a different spirit from everything else He does.

GOD'S POWER

Paul takes three different things separated by different lengths of time in a very vital element common to all, and declares them to be joined. In Ephesians 1 he speaks of the power energizing Christ in resurrection, and in chapter 3 he speaks of these identical separations in himself, and also shows that in every member of the Church these same forces are at work. He is speaking of original power, that is, God's power. This power is revealed in the New Testament to be the power of each of the Persons of the Godhead - the same power (*dunamis*) is attributed to them each and all. In this epistle it is given its most significant emphasis, and is revealed to be the source of God's energy; it is His inward power, the strength of His own personality - 'the power that worketh in'. Uniformity without parity is revealed side by side with the unitary nature of our salvation. We are assured that all was done by Christ - no-one can achieve parity with Him. He is unique.

It is the singularity of Christ which is the greatest feature of the New Testament - He is incomparable. To know uniformity with Him is not to presume or claim parity with Him. If we take the revelation of the body as the substance of

and an illustration of this, we may easily understand the truth. The body is uniform with the head, but there is no parity between the head and the rest of the body, nor between it and any member of the body. But just as all was done by Christ, so all was accomplished in Him. This is the first hint given in the epistle of the unitary nature of salvation ... 'He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.'

Developing from that beginning, Paul shows that everything of grace and benefit to us is in Him. In fact, it becomes obvious that God chose us in Him in order that we should be the benefactors of all He should accomplish; what He did he did for and as all who are in Him. So it is that in the sense that He predestinated us unto Himself, God did all for Himself. According to this purpose of God, it became necessary - indeed, absolutely unavoidable - that Jesus should be made sin and should die. He had to become as the great unforgivable sinner who had to die without mercy on account of all the great sinners who had been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. He died as the sin-offering for the aggregate of all their sin. But more than that, Christ died for the aggregate of the sin of the whole world. If He was going to die for the sin of all those chosen in Him, He had to die for everybody's sin, for sin is as unitary as holiness and grace and righteousness and salvation. It was impossible for Him to die for the sin of one individual and not at the same time and by the same act die for all the sin of the world.

THE INIQUITY OF THE JEWS

Let us here note the nature of the difference between John's statement as distinct from Isaiah's. John says 'The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world'; Isaiah says, 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' Isaiah is speaking of his own and his people's iniquity. He had a limited national concept only, but John spoke of the world's sin. No doubt we feel justified in universalizing the prophet's words and applying them to man in the present day. But there are undoubtedly two different kinds of evil in view in these two texts. Gentiles, that is, the whole wide world of men, were not guilty of Christ's rejection. He was not their promised Messiah. Though it was actually Gentiles who crucified Jesus, the Lord plainly said to the Gentile Pilate, 'Thou couldst have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above.' He also prayed for the soldiers who fastened Him to the cross, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Judas, the betrayer, who was a man of the tribe of Judah, as was Jesus Himself, had the greater sin. He represented and did the will of the Jews or Judah-ites. Pilate said, 'Thine own nation hath delivered thee unto me.' The iniquity of the Jews was Christ-rejection; it was to Jews that Peter made the accusation 'Ye by the hands of wicked men

have crucified and slain', when speaking of Jesus. The Gentiles were only the 'hands' by which the Jews committed their iniquitous sin. Though implicated in the crime, the Gentiles were not held guilty by God for the sin of Christ-rejection and crucifixion - they were only the instrument of the final crucifixion and dispatch of the rejected Messiah.

THE SIN OF ADAM

It is commonly held that John wrote his gospel for the Gentiles. His whole approach to and execution of the commission is un-Jewish. His introduction, omitting all references to earthly lineage and birth, combined with such explanatory expressions as, 'a feast of the Jews', mark his intentions. He is concerned with Jesus' appointment and accomplishments for the world and presents his gospel to the Gentile mind. Yet, even so, the death of Christ was as unitary for Gentiles as Jews. Paul, the first apostle to the Gentiles, unto whom was granted a special revelation of Christ, sets this out in plain terms in his letter to the Romans. He adds further thereto in his first Corinthian epistle, saying, 'As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive.' Writing again to the same people, he says, 'If Christ died for all, then all died.' But in Romans chapter 5 he shows first of all that Adam's sin worked in all, making many sinners, in consequence of which death reigned over all. Then, secondly, he says that in the same way Jesus' righteousness and the consequent conquest of the sin placed upon Him makes many righteous.

What Paul is showing is that by what one man did in one act he did as for all: all men were in Adam; similarly, in much the same way, all the chosen are in Christ. Adam's act was not committed in full knowledge of the breadth and length and depth and height of what it entailed, but Jesus' was. The sin of the world was Adam's sin, it was not the sin of Christ rejection, but of the rejection of God's word - disobedience. The gospel written for the Gentiles commences, 'In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and was God ...' The sin of the world of men is disobedience - refusal to believe and submit to the word of the gospel when it is presented to them. If Jesus had to die for that sin, He could not be selective about it. In its nature it is not divisible - we were all born with it. There was not nor could be any limitation in the act or the provision. Now, that there is limitation in the members who are saved is quite true. That there is also limitation in the number of the elect must also be true, but there are other factors governing that which are not operative in the act of righteousness, that is, the work of Jesus at Calvary.

The act of God at the crucifixion is universal and absolute over the whole realm and ramifications of the sin of the entire world of men. It must be borne in mind though that it did not cover the sin of heaven or of spirit beings, nor was it intended to do so. In this sense it was limited; but, even so, it was not limited in itself; it was only limited by the will of God from operating in that area and to those creatures. Universal in its appeal unto men though it is, we are not told that it gives any ground for appeal to condemned spirit beings.

MYSTERIES OF REDEMPTION

The mystery of redemption is far greater than we are able to gather from the few textual references to it. It is beyond the power of man to fathom the depths of God's mind; he cannot comprehend the Infinite. God tells us that He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, but He does not say when, nor apropos of what. What events preceded His choice we do not know. At which point He purposed His eternal purpose in Christ we are not informed. He does tell us it was for His own good pleasure, and that He did it in love and wisdom and grace, but the time factor involved or the procedural order of His mind and will still lies hidden in His wisdom. Did His choice of the saints in Christ precede Lucifer's sin, was it a decision taken in the foreknowledge of what would happen and the devastation it would eventually cause among the sons of men? Or was it an act taken with determination on God's part to salvage something from the wreck - a great rescue operation following Lucifer's fall? Was God's choice one of the causal factors of Lucifer's jealousy and pride which brought about his expulsion from heaven? Or with the wreckage of His former plans strewn around Him, did He as it were start afresh and do something new in Christ? We cannot with certainty fix the time or point in eternity when it was done; we can only praise Him with eternal gratitude that He did it.

In a far greater unitary sense than with Adam and sin, the plan and outworking of salvation is all of one. That is why moving throughout the opening chapters of the epistle we find the word 'together' or the recurring phrase 'together with'. God insists on showing us that all is bound up in and with Christ. If He chose us in Him, then of course all that happened to Him on this earth with regard to salvation happened also to us; we were together with Him all the time and had part with Him in much that He did. We did not do anything. We did not even know we were there and so could have no conscious part with Him in any of His works. The rather, in all our non-existence as personal consciousnesses, He took us with Him in order to make what He did ours. He did it all for us as us; He was able to, not only because He was God in flesh, but because we had been chosen and placed in Him by God.

ETERNAL LIFE

Before sin could infect us, He chose us in Him and preserved us in that position from sin and its inevitable consequences. Christ remaining holy in Himself was able to take us through the sacrifice for sin as though it were our own. He was sacrificed TO sin, and in that we had no part, for it was our sin that He was made. He was also sacrificed FOR sin and in that also we had no part; but that was imputed to us as though it was our own sacrifice. He was MADE sin and in that we were implicated. He also BORE AWAY sin but we did not share in that - we were so poor we had no oblation. Entering even further into the realm of the impossible, we had no existence, but yet He offered Himself without spot to God for us and AS us. This is perhaps the most wonderful aspect of amazing grace we shall ever realize throughout the ages to come. At that time, we were not alive, save in the loving heart

of God; we had to be born into it and thereafter by grace come unto conscious knowledge of it all.

We cannot understand either the mystery or the power of this great miracle. We were first chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. It may possibly be that each of us was foreknown and pictured and placed in Him in the mind of God, without having actual pre-existence as a person at that point. (In that sense, the term 'eternal life' takes on greater meaning, but it must not be confused with having eternity of life; that belongs to God alone. If we had that, we should be as great as God. Eternal life is a gift and must ever be understood by us as that; it is a gift from God's eternity of life. He is self-existent, uncreated: we received conscious eternal life when, in love and grace, He gave us birth from His will, purposing and begetting whom He desired and fore-knew according to His pre-creation choice.) Of the many sons, the Son was the only one who had pre-existence.

ETERNAL SONS

The grace of Christ lies chiefly in the fact that He laid aside His privileges and position, and came to earth and Calvary in order to make possible the actual existence of the 'many'. At that time, He was, and acted as, an individual, achieving for the many individuals that life-sacrifice each needed for sonship. As a man, He yielded Himself utterly to the good pleasure of the eternal will, so that the Father might beget eternal sons and God be able to create everlasting workmanship. This He did when He raised the Son, the Man from the dead. This great and mysterious begetting-creating demanded that the God and Father of Jesus Christ should work in power with all the strength of His might, energizing and raising the dead Jesus into the full stature and greatest measure of His Christhead. He had established the ground - the possibility and certainty of the realization of all God's hopes - it was the miracle of the ages.

The Father would not have called us unless He had hope that He could give us eternal life from this seed; nor would God have attempted to create us unless He had this spiritual substance in which to work. The Man, Christ Jesus, by His achievements at Calvary, provided His God and Father with all He needed to fulfil His pre-historic desires and long-awaited hopes. The vital will which sin had seriously threatened, and the eternal purpose Satan had threatened to break, could now be brought to fruition. Truly, when Jesus 'offered Himself without spot to God', He did so as far more than a perfect sacrifice for sin, He gave Himself also to be the substance of the new creation. In view of this, Paul's plain statement of intense desire to 'know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death' stands out in a new light. He understood what he was talking about - he gloried in the cross and the fact that he had been crucified with Christ upon it, for he had the revelation of all that happened in and by Christ for him there. He knew that the more he was conformed to that death, the more completely God could mould and develop him according to His eternal will and the skill of His hands in the new creation.

No wonder Paul wanted to 'know Him and the power of His resurrection'! He understood clearly that in the act of resurrection, when the Father begat His Son from the dead, God wrought in Him, and created all the other sons He had previously chosen in Him. Paul did not wish to know the immensity of the power in the article and fact of resurrection only, he wished also to know the immensity of the power of God's inworking in Christ at that time. The strength of the power of God's might, whereby He inwrought all His sons into the spiritual substance of the Man-Christ at that time was sheer poetry of absolute wonder to him. The apostle's questing mind and willing spirit lived by comprehension and knowledge as the might of the Spirit strengthened him with mighty power, giving him to contain the Christ within himself. Created and grounded in love, he sought to know the love of Christ yet surpassing him; that he might be filled with all the fulness of God.

THE BOND OF PEACE

Paul, thoroughly grasping the fact that the whole of salvation is unitary, proclaimed one-ness and whole-ness with clarity of understanding. Because of our nature, we do not find it easy to believe in the unity of the Spirit as God intends we should. Our minds readily enough conceive the meaning of the phrase, great as it is, but human limitations all too powerfully militate against its realization in us. It is this that the apostle is so concerned about. We are all too often content to rest in limited and partial experiences, disjointed and unconnected. Perhaps also we do not interpret the phrase correctly, making it mean 'togetherness' with each other only or chiefly, whereas it more pointedly refers to the inherent one-ness of God and all He has done. 'Here a little, there a little', 'line upon line, precept upon precept', is biblical enough; it is very human, though, and Old Testament. The New Testament revelation is not only one of unity but also of the unitary fact and nature of the redemption we have in Him. Paul is bidding us beware of partial, scrappy thinking - a bit by bit, or piecemeal experience; we must 'keep (preserve) the unity of the Spirit in the uniting-bond of peace'.

Presumably the uniting-bond is peace because of the possibility of discord or even argument arising over differences of opinion regarding personal experience. It seems there are varieties of experiences, seemingly valid enough, which at the time may be thought by the person undergoing them to be the only genuine way of God. If this thought hardens into dogma and forms into doctrine, it can cause endless and sometimes bitter controversy and division. Therefore, Paul sets down the seven-fold unitary statement of doctrine to which all must adhere, and if it be accepted in meekness, this will be a uniting bond indeed. If it be not received for the great uniting bond it is, the preservation of the unity of the Spirit will be utterly impossible. Men cannot succeed in uniting in spirit if they will persist in disunity of mind. If we deliberately think and speak differently from the mind of Paul and the Spirit on any of the seven points they are at such pains to set out, unity with them or each other is not possible. The kind of unity they seek is unity of spirit and of mind and of faith and of experience.

Unity is more than tolerance. To be tolerant toward others is a commendable affectation when listening to various views on the second advent, or Church government, or forms of worship. Toleration is virtuous under such circumstances, for none of these matters find place in the list. Differences of opinion are permissible on many issues, but not on the substance of this unity of the Spirit - it must be embraced without reservation or there can be no hope of its preservation. 'There is ONE.' There is no more than one. There are, it is true, more singular things than are mentioned in this section, but that is no excuse for disbelieving what are included there. The other singular things are not so fundamentally necessary to 'the Church which is His body' as are these, and so have not been enjoined upon us by God as being obligatory to the unity of the Spirit. THEY OUGHT to be accepted as being one, but THESE MUST be received without demur.

UNIFORMITY OF EXPERIENCE

Now, because these seven are a unity, there must be uniformity of experience also in those who believe. The final clause implies this: 'One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.' If that one thing must be true of all who claim to be God's children, so that uniformly we have to be known of Him before we can be His - then some necessity of uniformity extends equally over the whole. To read the opening chapters of the epistle through can do nothing but confirm this to the mind. In His eternal purpose and determined election and predestinating will, God redeemed us; and also gave us an inheritance. This was all accomplished in Christ. He has informed us of it by His

gospel and in grace brought us into it - it is a fait accompli. We neither thought of, nor purposed, nor added anything to this salvation; we were invited to accept it and the fact that we did so is taken by God as our promise in good faith that we shall abide by its terms. The seal of the contract between God and man is the gift to us of the Holy Spirit. In view of this, can it seriously be doubted that in these fundamental things God demands uniformity of experience for us all?

To deny it would be tantamount to charging God with having a vacillating will, and a changing mind and of acting with partiality towards some of His children. If this were true, no-one could be certain of Him or of what He wants. On the other hand, knowing His fixity of purpose and choice and that He works all things to His own ends and has set it all unchangeably in Christ, we may be assured that what is for one is for all without deviation or alteration. Uniformity must lead to conformity, all is of one and in one and therefore uniformly conforms all to one.

Because of the danger of over-emphasis of this vital truth, God hath also abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence. These two virtues are as indisputable as they are indispensable to us, and must co-exist in the mind of the apologist of this gospel lest zeal inadvertently gives a wrong impression. To so insist on the correctness of the above indisputable truth that the hearer is left with the impression that he has nothing to do is to hinder the gospel. In order to be saved, everyone must exercise real purpose of will and choose as definitely as God. Within the compass of uniformity, there is great variety.

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WHEN HE COMES

GEORGE W. NORTH

Always it seems wherever I turn in the New Testament scriptures I am confronted with the future. I do not know if this is because I am growing older, or because in the past I have neglected to give due consideration to the future, or whether it is the logical result of years of meditation in scripture. It may have to do with the maturing of collective truth, the growth of knowledge and experience, the blending of life with understanding, the natural progression of all things to an inevitable end, which should have been expected. Perhaps all too readily we dwell upon the necessary present, emphasizing apparent things, or stressing and lamenting the absence of needful things, pointing out that which is lacking. To look backwards or around can in some respects be likened to looking downward, to look forward is sometimes thought to be associated with unreality - 'pie in the sky when you die': yet to look forward is also to look upward. Events are moving from past activity to future activity, everything is heading up to that which shall be in the future. Except that which has been fixed eternally by God, all that now is has to pass away.

FULFILL THE CALLING ...

Except life be effectively cut off from the past so that it can be replaced with another which is of both present and eternal quality, I am not of the future but of the past. The old being cut off and replaced by a new it can develop as from birth unto the fulness of life which shall inhabit eternity with God. John says 'NOW ARE WE the sons of God', and having established this immediately engages our minds with the future ... 'what WE SHALL BE.' Because we are sons we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, but beside likeness in basic sonship, in what other respects may we anticipate being like Him? Being already a son of God, Paul was very conscious of the future, and says he was all the time reaching out to what he did not at the time know, nor apparently had even apprehended. Peter, looking forward to the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, challenges us with the question, 'What manner of men ought we to be?' Each of these men while living for God

wholeheartedly in the present was also living entirely for the future. They knew that what is must give way to that which shall be.

We must ever bear in mind that Jesus the Son of God was fitted for what was to be His future work by the life He lived and the work He did on earth. Not for one minute must anyone be under the illusion that to be in heaven instead of in hell throughout the everlasting ages will of itself be for ever satisfying to the heart. To be taken up with God must surely also mean that I am taken up with His concerns and works and not be merely an onlooker and admirer. An eternity of laziness, or of holiday making, or of keeping of holy day or Sabbath, or of sightseeing would be foreign to nature and life and contradictory to all we know of God. From the day of our regeneration, every further moment of life given to us on this earth must be received as opportunity for preparation for the future. Being made aware of this, the response of the soul must be, 'I must find and fulfil my earthly calling'. Learning from Paul, I discover that with the fulfilling of the earthly calling, another heaven calling sounds within; 'the HIGH calling of God in Christ'. To fulfil my earthly calling with my life will alone fit me to reach the mark for the prize of the higher calling; unless I succeed in THIS I shall not be fitted for THAT. I am called and chosen in the present and must be faithful to fulfil God's grace to me now, that I may fit myself for the future.

Relative to the future, my time on earth is very short, there is not a moment to lose, time is not on my side unless I fill it up for God, to waste it is folly, if not criminal. Let not earth bind me, nor its claims distract me. Fill not my eyes and ears with false convictions of indebtedness to this and that, deceive me not by these, thrust them not upon me, my time is not for them. I must pay attention to present commitments, the ministry to God and man is all that matters. These fulfilled lead to that higher, unending ministry which awaits me. Already I have begun this, unknowingly though willingly, I was thrust out into unendingness, launched upon the eternal sea. There were no horizons then nor are there now, I did not look for them, the ministry is eternal as immeasurable as the everlasting life which alone can fulfill it. Physical things shall not distract me, nor shall handicaps deter me there, labours shall not exhaust my strength nor weariness demand me to rest. There shall be no limitations, the tirelessness of eternal life shall be as the increase of strength. Therefore let me use what spiritual ability and mental application I now have, and devote myself to my duties without distraction. My body must be presented to Him whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel lest opportunity pass me by, never to return. The Lord will keep my body as fit as He wishes for this, that He may satisfy His desires in me for only this is fulfilment.

... WITH UNFLAGGING ZEAL

This done, He will appoint me to the place I can best fill for Him in the future. In that sphere of service each will be posted according to the faithfulness and devotion displayed in earthly service. Faithfulness is evaluated by the Lord according to the degree of application with which a man

devotes himself to his present work. There is no fairer way than this, it will be the clearest declaration of each person's love for God and his evaluation His will. A man must show that he has an uncomplaining spirit, fully satisfied with his Lord's choices for him here. If this is not so it will already be indicated, if it is so he will give himself with unflagging zeal to serve the Lord he loves with unfeigned love. 'I laboured more abundantly than them all', said Paul: it is this kind of declaration that sets the standard for all workers.

Let no man think there is the slightest degree of harshness about this. The Lord Jesus, that greatest of all God's servants, told some remarkable parables on the theme of service: of these let us consider three. Chief among these is the parable of the Good Samaritan, full of tender love and continued care right out of His own heart. Then there are the two parables of the Talents, and the Pounds, told us to spur us on till He come. In the first we learn that we must 'come where they are', and brings us this unavoidable command of our Lord, 'Go and do thou likewise'. The second answers any personal complaints or reservations we may entertain about ability or inability to obey the Lord. We sometimes act if we do not speak as though we do not have the ability to go where the needy lie and be unto them as a good shepherd. We forget that all earthly service is probational and preparatory, and that God knows us perfectly and gives us talents exactly suited to our natural ability. From that moment all work for the Lord is to be accomplished by the devotion of all our natural ability to the use of the talents He has given.

USE YOUR TALENTS

The talents are the Man's goods, that is, they are His substance, the means whereby the Man Christ Jesus lived unto the service of God. There is nothing wrong with the talents, all are perfectly suited to fulfil the desires and demands of God in the kingdom of heaven. Talents given by the Lord are ideal instruments of service, perfectly suited to every one to whom He gives them, and if properly used will bring great gain to the Man who gave them (that is they will add greater glory to the manhood of Jesus). By His own use of them as Jesus of Nazareth, He accomplished much and our use of them as citizens of heaven on earth shall achieve much also. Very clearly He says of the talents that they are 'Mine own'. Given to us they are to be returned to Him - though ours they are at one and the same time His, and on the day of reckoning are to be handed back to Him increased by our usage of them.

Everyone is given at least one talent. Not one of the Man's servants is so lacking of personal ability that he cannot handle one. None need feel outclassed or overpowered because of such an array of natural ability in nearly everybody else, he must not become inhibited and introverted before the display of such brilliance. It is not personal ability or inability, nor the 'unfairness' of human parentage, nor the advantages of health, wealth and position, neither is it intellectual achievements, or personal powers that count in His kingdom. Not these things, but the talents are the media of God's servants. Success depends upon personal faithfulness to use the talent or talents properly, and to the greatest

advantage. Devotion to Jesus and His talents and His methods and His ministry, decides it all.

If a man cannot by himself achieve success with his own talent, let him invest it with those who co-operatively direct and use them that together with other's talents, they each may make gain to the glory of God. Every servant must be able to return his talent to his Lord with profit, at the very least, with usury, there must be something earned for God. Properly held, each talent will of itself respond to the spirit and mind of a man, and thoroughly exhibit it. Spiritual strength, heart love, mental evaluation, soul investment, life commitment - these or lack of them are completely revealed by the talents. Talents are not designed or given to make the servants wealthy (however an individual may assess wealth in this world). If so, that man must realize that wealth does not lie either in personal ability or the amount of talents he may have, any more than it does in gold or silver or precious stones. Talents are for service not for substance, and are for expression as well as for achievement. They are additions not foundations.

READY FOR THE BRIDEGROOM

When rewarding the servants, the Lord reckons with them upon a basis of one for one. Apparently each talent should increase one hundred percent. Notice that it is not the improvement of personal ability that gets the reward, but the doubling of the talent. Let us beware of thinking that talents are to be thought of as natural talents such as having a good voice, or being musical, or a capacity to lead men, or financial perspicacity, or organizational ability. If this were so, it would imply that in some way a person must double his or her quality of voice, or of leadership capacity, and so on, which is absurd. Improvement may surely be expected in all these things, but the doubling of them is not possible. The Lord is gracious and does not make such impossible demands, but He does entertain proper expectations from investment of His talents in man. In order, the parable of the Talents is the middle one of three recorded in Matthew 25 which places the day of reckoning leading to the giving of rewards as following the coming of the Bridegroom for His Bride. We therefore see the reason for the peculiar nature of the reward - 'be thou over five or three or two cities', as the case may be. In the first of these parables the Lord lays down four points upon which final decisions will be made:

1. Personal condition
2. The state of readiness
3. The supply of oil
4. The light.

Upon these four conditions the whole matter will be settled. Being with the Bridegroom is the object of the whole and the reason why the Lord told the parable. By this, wisdom or foolishness are justified by their children. Virginity is not enough to gain the privilege, nor apparently is constant wakefulness, for all ten were virgins and all slumbered and slept. The final test is readiness, which depends upon:

- a. The supply of extra oil, and

- b. The light - the maintenance of the light.

This last appears to be deciding factor - 'Is the light shining?' The light lights the way to the bridegroom, the last few steps are vital, He will come in the dark. We must go in with Him to the marriage. Once the door is shut it will not be opened.

LOVE AND SERVICE

But that is not all there is to the future. Faithfulness to keep virginal in relationship with the Lord must be of first importance to our hearts, but it is not everything. Every one faithfully espoused to the Lord and waiting for His coming must also be His devoted servant. The Bride must not be so wholly taken up with keeping herself pure for Him that she neglects to do anything other than sit down and wait for Him. He may be a long time coming. Sitting down is idleness, she will fall asleep, and may not be aware that her oil is running out and the light burning low. When the Lord comes He will not tarry for anyone who is not completely ready. She it is who must tarry for Him; and if she takes rest in sleep, it must be in full confidence that she has sufficient oil to last through the night till He come. To fill and trim the lamp takes but a few moments. The virgins must recognize that more than virgins they are also bondslaves: the Bridegroom to be is also their Lord and Master. At first glance this may appear a horrible thought, from which the mind recoils in shock and self-protection. It seems to be so foreign to the beautiful concept of bridal love which is the inspiration of the kind of self giving so vital to ideal marriage. Surely if there is one union which can be viewed with complete idealism it is the marriage of God's Son with the Bride His Father gives Him. The thought of slavery cannot be entertained in connection with that! Strangely enough this is not so.

What the Lord is establishing by the order of His stories is the relationship between love and service. More than that He is also making known His generosity. He is no more an over-demanding task master than any proper husband is in an ordinary marriage. True marriage is as much about service as it is about love. Without loving service it would be most difficult to establish claims of love. To love is to give, to give is to serve, to serve is to gain reward, to be rewarded is to show love. Love is not a reward it is an award, it cannot be earned, it has to be given; unless love be bestowed freely it cannot be love. Love can be enhanced, increased, extended, and deserved by human hearts, but never bought. When thinking about Christ and His Bride all thoughts which habitually associate slavery with the obnoxious ideas of buying and selling human beings for the purpose of unpaid work and elimination of human rights, coupled with brutality, must be put firmly from the mind.

The kind of slavery the Lord intends is that to which a free person addicts himself or herself upon realization of love within the heart for another. Such love only wishes to spend and be spent in service upon the object of that love. That is not love which only wants to sit around waiting and doing nothing of use to God or man. As regards faithfulness to the

Lord of love, now long gone and soon expected back, we prefer to keep our hearts virgin from all other and idolatrous love. We will wait for our Lord, for there is none other like Him: HE is the only one of His Father; He has given Him for us, and us to Him. But as regards service we each must voluntarily addict ourselves to using the talent or talents He has given us. Doing this we shall not fall asleep but take proper rest in order to be refreshed, wide awake and ready when He returns. Any person who deliberately buries his talent will not be found among the sleeping virgins when the cry goes up 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh', he will be cast away into outer darkness. The shades of that darkness have already so blinded his mind that he had refused to even let others develop his talent that something should be gained for his Lord. See then how service or lack of it is the clear indication of love or the lack of it. It is absolutely true to say that where there is no service there is no love at all. It is also as true to say that where there is no love there can be no service.

LOVE THE BRETHREN

In attempting to interpret this chapter, we must beware of thinking that the people in the first parable are different from those in the second. All three parables in Matthew 25 are as much three parts of one whole as are the three stories in Luke 15. In both cases the stories were told by the Lord in this particular order so that in diversity He may develop a common theme. How magnificently he did it. The last of the three of which 'The Talents' is the central one is commonly called 'The parable of the sheep and the goats'. By this story, unparalleled in scripture, the Lord points and firmly underlines the wonder of unselective service. When He comes with all His saints He will gather all nations and divide them into two flocks - sheep and goats. Having done so He will then pass sentence upon them. Strangely enough, without so much as a trial, He announces His pre-judgement, and all is revealed. There has been no need for moral or legal argument for all turns upon the way men have treated Him. Some have treated Him well and others have ill treated Him. Yet whatever they have done, all they did was done in ignorance; no-one knew to whom they were doing it.

It is such an easy thing to serve Jesus. Apparently all a person has to do is to behave lovingly to Jesus' brethren, that is all - 'inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren ye have done it unto Me'. This is much harder than it appears. Jesus is testing everyone on his or her love, He is really saying, 'If any man says he loves the Lord and loves not his brother also, he is a liar.' To show love to Jesus a person must love the Lord's brother. The Lord will not allow any man to exist under a delusion about this, no-one professing love for Him would miss an opportunity of giving to Him, and of visiting Him: every one of God's children would go to the farthest extreme to feed and clothe Jesus should He be in need. No sacrifice would be counted too great to make for the Lord. The Lord knows that. But He will have none of this selective service and works. He singles out 'the least of these my brethren', and says He and they are one.

Such service as this requires nothing but love, neither special personal powers, or natural abilities are needed for this. The Lord is showing that contrary to his own ideas, the one-talented man need not hide his talent; there is no reason for him to try and find an excuse for burying it. The Lord is to be found everywhere - in his brethren - the very least of them (if such an one can be found). A man's brethren are the Lord's brethren, He can so easily be served. The question, 'When saw we thee?' discloses the simplicity and the naturalness of the loving heart that serves and gives. The talent for doing the unnoticed is perhaps less desirable to some minds than the ability possessed by others to minister in the other four. But Jesus, the unnoticed, notices the giving, the visiting, the receiving.

IN HUMILITY

This may appear to be a complete reversal of roles, a complete change of positions, but it is absolutely true to life. In order to correctly assess and pass just sentence upon everyone, the Lord takes the place of the needy, He identifies with the least. We would ordinarily equate Him with the giver, the visitor, the minister, we do not associate Him with the receiver. Surely the one being visited in sickness or in prison, cannot be the Lord? But He is. This is exactly what the Lord is teaching us by the parable. He is also telling us that true love is not necessarily to be associated with great or heroic deeds. This may be of course, but the two must not be automatically equated as though they are the same. The rather He is saying that love is best displayed by doing little unnoticed, unacclaimed things; love is most suited to doing deeds that are so ordinary that except by Him they are scarcely noticed.

In His own peerless way the Lord tells His stories joining love and service and humility together, making them tell one beautiful story of faithfulness, duty, meekness and devotion. He commences with virginal love, pure and holy, fixed upon Him alone, that must be first. Then He moves on to the need for utter concern with the distribution of His talents and their increase into greater wealth. From that He turns His attention to our brethren - 'love them', He is saying. We are not to be so concerned with Him and the increase of His business that we have no time for our brethren and sisters and human things. 'Love Me, love them; serve Me, serve them; live for Me, live unto them; wait for Me, work for them', He is saying. Pursue these things with diligence, and do not go to such extremes on one thing that you forget or neglect others. Do not run out of oil, do not bury your talents, do not neglect to minister to the very least of your brethren.

The balanced believer is:

1. The virgin going all out for the Lord.
2. The servant using his Lord's goods (talent/talents as the case may be), and going out to increase them.
3. The brother going all out to care for the Lord's people.

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This final study on John's Gospel is centred on the way John uses the Old Testament. This can help us to understand the relationship between the Old and New Covenants.

THE BOOK OF TESTIMONIES

'And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself' (Luke 24:27)

From a very early time the Church realized that Jesus' ministry, atoning death and resurrection, were not simply further chapters in the history of the LORD's dealings with men, but were the pivot and the outworking of truth deeply rooted in the seed bed of the Old Testament. The evidence of the Son's authority, and commission from the Father, was to be found right at the heart of Old Testament revelation.

Some Bible teachers believe that the disciples, and later the Church, were so thrilled with this revelation that they carefully scoured the Scriptures and put together a 'book of testimonies' - all the texts in the Old Testament that point to the work of Jesus. Some would say that it was this book that the gospel writers used to show how Jesus' life fulfilled prophecy.

John, on the other hand, rarely quotes the Old Testament, but his gospel is full of Old Testament 'allusions' - indirect references or echoes of Scripture. Almost every passage seems to have Old Testament teaching lying in the background. For John, Jesus is not only the fulfilment of the Old Testament but the basis of all the LORD's dealing with men since the foundation of the earth!

THE NEW BEGINNING

As we first read the opening words of John's gospel, we think - 'Where have I heard these words before?' Then we remember the opening verses of the first book of the Bible:

'In the beginning ...' (Genesis 1:1)

'In the beginning ...' (John 1:1)

Why should the opening verse of John be so similar to the first words of Genesis?

In the synagogue, once a year, usually in September or October, the sacred Torah scroll is taken from the Ark (A reminder of the one in the Temple) and the reader reads the last verses of Deuteronomy and the opening verses of Genesis. So the cycle of readings from the Law (Torah) begin for another year. The apostle took these opening words to declare that Jesus is the TRUE Torah, and His ministry is the opening of the new era of God's grace.

The Torah was, and still is, the focus of Jewish attempts to please God and maintain their side of the covenant. In revealing Jesus as the true Torah, John now indicates the opening of the New Covenant which is unilateral, unconditional, and unending.

THE NEW GENESIS

Having made a clear relationship between the old and new Genesis, John then names the Creator: the Word. Just as the first three words of the gospel echo verse 1 of Genesis 1, the Word echoes verse 2:

'And God said ...' (Genesis 1:3)

'Was the Word ...' (John 1:1)

The 'said' is the Word. Jesus is the 'expression' of all the Father is, coming from the very centre of the Godhead.

John has deliberately made verse 1 sound the same as Genesis 1. Why? Because Genesis is the book of beginnings, and Jesus is the new Genesis, the beginning of the LORD's most intimate revelation of Himself.

A SEED BED

The Prologue of John's gospel (chapter 1 vv1-18) is sometimes referred to as the 'seed-bed' of the gospel, just like Genesis is called the 'seed-bed' of the Bible. This means that it contains all the key ideas which will be slowly unpacked through the rest of the gospel.

The seeds, or key ideas, are often one word, like 'glory'. Read through the prologue (1:1-18) and see which words are 'seeds'. We can follow these seeds through the gospel to see how they develop and flower. For example, we find out in chapter 2 that the glory is shown through the signs (2:11). Jesus points out that the Father has shared the glory with Him (17:5). The flowering of the glory is at 12:23, where Jesus indicates that He is about to be glorified. This is the beginning of the Passion - IN OTHER WORDS, THE GREATEST REVELATION OF GLORY IS THE CROSS.

THE TRUE LIGHT

Within a few verses, John relates another aspect of Jesus' nature to Genesis 1. He tells us:

'In Him was life; and the life was the light ...' (John 1:5)

which we can compare with

'Let there be light ...' (Genesis 1:2)

John seems to be suggesting to us that the very light mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis was coming from the Son.

The light spoken of in the Creation was very special, because further on in Genesis 1, we find that the sun was not created until day 4! Yet the creation was already illuminated, and, more wonderful still, vegetation was growing - one day BEFORE the creation of the sun! Whatever light was created on day 1 was a life-giving power, a food to enable plants to grow. John now shows us that the source of that dynamic light was Jesus Himself.

What impact, then, can the Son have on those who will allow Him to enlighten them?

THE NEW DWELLING

‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14).

This verse is not a straightforward quotation from the Old Testament, like the other gospel writers used. Nonetheless, John is comparing Jesus with at least 3 passages in Scripture in this single verse.

1. He dwelt (pitched His tent) Exodus 25:8
2. We beheld Him Exodus 33:18
3. He was full of grace and truth Exodus 34:6

THE NEW TABERNACLE

‘And the Word ... dwelt among us’

‘And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them’ (Exodus 25:8)

(Not only is John making a comparison, but the very Greek word for ‘dwell’ - SKeNoo, has even the same letters as the Hebrew word in Exodus 25:8 - S-K-N: ShaKaN!)

Why did John go to all this trouble? He realized that God’s badger skin dwelling place of the Old Testament had only been a pointer to the day He would come amongst His people in the tent or tabernacle of a human body. (The word ‘to dwell’, in v14, would be best translated as ‘pitched a tent’). Of course, later on in the gospel, John would show that God’s ultimate plan is to pitch His tent in US (see John 14:7).

In this way, John carefully showed the Church that a pattern or shadow of God’s plans and principles can be traced through the Old Testament.

THE NEW MOSES

John has also included several references to Moses in his gospel. Why? Because Moses had a veiled experience of the LORD’s presence and glory (Exodus 33:18) but in Jesus we experience the fulness of the LORD.

As we read the words:

‘And we beheld His glory’

We are again reminded of one of the boldest requests of the Old Testament:

‘I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory’ (Exodus 33:18)

These are the words of Moses, who was only permitted to see the back parts of the LORD (Exodus 33:23). Here John is declaring that in the New Covenant WE become the new Moses - we are blessed with experiencing the glory of the Son. For Moses the experience of the glory faded, but for those who receive Jesus, the experience is both unfading and increasing - from one degree of glory to another!

THE NEW FULNESS

When the LORD revealed Himself to Moses, He declared Himself to be:

‘... abundant in goodness and truth’ (Exodus 34:6)

John again echoes these words:

‘... full of grace and truth’

(‘Goodness’ is the Authorized Version translation of the Hebrew word HESED, which could also be translated ‘grace’).

The LORD’s proclamation of grace and truth shows that Moses was exposed to the most basic aspects of the glory of God, that which many hymn writers refer to as ‘ineffable’ - beyond description. This is a pointer to the profound friendship between Moses and the LORD.

Now, John reveals that we too share in this relationship with God. In this way, the apostle shows that this experience of intimate revelation, of deep fellowship between the LORD and Moses, is ours in the Son.

(NOTE: John also makes a reference to Isaiah’s vision of the LORD’s glory in 12:41 - compare this with Isaiah 6. If we read this in context, 12:37-41, John seems to be suggesting that it was Jesus that Isaiah saw!)

THE NEW TORAH

Finally, John shows us that though Moses held a position of great privilege amongst Old Testament men, his experience was only partial:

‘For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17).

* Moses received the Torah (Law) but Jesus is the new Torah, of grace and truth. Moses was permitted an incomplete and temporary view of the glory of God, and was only allowed to deliver the law of precepts and statutes to the people. Jesus has come to lead His people beyond that which is incomplete, external and temporary. He sets the believer in the fulness (1:16). By His authority they become sons of God (1:12). And all these things are totally undeserved (1:16).

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