

“Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps, set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest” (Jer. 31:21)

The Living Way

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*Upholding the Original Christadelphian Faith concerning:
The Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12)*

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“I saw, and behold, a white horse; and he that sat up on him had a bow: and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2)

Haggai - Consider Your Ways

The prophet Haggai commenced his ministry at a highly significant stage of Israel's history. The 70 years of Babylonian servitude, as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 25:11,12) had ended. And a glorious new age had begun, when all of Israel were called upon to return to the land promised to their fathers.

THE RETURN TO THE LAND

Ezra chapter 1 describes to us how Yahweh stirred up the spirit of a Gentile ruler, Cyrus, to bring about the restoration. A proclamation was made, "Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, Yahweh Elohim of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:2).

What a remarkable thing this is! Cyrus recognised that he had not obtained his kingdom by the strength of his own hand, but that it had been given to him by the God of Israel. But also, he understood the Lord's intention to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, and that he was the man to bring this into effect!

This may well have been at least partly due to Daniel, who had been given a prominent position in the kingdom (see Dan 6:28). And so, in belief of Israel's God, Cyrus issued a decree in verse 3:

"Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh God of Israel, he is the God which is in Jerusalem." Accordingly, Zerubbabel (2:2) and "the chief of the fathers" (Ezra 1:5) rose up, and led the way back into the land.

The name "Zerubbabel" literally means, "out of Babylon". Thus, he represents the One who is able to lead his followers out of spiritual Babylon, to inherit the promised blessings. Just as Zerubbabel led the Israelites out of captivity into blessing, so the Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the bondage of sin, that he might lead us into glory (Rom 8:21; Heb 2:10).

THE RETURN TO WORSHIP

But just as Zerubbabel, as Governor, led the return into the land, Joshua the High Priest led the return to worship. In Chapter 3 of Ezra, we read how Joshua, Zerubbabel, and their brethren rebuilt the altar. Once this had been completed, the offering of daily sacrifices began once more.

This demonstrates the principle that blessing cannot be obtained without dedication and worship. First, the nation had to rededicate themselves to Yahweh. They had to offer sacrifice for their sins, and resolve to continue in faith. Only then could the work of building up the house of God begin.

And so it is, that upon our departure from spiritual Babylon, we must firstly establish the correct form of worship. We must put the Lord first, submitting to what he requires. Only then, when we have dedicated ourselves to Him, by association with the Sacrifice of His Providing, can we engage ourselves in His work, and receive His blessings.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Following the re-establishment of the principle of Sacrifice, the work commenced. Naturally, the first stage of the work was the laying of the foundation. This then would provide the basis for further building, that the edifice might stand complete and strong. The day when the foundation was laid was a day of great rejoicing, as “they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks to Yahweh” (Ezra 3:11).

Similarly, once we have embraced the system of worship which Yahweh requires, we must lay what the apostle describes as, “the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (Heb 6:1). Our faith and repentance forms the foundation of all further work in the truth. And once we have laid this foundation in joy, we will stand strong, ever building until the day of Jesus Christ, when he will finish the work (Phil 1:6).

But once we have begun our labour in the Truth, we will soon find that the way is not easy. As a loving father chastises his son, so our Father deals with us (Heb 12:7,8). And so, we are brought through difficulties and trials, as the Lord in His mercy prepares us for His Kingdom.

THE SAMARITAN OPPOSITION

And so it was, that very soon after the initial enthusiasm and rejoicing at the laying of the foundation, the Jews ran into a mountain of opposition. In Ezra 4, we read of the Samaritan inhabitants of the land, who sought to subvert the work of God. They “weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building” (v 4).

But notice, the Samaritans did not begin by opposing the work, rather by offering to help! “They came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as do ye” (Ezra 4:2).

How much like the churches this is! The Samaritans, although they professed to worship the God of Israel, also worshipped other gods. They had so many false religious ideas, that the Lord was able to say to the Samaritan woman, “ye worship ye know not what” (Jno 4:22). And so, just like the churches today, they were not troubled by mere matters of doctrine. They believed that “as long as we all worship the same God, that’s all that matters”. But Zerubbabel and Joshua’s answer is most instructive. “Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto Yahweh, God of Israel”.

And so, this is the answer we give to the churches: “ye have nothing to do with us,” but we, as the united body of Christ, will build together, as the Lord has commanded. So, opposition began, and a letter of protest against the Jews sent to the king. Another decree was made, and it became illegal to continue in the work of the Truth. But how did the Jews cope in such circumstances? Did they present the matter before the Lord in faith, and prayer, continuing in his work? No, rather they gave up. And so, we read that the work “ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia” (Ezra 4:24).

THE MINISTRY OF HAGGAI

This then, forms the general background to the ministry of Haggai. The work had commenced, the foundations had been laid, but the building had now ceased through lack of faith and trust in the Lord. But the Lord did not leave the matter there. In verse 1 of Haggai 5, we read, “then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews ... in the name of the God of Israel”.

Here, the work of the prophets began, to reprove the people for their apathy, and to encourage them in the Lord, and to cause His House to be built. And so we read, “Then rose up Zerubbabel ... and Joshua ... and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem, and with them, were the prophets of God helping them” (Ezra 5:2). Once again, the leaders, Joshua and Zerubbabel rose up, and led the people in rebuilding the house. The work recommenced, with the prophets themselves assisting in the work.

PROPHETS OF LABOUR

Notice this, “with them were the prophets of God helping them”. Neither Haggai, or Zechariah were like some today, full of condemnation and rebuke for other men’s failings, but never engaging in the work themselves. These men led the way, both by word and example.

And so, Haggai was a man of action. A man of faith, who, with Zechariah, brought the people back to God, that the work might recommence, and the House of God built. As we come to consider the prophecy of Haggai therefore, we are going to consider a prophecy designed to stir up our spirits. It is a prophecy designed to give exhortation and encouragement to those feeling the pressure of adversity, whose faith may be waning. It is an encouragement and a warning to us, that we might not forsake our obligations to the Lord, but rather be strong, setting ourselves to the task of building up the House of God in faith.

(To Be Continued)

Christopher Maddocks

Isaiah Chapter 1

We come each week to remember the sacrifice of our Redeemer, Jesus the Christ. And as we gather together, we do so being (for the most part) Gentiles who have embraced the Hope of Israel. Being wild olive branches, we are grafted into the rootstock of the Abrahamic covenant, standing by faith and not by works, lest any man should boast. We long for the day when the kingdom shall be restored to Israel, and when we might take our inheritance with our Messiah, as the Greater Seed of Abraham. In that day, ungodliness shall be turned away from Jacob, and the remnant of Israel shall look upon him whom they pierced, and shall mourn before him as mourning on account of the only begotten. Then they shall spurn the false prophets in whom is no light, and embrace the Truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and enter into the New Covenant, even as it is written: “this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith Yahweh, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33).

In the chapter before us, which forms one of our Old Testament readings for the day, we have a preface to the prophecy of Isaiah. This first chapter describes the rebellion of Israel against her Maker, the faithful remnant that is left and the restoration of Jerusalem as the city of righteousness, the faithful city. But as we consider these particulars – particularly the failures of Israel - we do so not to vaunt ourselves against the natural branches which were cut off, but to heed their example, that we might not fall as they did. Many lessons can be learned by considering Israel's history, as portrayed by the Spirit, and we shall consider some of these by way of exhortation today.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE

A key passage in Isaiah chapter 1 is verse 2, a verse that summarizes the central message of the book itself:

“hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for Yahweh hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me” (Isa. 1:2).

Israel comprised the children of God, borne from the womb, and brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord - something that is also spoken of later in the prophecy:

“Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb” (Isa. 46:3)

And again, Ezekiel describes a similar point:

“... as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee ... And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live: yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live... I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great ...” (Ezek. 16:4-7).

REBELLION

But even though Israel, as a national bride, were taken from birth to be blessed and multiplied, they soon forgot their Lord and Father who was the source of their beauty and prosperity. They rebelled against Him, and despised His ways, and the Law He had given them. The house of Israel were first in the transgression, with the house of Judah following close behind. Like Sodom, they corrupted themselves in their trespasses against Yahweh, as Ezekiel continues to testify of Judah:

“... thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at her left hand: and thy younger sister that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. Yet thou hast not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but as it that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways” (Ezek. 16:46-47).

Becoming even worse than Sodom, the nation quickly became corrupted in their abominations. The prophet continues to describe “the iniquity of thy sister Sodom” as being thus: “pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good” (Eze. 16:49-50).

THE INIQUITY OF SODOM

Many of these things can be seen in the modern world in which we live. Pride, abundance of idleness, lack of care for the poor and needy, haughtiness, and abominations are all hallmarks of today’s society, certainly in the western world. But there was another aspect to the sin of Sodom as described by Isaiah, when also speaking of Judah: “... they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not” (Isa. 3:9). The apostle wrote: “some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment, some men they follow after” (1 Tim. 5:24), and the sin of Sodom is a case in point. There was no attempt to disguise, or cover their sin: it was open, declared before all men. Again, this is something that characterizes the age in which we live: sin, iniquity, and licentiousness are openly displayed in the media advertising that we are all subject to. Intentionally designed to appeal to the flesh and the lust thereof, the pleasures of sin are openly displayed and promoted before all to induce us to follow the carnal mind – fulfilling the desires of the flesh, which are at enmity with the ways of Yahweh. The only antidote is to fill our minds with the things of the Truth (Phil. 4:8), so that we can identify the evil, and turn away from it.

Isaiah chapter 1 continues to speak of Israel in these terms of Sodom and Gomorrah, alluding back to Abraham, whose pleadings would have spared the cities if but ten righteous men were found there:

“Except Yahweh of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isa. 1:9).

If there had been found a remnant in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have been spared judgment - but there was a faithful remnant in Israel that prevented the nation from being utterly destroyed, which we shall come to consider shortly. The nation as a whole had descended into a condition and state of being morally worse than those cities, hence the prophet addressed them thus: “Hear the word of Yahweh, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah ...” (Isa. 1:10). And notice that here, the prophecy was directed at all classes of society: both “rulers” and “people”. None were without excuse: all heard the warnings of the prophet, and had the individual responsibility to amend their ways.

STRICKEN BY YAHWEH

Isaiah chapter 1 proceeds to describe the nation in terms of a body suffering with wounds:

“why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and pu-

trifling sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa. 1:5-6).

Sometimes it is suggested that this depicts a nation that is spiritually diseased. However, the context rather indicates that the condition is one of being smitten under Divine intervention: “why should ye be stricken any more?” Wounds and bruises come from being stricken, not only disease - consider the following parallel testimonies:

“O Yahweh, are not thine eyes upon the truth? ***Thou hast stricken them***, but they have not grieved: thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction ...” (Jer. 5:3).

“therefore ***I will make thee sick in smiting thee***, in making thee desolate because of thy sins” (Mic. 6:13).

“Come and let us return unto Yahweh: ***for he hath torn***, and he will heal us: ***he hath smitten***, and he will bind us up” (Hos. 6:1).

It is a divine principle that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). This is a paradox for men of the flesh: The natural way is to assume that if things in our life are going “wrong”, then God has left us, and is no longer with us. But the difficulties that life brings are actually tokens of our Father’s love for us! The spiritually minded will perceive the Divine Hand of Providence in their lives, bringing difficulties and trials to develop and strengthen a perfected faith. So it is written that: “if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye illegitimate and not sons” (Heb. 12:8). Israel were being “stricken” and bruised under the hand of Yahweh, yet they refused to learn, and continued in their sin: hence Isaiah’s question: “why should ye be stricken any more?”

A FAITHFUL REMNANT

As we indicated earlier, there was a remnant left within the nation: “Except Yahweh of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isa. 1:9). Though it were “very small”, the remnant remained all the same. This verse is cited in Romans chapter 9:29 to illustrate the wider principle that there always has been a faithful remnant who hold fast to the principles of mercy and truth when the majority have gone astray. Isaiah again alludes to this principle a few chapters later:

“Though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return” (Isa. 10:22).

This is a fundamental principle that we must try to appreciate: sometimes brethren lament the current situation where the inroads of apostasy appear to be gaining strength in the ecclesias, and the question is asked, Shall there be faith in the earth when Messiah comes (alluding to Luke 18:8)? But there always has, and always will be a remnant who hold fast to the Truth – like the seven thousand in the days of Elijah. The Way of Life will continue to be preserved and illuminated in even the darkest days of evil. The purpose of Yahweh will be accomplished - like it always has been - not by a powerful majority, but through a few despised folk: “the foolish things of the world” and

“the weak things of the world” (1 Cor. 1:27). We must therefore individually consider our own position: are we following the majority into perdition, or are we part of the faithful remnant with whom Yahweh has a purpose?

REJECTION OF SACRIFICE

Because the people had turned from their God in word and deed, their sacrifices were no longer accepted:

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Saith Yahweh: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats” (Isa. 1:11).

The principle is clearly expressed in Hosea chapter 6:

“I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6).

The unmerciful who oppressed the poor, and spurned the knowledge of God were rejected along with their sacrifices. Mercy, according to Messiah, was a “weightier matter” of the Law (Mat. 23:23), and is therefore a characteristic of the faithful, who seek to emulate their Heavenly Father. This is the teaching of Christ: “be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful”, for as he taught: “he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Lu. 6:35, 36).

KING DAVID

When he sinned in the matter of Bathsheba, king David found himself in the position of having no animal offering that could atone for his sin. The sacrifice of animals was not desired in his circumstance; what was required instead was a humble acknowledgment of sin:

“... thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burn offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:16-17).

The Law could not cleanse David from his sin: it rather condemned him. All he could do was to throw himself upon the mercy of Yahweh, and pray that Yahweh would cleanse him upon the principles of the New Covenant:

“have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. ***Wash me*** thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin ... purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow ...” (Psa. 51:1-2, 7).

In similar language, Isaiah chapter 1 describes the promise of Yahweh that when His People acknowledge their iniquities and seek to be cleansed from their sin, he will purge them to become as white as snow, and as white as wool:

“wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil ... come now, and let us reason together, saith Yahweh: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:16, 18).

Their hands were “full of blood” (vs 15) of the poor, hence their sins were as red stains which needed cleansing. But their sins would be covered, like a covering of snow presents a surface that is clean and white. Their covering would be “as wool” - which indicates to us that there would be a lamb who would provide a covering for their sin. The Lord Jesus Christ - as the Slain Lamb - is the only one who can wash us from our sins. John saw the great company of the Redeemed as: “they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Whereas the sins of Israel were red with the blood of the oppressed, the saints in Christ cleanse their garments in the shed blood of the sacrificial Lamb. Blood is not normally a cleansing agent: it naturally stains, rather than cleans. But paradoxically, association with the blood of Christ is essential for a washing of righteousness. It is written that Christ “loved the ecclesia, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it through the washing of water by the Word, That he might present it to himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot nor wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). Notice, in Revelation 7 the cleansing agent is the blood of Christ, whereas in Ephesians 5, it is the water of the Word. Combining the two, we see that it is belief in the testimony of the Word concerning the “name of Jesus Christ”, that forms the basis of our cleansing by the blood of Christ.

THE FUTURE

Whilst speaking of the sinful state of Israel, suffering under the smiting of Yahweh, Isaiah chapter 1 also describes the means by which their iniquity shall be purged, becoming a holy nation once more. So verses 26 and 27 provide a wonderful vision of the future of Jerusalem:

“... I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and they that return of her (marg.) with righteousness” (Isa. 1:26-27).

As a consequence of the restoration of Judges in Israel, Jerusalem shall once again become a city of righteousness and faith. The remnant shall return in righteousness, cleansed and purged from their sins. Interestingly, John saw a vision of this time, when there will be set thrones for judgment (cp. Psa. 122:5). In Revelation chapter 4, the judges are symbolized by 24 elders sitting in glory, with clean white garments:

“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold” (Rev. 4:4).

We come then, to bring our thoughts to the shed blood of our Redeemer, as emblemized in the wine before us. We direct our attention to the body of Messiah, given for the remission of our sins. We do so, not seeking to establish our own righteousness, but rather

to wash our robes in his precious blood, that we might be saved from our sins, and be given garments of salvation to wear before the throne of Glory. Let us heed the example of Israel of old: Yahweh does not delight in the faithless slaughter of animals, but in the confession of a humble spirit, and a contrite heart. Let us therefore “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15), that we might find grace to help in time of need, and be given a place in that wonderful kingdom to come.

Christopher Maddocks

2 Timothy 2 – Our Spiritual Warfare

In our New Testament reading for today, we receive the exhortation to be valiant soldiers in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Captain of our Salvation:

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

This aspect of fighting in a warfare of faith is not unusual in the inspired writings of Paul consider these three examples:

“fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12)

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7)

“for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

The Apostle also warns against those who “concerning the truth have erred:” (2 Tim. 2:18), and Jude admonishes us to contend against them: “... ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Again, Paul describes how such a contending in unison is a characteristic of the true brethren. They “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind *striving together* for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:27).

These passages all demonstrate the importance of having sound doctrine. The Truth of the Gospel is not subjective, and open for various interpretations: it is sure and steadfast. Only true doctrines save, hence Paul also wrote to Timothy: “take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16).

In our chapter for today, verses 17-18 provide an example of a specific false doctrine that had entered into the ecclesia. Hymenaeus and Philetus “have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some”. This is a warning to us:

those who teach principles that are contrary to sound doctrine are not simply presenting a “different point of view”, or a “different perspective” – they are overthrowing the faith of some, by presenting another Gospel, which is impotent to save. But the Apostle concludes:

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

The Lord knoweth them that are his. As the Master declared: “I am the Good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (Jno. 10:14). And by contrast, of those who are rejected at the coming judgment seat of Christ: “I know you not whence ye are depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity” (Lu. 13:27).

KORAH DATHAN AND ABIRAM

The example of Korah, Dathan and Abiram provides an Old Testament example of these principles. Despising the dominion of Moses, these three men gathered a following of two hundred and fifty princes, “famous in the congregation, men of renown”. The rebellion is described thus:

“They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Yahweh is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of Yahweh” (Num. 16:3).

Essentially, they were arguing that they were just as good as Moses, so why should he think himself to be greater than they? But they missed the point entirely: Moses was the man appointed by Yahweh Himself. He had not taken it upon himself to lead the ecclesia in the wilderness, indeed, it would appear that he was initially reluctant to accept this role. But Moses “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). He did not raise up a railing accusation against his adversaries. He did nothing to try and justify either himself or Aaron, rather he prostrated himself on the ground before Yahweh: “when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face ...” (Num 16: 4). He placed the matter before Yahweh and left it for Him to demonstrate who He had Chosen:

“He spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, even tomorrow Yahweh will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him; even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; And put fire therein, and put incense in them before Yahweh tomorrow: and it shall be that the man whom Yahweh doth choose, he shall be holy ...” (Num. 16:5-7).

Notice the expression he uses: “Yahweh will shew who are his” alluded to in 2 Timothy 2:19. The verse states: “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, ***The Lord knoweth them that are his.*** And let everyone that nameth the name of Christ ***depart from iniquity***” (2 Tim. 2:19).

This aspect of departing from iniquity is also from Numbers 16:

“Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram” (Num. 16:24).

“... Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye consumed in all their sins” (Num. 16:26).

This is the spirit of Paul “wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). There can be no amity between the faithful and the unfaithful, or the Children of Light, and the Children of darkness. We must not fellowship, or be partakers of other men’s sins, lest we be rejected with them (1 Tim. 5:22).

The Apostle continues his exhortation to Timothy:

“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22).

This aspect of a “pure heart” interestingly is from Psalm 73, which also links in with the rebellion of Korah:

“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (Psa. 73:1).

What is interesting for us to consider in this context, is how the censers in which the incense was offered were used:

“Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before Yahweh, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel” (Num. 16:37-38).

Notice that here (and in the verses that follow), the censers were beaten into plates, which were then placed as a covering of the Brazen Altar. That, would then “be a sign” to Israel. One example of this effectiveness of this sign, is in the case of Asaph, when he went before that altar. He begins Psalm 73 verse 3 thus:

“I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked”

And then continues:

“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou casteth them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors” (Psa. 73:16-19).

Here, when he went into the Sanctuary, Asaph would have seen the plates upon the brazen altar. And in considering those things, he was exhorted to think more soberly. No matter how “famous” and “renowned” these men were, despite having a reputation of being alive to the things of the Spirit, when they rebelled against the Anointed one of Yahweh, they were destined to fail. Those brazen plates testified to the final end of the rebels.

Returning to our chapter, we find an encouragement to be meek in our dealings with the apostate brethren:

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

This was the example of Moses, when faced with Korah’s rebellion. Being the meekest man in all the earth (Num. 12:3), when he was challenged by Korah and his associates, he made no attempt to justify himself, or his position. Rather, he fell down before his God: “when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face” and presented the matter before the Lord. The situation also reminds us of Messiah, who did not exalt himself, but was “meek and lowly of heart” (Mat. 11:29).

FLEE YOUTHFUL LUSTS

In the verse cited above, Paul exhorts Timothy to “flee youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). He was elsewhere exhorted to be on his guard, so that no man would despise his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). There is a need for newborn babes to grow and mature, and the same is true of those who are “born again” to become members of a New Creation. “Childhood and youth are vanity” (Eccl. 11:10) outside of the Truth, hence the need to be fervent in spirit whilst the day of opportunity is present:

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them ... (Eccl. 12:1).

The wise man continues:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14).

The point is sometimes made, that the word “duty” is not in the original, so it really ought to read “for this is the whole of man”. That is, the whole fulfilment of a man’s existence is to fear God and keep his commandments. And this is a product of imbibing the Word of Truth:

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Whether physically young or old, once a man believes and obeys the calling of the Gospel message, he becomes like a newborn babe (1 Pet 2:2), feeding upon the mother's milk. But he must mature into a complete man, devoted to the things of God. That is his whole duty, something to be aimed at by all who would follow the Lord.

Christopher Maddocks

Isaiah's Apocalypse

The second portion of our Old Testament reading for today brings us to consider a portion of Isaiah sometimes called "Isaiah's Apocalypse" (chapters 24-27). Isaiah 25 describes the fall of a great city, which will be made "an heap", in terms that relate to a future judgement of God upon the latter day Babylonian power.

Before we consider this, we need to note that Isaiah 24 continues a theme expressed in the preceding chapter:

"Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when Yahweh of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously" (Isa. 24:23).

In these words, we see the elevation of Jerusalem, which contrasts with the destruction of the city in chapter 25. This is important to note: whilst there are those who claim that the Apocalyptic Babylon (Rev. 17) is in fact Jerusalem, this cannot be so. Israel will be saved with an everlasting salvation (Isa. 45:17), whereas the harlot system of the Apocalypse is destroyed (Rev. 18-19). And today's chapter directly contrasts the two: Jerusalem exalted, and the city of Yahweh's cursing being made an heap.

Associated with Jerusalem's exaltation, is the reestablishment of Divine Rule over the nation, in a way reminiscent of her previous organisation:

"I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterward thou shalt be called, the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isa. 1:26).

These judges and counsellors are described again in Isaiah 24, cited above, which speaks of "his ancients" who will share the glory of Divine Rule. The principle is also in Revelation chapter 4, where we read of those who will rule with the glorified Messiah:

"And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders, sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold" (Rev. 4:4).

In that day, the political orbs will cease to shine: as per Isaiah: the sun and moon will be confounded and ashamed. Or as John had it describe to him: "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). When the ancients reign gloriously, the Sun of Righteousness will have arisen, to illuminate the earth with Divine Splendour.

This is the context in which the following words were penned it is to do with the future reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elevation of Jerusalem. In chapter 25, God is praised because he has overthrown a great city:

“O Yahweh, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built” (Isa. 25:1-2).\

THE CITY DEFINED

The Apocalypse helps us to understand what city will be destroyed, when Jerusalem becomes the centre of Divine worship and glory: Here, we read of a great harlot system:

“The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold, and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATION OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus ...” (Rev. 17:4-6).

Notice that this city:

- Is a mother system with daughters
- Bears the name, or reputation of Babylon of old
- Is prosperous
- Is a persecutor of Messiah’s brethren

This can only relate to the Roman religious system, which defines herself as being a “Mother Church”, with all other churches being her daughters. It is a prosperous system in material things and is notorious for having been foremost in persecuting the true believers down through the ages. And her system echoes that of Babylon of old – to the extent that several books have been written outlining that situation. This is the city to be destroyed when Messiah comes again. Then it will be proclaimed:

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen ... Therefore, shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her” (Rev. 18:2, 8 – but see whole chapter).

Indeed, that day will be one of great rejoicing for the true believers:

“Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her” (vs 20).

In that day, it will be said that “Yahweh is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land. Yahweh, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare

their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear: to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa. 10:16-18, also Psa. 72:11-14).

Isaiah 25 describes this situation when the great oppressor shall be ruined:

“thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm ...” (Isa. 25:4).

THE ELEVATION OF JERUSALEM

The oppressor having been destroyed, Jerusalem shall be exalted to become a joy and praise in all the earth (Isa. 62:7). It shall be a centre from which the nations shall be fed the bread of life, as Isaiah continues:

“In this mountain shall Yahweh of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa. 25:6).

Earlier in his prophecy, Isaiah had spoken of how all nations shall go to Zion and Jerusalem for worship and education in Divine things (Isa. 2:2-3). In this same mountain, there shall be a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa. 56:7), and there shall be a feast of spiritual delights, as the invitation shall go out:

“Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1.)

The Psalmist expressed his desire concerning the things of God:

“O Yahweh, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Psa. 63:1).

This is like our present situation. The area upon which the Harlot city exercises her influence – the European political animal – is describe as a “wilderness” (Rev. 17:3). Though it be prosperous in material things, it is spiritually dry and barren – where the water of life cannot be readily found. But the Psalmist continued to describe how this situation is only temporary, and looked to the future state of blessedness:

“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Ps 63:5).

The promised blessings of the Age to come will be as a consequence of the earth being “full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). At present, the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). They are blinded by the god of this world:

“if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

But for those who see their way to believe, the Apostle continues:

“God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

Isaiah describes this learning process in terms of a veil, or blinding covering being removed: “he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations” (Isa. 25:7).

The god of this world having been destroyed by the brightness of Messiah’s coming (2 Thess. 2:8), the vail cast over the understanding of men will be removed, and the key of knowledge restored.

The prophet continues: “he will swallow up death in victory ...” (Isa. 25:8). This is a primary work of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Apostle also alludes to this:

“we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. 5:4).

“... So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory ... thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54, 57).

This will be a time of tremendous joy and rejoicing for those who have endured hardships for Christ’s sake. Though weeping will endure for the night, joy cometh in the morning. When the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing, the sorrows of the night will become but a fading memory, replaced by the reality of the glorious kingdom. Hence our chapter continues:

“the Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for Yahweh hath spoken it” (Isa. 25:8).

And this is cited in the Apocalypse:

“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

In these words of the Apocalypse of Isaiah then, we find a glorious prophecy of days yet to come, when righteousness shall no longer be oppressed, and the people of God shall be restored back to Him. In that day, the nations will experience the blessings which result from righteousness, even a veritable feast of spiritual things. May that day be near!

Christopher Maddocks

Commandments and Love

“Exhort one another daily.”—Paul.

This breaking of bread is a pleasure; and the pleasure is of a kind that yields profit, which is a great and constant evidence of the wisdom of Christ in appointing it. There is no exercise in life which we can ever compare with it. It differs from every effort of instruction in which men can engage. We do not come together at the table of the Lord to learn. We do not meet to revive knowledge of any abstract truth we may have acquired. We meet to call to our remembrance a personal friend. He who commanded it, and whose command is alone our reason for attending to it, said “Do this in remembrance of me.” The institution is intensely personal in its meanings and associations, both as regards the object it brings before our minds, and as regards the relations it is intended to establish between ourselves and that object.

In this, it differs from all human systems of wisdom or knowledge. These systems are impersonal. They exist independently of any man. The men die and are forgotten, but the systems live on. English Liberalism is for the moment bound up with the name of Mr. Gladstone, but Mr. Gladstone will die and Liberalism will go on its course as if such a man had never lived. The scientific speculations popularised by Charles Darwin will thrive long after his bones have mouldered to dust. It is not so with Christ. He did not found a system, in the ordinary acceptation of that term. He offered himself. His language was “Without me, ye can do nothing.” “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whereof if a man eat, he shall live for ever.” “I go away, but if I go away, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” “I go to my Father and your Father: to my God and your God.” “This is the Father’s will that of all that he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

It is there fore a man—a person—a friend we meet to think about and to fix our minds on; more, a head, a captain, a God. In this, the truth supplies our need as no human system does. We need truth and duty drawn into this personal focus. We are not constituted to worship the abstract. Our minds have no faculty to work on the infinite. We are adapted to the personal and the single. We can worship truth incorporate and individualised. Every power of the mind is thus drawn out: every spring of the heart opened. Christ meets all our need. He is the standard of our duty, the magnet of our loyalty; the absorbent of our love, the theme of our intellectual appreciations, the stimulator of our sublimest sentiments, and the adequate object of our most fervent adoration. There is no extravagance in Paul’s declaration that “in Him are filled up all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

THE BEAUTY OF THE GOSPEL

In this is the perfect beauty of the gospel as contrasted with the wisdom of the world in its most pretentious forms—that in Christ, we have a man who is “the truth.” Astronomic truth has no personal applications. It is beautiful, but it is high and cold, like the glitter of the stars on a frosty night. It speaks no hope and yields no guidance. We are glad to retire from the fatiguing futility of trying to grasp it, and to take refuge in our small mortal ways. So with all other forms of scientific truth. They know us not and comfort us not as persons; and mock us with their sterile beauty and consistency, telling us that low and mortal we are, and must remain, and that the grave is the inexorable corollary

of life. On the other hand, if the world offers us a friend in some man of excellence, we have a theme more suited to our smallness. But how equally vain in another way! The best and strongest of mortal men are like the worst and weakest in one respect: "all are of the dust and all turn to dust again." As the flowers that grow and bloom, and show their beauty and exhale their fragrance in their season, and then wither and vanish, so the best mortal friend we can have is but a transient form of the universal power, destined to disappear in the ceaseless transmutations of things, and leave us comfortless and forlorn. Mortal friendship has no root. "The flesh profiteth nothing." Human knowledge has no result, and human friendship no permanence. And thus if we look to the wisdom of the world in its ultimate issues, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." What is wanted is, something that will connect the eternal verities at which science can only peep, with the personal attractiveness of friendship made perfect and abiding. This is exactly what is done for us in Christ. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The Word, which is God, and by which all things have been made, becoming flesh, has given us a man "full of grace and truth,"—a man in whom blend the sublimity of the infinite, the beauty of the perfect, the interest of the advantageous, and the felicity of the strong and lovely—yea also, the solution of history, the secret of futurity, and the remedy of the world. Science is poor by his side, for he holds in his hand the power whose multiform products science can but register and classify in man's puny style. History apart from him is a high-banked accumulation of cloud and fog, lurid with distant conflagration; futurity, an impenetrable night; destiny a frightful abyss; the universe, a suicide-engendering enigma.

In Christ is peace. He combines all that the heart can desire or the intellect aspire to. He is a friend and a head, and at the same time, the incorporation of the eternal and the universal. Sublime and glorious combination! He gives bosom to the aching heart and pillow to the tired head. They are no empty words that he uttered, though they have been deprived of all meaning by the vapid sentimentality with which they are usually associated, when he said "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—rest now, from the burden of human futility,—rest supernal in the issue to which he is leading human life on earth.

OBEYING COMMANDS

Being such, ought we not to listen, with fervent submission, to his voice? He says, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am." If he be master, what are we? His servants whose part it is to obey his word—with understanding, with implicitness, with thoroughness. This is reasonable. It is what he commands. It is what human masters exact: do you think Christ will be satisfied with less? On this Christ has spoken plainly, and it is for us, in calling him to remembrance, to remember what he has said. He says, "Call me not Lord, Lord, if ye do not the things that I say." "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." "The man that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, is like a foolish man that built his house on the sand, from which it was washed away by the descending storm." Here is a point that it is not possible to emphasise too strongly. However unpopular the doctrine may be,—however much men may fail in acting on the principle, it remains the same truth that will confront us at last when life's feverish struggle is in the past for ever—that the standard of our acceptance with Christ in the day of His appearing will be the obedience of His commandments. We may overlook this in the theoretical contentions forced upon us by the modern exigencies of the truth. We may even in some cases be tempted to profanely make light of the commandments of Christ, either as an impossible rule of action, or as

one that in our curious blindness we may say no man acts up to, but the fact remains the same. God has given no authority since Christ's ascension to relax any of those commandments given for general obedience.

Let us spend a moment in considering one or two of His commandments. Three times He asked Peter, "Lovest thou me?" This points directly to what, in a certain sense, we might call the first of His commands. All through His teaching, He exhibits himself as an object of love. He makes a man's love the test of his worthiness of the privilege of his friendship. "If any man love father or mother . . . more than me, he is not worthy of me," This was new and extraordinary teaching in the midst of Israel. They had been accustomed to the commandment delivered to them of old time;" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. . . Him only shalt thou serve." Here was one placing himself on the same pedestal as the Father. "I and my Father are one." This was what the Jews could not endure. They took up stones to stone him, saying, "For a good work, we stone thee not, but because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." The truth has enabled us to understand where the Jews failed to understand. Begotten and anointed by the one spirit consubstantial with the Father, Jesus was the manifestation of the Father,—the Son of the Father, whom it was the Father's will all men should honour, even as they honoured the Father. Therefore the love that men were Mosaicly called upon to give to the Father, belongs to Christ also, the love of whom becomes the test of fitness for inclusion in the family of the Father. Here then, Christ calls upon us—commands us—to love him. It was a love active with Paul. He said "the love of Christ constraineth me." It was a love that was strong, high, deep. He speaks of it as "the love of Christ that passeth knowledge." This is what we might call natural to the subject. Love varies with the value and loveliness of the object it acts upon. A man does not love his horse as he does his friend, nor the coals in his cellar, as the books in his library. A man who truly knows Christ cannot love anything as he loves him. Because he is so great, the love of him, when fully awakened, is a love transcending what we feel for any other object. The command to love him, and by comparison, to hate even our own lives, is reasonable; for, ultimately, it will be seen that he is our life and our joy: that apart from him there is no well-being at all. It might seem as if the command to love were an anomaly. Love, as an affair of moral affinity, might seem beyond the range of command. It is not so really. We have all heard of people trying to love persons to whom they did not feel drawn: and we have heard of success. Love can be cultivated. How much more where all the materials of love exist, but are inactive from inertness or ignorance, and where it is but needful to apply the fire of the will to set the whole aflame. The love of Christ will grow with acquaintance and contemplation: it will grow till it becomes the leading and constraining bias.

Christ gives us a rule by which we may judge of our attainments in the matter. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." And again, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." And again, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." It is evident that Christ will not accept a sentimental appreciation that falls short of practical compliance with his enjoined will. The reasonableness of this will commend itself. Do we not see in every day life that where love exists, it powerfully inclines the subject of it to do what is pleasing to the object of his love? Should we not say that one did not really love another if he showed himself indifferent to his wishes? Christ is only recognising a universally operative rule when he says, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." It is, therefore, in our power to judge ourselves, as we are told to do. Do we know his commandments and keep them? The answer will be the true decision of our standing in the matter of

love. Love cannot be quenched: hatred may tire, but love, never.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE LORD

We look at Christ. There is everything to love—his own excellence: his unflagging devotion to the Father: his tireless compassion for the multitude: his love for his friends, even unto death: his holiness as the sin-hater and sin-remover: his power, both to heal and to destroy: his towering greatness as the Son of God and the heir of all things: his immeasurable importance as the coming possessor of all things on earth and the dispenser of the permanent goodness of the ages—everything combines to engage the highest love, a love passing knowledge, when the eyes are fully open to his unsearchable wealth in all things. With this love aglow, his commandments become easy, and shortcomings a burden. We eagerly believe and are baptised. We joyfully yield him the first place in our lives, with bended knee and confessing tongue. What next? We desire to do what he instructed the apostles to enjoin on us: to “observe all things whatsoever he has commanded.” Love cannot be satisfied with anything short of this. He has commanded many things—some of them easy—some of them difficult. Love will not evade the difficulties: it will desire to “observe all” the things, difficult and easy.

Of one thing, he specifically says, “This I command you,” namely, “that ye love one another.” It is well that he spoke so plainly as this. It is a great help in the matter. It is comparatively easy to love Christ, because he is “altogether lovely,” and it is in a manner natural to love the lovely. But among ourselves, there are many faults and blemishes—a good deal that is not lovable; and if Christ had not made love one to another a matter of command, we might easily have given in to our aversions, and found ourselves hating where we ought to love. We are not to wait for the lovable before we love. We are to be beforehand with it, and even shut our eyes to the unlovely. Love covereth a multitude of sins. We are to carry this love so far as to “love even our enemies, and do good to them that hate us and despitefully use and persecute us.” Some say this is impossible. It is impossible for those who start wrongly. No man who does not first love Christ will love his enemies. If a man love Christ, he can love his enemies, because Christ has commanded it. His love of Christ will constrain him. If he look only to his evil neighbours and his own feelings, he will fail: he will hate his enemy and do him evil, in word and deed. But if he have Christ in consideration and view, he will find it possible to do good to them that hate him. The will of Christ whom he loves will help him.

The reason that Christ gives will also help: “That ye may be the children of the Highest who sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust.” The goodness of God is a fine copy for mortal man who was made in His image. It is high and, in its perfect form, unattainable by weak, erring man. But in measure, we can reach to it in obedience to Christ, who says, “Be like unto your Father.” He giveth liberally and upbraideth not. So the Lord loveth a cheerful giver. The world prescribes political economy as the rule of action. Christ prescribes the character of God as the standard. It is for us as His children to choose the one and refuse the other.

There are those who cynically declare that these commandments are never obeyed. We must not be discouraged by such. They speak not truly. They might speak for themselves: but they speak for others, and thus disobey the command which tells us to judge not one another. No one can judge another: for a just judgment requires that the judge know all, which mortal man cannot do. It is not for us to judge one another, but to exhort each other, pointing to the commandments delivered unto us, and the glorious induce-

ments God has associated with their obedience. By this course, obedience will grow in ourselves and others, and the abounding evil of our present state be a little modified and overcome by the good that God has brought to bear upon us in His world. And the way will thus be prepared for that morning of brightness and healing which will chase this night of darkness for ever away.

Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian Magazine 1886 PAGE 157–161

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Unforgivable Sin

“if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26-27).

Verse 18 also reads:

“Now the Just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”

But sometimes folk do fall away from the Truth, yet later seek repentance. The question sometimes arises as to whether their repentance can be accepted: it is said that since there is no more sacrifice for their sin, they cannot be saved.

But it is important to note what these words are **not** saying. Hebrews 10:26 does **not** say that those who sin after knowing the Truth will not be forgiven - if that were so, even the Apostle Paul would be rejected. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul describes his inability not to sin:

“... for we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I ... for I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not ... I find a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” (see Rom. 7:14-20).

The Law of sin and death is part of the human constitution, to the extent that even such an one as the Apostle Paul could not prevent himself from sinning. Clearly such sins as these are forgiven: even after Baptism, believers find themselves irresistably drawn away by their own lust, and enticed to sin (Jas. 1:14), and are therefore in need of forgiveness.

But sin is not imputed to those who have faith (Rom. 4). For those who had strayed, yet returned to the Truth, it is written: “..let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy

upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7). True repentance will be accepted: we have an example of this in king David. He committed a grievous sin, which involved adultery and murder. For him, there was no sacrifice under the Law that could atone for his sin:

“... thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:16-17).

Hence he threw himself upon the mercy of God:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psa. 51:1).

And this is picked up by the Master in his parable of the Pharisee and the Publican:

“... the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, **God be merciful to me a sinner.** I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other ...” (Lu. 18, see verses 10-14).

Indeed, the example of David is alluded to by the Apostle as an illustration of how God can justify the ungodly (see Rom. 4:5-6) who turn from their ways, and have the faith that saves. He was mercifully justified by faith, as we can be, if we forsake our sin, and “return to the Lord”.

A repentant sinner must trust in the power of the Lord to save. Of the ecclesia at Ephesus, the Lord wrote:

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of his place, **except thou repent:**” (Rev. 2:4-5).

Notice that this entire ecclesia had “fallen” from grace, and needed to “repent” - a change of mind and heart which would be accepted. Accordingly, those who desire to turn back to the Lord - returning to his “first love” then he will be pardoned and blessed.

WILFUL SIN

We see then, that repentant sinners will be received in again: our opening citation does not say otherwise. But what our verse **does** state, is that there is no sacrifice for those who “sin **wilfully**”. This is a very deliberate wilful sin, a specific rebellion against the Truth. For such, there remains “... judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27).

The Law of Moses recognised this difference. Numbers chapter 15 contains the command:

“if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering ... ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the

stranger that sojourneth among them. But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he is born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth Yahweh; and that shaoul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of Yahweh, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall be cut off from among his people” (Num. 15:27-31).

And this action of despising the word of Yahweh is alluded to in our chapter under consideration, speaking of wilful sins. To quote the relevant passage again:

“if we *sin wilfully* after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. ***He that despised Moses’ law*** died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:26-29).

This is plainly not speaking of unintentional infringements by those who share Paul’s struggle against sin in the flesh. Rather it describes a calculated and deliberate rebellion against the Word of God. Those who fit this category cannot be saved: they will experience the “fiery indignation” of the Lord.

An example of this is the rebellion of Korah, and his associates, who specifically set themselves against Moses (see Num.16) - we consider them in another context on page 10 of this issue. The 250 princes who supported them were devoured by fire, as their worship was rejected, and they were judged to be adversaries and usurpers. This was not a sin of ignorance: it was a specific, intentional and calculated rebellion against the Ones chosen by God.

Another relevant passage is Hebrews chapter 6:

“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame ...” (Heb. 6:4-6).

Notice that here, it is again a specific sin and circumstance that is not forgiven - those who had been “partakers of the Holy Spirit”, who “fall away.” This links in with the words of Messiah himself:

“wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Mat. 12:31-32).

The context of the Lord’s words, was the Pharisees denying that miracles were being performed by the Holy Spirit: “.... they said, This fellow does not cast out demons, but by Baalzebub, the prince of the devils” (vs. 24). In saying this, they were speaking

against the Holy Spirit, and denying the true source of the miracles that they saw. It was an unrepentant denial of the power of Yahweh. Speaking of this, Brother Robert Roberts wrote in his book "Nazareth Revisited", on page 144:

"There was no answer to Christ's question on the Pharisean theory of these things. His works could not be of diabolical origin on their own theory of diabolical operation. But the Pharisees were of the class of theorists who are inaccessible to reason, and on whom he could only "look round about with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts" (Mar. iii. 5). Nevertheless, for the sake of others who were to be reached by his recorded words for ages afterwards, he finished his argument, and uttered words of heavy moment. "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you. . . . All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. xii. 28-32). Mark adds "BECAUSE THEY SAID, He hath an unclean spirit" (Mar. iii. 30). It needs not this addition to shew the meaning of Christ's words about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The whole connection shews it. It was the crime of the Pharisees that was in view. The unforgiveable blasphemy of the Holy Spirit of which they were guilty consisted in attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to another agency.

That the offence should be unpardonable was, in the circumstances, just. It was both against reason, and against the evidence of their senses. It was therefore on a par with the "presumptuous sin" for which there was no forgiveness under the law (Num. xv. 30). The spirit in both cases was the same—a spirit of wilful, wanton, presumptuous rebellion against the light—a spirit which in any case makes the difference between that "sin unto death," and that sin which is not unto death of which John speaks (1 Jno. v. 16). It is this which gives character to the declaration of Paul in Hebrews that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come (a description applicable only to those who were the subjects of the miraculous gifts of the apostolic age)—if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. vi. 4-6); and also the statement that "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary" (x. 26).

Much mental torment that might have been spared has been endured in connection with this subject of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Sensitive persons have feared they may have been guilty of the offence without being aware of it. An enlightened apprehension of the subject will shew them that such a case as sinning against the Holy Spirit without being aware of it is not possible; and further, that it is doubtful if the offence is possible at all in our age when the Spirit does not visibly assert itself. The ground of the special responsibility existing in the apostolic age was the evidence. "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had

sin” (Jno. xv. 24). In our day, the evidence has become obscure and difficult of apprehension for the common run of minds. The Bible is truly the work of the Spirit of God, and the man who says it is human literally commits the sin which Jesus says will never be forgiven. But the circumstances are different, and it is questionable if in the circumstances of an era like this, when God’s face is hidden, such an offence would be estimated so heinously as in a day when the voice and hand of God were visibly displayed in attestation of His truth.”

From the above then, we learn that the unforgiveable sin is not something that can be committed without knowing about it. It is the deliberate rejection of the things of the Spirit of God, in a specific rebellion against the Lord. Rather than to be discouraged, we can look forward in hope for forgiveness. As we cited above, there is forgiveness with God, that he might be feared: “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto Yahweh, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7).

Christopher Maddocks

The Wisdom That is From Above

James chapter 3 describes to us two systems of wisdom: one that will tend to death, and the other to life:

“... This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (Jas. 3:15-18).

It is plain therefore, that we must seek the Wisdom “that is from above” in order to become “wise unto salvation through faith” (2 Tim. 3:15), for the wisdom that is “not from above” can only produce sin, and “every evil work”.

The Apostle also contrasts these two systems of thought in his inspired letter to the Corinthians:

“in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21), for “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent”. (1 Cor. 1 – see whole chapter).

In these words, we find that there is enmity between the philosophies of Man, and the Wisdom of God. The wisdom of man is foolishness with God – and vice versa – but salvation can only come through the belief system which is foolishness to man:

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men ... God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:25-29).

Notice that the whole arrangement is so that “no flesh should glory in his presence”. No man can boast that he found out the things of God by his ingenuity and intelligence, it has to be revealed to him by the foolishness of preaching. It requires the wise in this world to humble themselves before Divine Wisdom, which the majority are just not prepared to do, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). To embrace what the majority regard as folly takes courage and conviction; a willingness to stand out and be scorned by one’s peers. But this is the way of salvation, as ordained by the Great Creator Himself.

BENEATH OR ABOVE

James describes wisdom in terms of coming from above, or otherwise: “This wisdom descendeth not from above ... But the wisdom that is from above is first pure etc.” (Jas 3:15, 17). The Lord spoke of himself in similar terms:

“... He said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins ...” (Jno. 8:23-24).

To be from “beneath” is to bear the image of the earthy:

“the first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:47-48).

And the true hope for the true believers is expressed thus:

“And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (vs 49).

So it is that the Proverbs teach “the way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from sheol beneath” (Prov. 15:24), and the Apostle alluding to the same point wrote: “if ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). Rather than to dwell upon earthly considerations, the believer in Christ must aspire to heavenly things, trusting to bear the image of Messiah (Phil. 3:21), the Lord from heaven.

PURITY

The nations are likened to the troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt (Isa. 57:20), but by contrast, the Wisdom from above is both pure and peaceful – with purity coming first.

Hence in the next chapter, James continues his exhortation: “cleanse your hands ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (Jas. 4:8). As Isaiah has it, peace is the work of righteousness (Isa. 32:17) and cannot therefore be obtained in the absence of righteousness. So it was that in vision, John saw the peace to come upon the sea of nations in terms of “a sea of glass like unto crystal” (Rev. 4:6): no ripple of violence, and crystal-clear in terms of its purity.

This description of having clean hands and pure hearts comes from Psalm 24, in an interesting context:

“Who shall ascend into the hill of Yahweh? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Psa. 24:3-4).

Notice that the context is again to do with ascending – albeit this time to the hill of Yahweh, described also in Isaiah chapter 2:2. Those privileged to ascend and enter the holy place of the Age to Come, will be those who make the ascent and have purified themselves with the wisdom that is from above, being clean in both thought and deed.

GENTLENESS

James continues to describe features of heavenly Wisdom: “gentle and easy to be intreated ...” (Jas 3:17). This gentleness is reflective of that of our Heavenly Father, hence the sweet Psalmist of Israel said “... thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great” (Psa. 18:35). So Paul spoke to the Thessalonians: “we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children” (1 Thes. 2:7). Again he spoke these instructions to Timothy:

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

There are two aspects which are equally important, and which together provide a good balance. We must have no personal animosity and must not grudge one against another (Jas. 5:9). We must not be given to strife but rather be meek – as Messiah himself: “... learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart ...” (Mat. 11:29). But there were also times when he overturned the moneychangers’ tables (Mat. 21:12, Mark 11:15), and when he severely rebuked the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders (cp Mat. 12:34). Likewise, Messiah’s brethren have the duty to “earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). There must be a proper balance – to contend when necessary, but overall to be gentle and without malevolence. It would appear that the ecclesia at Ephesus did not have that balance right – they hated false brethren, but were in danger of losing their first love (see Rev. 2:4-5). We must contend both out of love for the Truth (contrast 2 Thes. 2:10), but also out of love for those who may yet turn back from their sin. Whilst the faithful brethren are united and “... stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:27), they have no personal quarrel with any man. Rather they show the spirit of meekness, mercy and longsuffering.

WITHOUT PARTIALITY AND WITHOUT HYPOCRISY

The servant of the Lord must be impartial and honest in their dealings with others. They must have no respect of persons – like God Himself, hence the judges were told:

“Wherefore now let the fear of Yahweh be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with Yahweh our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (2 Chron. 19:7).

And again,

“Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow ...” (Deut. 16:19-20).

This is the principle with which the Master himself will judge – not with respect of persons and a superficial appearance, but in righteousness and truth:

“... he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth ...” (Isa. 11:3-4).

The Pharisees respected persons in their judgement and delighted in the praise of men. They had a name that they lived, but were in fact spiritually dead (cp. Rev. 3:1):

“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Mat. 23-28).

But the Pure Wisdom which is from above, is “without hypocrisy” as well as being “without partiality”. Seeking not the praise of men, the brethren of Christ will not exercise favouritism in their dealings with others, but will judge righteously like their Lord.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

It is written of the Lord himself that he is “... of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

The book of Proverbs has the aspects of wisdom and foolishness as one of its main themes – and it is an interesting and profitable exercise to examine the attributes of Wisdom in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the central exhortation is to seek after, and obtain true wisdom:

“... incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:2-5).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), being even wiser than Solomon. He is the “word” that was “made flesh” (Jno. 1:14), the One who came to do his Father’s will (Heb. 10:7). Our part is to lay hold of the embodiment of Wisdom that we see in him, eschewing the folly of world philosophy, and holding fast that the only Wisdom that can give life.

Christopher Maddocks

Mortality, Sin and Death

The Bible declares very plainly that the reason why we die, is because we have what the Apostle calls “mortal flesh,” (2 Cor. 4:11), or “mortal bodies” (Rom. 8:11). But there is the claim that we also die because of committed sin. Hence the Sale Christadelphian Website teaches:

“Sin is the act of disobeying God and breaking one of His commandments. It creates a barrier between us and God. The Bible teaches that death is the punishment for sin and therefore because everybody sins, everyone dies.”

Again, this is the teaching of the CBM:

“Questions and their Answers: Why did Dorcas die? Why do we die? Because we all sin, that is, we all disobey God.” (Persian/English course on Acts)

“Adam’s death was no different from ours. We all sin, so we all die” (Lesson 22 of 40 Lesson course)

“It is because of sin that we die. If our sins are completely forgiven then, just like Jesus, we cannot stay dead” (Lesson 23 of 40 lesson course)

“So we see that Adam sinned, and, because he was a sinner, he died. We also sin and die” (Lesson 2 of 22 lesson course)

But it is not true that everybody sins: babies in the womb die “neither having done any good or evil” (Rom 9:11). Moreover, Paul state that “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13): people are not accountable for sinning when they knew no better. This why “many’, not all men will be raised for judgment (Dan. 12:2). The basis of accountability is knowledge: “... therefore to him *that knoweth* to do good, and doeth it not, *to him it is sin*”. Conversely, to him that doesn’t know to do good sin is not imputed. This being so, it would not be Just to punish people for disobeying laws they knew nothing about. Also, those who do obey the call of the Gospel message are forgiven their sins - so why punish with death sins which have been forgiven?

The doctrine that death is a punishment for committed sin breaks down very badly when we consider the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not “*all*” have committed sin, for he did not sin. Where then, was the righteousness in his death? If death is because of com-

mitted sin, then as Messiah did no sin, there would be an injustice in his death. It would be a declaration of unrighteousness, not of righteousness! But the Apostle spoke of the Master:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, *to declare his righteousness* for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25-26).

How would God be righteous in requiring the death of a sinless man, if death is the punishment for committed sin? He would be condemning an innocent man to die for a crime he never committed—there is no righteousness in that! Indeed, such a theory only leads to the substitution idea, which we have considered and refuted elsewhere. To say that the innocent has to suffer the punishment due to the guilty is almost identical to the standard church teaching concerning the Atonement, which Christadelphians have long rejected. Robert Roberts expressed it thus:

“The crucifixion was a Divine declaration and enforcement of what is due to sin, and as it was God’s righteous appointment that this should be due to sin, the infliction of it was a declaration of God’s righteousness”. (The Law of Moses)

THE TEACHING OF JAMES, PAUL AND EZEKIEL

Bearing these principles in mind, we consider the teaching of James:

“... every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: *and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*” (Jas. 1:14-15).

The question arises, if we do not naturally die as a punishment for committed sin, what is James describing? There is a parallel expression by Paul in Romans chapter 6:

“the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

When a person earns wages, when are they normally paid? Surely after the work has been completed - or “when it is finished,” and not before. That is the situation here, Eternal life as the “gift of God” will be received at the judgment seat and not before, and so it is the same time when the wages of Sin shall be paid. The work of sin will render the recipients to be worthy of their hire: a man will be rewarded according to his deeds (Rom. 2:6) - once they have been “finished: - and not before. There is a difference between the natural process of death (the consequence of having “mortal flesh”), and the judicial sentence which will be issued at the judgement seat of Christ.

This also illustrates the principles taught by the prophet Ezekiel:

“The soul *that sinneth* it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

This, it is contended, proves that death is a punishment for acts of sin. However, as with all passages of Scripture, the context is key. The context also speaks of the righteous: “he is just, *he shall surely live*, saith the Lord Yahweh” (vs 9). So then, sinners die, but the just shall surely live. But in actual fact, the just also die. No matter how righteous a man is, he will certainly die—unless the Lord returns before that event. How are we to understand this passage?

It is self-evident that this is not describing the natural process of growing old and dying—both the just, and the unjust still grow old and die no matter what kind of lives they live. It matters not how contrite a man is, or how repentant he is, he still has the law of sin and death as part of his physical make up, and dying he will surely die. As I say, this passage is not speaking of growing old and dying naturally (or even premature death due to disease or some other misfortune), but of a judicial sentence issued upon the basis of a wicked man’s lack of repentance. For the enlightened this is something that will be determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and not before.

KNOWLEDGE THE BASIS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

A related question which we briefly touched upon above, is What is required for a person to be held accountable by the Lord? Who will be raised for judgment? As we said earlier, men are not held accountable for disobedience to a law they knew nothing about. James 4:17 which we already cited above is helpful in this regard: “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”. Knowledge then, is the basis of accountability: it is counted as sin for a person not to do good, when they “know” they should do it. Jesus also confirms this, saying to his adversaries: “if ye were blind, ye should have no sin” (Jno. 9:41, see also Rom. 2:12, 4:15). And Paul: “it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pet. 2:21).

It is sometimes said that we will not appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), unless we are first Baptised. But in this scenario, a person can themselves make the decision to avoid judgment. They can spurn the Gospel, and despise the holy things of God, yet can evade being judged for it, by refusing Baptism. So, Baptism becomes the grounds of wrath and condemnation - something which the Bible doesn’t teach.

Jesus taught: “he that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him ...” (Jno. 12:48). In the words of James: he who knows to obey Christ, and does it not, “to him it is sin”. We must know and receive The Truth, believe and obey it in love - then we will be accepted of him, and be given life and inheritance in his kingdom.

To summarise, we die because we inherit “mortal flesh” from Adam. But once a person has received a knowledge and the calling of the Gospel message, they are accountable for their rebellion against it. At the judgment seat of Christ, those who are held responsible will have to give account of themselves (Rom. 14:12), and it is only then that the wages of Sin will be granted, and the gift of God will be bestowed upon the faithful. Our part is to heed the message, repent of our sins, and live as faithfully as we can, awaiting the coming of our great Redeemer.

Christopher Maddocks

The Song of Moses and of the Lamb

THE comparison suggested by our readings in connection with the observance of this commandment of the Lord are obvious; the connection between the song of Moses of old, and “the song of Moses and of the Lamb,” of which the Lord Jesus speaks, is natural and beautiful, and by the power of the truth, we are enabled to extract from the Word that encouragement and exhortation, and instruction and warning which it is designed that it should give us.

We are looking back to a time nearly 1,500 years before Christ, and here we stand, going on for 2,000 years after Christ; and the Jews are still with us, and they are “going down into Egypt” again. And the purpose of God is becoming so visible that Armageddon is illustrated in newspaper maps, and references are continually being made to the prophets, and the great war of the last days. We walk now almost by sight. We read of “the song of Moses and of the Lamb” in the 15th chapter of Revelation, and we are at once struck with the beautiful analogy of the allusions. The previous chapter had given us the picture of the Lamb on Mount Zion, with the 144,000 redeemed with him, and it concludes with the treading of the winepress without the city. Then in the 15th chapter, the apostle says: “I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues” (at once that strikes a note in harmony with the former plagues in Egypt, by which God made Himself known in Egypt, and in all the earth); “for in these seven last plagues is filled up the wrath of God.” “And I saw as it were (and as the result of this, we may remember) a sea of glass, mingled with fire (or, rather, having been mingled with fire).” Again, how natural and beautiful is the allusion to the crossing of the Red Sea, when in fiery judgments God made His wrath known among the Egyptians, who perished in the water by which Israel were saved, and through which they were “baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” as the apostle has it.

THE VICTORY

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass, having been mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.” Notice the qualification: “them that had gotten the victory” over a false and abominable system. I was in Egypt last year, and saw many sculptured memorials of that system; and if you saw them, you would understand a good many things that seem a little difficult in the word of God. This false system had been challenged by the God of Israel, through His servant Moses; a series of plagues and judgments had descended upon the land, and Israel had “gotten the victory,” and it was revealed that the Lord God of Israel was the true God, and the gods of Egypt one awful system of apostasy and abomination. In the days of Moses Israel stood on the brink of the sea in victory, and the apostolic vision is of a future standing upon “a sea of glass, having the harps of God.” And then that “sea of glass,” how beautiful is the figure; the prophets use the figure of the sea as representative of the sea of “multitudes, peoples, nations, and tongues.” “The waters,” said John, in the later exhibition, or rather the angel to John, “the waters where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” “The wicked are like a troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt.” If that be so, what is a glassy sea? Calm, translucent waters, like some of those bays you see in the southern seas; you look through their clear waters, right to the sandy bottom, and see the wonderful life there; that is repre-

sentative of the state of earth's peoples and tongues, after God has clarified them through judgments, and blessed them under the dominion of Christ and the saints. They stand on the sea of glass at last, "having the harps of God," and sing a song of victory, like that which Moses and Miriam celebrated of old time in Egypt, and which was typical of this for which we wait.

"And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." Then he says the temple of God was opened in heaven.

TYPES

We look back again upon the typical matter of the Exodus, and see that Moses personally, first of all, is a man of sign. Time would fail to exhaust the similitudes that exist between Moses and Christ; it is very wonderful indeed, and nothing but the spirit of God could have so ordered a likeness between men separated by 1,500 years span of time.

Moses was taken out of the water, so was Jesus. Moses was threatened in his infancy — his life was threatened by royalty—so was that of Jesus. Moses was brought out of Egypt; and of Jesus it is written, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." Moses was divinely fair—"a proper child," as it is quaintly stated in our version, but the underlying idea is that he was divinely fair. There was Jesus—if not a Hercules in the flesh, we read of him that "he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man;" and he was "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." Moses gave evidence of this, when he intervened in that dispute between the Egyptian and the Hebrew; but he was premature, and being premature, he was rejected of his brethren, who said, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" So they said of Jesus; they would not have him. Stephen most tellingly produces that similitude for us in his defence before the high priest: "This Moses," he says, "to whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected him, saying, Who made thee a judge?" showing what a parallel there was between their action towards Moses of old and their action now—that is, in Stephen's days—towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

Moses was exiled in a far country for a long time; so the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of himself in parable as "a nobleman who is gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." Moses was commissioned by God to return to Egypt by the hand of the angel who appeared in the bush. Jesus, likewise, is commissioned to return, to manifest the name of the Eternal in Israel, and in all the earth. Moses' brethren—Aaron, at any rate—was told to go forth to meet Moses, and he went, and "rejoiced to meet him;" so when Jesus returns, his faithful brethren will be apprised of the fact, and commanded to go forth to meet him, and those who love God's truth and strive to obey it, will do so, with rejoicing.

And so we might go on. It is a very wonderful parallel, but the thing we want to ponder during the time at our disposal this morning is that Moses was prepared for this great honour and responsibility; so was Jesus, so must we be; and it is that above all things

that we are liable to forget—liable almost to resent, because the flesh hates suffering. Therefore, let us ponder for a few minutes the preparation of Moses, of David, and of Christ, and the justification of it all in the victory.

We look at Moses; we remember his experience; but we are liable to forget that when this episode transpired Moses was a man 80 years old. We are liable to think of Miriam on the seashore as we see her painted in pictures, as a young woman of about 30—she was about 85; don't forget it, because during all that span of years there was long preparation. We remember that *when Moses was about 40 years old*, "it came into his heart to visit his brethren;" then that dispute took place, as a consequence of which he was exiled for 40 years. Think of it! Who of us has been in the truth for 40 years? Those who have been, think it a good long span, and so it is. And Moses was away in the desert for 40 years; In the wisdom of God that is beautiful. Supposing Moses had been put to this task immediately, fresh from the court of Pharaoh, what complications, what revolutions there might have been; but let the whole generation die out, and let this man be forgotten, then, when he himself is thoroughly humbled, and thoroughly instructed as to the truth, and has obtained a just perspective of life, and of all things, bring him into the new situation, and the new generation, where his activities will find full and just scope, and the glory of God not be obscured by any associations of Egypt and royalty. That was the idea, and at the end of that 40 years it would almost seem that, with Moses, the hope was becoming a little dim. One hesitates to speak with the least shadow of disrespect of such a man of God as Moses; but it was a fact that he did not circumcise his youngest boy, and nearly lost his life as the result. What can we conclude, but that because of the objections of his Midianite wife he neglected the first rite of the covenant; that argues that the hope was a little dim. That is all we venture to say.

THE BUSH AND THE NAME

Then the silence of God is broken, and the burning bush unconsumed is revealed, a thing incredible to philosophers and speculators; and now, with electric incandescent lamps we are surrounded with little burning bushes, and lots of them. Modern science opens the way for faith in a way that our forefathers could not have dreamed of. But here was an angelic revelation commissioning this man to go to Egypt, to fetch Israel out from it. Was he as ready as he was 40 years before? He said, "Not so Lord, I am not able. Send by the hand of him whom thou shouldest send." Aaron is there, my elder brother; he is an eloquent man; he has not been exiled in the desert like I have. And the objection almost made God angry; "Who hath made man's mouth? I know that Aaron can speak well." "Go thou; thou shalt be a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron shall be thy prophet." And he is sent, and the Memorial Name of God is revealed to him. "When I go," said Moses, "and say. The God of my fathers hath appeared to me, and the children of Israel say, What is his name, what shall I say unto them?" and that Name is revealed to which reference is made in the chapter we have read together: "The Lord, Yahweh, is a man of war: Yahweh is his name," commonly called in English, "Jehovah," because of the misunderstanding of the Hebrew pointing. But what is the meaning of the name? "He who will be," and what will the Eternal be in Israel? Here is the declaration, "A man of war." Will the Eternal reveal himself in a man? Yes, here are the memorials; the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of that great body of redeemed humanity, covered by the name of Yahweh. God's wonderful purpose is misunderstood in Christendom, which has tortured this glorious revelation into the fantastic doctrine of the trinity.

The truth has given us to understand, and has called us to be constituents of the Name. The multitude that John saw on Mount Zion had “the Father’s name written in their foreheads.” How so? By the writing of the gospel, the hope of Israel, in the understanding and affections bringing about the obedience of faith in baptism, an evidence of which we see in one being added to the Name this morning, in youth, and what better time? “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not.” The natural you see comes before, and is the basis of the spiritual, which brings us round these emblems of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we are met together as constituents of the Body of Christ, prospectively so in hope now, but hereafter, as concerning those whom he shall approve, everlastingly so, in victory.

“Yahweh is a man of war; Yahweh is his name.” This song of Moses approximately indicates that for which we wait, because Yahweh had become to them salvation of a sort, even then; for it was a very great salvation for a nation of slaves to be redeemed as they had been from this house of bondage, this iron furnace of affliction; and it had been accomplished by that which was highly typical of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, for which we wait; for how had it been accomplished? By the blood of the Passover, sprinkled upon the doorposts and lintels of the houses, according to the commandment of God, and the lamb was eaten by the house of Israel, in the end of the exodus. And what is said in connection with that, in the antitype? “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” So doing, it will be ours at last to sing, by the mercy of God, “Yahweh is my strength and my song; he is become my salvation; he is my God, I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, I will exalt him.”

THE TEMPLE

Again, look at this promise—“I will prepare him an habitation”; a singular expression, is it not? Moses did so, in a way: there was the tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterwards a temple in Jerusalem; but “doth the Most High dwell in houses made with hands?” The last chapter of Isaiah is eloquent upon that. How beautiful is that habitation to us in this connection, bringing before us as it does, “the Father’s house,” in which we hope to find an abiding place; “Thus saith the Lord, heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye will build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? All these things hath mine hand made, and all these things have been, saith the Lord, but to this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”—a singular comparison between houses and men—a house and a man, a temple and a man. Ah, but the substance, is it not beautiful? Christ is the temple—Christ individual, and Christ multitudinous.

When he cleansed the literal house of God in Jerusalem, and some objected as concerning his authority, what did he say? “Destroy *this* temple, and in three days I will rear it up.” It was a mystery to his enemies, but was afterwards intelligible to his disciples: “he spake of the temple of his body”; when, therefore, he was raised from the dead, “his disciples remembered that he had spoken this. Therefore, here is the “habitation of God,” the ultimate habitation. There will indeed be a temple, a “house of prayer for all nations,” erected in Jerusalem, to the glory of God, but what would that be in the absence of the Christ-temple? Take away Christ and the saints from the earth, and what would be the value of that architectural glory? Nothing; therefore here is the substance of the habita-

tion of the Eternal, of which Moses spoke so long ago, and concerning which we find ourselves gathered together in hope. It is Christ and the apostles who exhort the brethren regarding this hope, particularly. Does not Paul say to the Ephesians, that whereas they had been strangers and foreigners, now they were brought together, and “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” There is the very term, that is what Moses spoke of, approximately—the tabernacle, and the temple afterwards; but here is the substance, the Lord Jesus Christ through the Spirit. He is what we hope to be. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” He is in Christ by the Spirit for ever now, and when he shall appear, if faithful, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”—Ed.

CC Walker, The Christadelphian Magazine, 1915 page 162–165.

“All Flesh is as Grass”

*“... all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as
the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:
But the word of the Lord endureth for ever ...
(1 Peter 1:24-25)*

This was the thrust of John the Baptist’s preaching (Cp.Isa.40:6-8). James also speaks of those who are rich in the things of this life: “...as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth. So also shall the rich man fade away in his ways” (Jas.1:10-11). The life of human kind is transient, and not immortal (as the churches teach): “What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jas.4:14).

Humans, by their very constitution are sinful, weak and dying creatures. No man can save himself from his innate mortality and overcome sin in the flesh. Rather than being essentially immortal, the human soul cannot be saved by the endeavours of men: “none can keep alive his own soul” (Psa.22:29). By contrast, the Word of God “endureth for ever”. It logically follows therefore, that if we also wish to abide for ever, we need to incorporate that Word into our thinking. It is a stimulating and preserving influence upon the mind, causing it to become dominated by spiritual thoughts, as distinct from the carnal mind, dominated by fleshly thoughts. The Word of God is thus a powerful thing: “it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

When the Lord comes again to judge the living and dead (2Tim.4:1), we need to ensure that there is something within us that is worthy of perpetuation into immortality. We must have the incorruptible Word influencing our heart and minds and ways, for only then can we inherit life with our Redeemer - but by contrast, we neglect that Word at our peril!

Christopher Maddocks