

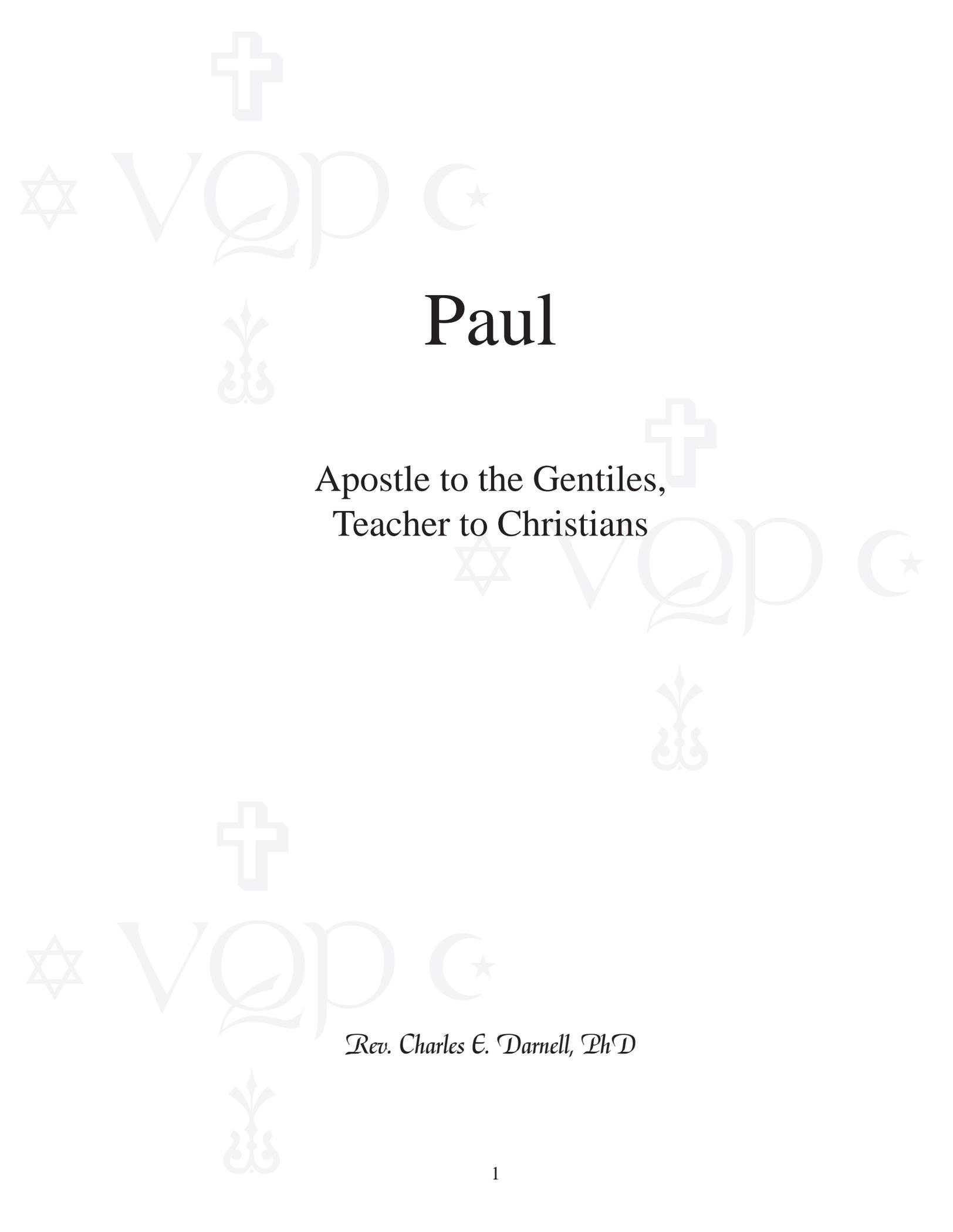
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ΠΑΥΛΟΣ.

Paul
Apostle to the Gentiles,
Teacher to Christians

Rev. Charles E. Darnell, PhD





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Foreword



A person's childhood impressions, their dreams of youth, their mature efforts to think things through, and the testing that comes through the ups and downs of a lifetime of vigorous living, make an interesting field of study, if one takes time in their latter years to think back through all of life.

The temptation to share the findings after such a revue needs to be resisted, for most of our reminiscences are of interest only to ourselves, or at most, to those who are near of kin. But, on the other hand, I have always been helped most by the confessional type of writing, wherein an author has laid bare their innermost self for one's retrospection. "Come ben the hoose," says the Scotsman to his friend, which means, I am told, "Come on in, clear through to the kitchen."

Regardless, I have written some things and here they are. From what I have been told, my psychology is a combination of activist and recluse. I like to do things and to see things get done, but many of my happiest hours have been spent in quiet solitude, trying to understand life, destiny, and all about this incomprehensible existence of ours and the mysterious universe of which we are a part. I began such a two-sided career when I walked the aisle at the age of twelve and gave my life to our Lord. I was a child full of questions about God, the Bible, Christ and life in general and many of my questions went unanswered by the adults both at home and church. So a great quest began whereby I took it upon myself to read and find the truth in all things that I might question. My journey took me through three marriages and multiple children, grand and great-grand children. I've traveled over vast territories of this globe and over many bumps that rested along the road of life. My dreams have come and gone into minor importance except for the emergence of a more abundant dream of a life of humble witness of the *Good News* that came to earth through Jesus Christ. That dream has grown and became ever more alluring through the years after my retirement from the United States Air Force. The fruits of this dream have ripened, with tantalizing slowness, as God led me through his holy word to find the truths that were there, but they are of an essence that is infinitely more meaningful than any earthbound achievement which I have accomplished.

So I now take pen in hand to report, as best I can, on this dream, of becoming a Christian and helping others do the same.

Rev. Charles E. Darnell, PhD



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I Christians

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. Acts 11:26

It was about 45 CE when a little group of people in Antioch of Syria were nicknamed *Christians*. That was more than nineteen centuries ago. In updating the achievements and growth of this small group, we find in 1963 The World Almanac reported 904,332,500 Christians in the world and in 2006 the Internet reported that there were 2.1 billion Christians in the world, or approximately one-third of the earth's population. A breakdown of that total indicates Christians are to be found in every area of the globe and represent practically every ethnic group, nationality, and social class.

The word *Christians* was coined by the Syrians as a name tag to distinguish some strangers who had moved into their midst. These new neighbors were zealots, constantly talking about a person they called *Christ*. By the actions of this group, who were evidently *Christ-people* or *Christ-ones*, the Syrians called these new neighbors *Christians*. My thoughts wonder if the term could indicate the Syrians were also impressed by their character and manner of life, as resembling the One called *Christ*, who had recently lived in nearby Palestine and died on a cross. The question remains, was the word *Christian* coined at its inception, merely a name tag or was it also a value judgement? It would be of historical and academic interest to know the answer.

As we trace the spread of the name *Christian* over the world and down the centuries, it becomes of much more than academic interest. In fact, it becomes a matter of deep practical concern, whether it was a mere name tag or as a value judgement that people were called *Christians*. It should also be a concern, to the two-billion plus people who are listed today by the collectors of statistics of tremendous importance to know what the title really signifies about those who bear it. What should the name signify? What is a Christian?

When Christianity came to Germany the translation became very challenging: "Sind Sie ein Christ?" (Are you a Christ?) To be asked such a question should shock one awake. Am I a Christ? How dare anyone suggest such a thing? Don't they know that *all fall short of the glory* and *I am but a sinner saved by grace*? But that is, for all intents and purposes, what we ask in English when we say, "Are you a Christian?" Paul, when writing to his fellow Christians, put it into even more startling form: Philippians 2:5, *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*. A more literal translation would be, "Let the same disposition be in you that was also in Christ Jesus." If that is what it means to be a Christian, "I'd better get down on my knees" (to quote a Black minister). If a Christian is one who has the mind and disposition of Jesus Christ, that individual thinks like Christ, loves like Christ, has the same objectives as Christ, and lives like Christ. Do I? Do you? Does anyone? When asking questions such as these, it is always more interesting to ask your enemies instead of your peers. Consider the changes within the world today, the United States and the west in general, are viewed as the great Satan by the Moslem world. Why? What causes the Moslem world to view the west in this manner? Is it because they are Christian? No! It is not by the mere title of our religion that the Moslem portion of the world views us as Satan. It is by our actions that the Moslem world views us! Remember what the old saying tells us, *actions speak louder than words!* They observe the decline of decency, the decline of moral values, the decline of respect, the decline of family values, and the decline of discipline toward our beliefs as the basis for their disdain toward the west.

The built-in definitions of *Christian* is indeed awesome. When we look past *Christians* to the historic Christ, it becomes sublime. To think like Christ is to look into the vast mysterious universe and whisper *Father* as Christ did. To have the same disposition as Christ is to look at another man, any other, and say, *Brother* regardless of his race, condition, or attitude. To have the reactions characteristic of Christ is to study confused, disappointing human society and set about with seeming naivete to turn it into the Kingdom of Heaven. To grow old in Christ is to face death with complete peace and joy and calmly prepare for a more meaningful life in *another room of the Father's house*. To love like Christ is to love God with all one's being, heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love the *neighbor* as one loves oneself. We are not only to love the neighbor who is lovable and responsive, but the unlovely ones, the hostile ones, and the naturally repulsive. To pray as Christ did is to ask forgiveness for those who would kill us if they could. To be like Christ is to trust in the things of the spirit, not to guns and battleships, but to justice, sincerity, truth, love, and the grace of God. To live like Christ is to strive for the objectives He sought, being the glory of God and the welfare of all mankind.

As one turns from these thoughts to the daily news and studies the problems of human hearts and human society as they are today, one should return to this picture of a *Christ-one* with a solemn prayer rising in one's heart. "God give us people like that!" or even, "God make me like that!" If there were enough of these *Christ-ones* they would make the world a paradise! It is for lack of these that the world continues to be, in many respects, a hell. But, alas, that is the destiny of mankind! It is for this reason prophecy is written concerning the end of this Age. This prophecy does not have any one single source and both the Moslem and the Christian can find similar statements in either the Quran or the Bible.

What, then, of our billions of Christians? Are they *Christ-ones* such as we have been describing, or are they *Christ-ones* as there are Republicans and Democrats? Maybe they are just partisans, perhaps with a degree of varying devotion to the name. Maybe the name symbolizes certain standards and ideals that appeal to them. Then again, God forbid, maybe we should join the cynics and say these *Christians* are merely people who have been caught up in a stream of inherited ideas and cultural practices. Ideas and practices that mean little to their lives but tend to carry on from generation to generation by momentum? We are they, these who have taken upon themselves *the name which is above every name*? We, you and I, who are called Christian, are those souls, and the world wants to know, are we truly *Christ like*?

Here are some *Christians* as we have observed them:

- 1) A weeping mother who plants a tiny gravestone over a little mound of earth bearing the epitaph *Asleep in the arms of Jesus*.
- 2) A raving young Moslem who cannot find words vile enough to condemn all *church people*, but when Jesus is mentioned he says with some enthusiasm, *Oh, the son of Mary? He's all right!*
- 3) A young honor student who has turned aside from fame and fortune to bury himself in a far-off post of service to suffering humanity *in Jesus' name*.
- 4) The church member who slips into his pew once a year (at Passover which most of you know as Easter).
- 5) A defeated derelict of skid row, weeping out, *Am I a Christian? Oh, how I wish I could be!*
- 6) The notorious caricature who was baptized in Christ's name, confirmed in his name, married in his name, and who will probably be buried in his name, but with no other church attendance to his credit.
- 7) The noble first citizen of the community who makes his every decision after a whispered prayer: *What would Jesus do (WWJD)?*

All this adds up to what? What is a Christian? Who does the Christian think he is? What does the name mean to him? Should we give attention to an increasing multitude of people who have not taken the name of Christian upon themselves, but have evidently been profoundly influenced by Jesus Christ?

On a recent tour of Palestine, an Arab guide who spoke fluently and understandingly of things Christian, was accosted by an American tourist: "You talk like a Christian."

"Of course," was his reply, "I am a Christian."

"But I thought you were a Moslem," said the tourist.

"Oh yes," he said, "I am a Moslem, but I am also a Christian, I believe in Jesus."

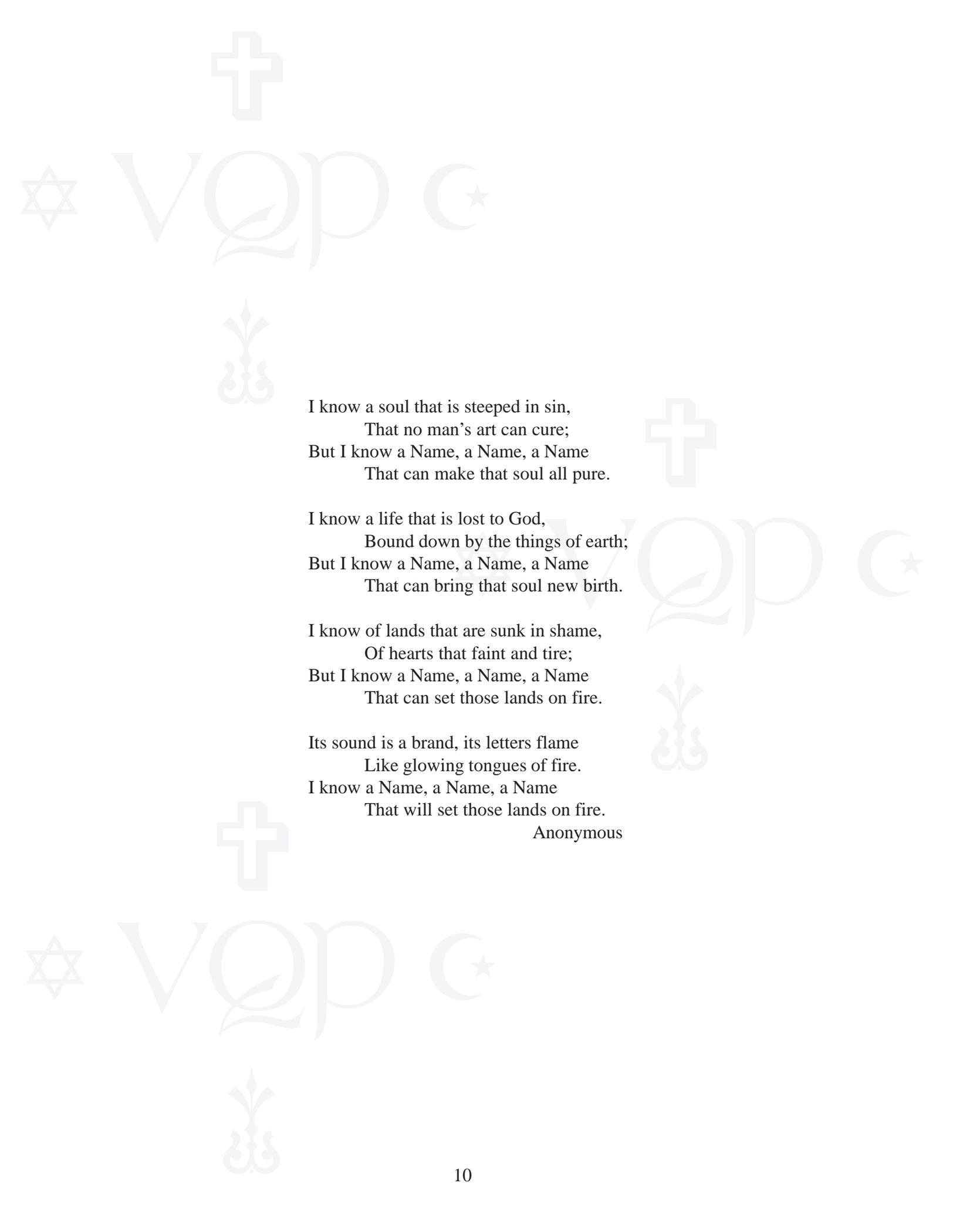
There is strong evidence that such marginal followers are increasing in number. Students of our times speak of silent *permeation* by which Christian ideals and attitudes are spreading among all cultures throughout the world. There are sects of Buddhists whose little children meet in Sunday schools and sing, "Buddha loves me, this I know." At the tenth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, it was impressive to hear prayers for peace and brotherhood coming supposedly from the sacred writings of Mohammed. However, we remember Mohammed also preached with a naked sword in his hand while he urged his soldiers on to bloody warfare. Gandhi, the Hindu, while still revering the sacred cow of Hinduism sang, "In the cross of Christ I glory" and called for nonviolence and love toward his enemies. Is it interesting to study the temples of Bahai, the new eclectic cult that has come out of Islam, and note the statue of Jesus standing prominently among the pundits of the ages, with his teachings chiseled on the walls.

What does the word *Christian* really mean? What should it mean? We hazard a general analysis of the varied reactions:

- 1) There is a vast and growing multitude of people throughout the world who are impressed by Jesus Christ, at least a little.
- 2) There are many people who not only like Jesus but follow Him in a general sort of way, He appeals to their best selves as the incarnation of all that is highest and best.
- 3) There is a noble group of folk who constitute the working force of vital Christianity, they have accepted Jesus Christ as the Son of God who is reconciling the world unto himself; they not only have Christ, He has them.

Who, then, deserves to be called *Christian*? Maybe we should leave the judgement to God. We remember Jesus took a surprisingly liberal attitude toward the first group called *Christians*, the farthest out of His followers. One of his zealous disciples protested to him one day that certain people, not of his disciple band, were carrying on in his name without authorization. Mark 9:39-40, "*Do not stop him,*" Jesus said. "*No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.*" Would it then be in harmony with Jesus' own attitude to say if any person, anyone, likes Jesus, even a little, to *let him alone and rejoice*? If folks like Jesus, they like what he likes, at least a little, and are headed at least somewhat in his direction. It is not for more words, nor institutions with their tags and procedures, nor movements with their membership lists that Christianity is concerned, but for life, love and eternal realities that lie deeper than words. Let us thank God for all who like Jesus, even a little, and for all *permeation* of Christian ideas and ideals. The more the better!

But is that enough? Is it the measure of power of the *name which is above every name*? Can we settle for horizon grays as an adequate palette for the portrait of Christ or Christian? To our fathers, the name was a martial word, with overtones of the Pilgrim's chorus, the throb of marching saints. These soldiers of right and truth lead on under His banner to the far-off divine event when the kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. As Christians, we should judge no one. We should face up humbly to all the inconsistencies in our own hearts and in the lives of others, who so often seem to be wearing the mantle of their Christianity in strange ways. We recognize the seeming cleavage between the drives of our human nature and the noble heights to which Christ is calling us. But we find no pattern of Christianity in either the Bible or Christian history that allows for anything less than an all-out commitment to the highest and best, as revealed in Jesus Christ.



I know a soul that is steeped in sin,
That no man's art can cure;
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name
That can make that soul all pure.

I know a life that is lost to God,
Bound down by the things of earth;
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name
That can bring that soul new birth.

I know of lands that are sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire;
But I know a Name, a Name, a Name
That can set those lands on fire.

Its sound is a brand, its letters flame
Like glowing tongues of fire.
I know a Name, a Name, a Name
That will set those lands on fire.

Anonymous

II

Can A Human Being Become Christlike?

What is man that you are mindful of him, . . . ? Psalm 8:4

The word Christian is heroic as we have noted. It seems we would like to be Christians worthy of the name and measure up to the picture we have just painted. All that is good within us says, *Amen!* However, the question remains, can we do so? Is it possible for earthbound, gland-driven, neurotic humans like us to achieve such nobility? Are such dimensions of character attainable in a world like this by people like us?

We may well pause to think and to pray before any of us called *Christian* provides an answer. These are not only embarrassing questions for all would-be Christians, they are perhaps the most searching questions that could be asked concerning the nature of man and his destiny. As we have said, enough *Christ-ones* such as we have described, would make the world a paradise, and it is for the lack of such that it continues to be, in many respects, a hell. Our meditation is turning the spotlight on earth's supreme deficit. Earth does not have enough *Christ-ones* to function as it should. Is it not irresistible logic then if anything can be done to increase the supply of such a strategic commodity. It is earth's most important undertaking? With an intensity that should border on desperation, we therefore ask, Can a human being become Christlike? Can even God make a *Christ-one* out of a person like me, who lives in a world like this? Or does realism demand we reduce our definition of the word *Christian* and settle for more earthly specifications? Shall we continue to strive for Christians who are Christlike, or should we be satisfied if we have Christians who like Christ but make little pretense of being like him?

The voices of the devout, the faith of our fathers, and the hopeful yearnings of the Christian centuries answer with an emotional **NO!** Let there be no compromise in our Christian ideals and goals! **Wait!** Another chorus of voices roars out of the contemporary scene today with an ominous **Yes!** Woefully however, they are calling for the downgrading of Christian standards to what they call *realism*. Some of the voices are thus demanding more earthy Christians are very loud, accentuated by prestige, backed by weighty volumes of opinion and endorsed by impressive *schools of thought*. To bid people strive for such moral heights some would tell us is a counsel of perfection that can only end in frustration and despair. Human nature is not like that, they argue. At best, they aver, to preach such lofty idealism will only produce hypocrites.

Having a strong tendency toward theological pacifism, we would find it more comfortable to ignore these philosophies of negation, avoid an argument, and go on our way. But, do we dare do such? Pagan cynicism is echoing too freely today through the halls of learning. It hangs like a psychological smog over too many thought centers of the world. It threatens to become a roadblock in the way of our whole Christian enterprise, especially if the Christian enterprise is anything like our fathers have conceived it to be.

The controversial situation of our day is easy to understand. We are living in a *disturbed world*, as some people are calling it. What we hear is the groaning of a sick shell-shocked civilization, maybe a decadent, dying civilization wounded unto death by a series of world convulsions. Time will tell which it is, sick unto death, or recovering unto newness of life. It is not Christianity that is sick but our so-called *Christian civilization*, a culture that is Christian in part but infiltrated with too many things that are not Christlike.

Voices that are shrieking bitter complaints from podium and bookshelf are largely those of *angry young men* who huddled in shell holes and dugouts of war, or *angry youth* on the street corner of our cities viewing the police across from them, with all hell raging around them. Our youth have cursed everyone and everything who might have been to blame for putting them where they are. Their anger is not surprising. We share much of it. Anger does not make anyone a safe guide toward truth and wisdom. Ideas must stand on their own feet as either true or false, wise or foolish, safe or dangerous. They must make good in the presence of wisdom of the past as well as in the torture test of contemporary emergencies. Grow up angry youth and while you grow, **listen**, even as you continue to compel those of the older generation to **listen** to you. If both groups, the younger and the older set, do not learn to **listen** to one another in a spirit led manner this nation is on the edge of another civil war. If that should happen it will be a full blown race war and both sides will leave God on the outside of reasoning.

The mental *groanings* of contemporary thought are due also to intellectual indigestion caused by the rapid intake of enormous quantities of new food for thought, coming from physics, psychology, sociology, anatomy, biology, and what not, with breathtaking breakthroughs into whole new areas of factual truth via the Internet. A statistician has estimated the total of human knowledge is now doubling every four years. We simply cannot take it in so fast and understand its meaning. We are intellectually and spiritually dizzy.

The specialist is more and more the *sine qua non* (essential) of the advancing line of scientific knowledge. It takes a brilliant-minded staff of specially trained scholars to man even a sector of the line, and the intensity and narrowness of specialization is increasing. Such is necessary for efficiency, but while these dedicated scholars learn more and more about less and less, they have less and less time, opportunity, or mind-set to gain overall knowledge outside their own specialties. Everyone is a layman beyond the boundaries of his own specialization, and in a judgment concerning ultimate truth, his ideas are only slightly more trustworthy than those of his untutored fellow citizens. Where are the wise? How can anyone be wise under the circumstances? Maybe the wise men will come along when all of us have had time to get out of our narrow ruts to think of broader horizons, and pray a little.

Philosophy is supposed to be the coordinator of knowledge, deducing harmonized meaning out of the mass of known facts, but philosophy is swamped today. The wheel of progress is turning so fast that the accompanying wheel of understanding is exploding at the hub with uncoordinated hypotheses flying off in all directions. Wisdom concerning the *universe* is in danger of degenerating into isolated theories about what is coming to look like a *multiverse*.

The worst hazard to any serious effort to attain ultimate truth is the fact that so much of the present advance is in the physical realm with only minor achievements being reported from the areas of the spiritual. We are so hypnotized by the performances of the physical sciences that we tend to forget anything but the physical exists. In many minds, realism becomes a synonym for materialism. Our fathers called theology the queen of the sciences. *Modern science was born of Christian theology*. The word *universe* was coined by Christian scholars to express their conclusions after they studied the doctrine of monotheism and its corollaries. Since there is only one God and all things exist in Him, they reasoned, the completeness of things is a unit, a universe. The God of nature is one God, therefore all the phenomena of nature exist in oneness in Him. Whatever is found to be true in one place at one time may be depended upon to be true anywhere, at any time. Truth is universal; that is, all-inclusive, eternal, unchanging, integrated and anchored in God. So, through the Christian centuries, scholars have experimented and thought their way from truth to truth into the vastness of modern science and our scientific civilization. Would one be justified in surmising that if men ever cease to believe in God they will soon cease to believe in the universe? Can a wheel continue to be a wheel if its hub has been destroyed? In other words, can the superstitions, astrologies, etc., that reassert themselves whenever Christian faith lags, destroy God? Our contemporary situation is calling for Christian theology to re-

mount the throne of truth, but to do so, it must be a mature Christianity. Your God is too small, is being said in some quarters and what the speaker is saying, of course, is that much of our thinking about God today is too small. Our thinking is too small to balance our advanced thinking about God's vast, mysterious universe, that we of today discuss so casually over our dinner tables.

Truth cannot be attained on a purely materialistic basis. When Jesus' disciples returned from their first mission they came back running over with joy. Remember, they had been sent out under His personal direction to minister to all human life, as He had been doing. Such wonderful things had happened and they now understood so much that had not been clear to them hitherto. Jesus rejoiced with them then in a prayer. He made a profound suggestion, paraphrased from Luke 10:21-24, *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ...* Then He said to His *little children*, *Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.* His *little children* now had the eyes and ears of their souls open to realms of truth to which they had formerly been blind and deaf. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. And let us not forget, spiritual things constitute a major sector of truth. Epistemology, the science of knowing, becomes mature and dependable only when its servants proceed with the eyes and ears of their souls functioning along with those of their bodies. The behavior of an atom may be learned in a laboratory of physical science, but the full meaning of its behavior lies far beyond that laboratory in the realms of being. We must all understand meaning is rooted in God.

But enough of this! Let us turn the scholastic debate over to the capable minds of the Christian scholars and hurry on to our appointed task, a practical concern for the making of Christians. According to the Bible and Christian history, it can be done. Page Francis of Assisi! Gregory the Great! Livingstone! Luther! Kagawa!, until you lose yourself among the myriads of the *white-robed throng*, before the throne of God! The world has had some wonderful Christians. Heaven is filled with them. But, oh, how we need more of them on earth today, real ones, many, many more of them! If the world is to be so well equipped with *means of mass destruction*, it had better become more adequately equipped with *Christ-ones*. If all the barriers of separation are to come down and all races, creeds, and colors of folk are to live in *togetherness*, as our next-door neighbors, some of us had better take on the *disposition of Jesus Christ*.

More *Christ-ones*! God, give us enough of them to make it a decent world! Christianity is that prayer in action.

III

The Man Who Did

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:15-16

There is a section of the Holy Bible that seems to be divinely provided to guide this quest we have undertaken. The making of Christians is its entire concern and we refer to the Pauline literature, so-called because its central figure is Paul the apostle. It is the section of the Bible following the four Gospels and consists of The Acts of the Apostles and thirteen of Paul's epistles. The Acts begins as a narrative of the continuing experiences of the people who had been nearest to Jesus *in the days of his flesh*, but it changes quickly to a report on the career of a man named Saul (Paul). He strides into the story in the seventh chapter, his words and deeds being reported from then on in great detail. In letters to friends and churches, he parallels the story of his life with an autobiographic account of his inner feelings and reactions. It is a surprising fact that almost half of the New Testament is either about Paul or from his own pen. The divine purpose seems obvious: the Bible thus gives us a running commentary on the making of a Christian out of a man who, at the beginning, was Christianity's bitterest enemy. It is the classic Biblical exhibit of the transforming power of Jesus Christ and points out the milestones that mark the way of his transformation.

We first see Paul, under the name *Saul of Tarsus*, as a bigoted, cruel young fanatic presiding over the stoning to death of a fellow Jewish youth named Stephen, Christianity's first martyr. The despicable young firebrand Saul goes forth *breathing threats and murder* against Christians everywhere, pursuing them even unto distant cities, and dragging them to prison and death. What a man this is, to become the author of much of Christianity's New Testament! Sometimes, it seems, as we read Biblical text, we find God has a very active sense of humor. When Judas Iscariot defected from the apostolic band and betrayed Jesus, and hanged himself, Peter wanted the apostles to hurry up and elect another man to take his place. And so they did, electing Matthias, a good man who had been with them throughout their three years with Jesus. But we never hear of Matthias again, God didn't seem to have a job for him.

God had a candidate for the apostolic position, an amazing one, Christianity's enemy number one, Saul the persecutor. From God's point of view, Saul was the perfect candidate, because God was about to take this enemy number one and change him into Christian number one, the most dynamic leader of the early church. Through thirty years of conviction, decision, repentance, growth, suffering, striving, plodding, learning, contending, forgiving, and just plain living, God would demonstrate in and through Saul how He could take the worst of men to become the best of men. In Paul's case, the most mistaken of men may become tremendously righteous. Saul of Tarsus would become Christianity's Exhibit A, *a sinner saved by grace*. So, it is to the Pauline literature we now turn to learn God's program for the making of a Christian. If it worked with Saul of Tarsus in the first century, it can work with you and me in the twenty-first century and with our children as with all mankind.

Paul (Saul) as a person was of interest from any point of view. He would have been listed sooner or later in the first century *Who's Who*, under one classification or another. His talents were

many, varied and of a high order. He was always dynamic, following whatever objective he had at the moment with all his might. Furthermore, he was the heir of four great ancient civilizations, Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Cilician.

When, with a flare of pride, he announced he was born in Tarsus, no mere city, he was saying much. Tarsus was the immemorial metropolis of the richly endowed province of Cilicia that had been an important area of the ancient world since long before human history was recorded. Cilicia was that spearhead of rich delta land and foothills thrusting itself south from the Taurus Mountains of Asia Minor into the Mediterranean Sea. It lay just west of the point where the coast of the Roman province of Syria turned westward and became the coast of what is now Turkey. Tarsus seems always to have been inhabited by a virile, progressive people. In ancient times they developed agriculture to a high degree, then they looked at the foothills of the Taurus range and introduced the raising of goats. Perfecting the breeding of their goats, through many generations, until they grew a long, fine hair that was superb for the weaving of tent cloth and made the Cilician tentmakers famous throughout the world. Next, the Tarsians looked at the mountain mass that shut them in to the west. Their Cydnus River rushed down from the heights past their city to the sea. It had flowed through the mountain barrier through rugged box canyons that were too narrow and precipitous to provide room for a road. Such a road was sorely needed, not only by Tarsus, but by the world. Beyond those mountains, away to the west, lay the vaguely known continent of Europe with its rising importance. The ancient lands to the east, Babylon, Nineveh, Persia, etc., and the equally ancient Egypt of North Africa had always wanted to get their caravans through those mountains but had been blocked at Tarsus. So, some forgotten engineer of Tarsus called his neighbors to bring their tools and to follow him into the hills. We do not know how long it took, nor what it cost in sweat, tears, and perhaps blood, but they chiseled a highway along those rugged cliffs and gave the world the *Cilician Gates*. Henceforth, the traffic of three continents would flow through the streets of Tarsus.

Finally, the men of Tarsus took note of their relation to the sea. The vast Mediterranean was at their doors, but it meant practically nothing to their lives or their business. The Cydnus River flowed into the sea through a flat, swampy delta, too shallow and uncertain to be navigated by seagoing ships. So, in due time, the Tarsians got their shovels, and with whatever engineering skills they may have possessed, dredged out a harbor so good that even the proud triremes of Rome would be glad to enter. Yes, it would be in that man-made harbor of Tarsus where Mark Anthony of Rome and Cleopatra of Egypt would stage their historic rendezvous.

What would the ambitious Tarsians do next? They turned their attention to matters of the mind and founded a university, which in time, would rank with Athens in Greece and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the three major centers of Greek culture in the world. Their philosophers, poets, dramatists, and athletes would rank among the most famous of the world. It is not surprising the Greeks came to settle in Tarsus in numbers and the Greek language came to be commonly spoken. In due time, Rome smiled on Tarsus and Caesar made it a royal city granting citizenship to its leading men. No indeed! Tarsus was no mean city in which to be born.

Our little hero was born there and was named Saul. The Bible tells us that as Paul he was from Tarsus (Acts 8:1), a Benjamite (Romans 11:1), a Jew (Acts 21:39), a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25), a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), an Apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), from Cilicia (Acts 21:39), spoke Aramaic (Acts 22:2), spoke Greek (Acts 21:37), and a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Paul tells us his people were Hebrews of the strictest sect, the Pharisees. His father, though a Jew, was a Roman citizen, which must have meant he was a man of unusual influence, perhaps wealthy, for that was a prerequisite of Roman citizenship. We do not know when Jews had first come to Tarsus. Since 722 BCE there had been repeated political convulsions in the little nation of Israel forcing her people to scatter over the world for refuge. By the first century, colonies of Jews had gathered in almost every

city and village of the Greco-Roman world. As has always been true of them, they suffered and prospered, they were despised and honored. In each ghetto and suburb they erected a synagogue to serve as the center of their religion, education, and social life. Each Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, the ancient scrolls would be reverently removed from their closets and read to the congregation. Gradually it came to pass that not only Jews, but soul-hungry Gentiles would gather to listen to the reading and preaching of the majestic concepts of the law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and Israel's messianic hope. All would join in singing the psalms once written by David and the musicians of the ancient Temple. Jewish religious culture was slowly sinking into the burned-out soul of the pagan world in Tarsus as in other cities.

Into the heart of all this came the child Saul. His name perhaps echoes the joy and pride of his parents at his birth. Saul, Israel's first king, had been a handsome young giant standing head and shoulders above all other men, and he had continued through the years, as the lamented darling of the nation, to occupy a central place in the hearts of the Hebrews. "Thanks be to God for this alert little lad," exclaimed the proud parents. He too would be kingly and great someday! They would name their baby *Saul*. As the little boy grew up, however, it became evident that physically he would not be kingly, but short, bowlegged, squint-eyed, and rather insignificant in appearance. So another name became attached to him, a Roman name, *Paulus* meaning *little*. We would guess it was a nickname given him by his playmates, *the little guy*, at least this is the way it would have happened in our present day.

So here was Saul growing up in the midst of the vigorous, many-sided life of Cilician Tarsus. Whatever might be insinuated about his physical appearance, everybody soon recognized that in mind and personality, he was indeed destined to be a giant. He would give an account of himself someday and his parents gave him every advantage for education and training. Following a strong Jewish tradition every boy should learn a manual trade to ensure his future livelihood, otherwise you are raising your son to be a thief. They apprenticed him to the tentmakers. While at the same time in the local synagogue he would learn reading, writing, numbers, the Old Testament Scriptures, and other fundamental subjects that every Jewish boy learned. However ambitious parents like Saul's were not content with that, and sent their son to the Temple University at Jerusalem, where, under famous rabbis like Gamaliel, he became a son of the Law, expert in all the traditions of the Hebrews.

While climbing this orthodox ladder of Jewish education, he also became conversant with the cultures of other civilizations of which he was a part. There is nothing to prove whether he attended the Greek University of Tarsus or whether his being Jew barred him from that privilege, but he was fluent in the Greek language. He could quote the Greek scholars, and in his illustrations he often used the language of the Greek athletic games. Had he been a registered student of the university at Tarsus, or had he just peeked through his favorite knothole at the games and listened with his keen young mind when famous alumni came back to read their poems and expound their philosophic theories? We do not know, but we do know that somehow he absorbed much of the Greek culture. Many an olive crown of victory was brought back to Tarsus from the Olympic games and we think Saul often joined in the cheers for the home team.

The little lad was also a citizen of Rome, whereas, few of his companions could boast of that high standing. His citizenship was inherited from his father and Paul was evidently very proud of it and used it often to the advantage of his personal security and the achievement of his purposes. Just as he depicted the Greek athlete in his writing to illustrate the Christian life, so he also pictured the Christian in the terminology of a Roman legionnaire clad in full armor. By any test, the young man Saul (Paul) of Tarsus was equipped to be a universal citizen of the world at his time.

He came back from Jerusalem in due time, wearing the insignia of his well-earned degrees, accepting with grace the chief seats in the synagogues, a learned rabbi, an honor student of the famous Gamaliel, a citizen of the Empire. Then, a supreme recognition, he was recalled to Jerusalem to become a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the religiopolitical council of the nation that wielded all the

power Rome was willing to concede to the Jews. It was in this role as a member of the council that Saul first appeared in the Christian records. He had cast his vote for the death of Stephen and was presiding over his execution. We do not know when or under what circumstances Paul had made his first contact with Christianity, but we know his reaction had been negative. Strict and thoroughgoing doctor of the law that he was, he did not like what he had heard about Jesus. Jesus had been too careless about observing the ceremonial laws and traditions of the rabbis, from his perspective. For a man who had been crucified to be proclaimed the long-awaited Messiah, that was too much. As to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, he did not believe it. Jesus was still dead and these fanatical followers of his had to be stamped out.

Modern psychoanalysis suspects some of the fire of Paul's bitter reaction against Christianity was being kindled by psychic reactions in his own soul. He had committed his whole life to becoming a son of the Law, but now in mid-life, he was facing failure. He loved the law, but he found he was not always able to keep the law (see Romans chapter 7). Within his being, there was a law of sin and death which kept rising out of his own passions to defeat his own high moral aspirations. Somehow the law was not enough. Furthermore, in aggravating contrast to his own inner struggles, he could not blind himself to the fact that the Christians had a spiritual something he did not have, a moral victory and a peace of heart such as he longed for, but could not achieve. He had seen Stephen die, as he prayed, Acts 7:59-60, *While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.* It was evidently Saul who later reported these details out of his own memory, showing what an impression they had made on him. Undoubtedly, there had been other experiences of like nature as he dragged Christians to prison and death. Have you seen the Christians die? came to be a byword in the early centuries. Saul was more and more haunted by the ghosts of his victims and by the unresolved problems of his own inner life.

So it came to pass that as he traveled to Damascus to apprehend some Christians who were supposed to be hiding there, at midday, according to his own report in Acts 26:13-18, *About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic,*

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Then I asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Then there follows an account of Paul's being told to arise and proceed into Damascus and prepare himself for great things that Jesus had for him to suffer in his name. In telling this to King Agrippa about twenty-five years after the event, Paul concluded the story: *So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.* (verse 19) Jesus, whom Saul thought dead, was alive again, and had confronted His persecutor in the way, challenging him to reverse the machinery of his soul and the whole bent of his life and become His apostle, and Saul had surrendered. Saul of Tarsus had risen that day, probably in the year 33 CE, from the dust of the Damascus road to play a leading role in guiding the world into Christian channels. What had happened to him? What continued to happen to him through some thirty more years of living? Paul tried to explain it in his epistles. Christians for twenty centuries have tried to understand as they read and reread those epistles. We are going to try to understand it through our study. God is here, engaged in, Dare we say? His supreme work, the making of a Christian. We will try to find guidance for **what can happen to us** by viewing what happened to Paul.

IV By the Grace of God

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17

Something had indeed happened to Saul of Tarsus, something revolutionary and of the essence of his being (existential). He was a completely changed man, not merely in a portion of his ideas and attitudes, but in his whole makeup. It was primarily as a report concerning himself that he wrote, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*. In sermons and letters he tried repeatedly to explain, using vivid figures of speech, explaining to himself, and at the same time explaining others to themselves, for through his influence, similar experiences were coming to many. Ephesians 2:1-3, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.* To all who had not committed themselves to Christ, he exclaimed: Ephesians 5:14 “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

In these startling metaphors, Paul, of course, is talking in poetry, for only poetry could portray such experiences. There are some things that have to be said with flowers and music, cold prose does not have the emotional warmth to transmit their meaning. However, be it prose or poetry, Paul is picturing some sober facts. He says the entrance upon a Christian life is an all-out break with the past and the beginning of a thrilling new existence that compares with the former things, as life compares with death, light with darkness, purity with filth, liberty with slavery. The fact that such a transformation is possible, is rooted in the most profound facts concerning God and man.

Becoming a Christian, he shows, is not a mere matter of repairing one's soul and bringing it up to Christian specifications by tinkering with a weakness here and adding a virtue there. One cannot do it that way, one cannot say to oneself: Come now, I am going to change to a more Christian philosophy of life, from now on I will look at everything in a Christian way. No! The new outlook does not come that way, nor can one write a code of Christian rules of conduct and say: Now I am going to behave like a Christian. Such a course will end in frustration and failure. New Year's resolutions are a gesture in the right direction but they are notorious for their ineffectiveness, at least, they are not the key to a Christian life. The way of Christ is a highway in every sense, very difficult to travel, too difficult for anyone to set out on it unaided and alone. Christ-like love is the key to all the virtues, but you cannot command yourself to love, especially to love as Christ did. You cannot suddenly shift the gears of your soul so as to love what you formerly despised and hate what you once loved. No, these changes must take place in the opposite order. First you must become, then you will do, just by being yourself. Become a *Christ-one* and then let your attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and decisions create their own channels. They will be channels of godliness! A meadowlark sings as he does because he is a meadowlark, a diamond shimmers with beauty because it is a diamond, and a true Christian blesses the world in which he lives, not by trying, but by being. As Jesus said of the follower, Matthew 5:13-14, *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”* So, in reality, a Christian just is!

The problem of making Christians thus looms up as a staggering one, involving not reformation but transformation. This, of course, brings us to the basic truth of the whole Pauline experience, and of our own experience. The making of a Christian is a job not for man, or for any unaided human scheme or endeavor, but for God, because only God can make a Christian. It is a miracle of divine grace, as our fathers have always said: It is *the given*, to use a term from theology, something God gives us out of His divine love, because otherwise, we could not attain it.

Christians can be made, for God is willing to help make them. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exclaims, Ephesians 1:19-23, *His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.*

Ephesians 2:1-5, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.* In other words, God the creator, who once cast the planets into orbit, exerted that same creative power to raise Jesus from the dead and He is now exerting it as He recreates the repentant souls of men, raising them from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Paul liked to call this process *salvation*. A lifesaver, on the bathing beach, in a burning building, or on death's row, is one who comes to do for helpless people what they cannot do for themselves. They are doomed beyond their resources until the Savior comes. As Paul meditated on Jesus, who had come to him in his extremity, he invented several titles for Him, filled with loyalty and affection, but none so beautiful as this one, *Our Savior*. *Jesus saves* was the emotion-packed battle cry of the campaign of loving concern he carried through the length and breadth of the Roman Empire.

So Paul lived on into a strange new career, repudiated by his own people, only half trusted by the Christians. He toiled at his trade in tentmakers' shops to make a living. He witnessed for Christ in the synagogues until driven out by wrathful countrymen. He suffered repeated insults for Christ's sake, but *always rejoicing*, praying, mediating, loving, thinking, thinking, thinking, preaching, and writing. Gradually, in his mind, a profound theology took form, centering in certain sublime truths.

First, Paul marveled at God's wondrous plan. These things had not just happened. God had planned them. His own early life, his conversion, the change that had recently come to his entire inner life, and the marvelous things he saw happening to others as he told them the *Good News* about Jesus Christ were planned by God. With inspired insight he wrote: Paraphrased from Ephesians 1:4-14, *Before the foundation of the world He (God) chose us to become, in Christ, His holy and blameless children. God has allowed us to know the secret of His plan, and it is this, He purposes, in His sovereign will, that all human history shall be consummated in Christ. Whereby everything that exists in Heaven, or earth, shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him and here is the staggering thing, we have been promised a share!*

Verily, Paul is soaring into the heights and plummeting the depths. In the eternal councils of God, before the world was, there was concern for you and me. Our names were written there. Of course it was so. God is the I AM, in whom past, present, and future blend into eternal present, but the thought is staggering. It is, in fact, the profound doctrine of predestination.

Could we reduce it to a more understandable level by imagining a human parallel? Once upon a time, in the quiet of the night, two loving human hearts conferred in whispers concerning the future welfare of their unborn child, you and me. Our name was mentioned there, nobody else knew it, and how beautiful was the picture painted that night of the life that was to be! God, our heavenly Father, is like that too, says Paul. He planned for us and as we write this, we could use another example and look at the construction of any significant building project. Let us look at a major project of construction. We are told the results will be very beautiful, but as far as we can see, in the beginning, are piles of rubbish and men scurrying about without any obvious purpose in anything they do. But, we are not worrying about the outcome, for we are in on a secret: in the office of the Superintendent of Construction there is a master plan worked out to every detail of the finished project. Paul lets us in on another secret: in this seemingly topsy-turvy existence of ours there is a plan. Oh, such a wonderful plan, and under the management of the Divine Superintendent, all things are working together for good toward ends that are sublime and wonderful, and above all that we could ask or think! And our names are written into that plan.

Second, Paul became more and more overwhelmed by his thought concerning *the price God paid* for our redemption. Its symbol is the cross! Out of Paul's meditation came the solemn sentence. Ephesians 1:7, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.* In the old days, before he looked at Christian truth from the inside, the cross had been an offense to him. To his philosophic Greek mind it was foolishness. To his strict Jewish mind it was a stumbling block. To believe Israel's Messiah had been crucified between two thieves was, he felt, an insult to the faith of his fathers. But, lo, now, when as a Christian, he looked at Calvary and whispered to himself. He died there for me! The Christians saw the cross as the truth that surmounts all other truths. 1 Corinthians 2:2, *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* He said to the people of Corinth. Paul also said this in Romans 5:8, *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Oh, the wonder of it! The tragedy of it! The assurance it gives us of the saving grace of God! The ages have vindicated Paul, the cross is the only adequate symbol of the Christian religion. Blessed is the Lamb that was slain and is alive again, sings the white-robed throng in heaven. In the cross of Christ I glory, sing the pilgrims on earth.

A third truth gripped Paul with new meaning when he looked long and reverently at the cross: the terrifying problem of human sin. Sin nailed Jesus to the cross. William Gladstone, the great Christian statesman of England, once shouted to the British Parliament, "Gentlemen, there is only one problem in England, it is sin." He might have said, "There is only one problem in the world, it is sin." Sin is man's rebellion against God, resulting in the corruption of his own being, the thwarting of his own aspirations and the destruction of his noblest institutions.

Paul had been conscious of the problem of sin long before he became a Christian. He had early committed his life to the battle against sin, by way of the law of Moses. But, alas, he had found at mid life that the law was failing, even in his own life, because of *the weakness of human flesh*. It was only when he had found a Savior to do for him what he could not do for himself, that he had won the victory. It was a crucified Savior who had come to him. Ah, came the breakthrough of understanding, it had to be a crucified Savior! That was the truth beyond comprehension, the cross of Calvary was the price God had paid for man's salvation. Honor student of the Scriptures that he was, Paul should have comprehended that truth from his early rabbinic studies in the Old Testament, especially from Isaiah, but it was not until he met Jesus on the Damascus road that it became clear to him.

In his letter to the Romans, he sketched in reminiscence, his own struggles with sin, Romans 7:25b-8:4, *So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through*

Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit.

Finally, Paul's consciousness was constantly exalted by a sense of *the presence of the living Christ*. He claimed the title *apostle*, explaining his apostleship had been conferred upon him in person by Jesus. He pointed to the experience on the Damascus road as the last of Jesus' resurrection appearances. The Lord had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden on the first *New Covenant Passover* morning, and then to the eleven faithful apostles from time to time. He had also appeared to Paul, "as to one untimely born," about five years later, to call him from sin and error into the apostleship. Paul henceforth lived in the perpetual consciousness of the unseen presence of this risen Lord. In the Great Commission, Jesus had told his disciples, Matthew 28:19-20, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" Though not visible to human eyes, Jesus was now keeping His promise, He was with them. Like other Christians of the early church, Paul made every decision and performed every act after prayerfully seeking the will of that ever-present, unseen Lord. He loved to call himself *the slave of Christ*. The Acts of the Apostles should really be named, *The Continuing Acts of Jesus*, the book that records Christ's continuing ministry, carried on *in the Spirit* through the obedient and faithful disciples, with Paul in the lead.

Along with the other Christians, Paul looked forward to an early physical return of the Lord. That would only make his constant day-by-day experience of living and working a little more intensive, but the unseen Jesus accomplished this through faith and prayer. In Christ, sitting in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, the living Christ within me, and other similar phrases were his way of describing this day-by-day fellowship with the living Christ. His frequent references to the Holy Spirit were another way of saying the same thing, involving statements that were later worked out by Christian scholars into the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

As the days grew into months, and the months into years and generations, *this program of Christian living grew into a church* wherein God and man went forward together, in a divine-human partnership, committed to the raising up of Christians. Although only God can make a Christian, man has an important part to play in the transaction. Man must give his assent and his cooperation if God's grace is to be effective. Philippians 2:12-13, *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.* As Jesus had pictured it, man and God were to become yokefellows, God's strength paired with man's weakness, but both essential to the pulling of the load. Jesus saves! But He will not do so without man's consent and wholehearted cooperation, through faith and faithfulness. God made man free, free to say *No!* or *Yes!* But how wondrous is the divine response when man does say *Yes!* When the prodigal son said: *I will arise and go to my father*, he found the father coming to meet him to welcome him home.

Paul's letters are nearly all written in two parts: the first part telling about God and what He will do for us and the second part telling what we must do for God, and thereby for ourselves. In the first part, it always sounds as if God must do it all, but in the second part, we are always warned it is all up to us. Paradox though it be, both impressions are correct.

So now we will study the human side of the making of a Christian, with Paul as our guide. What must we do to be saved? The progressive steps are to be found in Paul's life and letters.

V Obedient to the Heavenly Vision

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. Acts 26:19

Humanly speaking, Paul's entrance upon the Christian life was by way of a profound decision, his acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the divine Christ, Israel's promised Messiah. The decision was accompanied by an all-out commitment of his life to Christian discipleship.

Paul explained it all in his trial before King Agrippa at Caesarea about twenty-five years after it happened. (See reference text above.) Paul was on trial for his life, but he was really being held by the Romans in protective custody to keep his enemies from killing him for becoming a Christian. The Roman authorities were friendly to him as to a fellow Roman citizen, but his case was serious in their eyes, because Christians were suspected of being disloyal to Caesar. King Agrippa hoped to brush aside the damaging charge that Paul was a Christian and set him free. So it was in a very friendly mood that Agrippa bade him tell his own story. How had he, the distinguished Saul of Tarsus, gotten himself so involved with this despised sect called Christians?

Paul gave his answer simply, frankly, and with carefully chosen words. He told of his early years in Tarsus as a child of strict Jewish parents, of his activities in early manhood as a persecutor of Christians, and then of the episode that had taken place on the road outside the walls of Damascus. In ways beyond his understanding, he said, this Jesus whom he so violently opposed had appeared to him, obviously alive after death, and had challenged him to reverse the whole trend of his life and become one of his followers. And Paul concluded: Acts 26:19, *So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.* In other words, he confessed he was a Christian, explaining it as the result of a decision he had made on that day. He, Paul, had been confronted by the risen Christ, convinced the Christian claims were true, overwhelmed by the heavenly vision of what his own life and destiny would be if Christ could have his way with him, and he had given assent to the divine call. Everything that had transpired in his life since then had been in consequence of that decision.

To anyone who has read extensively in Christian literature, this story has a familiar ring. The records of Christian experience are filled with reports of just such a crisis of decision at the beginning of a Christian life. One senses innumerable other Christian careers that might have been, but did not come to pass, because the person challenged with the decision said, *No!* to God instead of *Yes!*

Pontius Pilate, the Roman judge (governor) who tried Jesus, found himself the real prisoner before the bar with a sickening realization, that in giving his decision for or against the majestic figure before him, he was about to decide not Jesus' fate, but his own. Matthew 27:22, "*What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?*" Pilate cried in an agony of soul. Oh, that Pilate had mustered the courage to follow his conscience in his decision. In the fifth century, Augustine, the brilliant philosopher of North Africa, found he had to contend with Jesus challenging his mind, his conscience, and his way of life. He resisted the divine confrontation desperately, for he loved his wildly extravagant, pagan ways, but Jesus would not let him alone, and when at long last he surrendered, God made him the spiritual strong man of his age to hold Christendom together through the desperate years of the breakup of the Roman Empire. Innumerable cases could be thus cited, not only from New Testament times and the Christian centuries, but from the millennia of Old Testament life. As a human soul walks life's way, the God of being confronts the human soul repeatedly with the necessity of making decisions. Some of those decisions are definitive, because in reality they are decisions for or against God. From such, the way of life and destiny always forks to the right or to the left, treads up or down, and all that follows for time and eternity is, to a considerable degree, determined thereby.

“Joel 3:14, *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.*” Cried the prophet Joel in the description of his age.

Joshua 24:15, “Choose *for yourselves this day whom you will serve,*” demanded Joshua of the tribes of Israel, as they settled in Canaan. Joshua announced his own decision, “*As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*” *What shall I do with Jesus?* has been the heart cry not only of Pilate but of millions of people since his time. For right or wrong, for good or evil, for the heights or the depths, for the God of truth and righteousness or the satanic adversary, for Christ or chaos; human beings and human institutions stand ever in the valley of decision, facing the solemn judgment of their own choices.

The Ways

To every man there openeth
A Way, and Ways, and a Way.
And the High Soul climbs the High Way,
And the Low Soul gropes the Low,
And in between, on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A High Way, and a Low.
And every man decideth
The way his soul shall go.

John Oxenham, in *Bees in Amber*.

Paul’s experience of decisions had several aspects worthy of our study. First, he was confronted with a *heavenly vision*. It was God who had taken the initiative and this is always so. God, at times and in ways of his own choosing, confronts every human being, we believe, with a vision splendid of the heavenly heights for which man was created. With some, the confrontation is dramatic and startling, as was the case with Paul. Others cannot be sure just when or how it happened. With some, the challenge to decide comes suddenly, as it did to Paul, but with others, most of us, we would guess, it comes slowly, gradually, and often through an extended period of inner struggle. But, it comes to everyone. It comes even to those who never knew the historic Jesus. To them, of course, the confrontation is in different thought patterns, but it deals intrinsically with the same issues, a choice between right and wrong and in the economy of God, it points Christward. It is the judgement of light: Light has come; shall I follow the light or choose darkness?

Robert Browning expounds on this truth in many of his poems, in fact, it is a favorite theme. John A. Hutton, in his delightful little book *Guidance from Robert Browning in Matters of Faith*, points this out, “Browning’s books teem with lines which tell of the tremendous forces that lie coiled within the soul, ready to burst out and tear open a way of escape,” an escape from human limitations and sinful habits to God and His salvation. This is done by means of innumerable careers with frequent experiences designed to stimulate their souls to make this heavenward leap. As Hutton says:

Suddenly a light falls upon a man, some message from the pure world of spirit strays into his soul, and in the moment, the world shakes beneath him. He sees himself, his sin, his shame, his awful peril in one amazing flash, and by the compulsion of a power which he cannot resist, he breaks away from it all. The past falls from him so thoroughly that the man can look at it now as if it were some horrid snake which had twined itself about him, and which now lies dead at his feet. The ray of light has burst the fetters of brass and the man stands breathless as if from a struggle, but stands for the moment free and clean, a soul newborn and made alive unto God.

It was perhaps in the angelic face of the dying Stephen that Saul first saw the reflection of the glory of God that was to awaken his soul. Later, when he was in the *fullness of radiant splendor* of the face of the risen Christ, Paul responded with his great decision.

Second, we sense Paul's decision for Christ was not easy. The story of the incident is clothed with reports of rugged accompaniments; a blazing light, men stricken to the ground, temporary blindness, etc., and these, we surmise, are suggestions of an even more rugged spiritual crisis that was raging within. The proud Pharisee of Tarsus stood confronted by the lowly carpenter of Nazareth on the issues of God's eternal purposes. As a doctor of the law, Paul supposed he knew all about such matters. Could it be he had indeed been mistaken? Had he indeed been kicking against the goals of God's will? The blinding light that had smitten his physical eyes was as nothing compared with this painful jolt of understanding that was slowly penetrating his soul. His decision was difficult, bought with spiritual pain.

Great moments of decision for God and godliness are usually painful. In literature there is the example of Victor Hugo's hero, Jean Valjean, battling through the night as his newly awakened better self strives to put down the demon hate that has grown within him because of the cruel wrongs that have been perpetrated against him. A hate so terrible he had all but killed the kindly bishop who befriended him. There is Jacob, wrestling with the angel who was trying to transform him from heel snatcher to prince of God. It is hard to commit one's life to God for several reasons: the awesome mystery of doing business with God; the reluctance of our lazy souls to launch on high spiritual adventure; and a haunting fear that if God gets His way with us. We will have to give up some things we love more than we love Him. These and other emotions cause us to resist.

Let us take a quick look at them. Great is the awesomeness and mystery of entering into a covenant with God: Moses, out on the mountain herding sheep; Moses in silence before the strange phenomenon of the bush that burned but was not consumed; Moses removing his shoes from his feet in reverence before the God who was speaking to his soul; Isaiah, in the Temple at worship, suddenly breaking through the symbolism of the liturgy to the reality of God, high and lifted up, with a job for him to do; Peter Marshall, alone in the night in his native Scottish highlands, with God tapping him on the shoulder and saying, "Peter, I want to use you!" Perhaps this was *you* when first your soul awakens to the profound fact of God and his claims upon your life. *Is this real*, you question in your heart? *My companions will laugh at me!* You stammer to yourself in cowardly fear of being different. *Maybe I'm just worked up emotionally: I'd better not take this impulse too seriously!*" Spoken as you procrastinate. No! It isn't easy to stand and face God when He comes to offer us the blessings that Saul of Tarsus learned to call salvation.

Great decisions are like a gamble. John Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* pictures his hero at the beginning of his Christian pilgrimage as a man in rags in the midst of a City of Destruction, realizing for the first time his desperate condition and crying out, "Whither must I fly?"

Evangelist comes to his rescue, saying, "Do you see yonder shining light?"

The man looks hard and long and then replies, "I think I do."

Evangelist commands him to follow that light. To decide for Christ and the Christian way is to follow a light we think we see. It requires a complete commitment of one's soul through faith.

In the smoky slums of Youngstown, Ohio, Miss Louisa Edwards, one of God's modern saints, used to spend many of her days counseling confused immigrant youths, guiding them toward the ways of Christ. She said one day, in reminiscence: "I always pity a young person who is trying to decide about becoming a Christian; he has to take so much by faith. When he has gone some distance in the Christian Way, he will find it good, but he has to make his decision on faith alone." Donald Hankey, the Student in Arms of World War I, wrote from the trenches: "Christianity is betting one's life there is a God." The first step Christward isn't easy. It is clothed with mystery and uncertainty, almost like a wager, a jump in the dark.

The natural laziness of our souls gives aid and comfort to this reluctance. Christ's call is to the heights, to things noble and heroic, humanly speaking, to the impossible. However, our human nature likes to take it easy, to loll in the valley, living by appetite and impulse. As we have already noted, Christianity has been criticized as being contrary to human nature. It is, indeed, contrary to the humanness of the human man. Human nature, when left to itself, is not likely to be Christ-like, even as a vacant lot left is not likely to become a rose garden. Water poured at random will flow uselessly downhill, not to the places where it is most needed. Human nature left to itself will probably flow downhill, not up; it is easier to do wrong than right. Theologians have given this tendency a name, *original sin*. However, the call of God is always up: Change that vacant lot from a weed patch to a rose garden! Channel that water to the places where it will work miracles of life and beauty! No, my lazy soul, this Christianity to which you are called is not a ride to heaven on flowery beds of ease. Peter called Christ The Pioneer of Life. His leading is always outward to the last frontier, to rivers that have never been spanned, deserts that cannot be crossed, and mountain barriers that are seemingly without a pass.

The superlative drag upon our souls, holding us from enlistment under the banner of Christ, is the guilty fear that if we follow Him, we may have to surrender some cherished idols from our lives. They have been occupying the throne where Christ should sit as sovereign. They are our false gods, our pride and secret sins, of which in our better moments we are thoroughly ashamed. To say *Yes!* to Christ is to say *No!* to the idols. It is hard to decide for Christ.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him down the arches of the years;
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears . . .

For, though I knew His love who followed,
Yet I was sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside; . . .
I said to dawn, be sudden; to eve, be soon;
With thy young skyey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous lover! . . .

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stoke!
My harness, piece by piece, Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee; . . .
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears
I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years —
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap . . .
Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven*

Francis Thompson's poem has become deservedly famous because it gives us such a true picture of this, our inner flight from the Hound of Heaven. The fleeing soul was desperately holding onto the cherished weaknesses in character or behavior that seemed, to him, to constitute the joys of living. He just could not give them up for God, life would become dull and unendurable. So he fled, fled, fled, in spite of his efforts, however the pursuing feet drew nearer. One by one his cherished idols fell from his weakening grasp. Then he saw a shadow cast over his head, falling on the path before him. The hand of the Hound of Heaven was reaching out to strike him down. At last, exhausted, he sank to his

knees and surrendered, and, lo, the shadow was of a nail-pierced hand of love *outstretched caressingly* to help him. The pursuing feet were the love of God, that *tremendous Lover* who would not give him up. When he had become enough composed to see clearly, he found all his cherished foibles, lost in his flight, were gathered in the arms of the Hound of Heaven, to be returned to him blessed and made perfect by divine grace. Said the Christ:

All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.

When one's decision for Christ has been made, all becomes clear and satisfying. Why did we resist? The outstretched hand was not trying to take things from us, but to give things to us, the blessings of heaven. We just did not understand! As is true of all his descriptions, Paul fairly breaks the backs of words to express the beauty and delight of this new life in Christ. Once we have chosen Christ above all others, we *sit . . . in the heavenly places* with him. Even more beautiful are the words of Jesus, Luke 15:10, "*In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*"

In Jesus' parable, the father of the repentant prodigal son says with deep emotion, "My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." When the son, having *come to himself*, returned home, he was greeted compassionately by his father, who ran and embraced him. Such are the ways of God, according to Jesus Christ and according to his servant Paul. God, our Father, awaits us, but the decision is ours, we must *arise and go*.

Western Americans love their deserts. Because, even though they be so dry and deathlike, their soil is impregnated with roots and seeds that lie waiting, perhaps for years, until rain comes to trigger them into life. Then the desert turns into a garden of beauty beyond description. When the heart of sinful man responds at long last to the call of God, the refreshing showers of God's love and mercy descend upon him to trigger into being a fullness of life and beauty that is celestial.

The Bible closes with God's universal call: Revelation 22:17, "*Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*" It rests with man to respond!

Are there not, Festus, are there not, dear Michal,
Two point in the adventure of the diver,
One — when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One — when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?
Robert Browning, *Paracelsus, Part I*

Choose ye! Come! Be obedient to the heavenly vision!

VI Crucified With Christ

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Paul's commitment to Christ and the Christian way was all-out and complete. The One whom he had so violently opposed became his *Master*. He plunged into a new career characterized by a total Christward reversal of practically everything in his life, declaring himself a *slave to Christ*.

Some twenty years later, in a letter to his friends in Galatia, he tried to explain. Ordinary language failed him, so he reached out for the most extravagant metaphor he could imagine: Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* The unlovely character known as Saul of Tarsus no longer existed. He had *died* (being crucified) that day on the Damascus road. Crucified on the cross of the Christ he had been persecuting. Oh, of course I still live (the meditation continues) and I am that man, or am I? I am so completely different! Ah, (comes the conclusion) the person who now lives is not I, but the living Christ within me. Paul's commitment to Christ was like death in its completeness. His life after his conversion was like a resurrection from the dead to a brand-new existence and Jesus was living once again, in him.

With Paul as our example and teacher, shall we then say: A decision for Christ should be accompanied by a repentance that is as final as death and a commitment to the Christ-centered life that is like a spiritual resurrection to a new kind of existence? These are strong words, expressing a very high concept of what it is to be a Christian and demanding a high price for its attainment. But we believe they picture the Pauline concept. It is likewise the Bible concept, throughout its pages. We have searched the Sacred Word for a lesser, more *human* way, but have failed to find it. Paul said the same things in different words on several occasions: Galatians 6:14, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* Colossians 3:1-2, *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* Galatians 5:16, *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

The crucifixion of Saul of Tarsus began with his will. The proud Pharisee who had spent his time commanding, threatening, imprisoning, and killing people to force his will upon them, now bent his own stiff neck to a higher will, the will of Jesus Christ. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" became his humble approach to every problem.

So, understanding, it must be with everyone who would become what Paul became. "Our wills are ours, to make them thine," sang Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Man's free will is his crowning glory, and his chief liability. He is free to do as he pleases. Alas! That means he is free to do evil as well as good, to destroy as well as build. Man's free will is a wild horse he must ride, capable both of trampling others and of throwing the rider for his own undoing. The way to noble living is to hand one's freedom back to God and make the divine purpose one's own. Then one's decisions become wise and strong, undergirded by the wisdom and strength of God.

Paul, as *the slave of Christ*, found victory over *the law of sin and death* within himself, which had been defeating his high purposes. He could now do, with God's help, the good he wanted to do. Dr. Louis Evans has popularized the saying: "Man's only liberty is his freedom to choose a master."

The perfect character of Jesus himself rose to its highest peak in his obedience. Luke 22:42 KJV, "*Not My will, but Thine, be done.*" His prayer in Gethsemane, while (Luke 22:44) *His sweat became like great drops of blood*, marked the crucifixion of His will that prepared Him for His victory next day on Calvary. The prophet Jeremiah reported a vision he had of God as a potter molding human lives to his purposes like goodly vessels. The lesson being that the human clay must be completely pliable to the Divine touch or the vessel will be marred.

Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.

My heart is weak and poor
Until it master find;
It has no spring of action sure —
It varies with the wind.

It cannot freely move
Till Thou hast wrought its chain;
Enslave it with Thy matchless love,
And deathless it shall reign.

My will is not my own
Till Thou hast made it Thine;
If it would reach a monarch's throne
It must its crown resign;

It only stands unbent
Amid the clashing strife,
When on Thy bosom it has leant,
And found in Thee its life.

George Matheson, 1890

The second phase of Paul's *crucifixion* was his emotions. The characteristics of his early years were those of a dominant, self-centered personality, emanating pride, wrath, impatience, and complete callousness toward the feelings of others. After his conversion, his emotions and attitudes were almost completely reversed. The fiery persecutor who had tried to stamp out Christianity in blood became the author of the world's classic prose poem on love:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13, *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

According to Paul's teachings, emotion, true Christ-like emotion, is the essence of Christianity. His letters are exciting mental journeys through profound philosophy: chatty, folksy personalities; sober (sometimes pedantic) teachings; and then, at frequent intervals, explosive outbursts of inspired emotion. In his letter to the Galatians, he lists the *fruits* of the Spirit that should ripen in a Christian life. They are all emotions or emotional attitudes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Christianity functions by the infusing of these godly emotions into a human heart to drive out the demonic emotions of sin. William James, our great American psychologist, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, explains the cleansing power of Christian conversion as *the explosive power of a great new affection*.

All this is in line with the most recent discoveries in psychology. It is the emotions that make us what we are and they determine the direction in which our lives move. We do what we like to do! Emotions also give the dynamics to our whole impact upon the world. The intensity of our desire to be or do anything determines the amount of effort we put into it! When our emotions become tangled and morbid, we are *sick*, mentally, spiritually, and physically. When the psychiatrists diagnose our ills, they find bad emotions at the root. Hates, fears, envies, jealousies, and greed each make us *sick* and dangerous! On the other hand, if anyone analyzes a noble life, he finds it rooted in noble emotions and their attendant attitudes. Christianity is basically a divine emotion of love, flowing from the heart of God, permeating through Christ and *Christ-ones*, outwardly, to the least and lowliest of God's human children. God save us, from that unlovely counterfeit, emotionalism! God fill us with godly emotion! Help us to shout with Paul: Ephesians 1:3, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

The third phase of Paul's crucifixion was his intellect. The learned doctor of law accepted the Man of Galilee as his supreme teacher. The report of the rabbis had been Jesus *had never learned*, that is, He had not studied in any of their graduate schools, however, Paul found in Him the *wisdom of God*. When he had recovered his sight after the Damascus affair, Paul tells us he went into Arabia and spent what must have been about three years, evidently rethinking his vast learning in the light of this new revelation that had come to him through Jesus of Nazareth. When he returned to civilization, to become one of the most listened-to moral philosophers of the ages, he had not lost any of his scholarship, but all of it had been transmuted into something new and different *in Christ Jesus*.

The divine revelation known to the world as the Old Testament had always been Paul's *major*, he was a master scholar in it. Now, in the providence of God, he was destined to become the chief author of a New Testament that would record the fulfillment of the Old through the life and teachings

of Jesus. He would interpret Jesus as being human, or living. Through Paul, Christ's new commandment, universal love, would come to be recognized as the fulfillment of the whole moral law. John 13:34-35 (NKJV) *A new commandment I give to you, "That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* He would teach men to know Christ not only as one who had lived nobly and died on a cross, but as one *who lives forever*, projecting himself redemptively through the lives of his disciples. Paul was destined to use the term *church*, of which Jesus had spoken only once, elaborate its meaning, *the body of Christ*, and *the household of God*, and then sprinkle the world with churches. His thinking would furnish the groundwork for the formulation of that elaborate system of teachings to be known as Christian theology. The great ultimates, God, man, duty, destiny, and salvation, would take on new meaning through his words! Only Jesus had ever spoken with assurance concerning these things, and Paul had been appointed by God to be Jesus' chief interpreter.

The Pauline literature brings another stream of thought into Christian thinking, a minor but valuable one, the Greek. In his sermon on Mars' Hill that undercurrent of Paul's mind came to the surface. The Greek philosophy, then dominating the civilized world, represented a brilliant cycle of speculation that had carried through more than five hundred years of thinking. The Greeks had tried diligently to understand the meaning of things: especially, *What is life and how should we live it to achieve the highest good?* Their answers and insights have come down through the centuries as some of the most precious treasures of the human race. Epicurus said, "Have fun, seek pleasure."

Epictetus the Stoic objected, "No, such a course will lead to ruin; death sets its traps with promises of pleasure; learn self-discipline and live above the emotions of either joy or pain." Plato called for a life that exalts the higher values rather than the lower, especially the values of mind and soul rather than those of the body. Aristotle led Greek thought to its summit, bidding men to dedicate their lives to great and worthy purposes. Noble Greeks! A stroll through the ruins of ancient Athens gives one a picture of their genius. They lost interest in their marketplace (the Agora), neglected the colossal temple they started to build to Zeus, the god of might, but climbed to their highest hill and built a temple to Athena, goddess of truth, so beautiful that even its ruins still evoke the wonder of the world.

Paul subtly reminded the Greeks in his sermon that they had not built high enough. Intuitively, they had sensed that fact, and among their idols and altars, through which they had given poetic form to their fancies, they had built one altar, *To an unknown god*. Paul spoke of the significance of that altar. There is something higher than truth. It is the God of truth, the living personal God who is not a creation of the fancies of men, but the Creator of all things! He is a savior God. *In him we live and move and have our being*. He is a sovereign God who rules us, a holy God who instructs us unto holy living. Jerusalem had built higher than Athens, thanks to Jehovah, who had thundered from Mount Sinai the moral law of life, the laws by which all men and all human society must live or perish. Paul was building still higher, with Jesus Christ: the supreme law is love, the real power is divine salvation. These are the fulfillment of the law of the Commandments and all human quests for truth. The law of Israel and the philosophy of Greece must achieve their goals through Him. Follow any line of spiritual truth to its ultimate conclusion, and you will find Jesus awaiting you with the final word.

The fourth stage of Paul's crucifixion was his social standing. We can only speculate concerning the early background of Saul of Tarsus, but it must have been quite *patriotic*. His Roman citizenship, inherited from his father, indicates a family of prestige and wealth. Added to that was an education that must have made him a distinguished member of his generation. Still more impressive was his membership in the Sanhedrin, Israel's national congress (at the time of Jesus). And when Paul fell from that lofty height to what his anguished friends must have considered the depths of disgrace and degradation by joining the Christians, he was evidently disinherited and disowned by his own people. We are

liable to speak the words casually and without understanding when we read his declaration to the Romans: *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*. His contemporaries in Israel thought he should be *ashamed*. Toward the end of his career, we note his references to *kinsmen* among the Christians, but there is no other mention of home or family or domestic love of his own throughout his writings, or in any external report of him. He was always penniless, moreover, except when he earned money by his trade or received it as a gift from people in his churches. He had been cast out by his family and former friends for the offense of becoming a Christian. He did not complain, dismissing it all as part of the price he had to pay to *gain Christ*, Philippians 3:7-9, “*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*”

So should it be with us! In our day it is fashionable to have a mildly friendly attitude toward Jesus, as attested by the figures concerning *Christians* who were recorded in the opening chapter. Is it really easy, even now, to be loyal to Him and His teachings on all occasions and in all associations in which we find ourselves? Have you ever been ashamed of Jesus? The author has often been tempted to be ashamed, not of Christ, but of myself for the things I personally do to dishonor my Lord. Do we smile indulgently at the snide remark that dishonors our Lord? Are we sometimes too cowardly to stand up and be counted for Him, lest we thereby stand alone with Him, and not with our human companions? Pessimistic contemporary books are picturing us as a generation without moral backbone whose supreme desire is to conform and be just like everybody else. If so, Paul was speaking to us as well as to the Romans when he pleaded, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold. Let God remold your minds from within so that you may prove, in practice, that the plan of God, for you, is good.” Dare to stand alone, along with Jesus Christ! That is what it is to be a *Christ-one*! Paul nailed his social prestige to the cross of Christ. Have I? Have you? Can we stand to be laughed at for Christ’s sake?

Finally, and above all else, Paul was willing to be crucified for Christ’s sake, in brutal, bloody reality. He expected it! As he said, he died daily for Jesus’ sake! The Master had warned that if anyone would come after him, he must *take up his cross and follow*. It proved to be so! All the Christians of that first century were tasting more or less of the same bitter cup from which Jesus had drunk to the last drop. Paul gave a summary of his own experiences in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29:

*Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more.
I have worked much harder,
been in prison more frequently,
been flogged more severely,
and been exposed to death again and again.
Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.
Three times I was beaten with rods,
once I was stoned,
three times I was shipwrecked (one more would follow),
I spent a night and a day in the open sea,*

I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Eventually, as we know, bloody Nero sent Paul beyond the gates of Rome to be beheaded. Only his Roman citizenship saved him from being crucified in physical reality. Christianity is costly, at least the kind Paul had. We modern Christians, of course, enjoy the security achieved by the civilizing influence of two thousand years of Christ's gospel, but even ours is an age of martyrs. Within the last few years, hundreds of thousands of human beings have been killed because they were Christians, in Africa, Russia, China, Korea, and of late, the Middle East. We of America, for the most part, are not liable to thus face the martyr's test: *Deny your Lord or die the death*, but it could happen. Would we measure up? Would we face the firing squad for his sake, and not deny him? We hope so! One never knows until one is tested. **God knows!** Whatever may be the answer to that heart-searching question, the logical conclusion from Paul's words and example is this: *The degree to which we would die for Christ measures the degree to which He can trust us to live for Him.*

VII A Personal Footnote

If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. John 7:17

The author would not be true to his deepest convictions if he did not add a personal word at this point concerning decision and commitment. Someone has written, *The only things I really know are what I have experienced*. It might also be added: The only things I have to share with others are what I have experienced in my own life.

Of course, each human being is different from others and experiences never repeat themselves in exact duplication, either in the realm of the physical or in the realm of the spiritual, anymore than fingerprints repeat themselves. But aside from reasonable personal variations, people follow the same general patterns of development, both physical and spiritual. So in an effort to be helpful to others, I record the following.

I was raised in a consistently Christian home and *gave myself to Christ* at the age of twelve with understanding and sincerity. Nevertheless, there came a realization some years later that all things were not as they should be. I joined the United States Air Force at nineteen, was married, the first time, at twenty-one and became a father that year. Between nineteen and twenty-three, my spiritual life was cold, objective, and formal, something to believe, something to do, and something to be loyal to, but without the radiance or enthusiasm that characterize the lives of those who accomplish things for God. If facts be known, during those years I was more away from God and his people than with them. I found it fun to go to a ball game, to drink a beer, and to explore other avenues of life; to go to church was a duty. Through my prayerful self-analysis and the guidance of a friend, a sobering fact revealed itself. I was finding very little personal thrill in my Christianity because I had never really made it *my* Christianity. The Christian religion had come to me through the words of parents and teachers and books I read from my inheritance, however I had never really made it mine. A then popular gospel hymn challenged me:

It may not be on the mountain's height,
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle's front
My Lord will have need of me;
But if by a still, small voice He calls
To paths I do not know,
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in Thine,
I'll go where you want me to go.

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
O'er mountain, or plain, or sea;
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be.

I had never really said that to Christ from the depth of my being. I was trying to have Jesus as one of the assets of my life and culture, but Jesus did not have me. In consequence, I did not really have Jesus. He was *One out there*, to be revered and obeyed in a general sort of way, but not *One in here*,

the friend and master of my inner life. Well, I said it with quiet sincerity and abandonment. Nothing sensational happened. but everything became different for *me*. Jesus was now at the center of *my* being, in a warm, personal, mystic way. He was *my* Savior. The Bible was now God's love letter to *me*. God's commands were to *me* and His promises were *mine*. It was the reenacting of the experience of a doubting Thomas, who, when convinced at long last of the reality of the risen Christ, cried out, "My Lord and my God!" Christianity had come alive for Thomas; it also came alive for *me*.

There have been honest criticisms directed toward this kind of religious experience, on the grounds that our religion must never be expressed in terms of the singular pronouns of the first person, I, Mine and Me. The contention is Christianity is always social and should include others in every expression of it, always we and ours. Note that Jesus taught us to say: *Our Father who art in heaven*. I agree that Christianity must be social and I accept the social emphasis of the gospel, but I believe that vital religious experience must be, first of all, a completely personal relationship with the personal God. Jesus believed in public prayer, but he told his followers to go into their closets to pray, where only God could hear; otherwise, they would be tempted to direct their prayers to the ears of men rather than God. Before one can say *Our Father* with its full meaning, one must learn to say *My Father* with a warm sense of its sublime, mystic significance.

At Amsterdam in 1948, the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held. It brought together, for the first time in history, a heterogeneous mass of people who represented all races, almost a hundred nations, and about one hundred and fifty creeds. They differed on almost everything, and had recently been split into hostile camps by a world war. These people began conversations in a hopeful effort to come together in a united movement for the redemption of the world. When, after muddling through many days and nights of baffling give-and-take, they brought forth their findings, and at the heart of them was this statement: *The closer we get to Jesus Christ, the closer we are to each other*. Personal togetherness with Jesus Christ must precede togetherness in human relations.

Out of long years of association with Christians I am led to conjecture that perhaps only a minority of them can recall boundary-line experiences marking their conversion from the old life to the new. Many Christians, better than I, could parallel my mild story of divine confrontation, but few of us met with a dramatic crises of a Paul, a Jerry McAuley, or other twice-born men of record. Furthermore, it is indeed questionable whether one should be happy about having crossed over an exciting bridge, from which should not have been his life career, to the glad new day in Christ. The ideal development of a Christian soul would be by benefit of nurturing so perfect that one's growing into spiritual maturity would be silent and gradual. It should be like the unfolding of a beautiful flower, its phases of progress being so quiet, they could not be catalogued. Nevertheless, somewhere in that process, deep in a moment of thought or a long period of deliberation, an expanding Christian personality must have made a definite decision for Jesus Christ and the Christian Way against all others.

I speak from my own life, from my experiences as an observant parent, and as a counselor of youth. There comes a time in the life of even the most sheltered and responsive child when God confronts him for a decision, *Yes!* or *No!* A person does not grow into the faith of his fathers without deciding for himself that it shall be his faith too. And to have what his fathers received from the faith, he must pay the same price his fathers paid in an all-out commitment. In our programs of Christian education, let us never forget the following facts. Decision is the goal of nurturing. To be taught about Christianity does not make a person a Christian until he decides for himself to accept Christ and walk the Christian Way. The degree of his *crucifixion* with Christ will determine the degree *in which* Christ will live in him!

VIII

Growing Up In Christ

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

We have discussed Christian beginnings, now we turn to Christian consummations. Becoming a Christian involves, first, the all-important spiritual transactions of decision, repentance, and commitment, as we have pointed out. But then begins an equally important phase that is a long process of spiritual development, a growing from the new *birth* in Christ to spiritual *maturity* in his likeness. It is Christian nurture or what theology calls sanctification.

When Paul welcomed new converts into his churches, he warned them they were mere *babes in Christ*, liable to be tossed about by every wind of false doctrine and every evil influence. **They must grow and become spiritual adults!** He wrote to his friends in Corinth, recalling the days of their beginnings: 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, *Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?* In a second letter to the same people, he wrote, 2 Corinthians 3:18, *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, ...* . In a letter to the Christians of Ephesus he philosophized, Ephesians 4:13-15, *Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

In all this, Paul is following the teachings of Jesus, even using the same figures of speech, paralleling life's experiences of physical birth and physical growth. These are two terms around which the Master's parables and metaphors rotate as He paints His pictures of human salvation. At the beginning of His teaching ministry, Jesus warned the scholarly Nicodemus that he could not enter, or even see, the Kingdom of Heaven, unless he was *born again*. But most of the Lord's teachings were about growth. He said in his address by the seaside, Matthew 13:31-32, *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."* A major characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven, according to Jesus, is that *it grows*. His term *Kingdom of Heaven* was evidently used to express approximately what we mean when we say *Christianity*. And the growth to which Paul pointed, evidently, characterizes both the individual Christian life and the developing Christian social order. Christianity, inner or social, begins as something small and seemingly insignificant, but it grows. Only God knows the possibilities wrapped up in that growth. Its consummations are lost in the mysteries of eternity.

When the kindly obstetrician spans a newborn member of the human race into a first noisy outcry, he is really saying, "Now wake up and grow, grow, grow up, assert yourself, and make your own contribution to society." That little voice may someday out sing today's musical artists. Those may be the hands of the earth's most skilled future surgeon. Those feet may someday travel faster down the cinder path than has yet been done. That little head may house a brain that will out-think Einstein. That

now uncoordinated little personality may lead his fellowmen to new heights of godliness. Great possibilities are wrapped up within him, but the outcome will depend in large measure on his maturing.

The word *educate* is from the Latin verb *educo*, meaning *lead out*. It is intended to express that same insight into human life, elaborated above, an insight that was noted first by the ancient Greek philosophers. “Know thyself,” the Greeks said, for wrapped within yourself are all the potentialities of effective living. When you have learned to know yourself and your possibilities, then educate yourself into your full potential development of body, mind and soul. Christianity, with recognition of the Christian revelation that all is of God, accepts this Greek thinking and adopts education as a major part of its program. Along with evangelism and worship, we look to Christian education as the means to the achievement of high goals that Christ has set for us. It is our *growing up in Christ!*

When we baptize our children, we are accepting the divine promise, symbolized by water, that God’s Holy Spirit will cleanse them of all unrighteousness. We are also accepting Jesus’ invitation to suffer the little children to come to Him, laying them back into His divine arms, that they may grow in Him, “In the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Likewise, when God’s minister stands before the congregation of the church and grasps the hand of a *new member*, we pray with the minister that the *new member* may not be merely one more member of the Christian fellowship, but also a *learner* who will grow into the fullness of Christ.

While we educate and nurture our children we also realize a day must come when the child accepts that they must grow in the knowledge of God. It is then that one grows in understanding of God and His Kingdom, God and His love, and God and His commandments. What heights we have to scale when we stride out under the leadership of the Holy Spirit to think God’s thoughts after him! Christian thinking begins where all other human thinking ends. It delves into the mysteries of our existence. It thinks through to the ultimates. What do we mean when we say *God*? What do we mean when we say *man*? Immanuel Kant, commenting upon the Nineteenth Psalm, said there are two realms of sublime mystery, the starry heavens above, and the strange universe within the heart of man. What do we mean by right and wrong? An intuitive moral absolute beats upon the conscience of every one of us, confronting us with right and wrong, but when we try to understand and define it, the rightness of right and the wrongness of wrong involves us in a profound problem. Is death the great abyss into which all must plunge, or is it God’s doorway into realms eternal? Only Jesus has ever dared answer with assurance. What is salvation? When life caves in on us and there is nowhere to go, Jesus says, “Come to me,” and introduces us to the amazing sufficiency of divine grace, grace we may experience but will never fully understand. Every Christian should become a theologian to the extent of his ability to think through these things!

One sometimes hears a plea for the preaching of *the simple gospel*. Such a request is based on both truth and error. One of the miracles of Jesus’ teaching is that it is expressed in such simple, basic experiences even a little child can understand if it is carefully presented, but when studied in depth, it overleaps the thinking of the keenest mind. *Father, mother, brother, home, love, good, bad* and the inarticulate language of a cry are simple terms such as little children learn first, and they are the terms into which Jesus poured his entire gospel. Through those terms, a dedicated teacher may lead her little learners into the profundities of ultimate truth: God is my father; all people, of many races and classes, are my brothers and sisters; being bad brings pain; love and goodness bring happiness. The church is the home (household) of God and even death is but a doorway into another room of the Father’s house. When life hurts me and I have *no language but a cry*, someone comes to me, hurrying through the darkness, to comfort me. That is the Gospel as God provided it for babes, or the most learned philosophers. It is a simple gospel, and yet, profound as each individual mind is capable of comprehending. Don’t be afraid to think theologically, lest you lose your faith. Think with daring and maturity or you will lose your faith in times like this. If you do not grow up theologically, you will be bogged down in

a lopsided mind that has grown up in secular thinking but still tries to function in its theological childhood. Go out under the stars, read the scientific truths about the *mysterious universe*, take off your hat, look up, and say, “Father.” Stand in the midst of the throng of races and nationalities that surge through an international airport today, and whisper, *My brothers*. Look through your tears and meditate on our *heavenly home*. God, give us increasing theological insight, enough to live by in our ever increasing age of mass destruction!

While our intellects grow, our emotions, purposes, and conduct must also grow. *The religion of maturity* is the goal we should seek, as pointed out in many dedicated writings throughout the ages. The Christian soul grows into *the fullness of Christ* through a lot of living that includes thinking, loving, forgiving, believing, suffering, and, yes, even dying,

The stages of this process of growing in Christ are defined beautifully by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18, *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

First, Paul tells us we must behold the glory. That is, we must turn from gazing at rival allurements and behold Jesus Christ. According to the dictionary, the word *behold* means *to look intently*. Look intently toward the glory that shines in the face of Jesus Christ, the light of timeless truth, Christlike love, and all the divinely appointed objectives of Christian life and destiny. To state this in exciting terms:

- 1) Join the church - this did not say *join a church*
- 2) Begin to read the Bible - that means to really read and not just scan a few verses each day.
- 3) Worship God - through His son Jesus.
- 4) Give a holy tithe - of your God given gain, not everything you own
- 5) Make Christian friendships - among like-minded people.
- 6) Pray - reverently and daily, keeping your prayer book up-to-date.
- 7) Begin to help others - acts of loving kindness.
- 8) Think on holy themes - ideas of goodness and not evil intentions.
- 9) Aspire with all your being - toward Christlike objectives.

Thereby the light of godliness will begin to shine upon you, and more and more it will flood your being. The early Christians first met in homes, then openly outside the home, until they were threatened and had to go underground. During the period they worshiped openly and they built their churches to symbolize this spiritual experience. Early Christians *oriented* their churches. That is, each church building was facing toward the east, with such precision that on Passover morning the light of the rising sun would shine through a specially prepared window and flood the altar. The hope of the people was that the glory of the risen Christ would shine upon their souls as they likewise oriented their lives Christward.

Secondly, text suggests that if we turn to behold the glory of God, we will grow into that same glory: From one degree of glory to another. It is a law of life that one becomes like the thing one adores. In physical nature, the sunflower turns its face to the rising sun and proceeds to grow by weaving the sunbeams into the fabric of its being. Scientifically stated, the flower transmutes dead chemical substances drawn up from the soil into living protoplasm by the power of the sunbeams it is gathering into its leaves. By parallel laws of human psychology, if anyone will make Jesus Christ the center of his love and loyalty, he will grow increasingly Christ-like.

Nathaniel Hawthorne has written this truth into a parable in his story of *The Great Stone Face*:

A boy named Ernest grew up in a beautiful valley hidden among the mountains. This particular valley was distinguished by an interesting phenomenon of nature. On a high mountain crag overlooking the valley, the rocks took the form of a human face — a strong, noble face that inspired wonder and high thinking in any person who looked at it intently.

There was a legend in the valley to the effect that someday there would return to the community a great and noble person who would resemble the face on the mountain. He would be a native son who had grown up there, had gone out and achieved fame in the big world outside, and then had returned to bring wonderful benefits to all.

Ernest's mother explained this legend to her little son, and he grew up looking often toward the mountain face, longing for the great one to come. By and by when he was a young man the news spread that the legend was about to be fulfilled. A son of the valley had gone out and accumulated great wealth and was now returning to spend his last years among his old neighbors. A big house was built for him and everybody was in high excitement, for it was reported that he looked exactly like the prophetic face on the mountain side. He came in due time, and in the excitement, the crowd shouted their cheers and believed it was so, but when Ernest looked at him, he was disappointed. That yellow, pinched, calculating visage had none of the nobility that characterized the Great Stone Face. Ernest was now prepared to make such a judgment, for he was looking often toward *the face* and meditating much upon the noble legend.

Time passed and Ernest grew older with years. He was a simple toiler along with his neighbors. In fact, he was a wonderful neighbor, a friend to all, sought out by many for counsel and comfort. Every few years there arose a new rumor, and another aspirant would come back to the valley acclaimed as the fulfillment of the legend. The second to arrive was a great general from the wars, *Old Blood-and-Thunder*. The third was a statesman aspiring to his country's highest office, *Old Stony Phiz*. Each time, led on by wishful thinking, the excited crowd was sure the longed-for benefactor had at last arrived, but each time, as Ernest looked hopefully to verify the report, he was disappointed.

Ernest labored on faithfully in the ways of the common life, played an increasing role of friend to everybody and continued to meditate on noble things, drinking ever increasing draughts of inspiration from the Great Stone Face. People sought him out, not only one by one, but by groups. In fact, it had become a custom for them to gather once a week to share the wisdom and assurance that came from his lips.

Finally, there returned to the valley a poet, whose exalted verse even Ernest had learned to admire. Maybe he was the fulfillment of the great hope, but when Ernest suggested it to him, he hurried to deny it. Alas, though his words reflected the noble image, his life had not always done so. But one evening as the poet sat with the other neighbors, and listened to the words poured forth from the heart of the inspired dreamer, the sunset glow that was beaming upon the prophetic face of the mountain shone also on Ernest's face, and the poet cried out, "Behold! Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face!" And when all the people looked, they saw what the deep-sighted poet had said was indeed true.

Some years ago the Presbyterians were flattered by a rendition of their denominational name into Chinese ideograms. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was translated: The church of those who are growing old together in Jesus Christ in the Beautiful Country. They all liked that, but wouldn't it be wonderful if the facts justified a slightly revised version: The church of those who are growing up together in Jesus Christ in the Country is thus becoming beautiful in his likeness?

Thirdly, a Christian reflects the glory that shines upon him. The marginal reading of our text verse is interesting and pertinent. It is found in some ancient documents of the Bible, though not in all. It reads: reflecting as from a mirror the glory of the Lord. Whatever the reason for its omission from some translations, the phrase is needed to add a truth that belongs there. He who chooses to live in the light of Jesus Christ will reflect that light to others. And as he grows into that light, from glory to glory, he will reflect an ever increasing measure of Christlike glory into the world about him.

It was so of Paul because he reflected Christ at all times. You couldn't become acquainted with Paul without becoming acquainted with Jesus. In Asia Minor he fell ill and sought a doctor. It was not long afterward we note that Doctor Luke, *the beloved physician*, had joined Paul's traveling staff. In

Philippi they threw Paul and Silas into jail and ordered the jailer to beat them. In the morning the jailer and his family were being baptized into the Christian fellowship. Paul was shipwrecked along the Mediterranean coast and had to battle his way to shore on floating wreckage from the crippled ship, but before crew and passengers cast themselves into the water, he *broke bread* before them in Jesus' name. He was put in the dreaded Mamertime Prison in Rome and kept chained to a Roman soldier lest he escape. So it was not long until he was writing to his friends, "There are now Christians throughout the guard." They had been chained to Paul long enough to hear about Jesus. **You could not meet Paul without meeting Jesus!** What a powerful statement! Could we hope for anything more than this to be said of us? He had turned to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and henceforth, he was a constant reflector of that glory. He was growing into the full likeness of Christ and in that increasing measure he was *reflecting the glory* into the whole Mediterranean world.

Man lives largely by reflected light, physically and spiritually. We spend little time in the physical sunshine, little during the day and none by night. Yet we have light to live by because the moon shares its light with us. By night the moon reflects the light of the sun. By day, the whole sunny landscape reflects its glory, past our barriers of roof, wall, and window shade. In the realms of morals and spirit, the world would be forever submerged in gloom and despair were it not for folks like Paul, who live near enough to the glory of God to reflect His light to others. Those such as Paul keep us reminded of holy things. They make it easier for us to believe in God and goodness. When they brush elbows with us in the crush of living, it is as if the sun had come from under a cloud. We smile, love, hope, and trust God, because they do. They do because they are living close to God.

The people of Idaho love the name of their state. *Edaho* is an Indian word meaning *light on the mountains*. Idaho is a mountain state, standing on edge, as the natives say, hence, the people living in the deep, shadowy canyons see the sun only at midday. But, as the Indians noticed long ago, it is a land of beautiful light because every mountain, standing in a blaze of sunshine, reflects its light downward to the human brothers who would otherwise live in gloom.

Lastly, we gradually take on *His likeness*. Can we really arrive at that? Perfection has been much discussed through the Christian centuries, but the people who have deserved it most have protested against its ascription to them. Paul finished his career still calling himself *the chief of sinners*, and *saved by grace*. Augustine, at the pinnacle of his noble life felt the same. Can anyone achieve to *His likeness*? Maybe Christianity is an adventure of forever *becoming* (more will be said about this later), but there is a glorious earthly consummation to the growing process.

To visualize that which we can feel, better than we can comprehend, let us borrow a text from the Old Testament which describes that *perfection*: Proverbs 4:18, *The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day*. Have you ever taken a sunrise hike to some mountain peak, perhaps with a company of young people? When you left camp, it was dark, chilly, and awesome. The hour before dawn is, by popular proverb, the darkest of the night, the time when life reaches its lowest ebb, the time when thieves do their work, and a time of silence except for the weird sounds made by night-prowling animals. You cannot see clearly where you are going, with only the stars and a flickering lantern to guide you. Objects of the landscape are visible against the night sky as blurred hulks of blackness. You wonder why you decided to make the climb but you stumble along because you have committed to it. As time passes, the going gets a bit easier. There is a little more light on the path. The weird landscape of near and far is beginning to reveal itself. By and by a jagged skyline of peaks and passes take form in the heights against an increasing grayness of sky. The gray turns slowly toward gold, then crimson. The shadows gradually roll down the mountain into the canyons below. The birds awaken and finally the big red disk of the sun rolls up from behind a distant ridge and a world of beauty and wonder spreads out at your feet, seemingly endless in every direction. The perfect day has arrived!

Is life like that? The ancient poet suggests *the path of the righteous* is similar to that. The analogy would suggest *the perfect day* of a Christian life is Christian old age, the *fullness of days*. Poet Robert Browning sings, “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made.” (In *Rabbi Ben Ezra*) Browning was a Christian poet and he testified from a rich Christian life. Paul’s words to the Ephesians (already quoted) suggest it was an established custom among the early Christians to refer to *the fullness of Christ* as an attainable goal, at the end of a godly life. But is old age really thrilling and satisfying like that, even Christian old age? Physically, no! One’s physical being is only a scaffold for building a temple of the spirit, and when the spiritual temple is nearing completion, the scaffold begins to come down. Is it spiritually true? Yes, we vote for the *golden years* in spiritual matters, even against the verdant ones of youth. The perfection is relative but it may be glorious.

We had some blisters on our feet when that sunrise hike was finished, and there were a few bruises received by people who stumbled off the trail in the darkness. Even so we soon forgot those inconveniences, for as we climbed we sang songs filled with the beautiful faith of unspoiled youth. We were thinking of the experiences ahead, at the peak.

Our final thought on this is for each of you to view the task of reaching the peak, and growing into the *fullness of Christ*!

IX Upsetting the World

... *These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.* Acts 17:6

There is a painful aspect to becoming a Christian that is liable to be a shocking surprise. To become a Christian tends to put one at cross-purposes with the world and may lead to persecution. It is the way of the cross, leading to a crown!

Our text, chosen to introduce this amazing area of Christian experience, is a statement that came from the lips, not of Paul, but of his enemies. One day, about the year 51 CE in the old, sophisticated Macedonian city of Thessalonica, a mob stormed down the street hurrying a couple of frightened men to the police court screaming, "*These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.*" According to the thinking of the mob, Thessalonica had been disgraced and its security threatened by certain foreigners who had intruded into the community. The men they were dragging along were not the culprits they sought, but those who had befriended them and made their activities possible. Who would have thought such a thing could happen here in this fair Greek city? The authorities must act, quickly, and drastically!

What was going on? Who were these rascals? What had they been doing? Judging from the excited charges of the mob, they must have been ruffians, outlaws, or at least dangerous revolutionary radicals. Well, no, and yes, in a sense! Paul and his traveling companion, Silas, were the men accused. Their coming to Thessalonica had raised all this ruckus. What in the world had they been doing? Doing good, healing the sick, befriending the needy, and preaching the gospel of love and salvation that they had learned from Jesus. As for law and order, they had tried hard to keep from disturbing the peace. Paul was on record almost everywhere he went as urging his listeners to obey *the powers that be*, even though they were evil and corrupt. Then why the excitement, and what did these accusations mean?

The answer is a long and tragic one. Paul and Silas were, in truth, upsetting things in spite of their peaceful intentions. They had a growing police record, a trail of arrests, imprisonments, beatings, stonings, mob action, and drummings-out-of-town that already stretched across Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and well into Europe. But why? It doesn't make sense. No, it doesn't on the surface, but it points to the tragic undershadow of Christianity. The mobs were telling the truth. These Christians were disturbing the world in which they lived, because they were acting as Christians are bound to act. They were starting a revolution with a deliberate intention of turning the world upside down, because Jesus had opened their eyes to the fact that the world was wrong side up. Not necessarily politically so, that was a marginal consideration that was inevitably involved, but not of the essence. The maladjustment was moral and spiritual. In the righting of things however, politics, business, and social life were bound to become disturbed and the people were sure to react against the disturbers.

This new religion, Christianity, was threatening the *status quo* of the whole Greco-Roman world, and it was beginning to strike back at the Christians with violence. That world had crucified Jesus. It would eventually kill Paul, and many of the fine people who were responding to Paul's messages would pay with their lives. Through most of three hundred years it would be a capital offense to be a Christian in that era or day. The Christians would win in the end and emblazon the cross of Christ on the shields of the Roman legions. None the less it would be accomplished at a terrible price, by out-dying the pagans as well as by out-living, out-loving, and out-thinking them.

As has been pointed out by many observers, there is social dynamite in the gentle gospel of Jesus Christ, enough to blow up any social order that has yet existed, if the gospel is applied quickly and completely. The Greco-Roman world was instinctively reacting against Christianity for its own preservation. “Away with him! He is not fit to live!” shouted the mob that tried Jesus (with Pontius Pilate as their unwilling stooge), and that mob was a fairly representative cross section of contemporary politics, business, and religion. At long last, in 1963, came an official admission from a major sector of Christendom that the Jews do not bear the sole responsibility for the killing of Jesus. Of course not, the *world*, the world of that day which is our world of today, was the murderer of Jesus. It killed him because it was too wicked to tolerate One who was so good. The world will never be comfortable with Christ in the ascendancy anywhere until it becomes Christ-like itself. Furthermore, any person or any program that is true to Christ, will be a source of irritation to the worldling and often be an object of his persecution. “They don’t like me,” said a dear old saint to us through tears. He had just been trying to be a Christian, and it had not made him popular.

Jesus warned us it would be so. It is the judgment of light. John 3:19-21, *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”* Yes, lest we Christians become self-righteous, the world will react even against us *sinners* (as Paul continued to call himself) if it senses any considerable reflection of the divine light of truth and righteousness that was in Christ Jesus. Unpopularity, resentment, ridicule, or even violence may come to us if we become too much like Him. In fact the degree to which we suffer will be determined largely by the extent to which we have become like Him.

It is enlightening to note the professed reasons for the persecution of Christians through the early centuries. During the first three hundred years of Christian history, the Roman Empire put forth its mighty power in ten major efforts and several minor ones to stamp out the Christian movement completely. Each wave of persecution was characterized by a slogan supposed to justify such drastic action. Those slogans suggest why the world doesn’t like Christians.

The earliest charge was Christianity hurt business. Absurd! But is it absurd? Christianity does hurt business, of one sort, bad business. Paul’s first jailing was for hurting business, the slave business. Shortly after he and Silas entered the city of Philippi, they came upon an excited group of people who were crowding around a slave girl to have their fortunes told. With an accompaniment of insane gesticulations, she was foretelling the future of one after another while her owners collected substantial fees. It was a superstition of those times that demons who possessed the soul of a demented person could predict the future, if they could be made to speak through their victim. Paul’s heart went out to the poor girl, and in the name of Jesus, he healed her. Praise God! She stood there normal and in her right mind but Paul was in trouble. He had hurt business! The superstitious people would no longer give credence to the fortunes told by a person who had become sane. The revenue ceased, the slave drivers were enraged, a riot developed resulting in Paul and Silas being thrown into prison, beaten with rods, and chained like wild beasts.

Paul had a similar experience in Ephesus. After preaching and teaching there for two years, so many people had been converted to Christianity and turned from their idolatry that the silversmiths faced a business depression. There was no longer a sale for the silver idols they fashioned in the likeness of the local goddess, Artemis, so the silversmiths raised a mob and tried to lynch Paul. It is of interest that in Bithynia, some years later, one of the earliest general Roman persecutions originated from the same provocation. Business had been hurt. So many people had become Christians that agriculture was in distress. The farmers could not sell their hay because the market for the feeding of animals destined for sacrifice to heathen deities was disappearing. The Roman governor of the prov-

ince, Pliny, complained, about 111 CE, to the Emperor Trajan, who said Pliny should investigate those publicly charged of being Christians and punish everyone convicted.

It has been true, with variations, down through the ages. Christianity has hurt business: the slave business, the prostitution business, the traffic in intoxicating liquors, the gambling business, the dope business, every business whereby any person makes a profit from the exploitation or degradation of another person. And, oh, the howl of rage that has reverberated through the years against Christians from the throats of those who have been thus deprived of their ill-gotten gains!

Our memory goes back to the days when Christian America had the moral courage to stand up and challenge the liquor business. During a campaign against that traffic in a certain county in Ohio, we dropped into a notorious saloon to check up on the progress and heard one of the leaders of the liquor faction discoursing before a group of friends. Among other statements, he said, "I know this is a _____ of a business, but there's a _____ lot of money in it." It was an eloquent statement of truth about the liquor business and every other traffic of its kind. When there is *a lot of money in it*, a certain type of predatory human being will promote it with all his might, regardless of the resulting wreckage in degraded human lives and community disturbance, it can cause. And if you oppose the propagator, he will do all he can to hurt you. The demonic fact involved is that bad business always brings a much larger profit than good business. Good business is content with the modest returns that come from transactions in which both sides are benefited, fair profits realized from the exchange of commodities of intrinsic value.

The stable civilizations of the world are built upon that kind of business. None the less a person can always multiply his *take* if he will turn to bad business. Get control of whatever satisfies the cravings of some vicious appetite or habit or desire, then cleverly build up the desire and mark up the price. You may charge your victims whatever you wish and collect it. They will give you all the money they can find to satisfy their morbid appetites. Look at the United States today as the Mexican and South American drug cartels do everything they can to continue selling their drugs to our youth. Look at your community as a few evil minded individuals turn to Meth production or prescription drug trafficking for their ill-gotten gains. In either case there is no concern for the outcome to the buyer of the drugs, only the money collected by the seller.

To become a Christian is to make one's self an enemy of all such businesses, an enemy of any business whereby human beings are degraded in body, mind, or soul. And be assured, *those businesses will not like you*, and may do you harm. If any Christian is not feeling a sting of resentment from the traffickers in bad business, his Christianity is perhaps not functioning as it should. Simply stated, he is not a world upsetter.

Are the Christians of America hated enough today? By bad businesses? We want to be fair to the differing convictions of some fellow Christians, but surely, we American Christians must again face the problems of intoxicating liquor, illegal drugs, prostitution, gambling, or pornography, in any of its ugly forms, with forthrightness. Many of the crimes, suicides, highway accidents, and juvenile delinquencies reported in the daily news are due, in whole or in part, to the trafficking of one or another of these bad businesses. Despite the negative influence the traffic carries on, advertising, selling, reaping fabulous profits, almost unchallenged. The gambling kings who spread over Nevada and other wide-open areas of the nation are ballooning their enterprises to multi-billion dollar proportions and furnishing basic support to the international crime syndicates by the power of a golden stream of *take* filched out of their complacent suckers. Today we find an almost unanimous support from governments to condone and support the gambling trade by having lottery after lottery supported in almost every state in our nation. There's even rumors of having a national lottery. Look at the playboy institutions. Their accompanying white slave traffic goes on merrily, wrecking American womanhood and manhood and undermining American homes with scarcely a rebuke from our sex-minded society. Turn

to illegal drugs and look at the damage done. Our children are being duped into believing an altered state of mind produces some sort of good, when, in actuality, it produces dependence which causes our children to turn to more violent crimes to obtain money needed to support the habit of drugs. At the same time, other children are being exposed to the chemicals and fire hazards associated with the making of certain illegal drugs.

Today the Internet can assist in learning and the distribution of valuable information instantaneously. The reciprocal of this is that bad business has exploited the Internet with everything from pornography, to on-line gambling, to Satanic worship, to selling of prescription drugs without a written script and even to wife swapping and any other desire of which an evil mind can conceive. If Christianity does not rise to condemn such things, who will? America is being dragged back into the mire of the ancient paganisms from which our forefathers have strived to lift us. We Christians are appointed to do something about such things, regardless of how we may suffer in the doing.

The traffic in illegal drugs is distinguished by being so extremely obnoxious and so obviously debauching that it is almost universally condemned. We call on the records to support the charge that the more respectable vices mentioned above are producing a toll of human wreckage that is much greater and more upsetting to the general welfare than illegal drugs alone.

Vast military armaments are the backbreaking burden today of all nations. We would not be dogmatic in proposing a correct remedy for the complex problems of national survival, but it is obvious these armaments are tempting men to become *merchants of death*, with an eye to fabulous profits. Even prospects of peace are eyed as potential threats to business *prosperity*. The problem of war, and how to remove it from the professional kit bag of politicians and diplomats, looms more and more as our world problem number one. The Christian conscience is increasingly convinced that war is *bad business* and must cease to be considered a respectable policy of statecraft. It is Christian love, primarily, that is seeping through the crevasses of hate barriers, at last giving some faint hope of peace. The only force that can really melt the desire for war is love. Preparedness for war has its part to play in guarding us against international banditry, but only goodwill can establish peace, and then, only when that goodwill is Christ centered.

God, give thy people courage to go on as world upsetters until the kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord! Alas, the Christians of today's world do not understand the severity of the deception Satan has cast upon mankind as a whole, and are losing sight of the Kingdom of our Lord. Christians on all fronts, and in every denomination, do not possess the knowledge, the concepts, or even the idea of what prophecy says concerning the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord. It seems the greed of *bad business* has overtaken the Christian heart. Today it is more acceptable to *keep up with the Jones* and be materialistic instead of being humble before God by obeying His will and following the principles laid down in His book.

The second wave of first-century Roman persecution was organized under a still more damaging accusation, the charge that Christianity was antipatriotic, producing traitors. This charge goes back even to the trial of Jesus. "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend," shouted the mob at Pontius Pilate, in spite of Jesus' admonition to his disciples to *render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*. It was under the general charge of treason that Paul was beheaded, Peter crucified head downward, and the palace grounds of Nero illuminated at night by the burning bodies of Christian martyrs. Throughout the centuries, multitudes of Christians have been put to death and other multitudes have been imprisoned and otherwise molested by angry rulers who accused them of treason.

As far as literal facts are concerned, these charges have always been false. Christianity, by its nature, is a supporter of peace and order but in a deeper sense, the charges have usually been correct. These great, historic persecutors have been the tyrants who were demanding an allegiance from their subjects that Christians can never give to human rulers. They were claiming the right to rule both body



and soul in ways that only God may do. **Hear me!** Hear me fellow Christians, sinners, readers, young people, and old people: Human government, important as it is, must always function under God, with recognition of that higher sovereignty that belongs only to Him. Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords! Conscience and morality must rank above political expediency. When Handel's Messiah was first sung in London, the Christian king of England rose to his feet and stood reverently through the *Hallelujah Chorus* in which, in grand crescendo, the King of kings was proclaimed. On United States warships, and often merchant liners, the flag of the nation flies beneath the flag of the church on Sunday mornings during divine worship.

Those early Christians were obedient citizens, rendering unto Caesar due loyalty, until, in his bloated pride, Caesar proclaimed himself god and had his images raised in the marketplaces, commanding he be worshiped by every passing person. It was then, the Christian had to disobey. Whenever a human potentate assumes the sovereignty that belongs only to God, Christians turn rebels, the most stubborn rebels of human history. The Mussolinis, the Hitlers, the Maos, the Stalins, and all their kind collide with the Christians. "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me," said Martin Luther as he refused to obey the command of his emperor when ordered to repudiate his conscience. Whenever bad government tries to play god, the whole inherent power of Christianity goes into reaction against it.

A third charge against the early Christians was that they were haters of the human race. This sounds completely absurd, for Christianity is basically a crusade of loving concern for all mankind. Nevertheless when we look closer, we see the basis of the charge. Christians, of course, have been, up until recently, unbending in their adherence to high standards of moral decency in their social life. Paul constantly urged them to do so. Living as they did then in the midst of that putrid, pagan immorality that Paul describes in his letter to the Romans, they must have found it necessary frequently to ostracize themselves from the social circles where once they had been active. One can easily imagine a case like this: the wild, lascivious debauch swirls noisily about the heathen idol (granted, the heathen idol may be alcohol, sex, drugs, even music or a Satanic ritual). Suddenly someone cries out, "Where are Neander and Helena? They used to be the life of our parties, but I haven't seen them lately."

"They have become Christians!"

"Terrible! They are lost to us then, those Christians are haters of the human race."

Has it not been so at all times down through the Christian ages? This has been the scene for centuries, up to only a few years ago! Once again, it seems today's Christians would much rather fall into line to be like the Jones, to be included in the acts of the world without a care toward the moral outcry coming from the prophets of old that tell us to guard against such practices. Even Paul warned those he taught to be aware of the influence Satan and his demons would and could make upon ones life. Up until only recent times the moral backbone of the American Christians stood up to the worldling who wanted to indulge in party after party with no consequences toward their personal actions.



Now days there seems to be no regard for moral, spiritual, or ethical practices. There seems to be no concern of respect for one's family, neighbors, community or even one's nation. Even Christians are becoming more and more self centered, whereby the only thing that matters is one's own self. The days of *longfaced*, *puritanic*, *sissy*, and similar words of prejudice and dislike being hurled by the wild youth against the Christian youth who refuse to join in their revels, appear to be long ago forgotten. The Christian youth of today may wear the title of Christian on the outside, but their heart on the inside, tends to agree more and more with the wild youth and their thoughts concerning only themselves. However, there is no social fellowship so happy, so wholesome, as that of the followers of Jesus Christ. If Christians live true to their Lord, there is much social life they have to shun. Churches of today seem to take the viewpoint that to gain members, the church must act as a social clearing house for every aspect of society. There must be a bowling team, a softball team, and a gym for activities. There must be some form of food service toward members and potential members and some mega-churches also

have clinical counseling treatment centers and campgrounds for their members. The social structures of God's true church rests in the association of like minded people and their personal belief in God the Father and Christ His Son. They must avoid the false belief that providing social activities is a means toward increasing the membership of the church. This is contrary to the belief of a potential increase in tithes and offerings made to the church if there is a new member gained via the activities offered. These ideals were pointed out by an ancient prophet as one of life's greatest concerns, to keep oneself *unspotted* from the world, for the Christian it should be imperative, whatever it may do to his or her popularity.

There is another complication that rises from the Christian's social contacts. One that was a major embarrassment to Jesus himself. Christian love impels one to identify oneself with unpopular minorities. Jesus was branded *a friend of tax collectors and sinners*, to the scandal of the socially elite. He explained that like every good physician, he associated with the spiritually *sick* who needed him rather than with those who *have no need of a physician*, but that did not satisfy the scandalmongers. Look around you today, and see the influence of what we consider as legitimate business and the effect they have upon this healing idealogy. If this was the time of Christ, do you think He would use the illustration of a good physician as an example? Family doctors of yesteryear would have a concern to find and treat a cause for an ailment. On the other hand, physicians today appear to go down a list of conditions and symptoms to find a treatment and prescribe a pill. They have to make note of other contributing conditions caused by the first pill, give a second pill to offset the first pill, which in turn may have a side effect causing a third, fourth, fifth or additional pills to be given. All the while, nothing is done to find the actual cause for the ailment in the first place. Remember, Jesus was denounced and almost lynched in his hometown because He said some good words for Syrians, Samaritans, and other aliens. His *yearning over the multitudes* got Him into trouble again and again, and it has gotten His followers into trouble throughout the years.

As Americans traveled over rubble-strewn Europe following the Second World War, we listened, while a gentle, brave Frenchwoman told of the sacrificial work done during the war by the Christian youth of France in saving Jews from Hitler's deadly fury. Many a Christian died for his kindly efforts. In that same spirit, the German Christian youth of a few years ago were organized into *Atonement Corps*, going to Israel and elsewhere, offering their services to the Jewish people for the most menial of labors or for anything requested of them. They hoped thereby to make up in a small measure for the awful wrongs which their fatherland, under Hitler, had perpetrated against that people. Reports came back that mountains of hate and resentment were being thus removed. It was the Christians of America who rallied to befriend the Japanese of California when in the hysterical days following the Pearl Harbor tragedy, they were being hustled off to undeserved imprisonment in interment camps. It was the Christians, white and black, who rallied to support the processes of racial integration during the 60's and 70's, and again, there are some people even today who do not like Christians for doing random acts of kindness.

Look at this whole field of application of the teachings and spirit of Jesus Christ to the problems of human society. It is one endless controversy! It will continue to be so until the social order is brought into harmony with Jesus himself. It is one of the cutting edges of His redemptive process. What a privilege it is to take up one's cross and follow Him, though the path may lead up the slopes of Calvary! We hear Him say, Matthew 5:11-12, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"

X

In The Household of God

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Ephesians 2:19

Are you ready to learn more about the social aspect of becoming a Christian? Basically, becoming a Christian involves the most individualistic transaction of one's own life. Only the individual and God are involved. In closet-like isolation from all other people, yes, even from those nearest and dearest to him or her, the person closes his eyes so the visible world may not distract them from seeing that which is unseen. They close their ears against the noises of earth so they may hear only the still, small voice of God. Then they kneel or otherwise relax their body from the tensions and activities of the physical life and pray in secret to the God who hears in secret. Then, with heart laid bare, they commit themselves, just as they are, to the only One in the universe who understands them altogether and loves them enough to *cover* their transgressions. Now, if your denomination teaches you must do this in some ritualistic manner, or with the help of an elder, or someone else within the denomination, run as fast as you can. This is not the manner God does things and you have been involved with some form of cult participation. The mystic man-God fellowship, thus begun at the altar of repentance, grows by faith and devotion to become the warm, dynamic core of the whole existence of man. Man's personal religion begins in one's own self, between God and himself, at the level of spirit and not by any other means. Yes! You can talk with God, just like you do with others. In fact, He even hears our unspoken thoughts and petitions.

Man is by origin and nature, a social creature, but one's religion does not remain personal and individualistic. Even though, once you become united with God through the Spirit you could most certainly go through the rest of life without social interaction with others and be quite content. Even Paul understood this when he wrote about marriage and his own life in his first letter to the Corinthians. The genes of innumerable ancestors have collaborated socially to give a person birth. They will project their own life socially through countless generations of people by way of their children and their children's children. From the time a child was conceived in his mother's womb, to the day when loving hands shall lay his worn-out body back in the arms of mother earth, his every act is part of a complex social interaction and give-and-take collisions between his life and the lives of other people. Our inner experiences with God will come to light primarily as motivation and guidance for our outgoing life with others. These experiences are like the mighty currents that move unseen through the ocean depths, but eventually come to the surface to affect the wind-made surface waves. In similar fashion God transforms one's being in its deepest inner strata, then sends one to live redemptively with other individuals. God, man, and fellowman, these are the wrappings and proof of Christian salvation.

The social drive of one's faith will perhaps first encounter social reactions that are negative. As we have noted in the preceding chapter, one's Christian ideals will undoubtedly collide with the practices of those who have not had the Christian's experience with Christ. But, thank God, most of the Christian's social contacts are likely to be gloriously positive and happy. We will find others who believe and pray and follow the Christ as we do, kindred souls who are going our way. It will be as one shares his faith with them that their life will grow richer and more definite. Prayer will take on new meaning as we pray with others. When we undertake to put our religion into practice, we will find we must join with others of like mind-set, as one of a team, if we are to do anything worthwhile for God or man.

John Fawcett wrote these words in 1782, and Christians have been singing them ever since:

Blest Be The Tie That Binds

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love:
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims, are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way;
While each in expectation lives,
And longs to see the day.

From sorrow, toil and pain,
And sin, we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity.

This *fellowship of like minds* is the church as it was meant to be. It is the final stage of God's *Miracle of Grace*. When the Holy Spirit moves people to repentance and thereby to newness of life in Christ, he also draws them together into spiritual fellowship of kindred minds. The *blessed communion* established first between God and man becomes, err long, the communion of God and man and fellow-man, God's church.

The church is not an organization, something put together by human effort and ingenuity. It is a divine-human organism, a living, spiritual entity. However, in the present day, it seems more and more people believe the church is a building for the gathering of people for whatever reason they may want to gather. Far too many churches no longer preach and teach God's truth! They do not teach the passion of Christ! They do not follow God's rules for mankind! They do teach grace by works, social experiences and togetherness of members within certain man-made guidelines. A bouquet of flowers might be considered an organization, beautiful if skillfully arranged, but man-made and prone to wither and fall apart. A flowering plant, on the contrary, is an organism, alive, integrated, growing and propagating

itself by the urge of its own inner being, a link in God's cosmic order of living things. The church, a divine-human organism, is God's invention for the nurturing of souls and the propagation of the Gospel.

When Paul, newly converted, became aware he was *a new creature* and had entered into a wondrous new experience, life in Jesus Christ, he instinctively sought others of similar experience and was introduced to the church. Then he set out Paul-like to find others who did not know Christ and tell them about Him. When he did that, he found himself involved in a new career, winning converts and building churches, more and more of them. As his restless enthusiasm drove him into widening circles, he left a living trail behind him of new Christians and new churches. It has been said of Attila the Hun that where he put his foot down the grass never grew again. In noble contrast, it might be said of Paul, wherever he put his foot down, there a Christian church grew.

The record of Paul's apostolic career is the epic story of the spread of Christianity over the Roman Empire. Following his conversion and a retreat to Arabia, he seems to have gone home to his native Cilicia and remained there about nine years. We guess he went home because there was nowhere else to go, since his enemies were trying to kill him. We have no record of what he did during that period. We visualize him making tents for a living and suffering heartbreak under the cold disdain of his relatives, who seem to have disowned him completely because he had turned to the Nazarene. There seems to be one exception to this situation, Paul's sister and nephew are indicated in Biblical text. There is evidence, however, of one thing he was certainly doing. He was telling everyone who would listen about Jesus! In addition he was also assembling the believers into churches. Paul's letters to those churches reveal he visited them as often as he could.

In due time, about 46 CE, Barnabas visited him in Tarsus and invited him to come to Antioch and help with a church that was growing there, the same, very vigorous, church where the word *Christian* first came into use. He settled in Antioch as a pastor, but about two years later, he felt the urge to go further. With Barnabas as his traveling companion, he set out upon a junket that took them through the island of Cyprus and the area of Anatolia known as Pamphylia or possibly Galatia. At the end of two years, they were back with reports of the founding of several new churches. These new churches were at Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

The success of this missionary journey had raised so many new problems and opened such exciting new possibilities for the future of Christianity that a general assembly of church leaders was called to meet in Jerusalem. Christianity's first ecumenical council was held in 50 CE. When the council was ended, Paul was on the road again with a new companion, Silas. This time, they went completely across the province of Asia and over the straits into Europe. Newly formed churches in Macedonia and Greece were henceforth a part of Christian concern. These churches were located at Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Beroea, etc.

A third journey, with intensive years spent in the province called *Asia*, brought into being the historic churches later mentioned in Revelation. These being Ephesus, Philadelphia, Sardis, Laodicea, Smyrna, Thyatira, and Pergamum.

All of this time, Paul had been longing to get to Rome, the capital of the Empire. He wanted to share his faith with the people of that strategic city. His plans to go there were repeatedly defeated, but finally he arrived, under strange circumstances. He had been arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome in chains to appear before Caesar for trial. He lay in prison for two years, but imprisonment did not stop him from carrying on his work. He talked with many individuals, especially the soldiers who guarded him, met delegations of local Christians who came to visit him, wrote letters to churches, and sent messengers to points far and near. In fact, those prison years in Rome proved to be about the most creative period of his life. Though the narrative of *The Acts* breaks off abruptly at this point, we believe there is sufficient evidence to infer that Caesar dismissed his case and set him free. Perhaps he made a

final tour that led even to far-off Spain, to the Pillars of Hercules, which Europe considered the end of the world, the *non plus ultra* (nothing beyond).

We must remember also that Christ's other dedicated apostles, Peter, John, James, Andrew, Thomas, and others, were likewise preaching the gospel and establishing churches. In fact, Andrew and Thomas seem to have gone farther afield than Paul.

The *church* was growing up in organization, liturgy, and doctrine. They were not only growing in numbers and extension of influence but as an institution. When the movement started, the followers of Christ were the followers of *The Way* because they had not known what to call themselves, but now the Antiochian nickname, *Christian*, was becoming universal. At first, there had been nothing distinctive about Christian worship. The worshipers were Jews and Jewish proselytes who worshiped according to Jewish patterns and on the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day of the week (Saturday). But Satan's deception of the church began to creep into the minds of men. Through misunderstandings of Jewish practices, their measurement of time and even the beginning of their day caused the early church to incorporate some changes. Jewish traditions, coupled with the desire for power, control and authority, influenced early church leaders to gradually began to worship on the first day of the week, calling it the Lord's Day.

These changes continued until such point in 324 CE that an edict was declared that Christian worship would henceforth be on the first day of the week (Sunday). During the same time, liturgy was developing from the simple forms that seem to have characterized the worship of Jesus to ever increasing ornateness and complexity, probably through imitation of the ceremonies of the old Jewish Temple. (Protestants were destined to revolt from much of this in due time.) A priesthood was also growing up as the tasks of worship became more and more specialized. There came to be orders of *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers*: Ephesians 4:11, *It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers*. Finally *bishops*: 1 Timothy 3:1 KJV, *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work*. The Christians had no Bible at first except the Hebrew scrolls (Old Testament), but through these years, within the fellowship of the church, there developed a New Testament consisting of the Gospels and the writings of the church's leaders.

An elaborate doctrine of the church developed to explain what the church is and how it should function. It comes to us couched in a series of word pictures mostly from the mind of Paul. Jesus used the word *church* at Caesarea Philippi when Peter made his great confession of faith. Matthew 16:13-19 reads, *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The Greek word, *ekklesia*, means *those who have been called out*. The church was to be a fellowship of those whom God had called from the world to become his holy people. Paul's statement of it was, what agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

*"I will live with them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
Therefore come out from them
and be separate, says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you."
"I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:16-18*

It has become difficult today to understand what is meant when we say *church*, because so many differing groups are claiming to be God's chosen ones. A babble of voices is in the air! Without going into the controversy, we will hazard a definition. The true church of Jesus Christ is an *invisible church*, consisting of those who have been truly *called* by God and who are fully committed to Him, regardless of their denominational affiliations. God knows who these people are, and He suggests how we may know them: **You will know them by their fruits!** Matthew 7:16-20, *By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.* Did you see anything in this text stating a denomination, race, color of skin or creed? Mankind plays by those rules and concerns. God deals with the heart and soul of every individual and He doesn't look at race or skin color anymore than He deals with time.

Second, Paul describes the church as the *household of God*, *God's family*, or *God's home circle*, wherein, people dwell with God the Father along with their brothers and sisters in Christ. One enters that household of God through the calling of God, a new birth of the Spirit, and in it he grows up spiritually, by the aid of Christian nurture, into the likeness of Jesus. John Calvin expressed this domestic concept in terms of Roman Catholic verbage: "The Church is our Mother; without her we could not have been born and apart from her we cannot grow up." In simple Protestant thought we do not consider the Church as our mother. Yes! We accept the Church as feminine, the bride of Christ and yes, as the Church we do grow, forever. There are no vacant chairs in this home circle of God, for those whose faces are invisible to our physical eyes on a Sabbath morning, have but gone on into another room of the Father's house. The family pew has been extended to include eternity and the church triumphant.

A third figurative term for the church does not always catch our attention in Bible translations. The church is likened to a theater, a *spectacle* wherein the ways of God and man, truth and falsehood, good and evil, are dramatized for our instruction. Like Bunyan's Interpreter's House, the church by the side of the road lifts her towers and opens her doors where the pilgrims of life go by, saying, "Come in and I will make you wise." Shakespeare described the theater as a mirror held up to nature wherein vice sees her own image and virtue her likeness. When the theater is functioning as it should, it does just that. The drama of human life, with its tragedy and comedy, is portrayed in miniature showing us the life roles we must play. The church with her preaching, teaching, counseling, sympathizing, and helping is likewise serving as a mirror held up to nature. The difference is that whereas the secular theater seeks to mirror life as it is, the church's task is to portray life and destiny as they ought to be, and more importantly as they would be if Christ could have His way with us.

Fourth, Paul's supreme metaphor was *The church is the body of Christ!* God has placed all things under the power of Christ and has set Him as head of the Church. For the Church is His body, and in that body (the church) fully lives the One who fills the whole wide universe. (Extracted and

paraphrased from: Ephesians 1:22-23; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). When the Master walked among us, He lived and served through a human body. Man, in his wickedness, crucified that Body so it could serve no more. Christ is still among us, in His spiritual presence, but He wills His ministry on earth to carry on through the dedicated bodies of His people. He had a tongue that proclaimed His gospel, now He wills to use your tongue and mine. He had hands with which to serve, He now wants our hands for deeds just as noble. His feet were restless in pilgrimages of love and mercy, His desire today is to travel on our feet. His smile of love and assurance lifted human hearts from gloom and so must ours. The metaphor is overwhelming, sobering, and true. Christ still goes about the world doing good through the body. Christ's body, through us as His people and through His church, the true church, as called by God, perform this work. *But if we fail Him, He does not go about as He would if we were faithful.*

Two centuries ago in England, a young Baptist layman by the name of William Carey, a cobbler, sat beside his shoe last carrying on his trade. On the wall in front of him, he had tacked a map of the world, that he looked at from time to time. The map was speaking to his heart with a terrible indictment of the Christian church. Jesus had told his followers to go into all the world and make disciples of all peoples and William Carey believed Jesus meant it when he said that. But a millennium and a half later, even more, had rolled by, and most of the world had not even heard of Jesus. When Carey talked with his fellow Christians about these things, they were bothered by him. "Hush, William Carey," they said. "When God gets ready to convert the heathen, He will do so without asking you about it." How wrong these people were! It is now clear to us, in retrospect. God was ready to convert the *heathen* and He was asking William Carey to do something about it. Through William Carey, He would launch the great movement of modern missions into all the world.

William Carey, Englishman, 1761-1834 — Central figure in modernization of India.
A self taught father and founder of modern missions who translated the Bible into several languages and dialects.

That is the way God does things. He is always ready to do great things for the world, greater things than we can ask or think, **but He waits until His people are ready to be His agents.** God wills to act through us, His church.

When the Christians of the world met in their first ecumenical session at Amsterdam in 1948, in the aftermath of the ghastly Second World War, we Americans went with the zeal of crusaders, hoping that at last, the Christian conscience of the world was about to do something about war. But we were met with an European rebuke, "Go home, Americans; when God gets ready to do away with war He will not ask you about it."

No doubt, we in our *adolescent* zeal, were in need of such a deflating rejoinder from the *older civilization* of Europe, but those words were tragically mistaken. God was ready, divinely, eternally ready, to move to the redemption of a war-torn world, but He was waiting for His church to awaken from her lethargy and march at His command. "The world is yet to see what God will do for and through one man who is fully consecrated to Him," said a man of God to a former generation.

Many a youth responded to that suggestion, saying prayerfully, "By the grace of God, I will be that man." Such a challenge should be made again on a more collective level. **The world has yet to see what God will do for and through His church when it becomes fully consecrated to Him!**

Paul's figure of the corporate nature of the church (Christ's body) takes on an added and more accurate meaning today, since we have learned more of how the body functions. Its real life exists not in the organs or in the body as a whole, but in each of the millions of living cells that compose it. Body warmth, energy, growth, and reproduction originate in the individual cells, becoming through their

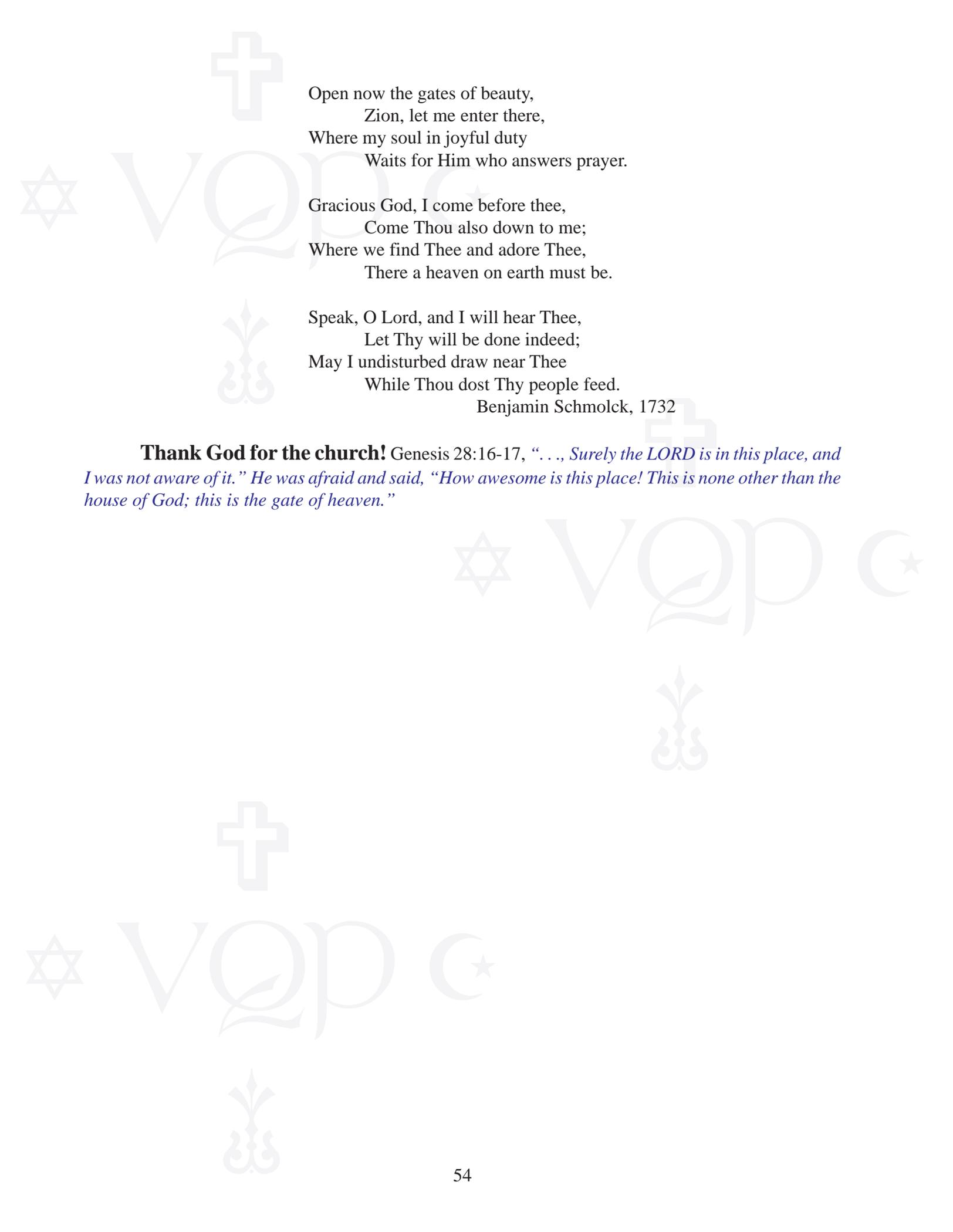
togetherness, the life of the whole. When cells are healthy, the body is healthy, when cells multiply, the body grows and when cells begin to die, the body is dying. Even so is the church, its life is in the consecrated lives of its individual members. When church leaders confer and plan for advance in the program of the church but fail to consider the deepening of the devotion and commitment of its individual members, they are deluding themselves. Stanley Jones says, "Unless Christianity begins in the heart of an individual, it does not begin, if Christianity ends with the individual, it ends." Individual Christians integrated into Christian churches equals Christianity.

The crowning figure is the metaphor calling the church *The Bride ... of the Lamb* (the Lamb being another name for Christ). The consummation of all things is portrayed in Revelation as The marriage of the Lamb to His Bride the church: Revelation 19:6-8, *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:*

*"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*

The obvious meaning of this beautiful poetry is the church is beloved of God above all earthly things. Christ knows his bride, the church, is human much afflicted with human weaknesses, but she is nevertheless His beloved. He is using all the resources of His divine love to lift her to the standards of His holiness, and He will succeed in doing so. At the consummation, He will receive her perfected and made ready, *"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."*

Whatever may be the full significance of all this, it means **God loves the church!** It should give us a sense of reverent awe before that fact! If God loves the church that much, what of us? Some churchmen today are speaking of the church in ways that are careless and irreverent. We know they are striving to be realistic, humble, the opposite of self-righteous, as they enter into conversation with the world. Good! Let's be and do all of that! But how can Christians speak of the church in a spirit as grossly negative as is now happening? Like ungrateful sons condemning the parents who gave them birth, the church needs criticism, and must have it until it becomes as it should! But surely, surely, if a Christian takes it upon himself to criticize his church, he should do it as he would criticize his mother, through tears of love! Verily, the church, though a divine-human institution, is not yet perfect. We often wonder how God can tolerate us, the avowed Christ-ones of today, the unworthy constituents of His project for human redemption. God does more than merely tolerate us, in fact, He is saving a world through you and I today! The merit is in Him, not in us! His grace overrules our failures, but in comparison with any other human enterprise of which we know, the church is glorious, a miracle of nobility and self-sacrificing service. It has been the privilege of the author, by God's grace, to visit many churches in America, Europe, Asia and even in the Middle East. I have seen a little of what happens in the higher brackets of ecclesiastical leadership! Many things should be changed! There is much reforming to be done, but: Alas! **The church of Jesus Christ is magnificent! Thank God for her, this nurturer of our spiritual life, this medium of our eternal salvation, this earthly Zion wherein man joins with God in the greatest of all enterprises!**



Open now the gates of beauty,
Zion, let me enter there,
Where my soul in joyful duty
Waits for Him who answers prayer.

Gracious God, I come before thee,
Come Thou also down to me;
Where we find Thee and adore Thee,
There a heaven on earth must be.

Speak, O Lord, and I will hear Thee,
Let Thy will be done indeed;
May I undisturbed draw near Thee
While Thou dost Thy people feed.
Benjamin Schmolck, 1732

Thank God for the church! Genesis 28:16-17, “. . ., Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

XI Victory Over Sin and Death

*"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our
Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Paul's years were slipping by filled with abundant living, tireless serving, almost uninterrupted persecution, sublime thinking, and profound writing. Gradually into his writings there came a new note, the mellow ripeness of age. In his letter to his friend, Philemon, a telltale phrase slipped in and he referred to himself as *Paul the aged*. He did this as an old man to gain a point through sympathy. The new note of wisdom, ripened by years, begins in the letters to the Corinthians revealing itself markedly in the prison letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon), and culminates in the two letters to Timothy. Here is one who has not only lived close to Jesus Christ but who has lived long. His witness carries the impact of *fullness of years*, years that have brought maturity to his insights and conclusions.

Sometimes, like an old man, he reminisces, as in his second letter to Timothy. Looking back through three generations, he writes: 2 Timothy 1:5 NKJV, *When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.* He is paternal, frequently addressing one or the other of his fellow workers as *my son*. He is constantly charging his assistants to be faithful to their trust and to guard the deposit of truth as he is committed to them. 2 Timothy. 1:14, *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.* He is worried by false teachings he perceives to be stealing into the churches through unworthy leaders. 2 Timothy 2:16-18, *Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.* He is fussy about the proprieties, especially concerning women's dress. His judgement of values is shifting more and more to the tests of heavenly eternity, rather than those of earthly time. He has become increasingly impatient with theological controversy, admitting readily there are questions we cannot answer: 1 Timothy 3:16, *Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:*

*He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.*

Paul insists that our faith is no less secure than Jesus. There are so many things we do know with abundant assurance. 2 Timothy 2:23, *Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.* He often repeats favorite bits of advice, "In conclu-

sion, my brothers, delight yourselves in the Lord!” It doesn’t bother me, the author, to repeat a piece of advice like this. At times Paul writes as if he had but one more word to record on earth, “Here is a last piece of advice.” He warns against the shallowness of much of the thinking of those who have not lived long enough to have the perspective of years, *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Philippians 3:19-21 During his last imprisonment he sends for two things, a cloak to protect his old, tired body from the prison chill and some favorite books to sustain his soul. Paul, the aged, has almost *finished the race* but his final insights are consequently most profound.

The most admirable characteristic of Paul, the aged, was his inner peace. He wrote, Philippians 4:6-7, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Verily, this demonstrates a heavenly maturity of mind and soul. It was based on a consciousness of victory over life’s two supreme enemies, sin and death. (See the text at the head of this chapter.)

It could be said that sin and how to overcome it had always been Paul’s *major* in the university of life. When, as a little Jewish boy, he toddled off to the synagogue school at Tarsus, he began the study of sin in the sacred books of the Jews. Sin and its redemption were Israel’s (Judah and Israel, together under the first three kings of that unified country) chief concerns throughout her noble history. The beautiful universe the Creator God gave to man, pronouncing it *very good*, had been spoiled by man’s sin. Like a snake, it had insinuated its way into the Garden of Eden and then through the ages, filled the world with lies, betrayals, murders, adulteries, and all their slithery offspring. Paul knew the story well, from sacred books, from observation, and, it would seem, from the struggles of his own soul. He knew sin’s problems and God’s remedies. Along with his fellow Hebrews, he was heir to the *Ten Words* (as the Hebrew scholars called them) pronounced long ago at Sinai. God’s sublime epitome of His moral imperative for man’s conduct was The Ten Commandments! No other gods, no idols, no blasphemy, a Sabbath Day kept holy, honor to parents, no murder, no adultery, no stealing, no lying, and no covetousness. Paul knew those *Ten Words* as an expert. We presume they were written on the doorposts of his boyhood home. They may have been embroidered upon the hems of his garments, perhaps worn on frontlets before his eyes. He had committed his life, from early years, to the vocation of rabbi that he might know and teach not only the Ten Commandments, but the innumerable rules that had been invented by the rabbis to guard their observance. He also knew and loved the traditions and teachings that had come down through the years through the long line of noble prophets who had been sent from God to help Israel rise above her sins and measure up to her high calling. In his rabbinic career, he had been closely associated with the priests who tended the smoking altars and offered the perpetual sacrifices through which Israel sought atonement for her trespasses. Paul had engaged in a lifelong campaign against sin, always following, to the best of his ability, the light he had at the time.

That commitment to the best he knew had led him, at long last, in his mid-life, to Christ, and then he had begun to learn the truths about sin’s redemption that only Jesus could teach. Man must have not only laws against sin, but a Savior who is able to deliver one from sin’s power and overcome its consequences. **Sin is slavery!** There must be found a power sufficient to break sin’s shackles and set one free from its bondage of evil habits and foul passions. Sin is transgression against the laws of God and the rights of man. Sin’s redemption therefore demands not only forgiveness but reconciliation with God. Restoration of the whole fabric of human society has been rent asunder by sin. **Sin is moral contamination and disease!** A sinful thought becomes an act, the act becomes a habit, the habit becomes a deviation of the whole personality toward evil and finally death (even as the deadly microbe, that steals into the blood stream, proceeds to multiply and gradually pollute the whole body with the

forces of death). The problem is, who can cleanse? Who can heal? Sin is guilt, a record written, often in blood, into the very fabric of the moral universe. “The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ, moves on” sang the pagan poet Omar Khayyám, and with his limited vision that saw only material cause and effect, he continued, with, gloomy words of doom, “nor all your Piety nor Wit shall lure it back to cancel half a Line.” Law is not enough to deal with human sin. Something, or someone, must *cover* (Old Testament word for *forgive*) both man’s sin and its consequences.

Paul had found an answer to all this in Jesus Christ, an answer sealed in Christ’s own blood. Romans 7:25; 8:2-3, *Thanks be to God ... the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death... . God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.*

In the power of this gospel of divine salvation, Paul had set out anew to conquer sin, in his own heart, in the hearts of others, and in the whole realm of human affairs. He had succeeded tremendously, not easily, not quickly, and not yet (let us note) to the degree that could be called perfection. His battle against sin was not to be ended in this world, but it was a winning battle, because Jesus Christ was fighting by his side with God providing His spiritual armor. He is now clad in the panoply of God. He has a *sword* with a blade keener than steel, *the sword of the Spirit*. He has his *faith* as a *shield* that cannot be pierced by all the flaming darts of the adversary. On his head is a *helmet of salvation*, impervious to the heaviest blows the enemy can rain upon him. His feet are shod with *the gospel of peace*, and over his heart is a *breastplate of righteousness*, not the earthly counterfeit known to this world, but the righteousness that comes from God. (Paraphrased from Ephesians 6:10-17).

In this military parable, Paul’s description is so vivid, he almost defeats his purpose. We get the feeling we are watching a real combat with physical weapons wielded against flesh-and-blood enemies. But what is being described is purely spiritual. It is the battle for man’s soul, fought in the inner recesses of his own being, against temptation and all the allurements and subterfuges of sin. Paul is saying that **God is on our side**. We are sure to win the battle against sin. Faith is stronger than doubt, love is mightier than hate, and in the long run, truth always wins against falsehood. God’s grace is sufficient to every test.

Amid the lengthening shadows of his sunset years, there finally came to Paul the peace of heart for which he had longed, “the peace of God, which passes all understanding.” He was still conscious of being a *sinner*, not perfect, morally or spiritually, but victorious. He was winning the battle on earth against the great adversary, and in heaven he was *justified* by the blood of Christ and the grace of a forgiving God. The aged veteran could retire now from combat and count his medals: 2 Timothy 4:7-8, *“The glorious fight God gave me I have fought, the course I was set (a rugged commando course it was), I have finished, and I have kept the faith. The future for me holds the crown of righteousness which God, the true judge, will give me in that day, and, of course, not only to me but to all those who have loved what they have seen in him”*

Need we say more in applying it all to ourselves? We, too, have fought that same good fight, run the same commando course against sin, battled for that same faith, and we have rejoiced as Paul did when we found ourselves winning because the living God was fighting not only by our side, but with and through us for victory. God grant, that with Paul, we may receive the olive crown of final victory over there!

Paul’s victory over sin, by the grace of God, had brought him that other supreme triumph, victory over death. *“Death is swallowed up in victory,”* he rejoiced. It was a taunt song to death he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians. (See it printed at the head of this chapter.) In his ancestral Hebrew religion, Paul had not found a complete answer to the problem of death, that terrifying terminal shadow that hangs over all human existence. It is not dealt with in the Old Testament in any direct way. The Old Testament is a book written for this life on earth with almost nothing to say about any

other life beyond it. Death is referred to as a final period put down at the close of a story of life. God's blessings, so profusely described, are blessings for this earthly life. The words *resurrection*, *eternal life*, and *immortality* do not occur in the Old Testament. *Everlasting* is used frequently to describe God and his works, but never in reference to man. *Eternal* and *eternity* occur three times, always in reference to God. *Immortality* is a Greek concept, no similar idea was developed by the Hebrews. It is not that the Old Testament denies immortality, it simply does not deal philosophically with the problem of death except by inferences. (Please note that we (people) say *except by inferences*.) The inferences are significant. God, who *inhabits eternity*, is good. We may therefore trust the eternal issues of our existence to Him and that is sufficient. As Moses led the people of Israel in their bold, dangerous exodus march into the Wilderness of Sin, he looked up to the rugged mountains that surrounded them and sang. Psalms 90 & 91, "*Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. . . . He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'*" Then God replies to man's faith, "*Because he cleaves to me in Love, I will deliver him (mankind); I will protect him, because he knows My name. When he calls to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him, with long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation*"

The citizens of ancient nations did not, as a rule, presume to understand the political issues that concerned their own lives. They left these issues to the king. Even though they were tremendously concerned, the Hebrews seem to have left eternal issues to God, with almost unquestioning resignation. Their logic seems to be: God dwells in eternity, we dwell in God. He is a loving Savior, therefore all is well with us for time and eternity. The problem of life beyond death is not discussed, except for a few scattered poetic suggestions that are very important, but poetic and intuitive.

The Book of Job is a drama written to deal with the problem of suffering. Why do good people sometimes suffer? The drama pictures an ideal man, Job, then develops a plot in which one calamity after another descends upon him. Job cannot understand it because he believes, along with his fellow countrymen, that virtue always brings prosperity and happiness, and suffering is always the result of sin. As his physical suffering increases, Job's mental and spiritual pain becomes unendurable. He is desperate. God is evidently torturing him to death, and yet he still believes God is good. What shall he do? *Curse God and die*? No, he cannot do that! Finally, out of his agony there leaps into his mind revolutionary ideas; *If a man dies, shall he live again*? It seems evident that God is not going to reward him for his righteousness in this life. Can it be there is another life, beyond death, where justice will be done? The idea grows, until with a mighty leap of faith he cries, Job 19:25-26, *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God*. It just must be so! Because God is good! Like the old woman in Africa who heard the story of Jesus for the first time. When she had listened through to the end with rapt attention, she exclaimed, "I knew there must be a God like that." It must be so!

David, the shepherd boy, had a deeply moving experience, an emotional *confrontation* with the God of his fathers when he realized, perhaps for the first time, that Jehovah was his divine Shepherd, who led him into green pastures, beside still waters, and even through the valley of the shadow of death, as he led his sheep. Then, as he thought these things through in his beautiful psalm, his inspired insight leapt beyond earth, past the barrier death, and he concluded: Psalms 21:6, "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever*." Here again, is Israel's *sublime inference*: *Surely* the Shepherd God who is so good to us here must have made provision also for life eternal. *The house of the Lord* must be large enough to include eternity too. Surely!

This same inspired intuition leads the psalmists frequently to the borderline of a doctrine of immortality. What, for instance, is the meaning of the phrase *in the morning*, used several times in the psalms? Does it refer to the bright morning that shall follow the dark night of death? Psalms 30:5b, *Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning*. Surely!

But only Jesus could bring *life and immortality to light*. In him, the inspired inference becomes assurance. He preached immortality and He announced immortality. Standing by Lazarus' tomb He said, John 11:25-26, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die*. In His last visit with His apostles (while alive and in the flesh), in the upper room, He comforted them concerning His approaching death by saying, John 14:2, *Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you? . . . that where I am, you may be also*. Jesus announced Himself to be Lord of eternity, going to prepare a place for His own in eternity. **Death is but a doorway leading to that other room in the Father's house!** The conditional clause is: Have I been obedient to God's Word? The question remains with us, we must make a choice regarding where we want to spend eternity.

On another occasion, when the listening crowds became provoked by one of His sermons and began to leave Him, Jesus turned to his apostles and asked, "Will you also go away?"

Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." That was a profound answer. They could have found many words about many things from other teachers, but concerning eternal life there was nowhere else to go but to Jesus. When He rose from his tomb, He put the seal of God's final approval upon the whole matter. There is life beyond death.

When Paul surrendered to his overwhelming *confrontation* that day on the road to Damascus, the two difficult factors in the experience to accept were the cross and the resurrection. This Jesus who had died on Calvary was evidently alive again. He had said He would return from death and here He was. So Paul went out to live in the framework of a brand-new psychology. Death had been repudiated; life abundant and life eternal had taken over as attainable goals. *Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen again* became Paul's theme. He preached it with all his might, all over the then-known world. Paul's words meant that Jesus was divine and His teachings were the word of God! It meant sin and death had been conquered, man had been *saved*, and man was born to live forever. The Christian church grew up on the basis of those sublime truths. Paul's enemies threatened to kill him for preaching to them, even as he had threatened Christians in his bad old days, but that blackmail weapon had no power anymore. Death? That dragon had been slain! If death comes, what of it? God evidently wills it, and it is but a doorway to another room of the Father's house. Paul understood now why his own threatenings had not stopped Stephen and others of his early victims.

In view of these satisfying assurances, Paul was at peace. The thought of death no longer disturbed him although sin still had to be resisted. As with Saint Michael, who slew the dragon, the monster was not yet dead, but Saint Michael smiled when he felt it writhe beneath his heel. As persecutions continued, Paul found himself looking forward to death as a welcome relief that God would send to him in due time. From his Roman prison he wrote: Philippians 1:20-25, *"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."*

Finally, the earthly sentence of death became a fact. According to tradition, Paul was condemned by Nero to die by the headman's ax outside the Ostian Gate of Rome. As the end approached, he fell into a mood of ecstasy and wrote in his final letter to Timothy the song of his crowning day, the

day when *the Lord, the righteous judge* would put *the crown of righteousness* upon his head. This mortal nature must now put on immortality. The sooner the better! He had felt, up to that time, it was needed for him to go on living for a while because his work was not completed. The harried Christians still needed him, but now, even that burden had been lifted from his heart. God would take over, after all. Only God can *establish* the work of any mortal man. If one's work has been of God, it will live on; if not, it should not live on. Paul's faith attained its highest point as he dismissed the whole matter, leaving it all to God and eternity. 2 Timothy 1:12, *I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

As it became evident that the day of his execution was upon him, Paul inscribed his last words, the closing sentences of his second letter to Timothy: Paraphrased from 2 Timothy 4:6, *For I am already on the point of being sacrificed, the time of my departure has come.* Then he painted the ecstatic picture of his crowning day to come, sent farewell greetings to a few of his most loved friends, and laid down his pen, forever.

The word he used to announce his impending departure is a nautical term, *unmooring*, used to describe the departure of a vessel going out to sea, *The time of my unmooring has come.* Catch the picture! Behold Paul, or our own beloved departed, or you, or me, standing there on the high deck of a great ocean liner (and the name of that ship is *Death*), awaiting the moment of *unmooring*, when the hawser (the large rope used to secure the ship) shall be slipped from the mooring post. The moment arrives, and slowly, gradually feeling her freedom, the great ship drifts with the tides away from the dock. The wind slowly fills her lifted sails (or the engines begin to throb), and friends who stand on shore are waving us off with tears of affection. Slowly those loved faces fade from our vision as the ship catches her stride. We sail beyond the horizon, to high adventure on the great, mysterious deep, then to shores we have never seen, where loved ones, lost a while, are waiting to welcome us. We are not afraid, for we know our Captain, who stands on the bridge saying: Matthew 28:18, *“Do not be afraid... All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

When men go down to the sea in ships,
`tis not to the sea they go;
Some isle or pole the mariners' goal,
And thither they sail through calm and gale,
When down to the sea they go.

When souls go down to the sea by ship,
And the dark ship's name is Death,
Why mourn and wail at the vanishing sail?
Though outward bound, God's world is round,
And only a ship is Death.

Robert Freeman

XII

Saved Through Faith

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- Ephesians 2:8

Salvation through faith is the overall term Paul used to describe all he had written. In the word *Christian*, as we have noted, is really a hyphenated word (Christ-one). You might say faith is the hyphen. Faith is that attitude of mind and soul that unites one to Christ and the whole content of Christian truth and experience. Faith is the human response to God's grace. God loves and offers blessing to men. Man believes and responds to the *divine encounter*.

Human faith helps God in his gracious desire to bless mankind, the lack of it hinders him. Jesus went about pleading with people to have faith, in order that He might help them to live abundantly and eternally. In His hometown of Nazareth, He *did not do many mighty works ... because of their unbelief*. On the contrary, He marveled at the faith of the Roman centurion and blessed him. Wherever He found faith, as in Peter at Caesarea Philippi, He rejoiced and advanced His program for human redemption.

Paul used the word *faith* more than two hundred times in his letters. If The Letter to the Hebrews is from his pen (it is not signed, as the other epistles are), he mentioned faith more than two hundred times. Hebrews, chapter 11, the Bible's classic chapter on faith, pictures a grand processional of heroes of faith marching through the ages, conquering kingdoms, enforcing justice, stopping the mouths of lions, escaping the edge of the sword, pleasing God, and blessing their fellowmen. In fact, *the world was not worthy* of them, because through their faith, those heroes were outliving, outloving, and outdying their contemporaries. They had insight, foresight, and inner strength beyond their fellows because they were walking with God by faith.

Hebrews 11:1 NKJV, *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. God equipped us humans with five natural senses to help us live: seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting. Faith provides a sixth sense which enables us to see that which is invisible to the physical eye. It also enables us to lay hold upon future possibilities still nonexistent and bring them to pass. Therefore, as Christians we confirm the following: 2 Corinthians 4:18, *We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*.

To him who is not walking by faith, the word *faith* is liable to be a confusing one. Yes! It may well be a hated word, an object of scorn! A so-called boy's definition is, *Faith is believin' what ain't so*. The brilliant-minded Tom Paine of Revolutionary times tried to call the infant American Republic away from its faith by announcing the age of faith had passed, and was being replaced by the age of reason. We would not respond to such detractors with rancor but with a prayer that they may be given eyes to see and ears to hear the wonderful realities of that other dimension of life and destiny which extends beyond earthbound awareness to things divine and eternal.

Faith is not restricted to the realm of religion, however it is a part of all living. Every daring and creative act of your life has involved faith. Every forward step has been a venture of believing. You were once a helpless baby. You didn't know anything and couldn't do anything but cry, but gradually your baby mind became conscious of a warm, loving presence that hovered over you. You made a venture of faith, you put your trust in her, and smiled and gurgled when she came near, and you were rewarded by having all the riches of mother's love showered upon you. By and by, you found you had hands and you felt an impulse to use them. You made a venture and tried them out, from faith to faith your confidence in them increased. Matthew 9:29, *According to your faith may it be done to you*.

Perhaps you now have the hands of a great musician, a skilled surgeon, or an expert typist. You discovered your feet, because you felt them with your hands. You kicked them around and found them interesting. Then you noticed other people could walk on their feet. Finally, you came to believe you could also do so. One day you stood, hesitating, holding to a chair. You believed, in spite of your unbelief, you could walk to that smiling person who beckoned to you with outstretched arms. Your faith increased. You let go of your support and took your first step. Never will you make a venture of faith more daring. It might have ended in minor calamity, but you tried again. Your faith increased from faith to faith, and soon you could walk like other people. Even today, your walking is a constant exercise of faith. Think of it! You stand with your whole top-heavy human weight balanced precariously on the small foundation of one foot, then you deliberately throw your weight forward, out of balance, trusting the other foot will be at the right place, at the right time to catch your fall and reestablish your poise. Walking by faith is a literal expression, even in the physical realm.

By and by everyone grows to maturity in their life's adventures. School days end and we face the necessity of choosing a vocation. All must find their place in the complex workday world in which we make a living. Finally we make a choice by faith. We do so with many misgivings. Can we be successful? Will we like our work? What happens after that choice of vocation is determined, in large measure by our faith, faith to apply ourselves to those tasks, trusting largely to the future for our rewards. With faith we forge ahead into ever widening circles of involvement? If we have ever ceased to believe in either our job or our own ability, the chances are our success has become very limited.

In due time we fall in love and marriage suggests itself. Oh, what faith it takes to face that issue! Am I worthy of her (or him)? Can we get along together? Can we build a successful home? Shall we be happy? Finally, we do one of two things, either we act on faith and launch out on that greatest of all earthly adventures, or we bog down in unbelief and muddle on alone. So goes the story of life, and each widening circle of human experience must be entered by a venture of our faith.

This is also the way of the scientist who moves into their discoveries by faith. First, they have an intuitive sense that something is true, that something will work if tried. Then they make a venture of faith and an experiment is performed. Finally, they arrive at proof by experience, positive or negative. "*He that willeth to do, shall know*" is a word of wisdom from the lips of Jesus, applicable equally to the spiritual and the physical realms.

Religious faith differs from the more earthly varieties only in that it opens vistas into spiritual rather than physical experiences. It is the highest form of faith, a launching pad that projects one's soul into orbit, not in outer space, but beyond all categories of space and time. You began your life by believing in your mother, then you learned faith in yourself and your inherited potential to do and be. You also developed faith in other people, sprinkled, alas, by doubts that led you beyond your merely personal encounters, to faith in your country, in civilization and in the various functions of organized society. Finally, if your soul attained full orbit as your Creator intended, you achieved faith in God, in righteousness, in eternal life, in the power of prayer, and in the full, rich content of the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. In these higher brackets of faith, you simply stepped beyond the limitations of the material into the spiritual.

You were bound, sooner or later, to be so confronted by the challenge of the spiritual because you are inferentially spiritual. You are, as Genesis proclaims, *a living soul*. Something within impels you to believe in God, to revere truth and to seek the highest in your living. We need to find a reality that is more solid and abiding than the passing show of physical phenomena. **We need God!** We are homesick for God until we find Him! As Augustine pointed out, God made us for Himself and our souls are restless until they rest in Him. The doorway to His presence stands wide open. **Faith!** Let go, let God! Acts 16:31, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*" Believe that God is, pray to Him even if it is only the agnostic's prayer: "O God, if there be a God", seek reconciliation with Him

through Christ, commit your ways unto Him, and He will become the companion of your soul. Faith leads to experience. “Be still, and know that I am God.” John 7:17, *If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.* Psalms 34:8, *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.* Hebrews 11:6, *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

To live only by the things that are seen, a mere flesh-and-blood existence, is to rob oneself. It is to live, as it were, with one's eyes shut. To refuse the revelations of faith is to miss the fullness of reality even in the physical realm. Things are not as they seem on the surface. The earth looks flat, the sun seems to rise in the east and set in the west, deep water looks blue, but none of these things are true. This fact of life is much more true in the spiritual realm. Physical things intrude upon us and make it seem the spiritual are not real. Self is intrusive in our psychology and makes us believe that the way to be happy, is to serve self at the expense of others. Selfish aggression looks like the way to greatness. Cleverness of wit, strength of arm, grit, and determination seem to be the only useful equipment for one's struggle for existence. Death seems to end all, so the worldling (the person of this world) sings, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

“Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost” quotes the earthbound philosopher, but these things are not true. Such conclusions are tragically blind to reality, the reality that Jesus revealed. Material things are but a passing show which sooner or later will fail us utterly. Only the spiritual abides. He who seeks happiness for himself alone will miss it, but he who seeks it for others will himself enter into its abundance. It is only when we surrender our self-will to God's will that we find self-mastery in our own lives. When we dedicate our treasures to heavenly purposes, we discover we have treasures laid up in heaven, *where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.* (Matthew 6:20) When bad times come, and the going is hard in the categories of eating, drinking and living in houses, life still flows in spiritual channels. If we are living by faith, sometimes we wonder if the whole experience of deprivation has not been sent as a blessing from the Lord. Learn from the following poem:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added affliction He addeth his mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again

Annie Johnson Flint

According to your faith be it unto you, in any realm. This does not mean gullibility such as would lead to easily believing that which is not true. It means courage to venture out, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, into all the realms of reality. Longfellow, in his beautiful poem written for the

birthday of the scientist Agassiz, paints a picture of religious and scientific faith adventuring together with God:

And Nature, the old nurse, took
The child upon her knee,
Saying: "Here is a story-book
Thy Father has written for thee."
"Come, wander with me," she said,
"Into regions yet untrod;
And read what is still unread
In the manuscripts of God."
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

A circle of little boys once stood on the edge of a chilly Canadian swimming pool. While others drew back, one boy gritted his teeth, saying, "I am going in, I am going to learn to be a great swimmer." It was he who later won the channel swim from Catalina Island to the California mainland.

Six centuries ago a few people were playing with the idea that the world was round and that perhaps unknown lands lay beyond the western sea. One man believed and he sailed westward to discover a new world. A century ago some Pennsylvanians were debating the possible use or nuisance of some ill-smelling oil they had found hidden beneath their soil. One young lad believed in it and he was John D. Rockefeller. Time does not permit us to tell of Edison and Ford, the Wright Brothers, and a myriad of others who adventured by faith into the secrets of nature and brought forth our scientific age. It would take even longer to list the heroes of faith in God and things spiritual who have marched through the centuries to complete the list of Hebrews chapter 11.

A shoe clerk gave reverent response to a challenge we have noted before, "The world has yet to see what God will do for and through one man who is fully consecrated to Him."

"By the grace of God I will be that man," he said and he was Dwight L. Moody. According to your faith, be it unto you!

Through faith in God, folks go forth *conquering and to conquer*, rising above their temptations, their boredom, their purposelessness, their fears, and their sorrows, to become servants of God and fellowman, *of whom the world was not worthy*. And when earth's last great venture beckons, they will follow without fear or hesitation because, as Paul testified for himself, what they have lived and proved of God's promises in this life, makes it easy to trust Him for the life that overleaps the earthly span of years into eternity. Having received the earnest (down payment) of our faith, we can trust Him for the final installments.

The crowning phase of this whole area of truth is that through faith, we are *justified* not only before men but before God. Sinners though we be, God accounts us righteous because of our faith and through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Our sins are covered by his grace, his loving-kindness.

*Though your sins be as scarlet,
They shall be white as snow;
Though they be red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.*

Isaiah 1:18

Paul recalls that, Romans 4:3, *Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*. Romans 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God*

through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A beloved father in the faith, Dr. Willian H. Hudnut, near the age of 100, gave us his *latest insight*. “Faith,” he said, “is really a verb.” The word should never be used as a mere noun because faith always involves action. When it ceases to imply action, it is no longer faith. Holding a thought concerning something, merely believing it in a latent sort of way, is not faith. Faith is believing something so tremendously it sparks our whole being into action. We must do something, be something, become something, because something tremendous is true.

To awaken to the reality of the living God, as Isaiah did in the temple, is to cry out as he did for action. God must do something for us because we are so unworthy. We must do something for God and man because there are so many tremendous and glorious things God needs to have done. We have heard the remark, “Isn’t it terrible that some born-again people act worse than the sinners do?” Such a suggestion is an error of the first order.

If the person under consideration is *born again*, by faith in the Lord Jesus and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he will not *act worse than the sinners*. Matthew 7:16, “You *will know them by their fruits*,” said Jesus. James warns that our works must prove our faith or we are giving evidence that our supposed faith is a sham. To use some old theological terms, if we are justified before God, we are at the same time being sanctified before men. Our living on earth will mirror the transaction in heaven. One side of our salvation cannot be true unless the other is true, anymore than a piece of paper can have only one side.

The amazing career of Paul the apostle, our guide in this study of how Christians are made, was a pilgrimage of faith. Paul possessed an overwhelming faith in Jesus, whom he met that day on the road to Damascus. It was then that his growing faith developed and followed through to his own martyr’s death outside the gates of Rome.

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world, Romans 8:38-39, *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

XIII

Redeeming the Social Order

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
Revelation 22:1-2

In hindsight, we fully believe God intended His program of salvation to transform not only individual human lives, but the social order they constitute. The institutions that furnish the mold for our living, government, business, religion, education, etc., should become righteous and Christlike as well as the individual personalities who comprised them. There can be only limited achievement toward making the world a Christian world until people can grow up in a Christian environment, and give expression to their aspirations and convictions through social media that are in harmony with such aspirations and convictions. Money, jobs, wages, laws, police practices, politics, housing, recreation, race relations, policies of national defense, the channels of communication of news, and innumerable other items of so-called secular life are of concern to the Christian religion because they permeate and dominate the lives of us all.

In that time of yesteryear, there was broad emphasis of the social order in the directions designed by Jesus and the prophets. If we read the Word of God correctly, and if our judgment on human affairs is correct, these things are true: (1) Every human personality is precious in the sight of God; every member of the human race is possessed of inalienable rights that God never forgets and man must cease to forget. (2) Man serves God primarily by serving his fellowman, which means men and women, boys and girls, helpless babies and tottering old people, wherever they may live. (3) To own is to owe, to have means is an obligation to share, to possess (a dollar or a talent) brings the duty and privilege of helping those who are less richly endowed. (4) The super personality of organized society bears the same responsibilities for ethical behavior as do the individuals who compose society. In fact, human society is all of us behaving in togetherness. We must be *Christ-ones* in our corporate actions and attitudes as well as in our individual ones.

That is what the Old Testament prophets said: Micah 6:6-8,

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? [Religious ceremonies] Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

This is what the LORD says: Amos 2:6-7

For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath] They sell the righteous for silver; and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.

Jesus identified Himself with the underprivileged: Matthew 25:31-45

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me."

Then the parable continues with the judgment pronounced upon those on the left:

Then He will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me."

They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"

He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me."

James summed it up for the New Testament: James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

These great principles of social justice and mercy are natural law in the spiritual realm. Human relationships were intended to be like that. It is the blueprint of God's moral order, therefore good economics (business), good sociology (through education), good statesmanship (in government), and good religion must incorporate them as nothing else will work. A strong and enduring civilization can be built on no other foundation, anywhere or at any time, nor in the name of any particular religion.

Do we Americans yet realize what it means that our ship of state was launched with these principles at her masthead as the avowed purpose for her existence? *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* (The Declaration of Independence).

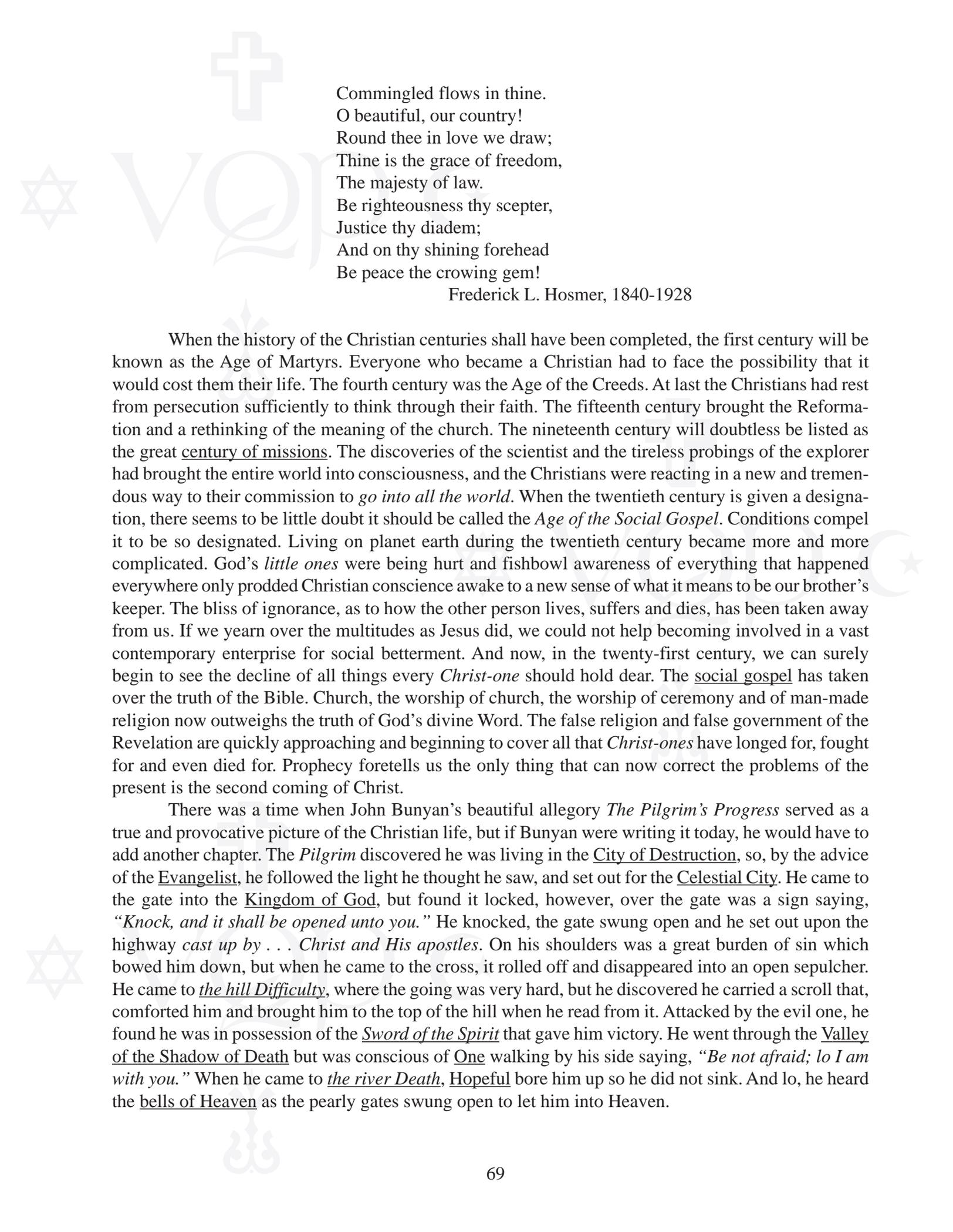
A brilliant-minded Asian once said, "Do you Americans know that all of us aspiring peoples who are seeking freedom and what we consider our rightful place among the nations of earth are looking to America for our inspiration? We would like to borrow your Declaration of Independence, your Bill of Rights, your George Washington, your Thomas Jefferson, and your Abraham Lincoln." He continued, "We hope you will help us achieve the same goals that you have sought and won. Our only fear is in your present strength, you may forget the days of your beginnings." Unfortunately, this has happened to us (see Deuteronomy chapter 28 and Proverbs 22:7) and we, Christian Americans, have forgotten the days of our beginnings.

Today, we must look a little further down the path this nation has traveled. The above statement was made over fifty years ago and some of the nations of the Asian realm were seeking to progress on the world stage as modern democratic nations. Nowadays, we find resentment among most of the nations of the world. We have forgotten what our forefathers penned within our Declaration of Independence. We've even forgotten why our forefathers fought so long and hard to bring us a Declaration of Independence. The nations of the Islamic world consider us the devil and have no desire to become democratic under our leadership. **To be bold and factual, the Bible itself predicts this nation will be broken in spirit before it learns what it truly means to be a Christ-one.**

There was a time when we could have prayed for God to help America to continue to carry the image of a nation that serves. Nowadays, we seem to find that we have adopted the image of a nation that attempts to dominate by and through her strength. No wonder the world resents America and what America has become. There really was a time when the underprivileged of the earth could have said, *Long live America!*

O Beautiful, my Country!
Be thine a nobler care
Than all thy wealth of commerce,
Thy harvests waving fair;
Be it thy pride to life up
The manhood of the poor;
Be thou to the oppressed
Fair freedom's open door!

For thee our fathers suffered;
For thee they toiled and prayed;
Upon thy holy altar
Their willing lives they laid.
Thou hast no common birthright,
Grand memories on thee shine;
The blood of pilgrim nations



Commingled flows in thine.
O beautiful, our country!
Round thee in love we draw;
Thine is the grace of freedom,
The majesty of law.
Be righteousness thy scepter,
Justice thy diadem;
And on thy shining forehead
Be peace the crowing gem!

Frederick L. Hosmer, 1840-1928

When the history of the Christian centuries shall have been completed, the first century will be known as the Age of Martyrs. Everyone who became a Christian had to face the possibility that it would cost them their life. The fourth century was the Age of the Creeds. At last the Christians had rest from persecution sufficiently to think through their faith. The fifteenth century brought the Reformation and a rethinking of the meaning of the church. The nineteenth century will doubtless be listed as the great century of missions. The discoveries of the scientist and the tireless probings of the explorer had brought the entire world into consciousness, and the Christians were reacting in a new and tremendous way to their commission to *go into all the world*. When the twentieth century is given a designation, there seems to be little doubt it should be called the *Age of the Social Gospel*. Conditions compel it to be so designated. Living on planet earth during the twentieth century became more and more complicated. God's *little ones* were being hurt and fishbowl awareness of everything that happened everywhere only prodded Christian conscience awake to a new sense of what it means to be our brother's keeper. The bliss of ignorance, as to how the other person lives, suffers and dies, has been taken away from us. If we yearn over the multitudes as Jesus did, we could not help becoming involved in a vast contemporary enterprise for social betterment. And now, in the twenty-first century, we can surely begin to see the decline of all things every *Christ-one* should hold dear. The social gospel has taken over the truth of the Bible. Church, the worship of church, the worship of ceremony and of man-made religion now outweighs the truth of God's divine Word. The false religion and false government of the Revelation are quickly approaching and beginning to cover all that *Christ-ones* have longed for, fought for and even died for. Prophecy foretells us the only thing that can now correct the problems of the present is the second coming of Christ.

There was a time when John Bunyan's beautiful allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* served as a true and provocative picture of the Christian life, but if Bunyan were writing it today, he would have to add another chapter. The *Pilgrim* discovered he was living in the City of Destruction, so, by the advice of the Evangelist, he followed the light he thought he saw, and set out for the Celestial City. He came to the gate into the Kingdom of God, but found it locked, however, over the gate was a sign saying, "*Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*" He knocked, the gate swung open and he set out upon the highway *cast up by . . . Christ and His apostles*. On his shoulders was a great burden of sin which bowed him down, but when he came to the cross, it rolled off and disappeared into an open sepulcher. He came to the hill Difficulty, where the going was very hard, but he discovered he carried a scroll that comforted him and brought him to the top of the hill when he read from it. Attacked by the evil one, he found he was in possession of the Sword of the Spirit that gave him victory. He went through the Valley of the Shadow of Death but was conscious of One walking by his side saying, "*Be not afraid; lo I am with you.*" When he came to the river Death, Hopeful bore him up so he did not sink. And lo, he heard the bells of Heaven as the pearly gates swung open to let him into Heaven.

Beautiful! True! But the pilgrim is not done. He must turn back to try to clean up the City of Destruction. His family is still there, other families are there, and men like himself still stand trembling in their rags, saying, "What shall I do? What Shall I do? And the city's name is San Francisco, New York, London, Paris; alas, its name is legion. As a picture of individual salvation, Bunyan's allegory does well, but we must recall him to add a campaign for the redemption of the City of Destruction. That is the social gospel, just the same old gospel of our fathers' faith, but applied with new concern to present day social issues. Issues that may now be too late to correct.

Jesus' challenge to human society concerns comparative values. "*Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?*" He questioned the first century follower, and all the centuries that succeed it. It is in the mad scramble for money, fame, and power that men, women, and young children are crushed and maimed in body, mind and soul. Luke 17:2, "*It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.*" Jesus warned. The important facts of human society are about people and their welfare, so shouts the prophet of this age of atoms and assembly lines. The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy? No one must be left out. God so loved the world.! He is the lover of my soul. He loves His church and cherishes her as a Bridegroom cherishes His bride, but that is not the outer boundary of His concern. He does not stop loving at the church's door, nor must we. He yearns over those who are still outside, and so must we. Our Christianity must constantly project itself into all the world, to every race and class of people, and to every condition that has to do with their welfare.

Merciful Father, who callest thy children to repentance and new obedience, hear us as we confess before thee our sins against thee and our fellowmen. We are surrounded by the light of thy revelation, yet we have often chosen the darkness of our own choices. In our willfulness we have grieved thee, we have hurt others, and we have disappointed ourselves. Thou who art holy, make us holy. Thou who art merciful, make us merciful. Thou who art forgiving, make us forgiving. Thou who art loving, make us loving. Grant us thy pardon, O God, and help us to enter more fully into the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen!

Bowed in humble petition last Sunday, along with a thousand fellow Christians, we repeated the above prayer to the living God. It is thus that Christians are praying, all over the world. God, grant us Thy grace that our words may become flesh in our own consecrated living and serving! Matthew 6:10 KJV, *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!*

An old concept that human society is basically and irredeemably wicked and that Christian redemption consists merely of the salvation of individual human souls as brands plucked from the burning, is not the message of the prophets, nor, we believe, is it the message of Jesus and the New Testament evangelists. *The leaves of the tree of life*, that grows by the throne of God, are *for the healing of the nations*. Some may believe it is for us, God's chosen messengers of our age, to apply these healing leaves to a sick society. But if one would only read the verse in Revelation, we would all come away with the understanding that the statement is made for the Millennium reign of Christ, and not for the present day nations of the earth.

In her mission to the social order, the task of the church becomes very complicated in America by reason of our tradition of separation between church and state. When we try to bring the Christian ethic to bear upon politics, business, and other areas sometimes designated *secular*, we are quite liable to be rebuked for meddling with things that do not concern us, we are out of bounds, supposedly. There seems to be about as many shades of opinion on the matter as there are Americans.

We join heartily with what we hope is still the majority opinion, that church and state should be separate. History is filled with incidents that make us feel strongly about this general principle, but we need to do some new and very bold thinking about the history and intent of the idea. Our present superficial thinking might be interpreted to mean we believe in antagonism between church and state. Such has never been true, just the contrary. These misunderstandings are doing violence to the ideals of the Founding Fathers, doing harm to both church and state and threatening to block America from her highest destiny. If our civilization is to endure it must continue to try to live up to the Christian idealism of the fathers on which it was founded. And if America is to continue to deserve her longtime claims, deserved or mistaken, of being a Christian nation, Christ must be in attendance at the council tables of every realm of her corporate life. There must be chaplains and formal invocations, in addition to men of faith as well as conviction among the counselors. To say so is not only good religion, it is true patriotism.

We need to take care that we keep this church-state partnership on a correct and a carefully guarded plane. It must never mean the church is at the council table to dictate — in business, education, politics, or any other area. Churchmen, however devout and wise, are only men, and they can be mistaken, woefully mistaken, especially when they are operating in areas that are not their specialty. The task of the Christian religion is to keep the light of God's timeless truth playing upon all issues of life, private and public, that men may see clearly to decide rightly. Along with the divine light of truth, there must be kept alive the awareness of divine judgement. Only the right, the true, and the just can win in the end, in this world created and sustained by God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.

The church's service to the state and the proper relationship between the two was given classic statement by John Calvin in his doctrine of, *The power of the sword*. He pointed out that the state wields the power of the sword, because of sin. The state's police power, to restrain or even destroy by force, is necessary because of evil forces within society that constantly threaten to disrupt the orderly processes of life. God has given us the church, whose power is of the prophet, intending to guide, restrain, and where possible, replace this drastic power of the sword, an instrument of brute force, instead, implemented by truth and godly persuasion. The state says, *You must*, the church says, *You should, because it is right and the will of God*. The state operates by instilling fear. The church impels by arousing the conscience and calling forth the impulses of love.

One night, at a meeting on law enforcement, the second-in-command of the Federal Bureau of Investigation said:

Law and order, in any community, depends primarily upon good homes, good schools, and good churches. If a community ever comes to the place where as much as 10 percent of its people are lawless at heart, no police force on earth can be successful. Only martial law will be effective. People must do right because they want to do right. The police are merely society's safeguard against the predatory criminal margin that has always existed.

The social order functions as it should when the prophets of God are faithfully, fearlessly, and sympathetically proclaiming God's eternal righteousness, thus representing the church. The state is represented by a devoted policeman who stands on the street corner with the power of the sword protecting society against the human predator. He protects us from those perpetual misfits who slink through dark alleys to steal and maim and kill, unless restrained by brute force. God help the church to be faithful to her peculiar task, and may she never get the idea she could promote righteousness by abandoning the spiritual techniques of loving persuasion to grasp the sword of compulsion.

The social gospel, in other words, the application of Christ's gospel to the social order, is here to stay. We must serve our God consistently, not only on our chosen day of worship but throughout the workday week, and righteousness must blossom, not only in the souls of the saints, but in a sanctified human society that the saints make possible.

Revelation 22:1-3, *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.* It is a shame the nations cannot hear those words.

XIV Forever Becoming

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."
Revelation 5:8-9

It is time to put down a period and consider our task accomplished, the book completed, but somehow nothing is yet completed. We set out to learn how to become a Christian and to teach others those traits. We have followed a trail that seems to be well marked, both by divine revelation and by human experience, but we find no end to the trail. If we know how to become a Christian, it would be logical to hold up the perfected example and say, "This is it, this is a Christian." But somehow we cannot do it. Paul is our pattern, and surely he attained the heights, but he put down no period designating *mission accomplished*. To the contrary, he talked to the end about pressing on. He faced death discussing a day of consummation still to come. He handed his unfinished work to his Master to hold in trust until that Day in that mystic future. The Christ he followed was still far out ahead, beckoning to him! Wild, daring speculations take over in our thinking. Maybe that is the essence of the whole matter, perhaps Christianity is a matter of *forever becoming*. The best is always yet to be, the heights always ahead of us and God is forever luring us! Scientists are talking about an expanding universe as they try to put together the facts they are learning about the universe from atoms to outer space. Some theologians have shocked us with talk of a *growing God* in their effort to express what they vaguely sense as they follow these same intriguing speculations. We leave it to God and eternity and we close as the Bible closes with John's alluring vision. Becoming a *Christ-one* overshadows this world and in our effort to understand the mysterious world beyond, we can only hope to follow gropingly, with light enough to comfort our hearts but not enough to satisfy our curiosity.

Near the close of the first century, John was on the isle called Patmos, in exile, in tribulation for the Word of God. His Lord had long since suffered crucifixion. Peter, James, Andrew, Philip, and all his other companions of the apostolic band had one by one suffered martyrs' deaths. The forces of Anti-christ were striving to stamp out every spark of the holy fire Jesus had kindled on the earth. John was caught in a situation that spelled naught but gloom and defeat, but it was the Lord's Day and he was *in the spirit*. In his spiritual exaltation, there came a vision that he recorded for us.

A door was opened in heaven and a voice said, Revelation 4:1, "*Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this.*" He went through the door, saw the throne of God, and in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne, was a book, the book of human destiny. The book was sealed with seven seals, and though a strong angel proclaimed with a loud voice,

Revelation 5:2, "*Who is worthy to open the scroll?*" No man in heaven or on earth was able to open it.

John says, Revelation 5:4, "*I wept much.*" Well he might! Human destiny is a sealed book! Human existence a tragic, baffling and a seemingly unanswerable mystery!

In the closing days of World War II, in a semi-ruined cathedral of France, American soldiers saw an oil painting of heroic size entitled *The Weeping Angels*. It pictured the Virgin Mary with the Christ-child in her arms, their figures standing out from the canvas in radiant, happy colors. But the shadows behind the mother and child formed an ominous cross. All about, through the shadows, were

myriads of baby angels looking on, and all of them were weeping because of the tragedy they saw foreshadowed behind the happy scene. They were wiping their baby eyes with their chubby fists. As eyes of these soldiers became accustomed to the lights and shadows of the picture they saw another baby angel at the bottom of the picture, looking over the balustrade earthward. He too was weeping, for he was beholding human affairs. One of his hands rested on a human skull and the other held an hourglass in which the sands of life were rapidly running out. Weeping angels!

These soldiers looked from the picture to the great, gaping holes blown in the roof and sides of the beautiful cathedral. Their imagination took over and they viewed the war-torn world of that day. At that moment it seemed their hearts joined in the weeping. Like John, they wept much!

But let us return to John and his revelation. He tells us he was aroused from his weeping by the heavenly voice telling him to look again. He looked, and behold: Paraphrased from Revelation 5:6-7, *A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, was coming forth from the midst of the throne. The Lamb took the book from the right hand of Him Who sat upon the throne and lo, all creation burst into a symphony of joy. They sang a new song, saying: Revelation 5:9,*

*“Worthy art thou to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for thou wast slain and by thy blood
didst ransom men for God
from every tribe and tongue and
people and nation.
One had been found who was able to
unseal the book of human destiny.
Hallelujah! Worthy is the Lamb!”*

The divine pageant moves on. The Lamb opens the first seal. Out comes a white horse mounted by one who wears a crown, with a bow in his hand, going forth *conquering and to conquer*. The second seal is broken and there appears a red horse, his rider bearing a sword to kill. The third releases a black horse, whose rider carries a pair of balances. The fourth brings forth a pale horse, ridden by Death. Aggression, slaughter, famine, and pestilence! The four horsemen of the Apocalypse ride forth to curse the Earth, as they have done from generation to generation throughout human history. Then the fifth seal is broken, and we see beneath the throne of God the souls of the martyrs who have been slain for their testimony to the Word of God.

They are crying, Revelation 6:10, *“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?”* The sixth seal brings a demonstration of the wrath of God against all earthborn wickedness. But four strong angels stand at the four corners of the earth, holding back the awful forces of divine vengeance, lest they destroy the Earth. God is patient! Finally, the seventh seal is broken and there is silence in heaven for about half an hour. It is the silence of awe, of reverence, of mystery, the mystery of the starry heavens, of human destiny, and of God’s strange patience with man’s folly.

What a sublime and realistic picture this is of human life as we know it! It is indeed the book of life, as it has unfolded through the successive ages of human history. But the pageantry moves on, and the Lamb proceeds to a solution of the human dilemma. Through sublime pageantry, we see Him working it out on two fronts, in heaven and on earth.

1. First, we are shown his solution in heaven. The heavenly answer is immediate and complete. The martyrs are given white robes and bidden to rest from their labors. Then a great multitude, that no man can number, appears before the throne, clothed in white, with palms in their hands, singing hymns

of praise to God.

Paraphrased John asks, “*Who are they?*” The answer is, Revelation 7:14-17.

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,

they are before the throne of God
and serve Him day and night in His temple;
and He who sits on the throne
will spread His tent over them.

Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat upon them,
nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;
He will lead them to springs of living water.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

In other words, there is compensation in heaven for all of earth’s tribulation, a compensation that is immediate and complete. *Earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot heal.* The white-robed throng sings the *new song*, a song purged of all minor chords and jarring discords that characterize the songs of earth.

Let us never lose sight of the basic fact thus pictured! The heavenly solution is the heart of our gospel. Christianity is heaven-based, it is otherworldly, in the finest sense, and its answers are all worked out, first in heaven, then on earth! Jesus preached to earth in the light of heaven. He talked about heaven constantly. In explaining Himself, He said He came from heaven, He was in heaven even while on earth, and He would return to heaven when His earthly mission was completed. He pointed to heaven as the pattern for what earth must become. He taught His disciples to pray, Matthew 6:10, “**Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**” The original Greek text is still more striking: “*As in heaven, so on earth. As in heaven Thy name is hallowed, Thy kingdom exists, and Thy will is done; so be it on earth!*”

Jesus had explained the characteristics of heaven in contrast with earth. Heaven is a realm of perfect joy because the things that bring pain on earth, are eliminated there: death, sorrow, and sin. Heaven is a state of perfect knowledge: here on earth we see as in a glass, darkly, but there face-to-face. *We shall know even as we are fully known*, with no lies, no darkness, and there is no ignorance in heaven! The word *security* so alluring to mankind today is a heaven-born word. “*Lay up . . . treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.*” There is no perfect security on earth. All earthly treasures have their enemies ready to destroy them, gnawing moths, corroding rust, and lurking thieves. Perfect security is an achievement reserved for heaven. Schemes for earthly utopias are born of man’s instinct for heaven. Dreams of youth point, not to earth, but to heaven, for their fulfillment. Let earth do its worst, it cannot defeat us.

2. The gospel of Jesus Christ has to do with Earth, as in Heaven, so on Earth! His pattern is taken from Heaven, but it is His will that it be applied to Earth. Christians must be more than otherworldly, they must work out their Christianity in the world until a Kingdom of Heaven is established on earth, even though they are really not of this world.

As John’s vision moves on, our eyes are drawn from Heaven back to Earth. Holy warfare rages on as the Lamb leads the minions of His church militant against the hellish forces of the beast. The

symbolism becomes too complicated for anyone to hazard detailed interpretation in this current book of thought, but it is clear beyond dispute. The divine offensive is succeeding, victory is coming on, even at what may seem to be a snail's pace, truth is proving mightier than falsehood, hate cannot stand against love, hope is victor over despair, and the grace of God is building a holy city and cleansing it of every abomination. Finally, as the battle clouds lift, we see the Lamb and His victorious forces standing on Mount Zion singing. It is a new old song, the song of Moses and the Lamb, covering the law and the gospel, intended for Earth as well as for Heaven. Finally, a strong angel flies through the heavens proclaiming, Revelation 11:15, "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord.*"

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*As in Heaven, so on Earth,*" it was a *petition*, a *command*, and a *promise*.

First, the petition. It must be our constant prayer, like Jesus, we must live with our feet planted firmly upon the realities of earth, but with our heads in heaven. We must hunger and thirst after the perfect righteousness, the pattern we have seen in heaven. We must expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. We must never become content with less than Christ's Kingdom of Heaven wrought out on earth. Thy Kingdom come!

We must do more than pray. We must work, as He did in the days of His flesh. The prayer He taught is a command and our petitions are a mockery unless they put us to work at the task. We, the church, are *the body of Christ* in this contemporary world. Through us, He wills to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoner, drive the demons of evil to their dens, and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord to all mankind. Through our faithfulness, He must come to reign in every human heart, in courts of justice, in legislative halls, and in the councils of the nations.

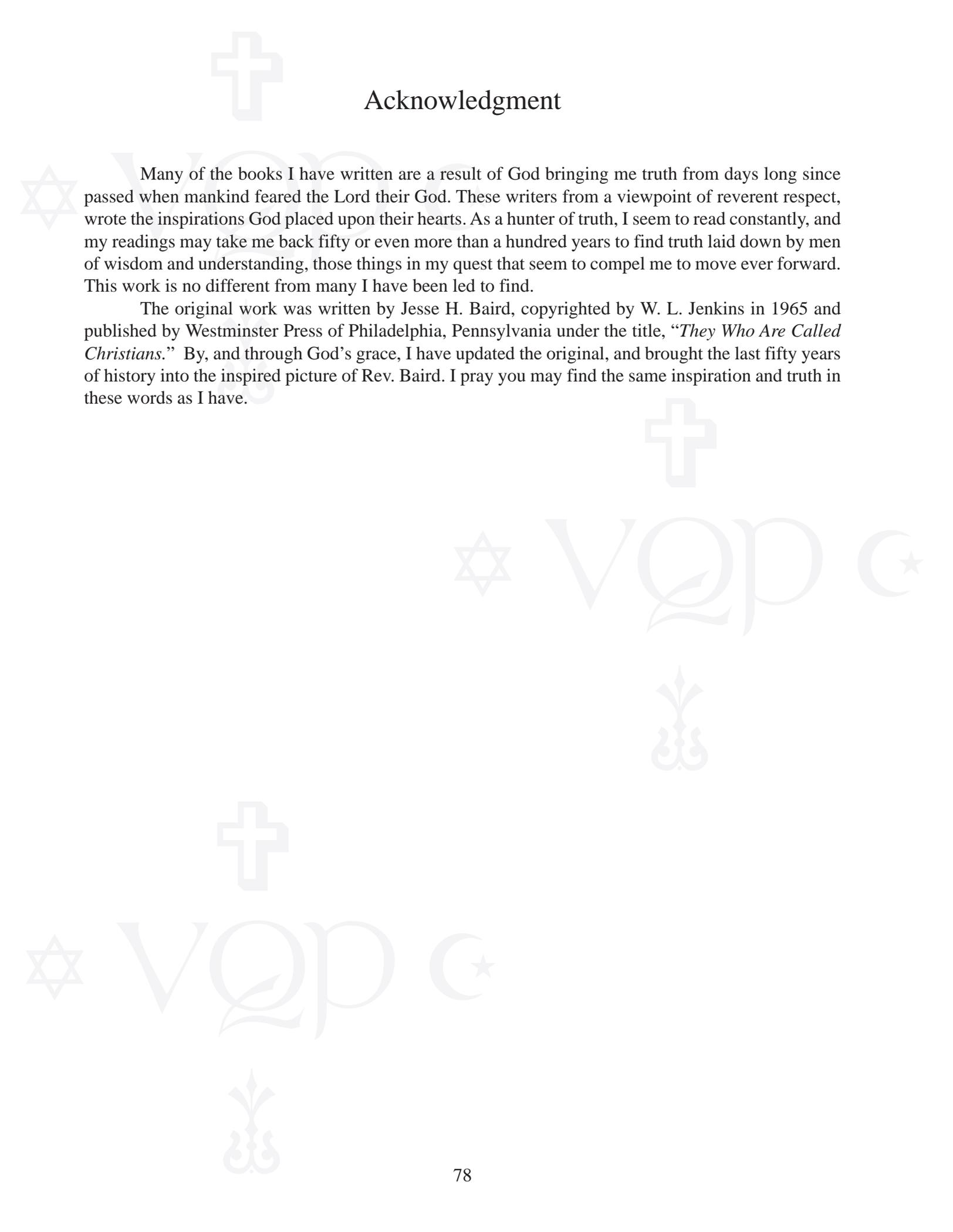
Finally, and we must not miss this fact, by His grace we *can* win. His prayer is a promise and when He bade us pray, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" He was not teaching us a form of idle words to deceive us and break our hearts. His Kingdom on Earth is assured by His grace. Our faith and works shall bring it to pass. "*Thy kingdom shall come, Thy will shall be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.*" It is not ours to know the times and the seasons. It is not for us to know what tribulations still await us. We know Christ and an awakened church constitute a victorious majority over all the craftiness of Satan. This shall become a Christ-ruled world.

Our God has pitted his church against the problems of an age of mass destruction and terrorist tribulations. He has appointed us to bring relief to the suffering, release to the captives, and healing to the sick. He commands us to carry His saving message to every living soul. "*The Spirit and the Bride say, Come and let him who hears say, Come. Let him who is thirsty come. Let him who so desires take the water of life without price.*" Evangelism and mission loom as the two great words. We must go forth into all the highways and hedges of earth to *compel* them to come in so no human soul is missed. Never before in human history have so many people been groping in doubt and cynicism, without any answer to the great ultimates of life and destiny.

But never before were they more willing to listen, hoping against hope to find answers. Christ alone has the answers, and we are appointed to be his witnesses. It is our assignment as a Christian church to win society's indifference that is cursing the earth. The present condition of the earth is but the result of cold hearts, cold with fear, cold with hate, cold with cynicism. Military might may serve as policemen to hold back the forces of violence and disintegration for a time, but the only force that will be ultimately effective for the winning of peace and decency is a vast offensive of purified and aroused Christianity. Faith (in God and man), hope (that the best is yet to be), and love (for God and fellowman) — these are the only weapons that can win the ultimate victory we seek.

O God, pour out Thy Spirit upon us that we Christians may interpret this heaven-born gospel into words, deeds, programs, and policies that will be effective toward Thy sublime consummation in heaven and on earth!

There was a bit more of the picture of the weeping angels in the French cathedral. As the eyes became fully accustomed to its lights and shadows, one could see what had escaped hitherto. At the top of the picture were other angels, not weeping, whose faces were radiant with joy because they were looking up, up into the face of God, not down upon the shadows of earth. "It's looking down that makes one dizzy," said Browning. Look up! Weep not! Revelation 5:5, "*Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.*" Behold, the book of man's dilemma. It is ours to teach the world a new song, the heavenly song of peace, joy, and salvation. The times are in His hands, including the consummation of the vindication of His holy name.



Acknowledgment

Many of the books I have written are a result of God bringing me truth from days long since passed when mankind feared the Lord their God. These writers from a viewpoint of reverent respect, wrote the inspirations God placed upon their hearts. As a hunter of truth, I seem to read constantly, and my readings may take me back fifty or even more than a hundred years to find truth laid down by men of wisdom and understanding, those things in my quest that seem to compel me to move ever forward. This work is no different from many I have been led to find.

The original work was written by Jesse H. Baird, copyrighted by W. L. Jenkins in 1965 and published by Westminster Press of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania under the title, "*They Who Are Called Christians.*" By, and through God's grace, I have updated the original, and brought the last fifty years of history into the inspired picture of Rev. Baird. I pray you may find the same inspiration and truth in these words as I have.



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