

In the Beginning and the Adamic Earth,

by W. Kelly,

first published in *The Bible Treasury* in 1891 and as a book in 1994

The position taken in this book has been called the “Gap Theory,” referring to the space of time between Gen. 1 verses 1 and 2. However, the view presented does not require that a 4 billion year evolutionary process took place during that interval, as many websites opposing this view claim is involved in the “Gap Theory.”

A belief in a 4 billion year evolution of life commonly involves the “big bang” theory of the origin of the universe. Really, it is implicit in this theory to believe in the eternity of matter and that matter goes through cycles eternally (unless it spontaneously generates). Yes, some Christians say that God caused the big bang -- to get around the eternity of matter. Just the same, a “big bang” is a ‘big nonsense’ theory, or worse.

Heathen cosmogonies have order arising out of chaos. The “big bang” has order arising from an explosion. How many design engineers wish they could have accomplished their work of designing equipment by using little explosions. It would have saved much planning and effort. Oh, it is objected, time, sufficient time, is needed. Well, the Greek god Chronos (the god of time) had to do his magical work in connection with the “big bang.” It took him a mere 4 billion years to produce humans who believe that an explosion can bring about order and the appearance of design. So a great temple, labeled evolution, has been built to Chronos, the god of time; and in this temple men, fettered by biological, paleontological, social, and psychological theories fathered by the notion that man has developed from an animal ancestry (the product of the explosion), pay homage to the explosion and to Chronos. And in that temple the product of the explosion is now investigating the explosion! Perhaps the explosion created Chronos. Perhaps the explosion is god, the evolver of all things.

Man is a kind of evolver and would like to be a creator; but he would make the true Creator into an evolver (as in theistic evolution) -- or throw out the idea of God altogether (as in atheistic evolution). Faith finds its assurance in the written Word of God, a refreshing and important contrast from the speculations of men.

The earth’s crust has been basically formed catastrophically in contrast to the uniformitarian idea involving Chronos’ work. It is true that recent uniformitarianism has made some room for some catastrophes that it is thought can be accommodated into the uniformitarian scheme -- such as the alleged dinosaur extinction some alleged 65 billion years ago -- as long as the over-all scheme is maintained. On the other hand, the “young earth” advocates place the catastrophism all (essentially) within the flood of Noah’s day. But it may not be correct to place all catastrophism into that great event. There may have been a number of creative acts of God, and a number of catastrophes, between Gen. 1:1 and 2.

W. Kelly’s book rejects the idea of Chronos’ work, and evolution, drastically reducing the time-scale but without attempting to force all into the Flood era.

W. Kelly’s book has been reprinted as a large pamphlet to reduce the cost.

The price is \$4.00 plus postage of \$3.00 on orders under \$20.00 in North America; 10% postage on all orders over \$20.00. Foreign postage is higher.



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Vol. 17, #6

CONTENTS

Chapter 5.7: What the Spirit Said to Laodicea	201
What is Self-Denial?	212
Chapter 2 God’s Invitation to Ruined Man	213
The Church Which is His Body	231
Our Altar	236

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Preface	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Subject of Propitiation and Substitution	1
Chapter 2: The Atonement, Leviticus 11:17	15
Chapter 3: The Day of Atonement Leviticus 16	25
Chapter 4: Propitiation	55
Chapter 5: Purchase, Ransom, and Redemption	65
Chapter 6: The Death, the Blood, and the Cross of Christ, in Their Meaning Regarding the Believer	79
Chapter 7: Died For All, Blood Shed For Many	89
Chapter 8: Propitiation for SINS -- only for Believers -- and, Propitiation for the World	103
Chapter 9: Bearing Sins was Only on the Cross	115
Chapter 10: The Showing Forth of The Righteousness of God, Romans 3:19-26	123
Chapter 11: Made the Righteousness of God in Him	151
Chapter 12: The Abandonment on the Cross and Communion With the Father	165
Appendix 1: Propitiation Not Made in Heaven	171
Scripture Index	181
Subject Index	185

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This is an 8 1/2" by 11" hardbound book in buckram cloth. The articles are drawn from various sources and part of the Table of Content is given below.

Introductory Notes	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Some General Considerations	1
Is Scripture Typical? A Word on Interpretation	1
Types Are of Different Characters	2
Resemblances and Contrasts	3
Types and Their Teachings	3
What About the Mystery and the Types?	5
Types of Christ	7
Direct Types of Christ with Scriptural Proofs Annexed	7
Indirect Types and Figures of Christ	8
Scripture Imagery	11
Outlines of Lectures On the Tabernacle of Witness, T. Newberry	127
The Temple	199
The Temple of God	203
The Two Temples	203
The Worship	204
The True Worshipers	205
David on His Throne a Type, C.E.S.	207
Christ the Substance of Every Shadow	217
Inspired Prophecy, W. Kelly	219
Chapter 1: Its Nature	219
Chapter 2: Its Object	227
Chapter 3: Its Occasion	231
Chapter 4: Its Sphere	233
Chapter 5: Its Language	237
Chapter 6: Some Old Testament Prophecies Referred to in the New Testament	241
Chapter 7: General Remarks	243
Symbols, J. N. Darby	247
The Symbols of The Apocalypse Briefly Defined	251
Extract from The Catholic Apostolic Body, Or Irvingites, W. Kelly	263
Subject Index	
Scripture Index: Old testament	
Scripture Index: New Testament	

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Chapter 5.7

What the Spirit Said to Laodicea

Where Does Laodicea Come From?

LAODICEA COMES FROM SARDIS

Where Laodicea comes from is an important matter. If one thinks Laodicea comes from Philadelphia, certain conclusions will be drawn. On the other hand, if one thinks Laodicea comes out of Sardis, as Philadelphia came out of Sardis, different conclusions will be drawn. It appears to me that J. N. Darby did suggest that Laodicea comes out of Sardis (not Philadelphia):

. . . she is in a bad state, nauseous to Christ. It is her religious state, descending religiously from Protestantism -- Sardis . . .¹

. . . the last three, from Sardis to Laodicea, are the history of Protestantism.²

LAODICEANISM FOUND OUTSIDE LAODICEA

It seems to me that both Philadelphia and Laodicea come from Sardis, Laodicea slightly later than Philadelphia. However, the spirit that characterized and animated Laodicea may be found in some measure elsewhere than only in Laodicea.

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 not far distant 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

1. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:80.

2. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:104.

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 growing rapidly today wealthy churches, where the poor have no place, 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, we see growing rapidly today. 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; and 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 proffers the most intimate fellowship with those who care for His company. "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

The mass, 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; while 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 this well-earned wrath upon those who in a day of grace have refused to own Him Lord.³

Are Any in Laodicea the Lord's?

The following remarks by E. Dennett are helpful in seeking an answer to this question.

Two things have to be carefully *borne in* mind in the attempt to ascertain the true

3. R. T. G., "A Few Thoughts on Revelation 2 and 3," *Christian Truth*, pp. 179, 180, 1955.

character of Laodicea. The first is, that there was an actual assembly in Laodicea to which, or to the angel of which, this letter was addressed; and the second is, that this actually existent assembly was taken up by the Lord as a type of a state of things which would obtain at the close of the history of the Church on earth. In other words, there are the historical and prophetic Laodiceans -- to say nothing now of the lessons contained in this letter for the Church in every age, continuously from the time of the assembly at Laodicea till the development of Laodicea which this prophetically foreshadowed. This being conceded, another thing follows; *viz.*, that the character of Laodicea actual is the character of Laodicea prophetic. Were there then any Christians, those who were really saints of God in this assembly, in the apostolic days? It is quite true that John's ministry extended beyond that of Paul, but this fact does not forbid our gleaning the answer to our question from the writings of the latter. Turning then to the epistle to the Colossians, we find Paul saying,

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and *for them at Laodicea,*" &c. (Col.2:1).

He also tells us that Epaphras had great zeal, or "labored much" for the Colossians "and for them in Laodicea" (Col. 4:13); and he directed that the epistle itself should be read to "the church of the Laodiceans." It is therefore impossible to doubt that God had saints at that time in this assembly; and this goes a long way to determine the question as to the state of things in John's day, seeing that only about thirty years elapsed between Paul's epistle and the letter sent through John.

But it is said that the language in the epistle itself forbids the supposition. Let us briefly examine it. Take, first, the warning that the Lord was about utterly to reject it because of its lukewarm condition. Can the Lord, it is asked, cast away His own people? Such a question, we submit, is altogether to lose sight of the nature of the epistle, and of the character in which the angel of this assembly is addressed. This assembly -- as all the seven -- is viewed as a light-bearer on earth, and is thus dealt with *in its responsibility as the vessel of testimony*. To be rejected in this way therefore has nothing whatever to say (for it is spoken of Laodicea collectively, or in its corporate character) as to the state of the individuals that composed the assembly. No one denies that the assembly as such was in a frightful condition from its self-complacent pride and boastfulness, and that as such it was loathsome to the Lord; but to apply this to the state of every individual in it is scarcely sober exposition.

Remark, in the next place that down to the end of v. 18 the address is to the angel, the moral representative of the assembly. Bearing this in mind, in addition to what has been said, there will be little difficulty in the interpretation of the well-known symbols of "gold" and "white raiment." One distinction should, however, be carefully noted. While the Lord counsels the angel to buy of Him gold tried in the fire and white raiment, the angel is exhorted himself to anoint his eyes with eye-salve (not to *buy* it) a distinction that has a most significant hearing upon the subject in hand.

Verse 19 contains the enunciation of a principle of divine importance. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Is this principle applicable to unconverted

professors? We turn to the Proverbs, and there we read,

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction: for whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth (Prov. 3:11, 12).

Here undoubtedly the words are spoken to one in a known relationship, as the term "my son" plainly shows. So also in Heb. 12, where this scripture is cited, applied, and expanded (see vv. 5-11); and so also we unhesitatingly assert in the passage before us. Indeed, all possible doubt is removed by the words, "As many as I love" -- *as many*, a distinct class, and, "as *I love*," marking out a special relationship to that class; *viz.*, the Lord's own people. And it is on this basis that the exhortation is given to "be zealous therefore and repent." Is this the way God speaks to the unconverted? No; it is the method in which the Lord addresses those who have been brought into relationship with Himself; and here therefore applies to those who were mixed up with all this frightful formality, self-complacency, and indifference. It is the warning which He sounds out from the depths of His heart, in order that His people might heed it before the final rejection of the assembly, and judge themselves ere He might be compelled in His love to lift up His rod and deal with them in chastening in order to effect their restoration.

Rev. 3:20, 21 are spoken to individuals. "If any man hear my voice." "To him that overcometh." First, then, we have the Lord's attitude: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." The Lord is here, without doubt, outside when He ought to have been enjoyed within. But is it that He is seeking admittance here for the first time -- into the heart of an unconverted one? In other words, Is this the presentation of the gospel? The whole drift of the letter contradicts the thought, as well as the connection in which it stands. That the gospel might be preached from it to any who claimed to be Christians and yet were not is quite true; but the question now is, Is this the attitude in which Christ presents Himself as a Savior to the unconverted? If so, it is without a parallel in the Scriptures. But it is said to answer to Luke 14. There is an important difference. The supper there, in its typical import, is God's supper, and, besides, is for all who will accept the invitation; whereas here it is the Lord who knocks for admittance, and promises that, if the door is opened, He will come in and sup with the one that opens, and that the opener shall also sup with Himself. It is the contrast to Luke 14 in every particular. To maintain this, moreover, is to suppose power on the part of the unconverted; for to open the door goes a long way beyond simple faith in the gospel message. No; what the Lord promises here is a secret and individual enjoyment. He will in His tender grace come in to any who may open the door and sup with them, and then they shall sup with Him -- have fellowship with Him in His things; the expression on His part of His greatest grace, and on the part of those supping with Him of the most exalted enjoyment.

Thereon follows the promise to the overcomer; and if no saints of God are found in Laodicea, whence are to come the victors? To assert that there will be none is possible, but surely it is to forget the character both of the Lord's heart and of His ways. The overcomers indeed are especially those who hear the Lord's voice, and having opened the door -- in contrast with the worldliness, pride, and

self-sufficiency of the assembly as such -- enter upon the enjoyment of the Lord's fellowship and of fellowship with Him. Thenceforward He dwells in their hearts by faith, and they are cheered by the promise of association with the Lord in His throne. This is surely a much lower blessing than that promised to a Philadelphian overcomer; but when estimated in the light of the past indifference and unfaithfulness of those to whom it is pledged, its grace and power to cheer and sustain are at once perceived.

The letter closes with, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." On the above supposition, this proclamation would be made in vain as far as Laodicea is concerned. We can only repeat that such is not the way of the Spirit of God; and we add that the contention will in the end beget that spirit of Laodiceanism which already is asserting itself on every hand. For if the warnings in his letter only concern an empty profession, we may delude ourselves with the thought that we are in no danger from the evils here indicated. ⁴

What is Laodicea?

There are many views of what constitutes Laodicea. ⁵

4. E. Dennett, *The Christian Friend*, pp. 45-49, 1883.

5. Here we will note some views by those who hold the foreshadow view.

Open Brethren:

"These last days 20th c. +," (*Believer's Magazine*, Feb. 1999, p. 49, from a chart).

The Laodicean Period of Church History (1900-Rapture)

The fourth condition must be Laodicean and it comes out of the evangelicalism and fundamentalism of Philadelphia (J. Allen, *Ritchie New Testament Series: Revelation*, Kilmarnock: Ritchie, p. 159, 1997).

It is quite interesting that this last writer did not inform us who these Laodiceans are that came out of Philadelphia beginning about 1900. His statements indicate that he must know this but will not tell us. Neither would W. Hoste tell us:

Laodicea was Philadelphia cooled down from boiling to lukewarm. They possibly quoted Matt. 18:20, "There am I in the midst of them," but they were not practically, experimentally gathering to His name, and He was morally outside (*The Visions of John the Divine*, Kilmarnock: Ritchie, p. 35, n.d.).

F. A. Tatford merely said:

It would be impossible to find more fitting words to describe the professing Church of the present day (*Prophecy's Last Word*, Eastborne: Prophetic Witness Publishing House, p. 71, 1974 [1947]).

Scofieldians:

The final state of apostasy (*Scofield Reference Bible*, in loco.).

Message to Laodicea: the church in its final state of apostasy (*New Scofield Reference Bible*, in loco.).

Since the apostasy begins in the middle of Daniels 70th week, the above idea is incorrect.

We see in Laodicea the final religious and apostate conditions of protestant

(continued...)

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IS LAODICEA MODERNISM?

Hamilton Smith presents a view of Laodicea that really makes it not a remnant in Thyatira and in Sardis, nor Philadelphia, but the vast remainder:

. . . the terrible condition, set forth in Laodicea, into which the great mass will fall who, apart from these remnants, form the Papal and Protestant systems. ⁶

This makes everything of Thyatira that is not the remnant to become Laodicea -- yet Thyatira goes on to the end. The same may be said for Sardis. What I understand this to mean, in effect, is that Thyatira and Sardis becomes Laodicea. This is incorrect.

In another paper he explicates this at some length, virtually naming Laodicea to be Modernism. ⁷ Rather, modernism is really what Sardis has come to, but having within her saints, as we noted when considering Sardis. Modernism is mainly found in Sardis, although in Thyatira also. Really, Laodicea is its own thing as come, mainly, out of Sardis.

IS LAODICEA "THE LAST PHASE OF THE CHURCH"?

Walter Scott wrote:

Laodicea, representing as it does the last phase of the professing church, has not yet been publically disowned. ⁸

What does that mean? -- that Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia becomes Laodicea? We can understand having difficulty with what Laodicea represents, but it should be obvious that his idea is not correct. How is it that expositors say the last four go down to the end and then say that the last phase of the professing church is Laodicea? The fact is that Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia are present while the Laodicean state is in effect. To say that Laodicea is the "general condition of the Church" ⁹ not only masks the true

5. (...continued)

Christendom and the complete rejection of the professing body (A. C. Gaebelien, *The Revelation*, Our Hope, p. 42, n.d.).

This is the apostate church out of which the Lord will call some individuals (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation: An Expository Commentary* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 79, 1971).

It describes the moral condition of the church at the close of the church age (Charles Lee Feinberg, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, Winona Lake: BMH Books, p. 46, 1985).

The present general state of the professing church . . . (*Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, p. 313, 1996).

6. *Addresses to the Seven Churches*, London: Central Bible Truth Depot, p. 119, n.d.

7. *"In the Last Days" or Philadelphia and Laodicea*, London: Central Bible Depot, p. 3, n.d.

8. *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 108.

9. Russell Elliot, *Fellowship* 3:256.

situation, it swamps out the place of the other aspects. There may be elements of Laodiceanism in the other three, but the other three are not Laodicea.

When we come to the presentation of Christ as the beginning of the creation of God, we will be helped by that to see what Laodicea is.

Presentation of Christ

And to the angel of the assembly in Laodicea write:

These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God (Rev. 3:14):

Christ's presentation is not his relationship to them, but His own character, **in contrast**. He is outside.

THE AMEN

All is yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Everything is secured for God's glory, in Christ. But Laodicea:

. . . neither puts its 'amen' to the promises of God in Christ Jesus, nor is it the true and faithful witness for God. The church ceases to be this, directly it looks away from Christ as the only source; and when it takes itself to be the vessel of riches, it then necessarily becomes a false witness instead of a true one.¹⁰

Laodicea does not answer to Christ as the Amen. He is so presented to contrast Himself with Laodicea. Indeed, Laodicea represents the substitution of the first man for the second man, pretending that that is Christ.

THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS

The reason for the presentation of the Lord in this two-fold character is because Laodicea was neither faithful or a true witness. It was an unfaithful and false witness to Christ. Every word and work and way of the Lord Jesus in His pathway here was the display of the will of the Father, wrought in the power of the Holy Spirit (cp. John 8:25). The expression, "the faithful and true witness" has the Father in view, not the Holy Spirit, though it is most important to bear in mind that Christ wrought all in the power of the Spirit. The Laodicean is specially marked out as contrasted to the faithful and true witness. The saints are to be the epistle of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3) and this the Laodicean assembly did not manifest.

Laodicea falsifies His character. And note that this involves the Holy Spirit also, in whose power the Lord Jesus wrought for God while here on earth. To be a faithful and true witness requires such action of the Spirit's work. And thus

10. *Collected Writings* 5:375.

Laodicea falsifies the work of the Spirit. Yes, the Spirit's work can be set aside in many ways, but what we have in Laodicea is something particular about this matter, and we will consider it more below.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CREATION OF GOD

What is Meant by the Beginning of the Creation of God?¹¹ This phrase does not mean that the Son of God began the creation of the universe. What does that have to do with the subject in hand? Nothing! It does not say that He is the beginner, but rather the *beginning*. "The creation of God" here refers to the new creation of which Christ is the Head and of which He was the first of

11. It seems nigh incredible that Walter Scott (when with Open Brethren) would write:

The extensive and magnificent system of things, celestial and terrestrial, animate and inanimate, of which Christ as Man is here termed "the Beginning," is the creation spoken of in our text (*Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, London: Pickering and Inglis, p. 110, n.d., sixth impression of the fourth ed.).

Surely he once knew better. F. A. Tatford (Open Brethren) said:

. . . not of course, the first object of God's creatorial work, but rather the active source and author of creation, and the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15, the pre-eminent One) (*The Patmos Letters*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, p. 143, 1969).

He is not alone in this: *The Witness* 59:40, 1929. Let me point out that the title "firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15) is a title that refers to the incarnation. If the Son enters the creation, He must have the title firstborn, indicating the first in rank, not necessarily in time. It is a title of preeminence.

W. R. Newel wrote:

He is also the Head, because the Beginner, of all God's creation. Here is a title far above all dispensational responsibilities of creatures . . . Christ speaks as *Creator* (*The Revelation*, Chicago: Grace Publications, p. 75, 1945).

This false meaning is also asserted by John MacArthur:

Archē (**Beginning**) does not mean that Christ was the first person God created, but rather that Christ Himself is the source or origin of creation (cf. Rev. 22:13). Through His power everything was created (John 1:2; Heb. 1:2) (*Revelation 1-11*, Chicago: Moody Press, p. 134, 1999).

And thinking that the presentation of Christ in this way should have some bearing on the assembly of the Laodiceans, he wrote:

This damning heresy about the person of Christ was the reason the Laodicean church was spiritually dead. Their heretical Christology had produced an unregenerate church (*Revelation 1-11*, Chicago: Moody, p. 134, 1999).

This is all imagination. Donald Grey Barnhouse, likewise objecting to the false use of the description, wrongly concludes:

Rather do we see that He who takes all the attributes of the God of creation announces that He is about to be through with the age of the Church and that a new day, the day of the Lord . . . will usher in an absolutely new creation. It will begin with Himself . . . (Isa. 65:17) (*Revelation: An Expository Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 81, 1971).

it.¹²

So if anyone [be] in Christ, [there is] a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

For [in Christ Jesus] neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision; but new creation (Gal. 6:15).

For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works . . . (Eph. 2:10).

The new creation began the moment Christ rose from among the dead. This began the new creation and He was thus the beginning of it. Though *personally* the second man in incarnation, in resurrection He took the proper *place* of the second man (cp. 1 Cor. 15:47). The grain of wheat fell into the ground and died; and the stalk stood forth in resurrection-life and power that believers might form one plant with Him in that resurrection-life (John 12:24). Acting, then, as the second man in resurrection-life and power, He brought His disciples into the good of this by breathing *into* them; and they received by that breath of the new creation the Holy Spirit as the power of life, which we may call “resurrection life” (see John 20:22). We have *oneness* of life in Him as being one plant with Him. (This is not the Pentecostal gift for *union* with the head in heaven and with one another as members of the body.)¹³ The testing of the first man ended in the cross and he has been supplanted by the second man.¹⁴ It is very important for the Christian to understand that the first man was judged in the cross and he is now set aside.

Why Was He presented This Way to Laodicea? I suggest that the reason for His bringing Himself before the assembly of Laodicea as the beginning of the creation of God is because they were not in the good of this truth in appreciation and practice. But there are Christians who do not understand these things that are not Laodiceans. The assembly of the Laodiceans went much further than not being in the appreciation and practice of this truth. *They enthroned the first man!* They set up again the first man as an imitation Christ. The flesh had been enthroned in Laodicea and they knew it not. No doubt Paul saw this at work in Laodicea, for He wanted the epistle to Colosse read in Laodicea. The epistle to Colosse brings out new creation truth in our completeness in Christ. You cannot add anything to one who is complete in Him (Col. 2). But something else was craved, it appears, in Colosse, and no doubt in Laodicea also, as Rev. 3 shows

12. There is an excellent article on the expression in Rev. 3:14 in *The Bible Treasury* 12:88-91. Also see *New Birth to New Creation*, available from Present Truth Publishers.

13. The reader will find an expansion on these subjects in *From New Birth to New Creation*, obtainable from Present Truth Publishers.

14. The reader will find an expansion on this subject in *Elements of Dispensational Truth*, vol. 2, obtainable from Present Truth Publishers.

it in its full development. New creation truth, with mortification of our members, is the answer to these cravings, varied as their forms may be, for they add to the Christian; and by adding, deny the completeness in Christ; and the result is taking away the truth of the new creation. This is very important as guiding us to understand that Laodicea is the setting up of the first man while claiming to have all the blessings from Christ.

King Saul is a picture of the first man and illustrates the principle found in 1 Cor. 15:46 as preceding David, the man after God’s heart. 1 Sam. 15 will be read with much instruction for us in our present inquiry. He had the word of the Lord, but did not obey it. Amelek, a type of the flesh acted upon by Satan, he would not utterly destroy:

And Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and oxen . . . but everything that was mean and weak, that they destroyed utterly (1 Sam. 15:9).

It was the flesh sparing the flesh, and judging for itself, in disobedience to God, what was good and what was bad. But it was *all* Amelekite-ish; and the man of God, Samuel, dealt with it in accordance with the commandments of the Lord. Laodicea partakes very much of the ways of Saul in 1 Sam. 15. And like him, they claim their imitation is a fulfillment of the word of the Lord:

. . . and Saul said to him, Blessed art thou of Jehovah: I have fulfilled the word of Jehovah (1 Sam. 15:13).

The seven churches do not present the church in its Godward aspect but rather as towards man. Yet here is man set up in Laodicea. The truth of the new creation was recovered in connection with Philadelphian recovery. The second man was given His place. In contrast, it is the first man of the first creation that characterizes Laodicea – thus the characterizing fleshly-ism and its self-satisfied claims.

The Spirit of God and the New Creation. When the risen Lord breathed into the disciples on the day of His resurrection, He said to them:

Receive [the] Holy Spirit (John 20:22).

We noted above that this was not the reception of the Holy Spirit as the power of *union* with the glorified Head of the body in heaven. It was the Spirit as the power of *oneness* of life in the Son, making them one plant in Him (John 12:24). Thus, the Holy Spirit is vitally connected with the formation of the new creation. The Holy Spirit *raised* Christ from the dead, not to the exclusion of the other Persons of the Godhead, of course, but He had a role in the formation of the new creation of which Christ in resurrection was the very first one, **the beginning** of it. And through the Spirit’s operation at Christ’s breathing into the disciples, they were brought into connection with the risen Christ as indicated in John 12:24. Thus they were brought into the new creation.

This also has a bearing on Laodicea. Not only did Laodicea replace the second man with the first man, they necessarily have a false spirit (not the Holy Spirit) to go along with their establishment of the first man. And as they imitate the things of Christ, they imitate the things of the Holy Spirit and call the imitation the actions of the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement does these things as a system, or movement. The first man is substituted for Christ and is called Christ. The human spirit, and other spirits, are substituted for the Holy Spirit, though the mimicry is called the Spirit.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he that does the will of my father who is in the heavens. Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied through *thy* name, and through *thy* name cast out demons, and through *thy* name done many works of power? and then I will avow unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, workers of lawlessness (Matt. 7:21-23).

Without restricting the application of this text to the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, that is by far the leading modern “movement” that claims to do these very things. Awful and fearful is the self-deception pictured in this text. It was all a pretension that it was Christ and the Spirit that was the power producing what they claimed. And how many of them shout, while some scream, “in the *name* of *Jesus*” when doing their “healings.” Why, it must be that the louder they shout, the more certain it is to happen! It is loathsome to the Lord and He will spew Laodicea out of His mouth.

THE ASSEMBLY	THE SPIRIT OF GOD
Thyatira	Pope substituted
Sardis	pulpit substituted
Philadelphia	given His place
Laodicea	flesh substituted

Laodiceanism Not Restricted to What Laodicea Specifically Is. On the other hand, we must realize that Laodiceanism, a Laodicean attitude, may be found outside of what specifically constitutes Laodicea as a phase of part of the church seen on earth in responsible testimony. The self-sufficiency that substitutes the flesh for Him who is the beginning of the creation of God is in its measure Laodiceanism. Let us beware!

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

Ed.

What is Self-Denial?

Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23).

The ordinary thought of self-denial, whether among saints or the people of the world, is giving up. There may be great diversity of thought as to what is to be given up. Some would limit it to certain, characteristically worldly things -- card-playing, dancing, the theater, etc. Others would confine it to a certain season, during which time pleasures which are freely indulged in the remainder of the year are rigidly eschewed, and even in the food and other habits the change may be noticed.

Others who see much more than this, still look upon self-denial as a matter of details. This, that and the other is to be given up, as pleasing to the natural man. Nor is it possible that such an interpretation should not tend to foster spiritual pride; for does not one deserve credit for relinquishing so much?

But is this the thought of the passage, “Let him *refuse himself*?” Self is to be refused, to be given up. A man may give up anything, and well-nigh everything, but so long as he holds fast to himself, he has not learned the first elements of self-denial. “I am crucified with Christ,” says the apostle. Did he mean that he was doing this or that distasteful thing, and so practicing self-denial? Ah no! Paul himself was denied; he was done with himself, and now it was Christ who lived in him. Can we think of Paul as occupied with a multiplicity of questions, as to whether he had to give up one thing and another? The cross settled all that for him. There was an end to himself, as well as an end to the world so far as he was concerned. And with this went the entire mass of questions that monasticism has tried in vain to settle.

And does not this explain the taking up the cross, which comes in the immediate connection? Let him “take up his cross daily and follow Me.” The ordinary thought of taking the cross is doing something that is disagreeable.

So people talk even of prayer and public confession of Christ as taking up the cross. But to the disciples the cross meant something very definite. They looked upon it as the sign of death, and death at the hands of the Romans. In modern language, we might substitute the word gallows for the cross. The ignominy, judgment and reproach of a shameful death go with it. To follow Christ, to take up the cross, then, means something more than doing a few distasteful duties. It means an end of self. Reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed to sin. But beloved, what relief we have here, what rest of soul. The root is cut and soon the fading leaves of human pride will drop off. Does the world persecute? does it threaten with the cross? It can have no terrors for one who knows the preciousness of the cross in his own soul. He has already taken it up, applied it, not to a few details; and in the end of himself, he has reached the end of struggling. The whole thing has gone, he is alive now in Christ Jesus, and can walk in the newness of life which goes with that. Now he will find power for laying aside every weight, and instead of a path of sorrow, he has one of unutterable peace and joy -- the path of the cross, which ends in the cloudless glory of God.

Help and Food 18:1-2.

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

Chapter 2

God's Invitation To Ruined Man

Luke 14:15-24

God's Sovereignty in Matthew, Luke, and John

LUKE 14:15-24 CONTRASTED WITH MATT. 22:1-14

Matthew emphasizes dispensational changes and dispensational connections of the events and teachings presented. Luke has an order also, of course, but the emphasis is on moral connections of the events presented and the moral bearing of the teachings. This does not exclude moral teaching and bearing in Matthew any more than it excludes dispensational aspects in Luke. It is a matter of emphasis and characteristics of the gospels.

Thus, the parable in Matthew has features in keeping with the dispensational character of his gospel. In Matt. 22:7 we can see the governmental consequence upon Israel, the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). We see good and bad brought in (with judgment at the end of the wicked) and we have here bondmen (plural), depicting human agency used in bringing persons to the wedding feast.

In contrast with that, in Luke there is but one bondman, a picture of the Holy Spirit. Another remarkable feature in Luke is the detail of excuses that are given. Each moral state of soul is exhibited with respect to God's invitation. Moreover we find that the one bondman *brings* and *compels* them to come. And so we see, looking at the matter from the divine standpoint, that an invitation to lost man is not enough. It is God's own action, by the Spirit, that furnishes the great supper with guests.

The point especially brought out is man's moral state of soul with respect to God's invitation, and with no one responding to the invitation (Luke 14:18), God sovereignly undertakes to furnish His great supper with a house full of persons (v. 23).

SOVEREIGNTY IN LUKE, MATTHEW, AND JOHN

And this brings us to notice how God's sovereignty is brought out in Luke. You should notice that the word "certain" is a characteristic word in this gospel. It directs our attention to God's particular, sovereign dealings with respect to the moral state of man in the circumstances in which he is found. He sovereignly addresses those particular situations, circumstances, and persons. In this parable man's lost condition is emphasized, yet God's purpose to furnish the great supper with guests will not thereby be frustrated.

In Matthew we see not only great dispensational changes and actions of God, we see also His divine government in Matt. 22:7. In emphasis, Matthew is governmental as well as dispensational. God's sovereignty is displayed in His governmental dealings and ways as well as His ways dispensationally.

In John we see the action of the Father and the Son (always, of course, in the power of the Spirit). We very much see the revelation of the Father in the Son, by the Spirit. Thus, we note the Father drawing persons, and giving persons, to the Son, and the Son giving eternal life to persons so drawn, and so given to Him. This is another aspect of sovereignty of God in salvation.

The Place of this Parable in Luke 13-14

Luke 13-14 is a section of events and parables that are morally connected in that they bring out the moral state of ruined man and God's sovereign dealing with that moral state, and His sovereign, gracious intervention for His own glory and for the salvation of those He causes to be blessed.

LUKE 13: SIX LESSONS ON MAN'S TOTALLY RUINED CONDITION

1. **Luke 13:1-5.** The lesson to be learned here is that all are sinners and all shall perish unless there is repentance. We do not learn here what the ultimate source of repentance is.

The Lord used these cases as representative of coming judgment. See how He used the news report: every man is ruined (totally, really).

2. **Luke 13:6-9.** God is patient but man must be cut down. Favored Israel, the cultivated fig tree, was fruitless, and should be cut down. The Lord sought fruit during His ministry here, but the cultivation of man does not produce fruit for God. The vine-dresser is a picture of the Spirit, Who says to give the tree one more year during which He will cultivate it. The end of the three years looking for fruit ended with the crucifixion, and the year of grace from that point ended with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). There is a reference to Stephen in Luke 19:14. He is the embassy the citizens sent after the man who went to another country. It is sending Stephen, by his martyrdom, after the rejected Christ then above in the glory. The citizens would not have Christ down here, and they would not have Him in the glory either.

We must keep in mind that favored Israel was part of the testing of the first man to see if he was recoverable. The cross was the end of the testing. The special year of grace, up to Stephen, was meant to manifest and confirm that state. It was not part of the testing. Man's ruin is not helped by cultivation.

3. **Luke 13:10-17.** Though all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and though man is fruitless and needs to be cut down, God has resource in Himself. What is manifested here is man's inability to help himself in any way, illustrated by this woman's condition, as "bent together and wholly unable to lift her head up." This goes further than Luke 13:1-5, where we see that there is no difference among men, as Rom. 3:22 states it, and where all need repentance. Many Christians erroneously believe that they can have faith to believe and repent. They have no more ability to do so than she had to straighten herself and lift up her head to God. Moreover, the power of the Enemy is involved (v. 16) in man's condition. As the tower fell on 18 persons, so she was bound 18 years. Three in Scripture is used in connection with manifesting something, and six is often connected with evil. Eighteen is 3 x 6 and indicates, in keeping with the subject of Luke 13, the manifestation (3) of the evil moral state of man (6). And no sooner did the blessed Lord heal her than the wicked heart of man, who finds something he thinks is religiously unacceptable, objects to this outflow of sovereign grace (Luke 13:14).

The Lord declares her to be a daughter of Abraham (v. 16). Surely she was of the physical seed of Abraham, but just as surely the Lord did not refer to that (for there were many ill daughters of Abraham in the ethnic sense) but that she was of Abraham's faith. This he said of Zacchaeus likewise (Luke 19:9). They were, happily, of the same family -- spiritual seed of Abraham.

The ruler of the synagogue, the representative of Israel's condition, hated the grace manifested by the Lord Jesus. This is characteristic of those who look to works for salvation. The Lord rebuked the hypocrite. As J. G. Bellett somewhere said of the Lord Jesus, "We have to do with a *faithful* friend, not a *flattering* friend."

Man, in total ruin, is not able to lift himself up. We see this also in the ruler of the synagogue who could not lift himself up above those words he uttered in v. 14.

4. **Luke 13:18-21.** And what should the kingdom of God be like (in the mystery form it has now) in the hands of such as objected to his healing the woman on the Sabbath? In the first of the two similitudes, it is like a worldly kingdom where Satan's ministers are (depicted by the birds lodging there). Here, *the man* is noted, thus indicating the public aspect of the kingdom. The second parable pictures the professing church (*the woman*, depicting the internal aspect) leavening the food of God's people, the three measures of meal, depicting

especially the doctrine of Christ. Such is man! The religion of totally lost man is demon-ridden and filled with evil.

5. **Luke 13:22-30.** And so the question arises, "Sir, [are] such as are to be saved few in number?" The Lord Jesus never directly answered such a question. Rather, he responded to the moral state of the questioner. He was concerned about the inquirer rather than the inquiry. Therefore, He addressed the questioner's conscience. He puts the man on his responsibility. Whether he can actually discharge that responsibility is another matter. Moreover, the fact is that a huge amount of religiousness is, in reality, the working of iniquity (Luke 13:27). Such are of Cain's religion. They set aside the blood (Heb. 11:4). They are debarred from enjoying the future coming kingdom of God on earth, though there will be those there from the east and from the west -- no doubt Gentiles. All enjoying the kingdom come in through the "narrow door" (v. 23). The lying down at table (v. 29) is a figure for the rich communion in the grace of God that was above all the evil in man.

6. **Luke 13:31-35.** "Certain" Pharisees come to get the Lord out of the path of God's will by using intimidation. Notice that they really preferred the fox (v. 32) to the hen (v. 34). Such is the moral state of man's heart. But His pathway, and its timing, was under sovereign control, and He would walk until the appointed time, knowing full well the outcome of that path leading to the cross. Then would the captain of our salvation be perfected (v. 32).

He would be judged at Jerusalem that kills the prophets (even as they stoned Stephen about a year later). The wicked will of man comes out in the statement, "ye would not" (v. 34). The Lord said, "how often I would have gathered thy children together." But that was the time of the testing of the first man and his state was brought out fully. The time will come when Jerusalem's children will be gathered together -- as the new Israel under the new covenant. So there is also the sovereignty of God in Israel's salvation, yet to come, spite of the "ye would not":

I say unto you, that ye shall not see me until it come that ye say, Blessed [is] he that comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:35).

He will bring them into the bond of the covenant (Ezek. 20:37) when He turns away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26). Then all Israel shall be saved -- they shall all be righteous (Isa. 60:21). It is very strange if salvation depends on man's alleged free will that they *all* will be righteous. Rather than human will, it is God sovereignly undertaking on their behalf according to the seven times repeated "I will" in Gen 17 and in Ex. 6. He does this when He makes good His unconditional promises for Israel under the new covenant. This He will do though Israel's house is now a total ruin, but there is, meanwhile, a "remnant according to election of grace" (Rom. 11:5; cp. 9:11). The national adoption, as well as other things, belongs to Israel (Rom. 9:4), and securing them cannot be

by the human will.

LUKE 14: FIVE LESSONS ON GOD'S SOVEREIGN INTERVENTION TO BRING MEN TO HIS GREAT SUPPER.

1. **Luke 14:1-6.** The Son of man has the divine prerogative of sovereignty to heal as He will. The Lord answered His own question about if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not. Met by silence, He healed the dropsical man. Then He questioned them again, thus once again addressing their state of soul. They reflect in their state of soul what the dropsical man's condition represents. He had edema, a *swelling* up. Man is *full of himself* in His self-willed pride of heart. But divine power can remedy this state. The words are so precious:

And taking him he healed him and let him go (Luke 14:4).

It was all His action. It is sorrowful to note that Christians also may have spiritual edema. In extreme cases it is called Narcissism. The same One has the remedy for it today.

2. **Luke 14:7-11.** Notice now how the state of spiritual edema manifests itself in the souls of those invited. Their souls were full of self and so they chose out the first, or chief, places. It is self exaltation when there should have been humility. He takes the occasion to bring out that great moral principle in the dealings of God (Luke 14:11) of which He Himself is the great example. The Lord is commenting on *man's supper*:

It is *his* {man's} supper. He therefore calls in his "friends, brethren, kinsmen and rich neighbors," i. e. those of a similar moral standing. Did any one ever see such "in lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than themselves?" Nay, but each one filled with self seeks out the "chief room." What a scene for God's contemplation! Men, with hearts as they appear before Him, pretending to a high seat! Yet, go where you please, ask the first man you meet, and, except he have been taught of God that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," you will find him a guest at the Pharisee's supper, and looking out for a chief room. He will represent you heaven as an inclined plane, and all doing their best to get a good seat in it.

This is natural religion; what suits the infidel Sadducee as well as the orthodox Pharisee, because it never stirs up the conscience nor reaches the heart . . .

Moreover, the character of such as sit at that feast is shown by the Master's words, "Go and sit down in the lowest room." *Grace* seeking out and meeting their need, has made them conscious of their ruined condition, and they are effectually humbled. They can "rejoice evermore," because "they know they have eternal life," (1 John 5:13), they know they "have redemption through His word, even the forgiveness of sins," (Col. 1:14), but they walk with their heads low because they also know and often feel "that in them, that is in their flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). These are the ones who

can "esteem others better than themselves," not in word, but in truth. ¹⁵

"He that abases himself shall be exalted" means that God will sovereignly intervene in His time. It is a general moral principle. And that is the only way such exaltation comes to pass.

3. **Luke 14:12-14.** Before the Lord's presentation of God's great supper, He next speaks of the principle upon which God sovereignly bases His choice of sinners. While we will find in the next parable that God's *invitation* to the great supper is not in itself enough to bring any one to the great supper, here the Lord enunciates a principle of action for His host in view of the coming resurrection of the just. That is the time for recompense. But man wants to be paid in some form *now*. God's sovereign intervention begins with His choice of guests without considering a recompense.

4. **Luke 14:15-24.** In v. 15 we note that someone says, "Blessed [is] he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (i.e., what we call the millennial kingdom). ¹⁶ To this the Lord speaks a parable to show that man does not want this on God's terms. How God sovereignly furnishes the great supper with guests will be seen in detail below.

5. **Luke 14:25-35.** God's sovereign intervention brings souls into the place of discipleship. The fact is that there are also those who profess to be Christians but are really not. They, as well as believers, are in the place of profession, thus in the place of *discipleship* -- which is here addressed by the Lord. It is not now to the point to go into the instructive things He brings to bear on this.

The Parable of Furnishing the Great Supper with Guests

(15) And one of those that were at table with [them], hearing these things, said to him, Blessed [is] he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. (16) And he said to him, A certain man made a great supper and invited many. (17) And he sent his bondman at the hour of supper to say to those who were invited, Come, for already all things are ready. (18) And all began, without exception, to excuse themselves. The first said to him, I have bought land, and I must go out

15. *Helps by the Way*, New Series 2:323-325.

16. What this person said was in keeping with the earthly calling of Israel. There will be the rule of God on the earth and this will be for man's happiness in a human way. It is right in its own place but the Lord, by grace, was going to bring in another calling, even the heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1). The great supper involves the change to bring in a new calling, while the earthly calling of Israel is in suspension until God's present work is completed.

and see it; I pray thee hold me for excused. (19) And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee hold me for excused. (20) And another said, I have married a wife, and on this account I cannot come. (21) And the bondman came up and brought back word of these things to his lord. Then the master of the house, in anger, said to his bondman, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring here the poor and crippled and lame and blind. (22) And the bondman said, Sir, it is done as thou hast commanded, and there is still room. (23) And the lord said to the bondman, Go out into the ways and fences and compel to come in, that my house may be filled; (24) for I say to you, that not one of those men who were invited shall taste of my supper.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAD DRAWN NEAR

One of those that were at table with the Lord expressed the blessedness of eating bread in the kingdom of God. He had in mind the kingdom under Messiah's reign, the rule of God on earth. We call it the millennial kingdom. Both John the Baptist and the Lord had announced that the kingdom had drawn nigh. But what was the moral state of those who heard this? Unless God had sovereignly wrought belief in the soul, the kingdom, as presented to them in the Person of the lowly Lord Jesus, was rejected. The fact is that most individuals rejected Him, though by God's grace some individuals accepted Him. The facts have been reviewed in detail in *Elements of Dispensational Truth*, vol. 1. In this parable we see the moral state of the individual rejecters exposed, along with God's response to that state.

Someone had spoken of that future blessedness when Messiah would reign. But there was another feast that God had in view meanwhile, before that day of blessing on earth. Sinners were to come to His great supper.

A NEEDS-BE IN THE HEART OF GOD

In Matt. 22:1-10 it is said that a feast was made for the king's son. But in Luke the great supper is for the satisfaction of God's own heart. He must satisfy His desire to give, to bless, and to enjoy His provision for those He would bless. Man's incorrigible state will not be permitted to frustrate His thought.

THE EXCUSES

Only Three Excuses. Really, the excuses present man in a 'good' light, so to speak. They were not excuses in order to do wicked deeds. They were all natural things to man and have their place in the created order. *The evil is in the refusal to heed the invitation.* These excuses expose the state of soul regarding man's response to God's invitation. If all depended on *invitation*, there would not be one guest at the great supper. The house would be altogether empty. The fact is that "all began, without exception, to excuse themselves" (v. 18). Every last one of those invited refused to come, but only three excuses are listed. Why only three? because they sum up the three-fold character of what controls fallen,

totally-lost man. We see these three things in the garden of Eden and in the testing of the Lord in the wilderness, and in 1 John 2:16 where they are presented as the motivations characterizing the world. These motivations are constitutional in what we call the old nature (i.e., the flesh), acquired in the fall of man, and actuating man ever since. The old nature dominates man. His will is *subject* to these motivations. They have power over the person -- over the "I." The will is biased against God. It is not really morally free to choose God. The will is in bondage to the old nature and is actuated by these three motivations, some persons more from one than from another motivation.

Scripture distinguishes spirit, soul, and body in man (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). In his soul man is viewed by God as the responsible "I" and that is where the will resides. As W. Kelly remarked:

But Scripture abundantly proves its seat to be in the soul. The spirit is inner capacity *as to* which man is responsible to God; but the soul is that *in* which he is so; and the body is the outer vessel which displays the result, whether by grace for God's will or by self-will in Satan's service. To the soul belongs the working of the will, and now also since the fall the instinctive knowledge of good and evil; so that one is enticed into fleshly lusts which degrade man, as well as reasonings of the spirit and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God. Hence we read of soul-salvation or "salvation of souls."¹⁷

The soul is the seat of affections and appetites. The will is morally bound against God by the three great motivations in the old nature that have self as the object, not God. Thus man is morally bound against God in the very seat of his responsible being. If the great supper is to be furnished with the full complement of guests, if the house is to be filled -- nay, if there is to be even *one* person there -- God must act sovereignly to do this, for man **will not** come, as we shall see.

Another preliminary matter to observe is the fact that the invitation to the great supper does not imply that man is able to respond to that invitation. The great supper is the enjoyment of, and fellowship in, the grace of God, which alone meets man's need. It is the opposite of the law which requires from, not gives to, man. The law requires man to bring to God. God's grace brings *all* to man. Man could not keep the law. We have the direct statement of Scripture saying so in Rom. 8:7:

Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be.

Thus, the self-willed reasoning of the flesh (in Christians) that God would not

¹⁷ *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 4:79.

command man to do something that he is not capable of doing, is utterly false.¹⁸ When faced with this some may shuffle and shift, and may say, “but that was under law, not under grace.” The opposing principle is “God will not command man to do what he is not capable of doing.” When faced with the plain, Scripture disproof of the false notion, why then shift ground? How can we expect to learn from the Word when we engage in such conduct? Have we never learned what God’s testing and exposure of man in his fallen, Adamic standing of responsibility to see if he was recoverable, really is? Have we not learned the lesson of man’s moral distance from God, that he is totally lost? Ruined man can no more respond to the invitation of grace than he can obey the commands of God through Moses. Before we look at the three excuses, a quotation about the testing of man under law is appropriate here.

Though God has no respect of persons, He nevertheless does heed His ways that He has Himself established. This makes so much less excusable the lack of faith on the part of the Jew. God never fails -- man always does. Favored man {the Jew, under testing to see if fallen man was recoverable} only makes the greater show of his own unbelief. Here the message to them was, “Come, for all things are now ready.” Such is the invitation of grace. The law makes man the prominent and responsible agent; it is man that is to do this, and yet more, man must not do that. Man therein is commanded to love God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, and with all his mind. But the commandment, just as it is, is wholly unavailing, because in this case man is a sinner and loveless. No law ever produced or called out love. It may demand but cannot create love; it is not within the nature or power of the law to do so. God knew this perfectly; and in the gospel *He* becomes Himself the great Agent. It is He that loves, who gives according to the strength of that love in sending His only begotten Son with eternal life in Him -- yea, also to die in expiation of sin. Law demonstrated that man though responsible had no power to perform. He was incapable of doing God’s will because of sin; but his pride was such that he did not, would not, feel his own incapability, or its cause. Were he willing to confess it, God would have shown him grace. But man felt no need of grace anymore than his own guilt and powerlessness to meet law. So he slights the call to come, though all things are now ready.¹⁹

Let us now look at the three excuses and keep in mind that we should see what we, not the Jews only, are by nature, as fallen.

Excuse 1.

The first said to him, I have bought land, and I must go out and see it; I pray thee to hold me for excused (v. 18).

18. Think of the absurd statement quoted by Samuel Fisk, “God’s commands are enablings . . .” (*Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, Neptune: Loizeaux, p. 50, 1973).

19. *The Bible Treasury* 8:179.

He was polite in returning his answer, but the answer is quite stupid, yet he thinks it a reasonable basis to be held excused. He bought first and goes to look at it later. Even so, he had an invitation and could see the land at any other time. He had to *see* it; that is *the lust of the eyes*.

Moreover, there are the world, the devil, and the flesh. What overcame the first to be invited was **the world**.

Excuse 2.

And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee to hold me for excused (v. 19).

He also was polite in his answer, though it was just as stupid as the first. He could have “proved” them later. Notice *he* had to prove them. This is *the pride of life*. Moreover, oxen in Scripture represent service. Perhaps a man is ensnared by religious or humanistic works. In Scripture the number five may be used to represent responsibility manward. All this may serve as a convenient, self-serving excuse to reject God’s invitation to His great supper.

The first great act of pride was when the covering cherub of Ezek. 28 lifted himself up. What overcame this man was the sin of **the devil**.

Excuse 3.

And another said, I have married a wife, and on this account I cannot come (v. 20).

It has been observed that:

There is such a thing as “*a moral cannot*,” as well as “*a physical cannot*.” In the former, our *wills*, tastes, affections, thoughts, and he who rules us by these, are often stronger than our judgments. Awful state! if our being subject to God is in question. “I have married a wife, and cannot come” told a tale about the want of *heart* and *will*, not of external ability.²⁰

Nor was this as polite an answer as in the first two cases. What we have here is *the lust of the flesh*. Marriage was instituted by God and is to be “held in honor in every way, and the bed be undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). But marriage is no excuse to refuse God’s invitation. This one was overcome by **the flesh**.

There is a further truth that comes out in this man’s answer: “I cannot come.” The first two cases illustrate the words of the Lord Jesus in John 5:40: and ye will not come to me that ye might have life.

This third case illustrates the words of the Lord Jesus in John 6:44:

No one can come to me except the Father who has sent me draw him . . .

20. H. P., *The Present Testimony*, 8:318.

Interestingly, the order of John 5, before John 6, is the order of the three cases here; (1) “will not” and (2) “cannot.” “Cannot” expresses incapacity to do it. “Will not” shows the hostility of the will under the control of the old nature and its three strong motivations. That is why man “cannot.” He is a slave to sin in the flesh.

Note well that man is not depicted as engaging in gross practices. He is presented as engaging in normal activities. We are to learn that man in his best estate will not come to the great supper though invited to come. Observe that ground, oxen, and wives are all gifts of God. These things are not sin. They are of nature. Notice a progression in the three things that are of nature. A man obtains a piece of ground. He then plows it. And he marries and wants a home. These things are not in themselves sinful, but he uses them to sinfully refuse God’s invitation. And so, man turns God’s very gifts into an excuse not to come to His gracious, great supper. How forcefully this parable brings out the moral state of man as totally lost! He wants his portion here apart from God’s great supper. He does not want God’s grace.

As to these three activities used as excuses to refuse God’s invitation, note that Adam was in the garden of Eden and was there to till it and to keep it, and be with his wife. But since the fall these very things are used by man as excuses to refuse the invitation of grace. The three excuses are a moral summary of the character of man’s refusal to come and indicate the total ruin of man. The excuses, we saw, involve the world, the devil, and the flesh. Moreover, the three controlling forces in the old nature named in 1 John 2:16 are likewise seen in the three excuses, as they are seen at work in the garden of Eden, and in the temptations presented to the Lord in the wilderness.

THE HOUSE FILLED WITH THOSE BROUGHT IN ON ANOTHER BASIS THAN AN INVITATION TO COME

The Israelites had the first claim upon the great supper, but the bulk of the leaders and the nation rejected the Lord Jesus. In their being tested by the offer of the kingdom as embodied in His lowly Person here, the leaders and the people are looked at as invited to the great supper. God’s invitation exposes the moral state of the heart of man. The conclusion is:

for I say to you, that not one of those who were invited shall taste of my supper
(v. 24).

The awfulness of eternal, conscious punishment awaits these rejecters of grace. This is the moral result of God’s invitation to man, for we must see that Israel was but representative of “the first man,” man viewed in the fallen Adamic standing, under test, under the law, but in the most favorable circumstances.

Just as in the case of “whosoever will may come,” man refuses. God hinders no one from coming. It is self-will that is indulged instead of coming. This is

universal. But God will have the house filled. Note the response to the refusal; “Then the master of the house, in anger, said . . .”²¹ He turns from the invited to have the servant take action that his house be filled. Yet there is room, for the master has not yet arisen to shut the door (Luke 13:25).

Note again that there is but one servant. It is a mistake to bring God’s human servants into this matter. It is the Spirit of God that answers to the one servant. We do not have in this parable a lesson about how Christians should do gospel work. God is light and God is love. This parable is about God satisfying Himself concerning His being love. We know that it was love that provided the sacrifice of Christ. God is light, and as such Christ was judged for us. God, thus satisfied, and glorified, is just in justifying the believer. He is righteous in having the Spirit compel persons to come to the great supper. God is love, and He will have before Himself, eternally, objects of His sovereign grace.²²

Besides Israel and its leaders, we have two more cases presented in this parable. The second case is given in vv. 21, 22. This refers to God’s work regarding certain individuals of Israel. While this still goes on, it had special application to the testimony in Acts up to the stoning of Stephen. In Matt. 21:31 the Lord warned the hearers that the publicans and harlots would go into the kingdom before they would. Here it is the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. No doubt this description uses these conditions to represent moral conditions, not actual physical conditions. There is *poverty*, no resources; *maimed* so as not to be able to serve God; *lame* so as not to be able to walk acceptably before God; and *blind* also, having no divine light in the soul. The servant sent, i.e., the Spirit of God, can discover this to our souls in His sovereign action to bring souls to the great supper. But this class has in view especially the work of the Spirit in individuals in Israel. Therefore we read in Rom. 11:5 of “a remnant according to election of grace.” That is, of course, the elect of Israel while the leaders and mass are rejected.

The third case is the Gentiles (v. 23). The order followed is the Jew first and then the far-off Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 28:23-28).

For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all who [are] afar off, as many as [the] Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:37).

But now in Christ Jesus ye who were afar off are become nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).

There is thus a moral order to God’s ways in what we have just considered.

21. Here we find anger expressed concerning man’s refusal to come to His provision of grace. In Luke 15, in contrast, we find “joy” and “merry” in connection with that three-fold parable showing the divine Persons engaged in finding sinners and bringing them -- where? -- into the house.

22. God is *light*, also, and there will be in the *outer darkness* (note the contrast) those who will not be at the great supper.

COMPEL TO COME IN, THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FILLED

The death of Christ is not presented in this parable (though that is, we are sure, the basis for all His display of grace towards man). The great supper is the enjoyment and celebration of His grace. The house is a figure for the place where God's order and will are carried out.

Blessed be God, His house will be filled. Man's refusal of His invitation cannot frustrate the purpose of grace. Christians who believe in man's moral free will (as do philosophers and free-thinkers) are offended by the idea that God should "violate man's will." "God cannot violate man's free will" it is said. Well, man's alleged free will, morally speaking, is only freedom to choose which excuse he makes in refusing God's invitation to the great supper. It is just there that we see the operation of man's will. In the words "bring here" (v. 21) and "compel to come in" (v. 23), we see *God's will*, by the Spirit. It is clear that "compel" in this context must be understood as an action differing from the invitation to come. And, obviously, physical coercion is not meant. It is easily explained in the light of Phil. 2:13:

for it is God who works in you both the willing and the working according to [his] good pleasure.

Regarding the words "work" and "working," J. N. Darby's footnote to the translation of this verse says:

Internal operation of power, though seen in results, as Matt. 14:2; Col. 1:29. Not as 'work out' in ver. 12.

And John 1:11-13 and James 1:18 show that man's will is excluded and that the new birth is by the will of God. God sovereignly implants a new nature that loves His will. It is not man's will that begins the work (nor completes it):

. . . he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day (Phil. 1:6).

J. G. Bellett wrote:

There must be more than an invitation. God must fill the chairs as well as the table. He must force His guests in as well as fill the board. He sends His servant, and says, "*Compel* them to come in, that my house may be filled." There is a peep into heaven. Did you ever know such a place in all your life? The richest feast ever seen, and not one at it that has not been compelled to come in! And does God put up with this? If there had only been the mission of the Son, there would never have been a single guest. If there had only been the mission of the Holy Ghost, there would have been no feast spread. What a wonderful exhibition of the love of God! If you had prepared a kindness for another, would you like to find an indisposed heart in him? *No*, you would not ask him again, but would say, let him go and get what he values more. But there is the double mission of the Son and the Spirit. The Son prepares the feast and the Spirit prepares the guests. So there is not a single merely bidden guest

there; they are compelled guests. What a wretched exhibition of the heart you carry! One has bought a piece of ground, another has bought five yoke of oxen. Anything but the Lord's feast. This is the contrast between God's table and man's.²³

Another wrote:

Think, dear reader, O, think for a moment of what salvation has cost God. And is the One who has so faithfully "finished the work He was given to do" going to get nothing. Shall the obedient Lamb go empty and the "roaring lion" get all, because man's will is for evil? Verily this would be making man the potter and God the clay {see Rom. 9:20, 21}. Thank God it is not so. Thy blood, Thy cross, Thy agony, Lord Jesus, have not been in vain, for God has ordained that Thou "shalt see of the travail of thy soul and be satisfied," (Isa. 53:11). Accordingly the servant is sent out with the admonition, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, etc." The command is carried out, the servant returns with the word, "Yet there is room," and again he is sent out with the order, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in." God in love provides salvation for a lost world. The world answers by rejection. Faithful to His Son, He will now provide for Him by election. His sovereign grace will now call out of the world (John 17). Amazing ways of God! Short-sighted man may form religious parties out of pieces of truth which he isolates from the rest, but, viewed as a whole, how beautiful! Every individual saved being a direct act of God's sovereign and gracious will, which, instead of limiting a salvation more free than the air, but reveals man's wilful and universal rejection of it.

Some precious soul may ask here, but is a sinner saved against his will? To this I reply: Why is it you were in such distress for weeks and months before you found peace with God? Your will, your wretched, wicked will, had to be broken before you would bow to God's will, and be saved through Jesus Christ. There was no *need* of your suffering so. There was nothing in it for God. Christ had done it all. But the Shepherd was after you, while you held out against Him as long as you could. All the children of God will find out some day that this is all the part they acted in their salvation, and their walk on the earth is not a little influenced by their recognizing it at the start.²⁴

Look at that last sentence again. It has been observed that the nearer we are (practically speaking) to God, the more we realize the moral distance from Him that there is in the lost state.

Well did Charles Stanley, of Rotherham, quote a stanza from a hymn:

Not only is this great supper spread, but the outcasts of the highways and hedges are compelled to come in. Oh, how they sing,

23. *Notes on the Gospel of Luke*, Bible Truth Publishers: Oak Park, p. 57, n.d.

24. *Helps by the Way*, New Series 2:326-328 (1880).

'Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forced²⁵ me in,
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin.²⁶

As C. H. Mackintosh said, everyone of us is brought or compelled, else we had remained outside:

Thus, in every volume of man's history the history of the human race in every section, every page, every paragraph, every line, we read of his total ruin, his utter alienation from God. We are taught in the most distinct manner possible that, if left to himself, he never could and never would though most surely he should turn to God and do works proper for repentance. And in perfect keeping with all this, we learn from our Lord's parable of the great supper in Luke 14 that not so much as a single merely invited guest will be found at the table. All who sit down there are "brought" or "compelled." Not one ever would come if left to himself. Grace, free grace, must force them in; and so it does, blessed forever be the God of all grace!²⁷

Concerning the notion that God cannot violate man's free will, while Phil. 2:10, 11 does not use the word that every knee will be *compelled* to bow, do you think that the eternally impenitent will bow voluntarily? Or, will God violate their alleged moral free will and compel them to do it? Will it be any man's will to enter conscious, eternal punishment? Is God going to violate their will by putting them in conscious, eternal punishment? How blessed it is to own one's own total ruin by nature and that God has sovereignly intervened on our behalf to compel us to come in. He has overcome our morally-bound will by the sweet compulsion of sovereign grace. The principle of Phil. 2:13 is found in Rom. 9 also.

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

"Not of him that *wills*" shows that mercy from God is not obtained by something within man, while "nor of him that *runs*" shows that no activity on man's part can secure God's mercy. His mercy is sovereignly given.

25. {In answer to a question concerning how the servant (the Spirit) compels, H. S. Paisley wrote: He compels by causing those invited, who are poor, maimed, halt and blind to feel their need and in doing so, causes them in their distress to come for relief to the feast (*Words in Season*, Nov. 2001, p. 235).

"Those *invited*" all, without exception, excused themselves, as we saw in the parable's statement. All others were "brought" and "compelled." Besides his distortion of the facts, he quoted the hymn and changed the word "forced" to "drew." When considering sovereignty in John we shall see that all drawn by the Father come to Christ, and only those drawn by the Father do come. The Father's *drawing* is involved in the Spirit's *compelling* and the Son's *quickening* of dead sinners.

26. *Selected Writings of Charles Stanley* 1:188, Bible Truth Publishers: St. Louis, n.d.

27. "Responsibility and Power," *Short Papers*.

According to his own will begat he us by the word of truth . . . (James 1:18).

This is the new birth, which will be considered in the next chapter. Here, we note that it was He that begot us, through using the Word of God. It is sovereignly implanted in our souls along with faith.

Wherein lies the problem with owning that man is totally lost, involving total moral inability to come? As one noted, the closer we practically draw near to God, the more we see the immense moral distance the natural man is from God.

THE WORD COMPEL

At this point, there is a phenomenon to which we should direct our attention, namely, the attempt by those who believe in moral free will towards God to circumvent the Scripture use of words like "compel" and "dead" (as describing man's spiritual state towards God). Here, we will look at some samples regarding the word "compel." When we consider John 5:24, 25 and Eph. 2:1-5, we will observe the circumvention of the correlative words "dead" and "quickening." Regarding "compel," why else than the need to maintain the notion of moral free will towards God would N. Crawford write:

But does the Holy Spirit compel sinners to come against their will? No, but by His awakening {what is this? he cannot mean quickening} and convicting power He makes them willing and anxious to flee from the wrath to come (John 16:8-11).

We must never read into the word "compel" (*anankazō*) the thought of "irresistible grace." The Spirit does not use force, but he does constrain sinners to come, in spite of their reluctance, urging them by His patient strivings.²⁸

What is awakening? In both John 5 and Eph. 2 we find two correlative terms: *dead* and *quickening*. If the dead are awakened, they are *ipso facto* quickened; and if thus quickened from spiritual death towards God, that is the initial work in the soul and *ipso facto* the person is made willing and thus is compelled to come to the great supper. Moreover, it is semantic nonsense to say that "The Spirit does not use force, but he does constrain sinners to come." *Constrain* means:

1. to compel or force; to urge with irresistible power . . .
2. to confine by force; to restrain from escape or action; to repress; to bind or confine . . .
3. To get or produce by force or strain, as a person's consent, an unnatural laugh, etc.²⁹

28. *Luke*, in The Ritchie New Testament Commentaries series, John Ritchie, Kilmarnock, p. 250, 1989.

29. From *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, sec. ed., 1975.

Others tell us that God does not “coerce” sinners. Why use the word *coerce* when Scripture uses *compel*? The same *Dictionary* says *coerce* means:

1. to restrain by force; to keep from acting by force, especially by legal authority; to repress.
2. to compel; to constrain.

At bottom, the objection means that man is capable of choosing to believe God. It is the notion of moral free will towards God no matter how the notion is dressed up regarding the matter of the Spirit of God. What the notion means, in effect, is that God is not really sovereign in the salvation of sinners. It is, in reality, defiance of such Scriptures as James 1:18; John 1:13; etc. By sovereign grace in salvation we do mean that it is *grace that prevails over the sinner*. The new birth is the result of the sovereign action of the will of God, Who implants a new nature along with faith, and grants repentance. The Spirit’s compelling is the sweet compulsion of grace. Without this, we would go down into the pit.

The editor of *Truth and Tidings*, Dr. A. J. Higgins, wrote:

Made in the image of God, he is a free-will agent (Sept. 2001, p. 229).³⁰

So says N. Geisler:

Since free will is a part of the image of God . . . (*op. cit.*, p. 259, sec. ed. 2001).

This false notion about “image” was dealt with in Chapter One. The well-known “progressive dispensationalist,” Darrell L. Bock, shows in one sentence how he misses the parable’s lesson on the sovereign action of the Spirit and the totally lost condition of man:

He is not going to force anyone to come, as his response to the original invitees shows.³¹

Now, why did he say “not going to force” instead of saying that God would not “*compel* anyone to come”? The same *Dictionary* says of the verb *force*:

1. To compel; to make (a person or animal) do something by force; as, masters *forced* their slaves to labor.

Moreover, he entirely misses the point about all invited refusing to come.

God’s compelling here is not at all like man’s. In *quicken*ing, (making alive of the spiritual dead, i.e., those who have no moral ability towards God) God graciously delivers the enslaved will, enslaved to the old nature, by implanting a new nature so that the will, as directed by the new nature, loves and does the will of God. This is the beginning of the work referred to in Phil. 1:6. Quicken

ing a person by God. The person thus has worked in him the willing and the working of Phil. 2:13. The person thus has been made partaker of the divine nature and is able to repent. Quicken

ing, accompanied by faith (which at this point may not have laid hold on all that it should) precedes repentance. The person, now having the new nature has the moral ability to repent. He is willing to repent. God has caused him to be willing. This is what the word “compel” involves. All this involves the recognition that man does not accept God’s invitation by his alleged moral free will towards God.

Of course, those who believe man has the moral ability to exercise faith and believe the gospel do not look at it that way. They put faith (it is human faith, not an implanted faith from God) before “regeneration” (they should say *quicken*ing instead). If God sets us free from our enslavement to sin in the flesh in the way described in the above paragraph, that is regarded by free-willers as a violation of man’s freedom. This notion is astonishing and only can be held by maintaining that man is not really spiritually dead and in need of quickening, and is not the slave of sin in the flesh, but rather he is morally able to choose to believe or not -- ***a denial that man is totally lost***. In effect, all this affirms that man does, in fact, respond to God’s invitation and denies that anyone is compelled to come to the great supper. This is of the essence of Arminianism and semi-Pelagianism.

Finally, *context* has a bearing on the use of a word and *compel* should be seen in its bearing in this parable in contrast to the *invitation* refused without exception.

THE CALL OF INVITATION AND THE EFFECTUAL CALL

We have seen how all who were invited refused to come -- ***without exception***. Is there no solemn teaching here regarding man’s totally lost condition? Let us designate this as a call of invitation, or the *gospel call*, to differentiate it from the case of those brought and compelled to come in. Concerning those, let us designate that the *effectual call*, or the call of compulsion, or the call of divine choice, involving quickening power on those spiritually dead towards God. And these designations will help us in understanding this:

For many are called ones, but few chosen ones (Matt. 22:14; see 20:16).

The subject of calling is considered later.

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

Ed.

30. See the notes on the subject of the image of God in chapter 1.

31. *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Grand Rapids: Baker, p. 1277, 1996.

“The Church, Which is His Body”

(From *Helps by the Way*)

There are few of my readers who need to be told that the meaning of the word “Church” is, simply, “Assembly.” And yet it would deliver us from a good many wrong thoughts just to remember this. And the uniform translation of the word by “assembly,” in our common version, would set aside some strange interpretations of peculiar texts. Thus, for instance, “the church in the wilderness” would surely cease to be quoted as a proof of the identity between the Jewish Assembly and the Christian, if the technical word “church” (which from the habitual use and application seems to justify it) were seen to be the same word by which even the riotous, heathen crowd at Ephesus is designated in Acts 12:32. Anybody may understand what perplexity it would create in the mind of the reader, if he found it there written of that heathen mob, “the church was confused,” or what an absurdity it would naturally appear for anybody to argue the identity of the crowd of idolaters there with the Christian “Church,” because the word for “church” was used in their case. Yet, people who should know better use exactly the argument in favor of the Jewish “church in the wilderness,” which they would be ashamed to use (although they might as well do so) in behalf of the crowd of worshippers of “Diana of the Ephesians.”

The definition of the Christian assembly, by which it may be known from any other assembly whatever, is plainly given in the heading to this paper. It is the “body of Christ,” the company of His members, formed by the uniting action of the Spirit of God, for, “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13).

I propose in this paper some brief enquiry, as to this “body of Christ,” and what the duty of believers is with regard to it. For that some obligation flows from the connection with it, I may be permitted for the present to assume.

In the first place, then, as I have already stated, and as Scripture in so many words assures us, the Church is the “body of Christ,” the company of all His real members. This “membership” is the only one acknowledged in the word of God. It has become a current phrase to speak of “members of this or that denomination.” Scripture speaks of but one body and one membership in it; Christians, therefore, everywhere “members, one of another.” Anything narrower than this would be treated by it as plain sectarianism. Nor do we find the expression even, “members of the *Church*”; that might allow the idea of membership being some more external thing; but there is none outside of the real “body,” the “body of *Christ*.”

We become members of this body, too, by no external act or deed, by no will or choice of our own. The custom is for people to say, “I am not a member, I have never *joined*.” It is no question of joining in this way, but of *being* joined, and that by the Divine act alone, the baptism of the Spirit: “by one *Spirit* are we all baptized into one body.” This is by no external ordinance, water baptism, or aught else. It is the operation of the Spirit of God, peculiar to Christianity, which began first at Pentecost and has been continued ever since. It is undeniable, however much the Spirit worked

(and He did work) in days preceding {when} the baptism of the Holy Ghost was announced for the first time, and as a future thing, by John the Baptist: “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.” To that promise the Lord distinctly referred after his resurrection, when “being assembled together” with His disciples, “He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me: for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4, 5). Pentecost for them fulfilled that promise. And what took place then was not merely therefore a display of miraculous power, such as has long since ceased, but (as the text in 1 Cor. 12 assures us) the formation of the body of Christ then began.

Hence, nowhere before this do we find even a hint of the existence of the body of Christ at all. The Old Testament knows nothing of it. ¹ Indeed, there was as yet no Head in heaven. Only when God “raised Christ from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places,” was it that He “gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church which is His body” (Eph. 1:20, 23).

The thought is indeed rooted strongly in the mind of Christians generally, that “the Church is the whole company of the saved. To deny the place of the saints of Old Testament times to be in the Church which is Christ’s body, is with them almost equivalent to denying their participation in salvation. But it is not at all so. They are not only sharers with us in the blessedness of salvation, but also in being children of God and partakers of heavenly glory. These things only the force of constant habits of thoughts has connected together. They are really and widely separate.

Another thing has tended to confirm this view of the matter. The baptism of the Holy Ghost has been confounded with new birth; and therefore it would naturally be supposed that being born again was the entrance into the Church. Thus, either Old Testament saints were not born again (which would be certainly contrary to the truth), or the Church of God must include these.

But the baptism of the Holy Ghost is not the same as new birth. The disciples were already born again when the Lord spoke to them of this baptism as what they should receive. And while men had been born of the Spirit all through the old dispensation, the *baptism* of the Spirit began at Pentecost. Attention to these points will, I believe, clear the mind of a confusion, well nigh universal, as to this.

The New Testament is full of a gift of the Spirit peculiar to the present

1. One passage (Isa. 26:19) has been thought, as applying to the true saints in Israel, to teach that they, too, belong to the body of Christ. It reads, as they rightly enough correct it, “Thy dead men shall live, my dead body, they shall arise.” Here Jehovah, according to the similar figures in Ezek. 37, Dan. 12, etc., speaks of the resurrection of Israel (cp. vv. 14-18) nationally defunct and their hope lost, but to be brought up again from the dead by Jehovah for blessing in millennial days. He, to signify His care for and love to this dead national body, speaks of it as His, -- “My dead body.” It is a singular misconception to take this as applying to the Church, which is never as a body dead at all. Nor does the phrase refer even to the dead saints in Israel, but to the nation at large, as I have said.

dispensation, and a thing super-added to new birth. Thus in John 7, where the Lord declares of the one who believes on Him, that “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,” it is added (John 7:39), “But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet [given], because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” Now, there again, we most distinctly find that after the completion of the work of the Lord Jesus, there was a reception of the Spirit by believers, such as never had been before. “The Holy Ghost was not yet,” is the real language used, which shows it was a personal presence of the Spirit Himself, which was predicted as a distinct thing from anything known before.

Yet He had been working among men, as we know, from the beginning. He had been “in” the prophets who testified of the coming salvation. And to the restored remnant of Israel had Haggai announced the gracious word of Jehovah “my Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not” (Hag. 2:5). In view of this men reasonably ask, what is the difference between the Spirit in prophets and the Spirit in Christians now? of the Spirit remaining in the midst of Israel, and the abiding presence of the Spirit now?

The first question, he who speaks of the Spirit in the prophets answers, making broad distinction between the Spirit of Christ testifying prophetically in them of things now preached, and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:11, 12). There is no difficulty in understanding the difference between the Spirit of prophecy bearing witness of coming salvation, and the Holy Ghost sent down to make good the reality of it in the souls of believers now.

And as to the second question, the Spirit remaining in the midst of the remnant of Israel was a very different thing from the Spirit abiding in the believer himself, and making his body His temple; a very different thing also from His baptizing believers into “one body,” and that the body of Christ.

Scripture, it is evident, makes a grand and broad distinction between these things. All former presence of the Spirit is so to speak ignored, or presented only as contrast to this marked and striking peculiarity of the Christian dispensation. “The Holy Ghost was not yet,” is decisive. And when the Lord Himself, in His last discourse with His disciples prior to His crucifixion, speaks of the coming of the Comforter, it is to put it again, in the strongest possible contrast with anything that had been before. Speaking of His own presence with them He had said long before, “Verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things that ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that ye hear, and have not heard them” (Matt. 13:17). Yet now He says of His departure from them, and of their loss of that great blessing of His personal presence: “It is expedient for you that I go away.” And why? “For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you” (John 16:7). What a wondrous thing must have been that coming of the Spirit for which it was “expedient” to lose the actual bodily presence of the gracious Lord and Savior! We look back to those times, and our longing hearts say, O to have seen Him then! But He says Himself, “you are more blessed in the presence of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, than if you had seen me then with your bodily eyes

on earth.” And, Oh, brethren; do we believe it? Do we realize the precious portion that is ours?

Pentecost was the time of the coming of that Comforter, as we have seen. And how plain it was no question of miraculous gifts, which have long passed away! The very fact that they have passed away, is a sufficient proof of the distinction, for the Lord tells us concerning the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, “He shall abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).

The results of that coming, which those miracles at Pentecost were only tongues to proclaim, it is not my intention now to enter into.² The baptism of believers into one body is that which alone we are now speaking of, and we have seen that Scripture speaks of it as a new thing at Pentecost. We have seen too, that it was needful for Jesus to be risen and ascended before the Holy Ghost could be given upon earth, and we can now well understand that necessity in order to the formation of the “body” upon earth, as it was as a risen and ascended man that the Lord actually took the place of “Head over all things to the Church, His body.”

Pentecost, then, saw the beginning of this. It is well, however, to remember that it is not to the 2nd chapter of Acts we are to look for the *doctrine* as to it. The Apostle Paul distinctly tells us that the “mystery, hid from ages and from generations,” was committed to *him*, in order “to fulfil [or complete] the word of God” (Col. 1:25, 26, and cp. Eph. 3:1-10). It pleased God in His wisdom not to reveal this mystery at once, but after a certain preparation for it; and it is nowhere save in Paul’s writings, that the doctrine of the “body” is taught. All that we see in Acts is that there did then begin an “assembly” to which the Lord daily added those He was saving. And the gift of the Holy Ghost, the characteristic peculiarity of the dispensation, in the first place following baptism, and bestowed by the laying on of the Apostles’ hands, marked distinctly what was connected with this manifest display of Divine power. It was not till the first *Gentile* was brought in -- Cornelius, -- that there was any exception to this order of things. *He* received both, apart from baptism, and apart altogether from Apostles’ hands. Thus began the present order of things, if I may so say, now that Apostles have long been absent from the Church.

Thus then began the existence of the Church of Christ on earth. It still continues; and its endowment with the Spirit continues still. Miraculous powers are indeed gone; the holy Ghost not; the Lord’s own words guarantee the abiding presence of the “Comforter” with His disciples.

It is now time for the question, which the hearts of many, it may be, have anticipated, “*Where* is this ‘Church, which is Christ’s body,’ in the present day?”

Ready enough will be the answer, doubtless, too. I shall be reminded of my own statements, perhaps, that this Church is the company of all true believers, and be told

2. A comparison of the following passages may help, however, in the apprehension of these, and show their distinction from anything before known: Gal. 4:1-6; Rom. 8:9-17; Eph. 1:13, 14; 2 Cor. 1:20, 21, etc.

that I shall find them scattered throughout the various denominations of Christians.

That is all true -- too true. But then if I turn to Scripture, I find *there* another thing altogether from members of Christ scattered through other bodies, whatever they may be. I find these members united together as such, and the body of Christ, the common union of the whole, a body visible, wherein each single member had his recognized place, relation, and office, as regards all the rest. The "body of Christ" was the only Church in existence among Christians. It was the one "organization," -- the one and only "denomination" anywhere. "Churches," or "assemblies," there might be, and were; but these were no otherwise separate from each other, than by the necessity of space and distance. The "Church of God in Corinth" could not be locally present with the Church in Thessalonica or in Ephesus. But these were not different organizations, or denominations, or even "bodies." There was but the "one body" (Eph. 4:4), even as there was but the "one Spirit"; -- a body God-made and not man-made -- where every one had his place, not of self-appointment, neither of human appointment, but of Divine.

Into this body, no men, or number of men, admitted, or had power to admit. The members of it "received one another," just as, and because "Christ had received" (Rom. 14:7). This was the condition of fellowship. They "received *one another*" upon that recognition of a mutual relationship towards each other, which Divine grace had brought them into. They dictated no terms upon which they would receive one another; they ordained for each other no code of religious law, no ritualistic service, to which all members of Christ were to subscribe or give adhesion. They were members of one family, bound in love and in duty to one another, -- but with One only Master, even Christ, and all else, brethren.

This was the Church of God, as he made it, -- the church, Christ's body. It was a body in practical, real, working order; not an invisible thing or a theory, which could be laid upon the shelf to make way for any more practicable invention of men's minds. There was no room for any other church. It claimed absolutely every one of the members of Christ. None was left free to join anything else according to his own taste or inclination; by the very fact that he was a Christian, he belonged of necessity to the "one body," the Church.

There were also means instituted for making known this oneness. The "assembly" was an assembly; they assembled themselves together; and not only for exhortation and edification, though surely for that; but they had a table also spread, around which they gathered, where the bread which they brake was not only "the communion of the body of Christ," the body given for them upon the Cross, but where they affirmed, that "we, being many, are one bread, one body; for even are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17).

But, you say, I shall find these members of the body of Christ scattered throughout the various denominations of Christians! It is too true; and what has scattered them? Judaism had done so; and the Apostle John tells us that Christ died, that (among other things) "He might *gather together in one*, the children of God which were scattered abroad" (John 11:52). It is no use to say, therefore, that the real unity

of Christians subsists still, and the multiplicity of denominations does not disturb it. It is no use, again, to speak of a unity of affection, of interests of hopes, etc., which abides still. However much that may be true, it was true also in the days of Judaism, as well as now; yet, says the Word of God, the children of God were "scattered" then, and Christ died to gather them together. But, according to your own confession, they are "scattered" still.

And some, yea, many, openly approve of this, as if it were most manifestly superior to the Divine plan. Though few would be so bold as to attempt to show us that Paul or Peter established different denominations, or that Episcopalianism had its representation at Ephesus, Presbyterianism in Crete, and Congregationalism at Corinth; yet they really speak as if it were an improvement now that these things should be. The "many men, many minds," can thus be accommodated. But what of God's mind? Has He none? And does Christianity, which legislates about a covered or uncovered head (1 Cor. 11), leave men's minds to their own wanderings, or subject them to God's? It is surely not hard to give the answer.

The Church of God exists. Thank God, it does. And it exists, "one body" still, not many bodies. Reader, if you be Christ's, I ask you to consider, with His word before you, is there any other religious body, which He owns as His, save this one Church we have been speaking of? And then, what claim have other bodies, which do not even represent the Church of God, upon your or my obedience?

I merely state the principle now. I leave it to every "honest and good heart" to apply it for itself. Certainly, if the Church of God abides, and we belong to it, we have duties which spring necessarily out of that relationship. God's word too abides, the simple test and judge of all. May the coming Lord be able to say to you and me, reader, what He could say to the Church in Philadelphia: "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name" (Rev. 3:8).

Helps by the Way 1:264-274.

Our Altar

(From *The Christian Friend*)

"We have an altar." -- Heb. 13:10

In olden time an altar was the usual way of approach to God. It might be simply connected with calling on the name of the Lord, as we find in Abraham; or it might be for offering sacrifices, as was done by Noah and others.

The altar had a central place among the children of Israel; for whole burnt-offerings, meat-offerings, peace-offerings, and sin-offerings were there presented to God. Blood too was put upon the horns of the altar, sprinkled upon it, round about it, and poured out at the bottom of the altar. The altar of burnt-offering was thus a connecting-link between the people and Jehovah; that which was done in service with it, while it was blessedly typical and instructive to us, was of a kind suited to a people who were outside the veil -- a people in the flesh, with an earthly calling

and hope, and outside the holiest of all, the place of God's presence.

The people were so identified with the altar that certain parts of some of the offerings thus presented to God were to be eaten. Hence we read, "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18). This was their altar, and their jealousy was properly stirred if anything seemed to interfere with THE ALTAR for all Israel; for they knew that by it they were remarkably connected with Jehovah. When on one occasion the other tribes heard that the Reubenites had built an altar on the borders of Jordan -- "a great altar to see to" -- they were greatly alarmed, and severely censured them, because it appeared to be divisive of the one nation, and to rival the one altar which was for all the people who formed the one family of Israel; and they were only satisfied by the Reubenites assuring them that they had not built an altar by Jordan for offering sacrifices thereon, but for a witness. They said, "God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt-offerings, for meat-offerings, or for sacrifices, *beside the altar of the Lord our God* that is before His tabernacle" (Josh. 22:29). It is clear then that Israel had an altar, and that altar was the altar of Jehovah their God, with whom they were in covenant relationship.

We see also in the days of Ezra the prominent place which was given to the altar when the children of Israel returned from their captivity. It was the first thing they set up, as if they could not approach God, or be connected with Him, on any other ground. We are told they "built THE ALTAR of the Lord God of Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set THE ALTAR upon his bases . . . and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto Jehovah" (Ezra 3:2, 3).

But Israel's altar was associated with many and oft-repeated offerings which could never "take away sins." There was, therefore, the bringing of sins continually to remembrance, without giving remission, so that the conscience was not purged. The worshipers too, even Aaron's sons, the priests, could not draw near, could not enter into the holiest of all, because the veil was up, to show that no one even of those who were connected with the altar and partakers of the sacrifices could enter into God's presence. They were thus at a distance from God. These sons of Aaron, with all their privileges, notwithstanding the exalted office they held, the garments for glory and for beauty divinely given them, and all the grandeur of the ritual system in which they occupied so important a position, could not with all have a purged conscience, or have access into the place of God's presence. The high priest only, and that not without blood and incense, could go there and live, and that only once in a whole year. This ritual system of altar, sacrifices, and priests, with its worldly sanctuary, though of divine origin, was of an earthly order, and shadowed good things to come. The many and oft-repeated sacrifices could not give a perfect conscience, because they could not take away sins. The veil standing, and an order of priesthood between God and the people, showed, as well as their altar with many and oft-repeated sacrifices, that the people were at a distance from God, and had not "access with confidence."

But we Christians have an altar, and our altar is very different from Israel's.

Those who are outside the veil have no authority to eat at the altar we have. It is impossible that it should be so; for it is for those who know that the veil has been rent from the top to the bottom, and that the Forerunner has for us entered, after having appeared here to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, so that now we have liberty by faith to be inside the veil in the very presence of God, without a fear, by the blood of Jesus, and that for communion and worship. "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." Our altar then is inside the veil; it is our way of approach to God. As the blood upon the mercy-seat typically set forth that sins had been judged, that all the propitiatory value of the sacrifice was always before God, as well as the merits of Christ in the perfume of the sweet incense, so He both invites and welcomes us there where He is, who entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Our altar then is not seen, but blessedly known to faith. It is connected only with one sacrifice, which was offered once for all, and because of its everlasting value need never to be repeated. Its eternal efficacy is ever before God; by it the believer's conscience is purged, so that he can be in God's presence as a purged worshiper. Wondrous privilege! By this one offering he is sanctified or set apart for God, and "perfected for ever." The infinite value of this one sacrifice for sins is also known by the fact that the One who offered it is sitting down in perpetuity on the right hand of God. "There remaineth therefore no more sacrifice for sins."

The presence of the Savior now in the glory of God, who was once the Sin-bearer on the cross, plainly proves that our sins have been taken away for ever. God, whose holiness demanded that the Sin-bearer should be forsaken, and who unsparingly poured out upon Him the judgment due for our sins, not only raised Him from among the dead for our justification, but gave Him the highest place in glory at His own right hand as alone adequate for what He had done as having glorified God in the earth, and having finished the work which He gave Him to do. The rending of the veil was also God's way of showing us His perfect satisfaction with the work of atonement, and that distance between Himself and the believer had been judicially removed, and for ever.

Our altar then is founded on the precious fact that our sins have been judged, and that we have a purged conscience; for God hath said, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." We draw near, therefore in the consciousness of this, and the presence of Him there, who went into heaven itself by His own blood, is our unquestionable title to be there, so that we enter in with "boldness."

Do we enjoy this blessed way of approach to God? Have we known what it is thus to "draw near," being assured of God's welcoming us on the ground of the precious blood of His own Son? If so, what can be our employ when there but praise and thanksgiving? In the consciousness of the eternal efficacy of the blood of Jesus, how can we hesitate to take our place inside the veil as purged worshipers who have "no more conscience of sins"? Consciousness of sin in us -- a sinful nature -- we shall have; and it may be the sorrowful consciousness of having sinned as God's children, and calling us to self judgment and confession in answer to the advocacy of Christ Jesus with the Father, before forgiveness is realized and our communion restored. But we are told that "the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of

sins”; that is, the believer’s conscience has been purged by the blood of Christ, and he is perfected for ever by that one offering, though he may yet fail, and sin, and be greatly distressed on account of it; but he can never be a sinner in his sins again under the burden, and guilt, and condemnation which his conscience once knew. Being perfected forever by that one offering, and having God’s assurance in His own word that He will no more remember his sins and iniquities, he can happily take his place before God inside the veil as knowing forgiveness of sins, having a purged conscience, and being a purged worshiper. How rich and marvelous is this blessedness! How could a Jew, however godly, know such happy nearness to God? Is it any wonder then that it is said that “we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle”? The word of the Spirit therefore to us is, “By Him therefore let its offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.”

But if our approach now is so near to God that we are able to come by faith where Jesus is as purged worshipers, what must be our place necessarily on earth? If we have now access with confidence where Christ is, surely no other place can suit us on earth but what suits Him. He certainly finds a spot on earth where He can be, and where He is; and where is that? Is it everywhere? The Lord Jesus being a divine Person, He cannot but be in every place beholding the evil and the good; but He graciously gives His own presence, and takes His place in the midst of two or three who are gathered together in His name. There may be in Christendom a loud profession of Christianity, largely organized systems to which the Savior’s name is attached to give them credit; they may bear the stamp of antiquity, boast of hereditary and successional claims, and, like the Jews, speak of some things among them having had a divine origin, be zealous also in observing ordinances, and yet be so far from subjection to the Lord Jesus, and so indifferent as to care for the truth of God as to become a “camp,” which the faithful are enjoined to leave. On earth, as in heaven, the Holy Spirit presents to us CHRIST, not men; CHRIST, not tradition, as the central Object of gathering (Matt. 18:20). As to our place on earth, we have, amidst all the confusion, to find out the spot where the Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst, around whom are those who “call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

Having found our true place at our “altar” inside the veil, it is *then* said, “Let us go forth therefore *unto Him without the camp*, bearing His reproach.” Observe here the question is not one of separation from the world, right as that is, but it is to go “outside the camp” of religiousness to the Lord Jesus in this time of His rejection, and suffer the reproach that may be connected with this faithful step. It is remarkable that the inspired writer quotes the sin-offering on the day of atonement for instruction as to this; for the blood of some of their sacrifices was carried *inside the veil* to the presence of God, and put upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat; and afterwards the body was burned *outside the camp*; and the reference to Jesus having died without the gate of the city as the antitype makes it clear that “the camp” was in those days the religious system of the Jews who had rejected Christ. The temple was then standing, and as there was a disposition in the Hebrew Christians to go back to Judaism, the inspired writer shows them that the path of faith is *outside* it all *with Christ*, bearing His reproach. No doubt Christendom has taken the place of Judaism,

by reducing the heavenly principles of the Church of God to an earthly, successional, and established religion on earth, and setting up again an earthly order of priesthood to accredit it, and also to give it a visible and permanent footing in the world which knew not Christ. The true believer, however, may say that “*Here*” (not only as to the world, but as to any established religiousness in it) “we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come”; and knows that the Lord is coming quickly.

It is important also to perceive in this epistle that there is no exhortation to go to Christ outside the camp until believers are brought as purged worshipers inside the veil. No doubt the order is divine. We cannot learn our true place on earth, but by first taking possession of our true place in the heavenlies where the Lord Jesus is. The blood was first carried into the holy place before the victim was burnt without the camp. First, it is said, “Let us draw near by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh”; and after this it is said, “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 10:20-22; 13:13). Then walk follows.

But the Israelite had frequently to offer sacrifices; and have we no sacrifices to offer? Yes, indeed we have, and that “continually,” as we have before observed. But what are they? They are “spiritual sacrifices” of praise and thanksgiving, and they are temporal sacrifices to those who need. But although our approach is so very near, and our blessings heavenly and eternal, all founded on the atoning death of Christ, and all secured for us by Him who is gone into heaven itself by His own blood, and now appears before the face of God for us, we are again reminded that it is “by Him” that our sacrifices are acceptable to God -- “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with *such sacrifices God is well pleased*.”

H. H. Snell, *The Christian Friend*, 1885, pp. 297-305.