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A Fitting Description of Our Day

"For men will be lovers of their own self..." - 2 Timothy 3:2, RSV

After stating that "perilous," or as we might say, "stressful," times would come in the last days Paul writes these words,

Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

Note that the Apostle does not say that they *will* be seen then for the first time, nor that all men without exception would be such. Rather, he describes the general moral/spiritual condition of the people living at that time.

Some may argue that the description given in verses two through five is applicable to any revolutionary period in history when belief in the mores or traditional restraints is weakened, when there is widespread repudiation of tradition and law, whether of God, parents, society, or natural affections, in favor of an arbitrary and extreme individualism. Others may insist that the total fulfillment of this prophecy may be future. And although both of these claims may have merit, it seems to me that the language contained in these verses is very descriptive of our day.

Let us notice, in light of this similarity, each of the points that Paul makes in the context of the Second Epistle to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

Self Lovers

"Self-lovers" properly heads the list and is balanced at the end of the list by "pleasure-lovers," rather than "God-lovers." Self, not God, is given the preeminence.

It shall be one of the characteristics of these times that men shall be selfish, even under the garb of religion. Egoism or self-centeredness is the root of many sins, just as love which does not seek her own (1 Cor. 13:5) is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10.)

Self-love *in* the sense portrayed here is sin because it substitutes sinful man for God. The truly religious man puts God at the center of his life. The lawyer who tempted Jesus asked our Lord what he could do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25). Our Lord's answer provides us with the divine perspective and sets the example for all who would gain eternal life. "*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"... "and thy neighbor as thyself"* (Mat. 22:37,39).

It has been suggested by one commentator that the first two items on the list, love of self and covetousness, are interrelated and constitute a pair. Selfishness, which is evidenced by love of money, the means of gratifying what self wants, is the mark of men at this time.

Covetous

The word which is here translated "covetous" is a Greek word distinct from that which is often so translated. The original word used here refers specifically to "loving money." This word is used only one other time in the New Testament. There it refers to the Pharisees: "*And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him*" (Luke 16:14).

Huge fortunes are heaped together by men who profess to believe the Bible and its testimony. There was one Simon Magus of old - a notable example. However, he has had many successors in the professing church today.

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. 15:27-29).

These words are equally as relevant and appropriate today as they were in the days of Solomon.

Paul admonished the Ephesians not to walk as other gentiles walked: in vanity of mind, without understanding, and alienated from God and blind to him through their self-imposed ignorance which resulted in lasciviousness, uncleanness, and greed (Eph. 4:17-19). He assured them that such behavior was not what they had learned in Christ; Not, that is, if they had heard him and received his teachings, as the truth is **in** Jesus (Eph. 4:20,21).

"But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:20-24).

So today, we need to examine our lives closely (to determine by whom we are being taught). We are to put off the old man, corrupted by deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of our mind and be clothed with that new man, who, according to God, has been formed in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Boasters

The third of Paul's charges is just as relevant today. What does boasting imply? The Greek word includes the idea of making false statements. The braggard often overstates his case. Being proud; he is arrogant, overbearing, and disdainful. The boaster betrays his character by his words. He is haughty by his demeanor and expression.

Boasters are noisy self-assertors, like criers in the markets, who rove about everywhere. Much boasting is empty: many boast of what they in reality do not possess.

Boastfulness is the opposite of meekness and humility. Boasting accompanies pride, which the Lord declares he resists, showing instead his favors to the humble. *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* (James. 4:6). Thus, if you rejoice in your boastings you may be assured that such rejoicing is evil.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jer. 9:23,24).

Yes, there is a proper form of boasting. This is verified by the mouth of a second witness when Paul says these words to the Romans:

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice [boast] in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory [boast] in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:1-3).

If we are praised, it should be done by others. And, may our greatest tribute be those words of our Master. *"...Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord"* (Matt. 25:21).

Proud

This is the next of Paul's accusations. Benjamin Wilson in his *Emphatic Diaglott* uses the word "haughty" in place of pride. Rotherham translates it as "arrogant." In either case it refers to those who show themselves above their fellows. These individuals not only pride themselves upon their own advantages, but look contemptuously at others. In some it is pride of wealth; in others the spirit may be that of sectarian pride - the pride of belonging; and to still others it may be family, cultural, or personal pride.

The Proverbs warn us against pride: *"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom"* (Prov. 13:10), something which reoccurs frequently in that book. There we find that pride leads to strife, even to warfare. The proud fool will not allow himself to be corrected, which of course has disastrous results: *"He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding"* (Prov. 15:32). We find, however, that pride is above all things an abomination to the Lord.

Prov. 15:25 - "The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow."

Prov. 16:5 - "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished."

Prov. 21:4 - "An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin."

On the other hand, humility is exalted as one of the virtues of the God-fearing man. Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matt. 11:29).

Blasphemers

"Blasphemer" is the next word used by Paul to describe this time. It is also translated "defamer," "abuser," and "railer." Some individuals are so exceedingly proud that they rail against God and men. These words apply to those who draw salaries as ministers of Christ while simultaneously denying his name in their lives or teachings. It may be done subtly, or openly. And those who listen to such, or who accept as truth their sayings, are guilty with them.

God's character is blasphemed by attributing to him evil deeds, evil motives, and evil purposes towards men. Some men even charge God with the authorship of the evils which now cause such great pain and groaning throughout his creation. Moreover, there are theories which prevail in popular opinion which are just as blasphemous in what they teach as being God's provision for the future. Such ideas as eternal torment-whether in literal flames of fire, or the torments of conscience-are blasphemous. These are worse slanders of the Divine Name than were held in the Dark Ages, when it was claimed that the vast majority went only for a time to "purgatory," from which discipline and suffering they would ultimately be released.

Ours is a day of mutual blasphemy: those who possess merely the form of godliness blaspheme each other. Many who claim to be governed by love seem possessed of a craving to speak evil of *their* fellows. John the Apostle denominates this the spirit of murder: "*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer bath eternal life abiding in him*" (I John 3:15). A murderous, slanderous, or blasphemous tendency is sometimes manifest in the home, at work, in religious gatherings and in private. Those who take pleasure in speaking words of kindness, approval, and love seemingly delight in finding opportunities to speak evil.

The Lord's people have been admonished to "*Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man*" (Col. 4:6). James says that we are not to speak evil of one another (James 4:11). And our Lord Jesus assures us that for "*every idle ["pernicious" - Diaglott] word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*" (Matt 12:36,37).

Disobedient

Disobedience to parents is listed as one of the crowning sins of the time referred to by Paul. The wide scale disruption of the family wrought by divorce, separation, and remarriage is, at least in my mind, closely related to and a probable cause of this problem. Opposition to authority goes hand in hand with this.

A Gallup Poll of teachers shows their foremost concern to be discipline. This may not apply in every instance, but in many cases the breakdown of discipline has resulted in many teachers leaving a noble profession in favor of sales or early retirement. Parents often complain that even they do not have control over their offspring. They cannot make their children obey. If a child decides not to attend school, or not to assent to established forms of acceptable behavior, they cannot be forced; and parents are frantic for a solution. But respect -- towards parents, authorities, teachers, etc. -- is something that has to be earned.

When one becomes acquainted with the children who cause problems and then compares the family backgrounds of those children, it is not surprising that they act as they do. How many children live with two parents? And if they do are they their own? How many times have parents been replaced with grandparents, distant relatives, boyfriends, or girlfriends?

It may be axiomatic that a child untrained to obey parents will not obey God. This applies to children raised by one or both parents, and just as equally to children of professed Christians.

The character of our times will be judged by the manners of the young. As nations and as families we have been sowing the wind in this respect. The reaping of the whirlwind, either individually or collectively, is certain to follow.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke ["irritate"] not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

The Bible indicates that children are commanded to obey - and parents are expected to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord. Even a quick glance at society will show that neither of these two instructions are being followed by the population at large.

Unthankful

The word for which "unthankful" is translated is only used in two places in the New Testament (cf. Luke 6:35). The prevalence of ingratitude would indicate a decline of religion. The result of true religion should be to make us grateful to every benefactor, to God and to man. To be UNthankful is to forget the source of all blessings, both temporal and spiritual. *"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."* (Eph. 5:20) -- this is how we should regard our God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thankfulness would seem the least costly of all graces. It implies the reception of favors and is merely a proper acknowledgment of them. No one can be a true Christian and be unthankful. We should be as apt to ask of ourselves the question which the Apostle put to the Corinthian church: *"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it"* (1 Cor. 4:7)? Should not our first response be that of gratitude? It is this thankfulness which leads to service and to sacrifice in the Lord's cause as a manifestation of our gratitude.

However, the ungodly may never consider giving thanks to God. If they are prosperous they may attribute their success to their own resourcefulness or ability. Divine providence probably does not enter their minds.

Unholy

This is Paul's next charge. "Unholiness" means to be irreligious, counting nothing sacred. It is associated with showing contempt or irreverence toward God or things held sacred. It could apply to abusive or irreverent language.

The godly separation from the world which the Bible encourages may be sneered at as prudish or Puritan. In its place has come a worldliness that does not correspond to the Christian profession. It is not necessary to be outwardly vile to be unholy. Giving up the separation between the believer and the unbeliever is unholiness.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble

you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright (Heb 12:14-16).

Elsewhere we are told to *"..shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness"* (2 Tim. 2:16), and Peter follows up on this idea saying, *"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation because it is written, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy...'"* (1 Pet. 1:15,16).

Peter is here quoting from the Book of Leviticus:

"For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44,45).

Christianity, no less than Judaism, summons us to holiness. However, the holiness it demands is not ritual and outward, but inner, the holiness of the pure in heart who shall see God because they are like him (Matt. 5:8).

Lacking Natural Affection

The Greek word Paul uses for his next accusation, "without natural affection," is derived from "love" in the sense of the natural attachment which is found even among brute beasts. That there is an increase of persons without such "natural" affection is obvious today. Cases of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment are numerous. In many cases parents are more interested in their own concerns: careers, materialism, pleasure, than they are in their own offspring. They love these more than children, family, or God. The foundations of family life are being eroded and destroyed. Many families are in peril, and stress at home is prevalent.

Addressing the church, Paul wrote: *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Tim. 5:8). Faith without love and its works is dead. To fail in so plain an obligation is proof of a lack of love. Even an infidel or unbeliever is taught by nature to provide for his own relatives, and generally recognizes the duty, although some fail to do so, as previously mentioned.

Trucebreakers

The next group addressed are those he terms "trucebreakers." The word in some translations is rendered as "implacable." It refers to those who are without control and who stray from the truth. These persons admit no truce or appeasement.

The Greek word is stronger than as if one merely "broke" a truce or agreement. It refers more especially to an unwillingness to make a truce, or to live in harmony, and to abandon hostilities. Combativeness seems to be on the increase and those whose hearts do not have the spirit of love, but selfishness, are not peace-loving but contention loving. Hence, instead of being easy to be entreated, they are the reverse: implacable (James. 3:17).

Another interesting and significant aspect remains to be mentioned about the word "trucebreaker." It means "without libation" and is derived from a word meaning "to pour out as a libation, to devote one's life or blood as sacrifice." The Apostle expresses these thoughts in two different places. *"Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and*

rejoice with you all" (Phil. 2:17). Note the translation of Wilson's Diaglott: *"But even if I be poured a libation on the sacrifice and public service of your faith, I am glad, and rejoice with you all."* The thought is an allusion to the wine and oil poured on the meat-offerings to make them acceptable to God:

"And with the one lamb a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil; and the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering. And the other lamb thou shalt offer at even, and shalt do thereto according to the meat offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD" (Exod. 29:40,41).

Paul was willing to pour out the costly libation of his own blood so as to render his faith more firm and consequentially more acceptable to God. Near the end of his earthly life he penned these poignant words, *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand"* (2 Tim. 4:6). Notice the similarity in language between these words of the Apostle and those of the Prophet Isaiah: *"he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"* (Isa. 53:12). Must this not be the attitude of all who would be the people of the Lord? Those who are new creatures in Christ have made a covenant with the Lord. It is called a covenant of sacrifice. Those who break this covenant are not faithful to it nor will they receive the crown of life promised to those who maintain their faith, overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil.

While in this world it becomes increasingly common for vows and contracts to be broken, the true church members must abandon the customs of the world and all those who are "nominal" in their practice of Christianity. They must patiently endure to the end. They must run with patience the race which is set before them, keeping their eyes fixed upon the author and finisher of their faith.

False Accusers

Continuing our enumeration of the points Paul makes to Timothy, we find that the next item is that there would be "false accusers" in those days. This refers to "traducers" or "slanderers." The Greek word is *diabolos*, and refers to Satan. The New American Standard version calls these persons "malicious gossips." Persons in this category excite contentions and quarrels. They communicate lies by inventing and spreading evil reports. They are trouble makers and deceivers.

That this type of behavior would be increased during these "latter days" should not be surprising. The source of this upheaval is Satan, since his time is short and he is stirring up as much trouble as possible. John tells us (John 8:44) that the devil was a murderer from the beginning and did not abide in the truth because there was no truth in him. When he spoke a lie he spoke of himself (the NAS suggests that he spoke "from his own nature"), for he was the father of lies.

In Revelation (Rev. 20:10) we have a description of the devil as one who "deceives." Peter tells us further that he is an adversary to the believers, one who parades like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour-whom we are to resist in all faith (1 Peter 5:8).

"A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies" (Prov. 14:25). Yes, the deceitful witness is a liar, and he that lies shall perish: *"A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish"* (Prov. 19:9). Nevertheless there are some who are willing, recklessly, to accuse others - knowing that their charges are false. This can only indicate the presence of an evil condition in the heart.

Such individuals have always existed. However, the point of the Apostle's argument is that these conditions, so foreign to the spirit of Christ, the spirit of love, would prevail in the end of this age among those who profess his name and have a form of godliness. He goes on to admonish us to have nothing to do with such.

Incontinent

"Incontinent" literally means "without strength," and that is the next of Paul's charges. In this instance the idea of being without strength to resist the solicitations of passion is the point of Paul's argument (cf. Barnes commentary, p. 232). The word is translated "without self-control" in the Revised Version and several others. The word "incontinent" has more of a sexual reference, whereas the Greek is used with respect to both the tongue and the appetite, as well as other things. Incontinence is coupled with the next item on the list.

Fierce

Those without self-control are led by their own passions and impulses. The Apostle's exhortation to the church is expressed in the words *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."* The Proverbs also treat this subject, saying *"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city"* (Prov. 16:32).

Self-control is seldom practiced today. A popular maxim seems to be "if it feels good, do it." Habits of spending, eating, drinking, and dressing, to mention just a few, are excessive. In many cases they are running wild, like horses on the loose. Some fault may be laid to the spirit of the times in which we live, with its false ideas of liberty, morality, and rights. Some fault must also be placed upon the laxity of moral and ethical training which has existed under conditions of permissiveness, comparative prosperity, and materialism.

Again, such conditions have long existed. However, today there seems to be an amplification of them -- an exaggeration. These characteristics seem both more obvious and more pronounced than ever before. It could be that we notice them because of the technology and communication which has become inescapable. But those who are "without control of self" are more likely to be harsh, severe, impulsive and rough while true religion produces gentleness, kindness, and calm.

Those who walk after the spirit and not the flesh - who belong to Christ Jesus -- have also crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. These follow after *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith..."* (Gal. 5:22). Against such traits there is no law.

Despisers of Good

Paul, in Titus (Titus 1:8), sets as criteria for a bishop or elder that he be a "lover of good men." This is a virtue in anyone. It is the opposite of what Paul enumerates as another of the characteristics of these latter days. This category also includes those who are hostile to virtue and goodness. They despise those who promote virtue and love good men. The follower of the Lord is instructed to be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love (Rom. 12:10) and to allow that love

to continue until it has its full work in each person. Along these lines we are reminded of a rule of thumb which we may adopt in keeping our own minds from developing the characteristics of this world:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil. 4:8, cf. Wilson's Diaglott).

Traitors

The next word used in Paul's list is found only three times in the New Testament (Luke 6:16; Acts 7:52). Luke, in his Gospel, uses the word to describe Judas Iscariot. In The Acts the word is used by Stephen, speaking just before his death: *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers"* (Acts 7:52).

The term refers to anyone who betrays - whether it be a friend or his country. As members of the household of faith, our greatest concern should be that we do not prove disloyal to our Heavenly Father, to our Lord Jesus, and to the fellow members of the Body of Christ. May we be mindful of and apply to ourselves the words of Paul given to Timothy:

"O Timothy, keep [guard]that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings [empty sounds], and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:20,21, cf. Wilson's Diaglott).

Distrustful

One special feature of the time of trouble will be selfishness and distrust. The motto at that time might well be: "Every man for himself." The prophetic declaration (Zech. 8:10) records this expected loss of confidence and general treachery, saying:

"For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbor."

Another description listed is that of "heady." This same Greek word in Acts is translated "rashly" (*Acts 19:36*). It properly means "falling forwards," "ready to do anything," and "rash." It is opposed to that which is deliberate and calm, and here means that some would engage in enterprises which would disturb others or prove their own ruin. The true Christian is not "heady"; on the contrary, his consecration to the Lord figuratively decapitated him; he "lost his head," renounced his own will and self-rule. He submitted himself, as a member of the body of Christ, to the absolute control of Jesus, the head of the church. Such, so long as he abides as part of the true body of Christ, cannot be heady, cannot be selfwilled. Ecclesiastes indicates that a wise man's eyes are in his head (Eccl. 2:14). If we are truthful in our love we will grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:15). Those who are "heady" carry out their own wills and resist the will of God. Wherever "headiness" prevails it is evidence that such are not holding

the head, Christ. If they have not already fallen, their fall is near unless they reform (Col. 2:19; Rom. 8:9).

Highminded

To be "highminded" is to be "puffed up." Such persons are inflated with pride and conceit. As we look around us we witness the problems of such "inflation" in many ways. The Revised Version uses the words "swollen with conceit" instead of highminded. Such are engrossed in conceit and folly, blinded by the sense of their own importance.

Some of the Lord's people have been ensnared along these lines. How appropriate is the Apostle's caution:

"For I say, through the *grace* given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

Lovers Of Pleasure Rather Than Lovers Of God

As was the case in verse two, we now have two "lover" terms, but they are not companions as they were in the second verse. These are opposites and thus form a unit as ending the list. The two are unified: "pleasure lovers rather than God lovers." "Rather" means that in place of a love and liking for God a love and fondness of pleasure (their own pleasure) wholly controls them. Certainly that is the mark of this present world. How it invades the membership of the church is evident.

We are told:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride [pomp] of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world [is passing away, and its desire, cf. Wilson's Diaglott]: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever [for the age]" (1 John 2:15-17).

People want to be amused and entertained, including many church-goers today. It is natural for every human being to prefer to be pleased, to be happy, to have pleasure. It is not a sin to love things which minister to our pleasure in proper ways. To be a Christian does not mean to have no enjoyment. However the Christian puts God higher than himself, loves God more than he loves himself, consecrates himself to God, and consequently desires to please God rather than to please himself. By such, any pleasure, no matter what, must be sacrificed if it comes in conflict with his still higher pleasure and duty and covenant of service to the Lord.

Having The Form Of Godliness...

This means having a formation that looks as though it corresponds to the essence, "*but denying the power thereof.*" So concludes the picture painted by Paul of those who would be alive during the latter times. Some think that the name Christian applies to the entire list of persons attending some church or meeting. This idea they hold despite the great difficulties which ensue. A church that is composed of all such would certainly be no church at all -- in any sense of the term. This is a description of people in general -- but these strongly affect the church and contaminate its

membership. Today we see this formation of godliness in many groups and individuals. In so-called Christian lands the world, too, adopts many Christian forms in its lodges and community organizations, in having prayers offered on all sorts of occasions, in talking about God, religion, and morality. But where is the "power thereof," the divine, spiritual, renewing, uplifting, and saving power of Christ and the true Gospel?

Do we find it in those who are only "Sunday morning Christians?" Is it to be found in large numbers in a country that claims "In God We Trust" but which also leads the world in the marketing of weapons? NO!

From Such Turn Away

Have not intercourse with them. Do not become **one** with them. Be not unequally yoked! This is God's picture of the last days. Look about you and see if these are not the conditions that characterize a great part (not necessarily all, however) of Christendom today: no reality, no power, yet much profession.

May it not be said of us that we are hypocrites who honor God with our lips, but our heart is far removed from him (Mark 7:6). God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

It is my prayer that we will each watch and pray lest we enter into temptation. May we keep our minds on things above, not on this earth and what it has to offer. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18). Amen!

- T.M. Thomassen

Solomon's Wealth and Wisdom

1 Kings 4:25-34

If the wealth of Solomon and his peaceful reign illustrated the glory and peace of Christ's Millennial reign, so Solomon's wisdom prefigured the comprehensive wisdom of Christ. As representatives of many nations came to hear Solomon, so when the kingdom is the Lord's and he is governor among the nations, all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto him, as the Prophets declare. They will say,

"...Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).

It is well to remember that the wisdom of Solomon which attracted the attention and admiration of the world (vss. 29-34) was not the heavenly wisdom, not the spiritual understanding such as is now enjoined upon the saints, which can only be spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:8-14) and which is never popular with the world. Solomon's wisdom was an imperfect realization of the wise and understanding heart suggested in his dream prayer (1 Kings 3:9), which will find its realization in Solomon's antitype.

It was Solomon's worldly or secular wisdom which impressed the world. By nature and through God's providential blessings in making of him a type, Solomon's mental faculties were large and well developed; and these he exercised in many directions with marked success--as a statesman, judge, and financier. The statement that his wisdom excelled that of the Chaldeans seems to imply that his wisdom was along the lines of the sciences and philosophies popular with them. But although he spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were one thousand and five, they were not all deemed of the Lord worthy of preservation as a portion of the sacred Scriptures.

The heavenly wisdom of the books of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Solomon's Song we accept as of divine direction, as were the words of the prophets who frequently wrote things they did not comprehend (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Z.' R2053

Marrow and Fatness **Our Thanksgiving Message**

"Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name." - Psalm 63:3,4

Who first penned these words, and under what circumstances? Were they the words of a monarch surveying the wealth of his possessions? Did they proceed from the hut of a lowly shepherd, surveying the peace and tranquility of his little flock? No, these were the words of a man put to flight. David wrote them from the wilderness of Judea while he fled from his envious son Absalom.

And who were the servants to whom he spoke? Were they liveried servants? Or sainted Israelites? No. David addressed Shobi, an Ammonite, who brought for David's use,

"... beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of trine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness" (2 Sam. 17: 28,29).

David had learned to say that God's lovingkindness was better than life because of the experiences which he had endured. Such praise is always an acceptable sacrifice. The pastoral calm of the shepherd psalms was developed on the starlit plains of Judea. But David would yet be driven into this wilderness to learn another lesson: that of life in its simplicity and the inspiring majesty of God's care for him.

This expression does not show a lack of appreciation for life. Rather, it suggests that life on any plane, at any time, is to be appreciated only in the light of loving kindness which the God of all gods dispenses at his pleasure. Only under his direction does life lead to fullness of joy.

"Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 116:11).

At this thanksgiving season we should recognize our reasons for thanksgiving more clearly than at any other time. Others live under the clouds of war, poverty, oppression, and hatred. Indeed, we are shamed when we hear stories of mass starvation in various places around this globe. There are those who live on a ration of food, but having food and raiment are content (cf. 1 Tim. 6:8). Others know no rest neither day nor night, but enjoy the rule of *"the peace of God which riseth above every mind"* (Phil. 4:7, Rotherham). Some know that their loved ones live in daily jeopardy, but trust in their God to *"work all things after the counsel of his own will"* (Eph. 1:11).

Yes, we who enjoy an outward peace, which persons in many places upon this earth do not know, should seriously ask ourselves the question again: *"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits for me"* (Ps. 116:12)? We would be hard pressed to suggest a grand plan or witness effort (or even several such projects) by which we could truly thank God for the marrow and fatness he has furnished to our hearts, minds, and bodies.

Men often answer God with the familiar, "I will do" or "I will give." But, inspired by the circumstances which God had allowed, David renders the ultimate answer: *"I will take the cup of*

salvation." He did not set aside the thought of rendering something back to God. Instead, he recognized that even in thanksgiving we offer that which we have first received.

Cups of Experience

At every festive occasion the "cup" has been present. It is a blessing: symbolic of the blessings which are shared with others. The Apostle calls it the cup of blessing which we bless (1 Cor. 10:16).

There is another idea in this thought of the "cup." The cup also represents a vow of death, a vow sealed by the rite of baptism. For corroboration of this idea we look to the social customs of the days in which Jesus lived. We find that those who were enemies of the state (criminals, but not in the common sense) were not, customarily, condemned to the ordinary forms of punishment.

No, the ancients considered that if the circumstances were extraordinary, so would be the punishment. The criminal would be placed into a special room - well furnished and alone. Apparently for additional comfort he was given a cup, a cup of wine. The prisoner knew, however, that this was no ordinary cup. Death lurked in its draught. The prisoner could not escape the penalty, but he was allowed special privilege: that of being allowed to decide the moment of his own death, provided he would drink the cup before the appointed execution hour. Whether it was a few moments or a few hours before sunset the prisoner could escape the ignominious death of a common criminal only by partaking of the cup himself.

How apt is the figure chosen for us. Within the chamber of death we do not know exactly the time at which our opportunity to lay down our lives in obedience to our Master's example will be withdrawn. But that need cause no fear, for we have but to put forth our hand promptly and "*... take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the LORD*" (Ps. 116:13) saying:

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD" (Psa. 116:14-19).

The Sacrifice of the Lips

There is something contrary to normal thought in this idea. The joyful giving up of one's life will not diminish one's faithfulness, but will rather increase it. "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name*" (Heb. 13:15). "*Ring out your joy, ye righteous, in Jehovah; to the upright seemly is praise*" (Ps. 33:1, Rotherham). This is not a sentiment which is suitable merely for the testimony meeting. This is a sentiment suitable for living. "*... my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed and meditate upon thee in the night watches*" (Ps. 63:5,6).

Perhaps we have all shared the sentiments of these words: "*If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy*" (Ps 137:6). All too many of us seem afflicted with this malady when we come together for worship, praise, or fellowship. But how could one who has spent seven days and seven nights meditating on God's goodness arrive at a weekly Bible meeting without overflowing with the blessings they had received?

But a life of service and praise can be an artificial thing too. If it does not spring from a genuine longing after God, it is no more than emptiness and sham.. Listen to David's words again: *"I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah"* (Ps. 143:6). *"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God"* (Psa. 42:1). Those of us who dwell in temperate climates do not understand the psalmist's alliteration. We have not known the baked earth of the desert. Nor have we seen it turn to rich pasture with musical streams fringed with oleander after the fall of tropical torrents. We can understand his words only as we have realized the reality, only after our hearts have spilled over onto others from the abundance of blessing which he has poured out for us. God gives of his spirit in order to fill the receptacle opened to his use. Does the mighty ocean forget to touch the edges of any of its shores? Or does a heart remain emptied whose floodgates have been opened to the torrent of divine love?

Israel An Example

As our Lord approached the hour of his own human death many thoughts must have forced themselves upon his memory. The Father had poured a cup for him. It was incumbent upon him to drink, and freely drink he did. Did he remember the serpent in the wilderness (John 13:14) and the healing which his people so desperately needed? Did he consider the blessings and the cursings which had been foretold when God had first given his people the opportunity to become a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6).

Jesus was not the only one given a memory of things past. Israel, too, had been promised memories that would profit them.

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God lead thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no" (Deut. 8:2).

Had they been humbled they would have praised God with all their might. But their hardness caused God to turn elsewhere to find the right seed to fill the promise he had given to Abraham.

The Gospel Age experiences of his people have echoed this lesson. Today these words seem all the more vivid and fitting. Praise God for his testings and for those who have been exercised thereby.

There are men who think God hard and merciless. They fault the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the believer who sings praise to the Creator while a thousand fall at his right hand. No one need fall, however, who has taken the cup of salvation, calling upon the name of the Lord. The believer's every thought and act will be guided by the spirit of thanksgiving to the righteous Judge whether he be engaged in prayer or in public activity. *"Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands **in thy name.**"* God looks into the heart of each man. He is not fooled by man's deceit or his ignorance. It is he who brings to light the things of darkness (1 Cor. 4:5), both those in the world and those which lie in the recesses of an individual heart. He knows which heart is good ground, able to bear fruit and to learn humility. And the history of true believers throughout the age has shown that even when the clouds have hung heavy over them, and when they have entered their journey through pillars of fire, their shouts of joy and hymns of praise have cheered every step along their way.

Weakness of faith has led men to doubt the presence of their God. Faith has frequently tottered as Zion has said,

"The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isa. 49:14-16).

When we too are cast down let us reach forth with the hand of faith until we realize that our God has been with us all along. We praise him, not for our weakness but for his power, not for our failures but for his victory, not for our pit but for his Rock.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies" (Ps. 40:1-4).

O sing unto Jehovah a new song:
Sing unto Jehovah, all the earth.
Sing unto Jehovah, bless his name;
Show forth his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
His marvelous works among all the peoples.
For great is Jehovah, and greatly to be praised:
He is to be feared among all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols;
But Jehovah made the heavens.
Honor and majesty are before him:
Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe unto Jehovah, ye kindreds of peoples,
Ascribe unto Jehovah glory and strength.
Ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name:
Bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Oh worship Jehovah in holy array:
Tremble before him, all the earth.

- Psalm 96:1-9, ASV

The Value of the Present Life

Is life worth living? What a question to ask! "Who wants to die?" a young person replies, buoyed with hope, unhampered with care, their cheeks glowing with health and their eyes sparkling with pleasure. How sweet it is to be alive, to think, to drink in life with joy on every hand. Oh, who would part with life?

Is life worth living? Another young one answers with a different tone. Hope has gone, its pale emaciated form and sunken eye speak of the heavy hand of affliction, of days and nights of anguish and unrest. "What is life to me! -- to be -- to suffer. Life a synonym for pain, and time only means continued torture.

What does life mean to men of riper years? They are busy from early till late. Are such labors so rewarding that they alone are reason to live? "Do not talk to me of setting aside time to plan and to do; of gaining knowledge, wealth, honor, and fame. Indeed, life has its trials and its stormy days. But these are fleeting shadows which bathe those other times with greater splendor." An answer comes from another at the peak of his life, "There are troubles wherever I turn. Life is nothing but sweat and tears." Some find that human affections have no sooner settled firmly around this earth's fairest flowers than death puts an end to all of their cherished hopes. Friends are gained only to be lost in death. Honor is a bubble that is burst by the first breath of jealousy. The cup of human pleasures is scarcely lifted to our lips before it is dashed to the earth again. "Has my life, thus far passed, dealt out to me such wonders and joys that I should crave the future; judging it by the past."

Is life worth living? We have an answer from a gray-haired veteran. The weight of years has bent the once proud form. His cheeks and brow are now furrowed, his senses are robbed of their acuteness. Alone, trembling on the verge of the grave, all he has left are memories of younger days. How will such an one answer? "My days have been few and sorrowful. Once we saw pleasure, wealth, and glory as beacons on the horizon. But they were fleeting, just as fleeting as the time we spent chasing after them. Life is to be, to hope, to hover between accomplishment and despair, to end in death; that fitting finale of life's fitful dream."

Christian! How would you answer this question? "This present life is my first and greatest blessing. It is the preface to eternity, that time in which true happiness may be gained. I do not look for present earthly joys. I know full well that the difficulties of this life are the means by which God is testing me. He wants to know whether I will do his perfect, sovereign will. What virtue would there be in serving him if by such service I were only doing my own will? How else can I prove him to be the chief object of my affection without being called upon to deny my own interests?"

This life affords the opportunity to battle for eternity, to struggle for an existence which will exceed our present understanding. Those who use this life for lesser purposes lack understanding. The curse of God rests upon the earth. We need not think very long about our motives and hopes to realize where the curse resides. It resides in the hearts and minds of men. But God has promised to remove all evil in his own good time. When he does we shall be blessed, true happiness will then be ours.

"I choose to follow him now. He freely gave us his love in the act of sending his own Son as a redemptive gift. Jesus died upon this sin-cursed earth in order to redeem us from condemnation. Because of his gift to me I return my life to him as a living offering, a living sacrifice to God. It is

a reasonable reaction at having been saved at great expense. I am trying to bring my life into conformity with the mind of his Son, thus I will come to know him and the power of his resurrection. I rejoice in his trials and his sufferings so that I may share in his glory. What should I do but glorify God? He has given me being and time in which to work out such a wonderful destiny!"

"Whatever my situation may be I will praise him for life. These things are temporary. I look at permanent things which he has promised, even though I can only see them by faith. *'he that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it'* (John 12:35). *'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'*" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Those who live to make the most they possibly can of earthly objects through their present lives are doomed to bitter disappointment. This life can prove to be a blessing only when lived for God.

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The Logos Became Flesh

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

It need hardly be said that the commemoration of the Savior's birth is really for those who believe the divine testimony concerning him. That testimony affirms that he was born by supernatural power and fashioned to be a Redeemer. He was to be a Savior in the sense that he was to present to God an atoning sacrifice which would offset the penalty of death which lay upon the entire human race.

Those who recognize him as the Christ of prophecy are most apt to hallow the memories associated with his birth. He was set forth in the Divine Plan as the Lamb of God "...which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Scriptures indicate of Jesus' First Advent that he was like a great light illuminating the world amid gross darkness. This same condition exists, in many ways, even today, even after nineteen centuries of the proclamation of the Gospel. This condition, however is to be expected, because the Prince of Darkness, the great Adversary, will hold the dominion of death "until he come whose right it is" (Ezek. 21:27). Consequently, in obeying the commands of their Master, the followers of the meek and lowly Nazarene have been burning and shining examples in the midst of a surrounding darkness. They announce the purpose of Christ's advent and the coming of his kingdom for the redemption and uplift of humanity.

The Light Shone In A Dark Valley

It was said of Jesus' contemporaries that *"the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light"* (Isa. 9:2). Our Lord stated that *"The light shined in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."* He was the light of the world and was in the world and the world did not recognize him. But there is a deeper sense in which these words are to be understood - they apply to all peoples who have been favored in the opening of the eyes of their understanding during this Gospel Age.

The Lord's people have dwelt among the inhabitants of earth as representatives of the "true light." Whether in Galilee of our Lord's day or other parts of the world since, these humble people have caused light to shine amid the darkness that surrounded them, and the darkness did not comprehend - as our Lord declared would be the case.

Why do so few appreciate the Gospel? *"The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not"* (2 Cor. 4:4) -- their understanding is so darkened by false doctrine, misunderstanding, and superstition that they cannot recognize the glorious things which are only to be perceived by faith. To see such things one's eyes of understanding must first be opened.

Another clue is given to prove that this prophecy was not confined to the people of Galilee. *"They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light hath shined"* (Isa. 8:2). The land of the shadow of death is the whole world, because the shadow of death has been on the world since the first transgression in Eden. Ever since then the curse or sentence of death abides upon our race. David describes the Lord's people as being blessed even while in the valley of trouble and abiding under the shadow of death. *"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me"* (Ps. 23:4). The true light shines upon this class: those who trust in him. He is not yet the glorious Sun of Righteousness to the world, as he will be

in his Millennial kingdom. Rather he lights their way like a little lamp, "*Thy word is a lamp to my feet, a lantern to my footsteps.*"

All Men In Expectation

That even the Gentile world was in expectation of the coming Messiah (Luke 3:15) is manifest from the visit of wise men [Greek *magi*, "sages"] from the east, probably from the area now occupied by Iran/Iraq. The term originally belonged to a class of priests among the Medes and Persians. They were a privileged class composing the King's counsel, cultivating astrology, medicine, occult and natural science. Ancient authors refer to them. Later the term was applied to all eastern philosophers.

The Chinese, Japanese, and other Far Easterners cherish an ancient tradition that God would descend to earth in visible form, to enlighten men and to redeem them from their sins. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Josephus all testify that there prevailed throughout the entire East at this time an immense conviction - derived from ancient prophecies - that before long there would arise a powerful monarch in Judea who would gain dominion over the world. Virgil, who lived a little before this, tells that a child from heaven was looked for who should restore the golden age and take away sin. Confucius, in China, (Circa B.C. 500), prophesied the appearance of such a deliverer and a deputation of his followers, going forth in search of him, was the means by which Buddhism was introduced into China. Zoroaster taught the Persians that a pure virgin would bring forth a child and that as soon as the child was born a star would appear, and he added, "follow wheresoever it leads you, and adore the mysterious child, offering your gifts to him with the profoundest humility. He is the Almighty Word, which created the heavens."

These expectations may have arisen from the mingling of Jews with their gentile neighbors. The prophet Daniel was himself associated with some of these wise men (Dan. 2:48). His prophecies were made known to them and the calculations by which he pointed to the time of Messiah's advent. These in time were woven into ancient literatures. Nearly all of the ancient religions are confessions of human need, and in their blind gropings they reveal the depths of man's degradation and misery.

When the miraculous star appeared its presence did not go unnoticed. Gentile wise men had been taught by their vague superstitions to look for such a sign. Eagerly, therefore, they followed its leadings in a blind feeling after God, a search for the wonderful light of the world. How kindly the Omnipotent One condescends to human weaknesses and ignorance. "*A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax will he not quench*" (Matt. 12:20). All men will, in due time, have full, clear testimony in which to establish their faith in the Holy One of Israel. All who love righteousness will gladly accept him. And those who now walk by faith have all the evidences they need to sustain their hopeful loving faith. All this notwithstanding, the blind of this world and the doubting Thomases too shall have the more tangible evidences in store for them. However, those who can walk by faith - now - are the more blessed (John 20:29).

Ancient Truth Seekers

The inquiries of these wise men spoke to the conditions of their hearts. First, it demonstrated that they respected, revered, and desired to do homage to the mighty God of Israel and his messenger to men. This was no little testimony by itself. Secondly, their faith in the divinely inspired prophecies is seen. It had been, perhaps, irregularly woven into their own traditions, but it had its desired effect upon them. Thirdly, these wise men are shown to be zealous in their search for truth and humble in their willingness to leave their own philosophies and to focus their

search for the truth upon the God of another nation. All these considerations allowed, they still desired the truth on the great subjects of God and of human destiny. They were determined to do homage to the appointed Ambassador of Israel's God when they could find him.

Jesus was born to be a Savior King. The latter term includes the former. The - great salvation is secured by both his humiliation (even unto death) and his exaltation (as king and deliverer). By his vicarious sacrifice our salvation was made legally possible, and by his glorious reign it will become an accomplished fact.

Herod too had faith. His was an irreverent and selfishly jealous faith. But a faith demonstrated in his actions and those of his staff as recorded by inspired prophets. So also did the people know and have faith in the coming of the Savior. They pointed to the predictions of time and place and repeated Christ's prophetic mission. What a marvelous testimony we have in the actions of the people to their esteem for the Hebrew Scriptures. Herod's selfish faith sought to kill the infant king and preserve Herod's place. Such is seen in stark juxtaposition to the reverent and devotional faith of the wise men. What evils moved this king, who, fearing for his own power, was moved with envy for the infant rival who already had attracted the attention of the world? As lies within the power of God, the wrath and duplicity of an evil man was overruled for good. The king gave the wise men the directions he had received from the Jewish prophets -- to go to Bethlehem. Thus were the wise men assured by the prophets of this same God that the star lead them on a sure course.

The wise men left the king and noticed that the star itself was progressing towards Bethlehem. Soon, standing over a young child, they found that they had completed their mission. The infant Redeemer and King had been found. Reverently they worshiped and presented their choicest of gifts. Even in infancy the light that was to lighten the Gentiles began to shine into some waiting and devout gentile hearts.

Angel Host Proclamations

Recall if you will that the angels who appeared to the shepherds intimated that the great King of earth was born into the world under the humblest of conditions. He was a babe, wrapped in swaddling bands, and would be found in a manger. This announcement was not necessary to their identification of Jesus. But it was necessary to bring the thoughts of these shepherds down from the lofty heights of their expectations. By looking to the grandeur of Messiah's final office they might have overlooked the humility of his arrival.

His arrival was inauspicious for several reasons. First it bespoke the savior who would suffer and die, the one who took to himself the low surroundings of those whom he was to redeem. It spoke of his death for our sins. And it also pointed to those who should later follow in his footsteps, sharing his humiliation and suffering: these would live like he did, die like he did, and one day be glorified like he was to be.

The Prophets spoke of both the glory of the Christ, head and body, and of the suffering which must precede it (1 Pet. 1:11). The universal lesson for all who have ears to hear is simply this: No cross, no crown! Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and rejoice - even in our humiliation -- so that we shall be prepared for exaltation in due time: to share in the glories of his Son our Lord, and to share with him in the work of blessing all the families of the earth.

How fitting was that climax! After the announcement by one angel of the good tidings of great joy for all people, his voice was answered by the voices of an angelic host, proclaiming, "*Glory to*

God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lu. 2:14). These words were but a reiteration of the message just announced. But what a reiteration it was! It declared that the work to be accomplished by him who was now but a babe would abound to the glory and honor of Jehovah -- the Father of this oh so small and humble infant. How sublime the proclamation of these angels, that through his work the good will and consequent peace of God would come to this world! How majestic were the implied blessings and restitution which their words carried! How enduring was the privilege of everlasting life which the payment of mankind's ransom forespoke.

How did the shepherds respond? They left their business and visited the infant. They paid homage to the Savior. Can those who today hear the message of grace with an appreciative heart do any less than to seek him, reverence him, and serve his cause by the proclamation of his gracious message. Let us each do at least this! And may our appreciation grow as the message becomes the more firmly fixed in our minds by our repetition of it to others.

The Word Offered Upon the Altar

The Word was made flesh, or as the Revised Version has it, "became" flesh. Both thoughts are correct. Both thoughts contradict the two extremist views of Christendom. It was the Word who was made flesh -- hence our Lord's was not an ordinary birth. On the other hand, it does not say that the Word was incarnated or "got into" flesh or "obsessed" it. The words say quite correctly *"The Word was made flesh"* (John 1:14 - *"The Word became flesh."* Let us be careful not to err on this point for it is important. Take the word of the New Testament just as it is written, without the twisting of human ideas. The first born of the Father, the beginning of the creation of God, the One full of grace and truth came down from a glorious life as a spirit being and was made flesh and dwelt among men.

"The man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), was not incarnated. But he was himself the same One who had been with the Father, and who had exchanged one life in the heavens for another life upon this earth as a man. At the age of thirty years he demonstrated his devotion or "consecration" of his life to the Father by water baptism; he was begotten of the holy Spirit. From that moment on he was the Anointed One, which in the Greek signifies the Christ and in the Hebrew the Messiah. He was anointed with the holy Spirit, *"with the oil of gladness above his fellows"* (Heb. 1:9). Directly after this anointing came upon the Master God began the work of selecting those who were to be his joint-heirs. Elsewhere they are styled the members of his "body," the "under priesthood," the "bride," the "lamb's wife." In the preceding verse we see how these companions were given the liberty to become the sons of God -how they were begotten by the holy Spirit with a view to their ultimate exaltation to the new nature of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Who was it that was glorified? Was it the Word made flesh? No, rather, we find that the Word offered himself as a living sacrifice to the Father and that he completed that sacrifice - at Calvary - when he cried "it is finished," ending his life - dying. The Word that had been made flesh ceased to be - he died. Neither was that "Word made flesh" ever again revived. No. He gave his life as a ransom for many: Adam and his posterity. He never took back his human life, sacrificed for us. Because of his sacrifice we are enabled to go free, as it is written, *"Deliver him from going down to the pit; for I have found a ransom for him"* (Job 33:24).

Behold His Glory

"And we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth..." (John 1:14). We may not fully appreciate the Apostle's thought. Subsequent to our Lord's resurrection John and the other disciples beheld the glory of the Lord when he manifested himself to them. Also, during the days of Jesus' earthly ministry they beheld another glory, the glory of service, of honor, of dignity, of his perfection as the earthly "image" of God. They had beheld him as God "manifested" in flesh.

We find here a lesson for ourselves, one doctrinal and practical. Those who are faithful to the Lord now are to be glorified together with him and to share in his kingdom. But to share in the reward we must first prove faithful, we must make our "calling" and our "election" sure by walking in his steps and finishing the work of sacrificing our flesh. *"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your reasonable service"* (Rom.12:1).

Reputation and Character

The circumstances in which you live determine your reputation. The truths which you believe determine your character.

Reputation is what you are supposed to be. Character is what you are.

Reputation is like a photograph of a face. Character is like the face.

Reputation is a manufactured thing, rolled, plated, hammered, brazed and bolted. Character is a matter of growth.

Reputation comes over one from without. Character grows up from within.

Reputation is what you have when you come to a new community. Character is what you have when you leave.

Your reputation can be learned in an hour. Your character does not come to light for a year.

Reputation is made in a moment. Character is built in a lifetime.

Reputation *grows* like a mushroom. Character grows like an oak.

Reputation *goes* like a mushroom. Character lasts like a redwood.

A single newspaper report can give you a reputation. It takes a life of hard work to give you a character.

If you want employment you need a reputation. If you want to keep your position you need character.

Reputation makes you rich or makes you poor. Character makes you happy or makes you miserable.

Reputation is what men say about you on your tombstone. Character is what the angels say about you before the throne of God.

- William Hersey Davis

The Question Box

What is the meaning of the advice "...make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9)?

Weymouth's translation of this verse is "*But I charge you, so to use the wealth which is ever tempting to dishonesty as to win friends who, when it fails, shall welcome you to the tents that never perish.*" Stewards of the mercies of God have his approval in the use of all earthly things in the development of their spiritual interests. The lesson here is that the wisdom of the unjust steward should be exercised by Jesus' disciples in their dealings with mammon of riches in the present life. For example, at consecration we give up all of our earthly rights and interests and become merely stewards of our time, talents, influence, and wealth.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

Use all you have energetically in the divine service.

At the end of your stewardship the results of your benevolence may cause you to be received at the resurrection into the everlasting inhabitation (Z' R5436) granted a share with the Messiah in his glorious Kingdom.

- Francis Earl

This text seems best understood in the context of the entire parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13). Evidently it was customary in olden times for a steward to keep a certain portion of the debts he collected for his master as his own commission. When about to be relieved of his duties, for mismanagement, the steward in the parable made wise use of his remaining tenure by reducing his own commission. By thus lessening the burden on the debtors, he would naturally have secured their friendship and good will, which would then have accrued to his own advantage after being relieved of his position.

Applying the lesson to ourselves today as stewards of the Lord's goods, we see the need for wise management of not only our God-given talents but of our earthly possessions and wealth as well. When appropriately devoted to the Lord and used to advance the interests of the Kingdom, they will secure a development of character within us that is pleasing to him and as a part of our total life of commitment they will ensure an abundant entrance into our "everlasting habitations" (2 Peter 1:5-8,10-11).

- Charles F. Redeker

In the preceding parable, Jesus has shown how the world works: deceit and compromise lead to reward. He then focuses on his ministry. Making Jesus' statement in verse 9 a question helps one to understand: *"And, is this what I say to you?"* That is, do I tell you to use the ways of the world to deal with my goods? His answer, in the rest of Luke 16:9 and in verse 10, is *"No, I do not say that. I say, he that is faithful in the least. .."* Luke 16:10 is Jesus' comment as to why he would not commend his disciples for doing as the steward of the parable-being willing to compromise in order to maintain status as Jesus' representative. Only those who treat Jesus' goods as their own and account for 1 honestly will hear the *"well done, good and faithful servant."*

- Len Griehs

Verse 9 should read "Make to yourselves friends out of (or by means of) the mammon of unrighteousness that when IT fails, WE (omit "they") will be received into the eternal mansions." The Pharisees loved money and were unfaithful stewards of everything given to us by God: talents (abilities), money. We are to do good (deal justly) with all men (Micah 6:8). In the parable, the steward dealt righteously with his master's creditors. Similarly, we are not to confide in uncertain wealth but in God, who gives us all things. Rather, we are to be liberal, rich in good works, willing to bestow, treasuring up for ourselves a good foundation for the future (1 Tim. 6:17-19; Matt. 6: 19-21). Israel was commanded to practice benevolence under the Mosaic law (Deut. 15:12-18). We are to make to ourselves friends by means of the blessings given to us by God. When the earthly treasures eventually fail, we will be received into the eternal mansions, *"For we know if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Cor. 5:1).

- John Karavas

Entered Into Rest

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