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Apology for having looked at Philadelphia, in this series, ahead of Sardis. Ed.

Elements of Dispensational Truth The Seven Churches

Chapter 2.5

What the Spirit Said to Sardis

Introductory Notes

There is something that could be said for considering the seven assemblies as divided into 3 and 4, since the last four go on to the end. However, Thyatira was really the development of Pergamos and Pergamos ceased to exist. So Thyatira fits in the first four. We have now come to what is outside of Thyatira, consequent upon the Reformation. Sardis represents what became of the Reformation, not the reformation itself. Philadelphia and Laodicea come out of Sardis, so to speak, and these last two assemblies are contrasts. In 1985 there was an article in *Christian Truth* that will serve here as an introduction to these last three assemblies, setting out thoughts that I have more or less held for some 30 years, only I will go further concerning Laodicea than this article, though really embracing what the writer brings before us.

Sardis is well recognized as giving us a picture of Protestantism, the state religions which came out of the Reformation when God raised up deliverers for His people from the yoke of their oppressors, and gave back to the Church an open Bible, and the precious foundation truth of justification by faith, through chosen and honored vessels. But how soon they sank down, as Israel under the judges, into forgetfulness of the God who had wrought for their deliverance! State churches are a gross admixture of worldliness and politics, though one gladly owns the faith and faithfulness of the many honored servants of the Lord who have been used of Him to maintain something of life toward God amid it all. Here too is a remnant of faithful ones who will be fully owned of Him in that day, while the dead and formal part will share the judgment of the world at His coming, since it is in reality only the world with the heightened guilt of the Christian name attached to what openly dishonors Him.

Philadelphia is the revival of the truth of the heavenly calling, the knowledge of the Person of Christ, and a care for His name and glory. Its condition of "little strength" is answered by the pledge on His part who has "all power. . . in heaven and in earth" of an "opened door, which no man can shut" (J.N.D. Trans.).

Nothing can hinder the testimony save the unfaithfulness of those who should maintain it. But it will be a testimony to Him, and not to their own knowledge or zeal, if it is to meet His approval. A warning is here given to "hold fast" lest the crown be taken by another, and the encouragement is, "I come quickly." To limit it in its application to any select company savors of the narrowness of man's heart and mind. Doubtless it points to the revival of God's truth which manifestly is found among His people today (as the wise virgins wake up to trim their lamps), but to seek to define its limits would be to forget the widespread dissemination and, let us hope, love of Christ and truth, though many sad blemishes are found in the ways of those who are content with a wider path than the one many are assured the Lord delights to have His people found in. But all will get their share of praise or blame when He who silently is taking account of His people's way shall manifest everything in the penetrating light of His presence.

What then of Laodicea? It seems hardly a gracious thing for saints to brand each other with this mark. Yet few there are, if truthful, who cannot find a measure of it in themselves to be judged and confessed, unless sufficiently blinded by a good opinion of themselves to have forgotten the measure of the Christian's responsibility and path -- the obligation or the call to walk as He walked. How much room for confession this leaves! *How little for boastful pretension!* Yet if it humbles, how it also cheers to look at Him and His blessed pathway through a world of sin and sorrow -- ministering, not ministered to, save by the hands and hearts of those who out of His fullness were receiving "grace upon grace."

If I look around in Christendom, I need not be at a loss to discover what is really Laodicea. "Lukewarm" is a mixture of hot and cold, and modern revivalism is just that. The alabaster box of ointment has been forgotten, and man is the object of many an earnest worker who creates a stir amidst what otherwise would soon be seen to be dead enough toward God. But we see churches growing rapidly wealthy today, where the poor have no place, where one can hear popular and eloquent preachers, sensuous music, and religious songs which the world can adopt; all this, while, save in a remnant, life to God is wanting. Laodicea is to Philadelphia, I believe, what Pergamos was to Smyrna. Popularize truth and you have spoiled it effectually. Adapt the gospel to man's tastes and you most effectually take away the offense of the cross, and if the whole counsel of God is not declared, the world will thank you for so yielding the cross as to make it attractive.

The sensuous in religion is eagerly sought today, and all that appeals to the natural man; this, in its broad features, is Laodicea. The Lord recognizes those mixed up with it who are really not of it, and whose hearts can only be kept awake by the rebukes and chastening which love inflicts. But for them Christ knocks at the door. He prefers the most intimate fellowship with those who care for His company. "I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me."

The masses, however, know Him not at all. Like the foolish virgins, they have no oil. The Lord counsels them to buy of Him what they lack. If we look at these pictures of the four churches as thus developed, each one continuing as a distinct thing until the end, we must not forget that instead of closely defined

edges, they are found to overlap and interlace at their edges; the nearer we get to the distinctly pronounced character of each, the more marked and separate the lines will be.

May the Lord give us discernment as to these things, that we may avoid what is offensive to Him, and be content with His approval and His company until He calls us up through that open door in heaven to share His throne and glory, and to view from thence the execution of the well-earned wrath upon those who in a day of grace have refused to own Him Lord.¹

There is another consideration regarding the character of the Reformation that we should consider:

At the Reformation there was no recognition of the status from which the church had fallen. There was the revolt of even natural conscience against iniquities of the so-called church; there was recovery of salvation by faith, and of right to the use of the Scriptures; but no serious enquiry as to the original status of the church, or as to scriptural practice in the church. The Lord's Supper in its true simplicity and beauty was not restored. The place and office of the Holy Spirit in meetings and worship were not seen and instead of the Spirit's power and guidance, a substitute -- humanly invented liturgies -- were continued and in place of a free exercise of the Holy Spirit's gifts in the body of Christ, a humanly appointed clergy was still permitted. So also in subsequent movements since the Reformation, resulting in the numerous denominations now existing; there has been in some, most blessed evangelizing zeal; in others a rallying for one doctrine or ordinance or another; but not any going back to the point from which the church had departed; no solemn calling to mind whence it had fallen, no studying it out from the Scriptures; and by consequence, no repentance and doing the first works. This is deeply important for the church today -- and indeed, for any case of repentance -- to go back, and not stop short of the topmost point of departure.²

And to this may be added the following:

The story of Sardis is soon told. We have no corrupt state, though there was much personal individual evil. On the contrary, there was the reputation of a moral activity which had delivered from evil -- a name to live. But the real character of the church was a state of death. And here remark, that the work of the Holy Ghost is itself not, and cannot be, the object of judgment. This is evident. God does not judge His own working; nor Christ, the Spirit's. It is the result in man's hands. Thus the work which produced Protestantism was God's work, the action of His Spirit; the result is the use man has made of this blessing. Some things remained; and they were exhorted to strengthen them, for they were ready to die. The Lord had not found their works complete. There was something failing -- lacking. It had man much in it. Christ had not found them complete before His God.³ It was not anything corrupt or superstitious exactly, but wanting in their character and

1. "The Seven Churches," *Christian Truth*, Addison: Bible Truth Publishers, pp. 14-17, 1985.

2. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 11:156.

3. Note that "complete before my God" is the correct reading.

motive. Activity, but not such as met the relationship of Christ with God on the earth; they were not Christian enough. Yet they had received much, and were to remember this, hold fast, and repent. If the church did not watch -- this was the great point -- they had got into the ease of the world, and were living as if things were settled and to go on for ever; it was not corruption and superstition, but deadness and worldliness; if they did not wake up and watch, they would be treated as the world. Christ would come on them as a thief in the night, and they would not know when.

I have remarked elsewhere the extreme importance of this threat. Because it is directly declared in 1 Thess. 5 that those whom the Lord owns as Christians would not be so treated; "Ye are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief." And they are exhorted to watch. But on the world that day would come unawares, as travail on a woman with child. The professing church, in its Sardis state, would be treated as the world if it did not watch. Not only is the judgment most solemn, but it shows that the spiritual judgment, that professing Christianity in this state is (morally speaking) the world in God's sight, is just. And note, here, that if we connect (as we should) 1 Thess. 5:1, with ch. 4:14, this judgment will take place when the saints come with Jesus. Protestantism, for such I doubt not it is, sad as the thought may be, will be found and judged as the world at Christ's coming with the saints. It is not terrible tribulation and special judgment as with Thyatira, but found to be the world. Here, too, the true saints are treated as a remnant. "Thou hast a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments." They had practical *Christian* walk. The white linen is the righteousness of the saints. "They shall walk with me in white." The church's works were not complete before Christ's God. There was a lack of what was properly Christian in them. Those who kept themselves in their walk as Christians would walk with Him in white. The same is repeated to him that overcomes, with the addition that he would not be struck out of the registers of God's people. When the once nominal church was treated as the world in judgment, it would not be even in the register. All professing Christians are, and in that sense, in the book of life. They have not life, surely, unless born of God, but they all stand on the public registry of life; a Jew, a Mahommedan, an open apostate, does not. When the saints were gone, and the nominal body visited as the world, that would have no real meaning, perhaps no nominal existence. The saint, faithful while it went on, would not lose his place on the register. Christ would confess his name as really His before His Father, and before His Father's angels. Here we have the saints very definitely individualized as to Christ's owning them, and in contrast with the professing church judged as the world below, confessed by Christ above in the presence of His Father and His angels. The warning to hear, as in Thyatira, comes after this distinction.⁴

Some refer to Sardis as "The Church of dead orthodoxy." Why? Why is Protestantism, departed from what was heard and received at the reformation, to be regarded as orthodox?

4. *Collected Writings* 30:342-344.

Presentation of Christ

And to the angel of the assembly in Sardis write:

These things saith he that has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars (Rev. 3:1):

“I have not found thy works perfect.” No decay of spiritual life ever lowers God’s standard of holiness in the church. The church at Ephesus is reproved for losing first love -- here it is “works,” v. 1. All resources of spiritual government and power are perfect in Christ. “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.” Christ has the perfectness of seven spirits and seven stars.⁵

HE THAT HAS THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD (v. 1)

Sardis foreshadows the reformation, or rather what became of the reformation, what characterizes it as going on until the coming of the Lord. It has a name to live but is dead. This is the Sardis state. It is instructive that now the Spirit of God is brought forward. The seven Spirits of God indicates Christ’s competency to order the assembly governmentally by the Spirit. I would suggest that Sardis (Protestantism) did not give the Spirit His place in His operations in the assembly; Philadelphia gave the Spirit His place in operations in the assembly; and Laodicea involves a characterizing mimicry and pretension of the operations of the Spirit. If Christ is here presented as having the seven Spirits of God, then what have Philadelphia and Laodicea, which come from Sardis, done concerning the Spirit of God and His place in the assembly? But let us consider the seven Spirits of God:

It is further to be remarked, that the seven Spirits of God belong to the comprehensive qualities and power of the Spirit in connection with bringing about God’s will, not the Holy Ghost dwelling in the church: of this we have nothing here. The seven Spirits are seen before God’s throne, and they are seen as eyes in the Lamb. We have got into new characteristics of Christ, in reference to His own power and rights, not what was already revealed of Him as walking amongst the candlesticks. His coming has been announced, and the outward successional church followed to the end. It was a system wholly corrupt, a mere Jezebel, a mother and source of wickedness. The Spirit now takes up Christ’s personal character and rights, and, in this respect, looks out beyond church scenes.⁶

. . . no doubt, the seven Spirits allude to the Holy Ghost, the number seven being the symbol of perfection in its diversified power. The title here given to the Spirit is in connection with the display of the power and intelligence with

5. *Notes and Jottings*, p. 162.

6. *Collected Writings* 30:342.

which the earth is governed (cp. ch. 5:6).⁷

Mark, then, the graciousness of the Lord, in the way in which He opens this address to Sardis. Before He touches on their terrible state, He first of all presents Himself as still possessing the plenary power of the Spirit, for the resource of faith; so that, notwithstanding all the failure and evil that had come in, the power and prevalency of the Spirit still remained the same, because it depended not upon the walk of the saint down here, but upon the value of Christ’s work above. Just as God spake to Israel of old when they had failed, by the mouth of Haggai the prophet, saying, “According to the word which I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not.” And so it is here -- “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” Then He goes on to take up the state of the church -- “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” What a terrible condition is this! It completely portrays what we see all around us -- I do not mean only at the present day, but what has actually been the state of the church for the last century and more.⁸

The Spirit came in a special capacity at Pentecost as the formative power of the body of Christ, uniting the saints together in one body, and to the Head in heaven. He was always here as omnipresent, but His coming denotes a special function. He has never since left in that capacity and function until the rapture. (He will, of course, be present as omnipresent, but as He came in a special capacity, so will He leave with respect to that special capacity at the rapture). So in this regard, He is still here. What mean prayers for God to send the Spirit? It is unbelief in His abiding presence. He is here for the operations for which He was sent. Some, as at Pentecost, are not repeatable. Some, such as miraculous gifts, had their place at one time. But He is still here to take care of Christ’s interests during His absence, and even in the ruin, for there are moral things which cannot be ruined, though the time for the ornaments of the church is past. Sardis may ignore those things of the Spirit, Philadelphia gives them their place, and Laodicea pretends that the church has its ornaments. Laodicea has need of nothing!

AND THE SEVEN STARS (v. 1)

The seven Spirits are introduced here. Not so with the seven stars. In Ephesus we see Him **holding** the seven stars in His right hand. In Sardis He “has,” not “holds”; nor even is it said “in His right hand.”

7. *Collected Writings* 5:261.

8. *Collected Writings* 5:327. The seven spirits of God are the same as in chapters 4 and 5, and they have eyes always. In Zechariah 3, we have the seven eyes upon one stone; it is one stone laid there because the Lord is in Jerusalem when the millennium begins.

The seven eyes give us the variously characterized action of the Spirit in the government of the world. All the characters are millennial, not ecclesiastical, and they are connected with Christ’s coming (*Notes and Jottings*, p. 370).

It is not said here, as it is in the address to Ephesus, “He that holdeth in his right hand the seven stars”; but “he that hath the seven stars.” And, mark, that no word in Scripture is omitted or changed without full meaning. The stars (the angels) of the seven churches are symbolical representatives of the churches, but considered in those who have a character of authority under Him, who is the head of government. In the address to Ephesus, Christ holds all the authority in His hand (the stars, as I have just remarked, being the symbolical representatives of the whole system of authority -- of that active energy which characterizes the churches to Christ’s eye, which acts in His name in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks), judging the state of the church, and holding the representatives in His right hand.

But here in Sardis, failure, and even spiritual death, had come in, and characterized the state of the church -- “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.” We have seen how failure and decay had already previously got into the church; but Sardis was, in one point of view, in a worse state than even any before her, having a name to live while she was dead. It was decay of vital power -- not the power of evil working, but a morally worn out thing; and consequently the Lord presented Himself to Sardis as having for faith all the fulness* of the Holy Ghost at His disposal -- “He that hath the seven Spirits of God”; and the seven stars, all power in the church, were at His disposal also (seven being the symbol of perfection.)

(*But this I think in the activity of its ministrations.)⁹

The church of Sardis presents Christ to us in a striking manner. He is in the very fulness of His power in respect of His relationship to the church-the fulness of power in government -- the fulness of spiritual energy to work. He has this; but it is merely the fact. The stars are not seen in His right hand. It is not the regular formed order in its right place, but all spiritual power of working not mentioned in His relationship to the churches, nor what had been seen in the things that were (Rev. 1:13-20).¹⁰

This denotes His place of power and authority, which was not restored to Him. It is not stated here said that He has them *in His right hand*.

But they are His, and national churches are inconsistent with this.

Laodicea is fleshly display; Sardis is fleshly control.

Commendation

None.

9. *Collected Writings* 5:324.

10. *Collected Writings* 30:342.

Judgment

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die, for I have not found thy works complete before my God (Rev. 3:2).

DEAD

And one understands readily why it was that death is so marked. It was the universal doctrine of all the Protestant bodies that, when souls are justified, they are put under the law as the rule to live by. Now, the necessary effect of this is the ministry of death, a most effective way to deal with a sinner to convince him of death. But the apostle, in the third chapter of Second Corinthians, sets forth a distinct contrast of the ministration of the Spirit, which is God’s will about His people now, with the ministration of death under the law -- that which was written and engraven on stones. As no man can deny this to be the law written by Moses, so he contrasts the two, and insists on it that the ministry of the law has, for its effect, death and condemnation.

Now the Lord here contemplates the result. It was indeed the inevitable effect of not going on, in the possession of life and acceptance of God, to walk in the Spirit as they lived in the Spirit. They attempted to embrace what was utterly incompatible; to put those born of God, and set free by His grace, on a common ground with the mass of men in all Protestant lands -- that is, to bring in the whole population. Now the natural way in which this could be done was by the law; and the consequence was that, while the Lord might use the law in particular cases for the conviction of sin, the saints of God suffered irreparably. For the law provokes and condemns evil; it neither quickens, nor strengthens, nor justifies. Souls never enjoy settled peace; and the walk is as feeble as is the hold on God’s grace. So He says: “I have not found thy works perfect.” There was an incompleteness about them. The savour of Christ was not there, life in Him being little known, any more than full redemption. In fact the law displaced the Holy Ghost. “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” So the Lord threatens, because the Protestant bodies fell back on the power of the world. Every one of them sought the patronage of the great. There were not any of them above thinking there was a mighty influence for good where there was an acquisition of worldly authority. And hence, therefore, it is that they were threatened by the Lord with the judgment which is to fall by-and-by on the world. The Lord, in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, brings it before the saints that He will come as a thief in the night, but not on the saints of God -- they are distinguished: Christians have a different position from the world. In 1 Thess. 5 He threatens the thief-like coming; and this is the very thing that is repeated here. I scarce know a more solemn thought than that Sardis, having accepted the world to govern itself in the things of God, has the Lord speaking of His coming as He threatens it on the world itself. If men choose the world’s power, how can they escape the world’s judgment? Such a choice is the less

excusable if they boast an open Bible; and this is the prospect of Protestantism.

The bright hope of the church is wholly wanting.¹¹

In the eyes of the Lord the profession was really dead, spite of reputation to the contrary. Cp. Heb. 9:14; Eph. 5:14.

BE WATCHFUL, AND STRENGTHEN THE THINGS THAT REMAIN, WHICH ARE ABOUT TO DIE (v. 2)

The deadness was a general state, but there was life here and there as indicated in v. 5. It is always well to seek to strengthen anything that God has given. If spiritual energy is not exercised, the things of God atrophy and then are lost. Persons go on with elements of Christianity in a merely religious way.

I HAVE NOT FOUND THY WORKS COMPLETE BEFORE MY GOD (v. 2)

Works are easily substituted for obedience. Even kindness is often substituted for obedience. Our works must have God for their object, and He must ever be immediately before our souls.

“I have not found thy works perfect before God.” It was set up complete in all the perfectness that there was in Christ for it; and therefore He looks for that which should answer to it, the perfectness in which it was originally set. Thus the Lord presents Himself as the One having all this perfectness in spiritual power and energy, and is looking for that which answers to it. We might say, “Is it not strange to say their works were not perfect, when we are told they are dead?” No, for the Lord never can descend below His own measure in dealing with evil, whether in the church or with an individual. If He gives a standard, it is that by which He must judge. The church must be judged according to the resources it has at its disposal. God never goes below this in looking for an answer to what He has done. Therefore we have to ask ourselves whether, as individuals, we are showing to the world the holiness that we are made partakers of, and the love we are the objects of. There are very many who profess Christ, while there are few comparatively who live Christ. There is no charge here of Balaam and his corrupt doctrine, eating things sacrificed to idols, or of Jezebel; but the Lord is looking for life. He looks for works complete, filled up according to the measure of grace with which He has connected the church. If we look at ourselves, dear friends, what can we say? The question is not whether we are producing any fruit at all, but whether the fruits that are produced are fruits meet for Him for whom the ground is dressed. If I till a field and sow it with wheat, and it does not bring forth according to my labors bestowed upon it, I must give it up, and I do not sow it with wheat any more. I am not here talking about the salvation of a soul, but of the Lord’s judgment of the results in the saints, in souls already saved.

It is true that God will produce the fruits of every principle of His grace in perfection, when Christ takes His power; but before this He commits it to

11. *The Bible Treasury* 16:287.

man. He gave the law to Israel, and they utterly failed respecting it. But Christ says, “Thy law have I hid in my heart.” So also of Israel, God will, in the latter days, write the law in their hearts. Now Israel has become “a proverb and a bye-word among all nations,” as having been unfaithful; but in the day of Christ’s power, when God will produce fruit in perfection and fullness, then “Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the whole world with fruit.”¹²

His comments that follow these are very important. Read them! We close this section with this warning:

Just in proportion as there is this secret measure of communion in our walk with God, in that which is hourly passing between the soul and God, will be the degree of our isolation. What we have most specially to look to is that all our works be perfect before God, that all our doings be measured with immediate reference to God; and this must necessarily produce a certain degree of isolation. It was thus with Christ: He was always lowly and He was already lonely, yet full of love to all, perfect in affability with every needy soul as with His disciples. It is no matter how we sink in the estimation of others, it will be the necessary consequence of faithfulness; and the reverse of all this is with a great show before the world -- just this, “that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead,” “for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” The works are done in reference to man, and not to God. At the same time it is quite a right thing to walk with the saints and to keep and cultivate their affections, although the more faithful individual walk is, the greater the isolation must be, because the fewer there will be who understand it. And yet the nearer to Christ, the greater, of course, will be the grace towards others, as He says, “as I have loved you, that ye also should love one another.” Thus in a close walking with God, there will be an abiding sense of His secret favor; but then this personal dependence upon God must lead to isolation. Our path will be a lonely one as Christ’s ever was. With all His grace and lowliness, to listen to all, and to serve all, yea even to the washing of our feet, yet He was left alone, though not left of God, as He said, “He that sent me is with me,” “the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things which please him.”¹³

Admonition

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and keep [it] and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come [upon thee] as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I shall come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy (Rev. 3:3, 4).

12. *Collected Writings* 5:328, 329.

13. *Collected Writings* 5:331, 332.

REMEMBER HOW THOU HAST RECEIVED AND HEARD (v. 3)

The Lord had warned “Take heed therefore *how* ye hear” (Luke 8:18). While it is also important *what* we hear, *how* indicates the moral condition of the listening soul. Here, both the reception and the hearing of divine truth is joined to the *how*.

Mark the two points here, “received and heard.” Firstly, the grace which it has received, and in which it has been set; and, secondly, the revealed word of God as their rule and guide. Grace has been received, and the word communicated. It is not that which we have not received, but that which we have received, that we are called to consider. The Lord presents the measure of responsibility in these two points, that which the church has received, and in which it has been set, and that which it has *heard* (the word of God being the alone measure of revealed guidance). God gives us His word to guide us, and grace to walk according to it.¹⁴

KEEP IT AND REPENT (v. 3)

Cp. 2 Tim. 1:14. Repenting involves self-judgment regarding the different moral state at a former time when truth was given to be treasured up in the heart, and our departure both from that former state and the consequent letting go the truth received.

COME UPON THEE AS A THIEF (v. 3)

This coming upon them as a thief refers to that part of the coming of Christ when He appears in glory. That is what introduces the day of the Lord -- which comes as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2). This involves going through the Tribulation period. Philadelphia is exempt from the hour of trial (notice, exempt from *the hour*, the **time**, of it). So Philadelphia does not displace Sardis, but is present while Sardis is present, only up to the rapture. To come upon Sardis as a thief is to treat Sardis as the world upon which Christ will come as a thief at His appearing in glory. The result is because of failure to watch: “If thou shalt not watch.”

Therefore Sardis is addressed as the world; it is not denounced as Jezebel, but as receiving the judgment of what it is in spirit, the world; for if the professing church is not coming up to the measure of what it has “received and heard,” this is its portion. If it be not found watching, it is courting in its measure the same judgment as the world. Of course we are not saying that the church of God, which is one with Christ in glory, and whose life is hid with Christ in God, could ever be so treated; but it is an exceedingly solemn thought that the great professing body, with its “great name to live” and a “fair show in the flesh,” is waiting for the same judgment as the world. It is the world itself in fact. Then arises this question, How far have your souls realized that all that is going on around us bearing the name of God, while it is not of God -- the

14. *Collected Writings* 5:332.

nominal church, or Christendom as it is called, which is in truth the world, but having this name and position -- will be treated as what it really is -- the world? Well, then, dear friends, what a solemn fact is this, that we are, in this day in which we live, walking through a scene which must thus be visited, because God has said it, and alas! we know not how soon. I know of nothing more solemn than the identification of the professing church with the world in judgment which is here found.¹⁵

A FEW NAMES HAVE NOT DEFILED THEIR GARMENTS (v. 4)

Here we shall have another important point opened out; for here we shall find the characteristics of what is called the “invisible church.” “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis.” These “names” here signify “individuals” whom the Lord had counted up and known, each one of them by name. “These are they which have not defiled their garments”; they had not gone on with the world, now the professing church had defiled their garments. Sardis is not charged with the seductions of Balaam, or the corruptions of Jezebel, it may be; but she is “minding earthly things” and is “glorying in her shame.” Sardis has not kept her garments unspotted by the world, and, therefore, her spot is not “the spot of His children.” As Paul said, “even weeping, they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, who mind earthly things.” It is the spirit of the world filling the heart as an accepted object, and hence conformity to it in order to walk with it, which is here spoken of. But those who have held by the cross of Christ with undefiled garments “shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”¹⁶ ♦

It is a great thing to walk with the Lord; but save the fact that they had failed, I do not find much here-- little relationship with the Lord, little intimacy. All is corrupted. They are faithful, it is true; they keep themselves from that corruption, but there is little speciality. They escape from this worldliness -- “They have not defiled their garments”; all is negative. Protestantism has hardly the sense that one is in relationship with God, and that there are many things to know in Him; there is but little spiritual exercise. Protestantism is insipid; it has not the idea of a God who is present.¹⁷ ♦

THEY SHALL WALK WITH ME IN WHITE, BECAUSE THEY ARE WORTHY (v. 5)

This is in keeping with walking with undefiled garments.

The character of the blessing always answers to the difficulty. They had kept their garments unspotted by the world when down here. Therefore they shall walk with Him in white up there, “and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” Mark how individual this is -- “his name,” so constantly recurring.¹⁸

15. *Collected Writings* 5:334.

16. *Collected Writings* 5:334, 335.

17. *Collected Writings* 28:341.

18. *Collected Writings* 5:334, 335.

Promise to the Overcomer

He that overcomes, *he* shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, and will confess his name before my Father and before his angels (Rev. 3:5).

In tracing the promises and their connection with what the first man (1 Cor. 15:47-49) has forfeited, another wrote:

The promise given next to the Church of Sardis carries us still farther on in the history of God's ways with the nation of Israel, and takes up its priesthood. "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." In king Solomon's days, when the ark was placed in the temple and the temple filled with glory, "the Levites, the singers, all of them arrayed *in white linen*, could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud," which had taken possession of the entire scene in the name of the Lord. Further, "her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire"; but the same prophet adds, "their visage is blacker than a coal, they are not known in the streets, their shin cleaveth to their bones." Zechariah shows Joshua the high priest standing before the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. The filthy garments, or the defiled priesthood of Israel, are set aside prophetically, as it will be really, in the future day of their national acceptance, when the fair miter on the priest's head, and the change of raiment in connection with "The Branch," will enable God to remove the iniquity of that land in one day. He who is the first and the last has likewise secured this forfeited place of blessing in Himself, adding to it (as He gives it out to the overcomers of this day) the assurance of its perpetuity. "I will not blot his name out of the book of life like the blotted page of Israel's history, but will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Our own personal security, and the permanence of every purpose, are alike found in a present companionship with Christ, till He comes. We have it not in the outward display, in which it is to be manifested, and on this account we hold all blessing not merely upon His title who deserves it and has the keys of death and of Hades, but in the delight of His own love. "They shall walk *with me* in white, for they are worthy." What a place and portion does our sojourn on earth afford us, the little while that we are waiting for His shout and our rapture! ¹⁹

CLOTHED IN WHITE GARMENTS (v. 5)

There are many things I could do as a moral man that I cannot do as a blood-bought saint. He calls us sons, and this name supposes us to go through the world as a washed and justified people. Sardis, as a whole, had not felt this, but some in her had, and these had garments which could be soiled. Lot's garments could not be soiled; Abraham's could. It would have been difficult to soil Lot's

19. *The Bible Treasury* 8:366.

robes, he was so like a worldly man, even though he vexed his righteous soul. But there were some in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and, says the Lord, they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. At Whitsuntide there is supposed to be a pure white flock of Christ for one week; but there is such a thing as a robe that is white *not* for a week.

There was extreme care as to how they walked in the dreadful day of Sardis. The Lord says: I see some who have not defiled their robes; they have been very careful; and such shall walk with me in white. Have you ever sucked the honey out of this promise? as a bee comes down on a flower? I might be in the Greek church, and Christ might say to me there, Cheer up; you shall walk with me in white; you desire to walk carefully; you have a sense of what I have done for you; and this sense is, in my mind, connected with that scene where you shall walk with me in white.

Christ's eye is upon me. Does He see that there is a sense in my soul of the privileges He has brought me into? He has washed me from my sins in His own blood, has that precious Lord. He has given me such a robe as this. Were He to call me at any moment I should not be ashamed. Does He see in me a kind of nervous fear to keep myself clean? to keep myself separate from evil?

What a thought when it comes home to me individually, is that of my Lord speaking to me of my walking with Him in white! He Himself will be there; He will be there, not only in innocence, but in purity. In the world there were evil reports of Him; there will be none there who will desire to do it. Does He wish us to think that He will walk there alone? Oh, the wretched incredulity of the heart as to the personality of the Lord Jesus! The same One who was crowned here with thorns, *He* will walk there in white. Has He never given you this promise to lift you as a lever over some difficulty?

The world says you pretend to be one about whom the Lord is occupied; but we can show them nothing as a proof of it but that we know our own weakness; for we are not occupied with covering over, and God would have us uncovered. Faith knows that there is such a thing as a robe, a blood-washed conscience; but it will not always be a question of faith; the day is coming when He will bring forth crowns and white robes. If these promises were rested in, God's children would not have the vague ideas of heaven they too often have: a happy place, but we do not know much about it. The white robe comes down to our individuality. He will present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy, and the sweetest part of all will be that we receive it from His own hand. The brighter the robe, the more it shows spots of defilement. *There* there will be nothing that can ever stain. Who will get the praise for not defiling their garments *now*? ²⁰

20. G. V. Wigram, *The Addresses to the Seven Churches*.

Excursus on Blotting Out, and The Book of Life (v. 5)

Let us look at this matter in some detail since it troubles some saints of God to think that their name might be blotted out of the book of life. The position taken here is that it is not intended to imply that some names will be blotted out; rather, it is a statement of assurance that none will not be blotted out. Let us look at a number of passages that do, or are thought to, bear on this matter.

EXODUS 32:31-33

(31) And Moses returned to Jehovah, and said, Alas, this people has sinned a great sin, and they have made themselves a god of gold! (32) And now, if thou wilt forgive their sin ... but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book that thou hast written. (33) And Jehovah said to Moses, Whoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

This has nothing to do with the “book of life” spoken of in the NT. Moses was not requesting that God blot him out of *that* book. This remark about “thy book” has to do with God’s ways of government on the earth (His disciplinary ways) and the peoples’ position under law.²¹

LUKE 10:20

Yet in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subjected to you, but rejoice that your names are written in the heavens.

The seventy had been sent on an extraordinary ministry of grace (so suitably recorded in the gospel of Luke, which brings sovereign grace so emphatically before us) just before the cross and the Lord’s departure to the Father. J. N. Darby concisely remarked:

But see the exquisite sweetness of the outgoing of Christ’s heart in vv. 18-24. They were to rejoice having their names written in heaven where He was now going, registered there, though the powers they wielded were those of the world to come, when Satan, fallen from heaven, would be fully bound. Jesus rejoiced in Spirit over the blessing conferred on them by the Father whose good pleasure had been in revealing to these simple ones these things. And then in full love to them, and what they could understand who had received Him as Messiah the Son of God, pronounces blessed those to whom He withal as Son had revealed the Father. It is an exquisite expression of Christ’s heart when passing from this

21. “Still God spares them in His government, and in answer to Moses says, ‘Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book’; but He brings them back under law, and it was the ministration of death and condemnation mingled with forbearance, which is not absolute law, but law mixed with grace” (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 26:308).

world to the Father.²²

I suppose that the names of all saints are written in the heavens. Such things come out in the NT in view of Christ accomplishing the work upon which God’s blessing the sinner is based. There is a general aspect to this but there are also some specific aspects, as we will observe below. There is that which applies to all the children of God and there is that which applies to Israel and that which applies to the church.

PHILIPPIANS 4:3

. . . and my other fellow labourers, whose names [are] in [the] book of life.

Some hold that the names of mere professors of Christianity have their names in the book of life but that such names will be blotted out. This thought seems to be inferred from a text, but not, of course, this one. This text and the others we have considered speak of saints of God. These texts seem to preclude the idea of the names of saints and of mere professors being inscribed along side of each other.

HEBREWS 12:23

. . . and to [the] assembly of the firstborn [who are] registered in heaven.

This speaks of those who truly form the church. Such are associated with the great Firstborn, Christ, in a special way. Thus there is a special registry of such in heaven.

REVELATION 3:5

He that overcomes, *he* shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, and will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

The book of life is a figure of speech, of course. God does not have a literal book in which He writes with pencils, and has erasers; or writing with pen and ink, needing ink erasure fluid, and blotters. The question is if some names will be blotted out of the book of life. It has been thought that no name will ever be blotted out; or, that names of mere professors who claim to have life from God are enrolled, so to speak, by their profession, only to be blotted out because God did not write the name therein -- or, a registry of names of all born into the world, from which the names of unbelievers are ultimately removed;²³ or, it might be used by some as if it were a registry for certain Christians who attain a higher degree of sanctity and obtain special blessings while Christian of less sanctity miss

22. *Notes and Comments* 6:358.

23. If these two ideas were so, why does the Lord say to the seventy to *rejoice* that their names are written in the heavens? These ideas evacuate what He said of its intent. Moreover, these ideas are not consistent with Phil. 4:3. The distinctness, and the distinguishing of believers, would be lost. Yes, assurance would be lost.

out.²⁴ Arminians, however, might view it as containing the names of the conditionally elect, who, if they do not continue, are blotted out.²⁵

Here is how J. N. Darby understood this matter:

The force of the expression, “the book of life,” is evidently that of a general registry of profession, taken from the custom of corporations of cities, where a name may be enrolled, the title to which may prove false, giving at the first blush a *prima facie* title to something, though on investigation it will have to be erased. Those who were written in this book had a profession, “a name to live.” This was very different from “being written in the book of life before the foundation of the world”; because God, in that case, had written them there: it was thus the book of the counsels and purposes of God.²⁶

I do not doubt that if God has written a name in the book of life that it will not be blotted out. I *do* doubt that anyone but God can write a name in it. I do not find it suggested in Scripture that any but a saint’s name is in the book of life. All viewed here are overcomers, all have their names in the book of life, and not one of them shall have his name blotted out of it. It is only the elect whose names are there. Not one false professor has his name written in this book of life, and when he stands before the great white throne, he will be judged according to the things written in “the books” (Rev. 20:12) and it will also be shown that his name is not in the book of life. “Not blot his name out of the book of life” speaks of God’s sustainment of the overcomer -- not of the possibility of names being blotted out.

In Rev. 3:2 we read, “thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” None who finally answer in their soul to that condition have their names in the book of life. Not the lifeless, but only the overcomer has his name in the book of life.

24. Are all Christians overcomers?

Surely the burden of proof is on the shoulders of those who would argue that the various warnings are not genuinely addressed to true believers as they seem to be and that the promises are genuinely addressed to all believers (as they do not seem to be). Hence the “overcomer” is the individual Christian who enjoys special benefits in eternity for refusing to give up his faith in spite of persecution in life on earth (J. William Fuller, “I will not Erase His Name from the Book of Life” (Revelation 3:5), *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26:3 (Sept. 1983), p. 299).

Believing in eternal security, his proposal is this: since in v. 1 “name” connotes reputation, then it does so also in v. 5 (p. 303) and thus refers to a reputation in heaven. Thus:

It promises a unique and honorable eternal identity (p. 306).

So then if a believer has his name blotted out, would that not mean that he has a non-unique and dishonorable eternal identity? The truth is that in God’s view of us in Christ, all are overcomers. The actual degree in practice is another matter. That there are *differences of rewards* is not in question, but that is not the subject here.

25. R. Shank, *Elect in the Son*, Springfield: Wescott, p. 207, 1970.

26. *Collected Writings* 5:335. See also 30:343.

REVELATION 13:8 AND 17:8

. . . and all that dwell on the earth shall do it homage, [every one] whose name has not been written from [the] founding of [the] world in the book of life of the slain Lamb (Rev. 13:8).

. . . and they who dwell on the earth, whose names are not written from the founding of the world in the book of life, shall wonder, seeing the beast, that it was, and is not, and shall be present (Rev. 17:8).

In the way Scripture presents this matter we find a distinction made between those saints whose portion is earthly blessing under the reign of Christ in the millennium and saints who form the body of Christ. The key to this is found in the following two expressions respectively.

1. From the Foundation of the World. It has been noted, quite correctly, that those that dwell on the earth are a moral class of persons referred to some 10 times in the Revelation. They are the apostates of Christendom. Their moral character as earth-dwellers is seen in Phil. 3:18, 19 in contrast to those who await the Lord Jesus as Savior (Phil. 3:20, 21). At the time of the rapture before Daniel’s 70th week, the OT worthies will be resurrected (Heb. 11:40) as well as the Christian dead; and we the living will be caught up, and be above. Those above are blasphemed by the Beast (Rev. 13:6) to whom homage is rendered by these apostates of Christendom, as well as the apostates of Judaism.

The Jews who reject the Beast have their names “written from [the] founding of [the] world in the book of life of the slain Lamb.” That this does have application to besides the Jews is seen in Matt. 25:34 which speaks of those Gentiles that had received the gospel of the kingdom preached by the coming Jewish remnant. “From the foundation of the world,” then, has reference to elect ones who have a special place in connection with earthly blessings

2. Before the Foundation of the World. Concerning members of Christ’s body, the Scripture uses a change in language stating that:

. . . he has chosen us in him before [the] world’s foundation (Eph. 1:4).

This has to do with the special connection we have with Him. Thus, 1 Pet. 1:20 speaks of Christ:

foreknown indeed before [the] foundation of [the] world.

We are bound up with Him in a special way.

REVELATION 20:12

Here we see the unbelievers before Christ, being judged in their persons according to the works, recorded in the books (a figure, no doubt, but no less certain on that account) listing their evils. Then there is their absence of name from the book of life, for they did not have life from God, but only their natural life. “The books” and “the book of life” are in agreement.

REVELATION 22:14, 19-20

Actually these Scriptures are not about the book of life, but about the tree of life:

Blessed [are] they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life . . .

And if anyone shall add to these things, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And if anyone take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life.

Verse 14 is, of course, the saved. The washed robes and the tree of life are figurative of purity and life respectively. The passage has in view the literal tree of life in the garden of Eden, the eating of which would result in living forever. That is the point here. Eating of the tree of life is figurative of having eternal life.

Verses 19-20 do not mean that a person that was eating of the tree of life might have been lost again and deprived of eating of it. In Gen. 3:22, one eating would have prevented death. God took away the ability of Adam to eat of that tree. It does not mean that he had been eating of it and then he lost being able to eat of it.

God taking away someone's part from the tree of life means that he shall never eat of it. The tree of life represents Christ. He has washed us from our sins in His blood (Rev. 1:5) and we have right to the tree of life. Indeed, He Himself is our life (Col. 3:4).

PSALM 69:28; ISAIAH 4:3; EZEKIEL 13:9; DANIEL 12:1

None of these texts speak of a book of life in the sense we have been reviewing in the NT.

Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous (Psa. 69:28).

And it shall come to pass that he who remaineth in Zion, and he that is left in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, -- every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem (Isa. 4:3).

. . . they shall not be in the council of my people, neither shall they be written in the register of the house of Israel . . . (Ezek. 13:9).

And at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that is found written in the book (Dan. 12:1).

It is helpful to have all these before us at once. Perhaps it is clearest that the last three refer to Jews at the time when the future kingdom will be established. They have to do with life here on earth in the kingdom. Then all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Psa. 69 also looks on to that time. The wicked Jews will be put to death. (Cp. Ezek. 20:38). The righteous of the scattered ones shall go into the land when Israel is regathered, being brought by God into the bond of the covenant (Ezek. 20:37). God will also deal with the wicked in the land (Zech. 13:8, 9; 14:1-3). Only the righteous will be left, and so Isa. 60:21 declares: "Thy people also

shall be all righteous." And this bears on Psa. 69:28. There, the book of life refers to the living ones here on earth. The wicked among the Jews will die and not be written among their righteous brethren in the kingdom when Messiah reigns before His ancients in glory (Isa. 24:23)

* * * * *

We will now return from our excursus on the book of life.

I WILL . . . CONFESS HIS NAME BEFORE MY FATHER AND BEFORE HIS ANGELS (v. 5)

"I will confess his name." The Lord will distinguish each one that is His. And in these individuals we see that the invisible church exists amid the wreck of all, and when the visible body is judged, they will escape, and not merely escape, for they will be taken to the Lord before this. So that, when the Lord comes to judge the world, they will come with Him; and the visible church, not answering to the grace, will be treated as the world. There is, therefore, an invisible church, I doubt not; but mark that when the true church is invisible, then the visible church is treated like the world. These churches were called candlesticks, and God had put light in them, not to be put under a bushel, but to be put in a candlestick to give light to all around. Well, then, is light invisible? If it is, what is invisible light worth? It only merits condemnation. What has been said by men for the last three hundred years is quite true, that there is an invisible church, but then this is the condemnation of that which is visible. Looked at with respect to its public collective testimony for God, does it bear out the precepts of Christ in its conduct and life? No; and, therefore, there has not been in the church the visible testimony to all the grace, and truth, and blessedness, which is the church's portion in Christ.²⁷

The believer will not be invisible when the Lord Jesus thus confesses his name. See also Luke 9:24-26; 12:9

Call to Hear

He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies (Rev. 3:6).

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

Ed.

27. *Collected Writings* 5:335, 336.

Notes on Marriage and Divorce

by Adrian Roach

Marriage and Other Relationships

or

Does Conversion Sanctify An Unscriptural Divorce?

The question answers itself by the asking. If I am living in a relationship, marriage or otherwise and continue in it, my being converted to Christ does not in any way make pure what before was not pure.

Examples

- (1) I belong to a ring of thieves and get saved -- does that mean that because I joined that ring before being saved that now it is pure and I can continue in it?
- (2) I am a saloon owner damaging souls with my merchandise. I get saved, so now it is all right because I started it in my unconverted days! Does Scripture teach that?
- (3) I join the Free Masons in my unconverted days and then get saved. Can I be received to the Lord's table and remain a Freemason because I joined when unsaved? No, I must get out of it and get clear of what dishonors Christ.
- (4) I am unsaved and divorce my wife or she divorces me on grounds other than fornication (Matt. 19:9). The Lord says I am living in an adulterous relationship (if remarried). When does this adulterous relationship cease? Does conversion now sanctify and make holy what was unholy before conversion? As long as I am in the relationship, the guilt attaches even though in Christ my sins are washed away. Notice "my sins," not my "relationship."

What Is Marriage: Does God Have Two Sets of Rules?

It is a purely NATURAL relationship *for sinner or saint*. This is based on God's order in creation (Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:3-6).

He which made them at the beginning made them male and female (Matt. 19:3-6). Thus the relationship is that of a man and woman being the counterparts of each other. It is not a spiritual relationship as it applies equally to the unsaved, though

a believer will bring Christ and the Word in to sanctify it (1 Cor. 7:39).

How Is it Formed?

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah and she became his wife (Gen. 24:67).

All without a legal ceremony.

What Is Meant by Matt. 19:6?

What God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:6).

It does not say "What the *LORD* hath joined together" but "what *GOD* hath joined". It is purely a natural relationship for saved and unsaved. All governed by the same principles. An infidel as a natural man is responsible to the Lord to keep his marriage relationship pure just as a believer. What is adultery for the unsaved is adultery for the believer. Matt. 19 insists on the natural relationship.

What Is an Adulterous Relationship And When Does it Cease?

A man or a woman (saved or unsaved) {who} puts away the marital partner for reasons other than fornication and then marries another has put themselves in an adulterous position. The meaning of "committeth" in Matt. 19 is in the present tense. In the original Greek it is not just one act; it is the continuance in it. A person in this unscriptural relationship is barred from the Lord's table, they have put themselves under the government of God.

But does not Mr. Darby teach that such can be received? Absolutely NOT. His letters have been misused to that point but a brief consideration should remove any doubts. In his *Letters*, vol.1, p. 347, we get ONE letter involved. The words that are misapplied are these:

I judge the church must take her as she is when converted.

The case is explained in the footnote:

. . .the position of a woman whose husband left her and his child, and went and married another; she, some while after, unconverted, marries a man who takes her and her child and cares thoroughly for them.

In the letter he also says:

I look upon the man's act as a breach of the tie before God, namely -- the tie as broken (Matt. 19:9); and that the church must take the person as it finds them when converted.

Notice it is the innocent party in a scriptural divorce who is not barred from the Lord's table. She was clear. So Mr. Darby is not teaching that everything that happened before conversion is to be dropped. If that were the case we would not require a converted Freemason to give up the Lodge as conversion would now sanctify an unequal yoke in a Fraternity which has no room for the Name of Jesus.

Adrian Roach, November 21, 1979

Marriage and Divorce: An Examination of J.N.D.'s Letters on the Subject

PREFACE

We can quote from Scripture or the writings of godly men and lose the meaning if we sever a statement from the passage or writing. One thought pulled out from the train of thought being developed will give us a wrong meaning. What is the chapter dealing with? What is the letter dealing with? A statement may be made as to a specific fact and I take it and apply it in a general way not intended. I believe that this has been done (not wilfully) with the three letters written by J.N.D. on the above subject. Scripture is clear on the entire matter but I have my thoughts and so isolate one of J.N.D.'s thoughts to confirm mine. What is he dealing with in the three letters? Simply this -- he is dealing with the question of believing sisters who have been left by their husbands. He is not taking up the question of whether a person can be received who, when unconverted, formed an unscriptural marriage. This question was not presented to him, but the status of the sisters who when free to marry, because of the sinful acts of their husbands, had so remarried and now wanted to break bread. With this in mind let us consider the letters.

(1) VOL. 1, P. 347 (STOW HILL EDITION)

The footnote to the letter shows that it concerns a woman who was deserted by her husband who in turn remarried thus leaving her free to marry according to Scripture. The man had broken the tie in the only way in which it can be broken -- (Matt. 19:9). She was thus free whether saved or unsaved to remarry and so as J.N.D. says:

the church must take her as she is when converted.

That is he recognizes it as a scriptural marriage which it would not be had she divorced her husband on unscriptural grounds. For a remarriage to be scriptural the divorce must be scriptural. Nothing can change the character of an unscriptural marriage -- not even the conversion of one of the parties. If one is in a guilty relationship so is the other. You cannot have a marriage where one is guilty and the other is not. If the wife cannot be received neither can he for they are in relationship with each other.

(2) VOL. 2, P. 130-131

This letter deals with desertion and divorce. It shows that adultery breaks the tie but simple desertion does not.

A person having left and being a long time away is not sufficient (p. 130).

Deliberate, definitive desertion which involves adultery does allow the innocent party to remarry. Again --

By act of sin the tie was broken already and judicial divorce allowed (p. 130).

In J.N.D.'s day a divorce could only be secured on the grounds of adultery so if a divorce existed then the one party was guilty and not free to remarry on a scriptural basis. So if the guilty party remarries he then lives continually in a state of adultery as long as he is in that relationship. Conversion does not take one out of a relationship even though all sins are forgiven. God's *government* and His *grace* run side by side. See David in 2 Sam. 12:13-14:

The Lord also hath PUT AWAY THY SIN; thou shalt not die.

But see verse 10:

The sword shall never depart from thine house . . .

and so it was to the end of David's days on earth. But did not the Lord say, "thy sin is put away"?

Yes but God's government was not withdrawn. Not only the sword but David paid "fourfold" as he pronounced upon himself unknowingly in verse 6! The child died, so did Amon, Absalom, and Adonijah!! How can conversion change what is unholy into that which is holy? A brother in New Brunswick will not give up Freemasonry to be received at the Lord's Table. But he joined it before he was saved and now he is saved -- is not that all forgiven? As long as he remains there he is out under the government of God. Years ago in Philadelphia a brother now with the Lord formed an unscriptural marriage while unconverted then got saved and saw the truth but had to sit back most of his life. He knew it was the right place and would go no where else. When his wife died he was then received to the table as death had severed the wrong relationship.

If all had passed before conversion, I should take it as I found it (p. 131).

It is wrong to take this to mean a person unscripturally divorcing his or her mate or being so divorced themselves can, by being converted, then change an unholy alliance into a holy one. What is J.N.D. dealing with in this letter? A woman deliberately forsaken by her husband who had remarried. It does not take up the man being later converted and then received. It is *the deserted wife only* that is in view. If an unholy marriage is sanctified by conversion then, and I say it carefully, "Christ is the minister of sin" (Gal 2:17). If J.N.D.'s letters are a bit difficult, it is because we bring into them what is not there. Besides it will cast us the more (as he would do if here) on the direct teaching of scripture. "Committeth adultery"

(Matt 19:9) is continuous as long as the relationship lasts.

(3) VOL. 2, P. 191

This letter likewise refers to one deserted by her husband who remarries, leaving her free to remarry. Again let us say -- it is not the husband being later saved and then being received at the Lord's Table -- THAT IS NOT THE SUBJECT OF THE LETTER. That question never arose in those days. He says

The previous desertion left her free when deliberately done.

This involved adultery. In the same letter he says

As the man left her, she practically entered the church of God *as a lone woman*, and I do not occupy myself with what was before.

FURTHER REMARKS

J.N.D. made a difficult and in one sense an ambiguous statement as to the heathen. If he were here he could clarify this for us. But when all the rest of the letter is clear we have no right to read into this what might not be intended. He says,

But as unconverted, I recognize nothing before unless sin; say a heathen, he may as such have had and left twenty wives. I ignore it all when converted . . .

He does not go into detail so there are some things we can "suppose" as to this to conform it to scripture which J.N.D. would want to uphold:

- (A) Had the previous wives first remarried? If so he was free to remarry also.¹
- (B) Was he living with a twenty-first wife contrary to scripture?
- (C) J.N.D. does not say that this left the heathen liberty to remarry after conversion, simply that all before would not be held against him. So this leaves us with the two alternatives above, namely: the previous wives had remarried, or he had not married again.

CONCLUSION

J.N.D. dealt with specific cases of which we have not the whole detail. However, all three letters deal with a deserted woman, the husband being guilty of adultery because of an unscriptural marriage. We do not know fully his thought as to the heathen which he applies to the THEN CIRCUMSTANCES which do not deal with the reception of a now converted person in an adulterous marriage. Remember that marriage was set up on a natural basis:

Therefore shall a *man* (it does not say a believer) leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:24 and Matt. 19:5).

1. I take (A) as being what J.N.D. supposed in his letter as he was speaking of one free to remarry.

God does not have two standards of marriage -- one for believers and one for unbelievers. What is adultery to the unsaved is adultery to the saved. Conversion brings forgiveness of sins but IT DOES NOT LIFT ME OUT OF AN UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGE. Human reason interposes and says, "Well, a man can break the wrong yoke with a fraternal society, but is he to give up his present wife so as to be received?" This is the wrong question. The question is simply: "Is the marriage unscriptural?" Does the Word of God condemn it? If so, then under the government of God (Gal. 6:7-8), they are barred from the Lord's Table.

Suppose a believing woman married to an unconverted man unscripturally divorced. What does scripture say? "Committeth adultery" and that is in the abiding sense. He then gets saved; is he to be treated in any different way than she? Why is she excluded? Because of the wrong marriage. She is in relation to him and this is unscriptural. How can he be received when it is her relation to him that is unscriptural? How can one be guilty and the other not? It is the MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP that is evil before God. We must lose sight of individuals and take unqualified statements of the Word.

May these thoughts turn us the more to the Word for guidance.

Adrian Roach, January 15, 1980

Extract from a Letter on Marriage

The question as to Matt. 19:9 is of great importance. There is a case in another gathering in which that gathering has called for help in the understanding from Scripture. Several godly brethren have considered it and some have discussed it with me. We are desirous of all the help we can get from well-taught and responsible brethren. Bro. Gill's pamphlet is a familiar one and makes clear the right of the innocent party to remarry. I have gotten much help from J.R.G. on this subject, especially in 1929. However there are two statements in the pamphlet which my conscience at this moment will not let me accept, that is without qualification.

Hence unscriptural divorce and remarriage in unsaved days is not a barrier to souls being received at the Lord's table (p. 6).

How does conversion turn an unscriptural marriage into a scriptural one? Suppose I changed the statement of dear J.R.G. to read: "Hence unscriptural joining of the Free Masons in unsaved days is not a barrier to souls being received at the Lord's table"?

Even after conversion the man would still be a Mason and must break that connection before he is received. Conversion saves him but leaves him in the same wrong relationship unless he acts to give it up. Now I see no difference with an unscriptural (or adulterous) marriage either. Conversion does not sanctify what is branded as sinful by the Lord Himself. Now it may be difficult to straighten out such

a marital tangle but the question then remains: “Is the guilty party (now saved) under the government of God by continuance in the adulterous marriage?”

The other statement is the quote from J.N.D., “The church must take persons as it finds them when converted.” Now this is no doubt basically true but scripture qualifies this. In Isa. 1:16-17: “Cease to do evil; learn to do well.” (Also 1 Cor. 5:11.)

1 Cor. 6:9-11 shows how some were received as the church found them when saved. But did they not give up the practice of these things? If not, then Christ becomes the minister of sin and by saving them sanctifies their evil course. What was wrong before suddenly at conversion is acceptable.

Dear brother, those are real exercises among several of us as to the case. In short let me put the matter this way:

A man in unconverted days unscripturally divorces his innocent wife and marries another. The Lord says in Matt. 19:9 that this second marriage constitutes adultery. Now this is a natural relationship and there are not two sets of rules, one for saved and one for unsaved. What is adultery to the one is adultery to the other. The man then gets saved and is still in the relationship which the Lord calls adultery. May he now be received to the Lord’s table? Salvation has given him pardon but how does it change the character of the relationship? The pamphlet of J.R.G. does not, as I see it, answer this question. I agree with you that it is far better to be occupied with the things that edify but it is also important to consider those things that affect the glory of the Lord as the Holy One in the midst. We shall need this exercise all our days down here.

Adrian Roach, from a letter dated April 23, 1969.

Notice: 1. The above paper by A. Roach is available from the publisher as a printed pamphlet.

2. A much more extensive set of notes along the same lines is available from the publisher in a “xeroxed” form.

An Additional Note from A. P. Cecil

Only, therefore, for one cause was divorce sanctioned, and that for the sin of fornication. Marriage was also forbidden with a divorced woman (Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9), and polygamy set aside.

Now this gives great light as to how far we ought to follow human laws on the subject of marriage. If they sanction sin, and divorce for anything less than fornication, the Christian and the Assembly are not to own such acts, as of God, though the divorce is legal.

God’s Sovereignty and Glory in the Salvation of Lost Man

Chapter 1

God’s Sovereignty in the Testing of Lost Man

(Chapter 1 continued)

Man’s Status and Responsibility Now

MAN’S PRESENT RESPONSIBILITY CONTRASTED WITH THE PAST

It is important to understand that the first man is no longer under probation, under testing, to see if he is recoverable. The cross ended that testing and the verdict of the trial of the first man has been rendered: he is unrecoverable; he is lost, he is dead (2 Cor. 5:14). It was J. N. Darby who brought before God’s people the truth about the probation of the first man and its character, its end at the cross, God’s governmental and dispensational ways, etc. Here we will consider some statements of his concerning the probation of man being ended and how man is now regarded by God

In v. 11 the “ends of the world” is the completion of the ages {i.e., the ages of trial of the first man}. To me the world now is not under any dispensation {the Mosaic age continues on}, but the whole course of God’s dealings with it are over until He comes to judgment {at the appearing of Christ to smite the nations}. Man was under responsibility from Adam to Christ {in fallen Adam, a standing in the flesh}, and then our Lord says, “Now is the judgment of this world” {John 12:31}. Historically I see this: up to the flood no dealings of God, but a testimony in Enoch. We see a man turned out of paradise, and presently God comes in by a solemn act, and puts that world all aside. Then after the flood we see various ways of God with the world. He begins by putting it under Noah {the first administration -- government}. He gave promises to Abraham, then law raising the question of righteousness {the Mosaic administration}, which promise did not. Law was brought in to test flesh, and see whether righteousness could be got from man for God. Then God sent prophets until there was no remedy, and then He says there is one thing yet I may still do: I will send My Son; and when they saw the Son, they said, “This is the heir, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours,” {Matt. 21:38} and then, so far as responsibility went, God was turned out of the world. Then comes the cross, and

atonement for sin, and a foundation for a new state of things altogether, and that was the completion of the ages {i.e., the ages of testing}. God is not now dealing with man to try if he is lost or not, and so in John's Gospel man is gone from chapter 1. The first three Gospels present Christ to man, and then He is rejected; but in John 1 {11-13},

He came to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

There we find God's power coming into the world, and the Jews all done with: only some receive Him who have been born of God, and so John's Gospel is thoroughly what men call Calvinistic. ² ◆

The history of man in responsibility goes on up to the cross; but, since the cross, a man, though individually he goes through the discovery of what he is, is not in a state of probation at all; responsibility in that sense is over. Here is a man who, say, has been trading, and has not a farthing left. It is of no use saying to him, "Take care of your money." He could only say, "I have no money to take care of."

So, as a present thing, when I have really found out my state, I find I am lost. Christ came to seek and to save the lost, not those who are in a state of probation. Still, I personally must go through the learning process.

I see I am lost already, my state is enmity against God; that is a present fact, i.e., in my unconverted state.

Now, when in my enmity I rejected Christ, God gave Christ to cleanse me from it, and I am brought to own this. As a man, I am done with, and I am no more in the flesh, for it was condemned in the cross; but I am clear now, and through the rent veil I go into the holiest as white as snow. ³ ◆

Man is preached to as lost; Christ (when the full truth came out, man having been tested by grace as well as law) came to seek and to save that which was *lost*. The law may be presented to a man now to prove it. It is made for the unrighteous, as the enlightened saint taught by the word knows. Christ may be presented to the sinner too; but if grace works not, he will none of Him; he will prove in his particular case -- what the word has proved of the world in its history -- he is a wilful doer of his own lawless (*ἀνομος*) will, and a hater of God, even if He come in grace {John 1}. And if God gives every evidence, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" (John 5). Thus the principle of man's responsibility was fully tested in every way. ⁴ ◆

Thus since the cross man's responsibility, as such, is over; it is not that he has not debts and sins, or that he was not responsible: all that is true, but God was rejected finally, and God comes and works His own work all alone by Himself. When that is done, He tells out His counsels and what He is going to do. At the beginning of

2. *Collected Writings* 26:248.

3. *Notes and Jottings*, p. 33. See also p. 321.

4. *Collected Writings* 10:275.

Titus, we read "the acknowledging of the truth" -- the gospel comes and man is responsible to own his ruin -- "in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began, but hath in due time manifested His word through preaching which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior." ⁵ ◆

Now, although the ground of man's responsibility is over in the sense of having wholly failed under it, when proved in every possible way, yet as to moral dealing with each individual, the responsibility is there to the full; and as an individual under moral dealing, a man has to go through the history of the process of responsibility and its failure; but he goes through it to bring out this, that he is lost already. He has to prove the truth of God's verdict that in man there is no good thing; and so the result of the principle of responsibility is for him to find out that he is lost, that the responsibility is over; not as if it was not true, but because he is lost and ruined, as the man who has lost all his money by foolish ways. It is important to keep up responsibility, but the individual is brought to the consciousness that on that ground it is all up with him. Man is lost. We have spent every farthing, and have only debts; these we have if that is any good. It is all over with the first man, and no mending of him will do: he is lost and ruined; but Christ came to save the lost.

Now the Second Man is set up. It is not a mending of the first man, but the substitution of the Second. There is no improvement or correction of the first man (although we are practically changed if we come to Christ), but the sins of the first Adam are all cleared away; and, secondly, the tree itself is cut down by the roots for faith. In the cross we see the responsibility met completely; Christ has met all the failure, the fruit of the tree of responsibility {i.e., the tree of the knowledge of good and evil}, and has glorified God in so doing. Man has brought in confusion; but Christ came, met the case, and cleared the scene, and triumphed over all. When He came, God's character as to facts was compromised, and there was no escape. If He had saved none, but at once cast off sinners, it were righteousness, but there would have been no love. If He had let all pass, when man was a sinner, and in such sort saved all (which man would call love, but which would not have been divine love, for God is holy), where were the righteousness? But Christ came. Well, surely in the cross there is righteousness against sin, as nowhere else, yet there is the infinite love of God to sinners.

In Him, in Christ, I get both the trees of Paradise united, fulfilled in grace, bearing our sins and putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and becoming life according to righteousness. I am brought to the discovery of what I am, and then I see Christ has died on the cross and has taken the whole thing on Himself. When I see Him -- the Son of God -- dying on the cross, I say if this is not righteousness -- judgment against sin -- I do not know what is. But whom is He dying for? -- the guilty sinner. Well, if this is not love, I do not know what is. ⁶ ◆

The cross met our responsibility; there the first man, whether Gentile or Jew, came to the last pitch of wickedness. This closed all the history of responsibility. Now,

5. *Collected Writings* 26:256.

6. *Collected Writings* 32:236.

when my mind is open through grace to look at my responsibility, it is not a question whether I can stand in the day of judgment; the gospel starts with the declaration that I am lost. I have lots of debts, and not a penny to pay: it is all over with me on that ground; but Christ “came to seek and to save that which was lost.” “Lost” was never said till man had rejected Christ, though it was true before. When the glorified Christ was preached by the apostles, the history of responsibility was closed. In that work on the cross Christ met our responsibility, and laid the foundation for all the counsels of God. This is summed up in Acts 7. “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” They had broken the law, killed the prophets, crucified Christ, and resisted the Holy Ghost. The Lord said on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Then came the testimony of a glorified Christ; it was rejected, and that closed altogether not responsibility, but the history of it. Then in the cross Christ has perfectly glorified God Himself in the place of sin, where He was “made sin.” He goes into God’s glory, which was the foundation for the counsels of God. Then the whole mystery of the church could come out. ⁷ ◆

SATAN HAS GIVEN A CHARACTER TO FALLEN MAN

The Lord Jesus pointed out to those who opposed him that they did what they had seen with their father (John 8:38); and that they did their father’s works (John 8:41); and that “Ye are of the devil, as [your] father” (John 8:44). Moreover:

He that practices sin is of the devil; for from [the] beginning the devil sins (1 John 3:8).

Indeed:

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the wicked [one] (1 John 5:19).

Since the cross, Satan is called the god of this world, and is engaged in blinding the thoughts:

. . . in whom the god of this world has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving . . . (2 Cor. 4:4).

And so Satan is:

. . . the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience: among whom *we* all had our conversation in the lusts of our flesh, doing what the flesh and the thoughts willed to do . . . (Eph. 2:2, 3).

Note well what the thoughts and the flesh *willed* to do. Man’s thoughts and the flesh never *will* to believe the gospel! Man is a *slave* to sin (Rom. 6:20) as is the devil himself.

* * * * *

Regarding the matters discussed in this chapter, the following charts summarize some of the differences before the cross and since the cross.

7. *Collected Writings* 34:403..

End of the Testing of the First Man

. . . that which is spiritual [was] not first . . .

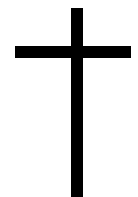
The first man out of [the] earth, made of dust, . . .

FINAL TESTING
BY THE PERSON OF THE SON, THE SECOND MAN
And at last He sent to them His Son (Matt. 21:37).

The perfect King and the kingdom (Matt.)
 The perfect Servant and perfect service (Mark)
 The perfect Man and perfect dependency (Luke)
 The only-begotten, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

The revelation of the
Father in the Son (John 15:24)

The first man, in the persons of the Jews, *was tested by the kingdom* in the offer of the King; and *was tested by grace* in the Person of the Son. Man is not now being tested by grace, nor will he be tested by the kingdom in the future. God has concluded testing of the



The First Man

TESTED UNDER
Conscience
 (lawlessness)
Government
Law
Priesthood
Judges
Kings
Prophets
THE SON
 (the Second Man)

“The fulness of the time” (Gal. 4:4)
“In due time” (Rom. 5:6)
 (at the end of the time of testing)

“Consummation of the ages”
(Heb. 9:26)
 (Ages of testing)

“Yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8)
“Still without strength” (Rom. 5:6)
 (conclusion at the end of testing)

The Second Man Established in His Place

... then that which is spiritual (1 Cor. 14:46)

... the second man, out of heaven (1 Cor. 15:47)

NOW

The Second Man has displaced the first man.

In view of the end of the testing
of the first man, God declares:

Wrath of God revealed from heaven (Rom. 1:18)

All under sin (Rom. 3:9; Gal. 3:22)

Every mouth stopped (Rom. 3:20)

All the world under judgment (Rom. 3:20)

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)

For God has shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might show
mercy to all (Rom. 11:32).

Man is the slave of sin (Rom. 6:20)

Thoughts of the unbelieving are blinded (2 Cor. 4:4)

All are dead (2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 2:1; John 5:24, 25; 1 John 3:14)

Now is the judgment of this world (John 12:31)

In due time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6)

Christ died for all (1 Tim. 2:6)

Christ gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:6)

Christ is the propitiation for the world (1 John 2:2)

The whole world lies in the wicked One (1 John 5:19)

Satan declared to be the God of this age (2 Cor. 4:4)

NOW: Rom. 3:21; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Eph. 3:10; Heb. 9:26

God **"NOW"** enjoins that they shall
all everywhere repent" (Acts 17:30)

"Upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11)

(what the ages of testing were leading to)

THE PERFECT WORK OF CHRIST SETTLED THE MATTER OF RESPONSIBILITY

Man's history was thus closed at the cross. First, lawlessness, then law-breaking, and then enmity to God; then comes that blessed perfect work of the last Adam, who met the need in His own Person, and brought in the full accomplishment of the purposes of God. He has brought man into an entirely new sphere by death and resurrection, and eventually glory, and has settled the whole question of responsibility.⁸

THE NATURAL FIRSTBORN IS DISPLACED

It is a fact that in what is recorded in the book of Genesis the blessing is not given to the firstborn. This begins with the setting aside of Cain and is seen in every case where there is sufficient information given so that this phenomenon may be observed. We see a foreshadow in this that it is the purpose of God to set aside the firstborn. In connection with the last Adam, Christ, it is written:

The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam⁹ a quickening spirit. But that which is spiritual [was] not first, but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual: the first man out of [the] earth, made of dust; the second man out of heaven (1 Cor. 15:45-47).

The setting aside of the first man is woven into the fabric of Genesis and God's judgment on the first man is seen in Exodus, the book of *redemption*. We see how appropriate this is when we realize that in the cross of Christ, where redemption was wrought, God has ended the standing of the first man. Thus it is reflected in the ten plagues, which divide into three groups of three (dealing with sin in its origin, character, and consequences, respectively) and then the final judgment, the striking down the firstborn of Egypt, Jehovah sending "the destroyer of the firstborn" (Heb. 11:28) -- signifying the final removal of the first man into the "gloom of darkness" (Jude 13). See Matt. 22:13, where it is "outer darkness -- totally away from God. God had just previously given a foreshadow of this in the ninth plague. No one moved from his place, nor repented, either. There is no fellowship in the "gloom of darkness." Fellowship is in the light (1 John 1:7). Psa. 150.

God has made Christ the firstbegotten, or firstborn -- speaking not of priority in time, but of pre-eminence in all spheres and spiritual relationships (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Rev. 1:5).¹⁰ Thus, He displaces the firstborn (Adam) of the natural order (concerning having a standing before Him as under trial to see if he was recoverable), for first is the natural and afterwards the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:46, 47). Moreover, the Christian in his special relationship to the Firstborn is among "the assembly of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23). We are under the headship of the last Adam, the Firstborn, who has displaced the first Adam regarding a standing before God.

8. *Collected Writings* 34:296.

9. {He is called the *last* Adam because there will never be another head.}

10. "*Only-begotten* Son" speaks of underived, unacquired, unique, eternal relationship with the Father. "*Firstborn*" is connected with acquired glories as man, in spheres wherein He must have pre-eminence.

Conclusion: Man, in Adam, is a Bad Tree

And already the axe is applied to the root of the trees; and every tree therefore not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire (Matt. 3:10).

Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt. For from the fruit the tree is known (Matt. 12:35).

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have set you that ye should go and [that] ye should bear fruit, and [that] your fruit should abide (John 15:16).

For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

So then [it is] not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy (Rom. 9:16).

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

Ed.

Was Our Lord's Life Vicarious?

Our correspondent asks, "How is it proved that our Lord's life-sufferings and obedience were not vicarious? Presbyterians teach that 'His life-sufferings from Bethlehem to Calvary were the true ground of our justification,' and that, 'He obeyed the law in our stead.'" Again, "What is meant by His being 'made under the law,' or by His being 'obedient unto death?' How did He 'learn obedience by the things which He suffered?' (Heb. 5:8), or in what sense was He 'made perfect through suffering?' (Heb. 2:10)."

Let us first look briefly at the question of justification. In Scripture usage, justification is always *from* sins and guilt, -- acquittal, -- clearance from charge and accusation. It has no idea in itself of giving merit or title to reward. Thus "by Him all that believe are justified *from* all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39); "he that is dead is justified from sin" (Rom. 6:7, *marg*). Again, "Who shall *lay anything to the charge* of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that *condemneth*?" (Rom. 8:33). Or again, "I know nothing by (i.e. against) myself; yet I am not thereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:4). Once more, "The free gift is of many offences unto justification" (Rom. 5:16).

Now when God becomes "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," what is the *ground* upon which according to Scripture He justifies one who is a sinner, and ungodly? Let the Scripture answer: "Being justified freely by His grace through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus" -- "redemption through His *blood*" (Eph. 1:7), -- whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in His *blood*" -- (Rom. 3:24). "That, being now justified by His BLOOD" (Rom. 5:9). Or again, "he that *is dead* is justified from sin; now if *we* be dead *with Christ*" -- (ch. 6:7, 8).

Now this is the language of Scripture, exclusively. Does it speak of "life-sufferings"

justifying, or of death, of blood, and that alone? I know, of course, that "life-sufferings from Bethlehem to Calvary" are meant to include the cross. All I ask here is, Does Scripture teach us so to mix up His life and death together, as together justifying?

It is quite true that I have omitted purposely, as yet, the passages which speak, not of justifying, but of *righteousness*. My reason is, that I desire to keep the things distinct from one another which Scripture in its wisdom, which is perfect, distinguishes.

"Righteousness" is in three places, and in three only, in the New Testament, a "righteous *act*" or "sum of righteous *acts*" (Rom. 2:26; 5:18; 8:4). In every other case it is a *quality*.¹ Thus the "righteousness of God" is His being righteous, His character as such. This, declared by the death of Christ, (Rom. 3:26), is revealed in the gospel as the hope and confidence of lost and guilty men, (1:17), for as surely as Christ died for sinners, the sinner who shelters himself in Him is safe by the very fact that God is righteous.

Righteousness for a man, a sinner, is a character he is credited with: he is accounted righteous, righteousness is reckoned or imputed to him. That is, not a sum of righteousness, -- so much doing -- but a certain character, as I have said. In one place (Rom. 4:6-8), righteousness imputed, is just sin *not* imputed. But if "Christ is made unto us righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30), this of course goes very much further; nay, as being *in* Him before God, every believer is necessarily "righteous as *He* is righteous," (1 John 3:7); all the value of Christ, of Him who glorified God on earth, whether by life or death, attaches to him.

Thus "by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). I have no intention, as I have no desire, to exclude His blessed life from this "obedience." But this is not *life-suffering*, even though He suffered doubtless in the path of obedience, nay, "*learned* obedience by the things that He suffered." This means, He learned what it was -- a new thing for "the Son" to obey, and to suffer in obeying.

So again, that "He became obedient unto death," that is, that death itself, lying in His path, was not refused by this obedient One, is surely true. Obedient He was in a life tested by suffering which had no equal; and obedient in death, where that was "even the death of the cross." By this obedience, perfect and entire throughout, one whole in life or death, we are made righteous, I again say. And here all that is really precious for the heart in the thought "He lived for us" as well as died for us, finds its expression and its justification.

But this is *not* the justification of the thought of a "vicarious life." By this term is

1. The first word is "dikaionia," the second, "dikaionia." "The termination -- ma, denotes the *result of an action*, and is affixed to verbal stems. Thus, prasso, prag-, gives pragma, a *thing done*, an *action*; and the obsolete rheo, rhe-, forms rhema, a *thing spoken*, a *word*."

"Substantives in osune, connected with adjective stems in on-, rarely in o-, denote *quality*; as . . . dikaionia, righteousness." (Handbook to the Grammar of the New Testament, published by the Religious Tract Society of England, pp. 154, 156).

In Rev. 19:8, the word is really a plural, "dikaionata," "the righteousnesses of the saints."

intended, of course, His being in our place, Sin-bearer therefore, from His birth. The place of sinners, -- *our* place, -- would be necessarily for Him that of a sin-bearer, Let me express this in the language of a very popular writer, extreme language, no doubt, but it is well to see where such thoughts carry us. Says Dr. Horatius Bonar thus:

He was Himself the true Sacrifice, the bearer of sin. As such He lived and died. In all that He did, and in all that He abstained from doing; in the places which He visited, and in the places which He abstained from visiting, He kept this in view. He was loaded with our sin, our curse, our condemnation, our leprosy; and as such, He must keep at a distance from the holy and the clean.²

The last sentence will be disclaimed as expressing the views of many, perhaps. I would fain trust so. Still it is the language of one whose writings have widespread acceptance among Christians, and those so-called "evangelical" at the present day. And the general thought is one which is evidently implied in the statement that the Lord's "life-sufferings from Bethlehem to Calvary are the true ground of our justification." Here His "life-sufferings" are looked at as the *penalty* endured in our behalf, -- are mixed up with the entirely contrasted sufferings on the cross, -- and are made the ground of a justification which, if it could have been effected in that way, would have absolutely rendered the *death* of the Lord unnecessary. That is not meant of course, I know; but it is right to show the consequences involved in that which those who hold it do not follow out to its consequences.

But let me ask now, where is the proof from Scripture, that the Lord bore sin for us "from Bethlehem to Calvary?" I read, "Who His own self bare our sin in His own body ON THE TREE," (1 Pet. 2:24). People have tried to make even this text speak another language. The marginal reading here gives "or *to* the tree," and many have tried to elaborate their own doctrine out of this. But it is impossible.³ And the same thing will be found elsewhere in this very epistle, as 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, *being put to death* in the flesh," &c. So universally: "Without shedding of blood is no remission"; "and having made peace through the blood of His cross";⁴ "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."

And thus when He cometh into the world, saying, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me," what takes the place of these many ineffectual sacrifices of the law? was it a sacrificial *life* or *death* that did so? Of which does Scripture speak when, having produced that saying of His, "Lo! I come to do *Thy will*, O my God," it adds, "By the *which will* we are sanctified, through the *offering* of

2. "The Banished One bearing our banishment," in *The Christian Treasury*, 1861, p. 314.

3. The word "bare" is the ordinary word for sacrificial bearing; and the word for "upon" the very word which has that meaning more simply and positively than any other word in the language. Alford and the Bible Union revisions both reject "to" and give "upon."

4. It has been actually attempted to make the shedding of His blood in *circumcision*, of the the same character and value with the "blood of the Cross." How decisively this is denied here, I need scarcely say.

the body of Jesus Christ once?"

If then, "without shedding of blood is no remission," did His "life-suffering from *Bethlehem*" put away sin? If "by the blood of the *cross*" He has made peace, did He bear sin all His life through, unavailingly till then?

Scripture declares in the most decisive way, that it was the suffering outside the gate of Jerusalem, -- the suffering of the cross therefore, -- which gave sanctifying power even to His blood-shedding. "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high-priest for sin, are *burned without the camp*; wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered *without the gate*" (Heb. 13:11, 12). How distinct the place and character which such words give the Cross! The only place where atonement was or could be made, is the only place where He could be the Sin-bearer.

I shall touch the question of the law presently. Let me first ask my reader's attention to the consequences of this doctrine of the Lord's being "loaded with our sin, our curse, our condemnation" all His life. For these consequences are to obscure the glory of His Person, and take away from the preciousness of His having "lived for us."

What was He in the world? The Light of it. What was that light? "The glory of the Only-begotten of the Father," the One "*in the bosom* of the Father."

But, I ask, Could there be the *shining forth* of the glory of One in the Father's bosom, in any due and proper way, in One all His life under wrath and curse? Sure I am, that the simple reader of Scripture, following step by step the course of that Son of the Father upon earth, would never dream of *His* being then in the sinner's place, bearing that sinner's due, when the Father's voice gave its witness of delight in Him; when upon the mount of transfiguration "He received from God the Father *honour and glory*," "when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory," &c., (2 Pet. 1:17). Surely "honour and glory" are not the sinner's due; and one who, as Dr. Bonar tells us, "kept in view" His being in the place of Sin-bearer, "in the places which He *visited*, and in the places which He abstained from visiting," and who, "if permitted to resort to Jerusalem," he further tells us, "could only do so as a stranger or way-faring man, who comes "in with the crowd during the day, but retires at night --"⁵ surely One in such a position and with such constant remembrance of it, could never even have "visited" the "holy mount!"

But enough of this. Till the Cross, the whole Gospel history is witness, He was *not* in the sinner's place. No, He was declaring the Father, doing the works of the Father, the Father hearing him always and always with Him. How different when that awful shadow fell upon the Cross, and the sufferer on it took up the language of the 22nd psalm:

"My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me? why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God! I cry in the daytime, and Thou

5. "The Banished One bearing our banishment," in *The Christian Treasury*, 1861, p. 314.

HEAREST NOT . . . Be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help . . . But be not Thou far from me, O Lord, O my strength, haste Thou to help me.”

There were other sorrows, I know. What element of bitterness did not then enter into the cup of the man of sorrows? But above all, *this* sorrow -- a far-off God -- was the crushing, decisive sorrow of the Cross.

To the difference between this and the whole previous part of our Lord's life, no Christian can be altogether blind. But it is a marvel that any should not see that here alone is the sinner's place taken, -- the sinner's due received, -- that here alone was that fulfilled, He was “made a *curse* for us.” When and where was this? Mark further -- “as it is written, Cursed is every one that HANGETH ON A TREE” (Gal. 3:13).

But we have not yet done with this doctrine of vicarious life. The law! what about the law? Was Christ not “made under the law?” Did He not fulfil it in our stead, and thus work out our robe of righteousness? And if the Cross alone is what meets our sins, is not His law-fulfilling the righteousness which fits us for, and entitles us to heaven?

Scripture answers --

Christ *was* “made under the law”; *did* fulfil it therefore, and that perfectly, as He must, being under it and the perfect One. So far all is plain. But there is a wide gap between this and what follows in men's thoughts. The moment I say, “He fulfilled it *in our stead*,” I say it without Scripture. “He magnified the law, and made it honorable” -- true. Not a step further will the Word carry you in this track. Why is it, it NEVER says, “He fulfilled the law in our stead?” Why is it, that it *never* says, “His law-fulfilling is our righteousness?”

Because it has a very different, -- a contradictory thing to this, to say.

The system which speaks of Christ's law-fulfilling as our righteousness, speaks on this wise. It puts you down as one under the law, to get to heaven by. The law promises heaven or eternal life to obedience. It denounces the curse on disobedience. Now then, it is not only necessary to have our sins borne, our curse taken for us. That would still leave us without a positive title to heaven; it would free us from hell but no more. And *there* comes in the necessity of a positive meritorious *fulfilling of the law for us being needed, as well as curse endured*.

Space fails just now for the consideration of this system. I propose rather to set side by side with it the Scriptural one, for the establishment of this will of course suffice to set aside the other.

Scripture then speaks of man, if under law, as under the condemnation of it merely, a lost sinner. For such, as soon as they believe in Christ, not only is His blood the purging of their *sins*, but they themselves are, in the death of Him who died for them, “dead,” and passed away from before God as sinners, part of the old creation. They are in this way, “dead to *sin*” (Rom. 6), “dead to the LAW,” (Rom. 7), and no longer “living (alive) in the *world*” (Col. 2:20). As another way of expressing it, they are “not in the flesh” (Rom. 7:5, 8:9). Thus then, there is no fulfilling for men belonging to the old creation, begun and ruined in the first Adam, the responsibilities attaching to *that* condition. No, it is ended and over before God on the Cross of His Son, with all that

belongs to it. And those who have their place in Christ before God have a place under the *last* Adam, in *new* creation, new creatures altogether, old things passed away, and all things become new (2 Cor. 5).

Nor did the last Adam take up the first Adam's responsibilities to fulfil them, and so secure the blessing which he failed to obtain. It is a mistake and a serious one. The first Adam and the last are not only type and antitype: they are, on that very account, *contrasts*. “The first man, Adam, was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit . . . The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Now as are the two, so are their responsibilities, and so is the work with which each is connected. To the first Adam it was never said, “Do this, and you shall go to heaven,” but on the other hand, “Do this, and you will *die*.” His responsibility was to *retain his place*, not acquire a new one. Nor could *any* law-keeping on his part have entitled him to a higher place than that in which he was created. No creature can do more than *duty*, and none can acquire a title to be raised above his natural condition. Hence the law which was the test of man, never says, “The man that doeth these things shall *go to heaven*,” but “shall *live* in them.” Had it found the perfect man for which it looked, he would not have died and gone to heaven; no, he could not have died at all. But *all* died. Yes, because “all have sinned.” The law says, “There is none righteous,” and leaves man there.

And now comes the work of the last Adam. Not being a mere creature, He *can* merit. But instead of putting Himself under the first Adam's responsibility to restore the condition of the earthy, He closes for those who believe in Him their entire connection with it, giving them in Himself (His work completed, and He in the value of it, as man, gone up to God), a new place of blessing, heavenly, in the Divine favor which rests upon Himself. This place was never attached to law-keeping; no man fulfilling that could ever have hoped for it, be he Adam the first or any of his sons.

And to say that the law, the measure of mere *man's* obedience, was the measure of *His*, by whose obedience many are made righteous, is to confound the lowest with the highest, man's work to keep his first estate, and Christ's to bring men out of the ruin of it to the heights of glory where He Himself is for us now. Was He no more than perfect man? was His work no more than Adam should have done? and are the results no more than if the first man had walked in his integrity? Alas, where have we got, if it be needful to ask such questions.

Doubtless He fulfilled the law, for the greater includes the less, and His obedience was beyond and above law altogether. Not in our stead did He fulfil the law, but by dying took us out of the condition to which law attaches, to give us a new place in grace which nought but grace could give, and which will be the wonder of eternity that grace could give us.

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