

# John 14:12-14

## TRANSLATION

*“I tell you the absolute truth, he who believes on Me, the works which I do that one also shall do; and greater than these shall he do, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, I will do this, in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*

## COMMENTARY

### “Greater Works Than These Shall You Do”

To human eyes, unblinded by religious prejudice and pride, the miracles of Jesus were startling indeed. But, if the miracles were startling, even more so was the statement by Jesus that His followers would do, not only His works, but also greater ones. Throughout the centuries of church history, this very statement has given rise, however, to some misconceptions that have tended to bring about a focus on the relieving of earthly ills and an emphasis on the spectacular and extraordinary aspects of the faith. But what did Jesus really intend to convey by this statement? What could possibly be greater than healing diseases and raising the dead? If we do not understand what could be greater, then we have failed to catch the central message of the entire revelation of God to man.

The constantly recurring theme throughout the Bible is the glory of the man whom God created after His own image; the loss of that glory through disobedience; and the restoration of the glory and of man's position with God. The original greatness of man, which lifted him above the animal kingdom, was in the realm of the spirit. Because of his spiritual qualities he was able to relate directly to God. In the Fall, he lost this quality of the spirit, and with it the capacity to relate directly to God. After the Fall, God placed angelic guards at the Tree of Life which was in the garden, lest man should eat of it and acquire by his own hand, eternal life. Apparently, had

man passed the test of obedience, his state of glorification would have been confirmed to him forever. (The story of the Fall and its consequent penalties can be found in Genesis 3.) As a result of the Fall, man cannot grasp spiritual realities except through the revelation of God.

Throughout the Old Testament, as God put into effect the process of redemption, He dealt with men and nations in symbolic ways. That is, the material world had to be used to convey in symbolic terms the spiritual message of redemption. Thus, God rewarded obedience and faithfulness with abundance of material possessions, as for example in the case of Abraham. Disobedience brought about the withholding of these material blessings, and in some cases, oppression by the enemy. Prosperity was usually a sign of God's blessing, and adversity, a sign of chastening. After the coming of Jesus, however, there was a shift in the nature of God's dealings with man. Now, He was ready to send His Spirit to dwell within man. The evidence of His blessing would no longer be in material things, but rather in His own Spiritual presence within. Now, prosperity was no longer the central indicator of God's blessing. Thus, many of God's choicest saints from the New Testament days until now have suffered grievous affliction.

During the transition period from the time Jesus first began His ministry until the coming of the

Holy Spirit, the miracles which Jesus performed were the sign from God that Jesus was truly the Son of God. These miracles were an evidence, not to the unbeliever, that he might believe in God, but rather to the Jewish believer—to the faithful remnant—that they might know from God that this was truly their Messiah. And again, the coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with miracles, thus attesting the authority of the apostles as they began the gargantuan task of spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

Certainly, the miracles which Jesus did were duplicated by the disciples, and have continued to this very day. However, the greater thing to which Jesus was referring would not be possible until after His death, when the Holy Spirit would come to take up His dwelling in the hearts of men. To be the agents through whom the life of the Spirit would be ministered to the world, was indeed the greatest work that man could ever perform.

A most important question must be asked here. To what extent does the church today engage in the miracles\* that Jesus did? There is no question but what God's power is really available to His people today in the healing of sicknesses and even, on occasion, perhaps the raising of the dead. There is certainly nothing in the Bible to indicate that God no longer works among His people in these ways. However, the important issue is the purpose of God's intervention in the affairs of His children. When Jesus was upon the earth, the miracles which He performed were primarily for a sign to the believers that He was the Messiah, as was mentioned earlier. Furthermore, the miracles which the disciples performed were also a guarantee from God that they were truly His

anointed messengers. Today, however, with the Bible as the proof of authority, there are other reasons why God intervenes in the life of His people. At the same time, there are reasons for adversity that make it necessary to determine what God's will is whenever we seek for His help.

One of the most prominent messages of the New Testament is the affliction of the believers. **“If we suffer together that we may be also glorified together”** (Romans 8:17). **“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. . .”** (II Timothy 2:12). There are many illustrations in the New Testament of believers who suffered affliction for the cause of Christ. As a matter of fact, it is assumed to be the standard lot of the Christian, to suffer on this earth, especially since this earth is the realm over which Satan has been given a large measure of control. We live in a hostile environment. Satan is our continual enemy. He is going to do everything in his power to make life on the earth difficult for us. It is God's grace to preserve us, and it is His to decide the degree to which He allows Satan to afflict us. The afflictions which we have, whether sickness or adversity of other kinds, are used by Him for our spiritual growth. It is not His purpose, primarily, to make life pleasant for us here on the earth. To insist that a believer should always be healed, if he has the faith, is to ignore this most important facet of God's handiwork in the perfecting of his believers. It is quite legitimate to ask for deliverance in these afflictions. But it is also quite essential to leave it to God to determine what He wants to do with us. It is certainly not a sign of lack of faith if one cannot be sure what it is that God intends to do in a given situation. To make the performing of miracles today a test for faith is a misapplication of this most important passage.

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\* There is some confusion about the word “miracle.” To some, the question, “Do you believe in miracles?” implies the question of whether or not God still performs supernatural functions today. Actually, the word translated “miracle,” is the Greek word *semeion*, which basically means “a sign.” The primary use of the so-called “miracle” was to confirm to the believers that Jesus was indeed the Messiah sent from God, and also to confirm later that the disciples were God's anointed messengers for the revelation of truth. It must be realized that at the beginning of the work of bringing in the new revelation of God to man, there was no New Testament scripture to provide the authority for God's messengers. Today, proof of one's ministry can be attested by whether or not he is faithful to the message of the Bible. It is perhaps more accurate to say that God works in supernatural ways today, than to say that He is performing miracles. However, it must also be recognized that the word “miracle” has come to have a broader usage today, and is therefore not altogether wrongly applied to God's supernatural acts. It seemed important to clarify this matter, more to help us to understand why some today may question the use of the expression, “miracle.” There is no question but what God does use His power in many ways today to bring help to His children, whatever the terminology that one chooses to use.

**“And whatever you ask in My name, this I will do.”** What does it mean—“to ask in the name of Christ”? What it certainly does not mean is that the name of Jesus can be used like a magic word to make our wishes come true. He is not like a genie in a bottle, who comes at our behest to make life good for us. It is rather more akin to the actions of an agent of the government, for example, who does things as a representative of his particular country. If he makes a request in the name of his country, he does so with the express understanding that it is what the country wants him to do. The same would be true in business. One who is the agent for a given business makes decisions not in terms of what he personally wants, but what he sincerely believes is the desire of the business firm that he represents. Thus, to make a request “in the name of Christ,” means that the one who is making the request has the confidence that he is doing so with sensitivity to what it is that Christ wants. It was especially true of the position of the disciples, to whom Jesus was at that time speaking. They were going out as agents of Christ. It was necessary that they conduct themselves in the full assurance that they were in harmony with what He would do in their place.

Paul makes it quite clear in the eighth chapter of Romans that the Holy Spirit is the One who leads us in our intercession. Effective prayer is that which is initiated by the Holy Spirit through us. It is no doubt true that any human being will make requests that are of the flesh, and not of the spirit. It is not that they are of the flesh because they have to do with the natural needs, or material things, but rather that requests for those things were not necessarily initiated by the Spirit. However, when we are looking for a reason why a particular prayer may not be answered it is well to realize the possibility that this was a prayer made in the flesh, and not in the spirit. There are, unfortunately, a great many forgeries in Christendom. There are a large number of requests made in the name of Christ, when there

has not been that much interaction with Christ as to what it is that He would like us to request. Thus, to pray “in the name of Christ” is to pray as His agents, in harmony with Him, as initiated by the Holy Spirit.

Nothing that has been said was intended to discourage praying, or to make it seem that prayer is a highly specialized thing that is not available to common individuals. It is not easy to tell whether or not we are praying in the spirit but, it is well to come boldly to the throne of God, nevertheless, and trust Him to guide us in these matters. It takes much time to learn the meaning of true communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Perseverance will be rewarded. An open heart from His child, is sure to bring response from the Father in heaven. If the Spirit is with you in your request you will feel a certain sense of confidence about the matter. If you do not feel confident, then it is quite possible that the Spirit is not with you in that particular request. Some people assume that if they are not certain about the answer to their request, it is because of a lack of faith on their part, and they may try to stir up feelings of faith in order to get their prayer answered. There is often a great deal of guilt attached to the matter of praying, because people have been taught that if they don't have confidence in their request it is because there is something wrong with them. Faith is, after all, a gift of the Spirit. It is not something any human being can stir up within himself.

The secret of effective praying in the name of Christ is to come with an open heart before God and trust that His Spirit will bring you into harmony with what Christ wants as you wait before Him. If you lack confidence in a matter, it is reasonable to assume that the Holy Spirit has not as yet participated in that particular request with you. **“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints . . .”** (Ephesians 6:18).



# John 14:15-24

## TRANSLATION

*“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Comforter [Paraclete, Helper], that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not behold Him, neither does it know Him; but you know Him, because He is dwelling with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little while and the world will no longer behold Me, but you are beholding Me; because I live, you also shall live. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, that one is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love Him and will manifest Myself to him.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, why has it happened that You are about to manifest Yourself unto us, and not unto the world?” Jesus answered and said to him, “If one love Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him. He who does not love Me is not keeping My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but that of the Father who sent Me.”*

## COMMENTARY

### “If You Love Me, You Will Keep My Commandments”

The human predicament that had brought Jesus into the world was the absence of the essential spiritual element within the heart of man that would enable him to identify with God and fulfill his total meaning as a being created in the image of God. In the last discourse that He would give to His disciples before His death, Jesus speaks of God’s expectations for man, His great creative masterpiece. There was a destiny to fulfill that would lift him to a place of oneness with the God of the universe. In the realm of behavioral science, the quest for human fulfillment is called “self-actualization.” The difference in what the psychologist calls “self-actualization,” and that to which Jesus referred, is the Spirit of God. There is a large number of philosophers known as “humanists.” Traditionally, the humanist believes that man has the innate capacity (apart from God) to solve the world’s ills, and to rise to very noble heights of self-fulfillment. Almost every major university in the world is profoundly influenced by this view of man—“atheistic humanism.” The

socialist system which governs a major portion of the world today holds this view as one of their basic premises. Without it, their whole system of human equality collapses. Believing that man is essentially good, they found a scapegoat in “the class struggle.” But selfishness, greed, and oppression continue unabated in the “classless society.” Atheistic humanism, the major alternative to Christianity in the world today must inevitably fail.

The Bible teaches that while man was essentially good, as created in the image of God, he lost the Spirit of God within him through disobedience, and became instead the slave of selfish, earthly desire. Thus mankind, brilliant, and very like God, is a captive of his own selfishness and greed. The socialist experiment, which is the cure offered by the humanist, can never work because people simply cannot be depended upon to live selflessly among their fellow men. Even God’s own people, the Jews, through whom He revealed Himself to

mankind, also failed. The prophet, Jeremiah, challenges the Jews in his famous lament, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9).

Comes now Jesus to talk of keeping His commandments. **“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”** How is this possible, given the state of the human heart? The Jews tried it for thousands of years, and failed ultimately as their history has shown. The Pharisees, who were the religious leaders of Israel, kept the “letter” of the law perfectly, but their heart was not right. What was basically missing was the law of love. It is possible to keep the “letter of the law,” and miss the heart of the matter, as the apostle Paul shows so clearly in II Corinthians 3.

But now, back to the question of how to apply the words of Jesus practically. The key, of course, lies in the Comforter. In the Old Testament era the Jews possessed the revelation of God; they had the commandments; they had the very presence of God with them; but they did not have His Holy Spirit within them. The motivation for the keeping of the law was primarily based upon rewards and penalties. But, human nature being what it is, the rewards were never great enough, nor the penalties severe enough to effectively control the behavior of God’s people. Something new was needed. That something new was provided in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The only true “cure” for the human predicament is the restoration of the Spirit of God within man which he lost in the “Fall.” That is what Jesus meant in His discussion with Nicodemus as recorded in John 3. He told Nicodemus that he must be “born again.” This phrase has suffered much today at the hands of promoters and opportunists; charlatans and chauvinists. But what Jesus essentially meant was that there had to come a new kind of life into the human spirit—the life of God’s own Spirit. The Spirit of God in us, and only the Spirit of God in us, can give us the capacity to keep Jesus’ commandments. We will look in more detail at the coming of the

Comforter, but first we must consider what it means to “keep His commandments.”

What are the commandments of Jesus? John 15:12 provides the clue, **“This is my commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you.”** And, in response to the question as to which was the greatest of the commandments, Jesus said, **“The first of all the commandments is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is One Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength:’ this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ There is none other commandment greater than these”** (Mark 12:29-31). Again, as He spoke to His disciples at the Last Supper, He said, **“A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you that you also love one another. In this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another”** (John 13:34,35). Love, then, is the essential element in Jesus’ commandments. But how can human beings love as God loves? Only as His Holy Spirit is within us. Romans 5:5 says, **“The love of God is poured out in our hearts through His Holy Spirit which is given to us”** (Author’s translation). And in his letter to the Galatians, Paul says that love is a fruit of the Spirit (5:22). When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, we have His love within us. The love that Jesus is referring to is the agape love of caring. It does not have to do so much with human emotions, as it does with a sense of concern for God and for our fellow man. (For a further discussion see chapters 3 and 11 of the Commentary.)

But, there is often a gap between caring and conduct. That is because we are human. It is what is in the heart that counts. If we care about Christ it is obvious that we have His Spirit within us. The Pharisees kept the law but did not have the love. We love Christ, and want to please Him, but do not always live up to that desire. Even the apostle Paul confessed to difficulty in this area. In Romans 7, he discusses the great conflict between

the flesh and the spirit. He confesses that even though in his spirit he desires to please Christ, yet in his flesh he sometimes fails to fulfill that desire.

But how can we honestly say that we “keep His commandments,” if we sometimes fail? In the same way that we claim to be law-abiding citizens, even though at times we may break the law, as in traffic violations. As law-abiding citizens, our

attitude toward the law is one of respect and not of indifference. But, as human beings, our expression of that attitude is imperfect. The Greek word that is translated “to keep” is *teóō*. From this word we get our English word “treasure.” If the Holy Spirit is in our hearts, we will respect, care about, and treasure the Word of God, but because we are still subject to the flesh, we will not always follow it.



## John 14:15-24 (continued)

### The Eternal Commitment—"I Will Not Leave You Orphans"

God came to the earth in the person of Jesus for one reason and one alone—to rescue man from his impossible predicament. This predicament is the most crucial issue of mankind today. It involves the alienation of the creature from the Creator. To understand this predicament one must accept the basic premise that the universe was created by an intelligent Being whom we call God. One must also accept the premise that God created human beings and imparted to them something of His Spirit, thus making them in His own image. One must also accept the premise that through an act of disobedience, human beings were deprived of this Spirit, in measure, and were alienated from Him. These concepts are made known to man through a revelation from God which is called the Bible. Therefore, in order to accept the foregoing premises, one must also accept the premise that the Bible is the inspired revelation of God to man. It is perhaps possible to presume the existence of God through certain evidences in the universe around us, but it is impossible to know the exact meaning of the relationship between God and man except through the specific or special revelation of God which is given to us in the Bible. But, for many human beings even to accept this revelation, let alone understand it and apply it, there is the necessity of a touch from God, awakening the spirit, and opening the mind to understand divine truth. This communication between God and man is accomplished by that part of the Godhead known as "The Holy Spirit." It is the person and work of the Holy Spirit that is the chief subject of Jesus' discussion with the disciples as recorded in John 14.

All human beings, as created in the image of God, have within them a spirit which gives them the capacity to enter into communion with God and

to function in the spiritual realm. This spirit was limited in the Fall, and needs to be restored before proper communication can continue between man and God. The restoring of this spirit is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is something of a projection of God to man. While all human analogies tend to break down, there is a sense in which the Holy Spirit is to God what the human spirit is to a person, although God is able to share His Spirit in ways that we cannot. We can no more separate God from His Spirit than we can separate the human person from his spirit, although God can project His Spirit in ways that we cannot, and provide with that projection a reality of person that is beyond the capacity of humans. God is, of course, a much more complex being than man, but there is some element of understanding to be gained by the analogy between our own human spirits and the Spirit of God in whose image we were created.

There are a number of different names used to designate the Holy Spirit. The other two prominent names are "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ." They all refer to the same person. The name, "Holy," is applied to distinguish between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. Another very important name is here introduced by Jesus—"Comforter." The Greek word is "*parakletos*." It means "one called alongside to help." It has the same meaning as "advocate." An advocate is a lawyer, or counselor. And that word is based upon the Latin word "*voce*," from which comes such English words as "voice," "vocal," "vocation." It has to do with a "call for help." In the King James Version, the word "Comforter" was used. This word carries with it the idea of joining another for strength. It is made up of the Latin word which means "together" and the Latin word from which we get our word "fortress." The

meaning is quite clear. God has sent His Spirit to provide human beings with all that is necessary to enter into and maintain a relationship to the God of the universe. When we ask Christ to come into our hearts, He comes in the person of the Holy Spirit and takes up His residence there to insure our eternal redemption, and to make it possible to carry on our communication with God. As He enters the human spirit, He makes of it a veritable fortress of faith. In spite of the weaknesses of the flesh—the inadequacies of intellect and emotion and will—the Spirit of God guards our spirits against the attack of Satan and carries us through to eternal salvation. The promise from Jesus' own lips is that the "*paraklete*" will be with us forever.

Another name which Jesus introduces to us is "**the Spirit of Truth.**" In an earlier section of this chapter we discussed the meaning of "truth," identifying it with reality. The Spirit of Truth is the "spirit of reality." That is to say, the Spirit of God is the source of all energies in the universe and is the source of the revelation of the truth of God to us. In Genesis 1 we are told that the Spirit of God came into the void and "**moved upon the face of the waters.**" The Spirit of God brought order out of the chaos of the earth and is the instrument of God in bringing order to the chaos of the human spirit. The human spirit, possessed by the Spirit of God, supercedes the transiency of earth, and dwells eternally with God, aware of who and what God is and aware of the meaning of the universe, through the "Spirit of Truth" who dwells in him.

The people of the world for the most part, do not know God; they are not aware of the meaning of the universe; they walk in darkness; because they have not received the Spirit of God into their hearts. Apart from the Spirit of God, no one can know God. Paul made a very strong point of this to the Corinthians when he said, "**The natural man [soulish, fleshly] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned**"

(I Corinthians 2:14). There is no way that the human mind can grasp the things of God. Those who ignore God, do so because they do not have His Spirit within them. In a number of places in the Scripture the blame is laid at the feet of the individual—they are willingly ignorant. If they would ask for God's help, He would send His Spirit to help them. They do not ask Him, because they do not want to put their lives under His control. All of the absurd theories proposed by man in regard to the origin of the universe are simply the feverish efforts to handle the meaning of the universe within the spectrum of natural law. "**God resists the proud, but gives grace to the lowly**" (I Peter 5:5). Those who are humble enough to admit their need of help, and seek God, do receive help from His Holy Spirit, and faith becomes quite possible.

"**I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.**" So the Greek text; although the King James uses the word, "comfortless." If the reason for Jesus' coming to the earth was to bring together the people of earth as a family for God, then why was He leaving them? The disciples had received Jesus as the Messiah. They had accepted the restoration of the people of God as a promise from Him. They had accepted the idea of a new kingdom, and now saw themselves as a part of it. Why then must Jesus leave them? Jesus goes to great lengths to explain it to them. As long as He was on the earth, He could be with them—He could be by their side. But now He will return to be in them. He wanted to do more than merely teach them, or reach out a hand to steady them. He wanted to possess their spirits and transform them by the power of His own Spirit. They would not be left fatherless; indeed they would be drawn into a total oneness with the Father that would go beyond any kind of human earthly tie. To us who have His Spirit, He is this very day our Father. He will indeed walk beside us as long as we are on the earth, but He will do more than that—He will be within us in the person of His Holy Spirit. Our victory is assured; we will dwell with Him forever and He will dwell in us.

# John 14:23-26

## TRANSLATION

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If one love Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling place with him. He who does not love Me is not keeping My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but is of the Father who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while I was with you. But the Comforter [Paraclete], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, that one will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things which I have said to you."*

## COMMENTARY

### The Spirit of Man—A Temple for the Godhead

Christ had come—the expression of the Godhead—to fashion a universe; Jesus had come—the incarnation of Christ—to bring the Godhead into human focus; and now the Holy Spirit will come to make of the human spirit a dwelling place for that Godhead. Jesus, in the closing moments of His life on the earth, makes to His disciples the grandest revelation of all—not only will He return in the person of the Holy Spirit to dwell within them, but they will be possessed by the fullness of the entire Godhead. To the statement about His own indwelling presence, and that of the Paraclete, He adds the name of the Father.

But what does Jesus mean by the Father? To whom is He referring? Is this someone outside Himself—a deity with a separate existence—justifying the Jews' charge of polytheism (many gods)? Jesus gives a clue to this in words uttered just prior to His statement about the coming of the Father. To Phillip's demand to see the Father, **"Have I been with you so long and you have not known Me, Phillip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father, how do you say, show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?"** Jesus' words indicate that He and the Father are inseparable. In a certain sense Jesus had a personal identity as a human being, and yet in another sense He was

the projection of the Godhead, and therefore never different from the Godhead.

Two things must be kept in mind in the attempt to understand this concept in a measure. First is that God possesses a nature of being that is beyond the capacity of the human mind to grasp. There is an absolute limit to our ultimate understanding of this, even throughout eternity, since we never will be exactly identical with God. The second thing we must remember is that the Godhead is more than just a "trinity," but rather a complex being, whom we might refer to as a "multifaceted" being. Our word "trinity" may be too limited to give us the proper understanding. This is not to deny the separate personal elements of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is rather to show that our concept of what "personal" means is too limited for the full description of the Godhead. There was never a time when Jesus in His Spirit was separated from the Father, and yet there was never a time when Jesus was so immersed in the Father as to lose His personal identity as Jesus, the Son of Man. Thus, the Spirit that was in Jesus was the Spirit of the Father, and the Father expressed Himself through the human nature of Jesus the Son of Man.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit into our spirits, all that Jesus possessed of the Godhead

dwells in us. The difference, of course, is that Jesus possessed the Godhead without measure, while there is a limit to the degree to which man can ever be possessed of God. Jesus' teaching on this subject is picked up by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:5—**“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”** When the Spirit of God comes into our hearts, the love of God is there. When the love of God is there, we will be sensitive to the words of Jesus (although not always perfect

in obedience). When the love of God is not in the human spirit, there is no sensitivity to the words of Jesus. However, the word of the Father, in divine judgement, will ultimately be heard by all.

The Holy Spirit is sent in the name of Christ—as the expression of Christ and the authority of Christ. Then it is that the *Logos*—the living revelation of God—will be mediated to the minds of men through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit.

## John 14:27-31

### TRANSLATION

*“Peace I am leaving with you, My peace I am giving to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful. You have heard that I have said to you, ‘I am going away and I am coming to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, in order that when it takes place, you may believe. I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of this world comes, and has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and even as the Father has given Me charge, so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”*

### COMMENTARY

#### Jesus and His Legacy of Peace—A Peace Not of This World

The world is a fearsome place. And Jesus knew it. The reason it is a fearsome place is because it is ruled over by the archenemy of Christ and perpetrator of all evil—Satan. Anyone who thinks that evil is only an error of the mind is deluded by Satan. Anyone who thinks that this world can be patched up with just a little love and understanding is equally deluded. Jesus knew His enemy, and He knew the arena of the battle. Jesus came with no easy solutions, or patchwork panaceas. He offered to the disciples His peace—not the world’s peace. His peace is not “peace at any price.” It is peace by righteousness (see Psalm 72). The only way this peace can be acquired is by coming to terms with Jesus Christ. However, in so doing one often stirs up conflict among those who do not understand. In another place, Jesus said, **“I came not to bring peace, but a sword.”** **“Do not think that I came to cast peace upon the earth; I came not to cast peace but a sword. For I came to set a man over against his father and a daughter against her mother and a bride against her mother-in-law, and the enemies of the man to be they of his own household”** (Matthew 10:34-36) (Author’s translation). Wherever Jesus goes, He forces a confrontation with reality. Most of the harmony between human beings apart from Christ is only

possible when there is a facade to cover up the incongruities. To deny one’s convictions for the sake of harmony does not bring about true peace but only cessation of hostilities. Jesus was never afraid of hostility. Therefore He would never back down before the Pharisees. The pursuit of peace among the godless has only led to confusion and uncertainty as to the ultimate meaning of life. The world has lost its way in the mist-shrouded moors of relativism, where there is no such thing as truth and the humanistic goals continually recede behind the horizon of human limitations. Jesus taught that man can know the truth. But where there is truth, there can be no tolerance of error.

There can be, of course, and should be tolerance for people who are the victims of error, but to accept error in the name of harmony is absurd. Of necessity then Jesus brought division wherever He went, because people were confronted with reality.

Thus, Jesus offers to the world peace—but it is His kind of peace. His kind of peace is often accompanied with hostility because it is based upon absolute truth and must bring to light the forces of darkness, which steadily resist the truth.

John said it earlier in his Gospel—**“Jesus came a Light into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”** The measure of one’s peace will be dependent upon the degree to which one walks in the Light with Christ. The effort to extract peace and harmony from Satan’s world must always be met with frustration and disappointment. In the realm of the spirit, where Christ dwells, we need never be troubled or fearful.

**“The ruler of this world is coming, and has nothing in Me.”** The Greek word for ruler—*archon*—referred to the chief ruler of the Greek city-state. The King James Version translates the word “prince,” but uses it in the Old English sense of a chief ruler, rather than in the more modern sense of the heir-apparent to a throne. God has allowed Satan a large degree of power in this world. It is only by the hand of God that His children are kept from being totally destroyed. The Christian who allows his heart to be drawn toward the things of this world will most certainly be vulnerable to Satan, who will attempt to use

the things of this world as a trap. Jesus indicated that there was nothing in Him that Satan could appeal to that would lead Him into such a trap. Often Christian people have ambitions and interests and desires that Satan can get hold of, like a handle, and shake them with. Then they hold back from following Christ, in the fear that they will lose position, or wealth, or friendships, or pleasures. If so, these are handles that Satan gets hold of to shake them with. The best response is to let the handle go, and thus be able to say with Paul, **“None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself.”** If there is anything in your life that you are clinging to, you can be sure that Satan will shake you with it. As Christ prepares to leave His disciples and return to the Father, He reminds them that His going away is very important to them. In fact He says that they ought to rejoice, because of the fact that His Father is greater than He. How can the Father be greater, if Jesus is one with the Father? The answer is in a statement already given previously—**“All of Jesus was filled with the Spirit of God, but there is more to God than Jesus.”**

# John 15:1-8

## TRANSLATION

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch in Me that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear better fruit. You are already clean [pruned] by reason of the Word which I have spoken unto you. Remain in Me, and I in you. Even as the branch is not able to bear fruit by itself, except it remain in the vine, so neither can you, except you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in Me, and I in him, this one bears much fruit; because without Me you are not able to do anything. If one does not remain in Me, he is cast out as the branch and is withered, and ones gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall happen to you. In this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and you shall become My disciples.”*

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus, The True Vine

The great revelation of God to man, which Jesus, the living Word, had been communicating during His days on the earth, was the offer of a restored relationship with God that would unite mankind with the Godhead for eternity. To symbolize the nature of this unity, Jesus used the figure of the vine and branches. It is true that some of the things that Jesus talked about were obscure, such as the time and circumstances of His second coming. However, in regard to those matters that were important for the individual to know in order to maintain a right relationship to God, He was crystal clear. That is, He was clear to the sincere seeker after truth. One way that He maintained this clarity was by the use of illustrations from nature and from daily life, that would not require one to be a philosopher or theologian to understand. Here in this discourse, Jesus likens the relationship between God and man to the living tie between the vine and its branches. The branch is joined to the vine, not as one piece of wood glued to another, but by a living union in which the branch receives its life-giving nourishment from the vine. We are thus given the liberty to believe that we are so united with

God as to receive from Him His life-giving energy.

Many religions are based upon the effort of the individual to acquire knowledge about himself and the universe and to seek, through self-discipline, to conform to the elusive forces of life about him. Such a religion is a lifeless exchange of ideas and an application of rituals and regulations. Like a dead branch, one clings to “whatever gods may be,” in the hope that one’s efforts have been adequate to merit the divine favor. However, without the revelation from God and the inner strength to appropriate it, there is always the nagging uncertainty throughout the journey as to whether or not one will attain the goal of eternal life. Some accept the uncertainty as inevitable.

The refusal to claim absolute authority appears to be a noble gesture of tolerance. In reality it gives witness to the fact that such ones have not as yet been in touch with the God of all truth. Jesus does not bother with such niceties as tolerance when the souls of men are at stake. Jesus

is the truth and He knows it, and here lays bold claim to title of the “true vine” even as He had previously, without apology, identified Himself as **“the way, the truth, and the life.”** If it be argued that Jesus did not make these claims for Himself, but rather that they were made by His disciples after Him, let it be remembered that His crucifixion by the religious leaders of the day was based upon what they considered to be “blasphemous claims” to deity.

Nor is the follower of Jesus left to depend upon his own capacity to be religious, or to satisfy God. One is rather given the assurance that the Spirit of God within him is the guarantee that he is securely held in the power of God Himself. In fact, rather than having to wait until the end of life to determine his success, he may now be

assured of his own acceptance with God. The nature of that assurance is the witness of God’s Spirit to the human spirit within, that he is a child of God (see Romans 8:16). Jesus had given such strong assurances on other occasions as in the discourse on the Good Shepherd in John 10 and the discourse on the Bread of Life in John 6. One does not need to be in doubt, because the very fact that one cares about Christ is evidence that the Spirit of God is in him. Apart from the Holy Spirit, one cannot receive the things of God, nor know them (I Corinthians 2:14). It is the life-giving flow of the Spirit of God within us that is the perpetual source of this inner sensitivity to Christ, just as it is the sap within the trunk of the tree that is the life-giving source of energy to the branches.

## John 15:1-8 (continued)

### Israel—A Branch for the Burning

The original symbolism of the vine was applied to the nation of Israel. In understanding the Bible, we must always be careful to distinguish between “interpretation” and “application.” It is not really true to say that the Bible has many interpretations. It can be said that it has many applications. Interpretation has to do with the basic meaning of the words. Application has to do with the ways in which the words may be applied. Unless there is a common meaning to words we are totally at sea in the process of communication. For instance, if I were to say that “America is a democracy,” we would have to assume that I was using the words according to their basic meaning, if there were to be any communication. There might be a considerable debate as to my exact application of that statement. Certainly, America would be taken as the designation for a particular nation. The word “democracy” has a broader meaning, but we must begin with the assumption that I am referring to a particular system of government. In general, the word democracy refers to a government wherein the people have a certain degree of involvement. That involvement varies quite considerably, including direct vote of the people at one end of the scale and vote by representatives of the people at the other end. The latter form of democracy is more precisely called a “republic.” It may be argued by some that the people really do not have that much voice in the government of America, and that the representatives do not always truly represent the will of the people, but all of that has to do with application.

There is a great deal of confusion in the Bible in the area of prophecy, because of the failure to make these distinctions. We should always begin with the assumption that the words are being used in their primary sense. Then, as it becomes

evident, we can make applications, but in a guarded way. A principle learned many years ago has been most helpful—“when the literal sense makes good sense, don’t look for any other sense.” Thus, if God promises to return Israel to its land, for example, there is no reason to assume that that is only symbolic, unless the Bible were to give us the strict liberty to do so. It is risky to put too much weight on symbolism. It is not altogether wrong, but it is risky, and must be employed with great care. Many bold statements have been made about the prophetic Scriptures that may perhaps be true, but ought to be said with moderation. Many men of God who have been very useful in the ministry of the Word, have put themselves in an awkward position in this matter by being too definitive in areas where the symbolism is not that obvious. Unfortunately, they lose credibility in other areas which are far more vital to the faith, if they do not prove correct in this one area.

Another important principle in the matter of application of symbols is that when the Scripture uses a symbol in a given application regularly, it is not sound to change that meaning. For example, sheep are regularly used to refer to God’s people. It would hardly be appropriate to force an application to the people of the world, or of Satan, who tend to be symbolized by the goat. In the case of the symbol of the lion, Jesus is symbolized as the lion of the tribe of Judah. In I Peter 5, the statement is made that Satan goes about as a roaring lion. This is not symbolizing Satan as a lion but rather saying that he goes about like a lion especially with reference to His roaring and devouring. In the matter of the serpent, even though the serpent normally symbolized evil, when it was used to symbolize the crucifixion of Christ in John 3, it must be remembered that

Jesus became sin for us when He hung on that tree. These two examples have been given in order to show that even though they may seem to be violations of the rule, they really are not.

The foregoing discussion was most important to the true understanding of the symbolism of the vine and branches here in John 15. The reason the matter is so important is that unless we handle the passage correctly the believer could be left with the impression that his salvation is quite insecure, and that if he does not perform according to certain standards he is in danger of being cut off and cast into the fire. While it is not possible, or advisable to make absolute judgments with reference to whether or not one could ever turn away from God, nevertheless the general thrust of Scripture everywhere is in the direction of assurance that our spirits rest secure in the fortress of faith under the watchful care of the "Captain of our salvation." But what, then, is the meaning of the symbolism of the vine and branches?

Throughout the Old Testament, and in a number of parables in the New Testament, the symbol of the vine and vineyard is used of Israel. Isaiah 5 is one of the most prominent chapters presenting Israel as God's vineyard. God, the Keeper of the vineyard, was dissatisfied with the fruit (idolatry), and ordered the vineyard destroyed. In the New Testament, Jesus makes reference to the vineyard in several parables, and Paul, changing the figure slightly to olives, rather than grapes, speaks of the unfruitful branch which had to be cut off (Romans 2). It must be remembered that Jesus' primary discourses were to the people of Israel, throughout His ministry on the earth. It is quite

obvious that He is referring again to Israel in the discussion in John 15. It is not that the individual who fails to perform adequately is going to be cut off, but rather that the entire nation of Israel, having failed God were still in the process of being cut off. The ultimate rejection would come within days now, when they would nail their Messiah to the cross, and Jesus knew it. The remnant of Israel who remained faithful to God, as represented by the disciples, were being purified and pruned, and would escape the judgment accorded to the unfruitful boughs. These thoughts are all very much in accord with Paul's statement in Romans 2, where he is warning the Gentile nations that if Israel of old had been cut off, being part of the original tree then they too, who were a graft rather than of the original tree, should be careful lest they also be cut off. In both passages we are dealing with an administrative judgment of God upon a group of people rather than a judgment of individuals. Incidentally, the message to the churches in the second and third of Revelation must also be seen in this light.

In summary then Jesus is here saying that whereas Israel, the children of God, were unfaithful to Him and were cut off, He, Jesus, represented the true vine who would provide the life-giving Spirit to the new family of God (His followers) but would bring them into a living and abiding relationship to God, and, through His Holy Spirit, to bear abundantly the fruit of godliness. All those of Israel who cared to join Him, as did His disciples, would not only bear fruit, but through His teachings, would be abundantly productive. But all those who chose to reject Him, would, like their forefathers of old, be cut off and cast into the fire for burning.

## John 15:1-8 (continued)

### The Discourse on the Vine—Fruitbearing

Jesus came to the earth, not to present a religious system, or to establish rules of piety, but to be the channel through which there would be imparted to mankind the eternal life of God. Accordingly, His message was filled with those imageries that breathe of life and productivity. Not only was this true of Jesus' message, but also of that living revelation of God from Christ, the Logos, beginning with the very creation of the earth. God, through the agency of Christ, charges all of His creation with the task of productivity. The more that scientists explore the universe, the more they find it vibrant with living substance. The very stars in the heavens go through their cycles of living, pulsating and dying. The life that God has given to the universe has innately within it the quality of productivity—of fruitbearing, and of replication (reproducing after its kind). The metaphor of fruitbearing is seen throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We meet it in the Garden of Eden in the "Tree of Life;" we see it in Joseph's "fruitful bough by the well" (Genesis 49); the tree "planted by the rivers of water" in Psalm 1; Israel likened to a vineyard in Isaiah 5 and again the tree with its roots budding out by the river in Jeremiah 17. In the New Testament, in addition to Jesus' own teachings, we have also numerous references to fruitfulness, as for example in Galatians 5:22 with the multiple fruit of the Spirit and finally in Revelation 22; at the final glorification there is the Tree of Life with its profusion of life-giving and healing fruits and foliage. These are, of course, only a very few of the numerous references, but they serve to show the emphasis that God places on fruitfulness as the sign of life. Perhaps one of the most penetrating statements that Jesus ever made to the Jewish people, as He sought to sort out the issues of their faith were the words, "By their fruits you shall know them."

But what is it that God wants to reveal to man in this frequent analogy of fruitbearing? It is very important for us to thoroughly analyse this meaningful metaphor. In this effort, we may begin with the following generalizations:

1. There can be no fruit without life.
2. The fruit is determined by the nature of the tree.
3. The main purpose of the fruit is not so much to produce other trees, as it is to please the planter.
4. Other fruit trees are produced by the seed within the fruit, as a by-product.
5. The quality of the fruit is determined by the quality of the care that it gets and the receptivity to that care.
6. When the fruit first appears on the tree it is hard and unpalatable, but becomes more palatable as it matures and ripens.
7. There is no possibility of adequate fruit apart from adequate nourishment from the trunk.
8. Fruitbearing is a natural process when the conditions of growth are proper.

These principles are much like the axioms of geometry. They must be observed if we are to make valid deductions about the meaning of fruitbearing as it is presented to us in the Bible. The misapplication of the symbol of fruitbearing has been responsible for much well-intentioned, but misguided activity within the church. Unfortunately, it has also been responsible for much discouragement among the believers.

But what then is intended by this analogy? The key is found in Galatians 5:22. Here we are told specifically what the fruit is that the believer bears. "Now the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, graciousness, goodness, faith,

**meekness [openness to God and man], self-control; as far as such things are concerned there is no law**" (Author's translation). It can be readily seen that fruitbearing, then, does not have to do with activities such as personal work, etc., but rather with the expression of the inner qualities of the spirit. It can also be seen that these are not qualities that one develops in order to be spiritual, but rather, possessing the Spirit within, one has these qualities naturally within one's own spirit. It does not mean that these qualities will be necessarily visible, or immediately expressed in their fullest maturity, but rather that one who possesses the Holy Spirit within will have these qualities resident within him.

The Scripture is quite clear that no one can be born again without possessing the Holy Spirit. But can it be said that all Christians possess these qualities? The answer is, yes! But, once again, we must understand the difference between the flesh and the spirit. The believer does indeed possess these qualities in the spirit, but, they are not always expressed in the flesh. When we relate to one another in the flesh we exhibit the tendencies of the natural man; when we relate to one another in the spirit, we manifest the fruit of the Spirit. That is why Paul said that he no longer relates to others in the flesh, but in the spirit (II Corinthians 5:16). When we come to others in the name of Christ, we come with the concern for their welfare, and thus manifest the attitudes of love and longsuffering; of graciousness and meekness. When we come with a greater concern for our own rights and interests, then we usually find it difficult to be gracious and open to them. In the matter of love, for example, which we have defined as caring, rather than liking, it is quite possible to be deeply concerned for one's welfare, and yet not particularly feel affection for them in a fleshly sense. In other words, to like a person and to care about their welfare are two different things. Caring is of the spirit, while liking, or affection, is of the flesh.

The same distinction between flesh and spirit must be applied to other qualities as well. In the matter of peace, for instance, it is quite possible to be

completely at peace in the spirit, and yet to be troubled in the flesh (see the Commentary on John 14). The same can be said for all of the qualities which are identified as "**the fruit of the Spirit.**" Every believer, then, possessing the Holy Spirit, does have these qualities in their own spirit, but they are not in evidence except as we function with others in the spirit. This, of course was what Paul meant when he said a few verses earlier, "**But I say, walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the desires of the flesh**" (Galatians 5:16) (Author's translation). Even the most mature believer can be tempted to have attitudes that are of the flesh, or act in ways that are fleshly. Whenever this occurs, even though that person is still a child of God, possessing the Spirit of God, and the fruit of the Spirit, he is not allowing that inner spirit to be expressed.

In John 15, Jesus speaks of the fruitful bough as requiring pruning that it may bring forth better fruit. The Greek word which is translated "more" in the King James Version can either be greater in quantity, or greater in quality. The idea of "greater in quality" fits better with the figure of fruitbearing, because in the process of pruning a fruit tree, the objective is not to gain more fruit, but better fruit. If the objective were more fruit, then one would leave more of the branches on. In the pruning process, the vine-dresser cuts out all of the dead wood, and the scraggly growth, and those cross-branches that interfere with the growth, and opens up the tree to light and air. There will, of course, be fewer branches to produce fruit, but the fruit will be of better quality. So Jesus was doing with His disciples, and so He does with us. Through the Word, and through His dealings with us, He is attempting to rid us of those things that interfere with our productivity.

Again, we must look at the concept of productivity. Often, fruitbearing has been erroneously identified with the work of evangelism or Christian service. It is as though God's great concern was to develop the "marketeting personality," whose chief reason for existence in the family of God is to further the cause. The well-worn phrase, "saved to serve,"

(which is not biblical) has promoted this general attitude. There is, of course, a great deal to be said for the exercising of the gifts of the Spirit in the responsibility of the church to evangelize the world, but the use of the symbolism of fruitbearing to teach this is completely misapplied. One plants a fruit tree, not so he can have other fruit trees, but so that he can have the fruit itself. As we have shown, the fruit that the believer bears is the fruit of the Spirit. The making of other fruit trees is a by-product of the seed within the fruit. In the misapplication of this figure, one may see fruitbearing in terms of salesmanship and statistics instead of in terms of the expression of those gracious qualities of the Spirit which in themselves will become effective instruments in drawing people to Christ.

In Jesus' use of the expression, "**Ye shall know**

**them by their fruits**" (Matthew 7:16), He was not drawing a distinction between productive and nonproductive believers, but rather showing that the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees, were not producing the fruit of godliness, but rather the thorns and thistles of legalism.

Without the Spirit of Christ within us, the fruit of godliness is impossible. All that the flesh can do is to produce an artificial substitute—a hypocritical facade. This was, of course, the basis of Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees. But, when the Spirit of Christ dwells within, making of each member of the family of God a vessel of godliness, then is the Father glorified. "**But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us**" (II Corinthians 4:7).



# John 15:9-17

## TRANSLATION

*“Even as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you remain in My love, even as I have kept My Father’s commandments and remain in His love. I have spoken these things to you in order that My joy might be in you and your joy might be fulfilled. This is My commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you. Greater love than this no one has, that one should lay down his life on behalf of his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you. I do not any longer call you servants, because the servant does not know what his lord does; but I have called you friends, because all things which I have heard from My Father I have declared to you. You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, in order that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give it to you. These things I command you, that you love one another.”*

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus’ Offer to the Disciples—His Love in Them . . .

The incredibly close, personal relationship between God and man, which Jesus has been presenting throughout this discourse, seems to be quite unrealistic, if not altogether beyond human possibility. If it was hard for the disciples to grasp (who knew Him well), it is almost incomprehensible for us who live nearly two thousand years later. As a matter of fact, very few Christians today believe deeply within themselves, that their own relationship to God actually does measure up to these standards. Even though they might admit that it ought to be true, yet very few would confess that it is, as a matter of fact, true consistently in their own lives. Most Christians feel uneasy, if not altogether dissatisfied, with the quality of their performance. When there are persistent feelings of inadequacy in any relationship, there cannot be a true sense of closeness and camaraderie. Human friendships can only endure when there is a substantial degree of mutual respect, and of the feeling that one is satisfying to the other. Human beings can accept a slave relationship to God, but that is not what Jesus has here presented. There will, of course,

always be a sense of unworthiness on the part of human beings, who stand before the God of the universe, but, generally speaking, there must be a sense that in a large degree, God is satisfied with us, or there cannot be a satisfying personal relationship to Him.

But how can one experience this kind of satisfying relationship? How can the love and joy and peace that Jesus has been offering become a reality in one’s life? As always, Jesus provides the clue—**“Remain in My love.”** He is not saying, “Continue to be a loving person,” but rather, “Continue in the love which I have for you.” One of the most common and unfortunate misconceptions about Jesus’ teachings is that they are conditions of His love, rather than guidelines to the satisfactory expression of that love. He uses, as an analogy, His own relationship to the Father. It is obvious that the keeping of the commandments was not a condition of His remaining in His Father’s love. He could never be separated from that love. In fact, Paul tells the believers in Rome that they

could never be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39).

But what then does He mean, **“If you keep My commandments, you shall remain in My love”**? We are back again to the question of what it means to “keep” His commandments. The matter was discussed in John 14 (Lesson 69), where it was pointed out that the central issue is the attitude. Respect for the Word of God, and the desire to keep it, does not imply perfect performance. It would be helpful at this point to consider I John 3, where the apostle indicates that those who are born of God cannot commit sin. In that same chapter (verse 4) the apostle defines sin for us. He uses the Greek word *anomia*, which means “lawlessness.” The use of the word “transgression” does not bring out the meaning of the Greek term. There is a vast difference

between being “lawless” and offending God because of human weakness. Lawlessness involves indifference to, or disrespect for the law of God. When the Spirit of Christ comes into one’s spirit, one can never again be indifferent to the law of God. We could paraphrase John’s statement in verse 9 by saying, “He that has been born of God cannot be lawless, or indifferent to the law of God.” If it were literally true that anyone who sinned in the sense of offending God, were either not born again, or would lose God’s love, then who on the face of the earth would be saved? What is, in fact, true is that when we possess the Holy Spirit in our spirits, we do possess the love of God within, according to Galatians 5:22. The reader is referred to the previous lessons on John 15. We must also refer the reader to the definition of *agape* love in John 3:16 of the Commentary (Lesson 12).

## John 15:9-17 (continued)

### And His Joy!

“These things I have spoken to you in order that My joy might be in you and that your joy might be fulfilled.” And now Jesus talks of joy! But soon He will be in the hands of His enemies! The villainy of the human heart will soon come to the full and the very Son of God will be drenched in its venomous issue. How can He speak of joy? Once again we must resort to careful definition. Just what does the word joy really mean? To most people, joy conveys the idea of happiness, delight, pleasure, exuberance. To the Greeks, who gave us the word that Jesus used, the word meant something much deeper. For these more surface emotions, they used another word—*hedone*—which was, of course, the basis of the name *hedonist*, the name of an ancient Greek society whose whole focus was on sensual pleasure. The word that Jesus uses is *chara*—one of the richest words in the New Testament. It is the root of a cluster of words which have to do with the great flow of divine benevolence to man and through man. From it come the following: *chairō*—to rejoice; *charis*—grace; *charisma*—a divine gift; *charizomai*—to forgive; and *eucharisto*—to give thanks.

As the Greeks used it, the word was deep enough to be appropriate as a response to the exhilaration of the contest and of the battle. Thus Paul properly uses it in Philippians 2:17: “**But if also I be poured out as drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.**” And James can say, “**Count it all joy when you fall into various testings**” (James 1:2). Again Paul, in great victory cry says to the Ephesian elders, as he faced certain persecution at the hands of his enemies in Jerusalem, “**But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have**

**received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God**” (Acts 20:24). The word “joy,” then, as Jesus and Paul and the other New Testament writers used it meant far more than pleasure or delight or exuberance. It was more akin to the exhilaration felt by the athlete in his competition, or the warrior in the challenge of the battle. A good example of this is seen in David’s description of the sun in Psalm 19. He said that the sun “. . . **rejoices as a strong man to run a race.**” The athlete coming from the contest is in physical agony from the supreme exertion, yet his heart is exhilarated from the sense of a contest well fought. Just so, the Christian, besieged by the enemy, wounded and weary, yet in the spirit there is the exhilaration that comes from the presence of Christ within, sharing the battle with us.

Again it must be noted that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. As in the case of love, true joy cannot really be comprehended by the human mind. Again it is not a matter of learning the meaning of joy so we can experience it, but rather of the Holy Spirit expressing that joy through us as He dwells in our spirits. The human mind is thwarted in its pursuit of joy, because it does not really know exactly what to pursue. Like happiness, it is one of those things that eludes us when we approach it. It is quite possible for one to be deeply distressed in terms of mental attitude; even to be in despair, and yet to have a deep sense of well-being in the spirit—the lift that comes from sensing that Christ is there. Paul was often in this condition. To the Corinthian believers he confessed, “**For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning our afflictions which took place in Asia, that we were weighed down beyond strength, so that we despaired even of life; but we ourselves had the sentence**

**of death in ourselves, in order that we may not rest our confidence upon ourselves but upon God who raises the dead . . .”** (II Corinthians 1:8,9) (Author’s translation). Also to the Corinthians, he shared other distressing situations, as for example in Macedonia—**“For when we came unto Macedonia we had not any rest in our flesh but we were afflicted in all things; without were fightings, within were fears”** (II Corinthians 7:5). Thus it is not only possible, but quite common, for the believer to be going through distressing circumstances in the flesh; to be extremely burdened; to be in distress; to despair even of life; and yet to have the joy of the Lord in our spirits. The battle with Satan may be raging in our flesh, and yet the presence of Christ in our spirit brings us the steady flow of divine benevolence. Thus it is that Jesus could speak of His joy on the road to Golgatha, and thus He could offer to us the fulfillment of that same joy within.

It is quite normal then, for a Christian to be

struggling in the flesh and to have moments of distress and disappointment and sometimes anxiety in the flesh and yet, to have Christ still reigning in the spirit. If Paul had such experience then surely we can accept it as normative in our lives. Our task is to take Him into our spirits; His task is to express that power and presence through us. As long as we are on the earth, we will never be in a position where the flesh is not a threat to us. There is no such thing as a Christian who has completely conquered the flesh so as to be troubled with it never more. There will be times all through the believer’s life on the earth when he will slip into fleshly attitudes or actions, even if the prevailing attitude is in the spirit. Whenever we relate to people or circumstances in the flesh, we can expect the normal disappointments and anxieties of the flesh to prevail. When we relate to people and circumstances in the spirit, then we can expect the attitudes of the spirit to prevail. Thus, in the midst of adversity, the joy of Christ is fulfilled in our spirits.

## John 15:9-17 (continued)

### Jesus Chooses His Friends and Prepares to Die for Them

Jesus had come to the earth for the purpose of reuniting God and His creation. But, He was more than the herald of a divine revelation, or the peacemaker between two opposing factions. He was the very projection of God, bringing eternal life to creatures caught in the web of mortality. He came not to acquire slaves, or servants, whose chief purpose would be to expedite God's purposes on the earth, but rather to restore him to the glory originally intended for him in an eternal oneness with the God of the universe.

Thus, Jesus came to choose eternal "friends" for God. But, we must first understand what He means by "friends," and secondly on what basis He chooses His friends. Our English word, "friend," like so many other words, has been so used and abused that it no longer has significance. We must, therefore, go back to the Greek word *phileo* for the true meaning of the word. We find the semantic roots of the word in the Greek classical literature. Here, the word has a number of uses, but basically has to do with the human emotions of feeling and favor. The parallel word, *agape* was used in expressing the idea of caring and respect, which was more an act of the will. The word *phileo* adds to the caring and respect of *agape* the dimension of taking pleasure in the caring. True *agape* love is an expression of the spirit rather than the flesh. It does not exclude the idea of *phileo* but neither does it emphasize that aspect. In terms of the *agape* love which God had for the world, the caring is lifted quite beyond the realm of human emotion. The *agape* love of God arises out of His essential Being and conveys a sense of total responsibility for the welfare of mankind. In this sense it is, of course, a far deeper word than *phileo*.

The Greeks used the word *phileo* to describe the attitude of their gods in exercising their will on

the earth. In this sense the idea is that they took pleasure in what they were doing. The Greek historian, Herodotus, uses the word in connection with the battle between Croesus of Lydia and Cyrus of Persia. When Cyrus asked Croesus why he turned to be his enemy, Croesus responded that it was what the gods wanted (or took pleasure in). Thus, the word *phileo* conveys the idea of one who finds pleasure in another, or who has found favor with another.

As these words came over into the New Testament, they were enriched by the touch of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in using this word with His disciples, indicates that they have found favor with Him. This divine favor is expressed in His receiving them not just as servants, but rather as those with whom He desires to share that which He has received of the Father. The English word, "friend," is not strong enough to describe this kind of relationship. In qualifying their friendship on the basis of "doing what He commanded them," He was not making the keeping of the law a condition of becoming His friend, but rather He was showing that love for others (which was His commandment) was the natural expression of those who had come into His friendship. Again, in commanding them to love one another, Jesus was using the word *agape*—to care about them. He was not saying that to be His friend they must feel affection for everyone, or engage in social work, or never offend anyone, He was merely saying that they could not be His friend and not care about those who were His followers. In other words, His friends must be their friends and His enemies, their enemies. He wanted them to understand that if they would be His friends they would be the enemies of the world, and if they would be the friends of the world they would be His enemies.

So, being a friend of Jesus meant sharing with

Him what He shared from God, and caring with Him as He cared for others. But, on what basis did He choose them as His friends? He chose those who came to Him. **“As many as received Him, He gave to them the authority to become the sons of God”** (John 1:12). Anyone could come to Jesus who, recognizing their need, would turn to Him. But only God could give them the power to be united with Him. No one, coming with a humble and open heart, would be turned away. **“And he who comes to Me I will not in any way cast out”** (John 6:37).

But what of His appointment to the bearing of fruit? **“I have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.”** One cannot be a friend of Christ without possessing His Spirit within. And when

one possesses His Spirit within, there will be the expression of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, as we learned in the last section, is the fruit of godliness. When one is the friend of Christ, he is appointed unto godliness. And, as the spirit is eternal, so is godliness eternal in the hearts of all of those who possess Him.

Shortly, Jesus will die for His friends. They, who are His friends, will one day be called upon to die for Him. He reminds them that His going away is very important to them. In fact He says that they ought to rejoice, because of the fact that His Father is greater than He. How can the Father be greater, if Jesus is one with the Father? The answer is in a statement already given previously—all of Jesus was filled with the Spirit of God, but there is more to God than Jesus.

# John 15:18-27

## TRANSLATION

*“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me first before you. If you were of the world, the world would befriend its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word which I spoke to you, ‘The servant is not greater than his lord.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all of these things they will do unto you for My name’s sake, because they have not known the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they do not have a screen to shield their sin. He who hates Me hates also My Father. If I had not done among them the works which no other one has done, they would not have had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But [this is so] in order that the word might be fulfilled which was written in their law that ‘They hated Me without cause.’ Whenever the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father, that one shall bear witness concerning Me, and you also are bearing witness, because you are with Me from the beginning.”*

## COMMENTARY

### To Be the Friend of Christ Means to be Rejected by the World

The friends of Jesus do not have an easy time in this world. It is not so much because of the antagonism of unbelievers of themselves, but rather it is the wrath of Satan, the Prince of this world, who pits his forces against anything that belongs to the kingdom of God. Those who have not accepted Christ as their Master, must then have Satan as their master. There is no other possibility. One is either in the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Satan. There are a great many nonbelievers who are not aware of this. They are ones who have not made any effort to be part of the kingdom of God, but neither have they been disposed to oppose Him. They like to feel that they are neutral in the matter, but this cannot possibly be. There are many ways in which such ones are the tools of Satan against God’s kingdom, without the least bit of awareness that they are being so used. Jesus said, **“He that is not with Me is against Me”** (Matthew 12:30). One may be aghast to think that that lovely friend, or relative, or neighbor, with whom one has had so

much pleasant association, and yet who is not a Christian, could possibly be even a member of the kingdom of Satan much less a tool in his hands. But according to the Word of God it is nevertheless true. Paul says, **“Wherefore the mind of the flesh is an enemy toward God; for it is not submissive to the law of God, for it is not even able to be; but they who are in the flesh are not able to please God. If one has not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him”** (Romans 8:8,9) (Author’s translation). And James says, **“Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”** (James 4:4). So, according to the Scripture, anyone who is not the friend of Christ is His enemy. One may be a citizen of an enemy country, and never engage in warfare. In wartime, one might be a citizen of a country that is an aggressor against another country, and not in anyway agree with the aggression, and yet in many ways be part of the war, just by going to work each day and thereby helping to support the economy of that country. This is not

something which anyone could be blamed for, and yet the reality of life is such that it is so. There are many ways in which a “live and let live” philosophy of a friendly but neutral neighbor can indirectly support the processes of this world through which Satan attempts to devour the people of God.

But some will say, “I have a number of friends that are not Christians, and they certainly do not hate me. In fact, they have been most helpful to me.” We must then determine what Jesus means by the word, “hate.” On the surface, it seems that Jesus sometimes contradicted Himself. On the one hand He told us that we ought to love everyone, even our enemies. But on the other hand, He told His disciples, **“If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple”** (Luke 14:26). Furthermore, Paul, talking about the election of Israel, quotes the Word of God to Malachai in the Old Testament, **“Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated”** (Romans 9:13). The answer is that there is a usage of the word “hate” which has to do rather with “rejection” or “setting aside” another person. It is in this sense that Jesus uses the word to His disciples. It is necessary for them, if they are going to follow Christ, to place Him first in their considerations even at the necessity of setting aside human relationships in order to follow His will. In the matter of Israel, it was an administrative choice. God accepted Jacob as the future leader of His people, and rejected, or set aside Esau. The judgments which came upon Esau later were on the basis of Esau’s own carelessness, and not because he had been passed over as the leader of the people.

Sometimes, in the case of Satan and his hosts, there is wrath and rage connected with the rejection. Peter reminds the believers that their **“adversary, the devil, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”** (I Peter 5:8). But often, this “hatred” takes the form merely of discrediting, or rejecting the way of life of the believers. Sometimes it takes the form of actual opposition, as for example, being

passed over for a job promotion. Sometimes it takes the form of petty jealousies, or envy, or contempt on the part of a nonbeliever for a believer. Often the attack has been violent and vicious, as in the case of actual martyrdom for the cause of Christ. In almost every period of world history, there has been, somewhere in the world, a pocket of persecution against the Body of Christ.

The hatred accorded to Jesus was completely unreasonable. His service to the people was gratuitous and of great benefit. He moved among them quietly and unobtrusively, with cures and comforts for all who came to Him. He did, of course, speak out boldly and often scathingly against the Pharisees and Saducees who were the religious leaders of the day. However, He posed no threat to them whatsoever, politically and, had they really believed in the validity of their appointment from God and their message, He should have posed no threat religiously. The Pharisees had the advantage of being deeply entwined in the life and traditions of the people. Of course, had they known God and His Word, and had they not been blinded to the truth, they would have seen Jesus, not as a threat, but as a Savior. Still, had it only been the religious leaders that hated Jesus, it would have been understandable. The incredible thing was that the leaders were so readily able to stir up the people against Jesus so that when these leaders finally succeeded in having Him brought to trial, the people, whom He had cured and comforted, *en masse* called for His blood. The deeds of Jesus should have been proof enough to every Jew that their Messiah had surely come. To the faithful remnant they did so, and they rejoiced in their salvation. But for the masses, the very miracles which brought faith, became like a searchlight penetrating the religious facade behind which they hid and exposed the sin of unbelief. Soon the Spirit of Truth would come and give witness to the reality of the claims of Jesus and all would be utterly without excuse. The disciples of Jesus, too, would give their witness, and suffer the same treatment as their Master at the hands of Satan’s army of the godless.

It is well for the believer to remember that he is living in a hostile environment. He is part of a world that is ruled by Satan. He will have adversities that he does not understand, and often cannot find a reason for, but behind which will be the hand of the archenemy of Christ. Many times there will be animosity between a Christian and a non-Christian, and yet the non-Christian will not even realize why he feels the way that he does. Satan will do everything in his power to keep the believers from prospering or finding peace or happiness in his world. Jesus, on the other hand, enters into the picture, and stays the hand of the enemy. Were it not for the power of God, the Christian would be utterly consumed in this world. As it is, the Christian is often allowed to taste adversity, for God's own purposes. These purposes may not be understood by the believer

at the time, but they are most important in God's mind, or He would not allow the adversity. It is wrong to assume that believers should always be immediately delivered whenever there is a touch of adversity in their lives. If God did this for us, He would be like the overindulgent parent who shields the child from all distress, and thereby seriously affects the child's development. The world is full of "spoiled brat" adults, who never grew up.

Child of God, beloved of the Father, and besieged of the enemy, know that you are in company with Christ. **"If you suffer with Him, you will also be glorified with Him"** (Romans 8:17). God has promised you **". . . beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"** (Isaiah 61:3).



# John 16:1-15

## TRANSLATION

*“I have spoken these things to you, in order that you may not be caused to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think that he is offering up a service to God. And these things they will do because they have not known the Father nor Me. But I have said these things to you, in order that when their hour comes, you may remember them, that I said them to you. I have not said these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going away to the One who sent Me, and no one of you is asking Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. But I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And when that One has come, He will expose the world and convict it concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment; concerning sin on the one hand, because they do not believe on Me; concerning righteousness on the other, because I am going away to the Father, and you will no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. I have yet many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them now. But when that One comes, the Spirit of Truth, He shall lead you into all truth; for He shall not speak from Himself, but whatsoever He hears He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming. That One will glorify Me, because He will receive from Me and declare it to you. All things which My Father has are mine; for this reason I said that He [the Holy Spirit] is receiving from Me, and will declare it to you.”*

## COMMENTARY

### When Jesus Returns to Glory, the Paraclete Will Come—And Persecution

While Jesus was on the earth, He had been a constant source of support and strength and guidance to the disciples. Now He was returning to glory and He was preparing them for the prospect of getting along without Him. What would they do? They would enter into the greatest experience that man can ever have—the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would no longer be with them only, He would be in them in the person of His own Holy Spirit. But, it is necessary for Jesus to return to glory before He can send His Holy Spirit to dwell within them. Thus, He tells them that it is “expedient” for Him to go away.

As Jesus shared with His disciples the necessity of His departure, sorrow filled their hearts.

However, Jesus encouraged them to believe that their sorrow would soon turn to joy. During all of the ages of God’s dealings with His people on the earth, He had been with them, beside them, above them, around them, but never before in them. Now, His eternal presence would seal their glorification and give to them the capacity to cope with the pressures and persecutions that they were sure to encounter while on the earth.

But, He must forewarn them of things to come. Not only would they suffer persecution (the Jews were hardly strangers to that), but many of them would be slain, and those who killed them would believe that they were doing it as a sacramental offering to God. But, perhaps even more

devastating to a Jew, beyond the fear of death, was being excommunicated, or put out of the synagogue. To a Jew, to be put out of the synagogue was worse than losing one's citizenship in a country. (For a poignant look at the impact of being put out of the synagogue, one is referred to the Commentary on John 9.)

The world would indeed be a hostile environment for the believer to dwell in. But, he would not be alone. The penetrating power of the Holy Spirit would search out every dark corner of evil and ultimately there would be a new heaven and a new earth **"wherein dwells righteousness."** Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes He will expose the deceit and iniquity of the human heart, and all the world will be guilty before God. The Greek word which John uses to describe this conviction is the word *eleḡcho*. It is a word which is employed to describe the kind of exposure that brings about conviction. For example, the historian Herodotus used the word in describing a scene from the ancient story of the stealing away of Helen, wife of Menelaus by the son of King Priam of Troy. As they sailed back to Troy, the ship was blown off course, then landed in Egypt. The Pharaoh of Egypt (Proteus) was attempting to find out what they were doing with Helen. Alexandrus was being deceitful about the matter, but the crew of the ship wanted to make the truth known. Herodotus says that they exposed (*eleḡcho*) the entire matter to Proteus. This now is the same word used by Jesus in describing the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world of its evil. The Holy Spirit will search out and expose every element of evil in the world. This exposure is such that there will be no question whatsoever about the justice of God in convicting the entire world. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will "convict" the world concerning sin, because of their not believing in Christ. Misdeeds are only a symptom of sin. The essence of sin is unbelief. He says further that the Holy Spirit will "convict" the world concerning righteousness, because He was going back to the Father and they would not see Him anymore. Jesus indeed vanished from

the earth after His resurrection, to be seen no more. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead and restored to the Father was the irrefutable evidence that Jesus was what He said He was—the eternal Son of God. The word "righteousness" (*dikaïos*) really means "rightness." There are multiplied thousands of human theories about God, about man, about the world, about life, but God's way is the only right way, or way of righteousness. The resurrection of Christ confirmed His claim to being **"the Way, the Truth, and the Life."** Jesus considered unbelief to be a matter of the will and thus charged those who failed to accept Him as the true revelation of God, with stubbornness and blindness rather than forgivable ignorance. He said, **"Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have eternal life"** (John 5:40). Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would "convict" the world concerning judgment, because **"the prince of this world is judged."** Throughout the Scripture, from beginning to end, God has warned of judgment to come. Also throughout the Scripture from beginning to end, man has ignored that warning. Now as the Holy Spirit comes into the world, He exposes the stubborn refusal of man to accept the truth. Whether man can see it now or not, or whether he chooses to believe it or not, Satan has indeed received his sentence from God. He has already been judged. In God's own time, Satan will begin serving his eternal sentence.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. He comes willingly and gladly to the heart of everyone who seeks Him, to reveal that truth. Over and over again, through His ministry, Jesus pressed the point that anyone who would seek Him would surely find Him. **"If any man will to do His will, he shall know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or I am speaking from Myself."** Again, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews reiterates this theme, **"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"** (Hebrews 11:6 KJV).

# John 16:16-33

## TRANSLATION

*[Jesus said], “A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me.” Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this that He is saying to us, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me?’ and, ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” They were saying then, “What is this that He is saying, ‘A little while?’ We do not know what He is saying.” Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you questioning with one another concerning this, that I said, ‘A little while and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me?’ I tell you the absolute truth, that you shall weep and mourn, but the world shall rejoice; you shall be full of sorrow, but your sorrow shall become joy. Whenever the woman gives birth, she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when the child has been born, she no longer remembers the affliction on account of the joy that a man has been born into the world. And you therefore have sorrow now; but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy no one takes from you. And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. I tell you the absolute truth, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give it to you. Until now you have not asked anything in My name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled. I have spoken these things to you in parables; the hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in parables, but I will declare to you plainly concerning the Father. In that day you shall ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father concerning you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came out from the Father and I came into the world; again I am leaving the world, and I am going to the Father.” His disciples were saying to Him, “Behold, now You are speaking boldly, and You are not speaking in parables at all. Now we know that You know all things, and do not need anyone to ask You; in this we believe that You have come from God.” Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Behold the hour is coming, and has come [is already upon us and the process has already begun], that each one has been scattered unto his own things, and has left Me alone; though I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. I have spoken these things to you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you have affliction [pressure], but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”*

## COMMENTARY

### After Jesus’ Departure—Sorrow and Joy; Affliction and Peace

For several years now the disciples had been with Jesus in trials and triumphs; in pain and persecution; in weakness and in woe. It was natural that they should develop a strong human attachment to Him. They had left all that was dear to them to cast their lot with Him, and, were apparently not paying attention to the hints and clues along the way that one day He would

be taken from them in the physical sense. Since the Holy Spirit had not as yet been given, lifting their sights to the higher plane, we would not really have expected anything different. Nor was there anything wrong with their being committed to Him at this level. The problem was only, as Jesus would later point out, that the flesh is not of itself strong enough to sustain the kind of

commitment that would be necessary in the fulfilling of God's purposes for them on the earth. Later, the apostle Paul, imbued with the Holy Spirit, reminds the Corinthians (II Corinthians 5:16) that his own allegiance to Christ had to be, of necessity, one of the spirit and not of the flesh. It is not uncommon for human beings to be swept up by grand causes. In fact, the remnant of the image of God within man often struggles to be free from the egoistic prison of self-interest, and pursue causes more worthy of the nobler meaning of life which he intuitively senses within. Unfortunately, such commitments, apart from the Holy Spirit, have nothing to do with salvation, or becoming part of the family of God.

So now Jesus is confronted with the task of explaining to His disciples why He must go away. Apparently, in spite of all Jesus' words to the contrary, the disciples still assumed that Jesus had come now to set up the new kingdom, and that they would be important aides to Him in the enterprise. As it suddenly began to dawn upon them that Jesus really meant that He was going away, sorrow filled their hearts. Jesus had often before chided His fleshly followers for their faithlessness. Now He is patient with them—almost gentle—as He once again explains the vital necessity of the coming of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them within for the spiritual battle which lay ahead.

Jesus did not rebuke them for their tears, but comforted them in the reality that their tears would be turned into triumph. The enemy would prematurely claim the victory, unaware that in reality their heinous crime against the Son of God would seal their own doom. In these final words to His disciples, we hear the echo of His constantly recurring theme: "**The Spirit is the life-giving element; the flesh profits nothing**" (John 6:6) (Author's translation). The entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, trumpets this message. All that is of the world is transient and disintegrating; only that which is of the spirit abides forever. Shortly Jesus' resurrection will give startling reality to this

theme, and He will become the forerunner of all who seek eternal life through Him.

Meanwhile, when He has returned to the Father, and the Holy Spirit has come to the hearts of His followers, it will then be their privilege and right to come to the Father directly as agents of Christ (in His name), empowered by the Holy Spirit, to commune with the Father and to make known to Him their petitions.

As Jesus was talking to His disciples, the dawn came creeping in and in a moment the sunlight of truth shattered the darkness as the disciples exclaimed, "**Now You are speaking boldly! . . . now we know that You know all things! . . . by this we believe that You have come from God!**" Even now the Holy Spirit was doing His work in the hearts of Jesus' followers. The patience of Jesus was amply rewarded.

The light was there; belief was there; but still Jesus must remind them of the weakness of the flesh. "**Do you believe? . . . you will be scattered and you will desert Me.**" Among the very last words that Jesus uttered before His crucifixion He reminded His disciples again that "**the Spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak**" (Matthew 26:41 KJV).

And now as Jesus concludes His discourse and prepares for Gethsemane, the garden of His agony, He sends forth to His disciples a shaft of light that will hold them in the midnight hours—"I have spoken these things to you that in Me you might have peace. In the world you have affliction; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Again, Jesus reminds His disciples for the last time that there is a place of peace within the spirit in spite of the affliction and turbulence in the flesh. The disciples must understand that there is nothing for them in this world except affliction and tribulation. In fact, the Greek word translated in the King James text by "tribulation" (*thlipsis*) really means "pressure." As long as they live in this world, the disciples will be under pressure, because the enemy will never let them rest. But, as long as they keep their

focus upon Christ, their spirits will be at peace. The presence of the Spirit of Christ within their spirit equalizes the pressure so that the world does not crush them. It is like the submarine which has been so designed that the pressure within the hull is equal to the tons of pressure from the sea around it, else it would be crushed like an eggshell. The believer is preserved from destruction by the enemy, not because he is good, or strong, or spiritually astute, but simply because the Spirit of Christ dwells within, and is more than equal to the pressures of the enemy without. It is not because our faith is adequate, but because the faith of Christ within us is adequate. Our human minds are not capable of

gathering and sustaining enough evidence in this world to reason our way to peace. The peace that we have within, because Christ is within, is what Paul means when he says, “**The peace of God which passes all understanding, shall garrison your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus**” (Philippians 4:7) (Author’s translation). Jesus has so thoroughly overcome the enemy that He can refer to His victory in the perfect tense, which in Greek is used to refer to action that stands completed in a timeless way. The kingdom of God, which belongs to the realm of the spirit, shall never be overcome by the kingdom of Satan, which belongs to the realm of the flesh.



# John 17:1-5

## TRANSLATION

*Jesus said these things, and lifted up His eyes unto heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, in order that the Son may glorify You, even as You have given to Him authority over all flesh, so that with regard to all whom You have given to Him, He may give to them eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You upon the earth, the work which You have given Me to do I have completed. And now, glorify Me, Father, with Your own glory which I had with You before the world was.”*

## COMMENTARY

### At the Crucial Hour—Jesus Prays for His Own

Jesus stands at the threshold of the most crucial hour of human history. In His life on the earth, Jesus has plumbed the depths of His very being, as He interacted with the human condition. Now He comes to that moment when the meaning of it all will be realized. He pours out His heart in the most magnificent prayer ever addressed to God.

“**The hour has come**”—the grandest moment of human history! It is the moment when the way will be open for human flesh to be transformed into spiritual reality; when the creature could be made one with the Creator and thus to become a participant with God in the eternal vastness of all that He is and all that He has made. Only through the sacrifice of the Son of God would this be possible—only then would the Spirit of God be able to enter human spirits and effect the transformation. Neither thoughts, nor beliefs, nor deeds, however true, however good, can lift the creature to be one with the Creator. Thus the ministry of Jesus on the earth, essential to the process of redemption though it was, replete with revelation of truth and deeds of mercy and miracle, was not, apart from His own death and resurrection, adequate to bring about the transformation from

earthbound creature to spirit being, eternally one with God.

“**Glorify Your Son, in order that Your Son may glorify You.**” The Father will glorify the Son on the earth in the power of the resurrection; and the Son will glorify the Father in the fulfilling of all that He was ordained to do in the recovery of the race. And, in the consummation of all things, all the redeemed from among mankind shall share in this ultimate glory.

Jesus’ prayer for glorification sweeps the entire universe for time and eternity. The word “glorification” was defined in some detail in a previous lesson (63), but let it here be said that when the word is applied to God, it refers to His entire substance. The glory of God is the limitless expression of Himself in all of His being; in all of His power; in all of His creation. But the glorifying of God is the fulfillment of all the purposes that God intends, and that fulfillment manifested for all to behold. Thus, Jesus, in completing that which God had intended for Him to do on the earth, sets the stage for the fulfillment of all of His eternal purposes for the universe.

While the Hebrew word for glory, *kabod*, implies

“weightiness,” the Greek word, *doxa*, implies “appearance.” From this perspective, it has to do with that which is seen. That which one possesses intrinsically is one’s substance (*kabod*). *Doxa* glory involves the manifesting of that substance in external expression. The whole idea of glorification would not have been applicable had there been no creation. The death and resurrection of Christ was the key to the bringing to a harmonious consummation all of God’s purposes for the universe, so that from the great galaxies of the outer reaches of space down to the most minute element of earth, all would be a majestic expression of the glory of God.

**“This is eternal life, that they may know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”** Fallen man has been lifted by the redemption in Christ Jesus, to be restored to the glory that God had originally intended for him. The entrance of the Holy Spirit provides the quality of life necessary to join with God in His eternal existence. There is only one true God and one true revelation of God which is Jesus Christ. There is no eternal life possible apart from

knowing God and the projected revelation of God—Jesus Christ. Here is where tolerance ends, where tolerance means that we must accept the possibility of truth of other systems. If tolerance means that we accept with benevolence another person, even though we reject their system of beliefs, then tolerance is, of course, in order. But, if by tolerance we must insist that there is no such thing as absolute truth, but that everyone has as much chance of being right, then this statement by Jesus regarding the only true God and the only true revelation, Himself, must be seen as eliminating the possibility that there might be many systems of belief on the matter of eternal life. There is no way to become part of God’s eternal glory, than by identifying with His Son, Jesus Christ. Moreover, the pursuit of truth by those who are members of the family of God, must be centralized in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Jesus (the Word made flesh) gives voice to Christ, the eternal Logos (Word), when He says, **“And now glorify Me, Father, with Your own glory which I had with You before the world was.”**

## John 17:6-12

### TRANSLATION

*“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You have given them to Me, and they have kept Your Word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever You have given to Me are from You; because the words which You have given to Me I have given to them, and they have received them; and they have known truly that I have come out from You, and they have believed that You have sent Me. I am asking concerning them; I am not asking concerning the world, but concerning those whom You have given to Me, because they are Yours; and all my things are Yours, and Your things are Mine; and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world; but these are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name whom You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. When I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name whom You had given Me; and I have guarded them, and no one of them is lost except the ‘son of destruction’, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”*

### COMMENTARY

#### The Prayer of Jesus—Responsibility for the Family of God Acknowledged

Into the hands of Jesus, God had committed the destiny of the human race. God had chosen to reveal Himself to man through a living revelation, personalized in His own Son, Jesus.\* God had created the human race, and in fact all of the universe, as an expression of His own being and power. Perhaps it could be said that such a creation was inevitable, given the power of life within Him. In keeping with the excellence of His creative power, it was appropriate that the being whom He made, should have a free will, and should not be merely a puppet or an automaton. However, the complexity of His creation also precluded any guarantees that His creatures would function in keeping with the glory that He intended for them. In other words, their free will left them also the possibility of making wrong choices. If God is omniscient (all-knowing), as the Bible seems to indicate, then it would also be true that human behavior had been predictable.

Thus, God would have known ahead of time that His creation would come to grief. Again, if He knew that a large segment of His creation would come to grief, He also knew that there would be a sufficient amount of success to make the act of creating a better choice than not creating. (It should be noted that when it comes to analyzing the purposes of God, we are involved to a certain degree in speculation. It is not for the creature to defend or justify the Creator).

The ultimate purpose of God was, evidently, to develop a race of beings, much like Himself, equipped with the power of choice, with whom He could eternally share His glory. The essential nature of these beings was exemplified in Jesus. The apostle John said in his Epistle, **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been made manifest what we shall be. Because we know that when He appears, we shall be**

\* For a discussion of the implications of Jesus as the living revelation of God, the reader is referred to the first lesson on John, and also to the author’s pamphlet, *Christ the Living Word*.

**like Him, because we shall see Him even as He is**" (I John 3:2) (Author's translation). Thus, Jesus becomes at once the revelation of what God is and the revelation of what God intends man to be. The ultimate fulfillment of our Christ-like nature will take place at the glorification when God will have brought together His whole family from every corner of the earth and will dwell with them throughout eternity. Meanwhile, it should be noted that we do not become like Jesus either by religious or by social efforts. Only the Holy Spirit can transform a human spirit to be like Christ. In a certain sense Jesus cannot be seen as an example for fallen man, since He took upon Him the nature of Adam before the Fall. There are some respects in which we are not like Him on the earth, but will be transformed into His image by the Spirit

of Christ in our final glorification.

But now Jesus is addressing the Father with reference to those whom the Father has given to Him on the earth. To whom does He refer in the phrase—**"those whom You have given Me"**? In general, He is referring to the entire race of mankind whom God had entrusted to His care. Yet, in another sense, He is referring to those who will believe on Him through the ministry of the disciples, and the activity of the body of believers in the ages to come. In still another sense, He is referring to members of the family of God which had its roots in the Old Testament patriarchs, and who now have come to Jesus as their Messiah. This is no doubt what Jesus meant when He reminds the Father that they had been His and were now given to Himself.

## John 17:6-12 (continued)

### The Prayer of Jesus—He Reviews His Work with the Disciples, and is Satisfied

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” To manifest something means to make it apparent, or knowable—to bring to light that which is obscured in darkness. If one reads a book of any merit, one wants to know something about the author. Accordingly, most significant books carry with them, often on the jacket of the book, a biographical sketch. This is most helpful if the author is not particularly well known. Unless one can find such a biographical sketch, the author remains a name only. His name has not yet been manifested. When Jesus came to the earth, one of His chief tasks was to make manifest the name of the Author of the universe. Accordingly, He lived among men, and brought to light through His own life on the earth, that which could be known of God. It was a service to mankind of incalculable value.

From the vastness of a seemingly endless myriad of heavenly bodies, to the inscrutable intricacies of submicroscopic elements, the universe remains to the natural mind, an endless enigma. And even to the scientist, the so-called “scientific proofs,” are not proofs at all, but only plateaus of understanding that make possible further search. The true scientist never assumes that he has come to the absolute and final thesis that will never have to be scratched. For one to come into the world with the bold assertion that he represented the absolute truth of God and that men could find in his person, the revelation of the meaning of God and the universe, was at once the most significant episode in human history, and the most incredible.

The serious seeker after truth could not in anyway accept such a claim without some considerable question. Nor would it be possible for the human mind to accept it at all apart from a touch of the

very Spirit of the God who was purported to be revealed in Jesus.

If it be asked how the claims of Jesus can be proved two thousand years after His existence on the earth, the answer is that it cannot be proved to the human mind. There can be no logical proof of Jesus’ claims since there is no way to test the validity at the absolute level. Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 2 (already quoted several times) is most appropriate here: **“But the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (v.14) (Author’s translation). This verse tells us that the things of God can be discerned only in the spirit realm, and not in the mental realm as such. If it be asked how one can prove to another the reality of Jesus, the answer must be that there is no way to prove the reality of Jesus to another person. Only the Spirit of God can do this. We can declare to another the claims of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus as given us in the New Testament, but we cannot give absolute proof that these claims are valid. The Holy Spirit must do this for Himself.

There are, of course, throughout history, many confirming evidences of the existence of Jesus, and there are countless episodes in the experiences of His followers that give further confirming evidence, but only the power of God can take these evidences and translate them into conviction in the heart and mind of the believer. The plain teaching of Scripture is, however, that anyone who seeks God with all his heart will surely find Him (Jeremiah 29:13 and Hebrews 11:6). Thus, when one approaches the search for God with an open heart, one may be assured that the Spirit of God will bring about the conviction within the heart

that He is real. When that conviction comes, it persists within the spirit in spite of all the human logic that wants to call it merely a subjective experience.

Jesus came to the earth in part to bring to light the truth and knowledge of God, to all who would receive it. This revelation was made known to the disciples, who would be responsible for seeing to it that the revelation was dispersed throughout the world. It was essential that these who would be the heralds of the divine proclamation, should experience the personal impact of the Son of God upon their lives for a long period of time on the earth. It is their experience of this impact upon themselves personally that is made known to us in the Gospels. Our confidence that these Gospels do indeed reflect the true life and teachings of Jesus is again dependent upon the conviction brought to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit within. To the natural mind this seems to be arguing in circles. We believe the testimony of these disciples in the Gospels because the Holy Spirit makes it real to us. On the other hand, we know about the Holy Spirit through the words of the Scripture. While this is not logical in the human sense, it is perfectly consistent in the divine realm. Man must continuously be in a position of utter dependence upon God for life and truth. It was his very independence of spirit that brought him into chaos in the first place.

**“The words which You have given to Me I have given to them.”** In addition to making known to the disciples who God is, He also declared to them the words of God. If the revelation of God to the world was a marvelous thing, even more so was the communicating of God’s words to man. Even though the words of God often have to do with instructions to man, knowing what it is that the master of the universe wants of His subjects is a vital thing. To illustrate, let us suppose that an employee has been sent out on a most important assignment. In the midst of the assignment he finds himself baffled and at a loss to know exactly what to do. At this point, the employer makes his appearance. What a relief it is; now, even though the employer’s

communications will be in the nature of instructions, how welcome they are! God, who made us, is the only one who truly knows how to instruct us in the way of life. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”** If a person is going to fulfill God’s purpose for him, it is essential to know what God has to say. Not all instructions are pleasant, but the achieving of the goal by following the instructions is, of course, all important.

**“I have kept them in Your name, whom You have given to Me.”** Greater still than the revelation which Jesus gave is the power with which He kept His disciples while He was on the earth. The word, *tebeo* carries with it the idea of keeping something as a treasure. Jesus shows the value that He placed upon those whom God had given to Him. But, He further expands the idea in the phrase, **“And I have guarded them.”** The next word, *phulasso* carries with it the idea of a garrison, or a place of safe keeping. Jesus had assumed responsibility for the people of God, and they were ever under His watchful care. Now, as Jesus returns to the Father, the keeping power is still there, but the seat of that power is transferred again to the Godhead who occupies eternity. And the watchman will reside within us, in our very spirits.

In His prayer to the Father, Jesus has declared the success of His earthly mission. He has presented the truth of God to man in word and revelation, and He has kept them who have become His followers. But, He has also a word of commendation regarding His disciples. These are perhaps the most comforting words in all of Scripture, because they reveal the measure of confidence that Jesus had in the effectiveness of His work with His followers. He says of them that they have received the Word of God, and believed it, and kept it. The reason that these words are so comforting is that the record shows that the disciples were at this very time far from spiritual giants. In fact they were very much like ourselves. They were often involved in the petty struggles that all believers seem to experience. They too had their moments of doubt and failure and

carelessness, and yet in Jesus' mind they had kept God's word. The central issue lies in the meaning of the word "keep." For a full discussion of the word, the reader is referred to the lessons on John 15, but let it be remembered here that the word implies the treasuring of God's word, or the appreciation of it and the respect for it, and not so much flawless obedience to it. The illustration

was given of the citizen of a country who considers himself to be a law-abiding citizen, and who thus respects and keeps the law, and yet could not say that he has never broken that law.

It is most comforting to know, then, that in spite of all the weaknesses and failures of the disciples, Jesus declares that **"they have kept Your word."**



# John 17:13-19

## TRANSLATION

*“Now I am coming to You, and I am speaking these things in the world, in order that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given to them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I am not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them [set them apart] by the truth; Your word is truth. Even as You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And I sanctify Myself on behalf of them, in order that they themselves also may be sanctified by the truth.”*

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus Prays for His Own—“Set Them Apart from the World, and Keep Them From Evil”

Jesus wanted very much to impart His joy to His disciples. He had come to them from the realm of glory as a part of the Godhead. He had lived for three decades on the earth in the midst of its tinsel substitute for glory and the futile pursuit of an ever-elusive bird of happiness. On a number of occasions His heart had spilled over with sighs and tears for the utter tragedy of the religious and political and social travesty that was taking place among those for whom He had come to die. He longed to impart to the world something of the pure and limitless joy that was the reality of God’s kingdom. The realm of glory from which He had come was a realm of truth and had nothing in it of pretense and facade. He knew that only in the light of God’s truth could pure joy be found. Thus, in His effort to share with them His joy, He must share with them the glory of God as found in the truth of God. (For a discussion of the meaning of the joy of Christ, the reader is referred to Lesson 77 of the Commentary on John 15.)

In order to impart to the disciples the glory and joy of God, Jesus knew also that there had to be a touch of God’s Spirit upon them, separating them from all of the attitudes and aspirations of

the world about them, and setting them apart as members of the heavenly kingdom, illuminated by the light of God’s truth. Jesus had said earlier to His disciples, **“If ye continue In My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31 KJV). The light and truth of God exposes the deceptions and illusions of the world and clears the way for the simple, pure reality of joy in the spirit. The simpler we are, the more likely we are to be at peace in this world. Commenting on this truth, Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount, **“The lamp of the body is the eye. If then your eye is simple (undiffused), your whole body shall be illuminated; but if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be dark”** (Matthew 6:22) (Author’s translation).

To what degree Jesus might have had reference to the principle in physics regarding diffused versus coordinated light is not certain. However, it makes a good analogy nevertheless. The recent development of the laser beam makes use of this principle of coordinated light. Light is made up of energy waves of varying length. Different wave lengths produce different colors. The forms of

light most commonly in use are made up of a number of different colors with different wave lengths. This produces what is called *diffused* light. Such light has very little effective force in it, because the waves are dispersed, and not concentrated. A good example of this kind of light is the flashlight. The laser beam, on the other hand, makes use of what is called *coordinated* light. By using one color and reflecting it repeatedly between mirrors, the energy waves, equal in length, are coordinated into a shaft of energy which is able to penetrate a steel plate in a matter of seconds. When Jesus speaks of the eye being simple (single in the KJV), He makes use of the word *haploos* which is very much like the word undiffused, or coordinated. Jesus is saying that when one's whole being is concentrated on fulfilling God's purpose on the earth, there is a focus of power that enables one to overcome the forces of evil and darkness in the world and to participate with God in His eternal purposes. Too much attention to the things of this world will dissipate that energy and leave the believer ineffective.

To this end, Jesus prays that the Father will **“sanctify them [set them apart] by the truth.”** The Greek word which has been translated by “sanctify” throughout the New Testament, is *hagiazō*. The Greek word is the equivalent of the Hebrew word *qadash*. Both words are used everywhere in the Bible for the setting apart unto God of the elements of worship—tabernacle, furnishings, sacrificial animals, and the people themselves. The Hebrew word is from an ancient Semitic root—*qad*—which meant “to cut.” The word evolved in its usage to mean “to set apart” rather than “to make good or pious.” The Greek equivalent is applied frequently in the New Testament to the body of believers. They are called *hagioi*, which is often translated by “saints” (sanctified ones). In his letters, Paul often addresses the believers in general as the *hagioi*. The designation was not ever reserved for those who were especially spiritual, or pious. It was in fact applied to the Corinthian believers who had many, many problems. The implication is that once one

receives the Spirit of Christ in salvation, one is numbered with the *hagioi* or “set apart ones” in spite of the fact that there may be a great deal of weakness and struggle in the flesh. In the New Testament sense, then, to be sanctified does not mean to be made especially spiritual, or pious, but rather to be numbered among the members of God's family. Christ is our sanctification in the sense that it is through Him that we are identified with God. Jesus applies the word to Himself in that having left His position in glory with the Father, and having taken upon Himself the form of man, it was necessary for Him to experience with man the setting apart of Himself unto God. In all the life and death processes of man on the earth, Jesus was the forerunner, and through His own sanctification, and death, and resurrection, He was the Captain of Salvation, leading men to God. If the agent of sanctification is the Holy Spirit, the instrument is the truth. Jesus said to His disciples, as recorded in John 15, **“You are clean [pure] through the Word which I have spoken unto you.”** The same idea is expressed here. When the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, enters the heart, one passes from the realm of the false to the realm of the true; from the illusory to the real; from darkness to light. Herein is the true sanctification.

When one is set apart unto God, one has no longer roots in the world, nor anything in common with the world. While the believer remains in the world, he is yet not a part of it. As the Father had sent Jesus into the world to be a light in the darkness, so Jesus sends His disciples into the world that the light may continue to shine after He has departed from it. And as the darkness could not overcome or extinguish the light of Christ, so it cannot extinguish the light of His followers, since they are filled with His own Holy Spirit. **“For 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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us”** (II Corinthians 4:6,7 KJV).

# John 17:20-26

## TRANSLATION

*“I am not asking concerning these alone, but also concerning those who are believing on Me through their word; that they all may be one, even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us; in order that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given to Me I have given to them; that they may be one even as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be consummated in one, in order that the world may know that You have sent Me and You have loved them even as You have loved Me. Father, concerning that which You have given to Me, I will that these also may be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which You have given to Me, because You have loved Me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known that You have sent Me; and I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, in order that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”*

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus Prays for His Own—That They May Be One Even as He and the Father Are One

There is no greater miracle in all the universe than the uniting of God and man in a oneness that can be compared to the oneness between God, the Father, and Jesus, the only begotten Son. The prayer of Jesus unmistakably teaches this astonishing truth. And, it is not for the disciples alone, but for all who believe through their word, and therefore all who, through the ages, also come to salvation. Jesus wanted to share everything with His followers. From the moment that He first extended to human beings on the earth the invitation to join with Him, He had in mind nothing less than total oneness with Himself and the Father. It is essential that we examine the nature of this oneness.

**“And the glory which You have given to Me I have given to them, in order that they may be one even as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be consummated in one . . .”** Four times in this one prayer Jesus repeats the request for oneness between God and Himself and His followers. It was clearly God’s intention that the recovery of mankind from his fallen

estate, was to include, ultimately, making him a part of His own eternal existence. Of course, the crucial question is, to what extent are we one with God? In His prayer, Jesus expressed the idea that the oneness that He was referring to was based upon the very indwelling presence of God’s Spirit within man. It was likened to the dwelling of Jesus in God and God in Jesus. In a previous discussion of the unity between God and Jesus, it was pointed out that all of Jesus was filled with the Spirit of God, but there is more to God than Jesus. The difference between Jesus and the Christian who is also filled with the Spirit, is that Jesus had the Spirit in Him **“without measure.”** Whereas the Holy Spirit permeated all of Jesus’ being, the Christian has yet the old nature as still part of him. Thus Paul, in Romans 7, and in Philippians 3, and in other passages, indicates that we still have the flesh to contend with and that in the flesh **“there dwells no good thing.”** In glory, the effects of our fallen nature will be totally eliminated, and then, according to John in his first Epistle, **“We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”** (I John 3:2).

The statements in Scripture as to the extent of God's fullness within us, are very strong. In Ephesians 3:19, Paul speaks of being **"filled with all the fullness of God."** In Ephesians 1:22 and 23 he refers to Christ as the head of the church, and the church as being **"His body, the fullness of the one who fulfills all things in all."** Apparently, after the incarnation of Jesus, that is His coming to earth, and His subsequent death and resurrection, He became so much one with His followers as to be incomplete without them. They became His fullness—the fullness of the one who Himself is the fulfillment of all. All through Scripture this essential unity between God and man is expressed. John 14 is a very strong statement regarding the indwelling presence of God in man and man's indwelling in God. The unity is thus an essential one, and will last for eternity.

It must be very carefully observed, however, that this essential unity between God and man does not in any way make man equal with God. There is a vast difference, for example, between the place of the finger, or the hand, in the human body, and the place of the head, or the central nervous system. While the finger is a very integral part of the person, it can hardly be said to be identical with the person. Jesus, in Spirit, was so identical with the Godhead as not ever to be separated from it. The body of Jesus was a different matter. In His physical presence on the earth, Jesus was the body of Christ, so to speak. Christ, the Logos, became flesh in Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of Christ were one and the same. When the body of Jesus was glorified, it became forever the bodily form of Christ. In Colossians 2:9, Paul says of Christ, **"In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form"** (Author's translation). Thus, Christ, who, prior to the advent of Jesus, was in Spirit form only, became permanently attached to a body. The text says that this bodily form of Christ will represent the fullness of the Godhead. When we get to glory, we will not see three Gods on three thrones, but rather we will see the one person, Jesus Christ, who will be the embodiment of the entire Godhead.

There is a special sense of oneness between God and Jesus Christ, that human beings can never

share, just as there is a oneness between the human being and his central nervous system that cannot be shared by the hand, for example. There is a belief, in some circles, that God is everything and everything is God. This is called "pantheism." This is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The Bible teaches us that there is a sense in which God, in His essential being, is other than man. Isaiah 40:22 says of God, **"It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers."** Throughout eternity, man will indeed be one with God, and yet never the same as God. **". . . In order that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me."** Ultimately, the miracle of the unity between God and man will be known to the world. Probably, not until that time when "every eye shall see Him." So, at that time, will the love of God be known to all. They will know what they have missed, but it will be too late. At the present time, the love of God and the miracle of unity with Him, are known only to those who **"seek Him with all their hearts."** To those who seek Him, the Holy Spirit reveals what God has prepared for them that love Him. **"Eye has not seen and ear has not heard and it has not entered upon the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. For God has revealed it through His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know them, because they are discerned in the spirit"** (I Corinthians 2:9,10,14) (Author's translation). The love of God—His eternal caring—was part of His nature before the world was made. The creation was part of that love, as well as the recovery. The glorious nature of man, created in God's own image, was an ultimate expression of that love; and so the extension of God's own being in the person of Jesus for the recovery of that nature. For the fulfillment of this love came Jesus to the side of fallen man—**"And I have declared to them Your name and will declare it, in order that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them and I in them."**

# John 18:1-11

## TRANSLATION

*When Jesus had said these things, He went out with His disciples across the torrential stream of the Kidron ravine, where there was a garden, into which He entered and His disciples. And Judas, who betrayed Him, knew the place, because Jesus had often gathered together there with His disciples. Then Judas took the temple guard, and the officers of the chief priests and of the Pharisees, and came there with lamps and torches and weapons. Jesus then, knowing all the things which were coming upon Him, went out and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, took His stand with them. Then as He said to them, "I am He," they backed away and fell to the ground. Again He asked them, "Whom are You seeking?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; if then you are seeking Me, let these go," in order that the word may be fulfilled which said, "Concerning those whom You have given to Me, I have not lost any of them." Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear; and the name of the servant was Malchus. Jesus then said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath; the cup which My Father has given to Me, shall I not drink it?"*

## COMMENTARY

### Gethsemane—The Crushing Agony of Jesus

The hour had finally come. Jesus, delivered into the hand of His enemies, would, in this moment of time, secure the recovery of mankind, and open the way for the entrance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, to enter the heart of man. To secure this priceless gift for man, Jesus had come to the earth as a babe, had borne the stream of outrageous ills "that flesh is heir to," had given His life to selfless servitude, and was now to face death at the very hands of those whom He had come to save.

Jesus had left the blessed chamber where He and His disciples had spent together their last spiritual rendezvous before He would be plunged into the blackness of Golgotha. Outside the walls of Jerusalem He came to that notorious ravine of death called Kedron. Its most notable usage was as a common burial ground. He crossed the rain-swollen torrent of this wretched ravine as if to give public notice that He was voluntarily passing

from life unto death. On the other side, He entered the garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane was a small private garden which included some gnarled old olives trees, perhaps of centuries past, where Jesus and His disciples had come together in a number of blessed moments of fellowship. At the entrance to the garden there was an olive press, from which its name had been taken. The word "Gethsemane" is from the Hebrew words, *gath*, meaning "press" and *shemen*, "oil." It was to be the beginning of the final crushing of Jesus' earthly self. From this crushing would flow in abundance the precious Spirit of Christ to the heart of man forever. Jesus left some of the disciples at the gate and took with Him a little ways further, Peter and James and John, to watch with Him in a final agony of intercession. No human on earth could know the depth of that hour when the faultless Son of God would face the prospect of taking upon Himself the guilt of mankind, and drink to the dregs the cup of human

wickedness, that had been brewed in the caldron of rebellion against the God of the universe. So intense was His agony that the sweat poured from Him **“as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”** (Luke 22:44). The prospect of physical suffering could not have elicited such intensity of resistance. The author of Hebrews was no doubt referring to this moment when he said, **“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”** (Hebrews 12:4). Many of His own countrymen had suffered physical torments as excruciating as crucifixion. But man has not yet known, nor will he ever know, the full extent of the effects of sin and rebellion upon the heart of God, especially as experienced in the agony of Jesus.

Into the abyss of human misery He came,  
And, though a babe,  
                    yet was His heart aflame with the Glory  
                    of God.

Into the abyss—the Glory of God for the world  
                    of men;  
Into the abyss, where once He dared to drink the  
                    cup of sorrow,

And then—faced the consequence of that abyss,

And bore upon His flawless frame  
                    the symbols of all human sin expressed;  
And in a tragic stroke the grand illusions  
                    laid to rest  
                    Of man’s inherent dignity.

(Strange it is that all the tragedies of time  
Have not sufficed to prove to man  
                    the depths of that accursed clime to  
                    which his soul was born.

Nor has it dawned upon his darkened heart

That e’en the noble things of man are part of  
                    vain facade  
And all the liberty  
                    In which he revels to indulge his  
                    selfish soul  
Is but a bondage, from the chains of which  
                    the grace of God alone can set him free.

And so, insensitive to all but grosser earthly thing,  
And unaware the raft  
                    To which he blindly clings is rudderless  
                    and without sail  
He drifts through life,  
                    grasping, striving,  
                    bearing fortune’s perfidies—

Until that disenchanting moment when the spirit  
                    flees the mortal cage  
And knows  
                    that all he lived for was but ashes  
                    and all the good he shunned—  
                    the stuff of which eternal bliss  
                    is made.)

Thus the abyss to which Christ came—  
                    the majesty of God enshrined  
                    for all the world to see—  
                    the Blessed Son of Man.

Into the abyss—  
                    the Son of God with the power to free  
The souls of all in one great deed  
                    of holy, and unselfish love.

Now on eagle’s wings the souls of those who will,  
                    may soar;  
And, unencumbered by the chains of demon power  
Know the thrill of life fulfilled;  
                    the joy of harmony with Him in whom  
                    the timeless universe remains  
                    secure.\*

David Morsey

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\* *From the Eagles Nest* by David Morsey (1977).

## John 18:1-11 (continued)

### Betrayed!

Apparently, not all of the disciples were of equal stature. They were all, of course, useful in the work of the kingdom, and certainly of equal value in the eyes of God. According to the Scripture, there are a great variety of gifts, and differences in function, but all of God's children are precious in His sight. When Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane, He left eight of the disciples at the gate, and went on further to confront His ultimate struggle, taking with Him, Peter and James and John, who seemed to be something of a leadership among the disciples. After three years of concentrated development and growth in the very company of Jesus, they faced with Jesus His ultimate contest, and responded by falling asleep. The mention of this incident in the midst of the grave hour that Jesus was facing would indicate that it has an important implication. Human frailty was, everywhere in the Gospels, constantly and overwhelmingly evident, as it was also in the Old Testament Scriptures. Soon, Peter would be engulfed in a more serious betrayal, and a final episode would be written proving the inadequacy of the natural man, apart from the Spirit of God, to do anything but fail. All that took place during the ministry of Jesus on the earth would point to the one final conclusion—the Son of God must die if the world would be saved.

There are many kinds of betrayal. If Jesus had any expectations about the capacity of His disciples to watch with Him in the hour of His agony, they had certainly betrayed that confidence. But, it was probably not surprising to Jesus, though certainly disappointing. If Jesus was disappointed in their behavior, He at least had expectations for the future, inasmuch as He was

well aware of the coming impact of the Holy Spirit upon their lives. One thing was certain, the flesh would never be dependable. Paul voiced the same conclusion to the church at Phillipi in his open confession that he was among those who “. . . **worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh**” (Phillipians 3:3). There will be further proof of this in Peter's shocking denial of Jesus at the trial.

The betrayal by Judas Iscariot was a different matter.\* He knew the private garden retreat, which had been one of the few places of personal sanctuary for Jesus. (The generous and selfless of the world are always vulnerable to opportunists among them with whom they share). Totally indifferent to what Jesus stood for, and coldly calloused to the memory of blessed hours shared with Him in ministering to the needy of the earth, Judas took charge of a cutthroat band supplied to him by the religious leaders who were righteously indignant over Jesus' “unauthorized” ministry to the people of God. (Secretly they feared His power over the people, a power they could not duplicate out of the stagnant reservoirs of their dead traditions).

The unholy band plunged into the garden of Gethsemane, shattering profanely the sacred aura of Jesus' holy struggle. In the ignoble act of ultimate hypocrisy, Judas greeted Jesus with a kiss. (See accounts in other Gospels). In a noble act of ultimate genuineness, Jesus addressed Judas as, “friend.” In the prophecy of Zechariah, Jesus is seen as “. . . **wounded in the house of His friends**” (13:6). Had he been contemptuous of Judas the whole matter

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\*For a further discussion, in detail, of Judas Iscariot, see Lesson 62 (John 13:18-30).

would have been much easier. As it was, the reproach of His own people broke His heart.

Jesus faced the brigands boldly. He had nothing to hide; nothing to fear. His first words to them hit them like a volley of shot, and flattened them on the ground. Deep inside they must have sensed the cowardly and reprehensible nature of their deed. Indeed, the impact of this moment drove Judas to suicide.

Peter rose impetuously to Jesus' defense. He seized his sword and lashed out at the enemy.

The sword caught the ear of a servant of the high priest, and severed it. The act was totally inconsistent with all that Jesus had taught him, but once again the human nature demonstrated its imperviousness to truth, and Peter reverted to type. Only with the coming of the Holy Spirit would these truths be indelibly inscribed upon the heart of the disciples. Jesus, ever consistent with His gracious nature, restored the ear of his enemy and gently rebuked Peter with words that have been ringing through the centuries: **“The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?”**

## John 18:1-11 (continued)

### “The Cup Which My Father Has Given to Me, Shall I Not Drink It?”

Up to that very moment in the garden, Jesus had been faithful in every detail to the mission for which He had come to the earth. Now at the moment of climax, He was determined to bring to fulfillment God’s redemptive purpose, even unto His own death. He would drink to the dregs the cup that was set before Him by His Father’s hand.

This simple response of Jesus establishes for His followers for all time, a guideline for the living out on earth, of the life of the child of God. Jesus had told His disciples that they also would drink of the cup of which He would drink. This profound statement came in the midst of a rather shabby episode of self-seeking, when two of His disciples and their doting mother sought a special position with Jesus. Patiently, but firmly, Jesus shattered their illusions of position and power, and offered instead His cup and His baptism.

In the symbolism of Scripture, the cup refers to one’s appointed portion. To the godless, there was the cup of wrath. **“For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He pours out of the same. But the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them”** (Psalm 75:8). For His people Israel, in their disobedience, there was a cup of chastisement. **“Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out”** (Isaiah 51:17). For all who turn to God, there is the cup of salvation. **“I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord”** (Psalm 116:13). In a more personal sense, David identifies his portion, or lot in life, with the Lord. In Psalm 16:5, a prophetic psalm pointing to Christ, he says, **“The Lord is the**

**portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.”**

The cup of the Lord was a cup of suffering and of death. The ultimate end of His earthly mission was to destroy death through His own death. The life of the spirit springs out of the death of the flesh. The whole decadent system of human activity on the earth must be purged of its satanic corruption in order that the true meaning of man may be realized in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That is why all believers must be crucified with Christ. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in Me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”** Christ could erase the penalty of sin by His own death, but, in another sense, everyone who enters into life, must go through a personal death to this world. It is this cup—the cup of suffering—that we share with Christ on the earth. Because we have identified ourselves with Him, we must continuously face the hostility of the world about us which is part of Satan’s kingdom. We face a life of adversity on the earth, embattled by the arch enemy of Christ, who would destroy the very elect of God, if he could.

If we would reign with Christ, we must suffer with Him. We must drink with Him the cup of sorrow. Paul says, **“And if children, also heirs; heirs of God, and fellow heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer together that we may be also glorified together”** (Romans 8:17) (Author’s translation). But he also goes on to say, **“For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is about to be revealed in us”** (8:18) (Author’s translation). To Timothy, his son in the

faith, to whom he will pass the baton of ministry, he says, “**If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him . . .**”(II Timothy 2:12).

It is very evident from the Scripture that the saints of God must suffer in this world. This does not mean, of course, that we get merit for self-inflicted pain. It rather means that as we simply follow Christ in this world, the inevitable corollary of our confession is hostility and adversity in Satan’s domain. Insistence from some quarters of Christendom that all pain and

suffering and adversity must be immediately resolved by Christ, is quite contrary to the teachings of Jesus, and the experience of the disciples as recorded in the Scriptures. Paul lived a life of suffering and sorrow and even physical disability, as he faithfully served Christ from day to day. As we seek the Lord in prayer, it is well to remember that if we have committed a matter to Christ, whatever is, is the answer to our prayer. Or, as Jesus put it, “**The cup which My Father hath given to Me, shall I not drink it?**”

# John 18:12-18

## TRANSLATION

*The cohort then and the temple prefect, and the servants of the Jews, took Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Annas first; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was chief priest that year. And it was Caiaphas who had counseled with the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die for the people.*

*And Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. And that disciple was known to the chief priests, and entered together with Jesus into the court of the chief priest, and Peter stood at the door without. The other disciple then, who was known by the chief priests, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and led Peter inside. The maiden who was the doorkeeper then said to Peter, “You are not also one of the disciples of this man, are you?” That one said, “I am not.” And the servants and the temple guard stood and made live coals because it was cold, and were warming themselves; and Peter stood with them and was warming himself.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Trial of Jesus—and a Betrayal, Most Bitter

The ill-assorted band—soldiers, temple servants, betrayer and betrayed—made its way first to Annas. Annas was no longer high priest, but with his son-in-law in the office, he was venerated as a sort of high priest emeritus. Bringing Jesus to Annas had no official purpose, but certainly was in the nature of displaying the “trophy” which had been the scourge of the religious hierarchy for several years. (Little did he realize that in time his triumph would turn to terror, and the memory of that night would sear his senses for eternity). Had Satan known, of course, that the death of Jesus would seal his own doom, he would never have perpetrated the event. It would not be the last time that Satan’s attempts to thwart the redemption of God would serve only to fulfill it. Quickly the scene shifted from the aged Annas to the “kangaroo” court of Caiaphas, the official high priest.

It was here that Peter would meet the bitterest moment of his life, and Jesus would suffer yet again the shaft of betrayal from a friend. Peter

would have his own cup to drink—the cup of human failure—and he would drink it to the dregs. That Peter loved Jesus was unquestionable. That he had committed his life to following Him was demonstrated in his forsaking all for Jesus’ sake. Why then did he deny his Lord and Master to this little maiden at the door, and subsequently to the servants at the fireside? To claim to know for certain the answer to this question would be presumptuous. The impact for us who later discover the episode, is to allow us to identify with one of Jesus’ closest companions, and confess that in spite of our love for our Master, we, too, caught off guard, cannot always control our actions. If one protests that this was Peter before Pentecost, we need only recall the incident between Peter and Paul at the church in Galatia. There, Paul has to rebuke Peter to his face for an act of gross hypocrisy. (See Galatians 2:11-14). At this point, not only had Peter been the recipient of deep experiences with the Holy Spirit, but he was also looked upon as one of the leading apostles in the care of the church. The devastating truth is

that in our flesh “. . . **there dwells no good thing;**” the glorious reality is that though in respect to our flesh we sometimes are involved in the law of sin, but yet with our hearts we serve the law of God (see Romans 7:25).

We are not left in doubt or suspense as to the outcome of this terrible episode of denial. In John 21 (which we shall discuss in detail later), we find Peter back in fellowship with our Lord and Satan defeated in his life. We cannot help but recall the words of Jesus as given in Luke 22:31, “**Simon, Simon, behold Satan has sought you out to sift you [all] as wheat; but I have prayed for you [Peter] that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.**” Peter’s immediate response to this was, “**Lord, I am ready both to be cast into prison with You and to go unto death.**” And here, Jesus revealed to Peter that whatever his words of bravado might be, the day would come when he would deny his Lord.

Satan had indeed sifted Peter—he would have destroyed him on the spot if he could. But without a doubt, it was the perceptive prayer of

Jesus that delivered Peter from the hand of Satan. It must be observed today that the people of God are surrounded by the enemy. It would be utterly impossible for any human being to stand against the “wiles of the devil,” were it not for the prayers of the body of Christ, and indeed of our Lord Himself. Peter had too much confidence in the flesh. He was roundly chastened for his presumption. He learned a bitter lesson. Paul also learned that lesson as he tells us in Philippians 3, “**For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit and make our boast in Christ Jesus and do not have confidence in the flesh . . .**”

The marvelous truth for the believer to gain from Peter’s experience is that on the one hand the failures of the flesh do not alienate us from God, because the Spirit of Christ Himself occupies our spirit as an impregnable fortress to the attacks of Satan. On the other hand, there is in our flesh “**no good thing**” (Romans 7:18), so that as long as we are on the earth we can never put our confidence in the flesh. In the midst of the struggle of the flesh, the citadel of the spirit is secure, and we are carried through to glory in the very power of God.

# John 18:19-27

## TRANSLATION

*The high priest asked Jesus concerning His disciples, and concerning His teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken boldly in the world; I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews gathered together, and I did not speak anything in secret. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard what I have spoken to them. Behold, these know what things I spoke." And when He had said these things, one of the temple guard who stood nearby gave Jesus a slap, saying, "Do you answer the high priest so?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken badly, bear witness concerning that which is bad; but if well, why do you strike Me?" Annas then sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*

*And Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him then, "You are not one of His disciples, are you?" That one denied and said, "I am not." One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "I saw you in the garden with Him did I not?" Again Peter denied it; and immediately a cock crowed.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Trial of Jesus—Grim Masquerade

The trial of Jesus, being a total travesty, there was no need of lending substance to it by recording in detail its nefarious proceedings. Peter's denial was given as much coverage as the trial, or more. In the grand finale to the death drama of Jesus, all characters are brought to the stage—faithful and faithless; friend and foe; religious hierarchy and pagan hegemony—to display once and for all the total bankruptcy of the human spirit. Even Peter, most surely a member of the kingdom of God, became an example, in the divine purpose to make known to all mankind the absolute necessity of the sacrifice which His Son Jesus, the Lamb of God, was about to make.

Since the Bible does not record much detail, it is well for us to avoid speculating in that area. To do so is to shift the main focus from that which the Holy Spirit would choose to reveal, to the trivia that man prefers to explore. The reading of the other accounts (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22) will confirm the point that Jesus said

absolutely nothing in His own defense. He merely stated the reality that one day His accusers would know the truth—"Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power [of the Godhead] and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64) (Author's translation).

These words had been spoken by Jesus to a hastily gathered quorum of the Sanhedrin. The Roman government had left the Sanhedrin in power with enough authority to govern the normal needs of the Jewish people, but without the ultimate power of death. Moreover, the Roman government was not interested in any of the civil matters that involved the Jewish community, except as it affected the empire. The high priest knew that the only way he could interest Rome in the matter of Jesus, was to prove that He was a threat to the already precarious balance between Jewish religious zeal and Roman regimentation. Accordingly, witnesses were sought who could

give testimony concerning the words or deeds of Jesus, that might be twisted into a case for Roman intervention. False witnesses were found (with some difficulty); words were twisted and taken out of context; and the highest levels of the Jewish religious leadership in the land, became the participants in a gross violation of the very laws that were the *raison d'être* of their existence. To this charge, Jesus gave no defense.

He could have explained it, and probably to the satisfaction of a Roman procurator, though certainly not to those who sought occasion against Him. He thus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 53:7: **“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.”**

# John 18:28-40

## TRANSLATION

*Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas unto the Praetorium, and it was early morning; and they themselves did not enter the pretorium, lest they might be defiled, but they would eat the Passover. Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation are you bringing against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If this Man was not doing evil, we would not have delivered Him to you." Then Pilate said, "You take Him, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to kill anyone," in order that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying what sort of death He was about to die. Pilate then entered the Praetorium again, and called Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Did you ask this from yourself, or did others speak to you concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your nation and your priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My aides would be fighting, in order that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not hence." Then Pilate said, "You are a king then are You not?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born unto this end, and unto this end I have come into the world, in order that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I do not find any fault in Him. It is your custom that I release one to you at the Passover. Do you wish that I release to you the King of the Jews?" Again they cried saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a thief.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Trial—Jesus and Pilate

By all the world's standards Pilate was a tough man in a tough job. As procurator, or governor of Judea, he represented Rome in a province of religious zealots, who had occasion to hate the empire as much or more than any of its subject people. And Pilate had set himself implacably against them to keep them in line. One of his first acts as governor was to move the Roman headquarters from Caesaria to Jerusalem, an act which itself brought bitter resentment, as he knew it would. They yielded to his move, but utterly rebelled against bringing the Roman insignia into their holy city. After five days of bitter contest and a number of executions, Pilate yielded. And so the bitter struggle raged on and on. It is important to realize that Pilate was *not* a simpering opportunist, like Herod, willing to do

anything to curry favor. At this point, he certainly would have been a credit to the Roman empire (given their objectives).

This is the man before whom Jesus now stood. The historical tradition is that Pilate really admired Jesus. And there is no evidence in Scripture to the contrary. Why then did he deliver Him up to the brutal crowd? This we shall see as we observe the encounter. Each of the Gospels has its own account of this confrontation; each adds its own pieces to the puzzle. We are considering John's account, but will find help in drawing from the others. The grammatical structure of the Greek language gives us insight into the mood of the dialogue. Pilate's first question was simple and direct—"Are You the

**King of the Jews?"** The way in which he asked the question gave Jesus the sense that there was more behind it than routine questioning. He was forcing Pilate to look at the question seriously, when He asked him whether this was something of his own concern, or something the Jews had put him up to. Pilate dodged the issue by claiming ignorance of Jewish matters. Jesus then answered honestly and openly. Evidently He saw something in Pilate that made Him want to discuss the issue with him. Whereas He was silent before the contemptible and contemptuous Pharisees, He was open with this misguided man of the world who was caught in a trap fashioned by powers over which he had no control.

**"If My kingdom were of this world, then My aides would be fighting you so that I would not be delivered up to the Jews."** Jesus spoke Pilate's language. "Do you think I am so weak that I would be taken without a struggle if I intended to gain a kingdom in this world?" Certainly Jesus was not building a case here for passivism.\* Pilate was impressed. Apparently he was convinced that there was indeed something regal about Jesus. If there had been other words that passed between them, the record does not show it. But, the simple straightforward interaction between these two men—one, a warrior of the world, and the other, a warrior of the spirit—left such an impact upon Pilate that he recognized the integrity of Jesus, and sought from that time on to obtain His release. In a question which (in terms of Greek grammar) reflected an obvious acceptance of Jesus' statement and an admiration for Him, Pilate said, **"Then You are a king, are You not?"** Jesus accepted Pilate's concession at face value, and readily opened up to him additional disclosures about His person and His work. This openness

was strong evidence that Jesus' attitude toward Pilate was far different than His attitude toward His other accusers. Jesus was always reluctant to waste His time with people that He felt were not sincere.

He spoke to Pilate of truth. Once again He confronted Pilate with naked reality, and would not let him back away. He told him that if anyone really wants to know the truth, they will hear His voice. Again, Pilate tries to dodge. **"What is truth?"** He was not being sarcastic. But, years of exposure to the deceptions and uncertainties of political intrigue, had left him with little foundation, or criteria by which to judge the truth. If he did not intend to be sarcastic, neither did He wait for an answer. He immediately went out to confront the howling mob, that had by now jammed the area outside the pretorium. As in his earlier confrontations with these radical religionists, he boldly challenged their actions. He dared to take a strong stand against them, and to declare his own conviction that Jesus was innocent of any charge. As the other accounts indicate, not once, but repeatedly he challenged them as to why they were accusing Him of wrongdoing.

Finally, unable to persuade them to withdraw their charges, he saw a faint ray of hope in the established custom of the Passover season—that Rome would grant freedom to one prisoner, whom they would choose. Jesus, being who He was, and the charges being what they were, it seemed quite certain to Pilate that in a choice between the murderous, unsavory Barabbas, and the humanitarian Jesus, they would choose Jesus. He was wrong. They were more base than he had realized. He gave them their thief.

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\* This text was often used by Christian young men in refusing to be drafted into the service. Without here debating the entire issue, let it be noted at least that Jesus, knowing of the countless wars fought by His countrymen to preserve their earthly kingdom, admitted that if He were the earthly King of the Jews, He would fight. If one believes that he should not go to war, this is certainly the wrong text to use in support of that contention.

# John 19:1-16

## TRANSLATION

*Then Pilate took Jesus, and beat Him. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it upon His head, and put a purple robe around Him; and they were coming up to Him and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and they were slapping Him.*

*And Pilate went out again, and said to them [the Jews], "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, in order that you may know that I do not find any fault in Him." Jesus went out then, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And [Pilate] said to them, "Behold, the Man!" When the chief priests and the temple guard saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify Him; crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I do not find a fault in Him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to the law He ought to die, because He made Himself to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this word then, he was rather afraid, and entered into the Praetorium again, and said to Jesus, "Whence are You?" But Jesus did not give him an answer. Pilate then said to Him, "Do You not speak to me? Do You not know that I have the authority to release You, and I have the authority to crucify You?" Jesus answered, "You do not have any authority against Me, except it be given to you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin." From this point Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you release Him, you are not a friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." Pilate then having heard these words, brought Jesus out, and he sat upon the judgment seat in the place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was [the day of] Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" These then cried out, "Kill Him, kill Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We do not have a king except Caesar." Then he delivered Him to them in order that He might be crucified.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Son of God Scourged by the Sons of Men

Fearlessly, and fully aware of the fate that awaited Him, Jesus voluntarily put Himself at the mercy of His enemies. Pilate had sought continuously to obtain Jesus' release through the yielding of the Jews. He had misjudged the nature of their religious fervor—there was in it no "quality of mercy."

Apparently, as a last resort, Pilate allowed Jesus to be scourged, in the hope that this would satisfy the mob-lust for violence. Neither the Greek word for scourging, nor the historical records, require the kind of brutality that often is depicted by

those who seem to feel that the fleshly aspects of Jesus' suffering must be made to elicit as much pity for Jesus as is possible. Without minimizing the intensity of Jesus' suffering, nor discounting the greatness of His sacrifice, it must here be understood that the kind of suffering that was unmatched by any degree of human sensitivity, was the act of taking to Himself the unspeakable awfulness of human sin and degradation. It is like one who would allow himself, though having a spotless record, to be identified as some kind of bestial criminal. The agony of some who have

been thus falsely accused has sometimes led even to their death. Jesus did suffer more than any human being has ever suffered—not by reason of the physical brutalities, but rather by reason of the inner agony of knowing what it means to be forsaken of God, because of sin. Had He not known what it means to be wholly one with God and without offense, the loathing of the condition of sin would not have been so intense. Human beings do not understand this feeling, because they have never been so pure.

Not only is it unnecessary to magnify the physical brutality in the crucifixion, it is totally inappropriate and unbiblical. It is best for us to be silent where the Scripture is silent. For Jesus to want the world to feel pity for His wounds for all time, would be totally out of keeping with the excellence of His manhood. Imagine, for example, a man who had rescued his wife from danger, and in the process was injured very badly so as to produce a great many hours of physical suffering as a result. What would his wife think if he kept constantly describing to her the injuries that he had received, and forcing her, year after year after year, to remember, in all of their brutal details, these wounds that were suffered for her sake. Without minimizing these physical sufferings of Jesus, or the extent of His sacrifice, it must be said that the use of pity as a motivation for commitment to Christ is totally unworthy of Him, and a betrayal of the perfect manhood which He exemplified on the earth. Pity is never an adequate motive for commitment. Sometimes marriages have been based upon this motive. In times of war a young man will come home as an invalid, and a sweetheart will be induced to marry him out of pity—not wishing to leave him in his hour of need. Such marriages end in tragedy. If she marries him because she truly loves him and does not consider the cost of caring for him to be a valid judgment, then it is of course a different matter. But if she marries him out of a sense of responsibility or nobility, her love may soon turn to hate in the bitter hours of the demands of his care. If we say that we ought to come to Christ because He suffered for us, then every martyr in the history of the world has a claim upon us. We believe in Jesus Christ, because He is the Truth, and not because we owe Him a debt of gratitude for His sacrifice. We are indeed grateful for His

sacrifice, and will sing His praises throughout eternity, but that is not the motive for our believing in Him. The only basis upon which any human being can commit himself to Christ is through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

It should further be said that to accuse Pilate of the kind of sadism which sometimes did accompany the scourging, would be totally unjust, in view of the constant effort that Pilate made to obtain Jesus' release. It is true that the soldiers exercised a certain amount of brutality as far as Jesus was concerned, but there is no indication in the biblical record that there were the sadistic extremes that some ascribe to the occasion.

There are some who see Isaiah 52:14 as a proof that Jesus was so brutally battered as to be almost unrecognizable. There seems to be a certain callous insistence in some quarters upon magnifying the agonies of our Savior. Again, it would be like someone insisting over and over again upon magnifying the tortures and brutalities of a loved one had who suffered in a concentration camp, for example. In Isaiah 52:14, the King James text does seem to indicate this brutality on the surface—**“His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.”** A much more likely and appropriate translation from the Hebrew text would be as follows: **“His appearance was thus marred at the hands of man, and His form at the hands of the sons of men.”** This places the emphasis where it should be—that sons of men should dare to so treat the Son of God. Jesus did suffer many hours of physical agony at the crucifixion, but it would be totally untrue to say that no one has ever suffered more physical agony than He. It would be absolutely true to say that no one suffered more agony of spirit than He. Only the spirit can properly worship Christ, and the spirit does not need imaginations of the flesh to enhance it. No human mind can fully grasp the implications of the sacrifice of Christ for us. We must depend upon the Holy Spirit to apply that truth to our spirits with the power that He alone possesses. There is no way that the human mind can appreciate or appropriate either the sufferings of Christ or His glory. As Jesus said, **“God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”**

## John 19:1-16 (continued)

### The Son of God Sentenced by the Sons of Men

It is not likely that Pilate, a veteran of countless confrontations with the wily Jewish hierarchy, was moved by their sudden “loyalty” to Caesar. It is even less likely that he was anxious to please these raucous rabble-rousers for any reason whatsoever, political or personal.

If Pilate’s scourging of Jesus was a last desperate effort to deliver Him by an appeal to pity, he had misjudged the measure of their mercy. Instead, they further profaned their religion by using it before a Roman procurator as the true reason for wanting Jesus’ death—“**We have a law . . .**”

They were tragically, wretchedly wrong about Jesus—some wilfully and some ignorantly, but all exposing themselves to the wrath of God. “He claims to be the Son of God,” they protested to Pilate. This did move him. His sense of justice turned to fear—not because he cared what the Jews thought, but because of his profound respect for Jesus. These Jews were liars; Jesus, he was convinced, was a man of truth. Could it be? Was He indeed one of the gods? Pilate would have been well aware of the Roman deities, many of whom had been borrowed from vanquished nations. It was not at all uncommon (in their minds) for these deities to appear on earth as mortals. While Pilate was not a religious man, neither would he, nor any Roman for that matter, lightly dismiss the possibility of the involvement of these deities with the world.

Pilate turned again to Jesus for verification of this startling claim. Jesus was silent. A short time ago Jesus had engaged freely in discussion with Pilate. But a turning point had come and Jesus knew that Pilate had already made up his mind where he would stand. Pilate had been deeply impressed with Jesus; he seems to have acknowledged Jesus’

claim to sovereignty; and he sought earnestly to release Him. The one thing he did not do was to commit his life to Him. At this point the only way Pilate could have truly vindicated himself was to have given up everything and stood beside Jesus for crucifixion. It was a scenario that had been played many times. Jesus knew it well. It would be replayed incessantly in ages to come. But, it was the only basis upon which Jesus could enter into serious discussion with Pilate. The rich young ruler had rejected these terms in days gone by; had turned away; and Jesus did not go after him. Jesus could never be anything less than real. To have continued the discussion with Pilate at this point would have been an empty gesture. (The followers of Jesus today would do well to consider the point that any discussion of faith apart from the Holy Spirit is but a philosophical farce. Human debate can never produce openness to the truth. Either the heart of one is prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the truth, or it is not.) Jesus never wasted time on those whose hearts had not been prepared to receive the truth. The price was too much for Pilate to pay. Jesus would no longer continue the discussion, and Pilate, though noteworthy for his attempts to release Jesus, and his refusal to participate in the farce, would go into oblivion.

Though Pilate had failed to come to personal commitment in his encounter with Jesus, nevertheless Jesus was not inclined to be harsh in His judgment of him. When Pilate claimed the authority to have Jesus released, Jesus gently reminded him that he was talking nonsense. In a final gesture of grace toward him, Jesus excused him from ultimate responsibility for the crucifixion and, instead, placed it upon those who had delivered Him up to him. The question of why Pilate had not, in fact, released Jesus, must

be found in historical tradition. Such traditions are not to be taken as absolutely authoritative, but do nevertheless shed some light. Jerusalem at Passover time was a governor's nightmare. The narrow streets were jammed with celebrants, and, given the constantly precarious balance between Rome and Jewry, anything could happen. Pilate had, as tradition tells us, sought for more troops to reinforce his position, and had failed to receive them. To have forced a confrontation with the Jewish leaders at this time, would have surely brought the city into chaos. That is why it was observed that Pilate had no choice but either to give up everything and take his place at Jesus' side, or to throw all of Jerusalem into turmoil.

In Mark's account of the trial, the text does seem to indicate that Pilate did indeed want to "content" the people. However, the Greek word which is translated, in the King James Version, by the word "content" is a word which really means more to "satisfy the situation." It does not mean so much to please the people as rather to so handle the situation as to bring about the best possible advantage to all concerned. Thus, Pilate, a constant foe of the Jewish people, was not trying to please them, but rather to so handle the matter as to avoid the confrontation that would have been beyond his control. This does not, of course, excuse Pilate from responsibility for his deed, but it does preserve the consistency of the narrative.

When Jesus was crucified, the searchlight of truth was focused, not upon Jesus Himself, but upon the various ones who participated in His death. Far more attention is given in the narrative to the crucifiers than to the crucified. Statements

directly relating to Jesus are surprisingly few. It was not the Son of God who was on trial after all, but the sons of men. The unfolding drama of the crucifixion of Jesus is an unfolding revelation of the heart of man confronting the Son of God. The facade is torn away and the soul stands naked before God. The procession across the stage included Judas and Peter; Annas and Caiphas; Herod and Pilate; and of course, the crowd—soldier and citizen; Jew and Gentile; pious and pagan; all confronted the Son of God and went away naked. Judas, the mercenary, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Peter, the bold egotist, denied Him before the servant girl. Annas and Caiphas, the religious leaders, hated Him for His truthfulness and called for His crucifixion. The soldiers, callous to the core, brutalized Jesus, senselessly. The Jewish crowd, in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (the symbol of God's mercy) screamed mercilessly for His death.

And then there was Pilate. The narrators all seem to linger over him—this hard, earthly warrior caught up in the political intrigue of a system that rendered him powerless to be his own man and survive. He was the symbol of the stream of men of earthly position and power, who are yet powerless in a decadent system. Struggling to be free, they find the cost too great. The threshold is crossed and the course is set; they will live out their lives in a masquerade; and reality will ever elude them. Such was Pilate. He came so close, and struggled so hard. For him, too, the cost was too great. He chose to save his life—and lost it. He turned Jesus over to the crowd; washed his hands of the matter; and set a course for oblivion.

# John 19:17-22

## TRANSLATION

*Then they took Jesus, and He, bearing the cross Himself, went out unto the place called The Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on the one side and one on the other, and Jesus between. And Pilate wrote a title and placed it on the cross. And it was written, "JESUS, THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." This title then many of the Jews read, because the place where He was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews then were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that One said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."*

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus Crucified—The Lamb of God Without Blemish

The awesome moment has arrived when the eternal *Logos*, the Living Word, sheathed in mortal frame, will experience a mortal's death. Bearing His own cross, He begins the wretched road to Golgotha—the Place of the Skull.

In other accounts, the pathway of pain, the *Via Dolorosa*, will be described—the agony of Jesus, the mocking crowds, the weeping women—but John elects to pass over these details. In fact the whole brutal scene of the actual impaling of Jesus, and the erecting of the cross, is noted by the simple phrase, "**There they crucified Him.**" Even in the other accounts, where some details are added, there is little emphasis placed upon the physical process. Gone from the Gospel narratives is the tasteless assault upon the senses, that so often accompanies human efforts to shock the soul into salvation. Such efforts appeal only to the flesh, and are likely to produce a religious experience rather than a rebirth of the spirit. Appeals to pity are unworthy of the superb manhood which our Lord exhibited all during His life on the earth, and totally ineffective in moving the spirit either to salvation or to devotion. It must be observed in passing that it is totally inconsistent to protest brutality in secular presentations and then excuse

it in a Christian message on the grounds of purpose. That would be the fatal error of assuming that the end justifies the means. Such an assumption has been responsible for many shameful chapters in the history of the church. It is true that the Bible deals with many an act of violence, but it should be well noted that, as in the case of the crucifixion, it only refers to these incidents in simple, matter-of-fact statements. It never dwells upon them in such a way as to assault the senses. The Bible is always real, but never needlessly crude. Its appeal is always to the spirit, and not to the flesh. Many incidents of human degradation are presented in the Scripture, but it is done in such a way that it is obvious that the Holy Spirit Himself must make the application, rather than the human imagination.

Instead of dramatizing the death scene, John focuses once more on Pontius Pilate. Why does John give so much attention to Pilate? The answer lies in part, at least, in the issue of Jesus' innocence. The trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin was a farce. And yet, its proceedings, shrouded in the blackness of the night, would never have been open to the public scrutiny. For all time there might have been a question in the minds of the

common man about Jesus' innocence. Human nature would assume that if Jesus did not have some measure of guilt, He would not be brought before the Sanhedrin. All of this was changed by Pilate. So thoroughly does John cover the exchange between Jesus and Pilate, and the subsequent stand of Pilate with reference to Jesus' innocence, that there can be no doubt left in the minds of honest men.

The fury of the Jews was such that even Pilate in all of his efforts to save Jesus, was powerless against the sweeping tide. But, in a bold act of defiance, Pilate had, indeed, the last word. On the sign which, by custom, bore the crimes of the accused, Pilate had written, in the languages of Jew and Gentile alike, his final proclamation—**“Jesus, the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.”**

The Pharisees were furious. The world would know that the Roman government had supported Jesus' claim. The death of Jesus would indeed be laid at the feet of the Jews—regarded as an act of religious jealousy. And so it has been throughout the centuries of history. Though many have disputed Jesus' claim to deity, none has seriously assumed that He was worthy of the death that He died. As the Roman governor proclaimed Jesus' innocence and washed his hands of the matter, the Jewish multitude exclaimed, **“His blood be upon us and upon our children”** (Matthew 27:25). They got their wish. Pilate was adamant: **“What I have written, I have written.”** The sign remained. The Roman government, the most powerful authority in the world of that day, had declared the innocence of the Lamb of God.

# John 19:23-30

## TRANSLATION

*Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and divided them into four parts, to each soldier a part, even His tunic; and the tunic was seamless, woven from the top throughout. They said then to one another, "Let us not divide it, but let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be," in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "They divided My garments among themselves, and upon My vesture they cast lots." The soldiers then did these things. There stood beside the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary the Magdalene. Jesus then seeing His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing alongside, said to His mother, "Woman, behold your Son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your Mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own place.*

*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been completed, in order that the Scripture may be fulfilled, said, "I thirst." There was a vessel there full of common wine; they took then, a sponge full of the common wine and placed it on a sop of hyssop, and offered it to His mouth. When therefore Jesus took the wine, He said, "It is finished." And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.*

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus on the Cross—Caring to the Very End, He Gives Up His Life for the Sheep

The soldiers, who participated in the grisly business of crucifying Jesus and the criminals beside Him, had witnessed, and participated in so much brutality and death, that they cared little for the pathos of the scene around them. With callous indifference, they took the clothing of Jesus and divided it among themselves as though they had obtained it from a rummage sale. Apparently, they never had the slightest thought that they were part of the most momentous episode in human history. Nor did they know that their very action had been foretold nearly a thousand years earlier and was a part of the Old Testament records. But, of course, like Pilate, they were locked into a system which they did not even understand, much less control. Jesus Himself had said, "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do**" (Luke 23:34). The guilt must remain upon the shoulders of those who had agreed to accept it in the first place. On the day

of Pentecost, Peter, in his famous discourse, boldly establishes this guilt. "**Let all the house of Israel know certainly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.**" For all of the centuries since, the Jewish people have fought to get out from under the burden of guilt. They would like the Romans to share the guilt, but Jesus had already excused them from it. That is not to say that God would not or does not forgive the Jews for the deed, when they acknowledge it. Both Paul and Peter made it abundantly clear that the confession of this guilt brings ready forgiveness from God.

The caring of Jesus was ceaseless. As He hung upon the cross in His own agony, He was sensitive to the needs of His mother, and, seeing beside her the disciple whom He knew would take special interest in her, He committed her to his care. The laying down of life for Jesus had meant

far more than the final experience of death. All through His life on the earth He had laid down His life for the sheep in countless ways. By His own testimony, **“Even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life as ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). In His physical death on the cross, Jesus became the symbol of God’s mercy and forgiveness to all the world. His death made it unnecessary for anyone else who would accept the sacrifice, to die because of sin. But, there was one death that Jesus could not die for anyone else. That is the death to which Paul refers in Galatians 2:20: **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself for me.”** By identifying ourselves with Christ in His crucifixion, we also experience a kind of death. Our lives no longer have meaning as far as this world is concerned. The goals and ambitions and selfish interests of this world have no significance to our lives, whose meaning must be found in the realm of the eternal spirit. The great benefit that accrues to this position is that we are released from the bondage of serving the self. The self is the greatest taskmaster of all—it is never satisfied. The effort to satisfy the self is an endless one which has no possibility of success, but only of frustration and disillusionment. Jesus said, **“If the Son therefore shall set you free, you shall be free Indeed”** (John 8:36). To the last hour of His life, Jesus focused on others and not on Himself. Filled with the Holy Spirit, it

was a natural response for Him. Such genuine caring cannot be cultivated by the application of human will or emotion, but can only come as the natural expression of the Holy Spirit within.

John does not record all of Jesus’ words that He spoke on the cross. But he does give us His very significant ones. Appearing as a constant refrain throughout his narrative, is the meaning and ministry of the Holy Spirit. More than any other writer in the New Testament, John goes into the implications of the Holy Spirit as God’s gift to a thirsty world. John presents Jesus as the Bread of Life to a hungry world, and as the Water of Life to a world that is athirst. Matthew records Jesus’ words of the Sermon on the Mount: **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”** (Matthew 5:6). In great detail John shows how the Holy Spirit will fill that need. Now Jesus Himself, on the cross, experiences the devastating thirst of the soul apart from God. In order to make the Water of Life available, He must experience death. Jesus received from compassionate hands the offered relief, cried out, **“It is finished,”** and gave up His Spirit. In that moment, the floodgates of heaven were opened, and a river of life would flow to a thirsty world. We are reminded of Jesus’ offer to His people on the day of the feast **“Jesus stood and cried out saying, ‘If anyone thirst let him come to Me and drink. He who believes on Me, even as the Scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’”** (John 7:37,38).

## John 19:23-30 (continued)

### “It Is Finished”

For Jesus, the “travail of His soul”—the years of toil and heartache and agony—had come to an end. He had only lived on the earth half a lifetime, but, considering His keen sensitivity to the full meaning of the human predicament—the glory of man as God intended him, and the shadow of man as he had become under the bondage of sin and Satan—He suffered more in that half a lifetime than the average person of earth would suffer in two or three lifetimes. The suffering was part of the sacrifice. The lamb of the burnt offering must be flayed (Leviticus 1). **“Even as a Son, He learned submission, from the things which He suffered, and having been made complete, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who submit to Him”** (Hebrews 5:8,9) (Author’s translation). Jesus drank to the full the cup of human suffering that He might share in every way the meaning of human life upon the earth. **“For we do not have a high priest who is not able to suffer with us in our weaknesses, but was tested in every way of likeness [to us], without sin. Let us then come with boldness to the throne of grace, in order that we may receive mercy and find grace for a timely help”** (Hebrews 4:15,16) (Author’s translation). All need of suffering having been fulfilled, and the sacrifice having been accomplished in perfect obedience, Jesus said, **“It is finished.”** He bowed His head and gave up His life.

The suffering was ended; the purpose of the coming of the Son of God to earth was fulfilled; the Lamb of God had been offered in perfect obedience; all provision for the redemption of God’s creation was complete. But what did it all mean? What was accomplished by the death of the Son of God? Why should He have had to die in the first place? In many respects the human

mind is not able to grasp in full measure the meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus. In I Corinthians 13 we are told that the human mind can only grasp things imperfectly—**“Now we see through a glass darkly,”** as the text says. When we are finally glorified, that is, restored to the original excellence that God intended, then we shall see things clearly. Meanwhile, on the earth, it is very important that we approach these truths humbly and respectfully. The insistence upon developing a theological system that resolves all difficulties and provides answers for all questions, has led the church into much difficulty, and certainly accounts for a great deal of the divisions that have plagued the church from its very beginning. It is very presumptuous for one group to assume that it is “more spiritual,” than another, or “more sincere” than another. Sometimes divisions occur because of a lack of knowledge; sometimes, because of certain biases which tend to blind one; sometimes, through satanic deception, which usually occurs when one takes the eyes off of Christ and onto philosophy or theology. But, with men of God, with equal knowledge and scholarship, and with openness to the truth, and reliance upon the Spirit of Christ, there should be a general unity of understanding and belief, unless, the Holy Spirit has not chosen to reveal the matter at this time. Sometimes, we must see both sides of a given issue, and assume that the matter is resolved in the absolute truth of God. Only God really has the truth in absolute form. We on earth must now be content with “functional truth,” that is, truth that is adequate for our needs at the present time, but which will be revealed in fulness at that day when we shall “know as we are known.”

There are many mysteries in connection with the sacrifice of Christ which belong to this category.

But what can we know, certainly, about the atonement? The best approach to the question is to use the symbolisms and object lessons that the Scripture has provided us with. Much misunderstanding and division in the body has come from the attempt to put into philosophical statements truths that are living realities. We must start with the point that Jesus was called the **“Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). Whatever the purpose of God was for the Old Testament sacrifices, it was fulfilled in Jesus in His death on the cross. If we take it simply, we are more likely to come to what God intends, since the truth of God has got to be available to all, even the child. When we get so complicated that the simplest person cannot understand it we are most likely going beyond what God intended us to understand. It is not that the atonement is in itself a simple matter, but rather that the deepest implications of it are known only to God.

Underlying the whole issue of the atonement is the basic reality of man's alienation from God as a result of his disobedience in the Garden of Eden. At that time death entered the world. The quality of life which we had, as possessed by the Spirit of God, was forfeited, and man became limited to an existence void of the Spirit, and subject to corruption and decay. He lost his capacity to communicate with God and was enchained in a world dominated by Satan and the forces of evil. God had warned Adam and Eve that disobedience to Him would bring about this condition of death. It was not so much that God was punishing them by bringing about death, but rather that in the nature of things disobedience contaminated man as poison contaminates water. God had no intention of leaving man in this condition, but instituted immediately a process of redemption. Disobedience must be countered by obedience. As disobedience had brought death, so obedience would bring life. But, perfect obedience would be impossible now without the presence of the Spirit of God within. Thus, man must be made to confront both the consequences of his sin as well as his helplessness to overcome it. Thus God offered for man a substitute in the system of

animal sacrifice. Obedience to God's holy ordinance would be the expression of faith in the acknowledgment by man of his condition. The continual confrontation with death would be the constant reminder of the grace of God in allowing the substitute. (For a further discussion, see the Commentary on John 3.)

It was God's intention that man should offer these sacrifices until such time as He would provide the eternal sacrifice, which was Jesus. Failure on the part of one of Adam's sons (Cain) to follow God's instructions led to the division of the race into two groups—those who would follow Cain in his disobedience, and become the roots of a heathen world, and those who would follow Seth (replacing Abel, who was slain) and form the roots of the family of God who would be faithful to His redemptive process. With the coming of Moses, and the forming of a national entity, called Israel, God gave detailed instructions regarding the system of sacrifices. For a time, the sacrifices were faithfully followed, but then came the intrusion of paganism, and idolatry, in the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. The manner in which the sacrifices were observed, became so odious to God that He finally told them to offer no more. By the time Jesus came to the earth, God's people were totally bankrupt, not only in their ability to keep the commandments, but even to offer a suitable sacrifice as a substitute for their weakness.

Into this wilderness of spiritual desolation, God sent His Son, Jesus: **“But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”** (Galatians 4:4,5 KJV). The system of animal sacrifice had proven to be completely inadequate, so deep the desolation of the human soul. Having demonstrated this point, over thousands of years, God now reveals the necessity of His own personal involvement in the redemptive process. Thus came Jesus, **“The Lamb of God which**

**taketh away the sin of the world.”** Where the animal sacrifice was inadequate the Son of God totally fulfilled the requirement. The book of Hebrews gives a thorough discussion of the failure of the old covenant system (Old Testament), and the fulfillment of redemption in the new covenant which was sealed by the blood of Christ. Whereas the Old Testament sacrifice could provide covering for sin and God’s forgiveness, it could not make the worshipper perfect in heart. The New Testament, or covenant, established by the sacrifice of Christ, provided not only forgiveness, but also the renewing of the spirit, that the law would no longer be written on tables of stone, but in the very heart of man. **“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”** (Hebrews 9:13,14 KJV). (For a further and complete discussion of the

difference between the animal sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, the reader is referred to the book of Hebrews, chapters 5-10.)

The purpose, then, of the sacrifice of Christ, was to take away the guilt of sin, as well as to provide for the recovery of the human spirit in order to enable man to fulfill the righteousness and the glorification which God intended for him. (The full process of redemption was not complete, of course, until the subsequent resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit).

Thus, the purpose of God for the sacrifice of Christ, and the meaning of that sacrifice, are quite clear. Even a child can understand this. The difficulty comes when we try to explain, theologically, just how God brought all of this about. The human mind cannot handle this. When we take the Spirit of Christ into our spirits, He makes the application for us. We thus enjoy the truth and reality of redemption, although we will not understand it until that day when we shall see Him face to face, and **“know, even as also we are known.”**



# John 19:31-42

## TRANSLATION

*The Jews then, since it was the Day of Preparation, in order that the bodies may not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath (for it was that great day of the Sabbath), asked Pilate to shatter their legs, and take them down. The soldiers came then, and shattered the legs of the first one, and the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus, since they saw that He had already died, they did not shatter His legs; but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water. And he who beheld it has borne witness, and his witness is true; and that one knows that he speaks the truth, in order that you may believe. For these things took place, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, “A bone of Him shall not be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”*

*And after these things, Joseph from Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, secretly on account of the fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take the body of Jesus; and Pilate permitted him. He came then and took His body. And Nicodemus also came, he who had come to Him at the first by night, bringing about a hundred liters of a mixture of myrrh and aloes. They took the body of Jesus then, and bound it with linen wrappings with the spices, even as it was the custom of the Jews to bury. And there was in the place where He was crucified, a garden; and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been placed. They placed Jesus there on account of the Preparation of the Jews, because the tomb was nearby.*

## COMMENTARY

### From the Blackness of Death—Rivers of Grace and Life

In a last stroke of infamy, the Jews sought to have Jesus' legs shattered. Once again they used the law as an instrument with which to batter the Son of God. Their religious rituals would not allow them to leave anyone on the cross after sundown before a “holy” day. The breaking of the legs would slay the victim and permit him to be removed from the cross, that the “holy day” would not be violated. But their infamous deed would not be allowed—Jesus had already died. The Scripture had been fulfilled—**“A bone of Him shall not be broken.”**

But a soldier did thrust a spear into His side. And from that side there flowed two streams—one of blood and one of water. To speak in terms of the medical here would miss the most significant

point. It has been suggested that the issue of water would indicate the breaking of the pericardium, which would suggest a broken heart. But John did not pursue this point, nor would his readers have had the ability to catch that significance with the limited amount of medical knowledge then available. If the Holy Spirit had wanted to inform the reader about the broken heart, it is obvious that it would have been so explained.

But the magnificent symbolism is so clear and so readily available. That there should yet be moisture in the body of One who had so suffered, and been so exposed, is highly improbable. It is therefore an obvious touch of God upon the slain Lamb of God. Out of death there came life. From the innermost being of Jesus, there flowed a river of

living water. At the same time the blood of Jesus became a river of cleansing and of covering for the sins of the world. The grace of God poured forth upon mankind—a floodtide of grace and life for the world. Jesus foretold this blessed theme one day at a feast of the Jews as He looked out upon the drought-cursed landscape of their religious life—**“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of His belly shall flow rivers of living water”** (John 7:37,38). But, seven centuries before that, the prophet Isaiah had revealed this marvelous truth. Speaking of the restoration of God’s people, he spoke the words God gave him, **“For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring”** (Isaiah 44:3). And the prophet Zechariah had been even more pointed when he said, **“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness”** (Zechariah 13:1). The fountain had indeed been opened, but at the price of the death of the Son of God. And it flows to this very day—two unending streams—providing life and the covering of sin for all who will plunge into their healing flow.

**“They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”**  
Someday the veil will be parted—the heavens will

roll back as a scroll, and those who shared in the piercing of the side of Jesus will look upon Him and know the truth of their awful deed, and join with all nations in weeping and lamentation (see Revelation 1:7).

But the final curtain does not close on the crucifixion before there comes on the stage yet two more who must confront its piercing reality. Both are Sanhedrists; both had accepted Jesus as the Messiah; and both had been hiding as far as their faith was concerned—their fellow Jews did not know of their commitment. The cross changed all of that. Now, in the presence of Pilate; in public; in defiance of their fellows, they sought to honor Jesus by the proper burial of His body. Pilate readily agreed. Spices and linen were hastily procured. A nearby tomb (probably Joseph’s) was acquired; and the deed was done ere the Day of Preparation had begun. Nicodemus and Joseph had sought no special merit or favor; but their lives would never again be the same. The application of Calvary to the human heart is made by the Holy Spirit, and the sincere believer finds in himself a compelling force drawing him onward into an ever deepening involvement with the Master. There is no need of human pressure, or patterns. The Spirit Himself presses us onward in the realities of Christ, and there is no going back. Joseph and Nicodemus were marked men. They, too, had confronted the Crucified.

# John 20:1-18

## TRANSLATION

*Now on the first day of the week Mary, the Magdalene came early unto the tomb, while it was yet dark, and saw the stone taken away from the tomb. She ran then, and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter then went out, and the other disciple, and were coming unto the tomb. Now the two of them ran together; and the other disciple ran more quickly than Peter, and came first unto the tomb, and stooped down and saw the linen wrappings laid, but he did not go in. Simon Peter then came, following him, and went into the tomb; and beheld the linen wrappings laid, and the napkin, which was upon His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but folded up separately in another place. Then the other disciple, who had come first unto the tomb, entered and saw and believed. For they did not yet know the Scripture, that it was necessary for Him to rise from the dead. The disciples then went away again by themselves.*

*And Mary stood by the tomb without weeping. As she wept, then, she stooped and looked into the tomb, and beheld two angels in white, seated, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And those men said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When she had said these things she turned and beheld Jesus standing, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing that it was the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if you have borne Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni" (which is to say, Master). Jesus said to her, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father, and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.*

## COMMENTARY

### The Empty Tomb—Despair and Ecstasy

In sorrow; in wretchedness; in the dark moments before the dawn; came Mary, the Magdalene, to minister yet once more, in funereal sadness, to her beloved Lord. The singular thing about Mary's devotion, was that she cared about Christ. She had been miraculously delivered from demonic bondage and she, along with certain others who had been so delivered, had given of her life and substance in ministering to Jesus. Last at the cross in tragic vigil, she was also first at the tomb with

broken heart. When she came to the tomb, the stone was rolled away, but her Lord was gone! In panic, she ran to Peter and John and told them. They rushed back to the tomb, and made the startling discovery. The linen wrappings were scattered, but the napkin that covered His head lay neatly folded in its own place.\* Apparently skeptical at first, of Mary's story, Peter and John now believed. "They did not yet know the Scripture that it as necessary for Him to rise

\* This could discredit the idea that there is yet a shroud somewhere that once covered the body of Jesus. The head was covered with a different cloth than the rest of the body and the covering was strips of linen.

**from the dead.”** Incredible as it may seem, the truth of the resurrection had not yet penetrated the minds of the disciples. They had heard it with their ears, but not with their hearts. Jesus had given them many clues over the period of His life with them, but somehow the truth had failed to penetrate. Only the Holy Spirit can convince of truth. One can hear the Word over and over again, but until the spirit is ready, the mind will not receive it. How much of an impact was now made upon the disciples by the empty tomb is not clear. They saw and accepted and went away—nothing more.

But Mary, overwhelmed by shock and grief, stood by the tomb weeping. In her years with Jesus, her heart had been convicted of sin; purified by forgiving grace; delivered from a living death; and then crushed and shaped by the skillful hand of the Master. And now again the crushing and the weeping. Alas for the human flesh, this must be the lot of the followers of Jesus as long as they are upon the earth. **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow In His steps . . .”** (I Peter 2:21). But, if that seems a bleak prospect, we may take comfort in the words of Paul in Romans 8:17,18. **“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”** Truly, Mary’s heart had been crushed, but out of that crushing there came the glorious fragrance of a life forever devoted to Christ. Her one consuming desire now is to see Jesus. This is the only adequate focus for the followers of Christ. Where the focus of the bride of Christ is upon the trappings—the promotions, the methods, the systems, the theological debates—and not upon the Bridegroom, there will be nothing but confusion, and division, and a barren religious pose. The central theme of the entire Bible is a restored communion between God and man for eternity. The focus upon this communion with Christ will keep one from becoming lost in the wilderness of man-shaped religion.

The persistent devotedness to Christ by Mary had its reward. To her was given the priceless honor of being the first to see Jesus after His resurrection. It is doubtful that anything was going through Mary’s mind at this moment except the stunning reality that her beloved Master was gone. There was naught within her but a broken heart. Even the glory of the angels could not illuminate the darkness of her desolation. Addressing them as if they were human persons, she sobbed out her loss—**“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”** Not waiting for a response, she turned to go and saw a figure standing there, whom she supposed to be the gardener. Nothing of sight or sound would assuage her grief—nothing, that is, except the voice of her Master. He had only to say her name—**“Mary.”** The light exploded—**“Master!”** It was all she needed to lift her from despair to ecstasy. **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand”** (John 10:27,28).

Mary would have seized Him and clung to Him, but He restrained her. It was not that she was out of order, but rather that His resurrection body had not as yet been confirmed in glory. Later on He urged the disciples to touch Him. Something occurred in the interim between His encounter with Mary and His return to the disciples to allow Him once again to be appreciated by human senses. **“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have”** (Luke 24:39). To Mary again, the supreme honor of declaring to the disciples the first words of Jesus after His resurrection. Bearing the most startling revelation in the history of mankind—the resurrection of the Son of God—her first words were simply, **“I have seen the Lord.”**

This is the one great prevailing reality in the universe—the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what gives substance to our faith. All the theology and ritual and service of a lifetime can never substitute for the reality of the very Spirit of Christ within our spirits and the comradeship of Christ in our daily lives and the glory of our eternal life with Him.

# John 20:19-23

## TRANSLATION

*When it was evening then, on that first day of the week, and the doors having been shut where the disciples were because of the fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace to you." And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. And Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you; even as the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosever sins you forgive, are forgiven them. Whosever sins you retain, are retained."*

## COMMENTARY

### The Dawn of Resurrection Life

In the evening, in Galilee, behind closed doors, the disciples of Jesus watched and waited. Jesus had indeed risen, but the reality of it was only slowly dawning upon the flesh-dulled senses of the disciples. The blackness of the night of human misconception was slowly giving way before the dawn of resurrection life; but the sunlight of the Holy Spirit had not yet broken across the morning sky. Jesus had not yet been glorified and therefore the Holy Spirit had not yet been sent. Before ascending to the Father and to His glorification, He must have words with His followers.

Thus it was that Jesus stood suddenly in the midst of His disciples who were cowering, sequestered from the Jews in a secret chamber. Apparently, the walls restrained Him no more than death or the tomb. Suddenly there He was, standing in their midst. As on numerous other occasions, the incessantly alarmed disciples had to be reassured. His first word to them was the common but wondrously expressive Jewish greeting—*"Shalom."* It is most important to note the continuous commonality with which Jesus interacted with His followers in that interim period between His resurrection and His ascension. It was the same spirit that accompanied all of His wondrous ministry on the earth. Nothing was sensationalized or magnified for its

own sake. In all events—all miracles, all revelations, all expressions of divine glory—God must be glorified, and God alone. The glory of the ultimate recovery of God's creation for Himself outweighs all events upon the earth. And there is no language of man that is adequate to describe this glory. Therefore, when the events of the life of Christ are narrated in the Gospels, the use of simple statements of fact reflect the realization by the writers that only the Holy Spirit can give the true impact to these events. Shortly Jesus will meet the disciples on the beach. They will have breakfast together—an event, the simplicity of which, adds to the weight of evidence for the authenticity. For what author, if he were contriving these stories, would think to suggest that the Son of God, risen in all of His glory should come to make breakfast on the beach for His followers.

If the statements of Jesus, on the occasion of His first encounter with the disciples after His resurrection, were simple, they were also most profound. They reveal to us some very important facts about the resurrection life. In the first place, it must be noted that what Jesus became in His resurrection body, those who have taken His life into their spirits will also become. Paul tells the Corinthians, **"But now is Christ risen from the**

**dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept**” (I Corinthians 15:20). This means, of course that Christ is the first sample, or example, of all that will follow, just as the first handful of grain is the sample of what the entire crop will be like. The apostle John also confirms this point in his first Epistle when he says, **“It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is”** (I John 3:2). Jesus then has given us some very important clues to our own future glorification.

In the first place, it is evident that the structure of a building did not restrict His movements. That is, He was able, apparently, to simply pass into the room in spite of the walls. While our glorified bodies will have substance, in some degree like our present bodies, yet, they will also not be imprisoned by the restrictions of space and time. We will no doubt be able to enjoy God’s entire universe without the restrictions which today prevent us from knowing more than a very small part of it. On the other hand, it was evident by His statements, that He was not merely a disembodied spirit. He instructed His disciples to touch Him and see that He was not merely a spirit, but that He had also flesh and bone (see Luke 24). Luke also records that Jesus took some fish and honeycomb and ate them—indicating, of course, that the glorified ones will be able to enjoy food. In Revelation 19, reference is made to a marriage feast. In fact, all of the events that had to do with the period of time between the resurrection and the ascension, flow in such a normal fashion as to indicate that our life through eternity, while it will be without the pain of suffering of this world, will nevertheless, not be that much different than the normal processes of our lives here and now.

Much of the apprehension that accompanies the afterlife has to do with the uncertainty of just how that life is going to be. It is the common human apprehension of the unknown that concerns people. According to all indications in the Scripture, passing from this life into the next is but a momentary shift of locale, with very little change in the realities of our human existence. As

a matter of fact, God’s handiwork in the beginning was superb, and was only affected by the Fall in certain specific limitations. The human being is still a marvelous creation, and will serve us well in the eternity of God when the negative effects of sin are removed. The brain, for example, is a marvelous instrument. Limited by the effects of the fall, we now know only in part, but then we shall know even as also we are known. In fact, when the Holy Spirit comes into our spirits and thus has a sanctifying effect upon the mind, it becomes once again, even on the earth, a very useful instrument. When the Holy Spirit is absent, the mind is very untrustworthy. Even now as a sanctified instrument, it still must be regarded with care, because it can easily be affected by old patterns of thought. Everyone who has taken the Spirit of Christ into, one’s own spirit, possesses the very attributes of Christ in that spirit. When we apply the spirit to the circumstances or relationships around us, the result is an expression of the fruit of the Spirit. To approach a circumstance or relationship in the Spirit means to want what Christ wants in regard to that matter. When we want what Christ wants, our human spirits, possessed by the Holy Spirit, effectively express the love and joy and peace and patience, which are said to be the fruit of the Spirit. But, when we approach these matters in the flesh—that is when we want something for self, then attitudes of the flesh are evident—anxiety, bitterness, envy, and all of those attitudes which make life miserable. Paul tells Timothy to “. . . **lay hold on eternal life . . .**” (I Timothy 6:12). Even now, in this life, we may enjoy the fruit of resurrection life. Plagued by the effects of the Fall, this enjoyment is not without its limitations, but the more we apply the attitudes of Christ toward relationships and circumstances, the more we may live now in the foretaste of our future state.

Thus, the resurrection of Christ guarantees our future resurrection and the nature of our glorified being. The greeting—*Shalom*—conveys so much of natural warmth and grace, and takes the entire encounter out of the realm of the mystic and mysterious, and assures the disciples that they are confronting the real presence of Jesus their Lord. They believed and rejoiced.

## John 20:19-23 (continued)

### The Master's Life, the Master's Power, and the Master's Work

Having assured the disciples of the reality of His presence, Jesus now charges them with the fulfillment of His mission on the earth: **“As the Father has sent Me into the world, I also am sending you.”** Marvelous mission—to stand on earth in place of the Son of God! We are not surrogate (substitute) gods. We do not have power of ourselves, but only as His Spirit works in us and through us. In the other Gospels, the nature of the work is outlined: John focuses on the marvel of human beings sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world. This is an important focus. Sometimes the majesty of the mission is obscured by eager promotional tactics which tend to couch the concept of ambassadorship in such legalistic demands that the sense of privilege is replaced by bondage. Jesus spoke out against this very tendency in the Pharisees.

To be here on earth in the place of Christ means to function as His body. We are not “little Christs” going about to imitate Him on the earth. We are rather His body, functioning under the direction of Him as the head. Thus, the so-called “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:19 is a corporate commission—that is, it is given to the body as a whole, to function in many different capacities and so together fulfill His will and purpose on the earth. It is not that each individual must go out and preach the Gospel, but rather exercise one's own gift in conjunction with the other gifts. As each one exercises his own gift, the result is that the entire body of believers is preaching the Gospel together. Some have public gifts which put them in the position of speaking the Word, but others have gifts that are not immediately obvious or public. When the body of believers is functioning properly, as the evangelists and teachers go out to speak, the body of believers

goes with them in spirit, and exercises its supportive gifts in terms of fellowship and prayer and giving, for example. Thus what Christ did personally in the way of ministry when He was on the earth, His body now does corporately, and even more, because they are now endued with the power and presence of His Holy Spirit. It is most important for the body of believers to realize that not all gifts are vocal or public. It is sometimes assumed that every believer must go and proclaim the Gospel publicly in one way or another. This produces discouragement in many believers who are endowed with gifts that may not be obvious. Paul warns against this very thing in I Corinthians 12. Not everyone is a “mouth.”

**“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** In a pre-pentecostal touch, Jesus ministered the Holy Spirit to the disciples. It was obvious that they did not receive the full impact of the Spirit as later they would on the Day of Pentecost. Later, Jesus would tell them to remain in Jerusalem until they would receive the **“promise of the Father,”** in fulfillment of which they would be **“baptized with the Holy Spirit.”** The touch of the Spirit from Jesus in the upper room was preliminary to this, and was still of the nature of the numerous incidents in the Old Testament, in which a special touch of the Spirit was given. Perhaps this touch of the Spirit would enable them to receive the ministry of Jesus to them during these last few days on the earth and prepare them for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

**“Whose ever sins you forgive, have been forgiven them”**—the disciples did not have the power to initiate forgiveness. God alone can forgive sins. What they did receive from Christ, however, was the power to express the forgiving

grace of God to others. And, by the same power, they could express the withholding of that forgiveness.

Thus the body of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will fulfill the work of Christ on the earth. Jesus plainly declared, **“He who believes on Me, the works which I am doing**

**shall he do also, and greater than these shall he do because I am going to the Father”** (John 14:12) (Author’s translation). And Paul picks up this theme in his letter to the Ephesians, **“And He has given Him as a head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of the One who fulfills all things in all”** (Ephesians 1:23) (Author’s translation).

# John 20:24-31

## TRANSLATION

*And Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples were saying to him then, "We have seen the Lord!" And he said to them, "Except I see in His hands the prints of the nails, and put my finger in the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe at all." And after eight days the disciples again were within, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, "Peace to you." Then He said to Thomas, "Bring your finger here, and behold My hands; and bring your hand here, and put it into My side; and do not be an unbeliever, but a believer." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God." Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed." Jesus did many other signs also before the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these things are written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

## COMMENTARY

### Thomas and the Problem of Faith

And yet once more does the spotlight focus on a soul in search of Jesus. Thomas was not one of the more prominent of the disciples. There are a number of traditions about Thomas, including one which has him establishing a church in India, but, as we have noted before, it is probably better to focus rather on those things that the Scripture itself tends to emphasize. If the Holy Spirit wanted us to know more about Thomas, He would certainly have impressed the writers to have included it in their narratives. The fact of the matter is that the incidents which the Holy Spirit chose to reveal to us about Thomas are most instructive. Evidently, the problem of belief was a constant one for him. Our first real introduction comes at the time when Jesus has acknowledged that His beloved friend, Lazarus, was dead. Jesus had sought to convey to the disciples the deeper truth that in the sight of God, the Father of life, the word "death" was misapplied. In fact, He intended to go now and demonstrate this reality in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The explanation was utterly lost on the flesh-dulled

senses of the disciples. In fact, Thomas, completely unfazed by Jesus' remarkable words, reacted with typical Jewish empathy—"Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Our next encounter with Thomas, coming sometime later, just prior to Jesus' death, finds his thought processes no less earth-bound. After countless conversations and revelations and miracles, in the company of Jesus, Thomas has still not figured it out. It was on the occasion of the Last Supper. Jesus had spoken many words to His disciples, just before His final suffering, to help them understand just what was about to happen, and what their own future would be. Once again Thomas appears to have been totally in the dark about it all. Jesus declared plainly that the disciples should know where He was going, and the way to life that He had so thoroughly revealed to them during their sojourn together on the earth. Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?" His question gave rise to one of the outstanding statements of Christ about

Himself—"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." For Thomas' persistent pursuit of the truth we can be grateful, because through his questioning we, too, have received much insight. Still, the struggle of Thomas to break free from the shackles of his human consciousness, and to enter into the full freedom of faith, is obvious to all. But, if it is obvious to all, it is a problem with which all can identify. In fact, of course, apart from the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for the human mind to grasp the things of God. But, as Jesus taught during this very period of time, the Holy Spirit would not come in His fullness until Jesus would send Him to the people of earth, after His own return to glory. The incomplete understanding, suffered by all of the disciples, was the result of the, as yet, incomplete coming of the Holy Spirit, prior to Pentecost.

And now, in Galilee, in another upper room, Thomas will come at last to the end of his human vacillation. The clouds of doubt will be swept away before the sunlight of the real presence of Christ. Apparently crushed by the weight of what seemed to be the consummation of his worst fears—that they did not know this Jesus at all, nor what He was doing, nor where He was going—Thomas had quietly separated himself from the disciples who had gone to the secret chamber. Whether he had decided to give up entirely, or merely needed time alone to collect his thoughts, at least Thomas was not among the disciples when Jesus made His startling appearance. True to himself, he would not, when finally sought out by the other disciples, accept on their word, the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. He had to see for himself—to examine the wounds, and touch them, and speak with Jesus face to face. The grace of Jesus was adequate for the earthy, incredulous, struggling Thomas. Patiently, He invited Thomas to come and see and touch and to give up his unbelief. **"Be not an unbeliever, but a believer."** Thomas believed. The years of stumbling and wavering passed in a moment, and Thomas joined the family of believers. What was he prior to this time? It is not certain, but Jesus' statement is quite strong—

**"Do not be an unbeliever, but a believer."** Was it possible to be in company with Jesus, and yet not be a believer? Obviously so. Consider Judas. There is, of course, a difference between believing theologically, or historically about Jesus, and believing in Him so as to commit one's life to Him. The Greek word for believing, *pisteuo* carries with it the idea of commitment. (In this sense, it is used in John 2:24.) Thomas had been drawn to Jesus, had sat at His feet as a teacher, had journeyed with Him, and had come even up to the cross with Him. But, with all of that, it was quite possible that Jesus' words could be taken literally—that he still had stood on the side of the unbeliever. Now, he had touched Jesus and become in the true sense, a believer.

The episode of Thomas affects all mankind. The most important single issue in all of life is the question of the nature of our being. Where did we come from? Where are we going? What is our ultimate connection with life? All of the major decisions of our lives and a great many minor ones rest on these questions. Our attitude toward what this world is all about is called a "world view." Sometimes one's world view is merely philosophical. That is, one has never really tested it out as a basis of decision-making. There is sometimes a great discrepancy between what one claims to believe, and how one actually lives in the day to day world. The real difference between philosophy and religion is that philosophy brings together ideas, and religion, theoretically, at least, represents the ideas that one actually lives by. The word "religion," technically, does not necessarily involve the idea of God. Its root meaning actually has to do with regulation, or the rules by which we live. (Confucius, who founded the religious movement that controlled China for 3,500 years, did not have anything to do with God, or the afterlife.) Thus, religion has to do with those ideas that we hold with enough conviction to use them as the basis of our values and goals in life. The only way to really make sound decisions in life is to make them on the basis of one's world view. Otherwise one's life is a disconnected series of episodes. It would be well for one to stop sometime and ponder what one really believes,

and consider just how one's life goals and life style are in harmony with this view.

We can organize our thinking around these three divisions of life—*life view, life goals, and lifestyle*. *Life-view* has to do, as already explained, with the fundamental beliefs that are the basis of our decision-making; *life goals* have to do with the objectives we have, or what we plan to do with our lives; *lifestyle* has to do with the manner in which we live—social status, material possessions, activities, etc. Our lifestyle is really the face we present to the world. Now, for a well-ordered life, all of these various aspects of our lives ought to be in harmony. For example, if one's life view includes in it the idea of God and the meaning of eternal life, one would hardly select for life goals, objectives that are totally consumed in this world, as for example, to make a million dollars. One might, on the other hand, find it consistent to have as a life-goal the establishment of a business, if the ultimate end of that business would be to serve the Lord through it. Further, if one selects life goals that limit income, one must then be careful to make choices about lifestyle that are consistent with the limitations of the income. For example, if one elects to take up a career that is chiefly a matter of service (a form of the ministry, for example), one would have to limit one's taste for elegance. On the other hand, if one's life view does not include the idea of God, or of any meaning to life beyond the grave, then one ought to choose life goals that would not in any way limit one's fullest achievement of satisfaction in this life. All ideas of charity and service to mankind are absurd, if there is no God. And if one were to argue that such a view is very selfish, then one must be reminded that unselfishness is a moral value that has no meaning apart from God. But, one may argue that unselfishness makes for a better world and in turn makes life better for ourselves, then one is merely arguing for another form of selfishness. It is most interesting to observe that many who attempt to dismiss God by the theory of evolution, supporting a theory that requires survival of the fittest, will regard the same thesis as immoral when applied to society. They want to engineer society so that it

may be reduced to the limitations of the weak. Egalitarianism, which means reducing society to a state of total equality, is completely inconsistent with the theory of evolution. Yet, many argue vehemently for both. Unselfishness and equality are luxuries that the evolutionist can ill afford. All of this has to do with the consistency between one's life-view, and the realities of one's daily attitude and conduct.

The above discussion may seem to be a sidetrack into the brush. In reality, it has very much to do with the original questions which were posed. The daily decision-making and conduct of our lives is very much dependent upon what we think life is all about. Many people believe in God, philosophically, but not enough to make the reality of God the basis of their decision-making. On the other hand, many who deny the existence of God constantly involve themselves in issues and activities that are meaningless apart from God. If one's faith is only a philosophical matter, then it doesn't make a lot of difference what one believes. For such ones, religion is an endless debate. But, if one seriously wishes to live consistently with one's beliefs, then faith must be a matter of commitment. But, how can one believe that strongly? How can we bridge the gap between the limited human consciousness locked up in natural laws, and the idea of a Supreme Being, who must, of necessity, be beyond nature. If one insists that there is nothing outside of nature, and that all of our ideas must come from within the limits of human mental capacity, then the argument is closed. But, if one believes that there is something beyond nature, then the natural mind must be open to spiritual forces beyond nature. Some forms of religion (e.g. mysticism) believe that there is no absolute revelation of truth, and insist that one must explore this realm for oneself, accepting such assistance as is available. Others, however, believe that there has been a revelation of absolute truth from God, by which human beings can be guided in the spirit realm.

The followers of Christ belong in the latter category. They believe that God has given a specific revelation of Himself through the Living Word, which is Christ, and through the written

Word, which is the Bible. To be a follower of Christ, one must accept the Bible as the true revelation of God, written by Him, through the inspiration of human authors. The reason that this is a necessity is that outside of the Bible we have no way of knowing for sure who Christ is, or how to relate to Him. Thus, the Bible becomes the most reliable link that we have between ourselves and God, especially since it gives a specific definition of who God is, and how human beings can relate to Him. It should be observed here that the tendency in the church to focus on extra-biblical revelations is dangerous. It opens the mind to easy deceptions by Satan. The claim of special revelations from God is so universal in every religious movement, Christian and non-Christian, that the claim to authenticity is highly suspicious. It would be far better to master the written revelation that God has already given us before seeking special revelations. Unfortunately, the amount of work required to master the Bible makes it more attractive to depend upon private “revelations,” allegedly from God. God gave the gift of teachers to the Body of Christ for this very reason. It is obviously impractical for the individual believer to master the Bible, including its languages. But, the members of the Body have every right to expect the teachers to master it. The mastery of the Word, along with the anointing of the Holy Spirit would be the chief criteria by which to judge the teachers. Wholesome, nourishing food is essential for healthy growth. If God has given us a revelation, He expects us to (1) use it wisely and (2) trust His Spirit to apply it to our lives.

This, of course, brings us to the crucial question of how we can know for sure that the Bible is from God. The answer is that as we read it or hear it, the Holy Spirit Himself confirms its truth to our spirit. Just as “**His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God . . .**” (Romans 8:16), so the Spirit of Christ within us bears witness to the truth. Jesus said, “**If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the teachings whether it is of God, or I speak from Myself [that is, as a man]**” (John 7:17) (Author’s translation). It is quite

honest and legitimate to come to God and ask Him to reveal the truth through His Word. If God expects us to believe the Bible as His Word, then we have a right to expect Him to confirm to us its truth. We cannot, however, expect Him to prove it before we read it. If we try to judge its authenticity before we read it, then we will probably never read it. It would, of course, be unsound to judge it on the basis of a very sketchy reading, or on the basis of passages extracted from it. If we are going to judge the Bible properly, we must read it as any other book. (It would probably be well for one to begin reading in the New Testament, if one is picking it up for the first time.)

The answers set forth to the questions introduced at the beginning, are to be found in the Bible. But, the only way that the human mind can be convinced of the truth of the Bible is by the witness of God to us. However, we cannot expect Him to give us such a witness without reading it. The promise of Jesus is, “**Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you**” (Matthew 7:7). To this the Old Testament prophets also give witness—“**And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart**” (Jeremiah 29:13). While this was written originally to the people of Israel, yet the New Testament writers apply it to all people everywhere.

Jesus’ words to Thomas reveal two important things about faith—(1) it is possible to believe without seeing, and (2) God does sometimes help the weak by allowing them material confirmation. True to His word, if anyone is sincerely concerned to find the truth, God has many ways of confirming it. The important elements are a sincere search and an open mind. Jesus’ preference was obvious—“**Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.**”

But, what is faith? What does it mean, “to believe?” In the *first place*, belief, as it refers to faith in Christ, involves commitment. That is, it means believing beyond the philosophical, to the practical—to the application of it as the regulating

or controlling force of life. In the *second place*, it is a gift of God—that is, it is only possible through the agency of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “**No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw Him . . .**” (John 6:44). As a gift of God, faith is a natural function of the mind, when it has been touched by God. As the eyes respond to the light by seeing, the mind responds to the touch of the Spirit of Christ by believing. All external evidences, such as miracles, or special circumstances, are secondary. People who insist that they must have special proofs, are likely to be disappointed. The same blindness that keeps one from being open to the Spirit of God, will also keep one from accepting any external evidences as valid. The miracles which Jesus performed were never meant to prove to unbelievers that God exists. They were rather used to confirm to the believers that Jesus was indeed coming from God. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit, ever sensitive to individual needs, will provide whatever is necessary for the sincere seeker after truth, to come to faith.

In the *third place*, faith stands by itself as an energizing force within us, enabling us to function in the spiritual realm, as electromagnetic current is an energizing force enabling us to function in the physical realm. In Hebrews 11:1 we read, “**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” The word “**substance**” is a Greek word, *hupostasis*, which refers to the underlying structure of reality. For example, it is the concrete structure of a building that lies under the tile or marble facade. In another figure, the electromagnetic current flowing through the conduit is the reality, whereas the conduit is merely the appearance which gives us the expectation of the reality. The word “hope,” again, must be understood as the Greeks understood it. The Greeks did not use the word in any sense of uncertainty, as the English, “hope” conveys. It rather meant “expectation,” which was an assumption that the appearance was also the reality. The English word “expectation” is a better translation. When we see electrical conduit, we have the *expectation* that

is there for the transmitting of electromagnetic current. That energizing power within us also becomes the evidence (Greek: confirmation) of the very presence of Christ and the truth of His promises. That confirming sense of the Holy Spirit within us is much like the vitality that we sense as living beings charged with the impulses within us that make up the nervous system. As we sense the vitality of being alive, physically, so the presence of the Holy Spirit within us gives us the sense of being alive spiritually. Thus, it is not necessary to see in order to believe, any more than it is necessary for a light bulb, or an appliance to work in order to assume that there is a source of electromagnetic energy feeding it, all things being equal. In this case, the energy source is the reality and the light fixture is only a circumstantial, but undependable expression of that energy. Those who rely on such circumstantial evidences are subject to continual disappointment, disillusionment, and deception.

But how does one determine if the faith of God is really present within? The simplest and most profound answer lies in our attitude toward Christ. **THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US WILL CAUSE US TO CARE ABOUT CHRIST.** But, “caring” does not necessarily mean “feeling.” Feelings are really physical, and as such, are not at all dependable. We may be frustrated, disappointed, indifferent, as far as our emotions are concerned, but the caring is still there if we have the Spirit of Christ in us. The test is not how we feel about Christ at the moment, but whether we still want Christ with us and still want to please Him. Wanting to please Him and actually carrying out that desire are also two different things. Thus, the Christian may have a very disappointing day—full of frustrations, anger, failures, but if, at the end of the day, one still cares to be with Christ, that is the evidence that the Spirit of Christ is in us. Without the Holy Spirit, we could not relate to Christ, anymore than a light bulb could function without the electromagnetic current.

**“But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**

...” The Holy Spirit communicates to us through His Word. There is no use to wait for a special revelation, or a special miracle. The world is around us as the greatest possible miracle, and the Word of God is before us as the greatest possible source of truth. To look beyond these is presumptuous. As to the former, the apostle Paul

declares to the people of Rome that things of creation are such a powerful witness to the reality of God that those who refuse to accept it are without excuse (see Romans 1). As to the latter, Paul says in Romans 10:17, “**So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.**”

# John 21:1-14

## TRANSLATION

*After these things Jesus appeared Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself thus. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas, who was called Didymus, and Nathanael who was from Cana of Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also are coming with you." They went out and embarked on the boat; and on that night they caught nothing. And when it was early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore; although the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them then, "Children, you do not have any food, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you shall find." They cast then, and were no longer able to draw it because of the multitude of the fish. That disciple, whom Jesus loved, said then to Peter, "It is the Lord." So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, girded himself with his outer tunic (for he was clad only in the inner one), and cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came with the boat (for they were not far from land, but about three hundred feet), dragging the net of fish. As then they disembarked onto the land, they saw a fire of coals laid, and fish, and bread laid upon it. Jesus said to them, "Bring of the fish which you have just caught." Simon Peter then went and drew the net unto the land, full of the great number of fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared inquire of Him, "Who art Thou?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread, and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This was yet the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after He had risen from the dead.*

## COMMENTARY

### Breakfast with Christ on the Shores of Galilee

For a monarch to prepare breakfast for his subjects would be, by all standards, an act of *noblesse oblige*—nobility serving commoners in symbolic social duty. For Jesus, who had, in resurrection power, achieved the position of "Lord of the universe," it was a startling, but certainly genuine, expression of personal identification with His people on the earth. It was a clear statement by Jesus, not that He was willing to lower Himself, in spite of His glory, to the inglorious functions of human beings, but rather that the normal functions of human beings are not, after all, unworthy of the glory of God. God had, in fact, created man in His own image, and had no cause to be ashamed of His handiwork. Part of the glory

of man has been his capacity for free choice. The risk of creating such a being, of course, was that his choices might prove to be out of keeping with God's intentions for him. What will at last prove to be the supreme justification of the greatness of God's creative act, is that myriads upon myriads of His creatures will, in fact, choose to dwell with Him forever. Thus, in this simple episode by a tiny lake on the surface of the earth, Jesus once again demonstrates the complete compatibility between the ordinary processes of human beings, and the ineffable glory of God.

The sea of Galilee (renamed Tiberias) had been the scene of Jesus' initial efforts to assemble His

disciples. So strong had been the power of the Holy Spirit, that these burly, practical, simple men of the sea, had left all and followed Jesus. It was the more remarkable, considering that Jesus was a controversial figure who seemed to run counter to many of the traditions of the religion which had been, for these simple men, their only substantial link to God. Apparently, some of the disciples, at least, went immediately with Him, without further evidence of who He was. In later months, there would be many questions and many doubts about Jesus, but the Spirit of God was so strong upon them, that they now went with Him without question.

It is surely not by accident that the culmination of all Jesus' earthly sojourn, should take place on the same spot. The disciples had returned to their boats. Why, after such a glorious event as Jesus' personal appearance to them in the upper room, would they think to pursue such a mundane activity as fishing? Was it cynicism, or doubt as to the reality of Jesus? Certainly not! They had already encountered the risen Christ, and been convinced by Him. Was it uncertainty as to their future? Again, decidedly not! They had just received the grand appointment as ambassadors of Christ to the world. The very calmness of the disciples' mood speaks of the peace and tranquility that is promised by the Holy Spirit. They had the commission, but not as yet the orders. And, they will wait still further at Jesus' instructions, until they are empowered from above for a task that is quite beyond their own power. The humanistic spirit of promotionalism has often been responsible for premature pressures to "get the job done," not in keeping with the more important need of waiting for God's power and God's timing.

And so the disciples, having no other word of instruction as yet, put out to sea for another "catch." Despite their new "position of privilege" with God, they were not favored by the sea. A futile night was passed, and the dawn about to break. With the dawn came Jesus and stood upon the shore. The stinging question—"Did you catch anything?" and the advice, "Try the other side," was doubtless received because the voice of the Spirit came through the Master. These were

professional fishermen, not weekend anglers; they knew the sea; they were frustrated and weary. Ordinarily, such questions as these would have added insult to injury. Nevertheless, at Jesus' word, they lowered the nets yet once more—success!—and in such abundance that they could not handle the net. Thus, a marvelous and pointed lesson was given them on the threshold of their assignment—no amount of human effort to accomplish the work will avail apart from the Holy Spirit. God's timing and God's power are essential. Jesus had said in the beginning that He would make them fishers of men. They were learning, indeed, how to fish.

Back at the shore, Jesus had prepared their breakfast. In all of the Bible there is no more delightful, warm, comforting scene than this one. Who, of human authors, if they sought to fabricate the life of Jesus, would have included such a scene? It is such total artlessness that helps to confirm the authenticity of the Bible. But, what a revelation to us of the heart of Jesus! And, what a revelation of that which lies ahead for us in our glorified state! While the limitations that have been the curse of our fallen state, will no longer trouble us, yet, in all other respects, we will be very much as we are now—we shall think and feel and eat and fellowship and know one another, as Jesus did that day on the shores of Galilee with the disciples.

God and man came together and shared fellowship on that earth-bound shore in complete compatibility. There was no "superspiritual" pose; there were no religious formalities; there was no pious superiority; nor any of those things by which the fleshly man tends to pursue God, or to prove himself to God, or to prove God to himself. There was only the simple reality of God and man together, reconciled by a successful mission of Jesus to rescue the people of earth. Even before the ultimate glorification of man, such fellowship was available to the disciples then and to the millions of His followers that have come after. It is not necessary to wait for the ultimate glorification. The same fellowship is available today for all who wish to share with Christ what the disciples shared on the shores of Galilee.

# John 21:15-25

## TRANSLATION

*When they had eaten then, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me [hold Me in high esteem] more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You [consider You my dear friend]." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me [hold Me in high esteem]?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You [consider You my dear friend]." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me [consider Me your dear friend]?" Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me [consider Me your dear friend]?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You [consider You my dear friend]." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked about wherever you wished; but when you become old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and will carry you where you do not wish." And this He said, signifying by what sort of death he would glorify God. And when He had said this, He said to him, "Follow Me."*

*Peter turned, and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved, following, (who also had reclined at supper on His bosom and had said, "Lord, who is he who is betraying You?"). Peter then, seeing this one, said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this one?" Jesus said to him, "If I wish for him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." This word then went out unto the brothers, that that disciple would not die. But Jesus had not said that he would not die, but, "If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"*

*This is the disciple who is bearing witness concerning these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his witness is true.*

*And there are many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written at one time, I suppose that not even the world itself would be able to contain the books that were written.*

## COMMENTARY

### Peter and the Problem of Love

In all of the Gospels; in every encounter between Jesus and the persons who came across His path, He pressed for reality. Under this pressure many turned away; some responded readily; some struggled exceedingly and finally yielded. Such was Peter. He is not new to us; we have met him before—in the crucible. Of all the disciples, he epitomizes the struggle. Jesus knew Peter from the moment that they met, as He had known the other disciples. How did He know?—both by

the revelation of God within Him, and by the sensitivities acquired over thirty years of "being about His Father's business," which was people. To the startled Nathanael (John 1) Jesus accepted the implication that His knowledge was beyond the ordinary, assuring Nathanael that he would see even greater works in the days to come. In John 2:24, on the other hand, Jesus professes to know what was in man, and uses a Greek word *ginōskō* which usually refers to acquired

knowledge, rather than revelational knowledge. And so Jesus knew what was in Peter, the agonizing struggle of his soul that awaited him, and the ultimate victory that would make of him, “a rock.”

Understanding the deep, penetrating knowledge that Jesus had of Peter is essential in understanding the encounter between Jesus and Peter on the question of love. Of all human emotions, love is probably most subject to the problem of deception. It has the potential of being as evil as it is good; and deception is as much a problem for the giver of love as the receiver. Peter had made some rather bold statements in regard to his loyalty to Jesus, and had failed miserably in the test. Jesus must now plumb the depths of Peter's soul, and expose the level of reality there. He had done this with so many. The “rich young ruler,” for example, thought that he kept the law, until Jesus ripped off the veneer and exposed the wretched reality. Another was Thomas—who must see himself, not as a realist, demanding evidence, but as an unbeliever, needing penitence. Jesus always saw faith as a matter of the will, and doubt as a smokescreen hiding an impenitent heart. His promise was that anyone who had the will to believe would have God's help in finding faith.

Just so with love. God's commandment to us to love one another was not addressed to the fickle human emotion, but to the Spirit-empowered will. If one did not have power to choose to love, God would not have commanded it. Concerning this matter, John, the apostle, writes, “**Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born from God and knows God**” (I John 4:7) (Author's translation). The godless may speak of love, but, on the strength of the Word of God, we must assume that whatever they are talking about, it is not what God is talking about. But, what then is God talking about?

To answer this question, we must pay very close attention to the exchange between Jesus and Peter. In this exchange there are two different words

used for love. The distinct pattern makes it unlikely that they are being used interchangeably, or as synonyms.

There was no question about Peter's restoration. He had been forgiven, and apparently enjoyed full fellowship with the Savior. However, Peter had been quite presumptuous in his attitude, and Jesus would not let it pass. There had perhaps been a number of incidents that reflected this attitude of Peter's, but one recorded by Matthew certainly points up the problem. “**Peter answered and said unto him, ‘Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended’**” (Matthew 26:33). Jesus followed this by saying, “**Verily I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice.**” This should have been enough for Peter to stop and consider what he was saying. But, Peter blundered on—“**Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.**” Peter will now be reminded of his claims. It is a most painful moment, but an essential surgery. If Peter would go on with Christ, he must confront himself honestly at every point.

“**Do you love Me more than these?**” “What now about your boasts, Peter? Do you love Me more than these others? Will you not be offended even though everyone else is?” In Peter's response to this question, he uses a word for love that has a more intimate sense than Jesus' word. It has to do with very personal relationships—friend, relative, close associate. To understand this text, we must see the distinction. The word Jesus used for love is the Greek word, *agape*. It is by now, quite familiar to the body of believers. It is unfortunate that both words are treated by the English word “love.” *Agape* is the general word used throughout the Bible for God's love for man, and man's love for God. It is everywhere used for God's command regarding love. As such, it is an appeal to the will. Its basic meaning in classical Greek included the ideas of caring, esteem, respect, considerateness, and satisfaction. It does not necessarily involve the emotions, although sometimes it is used in that context. It is a rational love, based upon identifiable reasons. It would

not, normally, be used of spontaneous emotional response. When God commands love for our enemies, He is not asking us for emotional response, or affection, but rather for caring and consideration. It is this kind of caring that allows us to pray for our enemies, and to give assistance to them where it is needed. One does not have to condone an enemy's deeds, or even have any affection for that enemy at all, but only to respond to him as God would respond to a world of sinners. Such love, in its truest sense, could of course only come from God, as the apostle John reminds us in a passage quoted above.

The word with which Peter responds to Jesus' question—*phileo*—is a much warmer word. It does involve the emotions quite considerably. It has to do with liking, affection, very personal relationships such as family and close friends. It is, in fact, the basis of the word “friend,” and even of the word “kiss” used in the Garden of Gethsemane where Judas identified Jesus with a kiss. It is never used as a point of command. It is often used in surface emotions, but is not necessarily a superficial word. In several places it is used in connection with the love between God and Christ. As such it reflects the relationship of father and son in particular. *Phileo* would, in the nature of the case, normally include *agape* but *agape* would not necessarily include *phileo*.

What Jesus asks of Peter is the *agape* love of esteem and caring, as reflected in the law. Peter, not yet filled with the Spirit, responds still in the flesh, still somewhat impulsively, “More than that, You are my very dear friend.” Twice, Jesus questions him on the basis of *agape* love and then accepts Peter's word, *phileo*. Peter, probably not as sensitive to the distinction as Jesus was, is grieved that his friendship should be challenged three times. After Pentecost, Peter will be filled with a love not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. “**The fruit of the Spirit is love . . .**” (Galatians 5:22). Jesus, of course, knows what is ahead for Peter, and is bold to ask him to be a shepherd of the sheep whom He now must leave as He returns to glory.

The issue of love is a crucial one for the believer,

as is the issue of faith. The crucial questions are, (1) What is the nature of the love that God expects of us; and, (2) How do we achieve such love? In the strict definition of *agape* love, feelings as expressions of the human psyche are not necessarily involved. That is not to say that the word *agape* could not involve the emotions, as it is sometimes used, but it does not require the involvement of the emotions. This is most important for the believer, who often assumes that because he doesn't feel something, he must not, therefore be expressing love to God. The fact that human beings often do feel something of emotion in their relationship to God, is normal and appropriate, but is not essential to the commandment. The human emotions are quite undependable. In our relationship to other human beings, the emotions are not always consistent. In fact, if the emotions are constantly stirred up, either positively or negatively, it can drain the energy, and cause difficulty. Properly expressed, *agape* love directed toward God would be fulfilled in an attitude of caring about God and holding Him in high esteem.

*Agape* love would be expressed toward our brothers and sisters in Christ by caring about them, and praying for them, and ministering to such physical and spiritual needs as we can. *Agape* love for our enemies would be expressed in caring for them, praying for their salvation, and ministering to their material needs as the Lord may direct. Christians do not have the responsibility of feeding the world. Rather, we have the task of serving the Lord among believer and unbeliever as He may direct. It is certainly not necessary to feel any affection or warmth for our enemies, any more than Jesus felt affection for the Pharisees. He surely cared about them, but never gave any evidence of affection for them. By the same token, *agape* love even for our fellow believers, does not require us to have particular affection for them. Many times the conduct even of Christian people, is offensive, and should not be condoned by being overlooked. It is not the responsibility of a Christian to display affection to all believers just because they are Christians. It is very important for people to have to face the

consequences of their conduct. Thus if someone acts in an offensive way, it is very important that they realize that they alienate other people when they so conduct themselves. One of the disintegrative factors in family relationships is the assumption that just because one is a relative one deserves our affection. People who are careless in their relationship to others, will have to face the possibility of spending much of their life alone. Nor does *agape* love require general forgiveness. God Himself only extends forgiveness to those who ask for it. He, of course, always has a forgiving Spirit, but only extends the forgiveness as it is sought. Jesus gave specific instructions on this matter. **“Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him”** (Luke 17:3).

Now, as to how we acquire this love, the Bible very clearly indicates that it is a gift of God—a fruit of the Spirit. In addition to the passage already quoted from I John 4, there is also the express statement in Galatians 5:22—**“The fruit of the Spirit is love . . .”** It is very important to distinguish here between love that is of the spirit and love that is of the flesh. When we possess the Spirit of Christ in our spirits, we have His love in us. The only way we can be saved is to be born of the Spirit. And if we are born of the Spirit, then we have His Spirit in us. And if we have His Spirit in us, we have also His love in us. When we function in the spirit, His love flows through us to others. It is not a matter of learning how to love, and then loving; rather it is a matter of letting the Holy Spirit love others through us. Our task is to relate to others—His task is to love them through us. When we relate to others in the spirit—that is, in the name of Christ—the Spirit of God in us reaches out to them in love. Relating to others in the spirit simply means that in our relationship to them we want what Christ wants. If we relate to others in the flesh, that is, in selfish interests, then we can only depend on human love, or human feelings, which are completely undependable.

It is very risky to judge the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives on the basis of any kind of

human emotions, especially of love. If we judge our relationship to Christ on the basis of how we feel about Him at a given moment, we are going to be very much confused. Love that is a fruit of the Spirit, expresses itself by caring about Christ. If the Holy Spirit is in us, we will care about Christ. We may not feel very much, and we may not always be satisfied with our actions, but if we care about Christ, it is obvious that the Holy Spirit is working in us. No one can truly care about Christ apart from the Holy Spirit. The most mature believer is subject to being in the flesh at times. As long as we are on the earth, we will have to contend with the natural man. If we relate to people or circumstances in terms of the flesh, we will have to suffer the consequences of fleshly attitudes and feelings. This may affect our peace of mind, or our feelings of devotion, or well-being, but this does not mean that we have therefore lost the Spirit. If we have taken the Spirit of Christ into our spirits, He has established there a fortress of faith, which remains secure in the midst of the variables of our human thoughts and emotions. As we relate to people and circumstances in the spirit, the qualities of the spirit prevail; if we relate to people in circumstances in the flesh the qualities of our own nature prevail.

In summary, the love that Christ commands of us is the *agape* love of caring, esteem, considerateness. The love that Christ commands does not necessarily involve the *phileo* love of the emotions. Anyone who possesses the Spirit of Christ within, possesses also His love within. That love will be expressed through us insofar as we relate to Him and to others in the Spirit—that is, in the name of Christ. When we relate to others in the flesh—that is, in terms of self interest—then we are at the mercy of fickle human love. The love which Christ commands of us does not require feelings of affection for others, or approval of them. It requires only that we care about them, and express that care as we are directed by His Spirit. We can be assured of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and of His love, when we care about Christ and others.

Jesus, satisfied that Peter had gotten the message, then revealed to him that one day he would be called upon again to face the test. This time, Jesus does not intimate that Peter will not pass the test. Immediately after this high point of fellowship with Christ in the Spirit, however, human nature again asserts itself and Jesus must rebuke Peter for intruding in the private relationship between Christ and a fellow

disciple: **“What is that to you. You follow Me.”** It is almost as though the Holy Spirit would conclude the discussion with another reminder that the struggle between flesh and spirit will continue incessantly as long as we are on the earth. The great hope for us human beings, in the midst of these struggles, is that for thousands of years God has been patient with His people and will see them through to ultimate victory.



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