

The Vicarious Atonement and Obedience of Christ

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From the book, *A Handbook of Revealed Theology*, 1883

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We come now to consider the moral import of the life and death of our Lord. In what light should we regard His career on earth, the shedding of His blood, and the laying down of His life? Was His work an atonement for our sins? Did He die as the substitute of the guilty? Are sinners pardoned and justified for the sake of His sacrifice and righteousness? Was His propitiation an element in the moral government of God necessary to the honourable exercise of mercy to the rebellious?

Or was this work simply a martyr's testimony to the truth of certain doctrines which in His life He had taught? Is it true, as some professedly orthodox divines have recently taught, that "there is not a word in the Bible about the punishment due to our sins being inflicted by a just God upon His own Son;" and that "Christ only shared our sin in the sense of it, in sorrow for it, in a vicarious confession of it, and in the miserable consequences of it"?

This is clearly a controversy about a fundamental. If the tame and lifeless theories of the modern school of theologians be true, then there is no such doctrine as atonement or propitiation, and redemption by the merits of the Son of God must be abandoned as a myth.

Even the Unitarian Channing makes the following admission:

"We have no desire to conceal the fact that a difference of opinion exists among us (Unitarians) in respect to an interesting part of Christ's mediation; I mean in regard to the precise influence of His death on our forgiveness. Many suppose that this event contributes to our pardon, as it was a principal means of confirming His religion, and of giving it a power over the mind; in other words, that it procures forgiveness by leading to that repentance and virtue which is the great and only condition on which forgiveness is bestowed. Many of us (here Channing evidently includes himself) are dissatisfied with this explanation, and think that the Scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death, with an emphasis so peculiar that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing punishment, though the Scriptures may not reveal the way in which it contributes to this end. Whilst, however, we differ in explaining the connection between Christ's death and human forgiveness, a connection which we all gratefully acknowledge, we agree in rejecting many sentiments which prevail in regard to His mediation."
(*Complete Works*, vol. ii. pp. 515, 516, Griffin)

Now it is notorious matter of fact, as their published writings prove, that in our day many professedly orthodox men, both in the Establishment and out of it, are scarcely prepared to maintain even as much as the Unitarian Channing admits—namely, that the death of Christ has a special influence in the removal of punishment. We turn, however, from these unsatisfactory theories to a simple induction of the scriptural testimony on the subject. In this chapter we propose, first, to prove that the life and death of our Lord was a true and proper sacrifice and propitiation for sin, for the sake of which the sins of all believers are forgiven; secondly, to examine the extent of this glorious redemption; and, finally, to reply to objections.

I. First, then, we have to prove that THE LIFE AND DEATH OF OUR LORD WAS IN VERY DEED A SACRIFICE FOR SIN, by which the moral government of God was propitiated, and the forgiveness of the sins of believers was rendered consistent with the claims of eternal justice.

We say the life and death of our Lord was one complete sacrifice. His whole career was one grand act of atonement. "He gave HIMSELF for us." (Ephes. 5:2) "He was obedient unto death." (Phil. 2:8) The obedience commencing with His human life, and only culminating in His death. And the propitiation consists of the whole of His vicarious "obedience unto death," the shedding of His blood being absolutely necessary to complete the sacrifice, inasmuch as "without shedding of blood there is no remission." (Heb. 9:22)

We advance, then, to the proof of our position:

1. We refer to the vicarious and representative character which Jesus Christ sustained. It is obvious that throughout His career our Lord, as the God-man, acted as our federal Head. The Scriptures clearly testify that Jesus came among us to sustain an official relation to those whose cause He had undertaken. Hence He is called "The Last Adam" (I Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:14); "the Surety of the better covenant" (Heb. 7:22); "the Mediator between God and man" (I Tim. 2:5); "the Head of the Church," (Ephes. 4:15); "the High Priest of our profession" (Heb. 3:1); "the Husband of His spouse the Church" (Ephes. 5:25-32); "the Advocate with the Father" (I John 2:1); "the Propitiation for our sins" (I John 2:2); "the Intercessor for transgressors" (Isa. 53:12); "the Substitute of the unjust" (I Pet. 3:18); "the End of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4); that is, the preparatory setting forth of Christ as the sinner's righteousness was the object at which the law aimed.

As our substitute, then, the Redeemer lived, suffered, and died; and in virtue of this fact, the sins of those whose substitute He was were laid upon Him. If there be one truth taught more fully than another in the sacred volume, that truth is the substitution of Christ in the place of the guilty. But legal substitution involves the obligation of the substitute to meet the shortcomings of the person whom he represents.

For instance, if a man fails to pay his debts, his creditors come upon his surety or substitute, should he have one, for the amount. So in the case before us. Christ Jesus, as the voluntary bondsman of transgressors, acting in His official relation to them, meets their liabilities, pays the price of their ransom, and thus secures their deliverance. He becomes the propitiation for their sins, and by His one offering "perfects for ever all those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Now we know the outcry that is always raised against such illustrations as the one just given. We are told that it is highly improper to reason respecting God's moral government according to pecuniary and mercantile analogies. We answer, that God Himself has used these illustrations in His own word; for there we are told that Christ's life and death were the ransom price of our redemption (Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 2:6); that we are bought with a price (I Cor. 6:20); that "saints are bought from among men" (Rev. 14:4); and that "Jesus hath purchased the Church of God with His own blood" (Acts 20:28), etc. The illustration, then, taken from ordinary legal transactions, is divinely authorized.

We know that such representations of the great transaction of our redemption are only figurative; and that the figure in such a case must be explained with a due regard to the difference between purely pecuniary and moral transactions.

But the figure means something, and in its real meaning teaches a great truth. Obedience to the law is a debt which man owes to God, as truly as he does any mercantile obligation which he has contracted with a fellow creature. The endurance of punishment is a debt which the man who has broken God's law owes to that law, as justly as any culprit in our prisons

owes to the outraged laws of his country the imprisonment or other sentence which he is there suffering. Moral obligations, whether they relate to obedience, or to the undergoing of punishment for disobedience, are DEBTS most sternly true and real.

The only question is, then, did the Saviour consent to become our Substitute in the eye of the law which we had broken? And did the Eternal Father acquiesce in this arrangement? There can be only one answer to this inquiry if the Bible be true; for, as we have seen, throughout His career, our Lord sustained this official relation, and in what He did and suffered represented others. As their voluntary legal Substitute, He fulfilled the law which they had broken, and endured the curse which they had deserved.

2. The sacrificial character of our Lord's work and death appears from the names given to them. If language can teach anything, the Holy Scriptures set the work of Christ before us as a true and proper vicarious propitiation offered for our sins. They describe that work as being "a purchase" (Acts 20:28); "a price" (I Cor. 7:23); "a ransom" (Matt. 20:28); "a redemption" (Eph. 1:7); "an atonement" (Rom. 5:11); "a propitiation" (Rom. 3:25); "a sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 9:26); and such is the uniform style of Scripture in describing the nature of the Redeemer's work.

It is a profanation of the divine testimony to fritter away the moral significance of such terms, until we have nothing left but a mere shadow of their original meaning. If we may resolve "a propitiation for our sins" (I John 2:2), "a propitiation through faith in Christ's blood" (Rom. 3:25), into "a mere vicarious confession of our sins" for us by Christ; what may we not do with the sacred text? We protest against such dishonourable attempts to spirit away the whole force of a doctrine which is still professedly held.

For the fundamental idea of a sacrifice, or propitiation, or atonement for any crime, is that of an act of satisfaction rendered to the majesty of violated law, whereby the dishonour done to it by the transgression is repaired. Thus Christ's sacrifice for our sins was presented to His Eternal Father, against whom we have rebelled. It was a propitiation to the law which we had broken; to the justice which we had incensed; to the rectoral rights which we had repudiated. Jehovah Himself tells us how the vicarious work of Jesus operates in securing to us the remission of punishment—namely, by vindicating the judicial righteousness of God in the transaction. Channing affirms that the Scriptures say nothing on this head; but with all respect to the memory of that great man, we assert the contrary.

The whole theory of the atonement is comprehensively stated by the Apostle Paul in these memorable words: "Whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His (the Father's) righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25, 26). By the offering of the person of Jesus Christ upon the altar of eternal justice once for all, Jehovah proved his rectoral righteousness in the remission of the sins of believers who had lived before the offering up of the great atonement; and He still to this day vindicates the same attribute of rectoral righteousness in the justification of those who trust in Jesus as their Saviour. Thus the work of Christ magnifies the law, and makes it honourable in the forgiveness of the sinner. And thus "God is both faithful and just in the pardon of our transgression" (I John 1:9).

The propitiation offered to God does, indeed, reconcile us to the divine government and righteousness; but it does this by first reconciling the divine government and righteousness to our salvation. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. 5:19). And the ground of the non-imputation of trespasses is thus stated: "For He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21). The Redeemer took our sins and bare their judicial consequences, that we might take His righteousness, and receive a full and free justification by its merits.

The propitiation does not procure for us the love of God, or, as Dr. Watts unhappily puts it, "turn the wrath to grace;" for, in truth, it is itself the most wonderful expression of that love. "God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The propitiation of Christ is a testimony both to the infinite love of God, and to His inviolable righteousness as the moral governor of the universe. The death of Christ did not

make God disposed to love us; but it was the sacrifice which rendered God's love for us harmonious with the claims of His moral government: so that He might be "just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

3. We prove our position by those passages in which our sins are said to have been laid upon Christ. Jesus Christ had no sin of His own, either original or actual He was emphatically "without sin." He "knew no sin," and He "did no sin." He "was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." If, then, He suffered for sin, it must have been for the sin of others. This is a manifest truism. Accordingly, the Holy Scriptures tell us that "He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (I Pet. 3:18); that "He died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6); "God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin" (Rom. 8:3); and the sins of those for whom He died are said to have been laid upon Him.

It is not affirmed that the consequences merely of those sins were visited upon Him, but that the sins themselves were placed to His account. The men of the modern school of theology stumble at this doctrine. They teach us that "the essence of the atonement consisted in our Lord's expiatory confession of sin on our behalf and in our name; His death being not a penalty endured as a substitute, but the perfected expression of such confession." They tell us, too, that Christ only "shared our sin in the miserable consequences of it."

But what saith the Scriptures? The testimony which they bear is, that our sins, and not their consequences merely, were laid upon Jesus. Let the reader take the following passages as a sample:

"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (I Peter 2:24). "The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). "He bare the sin of many" (Isa. 53:12). "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). "God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin" (Rom. 8:3). And so strongly is this idea put in some passages, that Christ is said to have been made "sin itself." "He hath made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:24) "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written," etc. (Gal. 3:13).

We know that in such passages the meaning is that Christ was made the great sin-bearer and curse-bearer. But this is the very point which the men of the modern school deny. They assert that Christ bare "the miserable consequences of our sins," but not our sins; whereas the Scriptures tell us that He bare both; that, in fact, our sin was judicially laid upon Him as our substitute, that He might endure its penal consequences. Had not our sin been judicially laid upon Christ, He never could have suffered its consequences, inasmuch as He was Himself without sin.

What end is gained by the denial of the laying of our sin upon Jesus, if it be admitted that He endured all its miserable consequences? They tell us that it is revolting to their moral sense that the sin of one moral agent should be laid at the door of another! But we ask, is there not the same difficulty about the endurance by one moral agent of all the miserable consequences of the sins of other moral agents? The suffering is the same in both cases. The difficulty is in reconciling the anguish of the victim with his admitted personal innocence. And this difficulty is increased by the denial of the laying of our sin upon Him; for in that case we have a victim suffering all the miserable consequences of sin, being, at the same time, without sin Himself, and without the sin of others imputed to Him. He endured all the miserable consequences of sin, whereas no sin was laid upon Him! Who can believe this?

Admirably does Mr. Rogers put this argument in his third letter on the Atonement:

"And remember that if you insist on the injustice of God's inflicting suffering on Christ, for the sins of others, you cannot escape similar difficulty, and greater in degree, on your own system; for can it be less unjust to inflict such sufferings on Christ for no sins at all? If it be unjust to accept Him as sacrifice for the guilty, how much more un-just must it be to insist on the sacrifice for nothing, and when the victim thrice implored in agony that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him."

The true, proper, and voluntary substitution of Christ, explains the whole transaction. He took our place of His own free will; stood between us and the law which we had broken, and consented to bear the punishment due to our transgressions. Thus, bearing our sins, He submitted to the endurance of the curse justly attaching to them, and in the depth of his anguish exclaimed, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11)

4. We further refer to those portions of divine truth in which all the penal consequences of our sins are said to have been visited upon Jesus. As our sins were laid by imputation upon our great Substitute, it was a judicial result that He should bear their penalty. And that He did bear all the penal consequences of our imputed sin appears from the following testimonies:

"He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3). "He gave Himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4). "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace (that is, the chastisement or punishment by which our peace with God is made) was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isa. 53:8). "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief; when His soul shall make an offering for sin, He shall," etc. (Isa. 53:10). "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).

5. The same great truth is confirmed by those texts which teach us that the remission of the punishment justly due to our guilt is owing to Immanuel's endurance of it in our stead. How numerous, how emphatic are the testimonies given in Holy Scripture to the connection existing between the substitutionary work of Jesus and the remission of our guilt! Our punishment is remitted because Jesus has died in our stead. The mediatorial economy is obviously a remedy for the evils attendant upon SIN, and hence the obedience and death of the Saviour secured to all believers the enjoyment of that inestimable benefit—pardon. The proof of the truth of this doctrine is found scattered profusely over almost every portion of revealed truth.

Messiah was to come to:

- "Make reconciliation for (literally, cover) iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24).
- "With His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).
- "By the knowledge of Him shall my righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11).
- "Now once in the end of the world (that is, under the last dispensation of divine mercy to man), hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26).
- "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).
- "When he had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down" (Heb. 1:3).
- "He is the propitiation for our sins" (I John 2:2).
- "He loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:5).
- "Christ hath loved us, and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God, for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2).
- "We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7).
- "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all" (Heb. 10:10).
- "By His one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).
- "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).
- "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).
- "For this cause He is the Mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were (committed) under the first covenant, they who are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15).

This last passage is obviously parallel with Rom. 3:25. Its meaning is that the death of Christ was as truly the legal ground of the remission of transgression under the law, as it is under the gospel. Thus the very method of the forgiveness of sin, and the justification of the sinner, assumes the substitutionary character of Christ's obedience and death. HE died in our stead, and because He died, those who believe in Him live forever. As the Substitute judicially meets the liabilities of those whom He represents, so all who are interested in His substitutionary work receive the benefits resulting from what He did and suffered. And thus we can understand the full import of those sublime sayings, "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us" (Eph. 4:32); and, "Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (I John 2:12).

The work of Christ is the "fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). "The Son of Man was lifted up (on the cross), that whosoever believeth upon Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15). "Whoso eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood hath eternal life" (John 6:54). Thus all our hopes of redemption and glory cluster round the sacrifice of our Lord, and every blessing is bestowed upon us through the merits of His vicarious death. The doctrine of atonement is like a golden thread which runs through the entire length of revealed truth, so that we cannot separate this verity from the rest without tearing the whole fabric.

6. The wonderful distress of soul under which Jesus Christ laboured at the close of His career, can only be explained on the ground of His substitution in the place of sinners. It was predicted that our Lord would save His people by the endurance of fearful soul-travail on their account. "When His soul shall make an offering for sin, He shall see His seed," etc. (Isa. 53:10). "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." (verse 11)

And in harmony with these predictions, when He drew near the close of His earthly career, we find Him exclaiming, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? (Shall I say) Father, save me from this hour? Nevertheless, for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:27, 28). The tempest of divine wrath against sin was already lowering, and the very crisis of the Redeemer's agony was at hand. In the garden of Gethsemane the anguish of Messiah's soul was still greater. This was His plaintive cry, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). His heart was overcharged. His agony was almost unbearable. Thrice He retired to repeat the prayer, that "if it were possible the cup might pass from Him;" and thrice He returned to His disciples with His terrific burden unremoved. At length His anguish became so intolerable, that His human frame seemed breaking up. Nature was giving way. A fearful, bloody sweat began to exude from His pores, and had not His sinking spirit been miraculously sustained, He must have died upon the earth of Gethsemane (Luke 24:44).

And why was this agony endured? No created hand had then been laid upon our Lord. The executioner had not yet nailed Him to the tree. The hand that was bruising Him was an invisible one. The law and justice of God were now "smiting the shepherd," and the terrors of the Lord were entering into the heart of our Substitute. The cup which He was draining to its dregs was the cup of the divine indignation against sin. This explains the whole transaction, and reconciles it with the moral dignity and greatness of Messiah.

There was an element of woe in His last agony which no believer has in his. Christ died in the dark that we might die in the light; He expired under the curse that we might expire in the enjoyment of the blessing; He sank under the weight of our imputed sins, that in the hour of dissolution we might rise to God clothed in His righteousness! Believers are enabled to die cheerfully by the very darkness in which the soul of their Lord was enwrapped in the hour of His departure. His woe is the secret of their bliss.

On the cross, too, we hear Him uttering that mysterious groan, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46) Separation from God is one element of the curse of sin, and it was right that our glorious Substitute should taste this fearful infliction. The light of His Father's countenance was withdrawn, and the human soul of Immanuel was covered with the shades of the second death.

Besides all this, the powers of hell were suffered to do their very worst in assailing the soul of our Surety. The Redeemer was conscious of this when He exclaimed to those who apprehended Him, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 23:53). Thus, amid the assaults of hell and the frown of heaven, the glorious Victim offered up Himself upon the cross! Thus was He made "sin" and "a curse" for us.

Surely the idea of "a mere vicarious confession of sin on our behalf by the Saviour" is too tame an exposition of woe so unutterable as this! Such a line is too short to sound the depths of the Redeemer's anguish.

7. The types of the Old Testament dispensation adumbrate the same great truth. The sacrificial teachings of the Mosaic ritual are summarized in the memorable words, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). To particularize all the types of the law would require a separate volume; but in every instance the sins of the offerer were supposed to be laid upon the victim slain in his stead. The ceremonies observed on the great day of annual atonement were full of gospel teaching. The two goats, both emblematical of Christ,—the slain

one of Christ dying on the cross, and the live one, the scapegoat, of Christ as raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven—and the confession of the sins of the whole congregation over the head of the latter, and the consequent atonement made, were obviously suggestive of the transfer of our sin to the Lamb of God (Lev. 16). The inspired Epistle to the Hebrews, that grand commentary upon the law of Moses, is our warrant for regarding the sacrifices of the law as typical of the better sacrifice to be offered in the fulness of times. And from one end of it to the other the Levitical economy teaches us that our sins were laid upon Christ.

Jesus, by appealing to the Law of Moses as testifying to His death and atonement, which He did (see Luke 24:26, 27, and 44-48), has forever decided the question of the spirit and design of the Levitical dispensation. If we reject the Law of Moses as a prefiguration of Immanuel's death and atonement, we must not only erase the Epistle to the Hebrews from our Bibles, but we must cease to call ourselves believers even in the INSPIRATION of the Saviour.

It is only on this principle of interpretation that the wisdom and propriety of the Levitical economy can be demonstrated. Unitarians deny the only truth which can explain and justify the rites and ceremonies of the Levitical economy, and then complain of the darkness which enshrouds that dispensation. And we are frank to confess, that if we did not believe in the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, the Levitical law would make us infidels, not only with regard to the Old Testament, but with regard to the New; because we find both Christ and His Apostles repeatedly appealing to the former as a preparatory witness to the great Atonement. If the Old Dispensation had no such significance, Christ and His Apostles were grossly deceived; they falsely attributed a sublime meaning to a system of empty ceremonies; the law of Moses was a farce; and Christ and His Apostles have for ever ruined their credit by giving to it their sanction.



The Necessity of Christ's Death

A. Fisher

From *The Baptist Pulpit*, 1850. Joseph Belcher, Editor.

It was necessary that Christ should die, because the maladies of men could not be cured by less effective means. The object of God in the plan of Redemption was doubtless the salvation of sinners. In devising the means by which the object could be attained, he would no doubt adopt such as would meet the case. The difficulties, as well as the nature of the means, would be considered.

When disorders are deeply-seated and violent in their nature, they require powerful remedies, but when they are slight and easily cured, less solicitude is felt. If man had been only partially disordered, some slight remedies might have answered the purpose; but such is his disorder, that no such remedies would reach the seat of the evil. The disorder of sin is seated in the heart. By the apostasy of our first parents, all their posterity was tainted with sin, for they communicated to them a love for the evil.

In consequence of this, all the generations of men before Christ were disposed to pursue sin, and did pursue it. The world was full of violence. Guilt, as is always the case, was the concomitant, so that every individual became hardened with the guilt of his own sins. The law of sin, which was natural to man, discovered itself in innumerable ways; it produced all the crimes which were committed against God and man. The world in general and all the individuals composing it were deeply involved. The evil inflicted by the fiery serpents on the Israelites was but a faint emblem of the evil of sin.

In order to the restoration of man to holiness and the favor of God, powerful means were necessary; those of a different description could never accomplish the end. This is evident from experience. Innumerable laws have been framed to stop the current of human depravity, but it bursts over all barriers, and carries everything before it.

Human inducements have been held up to men to keep them from committing crimes, but they also prove ineffectual. Innumerable ways have been devised to remove human guilt, but alas, how unavailing have they been! All the superstitious rites which men have observed, in different ages and countries, are designed to propitiate the favor of the Deity. But these are all without effect.

The all-important question still returns, "How can man be just with God?" Now the exhibition of Christ is the only remedy which has been found of sufficient efficacy to remove the love and guilt of sin. In order, therefore, to make men holy, and deliver them from death, Christ must be crucified. As this was an important object with God, his death became necessary. The death of Christ removes the love of sin, by procuring the Holy Spirit, by whose influences men are made new creatures.

Without such influence, men would forever remain at variance with God and holiness, and of course under the dominion of sin. But by these influences an immense multitude of the human family have been effectually cured of the evil of sin, made completely holy, and so prepared in this respect for the enjoyment and business of heaven. By the agency of the Holy Spirit, men are made to believe in Christ, and so to become heirs of eternal life.

Nor is the death of Christ less effectual in removing the guilt of sin than its dominion. Indeed, in this respect it has a more direct influence. In the Scriptures, all other means are represented as being unable to wash away sin; but this is represented as effectual. The blood of Christ cleanseth from it, is the repeated doctrine of revelation. This effect is produced by believing on Christ; the moment faith is exercised in his atonement, sin is taken away. There may not be at the time an exact view or feeling of it, but the effect is nevertheless produced. No sinner is ever savingly benefited by the sacrifice of Christ without faith in him, but everyone who does believe will be saved. This is the only way in which the sinner can be delivered from death, and received to heaven.

This last reason why it was necessary that Christ should be crucified will be rendered more clear by adverting again to the brazen serpent. When an Israelite had received a wound from one of the fiery serpents, he could not expect healing without a view of the brazen serpent, and his looking at that implied an acquiescence in the appointed method of cure, and faith in it; so the sinner's looking to Christ implies the same. When the wounded Israelite looked at the serpent on the pole, he immediately lived, that is, he felt his disorder abate, and assurance of a cure. So when a sinner looks to Christ, however deep his stains of sin may be, he will find relief. If the serpent had not been erected for the people to look at, all bitten must have died; so had not Christ been slain for the sins of men, all the human race must have perished.

We see, therefore, the propriety of the text: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."



The Master's Test

J. Jackson Goadby
From the book, *Timely Words*, 1869

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith to Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto Him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." John 21:15-17.

There is very much about this incident to fasten our attention. The scene itself, where Peter was questioned by his Master, was fitly chosen. On every side lay familiar objects, which Peter had known and loved in his boyhood, and in his riper years: the pebbly shores of the Lake of Galilee; the small promontories, covered with flowering shrubs; the deep blue water, on which he had so often seen the midnight stars reflected; the snowy ravines of Hermon, which appeared like a white line upon the northern sky; the nearer hills of Gadara, that looked, from this distance, like a long level plain.

On this lake Peter, since his call by the Master, had often seen surprising evidences of His power: in stilling the tempest, in walking to the frightened disciples upon the yielding waves as if they had been solid earth, in rescuing Peter from impending death. Hereabouts many other wonderful works had been done, many words uttered,—of wisdom, of warning, of rebuke, and of love; all now linked, by the law of association, to some well-known objects;—so that turn where Peter might he saw something to recall the power and wisdom of his Lord.

Nor was the time at which this questioning took place without its significance. The Master had been snatched from the midst of His disciples, the Lord from His servants; and during that interval what memorable events had transpired. Peter could not forget some of these: his own loud boastings of unshaken fidelity; his misplaced violence in the garden; his flight from his Master's arrest by the armed band; his creeping into the hall of the palace after John; his threefold denials of his Lord; his Lord's sorrowful look, that smote the rocky heart, and brought forth floods of tears; his wonder during the days which succeeded the death on the cross; and that interview which his Lord had granted him, and which had given rise to the joyful exclamation of the resurrection night, "The Lord hath risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon." After all this he finds that the Master is still unchanged; has the same tenderness, the same quick discernment of the heart, the same unshaken affection.

There is also for us another value, over and above all this. Christ, the King, is now laying the foundations of His kingdom. In these repeated questions to Peter—whether Jesus is asking for more love than Peter gave to his calling, or to his fellow-believers, or than they had at present given to Him—we shall learn more about the Christianity of Christ than from ten thousand encyclical letters issued by men who claim to be supreme heads of the Church, and with mock humility call themselves "the servants of servants;" or from any number of ecclesiastics who teach for doctrines the commandments of men. We have a test given in those questions as to what is true discipleship, a test which was applied by Christ Himself, and which we also may apply individually.

What is this test? Is it love for the thoughts of Christ? There is great moral beauty in them, which skeptical men have not been slow to perceive, and from which they frequently pilfer without acknowledgment. No teacher ever clothed his thoughts in such fascinating Parables: so true to nature and fact; so vivid, as to read rather like narratives than pictures to illustrate truth. Although there are but thirty Parables in all, we may affirm, without fear of contradiction, that there is nothing like them in the whole literature of the world. They are not mere rabbinical tales redressed and reset. They are, in the highest sense, original.

As a consequence, they are fresh, with dewy freshness, after the lapse of nearly twenty centuries, speaking out through their wondrous words to men of every clime and age. They supply, in the brief compass of a few pages, more moral and spiritual teaching than all the libraries of numberless sages. If only one comes to them with a receptive mind, new beauties of thought, new depths of meaning, constantly appear. They are themselves the revelation of life, and the seeds of life. There is in them a power to touch the conscience, and awaken the soul. Hidden to some, from their want of docility, they are yet revealed to others who are "as little children."

And that which is true of the Parables of Christ, is more emphatically true of all that was spoken by the Son of God. His words are full of disclosures of Divine thought and love, of human need, of the present and the future. They are vaster than the ocean, deeper than the abyss. "Never man spake like this man," because never man had so much to speak, or of such a character, or such an inner life. "In the words of Christ all the scattered and intersecting rays of truth extant in humanity are collected and blended into the full and perfect light of day." He claims to be "THE truth," and He is what He claims.

But a love for the words of Christ is not Christianity. We may love them artistically, as the best of their kind; just as men love the best books or the best pictures. They may be preferred, not for what they say, but for the way in which they say it; for

their form, rather than for their spirit. Or men may assume the airs of "higher criticism," as modern philosophers call their skeptical presumptuousness, and say,—"Unquestionably, Jesus stands first as the teacher of morals; and to Him, therefore, one must bow on questions of this kind." Or, if this be not the offensive, half-patronizing air assumed, it may be this: "I know all the words of Christ, if not by heart, at least so familiarly that I should detect one upon the instant if it were ever quoted in my hearing. What more is needed?"

But is THIS Christianity—accepting Christ's words as revealing the truest kind of morality, or merely knowing those words, having some sort of apprehension of their meaning? Would the fact that a man had kept all these from his youth up; or that he knew the Gospels by heart, be the proof of discipleship that Jesus himself would demand? Is this how He tests His followers? That the disciple will treasure up the words of His Master is certain; but the apprehension of them, or their retention by the memory, are not infallible proofs of discipleship. Readers of the New Testament are not necessarily Christian men, although they may read it without any skeptical bias, and with critical appreciation. Something much more than this,—closer, more searching, and more personal,—is declared by Christ Himself to be the only sufficient test of discipleship.

Nor, again, is any mere love for the wonderful "works" of Christ enough, any gazing, with awe-stricken heart, at their majesty and power. There is, confessedly, very much about those miracles to arrest attention; their unlikeness, for the most part, to the miracles of an earlier time; their larger and more glorious character when they bear any resemblance to those which preceded them; their ease and naturalness to Christ, seeming so to befit His whole spirit and demeanour; their revelation of inherent Divine energy and power.

Moreover, they differ so entirely from the pretended miracles which Apocryphal writers of the early Church invented—are never mere wanton freaks of power, never ostentatious—that men must be struck with the difference with the impossibility of invention in the one case and of the proof of invention in the other. Never wrought for His own personal convenience, they stand as conspicuously out for their truest and purest benevolence.

At once, as we think of them, pictures arise before our imagination of those weary and famishing multitudes on the grassy plain who were plentifully fed by such apparently improbable and inadequate means; of the fever-stricken, who were calmed and cooled, and won back to soundness of health; of the blind, who, through His gracious power, were permitted to gaze upon this dædal earth, and these fair over-hanging heavens; of the lame, who leaped like the wild gazelle; and of the deaf, to whom wisdom at one entrance had been quite shut out, now for the first time hearing the song of early birds, and the sweeter music of human affection.

One thinks of those afflicted creatures, demonized once, but now delivered from their infernal thralldom, quiet, thankful, happy—"sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right minds." Or one recalls that sad and sorrowful procession, just merging from the narrow gate of Nain, headed by the bier of the widow's only son; a procession which was presently stopped in its mournful march, the bewailing hushed, the tears of the mother dried up, and he who was dead now walking back into the city, to the wonderment of himself, and of his mother, and of his friends.

Or one thinks of that other scene, when the blooming daughter of Jairus was delivered from the icy grasp of death; or of that still more memorable incident on the other side of Olivet, toward the sunrising, where the brother and the friend beloved had died, and where, standing by the tomb, Jesus had cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" All these events, so astonishing in themselves, produced both fear and gladness in those who saw them, have filled the imaginations of painters, and poets, and readers in every age of Christendom. But a love for all these may spring from motives far removed from that which alone deserves the name of true discipleship.

I may stand in awe before the grandeur of the miracles of Christ; I may marvel at their uniqueness, their ease, their number, their variety, their humanity; but except I see in them more than this, I misread the "wonders," and misunderstand the "signs." I have yet to come to acknowledge of the truth. All this admiration and astonishment are compatible with an absence of that true root of inner life without which my other possessions are barren than ice. Many who were spectators of the miracles still remained in their condition of spiritual darkness; and many to whom each of these "works" of Christ is familiar, even to the minutest detail, would fail to respond to that test which Christ applied to Peter.

Nor, is the activity which men show in what passes under the name of Christian work, sufficient evidence that we have the root of the matter in us. If you only think of it, there is much to awaken love for that which now passes current among large classes of men as Christian work. By attention and diligence in it, applause is won, desirable associations are formed, substantial gains are secured. Wherever there is a Church in alliance with the State, there are temptations to become ministers at her altars for those who have nothing but the form of godliness; and although the Establishment of England was never so conspicuous for the piety of its clergy as at the present moment, he would be a bold man who ventured to say that that piety was the offspring of the Alliance of the Church with the State. So again, in regard to what is called Christian work among the sects outside the pale of the

Establishment, there is still much to attract certain minds. They may gain through it a position of prominence which would otherwise be hard to secure. There is the temptation to do what is done, from love of applause, or love of pre-eminence, or love of power. The applause, or position, or power, may not seem of much value in the eyes of more ambitious men; but they are not destitute of influence upon scores and hundreds of their fellows. Now the mere fact that a man is in any sacred office, or is giving himself to any so-called Christian work, is no un-questionable proof of piety. The presumption is, that no man would seek such offices or duties who had not some love for the work they severally represent; but the holding of the offices themselves is no necessary guarantee of the existence of that true root of Christian life which the Apostle Peter really possessed.

Still less would it do to take the bare fact of confirmation by the hands of an Episcopal bishop, or the formation of Church relations by any of the various methods adopted in different religious communities,—as enough. One may take part in a solemn ceremony, or repeat a creed, or feel one's heart thrilled and subdued by the witchery of sacred song, or take a certain pleasure in listening to the advocacy of truth, and yet lack "the one needful thing." The painful evidences furnished by the worldly lives of the "confirmed," or "the members" of different religious societies, are sufficient attestation of this fact to all whose eyes are not blinded by the prejudices of sect or party. If the ordeal which Peter was able to bear were one to which every individual member of every Church in Christendom should now be submitted, how many would give Peter's reply? How many would have within them the spirit that prompted it?

Nor, further, is a love for the heaven which the New Testament reveals, any proof of true discipleship. There is very much to draw out men's hearts toward that heaven, even in the brief and scanty pictures of it which that Divine Record reveals. Its perpetual peace strikes the fancy of those who live in whirlpools of excitement and confusion; its unceasing joy is sure to fasten the desires of the sad and mournful; its perfect health will be for the suffering and sick a blissful and welcome picture; its absence of want, a delight to those who now feel the pinch of poverty.

To have no more sorrow, nor sighing, neither any more pain; to be with one's friends and companions evermore; to be in the midst of all the great, and wise, and noble—no more to be separated, to die no more—all this produces a certain desire, indefinable, yet pleasant, winsome, entrancing. More than this: we may so talk of the joys of heaven, or so hear others speak about them, until we grow impatient to share their fulness; and though all this may be true, men may still be unable to bear the test of Christ.

It is an unwise and an unscriptural plan to make a love for heaven, apart from all else, the test of true faith, as some are wont to do. One may picture a heaven, and love the creation of our brain, without dealing fairly with the revelation of that future which Christ and His apostles have given. Nay, one may even wish above all things to have that heaven, and yet leave out of our wish the One perfect Being, who is its centre and joy. A mere vague love for a beautiful, calm, joyous, unchanging state is not the love which Christ Himself makes the ruling test of discipleship.

But, asks someone, where so much is excluded, what is left? If a love for the words of Christ be no real test, nor a love for His "wonders" and "signs," nor a love for so-called Christian work, nor open alliance with Church organizations, nor yet a love of heaven—where shall we find the true test? Just where our Master and Lord has placed it—LOVE FOR HIMSELF. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou ME?" This is the very pith and core of Christianity, the truest, the simplest, the severest test of discipleship. This is the Christianity of Christ, so different from the Christianity of creeds, and of many avowedly Christian Churches.

There is in this, however, all that the most evagelic creeds clamour for, till that Christ asks, whatever Churches may desire. How, for example, could Christ claim this love and be a true "Teacher sent from God" unless He were "one with the Father?" Fancy any human being putting himself before all others, claiming precedence in affection to husband, wife, child, father, mother,—except there were in Him, not merely a Divine afflatus, a delegated preeminence, but the life of life, the love of love,— Eternal life, Incarnate Deity? It is because He is Immanuel that He can ask for this precedence, and must. Think, moreover, of the power which this love, reciprocated far beyond what we can give, must certainly incite.

We are fond of repeating that love is the mightiest impulse to which the human heart is obedient. You may work through fear, or interest, or duty; but there is no impulse so comprehensive in its grasp, so mighty in its effect, as the impulse of love. There is, for example, the love of the mother for her offspring. See, how, in the sickness of her child, that love will clothe the weak and fragile form with surprising power. There is energy within her soul that will not yield to sleep, and that prompts her, though worn with patience, to watch as if unwearied still. No other impulse would produce the same results. You could not secure, either from duty, or from interest, an equal tenderness, though you might obtain some shadowy likeness to her unweariness.

No hand can smooth the pillow so carefully, and no hired service can render the same patient attention. She is tending the couch of her sickly, of her only child, and of one who is therefore dearer to her than life. Love is trustful. When adverse things are said or done, love believes that an explanation is possible; and will patiently wait, though the explanation be long delayed. Love is inventive; not only to help, but also to devise the means of helping. Love is quick-witted, and can read a sign or a symbol intuitively. When the heart is surcharged with love, a whispered wish speaks louder than a thundered commandment. Love is daring and self-forgetful; will boldly venture, like Mary ventured when she hurried to the sepulchre, while it was yet dark, and while rude soldiers were about; and though her Lord was absent, would still sit over against the sepulchre and weep.

Love is pre-eminently strong. The mother's affection for her fallen child lingers the longest, dies hard, and dies slowly. When others have given up all hope of amendment, she will hope against hope. Many waters cannot quench her love, neither can many floods drown it. Love is the pre-eminent Christian grace, whose panegyric an Apostle has sung. Love is the test which the Master applies to every disciple. Possessed of this love, what works will not men attempt, what service will they not render?

And even when our love may flicker and seem ready to perish, the recurrence to that great love wherewith He hath loved us again fills the lamp and trims the flame. As the daughter's love is deepened and enlarged by acts of disinterested kindness shown by her mother, so the disciple's love for the Master grows truer and stronger as he brings before himself, by the aid of God's Spirit, the persistent, unwearied, unmerited, everlasting love of his Saviour and Lord. He is "constrained" by it, as nothing else would constrain him. He is patient because of it, knowing that He will do all things well. He can, therefore, wait, with the firm conviction that love shall yet appear in all his Master has placed upon him. What he knows not now, he shall know hereafter. He is quick to discover his Master's love where others would not discern it; reads a symbol with appreciative heart; becomes bold in His service; and has his own love preserved and nurtured by the everlasting love which flows out to him from his Lord. His words are "more precious than rubies," because they are the words of his Master. His "works" are accepted as the patterns of higher, of spiritual, of enduring good. His service is a delight, "for His sake, and the Gospel's." His own departure is joyfully anticipated, because his exodus from this world will bring him into the immediate presence of Christ his Lord.

The question of the Master does not touch upon the genesis of Peter's affection, but only upon its existence. And it is in this light that we are now looking upon it. The words of Christ are necessary to reveal to us the mind of Christ. His "works" testify of Him as nothing else can testify. His Cross reveals the love which passeth knowledge. But the test to which the Master subjected Peter was intended to reveal the use that Peter had made of all his opportunities. None had been so favoured, save John and James; none so repeatedly an eye witness of His majesty and grace. Jesus is, therefore, putting to the proof the result of all.

To hear the words of Christ; to behold His power; to gaze from afar upon His cross; to rush hurriedly into His empty tomb—is one thing. It is quite another to have that within one's breast for which, in Christ's estimation, nought else can be substituted—personal affection for Him. You may have love for the morality which Jesus teaches, love for His beneficent

works, love for those who pass among men for His people, and love, also, for His heaven: but unless you have love for Christ Himself, all your vauntings of preference are as sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.

This is the surest test of our reception of His Gospel—that we can say what Peter said, and with unfeigned lips. He submitted to the test, and did not fail. The trial of his faith brought him out of it stronger in character, holier in life. The Master's test is also the one adequate test for every Christian. The words, the works, even the Cross, are the means—love for our Lord is the end. We shall, therefore, best know whether that end is reached by applying the touchstone furnished by the Saviour Himself: "Simon, son of Jonas, LOVEST THOU ME?"

The incident teaches us more than this. It reveals the power which Christ possesses of applying the test to each individual heart. The reply of Peter pointedly singles out this Divine prerogative. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Under the gaze of his Master's eye, he felt that there was nothing hidden, and that there could be nothing hidden, even in the innermost recesses of his heart. His Lord knew all things, and, therefore, must know what was passing within the mind of His Apostle.

"All things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do,"—the secrets of all hearts are disclosed. He can put to the proof those who are called by His name. He alone can tell whether the feeling within us toward Himself is one of mere admiration, or of love; of cold and critical apprehension, or of consuming desire; of reluctant and half-hearted reverence, or of deepest devotion; whether He is "that just person," as Pilate's wife thought Him; or "the holy one of God," as even daemons declared; or whether, as Mary and the beloved disciple, there is but One who can fill all the heart and thought: (the first supposing from her question on the morning of the resurrection, that he whom she had taken for the gardener, and all other dwellers in Jerusalem, was thinking of her Lord)—"Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou halt laid Him, and I will take Him away;" and John, adopting the same indirect and yet pointed method of speaking of his Master, until it became a distinguishing feature of his style; or, whether, with the Centurion, Jesus is regarded as "verily a righteous man;" or, with Thomas, smitten by His kindness and patience, he can at length clasp His feet, and exclaim, in ecstatic and adoring love—"My Lord, and my God!"

He knoweth all things. He therefore sees whether our love for Him is pure, or selfish; a love for Himself, or a love for what we may hope to receive from Him; a love of goodness, or a love of gifts. It is possible to look upon Christianity solely as a good investment for the future, and upon the Sinless Saviour as a champion who has earned our gratitude for His heroic venture upon our behalf. But such a purely commercial view of the truth gives no true sympathy with Christ Himself, or with His purpose and spirit.

No unbiased reader of the New Testament can fail to discover the uniqueness of the life of Jesus: that while other men are born to live, He was born to die; that the shadow of the Cross always rested upon His sacred heart; and that every onward step was also a step upward to the altar of sacrifice, until He laid down His life for the world. No passionate words can overstate the magnitude of our debt to Him. But that which made the sacrifice was not the mere fact of the crucifixion it was the spirit of self-surrender which shone through it all. "He pleased not Himself;" His meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work. Herein is love; and herein is the stimulus for every sincere disciple. We love Him, because He first loved us. But this is very far removed from the huckstering spirit which some minds would make the standard of Christian life.

Christ knows all things. He knows, therefore, whether our love for Him be a momentary impulse, or a supreme and abiding affection. The most worldly men are not altogether destitute of occasional glimpses of a better life, and of occasional glimpses, also, of Him who is its true Revealer and Source. Some startling Providence, or humanizing sorrow, or terrible calamity, seems, upon the instant, to sweep away the clouds from their horizon, and show them the Light of Life. This is not fear exactly, and yet there is a good deal of fear in it. But the love that Christ asks for is the perfect love that casteth out fear,—a love at once complete, supreme, and abiding. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." "Continue ye in my love." Well, therefore, for us, if when the Master should apply His test, whether now or hereafter, we be severally able to take Peter's words for our confession,—"Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

When Peter confessed his love for Christ, his Master set him to work. By this fact we are plainly taught, that the true license for proclaiming the truth, as well as the true motive, is this very affection. If, therefore, we have this affection within us, we shall not need prompting to work for our Lord, or urging to win souls for truth, for holiness, and everlasting life. Nor shall we wait to speak of our Master until we can speak in the purest and most fitting words. We shall get to work at once, and seek to make up for the deficiencies of speech by the earnestness of our spirit. We shall have spur enough within us in this very love to aim at the highest excellence, and never to be satisfied with any offering we may lay upon His altar.

In the light of a single incident like this, we can afford to smile a smile of pity when men take airs to themselves, and thus write "The Church of England is the only Christian body having mission from Christ in this land. Other bodies of Christians in England (?) may have or may lack a valid priesthood; but all agree in either lacking mission altogether, or in having an intruding mission, which is worthless." Here, surely, the old spirit of priestcraft reappears in the new words of a Ritualist clergyman; but reappears in vain. The darkness which was necessary to make men think a mitred bishop or a stoled priest an angel of light, has long since passed away, and with that day all possibility of would-be religious monopoly, either of grace or work.

Men are not likely to close their New Testaments and take to studying with restless diligence the writings of the Fathers who lived after the Council of Nicaea; or, wanting the opportunity or the power to read their learned trifling, to be thankful for any Patristic crumbs which may fall from the table of Ritualist clergymen. England is too intelligently Protestant ever again to be hoodwinked either by Papist priests, or those who, both in ceremony and in creed, limp after them in base, awkward imitation.

The words of Jesus to His apostle reveal the varied character of the work with which Peter was now solemnly reinvested. The lambs needed caring for, no less than the sheep; and for both no place was then, no place is now, so secure as the fold of Christ. To the younger members of the flock each shepherd will show his fatherly care; and over those of riper understanding, his sleepless vigilance. With this inner monitor,—love for Christ,—men will be quick to discern the wants of every class, and will be as prompt to devise means for meeting them.

Nor is there anything but this love that can brace up the mind to face the difficulties incident to such an onerous office as that of Christian pastor, or sustain men in that office when those difficulties successively arise. The fickleness of some of their flock, the feebleness of others, the wants of all, make large demands upon the pastor's heart. But constrained by this love, he will suffer long, and be kind, envy not, vaunt not himself, be saved from vainglory, from unseemliness, from self-seeking, be bard to provoke, or to accept the thought of evil; ever rejoice in the truth; bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. He will be all this, and do all this, because the love of Christ feeds and nourishes his own. When ready to give up his work, he will recall his Master's patience; when failing in affection, rekindle his lamp at the flame itself of Heavenly Love.

We must, therefore, look to this affection as the source of continued fidelity, as well as the test of discipleship. Here, also, is the secret of that industry which disposes us unweariedly to "stir up the gift that may be in us;" to lay all things under tribute the better to serve our Master; to perfect that which is lacking either in character or qualifications; and yet, struggle how we may, never to think we have now at last attained, or are already perfect.

The empty praise of man is a poor substitute for the enriching favour of God; and unless the Christian pastor is nourished by "that favour which is life," he will soon flag and fail. Moreover, all Christian men, no less than those whom He has called to watch for souls as those who must give account, will strive to please Him who has called them to be "soldiers." Love to Christ will bring upon us the largest blessing, whatever be the sphere in which we work. Depending upon His affection, and ever more seeking it, we shall become the channels of His grace. The more quick and sensitive our own hearts are kept to the love of Christ, the larger will be our ability to awaken that love in the hearts of other men. We shall only become Peters in labour and success as we are Peters in heart.

But what is now our position before our Lord? If He should think fit to prove us, as He proved Peter by the Galilean lake, what would be the issue? What are our actual advantages? Are not we surrounded on every side by symbols and memorials of our Lord? Do not the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, all speak to us of Him? Have not our ties of kindred, our chief nourishment in life's feast, our most abundant supplies for our perishing wants, been engraven with His image?

But with these tokens of our Lord around us, and ever before our eyes, have we shown our readiness to profit by our Master's instructions, or even a swiftness to hear Him when He speaks to us? Does He speak repeatedly, and speak in vain,—by His Word, by His Providence, and by His Spirit? What is now the actual basis and character of our love to Him? Is it coldly critical, or rapturous? Selfish or pure? Fickle or abiding?

And what is your relation to Christ's merciful work of blessing and saving men;—yours, who though not public ambassadors for Christ, are yet His servants, and rejoice so to be esteemed? Do you stand aloof from it, or are you in sympathy with it? Are you helping, or hindering? Teaching truth by life and lip, or perverting men? Saving souls from death, or offending "little ones?" These are searching questions. Lay them to heart. Make them the touchstone by which you try your character and work—lest, when the test should be applied in the day of Christ, you be found wanting, and your work perish; you yourselves being saved, yet so as by fire.



Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

Edwin T. Winkler

From *The Baptist Preacher*, VOL. v., June, 1846

"And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom; declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." 1 Cor. 2:1, 2

To hold up the image of a dying Saviour to the world, is the great design of the Christian ministry. Men have learned to expect it, and to wonder, and to censure when objects of a less exalted character occupy the attention and the labors of an ambassador from God. But at the time when our text was written, the good tidings which it contains, must have excited as much of derision in the people to whom it was addressed as would be excited, were one at the present day to attempt to substitute in the place of the doctrines or ordinances of Christianity, the worship of Brahma, or the hideous rites of African idolatry.

Our text was originally addressed to the people of Corinth, the wealthiest and most beautiful city of Greece. It is not to our purpose to expatiate upon the extent of that commerce, which constituted Corinth a great treasure-house of nations, and made her merchants kings; or upon that culture which gave generals to head the armies of the republics of Greece, or on that refinement which filled her streets and palaces with the choicest and most beautiful productions of art; but we would speak of her religion. It was the religion of their fathers, and therefore venerable; it was the religion of art, and therefore beautiful. The imagination regarding it became entranced and lost in its exceeding loveliness.

The reason, nicely scrutinizing it, on a sudden shrinks back, appalled from the presence, and by the fear of those awful beings, the objects of a people's admiration. For century after century, it had been interweaving the threads of its mythology among the fibres of the national heart. It was the theme of those popular ballads that, more efficiently than laws, mould and determine public character. It had inspired those loftier poetic strains, which, requiring centuries for their production, never die, and never lose their influence. To a people, passionately fond of beauty, it had given streets adorned with colossal monuments, and religious emblems; and had thrown open temples, in which the architect, and the painter, and the sculptor had combined to exhibit the beauty of classic taste, and upon which the merchant had lavished the treasures of commercial opulence.

And when we remember that the Corinthians sung the poems which Homer sung; and admired the works which Phidias and Protogenes wrought; that the sculptured majesty of Jupiter, hurling the thunder-bolt, and the Apollo touching his marble harp, towered from their temple pavements, and the penciled loveliness of the sea-born Venus smiled on them from the temple walls; that every grove, and spring, and mountain had its genius; that the stars were ruled by awful spirits, and the caves of the ocean inhabited by lovely shapes; and when we remember too, that all these forms of beauty and of awe were

the offspring of their religion, we can readily imagine how it must have interwoven itself into the hopes and fears, the admiration and love, of this classic people. We can readily imagine with what a mixture of horror and disgust they saw the apostle attacking, beneath the very shadows of their gods, the religion of their fathers. A foreigner (a barbarian, as the Greeks termed him,) standing in the midst of the splendors of paganism, assaulted the religion of poetry, and beauty, and art!

The inimitable productions of the Grecian masters were all around him, but he passed them coldly by. The pompous processions, and the Isthmian Games, and the imposing ceremonies of paganism, would naturally have attracted the curiosity of a stranger, but they had no charms for him.

The sophist reasoned in the groves and porticos, upon the principles of nature and philosophy, but the apostle paused neither to dispute with the sophist, nor to gain instruction from the lips of the philosopher. St. Paul was a man of refinement, and versed in Hebrew, and to a considerable extent, in Grecian literature, but he looked upon the refinements of Corinth as vanities, and all that was imposing to the Grecian idolater was to him but as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal. Pervaded by one great idea, animated by one astonishing fact, he said nothing, heard nothing, cared for nothing, but what pertained to the great object of his mission and apostolic labors. For "I, brethren, when I came unto you," he says, "came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom; declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

It is utterly impossible for language to express the claims of Christianity, more forcibly and fully than they were expressed under these circumstances by these words. It is as if the apostle had said: the religion of Jesus comprehends facts, and involves duties, compared with which, human enterprise and human thought, the accumulated wealth of centuries, and the grand intellectual and moral progress and works of a nation, sink into insignificance.

I see the wings of your commerce, whitening the Mediterranean; I behold the labors of the husbandman, adorning your fields with nodding harvests; I see the immortal works of art, that beautify the streets and temples of your city; but they are to me as if they were not. Another subject, better and nobler, occupies my thoughts and inspires my actions; it is the religion that, turning away from the marble and the canvass, from the altar and the temple, takes up its abode in the heart, even of the humblest of men, and makes it the temple of the living God. It is the worship of a spiritual deity. It is the doctrine, that taking its place at the feet, looks upward ever to the countenance of Jesus,, that surrounds with glory the cross on which they have crucified my Lord. And this religion is the one thing needful; this is the all in all.

It is our design to present a hasty sketch of those prominent excellencies of Christianity, that warrant the use of such language, and the exercise of so intense and lofty an enthusiasm. We would remark, by way of division, that Christianity is surpassingly excellent, as a doctrinal and as a practical system—excellent in itself, and exhibiting its excellence in the results which it has accomplished. It is equally worthy of admiration, whether we regard it as it rose at first in lofty beauty from the hands of its divine original, or as in its progress, it spreads the rays of its celestial light down the long lapse of time.

I. Let us look at the excellency of Christianity in itself.

Christianity, as it reveals itself to us in its glory and its humiliation on the cross, exhibits more clearly and fully the character of God. The nature and attributes of the Deity had been already revealed in the Old Testament. But there was ever a cloud around them—a cloud by which was dispelled only by the work and the doctrine of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, God's love to his creatures is displayed. The Psalmist celebrates his loving kindness and tender mercy, and that ineffable goodness which supports and cherishes the varied forms of life inhabiting our globe. The writings of the prophets are not devoid of tender expostulations and melting entreaties. But the great attribute of God, which is prominently displayed in the whole Mosaic economy, the dispensation of the prophets, and the entire Jewish history, is his terrible majesty. The earliest chronicles of the human race bear its impress. A fearful curse descended upon the first man and woman, and rested like a blight and a mildew upon the beautiful world which had just been brought into being.

Sinai with its lightening and its thunders took up the solemn theme; and the Jew, as he looked back to the time when the law was given, and the institutions of his people were established, beheld, rising like a pillar in the midst of the affrighted

hosts, the fire and the blackness that enveloped the awful presence of Jehovah. The Psalms exhibit God in his fearfulness; while the people to whom they were addressed, saw in the calamities that overwhelmed the hosts of their enemies, and learned by bitter experience, how fearful it was to excite the divine indignation.

It was left to the New Testament to reveal in its fullness that attribute of God, which forms the closest and sweetest bond of union between the creator and his creatures. In the birth and death of Jesus, we behold its brightest exhibitions. From his lips and in his actions, we hear expressed and re-expressed, a thousand and a thousand times, God is LOVE.

The other attributes of God render him an object of fear to us. God is holy, and we are sinful; God is just, and we are transgressors; God is omnipotent, he can destroy us; God is omniscient, our secret sins are bare before him; God is omnipresent, we cannot escape him: but God is LOVE, and we are his children! Transporting, rapturous thought! Had the religion of Jesus done no more for man, than make distinct to him this one great idea, it would have been entitled to our lasting admiration and regard. But it has done more than this.

The New Testament has thrown light upon the destiny and the duty of man. It has taught us clearly, that we are immortal. Among the early institutions of the Jews, this doctrine lay concealed beneath cloudy allegories and symbols. It became more distinct, as the time approached for the birth of the Messiah. But it was left to Christianity to exhibit this truth fully and distinctly; it was left to Jesus to illustrate it by an ascension to heaven, after a resurrection from the dead.

Four centuries before the coming of Christ, Plato had announced to the nations of paganism the immortality of the soul; but his opinions were enforced by such arguments, as were beyond the reach of the mass of mankind; and this truth was rather the object of hope than of expectation. But Christ in his own person broke the bonds of death in sunder, and rose from the grave, leading captivity captive. And now, to the soul secure in the favor of its God, death has lost its sting and the grave its victory. Dreadful fears of annihilation, or of a doubtful hereafter, no longer dismay the spirit conscious of its immortality. Our Saviour has thrown the arch of promise across the dark stream of death; and hope stands beaming on his sepulchre and pointing to his ascending Lord.

Again, Christianity has revealed to us the way of salvation. And we may here remark (and the fact, however simple and obvious, is one that we are prone to forget) that the light which we possess on this subject, was not possessed before the coming of Christ. It is easy for the Christian student to find among the instructions and forms of the old dispensation, the statement, or at least the traces of those doctrines and facts which are the characteristics of the new.

And the reason is obvious. In the person of Jesus Christ and him crucified, the mystery of godliness has been made manifest; and what was before ambiguous or entirely un-known, has been rendered distinct by the light of the glorious gospel of God's blessed son. And therefore, it is easy for us to see in both dispensations, "the parts of one stupendous whole," and in the cross of the dying Redeemer, the great central figure in the system of revealed truth.

But it was otherwise to the Jew. Even Abraham, the man so highly distinguished by the divine favor, believed in God; and it was counted to him for righteousness. Even the disciples of the Saviour were so entirely unacquainted with the spiritual nature of the kingdom which he came to establish, and of the way of salvation which he came to open by the sacrifice of himself, that we find them disputing for pre-eminence in his earthly kingdom.

It was the design of Christ in his coming and his work, to secure the possibility of man's salvation. For this, being rich, he became poor. For this, being the Lord of angels, he became the despised and the rejected of men. For this,, publicans and sinners were not too low to be his companions. For this, the Pharisees and spiritual lords of God's heritage were not too high nor too powerful to escape his rebukes. For this he labored and suffered. In the prosecution of this holy work, Jerusalem saw his tears, and the trees of Gethsemane bent over his midnight agony. For the accomplishment of this sublime design, the manger of Bethlehem sustained his helpless infancy, and the accursed tree upheld the torture and the shame of his expiring manhood.

The way of salvation has now been opened. God can be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The poor of this world may become rich with an immortal inheritance. The afflicted mourner may be upheld by an, everlasting arm. The heart which is full of depravity and corruptions may become the temple of the Holy Spirit. He who despairs of earthly joy,

may take to his bosom that hope which is as an anchor to the soul. He who trembles at the prospect of the grave, may follow the footsteps of Jesus, and go on exulting, to meet his Lord.

The blessing is not only great, but it is broad and free. It was designed to be carried into all the world and offered to every creature. Wherever a single human heart is beating, however low and degraded it may be, the gospel invitations are addressed to it. "The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the waters of life freely."

What a boon is this! How immense—how surprising! What a world of priceless blessings surrounds the cross of Christ! In comparison with this, earthly honors are but baubles; earthly pleasures are but vanities; all other subjects of human thought—all other objects of human effort are truly insignificant. We wonder not that the apostle Paul, in the city of science and literature, in the circles of refinement and the schools of philosophy, determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

No unkind or unworthy action is allowed to those who would embrace this holy faith. A dedication of self to God, it claims no less than the devotion of a life-time—than the surrender of every desire and thought, every passion and energy, to the will and the service of him whose cause it has espoused. And what a service! It is the beautiful homage of a grateful heart. It is willing obedience to a just and gracious monarch. It is childlike confidence in a father. It is reverence for the source of all wisdom and excellence.

These noble precepts Christianity shares in common with Judaism. It also inculcates the duty of universal love. It teaches men, that as inheriting a common destiny, bound to the same heaven or the same hell, the creatures of the same creator, the recipients of the same bounty, and alike the heirs of immortality, they should love one another. But Christianity has advanced even beyond this point. Centuries before Christ taught, a Grecian philosopher declared that men ought not to revenge an insult that they might be like the gods. This was the height of the religion of nature.

But when Christ came, he taught—"love your enemies: do good to them that hate you, and despitefully use you, and persecute you;" and he himself, through a life of contumely and woe, caused by human hatred, has given us the most beautiful example of forgiveness of enemies that the world has ever witnessed.

The arrangements made for securing human obedience also attract our admiration. The man who has enlisted in the service of God—who is truly born again has entered into the sphere of the widest and most perfect liberty. Obedience is the offspring of love. He who loves, obeys spontaneously; and in the Christian's heart love to God is the supreme emotion.

Not only the great aim of his life, but the ruling desire of his heart is to glorify God, and his aim must be exhibited in his actions. We do not say that the Christian does not sin, nor that he does not sometimes feel the law of God to be hard; but this we do affirm, that whenever he sins, and whenever he feels the law of God to be a restriction, it is not because the love of God is in his heart, but because he still clings to something that is opposed to this sublimest of sentiments. But let the love be perfect, and it will exhibit the fruits of spontaneous and perfect obedience.

We might enlarge upon this portion of our subject. We might appropriately consider here the inimitable and perfect character of Christ, or the symmetry of the Christian graces, or those great doctrines which are the foundations of the Christian's hope. But we are compelled to forbear. Like the philosopher, we have gathered a few pebbles on the seashore, while the great ocean of truth lies unexplored before us.

II. We remark in the second place that Christianity has demonstrated itself to be surpassingly excellent by the results which it has accomplished.

The gospel was committed by the Saviour to the hands which seemed least able to sustain the precious charge. Gathered from the boats of the fisherman, and the stalls of the publican,—cherishing in their hearts, and heralding abroad a religion, diametrically opposed to the opinions and inclinations, and actions of the world, their labors seemed to be hopeless in the extreme.

Armed only in the panoply of the Spirit, single-handed and alone, they went forth to engage in a contest with the universe. Shall we trace the progress of their cause from the planting of the seed in the cities of the East and West, until a mighty tree arose, bearing its thousand fruits, and stretching far and wide its sheltering branches?

They are the topics of history, with which we all are familiar. We know how men received the word, and how thickly converted souls gathered around the apostles, as the gems in the crown of their rejoicing. We know how the persecutions that threatened it, transformed the blood of the martyrs into the seed of the church. We have read how vainly the potentates of the earth opposed it. We know how it passed from heart to heart, from house to house, from city to city, until it reached the hearts of kings, and became the religion of nations. It spread from Rome to her provinces. Barbarian hordes received it, and civilization, and the blessings of social life, followed in its train. Britain received it, and Britain became the mistress of the seas. It crossed the ocean, and entered the howling wildernesses of America, and America became a mighty nation.

The skeptic may sneer at this proof, but it is no less true, and no less convincing. It is a startling, although universally received fact, that where the Christian religion is, there refinement and happiness are; and where the Christian religion is not, the people are enveloped in the grossest barbarity. And those nations which are the highest in point of intelligence, which have made the greatest progress in the arts and sciences, and in literature, which are the most powerful, the most wealthy and the most happy, are those in which Christianity is preserved in its greatest purity.

The religion of Jesus has affected nations by affecting men. Entering as a fire in the midst of the corruptions of the human heart, it has purified and dissipated them. It has given man purer thoughts. It has excited more sublime desires. It has offered a realization to his loftiest hopes. It has afforded him an object of thought suited to the capacities of an immortal being. It has therefore encouraged and accelerated the advance of his mind, and thus has it directly, yet efficiently, surrounded his home with comforts, and blessed his country with refinement, and law, and liberty. It has made man noble, while it has made him happier. It has moulded the most excellent characters that the world has ever seen. It has inspired the greatest self-denial, and the most generous acts. It has given freedom to the burdened captive of sin; and has wakened the dead in iniquity, to life, and light, and immortality.

Friends and brethren, if the doctrine of the cross contains such sublimities and conveys such blessings, what claims has it upon our attention and our regard? In the decision of this question, we challenge the exercise of the most nicely discriminating judgment, and of the most frozen heart. Let the value of Christianity be regarded as a matter of rigid calculation, let it be computed and compared with the value of all earthly systems, and of all other objects of human thought; and let men act with regard to it only as rational beings, and there is not a voice on earth but would unite with that of the apostle, "Yea, yes, hereafter we determine to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified!"

Brethren, you have learned by experience the value of this great lesson—the sweetness of this solemn truth. You have felt what a world of joy and peace, of hope and consolation exists in the words, "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Oh, may the impression that it has made, never be effaced from your minds. If ever earthly considerations would come between us and our God, let us remember the claims which the gospel has upon us. Let us remember that its claims are the greatest and most imperative of all claims, and that it comes to us recommended by the noblest of all motives. Let us remember that all things are as nothing in comparison with this.

We may lose honors and sources of pleasure, we may lose friends, and possessions, and home, but if we possess the Christian's hope, and are fellow-heirs of the Redeemer's kingdom, we are rich in our poverty. This world may surround us with its adulations and its prosperity, and all the sources of pleasure that wealth can command, may be at our disposal, but without a heavenly inheritance, we are poor indeed. Then let us banish from our hearts every object and desire that may come into competition with this sacred claim.

Let us regard no pleasure as too exquisite to be sacrificed; no sacrifice as too great to be made, which is demanded by the holy cause which we have espoused. Let us labor to overcome every passion, to sanctify every thought. Let our desires aim at no less glorious an object than the confident persuasion that neither life, nor death, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of-God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Sinner, a parting word to you. You have listened to an imperfect representation of the excellency of the gospel. With its broad, free provisions, it is offered to your acceptance. We beseech you to pause and consider. We beseech you to act in this matter with the consciousness that you are deciding upon the most important interest of your life. Oh, let not this offer pass by unheeded! You must confess that the great claims of the gospel upon you are Just. You cannot refuse it the admiration of your understanding, even while you deny its admission into your heart.

Oh, now in the presence of the Almighty, throw open the portals of your heart and admit the blessed visitant. If you refuse, we are compelled in sorrow to warn you of the fearful consequences. We warn you that if you reject it, it will but add to your condemnation, that the claims of God's glorious gospel have been exhibited to you to-day. Oh, when this gospel is so exceedingly rich and precious, so excellent and noble, how can you hope to escape if you neglect so great salvation!



The Character of Genuine Revivals _____

A. Bennett

From *The Baptist Pulpit of the United States*, 1860

The providence of God developed his purpose of mercy, and called forth human action. The agency of the church followed in the wake of Divine influence. In all these precious seasons of ingathering to the church of God, he led the way. He put his own sheep forth, but he went before them, and it was their joy and pleasure to follow him.

The agency of the Holy Spirit was signally manifest in preparing the saints for their duty, and delightful labor in these revival seasons, and in reproving sinners for their unbelief, and in quickening and raising them up, prepared to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The means employed were prayer, the ministration of the gospel, and ordinances of God's house, and exhortations, both from experienced Christians and young-converts. All this was combined with united extensive Christian effort put forth in visiting from house to house, connected with personal appeals and fervent prayer, as far as practicable in every family.

The saints in addresses to the people, whether in the public exhibitions of the gospel, or in their social exhortations in the conference room and family visits, did not approach them in a menacing tone, bearing down upon the impenitent, or backsliders, with a fault-finding, or even commanding style; but with that penitent subdued, affectionate, and expostulating manner, which reached the heart through the understanding. Or, if it did not reach the heart at once, it convinced the judgment, that the appeal was made by a friend, and from the best motives, while it was sustained by the most weighty reasons.

Instead of descending on the soul like an avalanche, carrying all before it with frowns and terrors, the address seemed to come up with the breathings of a heart stationed near the cross, or throne of God, with melting accents of kind entreaty, showing they were prompted by the Holy Spirit; so the proud sinner was reached, like Zaccheus in the tree, and called upon to come down, while the spirit and humble demeanor of the person who addressed him, presented a striking contrast to his own character, and seemed to challenge imitation.

The preaching in those revivals was distinctly marked with that truth which vindicated God's government over his creatures, and charged the sinner with the guilt of violating his holy law. It was that kind of preaching which seemed more careful to please God than to be approved of men - which showed the sinner that while his misery was the result of his own choice, his salvation and ultimate happiness depended entirely on God's choice. Of course, it was his only hope and indispensable duty to repent and believe the gospel, and look to God through the atonement of Christ for pardon and justification as an act of his sovereign grace.

Convictions of sin were deep and pungent, both in saints and sinners, and at times it was hard to know in which they excelled, for backsliders returned in deed and in truth, and not in word only. The conviction of the sinner arose at first from a sight of his life. He had done wrong, and he feared justice, and awfully trembled in view of hell. But he soon saw his heart was worse, much worse than his life had been, and was the seat of the difficulty.

For it was enmity against God—that the imaginations of the thoughts of the heart were evil, and had been evil continually, and therefore there was no hope but in the mercy of God. Truth led them to discover that nothing but the righteousness of Christ imputed to them could give them such a character as they needed for acceptance with God, and even to enjoy pleasure themselves.

The length of time conviction of sin continued, and varied from one day to three weeks—generally from one to two weeks. It was not a common thing for a convicted sinner to find peace of mind in public meetings. Few, it is believed, dated their conversion in the conference room, or while others were praying with them. The greater number gained evidence of pardon from God, against whom they had sinned, while they were alone in humble prayer, reading the Bible, or in silent meditation.

The prevailing exercises of the converted were love, joy and peace. Love to God, as the Sovereign of the world; to Christ, as the Saviour of sinners; to the Bible, the people, and service of God. The holy law of God, which was their chief trouble before, now afforded exquisite delight. That very law which they found to be unto death, was now adopted as the rule of life, as the only rule by which they desired to walk; and its statutes became their song. They would often say, "O, how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day."

But Christ, the blessed Christ, was the theme on which all loved to dwell. Each seemed to vie with the other in adoring, extolling, honoring, loving, and praising Christ. He seemed to occupy most of the thoughts and affections, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth spoke. Christ formed the ground of encouragement, and constituted the chief argument in prayer.

Christ crucified occupied a large place in all the exhortations and addresses, in which the saints gave vent to their feelings in the public assembly, and by which they ought to win back their fellow-sinners from the paths of the destroyer.



The Need for a Sending Church ---

Missionary Don Clough

Sent by New Testament Baptist Church 2119 3rd Ave SE Rochester, MN 55904, Pastor Curtis Martin

For some, the question of finding a sending church is a mere formality. Many missionaries choose a "sending church" knowing that some Baptist churches will require it before the missionary will be considered for support. And so, the missionary often chooses a "sending church" that will allow them to do what they want to do, and will not "interfere" with their ministry. The "sending church" that is chosen often times hasn't had any influence in the spiritual lives of the missionary. The missionary wasn't saved there; wasn't called there; wasn't trained there; and never served there! In this case, the "sending church" only acts as a rubber stamp, having little or no authority over the missionary or his ministry. Is that the pattern that we find in the New Testament? No!

Missionaries Should Be Members of Their Sending Churches

Paul and Barnabas didn't just choose a "sending church." They were already members of the church at Antioch, which sent them out (Acts 11:25-26; 13:1-3). I've seen prayer cards from missionaries that list both a "sending church" and a "home church." Where do we find that in the Bible? A lot of times, those type of missionaries will choose a large, influential church to call their "sending church", when in reality, that church has little, or not authority over the missionary or his ministry. Biblically, the "home church" and the "sending church" should be one and the same.

Missionaries Should Be Serving In Their Sending Churches

Not only were Paul and Barnabas members of the church at Antioch, but they were also serving God in and through their church (Acts 11:26; 13:2; 15:35). Many missionaries list "sending churches" that they have never served in. The Bible tells us, "Lay hands suddenly on no man..." (I Timothy 5:22) How can a church ordain, and send a man who has never served in their church? How do they know the spiritual condition of that man, if they have not labored with him, side by side? The missionary then does himself much harm, for the people of that "sending church" often times do not know him, and have no natural care for him. How apt are they to pray for him? And, the church does itself much harm, as well, for they have a missionary whom they do not know, that does not answer to them, that is representing them (the church) wherever he (the missionary) goes! The testimony of that church can be harmed by a missionary they hardly even know, because they've allowed him to be associated with them.

Missionaries Should Be Sent Out Under the Sole Authority of Their Sending Churches

The Local, New Testament church is the only Biblical sending agency (Acts 13:3; 15:35-41). Any organization that usurps the authority of the church in the work of missions is not Biblical. The Great Commission was given to churches, not clearinghouses, or mission boards. Note: I know some good men who use mission boards, and clearinghouses. I do not condemn them. However, the Bible clearly teaches that missionaries should be sent out under the sole authority of their church. The Great Commission was given to the institution of the local church - not to individuals.

A Biblical sending church will recognize the call of God upon their men, and when the Holy Spirit leads, they will send those men out to do what God has called them to do. How can a sending church recognize the call of God upon its men? It can only happen when those men are members of the church, and serving in the church.

Missionaries Should Be Accountable to Their Sending Churches

Paul and Baranabas were held accountable by their sending church. Upon completion of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to their sending church and gave a report on their ministry (Acts 14:26-28). And, at the conclusion of Paul's second missionary journey, Paul returned to his sending church in Antioch to report to them (Acts 18:22-23). Even the Apostle Paul submitted to God's order, being sent by the church of Antioch, and being accountable to them! Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find any missionaries that were accountable only to themselves.

Many missionaries claim that they are only accountable to God. They claim that they have no need to be under the authority of any man. If that is true, why did God ordain the institution of the family, and command the wife to submit to her husband, and children to obey their parents? And why did God ordain the institution of government, commanding us to be subject to the higher powers? And why did God ordain the institution of the church, commanding the members to "obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves"? God has ordained human authority at every level of society. Is the missionary alone exempt from human accountability? If the missionary is a member of his sending church (and he should be), then his sending church and his pastor have God-ordained authority over him.

I've met missionaries who have changed their sending church because their church won't let them do what they want to do. I believe that a missionary should only change his sending church if that church has departed from the faith, either doctrinally or morally. A Biblical missionary is not his own agent, but is an extension of his sending church. The sending church has every right to hold that missionary accountable, and even set expectations for that man's ministry. If a missionary will not be accountable to his home church, then the problem lies with the missionary, not the sending church. How can a missionary say that he really believes in the authority of the local, New Testament church, if he is not willing to submit to his sending church, or his pastor? A missionary that won't submit to his sending church is not submitted to God either, whatever he may say.

Thus, a Biblical sending church sends out its own men, who have been called by God, and that are serving God in and through their church. And, a Biblical missionary is sent out through the sole authority of his home church, and is accountable to them. Any deviation from this pattern is not Scriptural!

