

A COLLECTION OF WEEKLY RADIO MESSAGES BY
R.J. RUSHDOONY



EDITED BY SUSAN BURNS

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GOD

June 15, 1954

Good morning, friends. Every now and then our children stagger us with a simple question of vast scope and leave us groping for an answer. One such question is, “Who is God?” or “What is God?” How are we going to answer that question, both for ourselves and for our children? After all, what is God? The question is not a new one. A long time ago, on the mountain Horeb, a shepherd named Moses received orders to return to Egypt and lead his people out of captivity. Moses balked at God’s orders, saying that the people would challenge his authority. “What shall I say unto them,” he asked, “if they ask me your name, that is, the definition of the God who sends me?” “And God said unto Moses, I am that I am, and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exod. 3:14). How did God name or define Himself to Moses? As the self-existent and self-sufficient One. God appealed to nothing we know in declaring Himself: He simply asserted, I am that I am.

How are we going to understand this definition? The *first* and foremost point is this: God refused to define

Himself; instead, He revealed Himself. His definition, I am that I am, is really a rejection of a definition. To define something is to limit it, to fence off its boundaries and to comprehend its territory and nature. This no man can do with God, for to define or to understand God, man would have to have a mind equal to God. Every system of doctrine or thought which gives us a god we can understand gives us only a god who exists in man's imagination, not in reality. When we make God comprehensible or understandable, we make Him less than man, and such thinking always makes man and the universe incomprehensible and ultimately divine. Thus the first and foremost point in our thinking about God must be this, that God is beyond the understanding of man, and that God refuses, when asked for His name or definition, to do more than assert His self-sufficiency, His self-existence; I am that I am.

The *second* thing that we see when we examine God's answer is this: although God refused to define Himself, He did reveal Himself. Thus the extent to which we know God is the extent to which He reveals Himself. Our knowledge of God, therefore, depends not on our understanding but on His self-revelation. The immediate impact of this situation is that man can never prove the existence of God and that all the arguments for the existence of God are vanity and the proofs false. The only god man can prove by his reasoning is a god who

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is less than man and is therefore not God, for God is known, not by our discovery or recognition, but by His self-revelation. Because He is our Creator, both we and all things around us are understandable in terms of Him. It is not our mind but His person that is the key to all things. It is folly to attempt to prove Him apart from whom there is no fact.

How does God reveal Himself to us? The *first* way in which God reveals Himself to us is by means of nature, that is, by means of all creation. Everything testifies to Him, and nothing makes any sense apart from Him. As Paul said, “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). But, because men are in rebellion against God, they prefer to trade the truth of God for a lie (Rom. 1:25) and worship themselves rather than God. Thus, although God reveals Himself in nature to the extent that man is left without excuse, man rejects this knowledge and will not admit its existence.

As a result, God reveals Himself to us in a *second* way, in the person of Jesus Christ. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

But our knowledge of God’s self-revelation in nature and in Jesus Christ is dependent on a *third* aspect of His self-revelation, that is, through Scripture. The extent to which we accept the Bible and make it the exclusive

basis of all our presuppositions and thinking is the extent also to which we see Him in creation and in Christ. Then everything reveals God to us because we recognize all created facts as a part of God's revelation to man. We bow before God and hear His word rather than before man and man's word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Thus the answer to the question, "What is God?" is this: God is what He says He is in His self-revelation, never what man understands Him to be. Thus, in the words of the Lager Catechism, as it summarizes Scripture:

God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. (WLC A:7)

Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. (Job 11:7-9)

I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. (Isa. 46:9-10)

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

June 22, 1954

Good morning, friends. Last week we dealt with God's answer to Moses's question asking for a definition or a naming of God. We found that God's answer was simply this: I am that I am. God refused to define Himself: instead, He revealed Himself. God, the self-sufficient and self-existent being, is beyond the comprehension of man, for to understand God and to comprehend Him, we would have to have the mind of God. The extent to which we know God is the extent to which He reveals Himself, for God is known, not by our discovery or recognition, but by His self-revelation. Our knowledge of God, therefore, depends not on our understanding but on His revealing.

He reveals Himself to us in three ways, in nature, in Jesus Christ, and in the Bible. He meets us in the place where He declares He will be met, not in the place of our own choosing. Thus, when God said unto Moses, I am that I am, He not only refused to define Himself, but declared also that He would reveal Himself, not at Moses's wish, but according to His own counsel.

For “God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exod. 3:15).

God thus made two things clear to Moses: *First* of all, He asserted Himself to be the only true God, eternal, self-dependent, and utterly free; I am that I am, this is my nature forever. *Second*, He declared that His memorial had been made known to all generations, and His memorial revealed His nature and His name, Jehovah, I am that I am.

What was this memorial which God left to all generations, which definitely includes us, to witness to His name and nature? According to His own statement, it was this, that He was “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

This is an expression which we find often repeated in Scripture. Some years ago, when I was much younger, I wondered about that phrase: it seemed to me a poor way of describing God. After all, how much good was there in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for God to describe Himself to all generations by calling Himself their God?

In terms of the Lord and His requirements, these men were sadly lacking. Abraham lacked moral courage on occasions and was ready to surrender his wife to another man to save his life, and his son Isaac proved to be equally weak. Abraham found himself in a sorry mess with Hagar and Ishmael and unable to act decisively or forcefully. Isaac favored and pampered a no-account son and divided his family. Jacob cheated his father, was

cheated by his wives, his father-in-law, and his sons. His family life was a long series of scandals.

For God to reveal Himself to all generations as Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, seems at first glance a very strange kind of self-revelation. And yet it is precisely in this memorial that we find Him revealed in power and in truth. There was, in these three men, no good thing. The only good thing in any of them was this, that the Lord called them out of darkness, made them His people, identified His redemptive purpose with their name, and blessed them accordingly. The only good thing, therefore, about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the Lord. That the Lord redeemed them and worked in and through them was nothing but pure grace. Not one of the three had any claim on God: God had every claim on them, and yet, in His mercy and grace, He made them His people and Himself, their God.

God declares Himself to be their God because He thereby declares to all generations that such is His dealing with us. We are saved, not by our intelligence or our understanding, not by our good works or good thoughts, not by anything we can do or be, but by the pure and sovereign grace of God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not find God: God found them. This is His memorial to all generations, that He who is the eternal

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and self-sufficient One, makes Himself the God also of dying men. He, who is higher than high and infinitely beyond us, makes Himself very near. The independent God enters into a covenant with men and works in and through them. And the God of these sinful men is our God also. This is how God reveals Himself to us, as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and our God also. When God declared that He was utterly free, He then proceeded to demonstrate both His freedom and His nature by calling three men whose only merit was the grace of God.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:26–31)

This is my memorial unto all generations.
(Exod. 3:15)

THE TRINITY

July 27, 1954

Good morning, friends. On the Indian reservation where I spent eight and a half years before coming to Santa Cruz there was an elderly Indian whose life and experience was limited to that area. As a result, the only trees he knew were the balsam pines, juniper, cedar, cottonwood, willow, aspen, and the like, trees of the area, none of them big trees. You can imagine his disgust when, some years ago, he heard a missionary speak about the big redwood trees on the slopes of the Sierra, describing one tree in particular as so big that his car, and even a bus, could drive through the hollow center of that living redwood. The old Indian got up and left immediately, remarking of the missionary, "That man is the biggest liar I have ever seen."

Now, before we laugh at that old man, it would be best for us to remember our own tendency to doubt what is beyond our experience. We tend to limit the possible to what we know and to what we believe is possible.

We have another failing. We tend to be interested in things only because of their relation to us. We tend to be interested in people only because of what they mean to us, rather than what they are in themselves. Their money,

sometimes, but more usually their personality, their background, our common opinions and interests, these things draw us together and hold us. But let a person become sick, helpless, and removed from our everyday life, and the tie immediately begins to snap. We feel sorry for the person, but most of us find it more and more difficult to maintain the contact unless we, too, are undergoing a like experience. Man gives meaning to things as he experiences them, and he similarly strips them of meaning as they become remote and meaningless to him. This is his basic selfishness and his sinfulness revealing itself.

As Christians, we tend to do exactly this same thing with God. We are only slightly interested in God as He is, the triune God, and mainly interested in God in His relationship to us. We want to think of God exclusively in relationship to our salvation and providential care, in terms of what He can do for us, in terms of our experience of Him, rather than in terms of Himself. It is easy to interest people in such a subject as, "What God Can Do for You," or "How to Gain Happiness by Faith," but to talk about the Trinity is remote and meaningless to them. Just as some people are interested in us only for what we have, and do not really know us as a result, so people only interested in God in His relationship to man really never see God as He is.

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God as He is in Himself, is God the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each equally one God, complete and absolute, three persons, yet one God, each possessing the indivisible divine essence in all power and perfections. God reveals Himself as one God who is triune. This is beyond our experience and conceiving, although we can see a hint of its meaning in creation; the world is one yet many, a world with a common existence and law, yet containing so amazing a variety of forms without doing anything to mar the unity. In fact, the multiplicity and variety of creation speaks all the more eloquently of its unity, derived from its Creator.

God is complete in Himself and is from all eternity triune. Creation was no necessity or need on God's part, and God is therefore not exhausted in His relationship to creation, that is, there is more to God than relationship, just as there is more to us than our contact with people during the course of a day. If people have no desire to see us or know us beyond our relationship to them, then they no more know us than we know a waiter who appears, takes our orders, serves us, and is gone. Because God is our Creator, all creation does reveal Him, and all His dealings with us show forth His nature, but God Himself, who in His tri-unity is beyond our conceiving, is in His being beyond our experience. Because He is Creator, all things have meaning and are understandable only in terms of Himself, and He is more than we can fathom or comprehend.

What does this all mean? Simply this: to worship God we must worship Him as God the Trinity; we must see Him, not merely in what He does for us but as God Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thrice-

holy Trinity, whom to worship alone is true worship. To glory in the Lord cannot mean to glory in what He does for us, for then what we worship is ourselves and our gratification, our satisfaction. To glory in the Lord means to glory in this, that He is the Lord, “the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things” (Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 2.2).

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.
(Rev. 4:11)

The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will ... And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?
(Dan. 4:25, 35)

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.
(Heb. 4:13)

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (Rom. 11:33–34)

Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. (Ps. 147:5)

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

August 2, 1954

Good morning, friends. All of us have a constant problem in understanding God, because we approach Him with our idea of what He should be, instead of His declaration of what He is. We want God to be certain things in order to fulfill our idea of His being, but He refuses to meet our expectation and declares, "I am that I am."

One such man, who approached God hoping to see His desire fulfilled, was Moses. As leader of the chosen people and the God-appointed spokesman, he had a fellowship with the Lord of a rare and profound nature. As a result, he asked on one occasion, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (Exod. 33:18). The glory of God, as Moses no doubt imagined it, was something far surpassing the glory of kings and empires, and of all creation. The magnificence and awe-inspiring glory of creature and creation would be struck dumb before the glory of God.

In a sense, this was true. The Lord said to Moses, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Exod. 33:20). Man cannot see God as He is and live, for God is a consuming fire to unholy man, and man as flesh is incapable of seeing and

comprehending the infinite and absolute God who is spirit. And so Moses found a hiding place in the cleft of a rock, and from that position, covered by the protecting power of God, saw the back, that is, the reflection of God's glory.

But in another respect, Moses found his desire to see the glory of God surprisingly answered. His question was simply this: "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." God answered thus: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord [Jehovah] before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (Exod. 33:19).

Moses wanted to see the glory of God, and God declared that His glory was not His majesty as such but rather His goodness: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee." The goodness of God is His glory. The goodness of God is not His kindness, nor His willingness to answer our prayers. If God were to give us everything we wanted, whether it be a million dollars or a changed environment, it would not establish His goodness, but only His indulgence. The goodness of God is His glory, and yet that goodness is often unkind from our point of view, and is trying for our souls to accept when it involves troubles, sorrow, and burden-bearing.

If the goodness of God is not His kindness and is definitely not indulgence, what is it? God declared that His goodness was to proclaim His name, I am that I am, the eternal being, and to be gracious and merciful to all whom He pleased to be gracious and merciful to. The glory of God is His goodness, and His goodness is His being. The glory and the goodness of God is this, that of

Him, through Him, and to Him are all things, and everything has meaning and purpose only in terms of Him. As the psalmist says, “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works ... The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing” (Ps. 145:9, 15–16).

God’s goodness is His glory, and His sovereignty and absolute ownership and control is the heart of His goodness. Job told his friends that all creation testified to the absolute might and total control of all things by the Almighty:

Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: And the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:7–10)

All nature testifies to the sovereignty of God, that He is the Lord. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). The goodness of God is this: that the government is upon His shoulders, that all things are in His hands, and He does all things well. The goodness of God is

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His sovereignty, whereby we live, not by our own act, but by His creative purpose and to His glory; we move, not by our decision alone, but in and through His grace and mercy; and we have our being, not of ourselves, but through Him and for His glory.

If our life is hid with Christ in God, then we know His goodness indeed. We know the glory of His omnipotence and grace, and we know, then, the extent of His grace and the meaning of His glory.

This puts a pertinent question to us: if God's glory is His goodness, and His goodness is His sovereignty, what is man's goodness like? It is to seek the glory of God by manifesting His grace and His goodness, and to set forth His sovereignty by being under His dominion.

This means to cease from fretting about today and tomorrow: give God the glory: He is the ruler yet.

It means to show forth love and mercy to all, even as He manifests it to us.

And it means to live for Him whose will alone is our peace, and in whom alone is there power, dominion, and glory.

IS YOUR GOD DEAD?

September 7, 1954

Good morning, friends. There are times when all of us have a desire to ask someone a blunt question. We feel the air needs a little clearing, and that some honest thinking is necessary. So we speak out. Well, I have a question of that sort to ask this morning. I have no intention of being disrespectful or irreverent, and I ask it humbly and earnestly when I say: is your God dead?

It seems to me that all too often people worship a God who is to all practical intent either nonexistent or dead. And too often men talk and preach about a God who sounds sweet and beautiful enough but is actually completely helpless to aid us and useless in our struggle. In fact, to hear some men talk, the tables seem to be turned, and it's God who needs our help and cooperation and not we His help and salvation. I mean it reverently and religiously when I say that the decent thing to do with such a god is to give him an honest burial and quietly forget him. There is no sense in worshipping a God who did not create us, cannot sustain, does not save us, and is nothing to us except a beautiful ideal. We would then have fewer churches

cluttering up the landscape and much more honest Christianity.

For the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Scripture, is a very different God than the anemic and lifeless deity many people try to worship. He created us out of nothing and sustains us by His grace. He saves us supernaturally, surrounds us with His supernatural purpose and providence, and gives us a salvation which is real, supernatural, and eternal. This living God is never dependent on us: rather, at every moment we are wholly and completely dependent upon Him.

The dead god of many moderns is a beautiful ideal, but the living God and Father of Jesus Christ is our eternal refuge, and ever-present help in time of need. The living God does not leave us helpless, alone, and afraid in our perplexity and need. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, ABPS). The living and Almighty God demonstrates His concern for us by the incarnation, whereby God the Son became man and experienced all the trials of human kind and became victor over sin and death.

The living God then sent the Holy Spirit into our lives to manifest Himself in and through us. Not only does God manifest Himself in us, but He manifests Himself in and through all events and things in this world by His providence, so that everything is foreordained to its destined end.

If we worship a dead God, our lives are full of futility and waste. Nothing seems to work out right. The ideals we get from the pulpit seem beautiful enough, but all

things seem bent on perverting our faith or mocking it. This is the inevitable mood of all false faith.

But if our faith be in the Holy One of Israel, the triune God, then we know that there is no waste in our lives and our experience. Everything has its ordained place and purpose. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). We know this because the Holy Spirit Himself assures us. As we stand in the midst of trying experiences and perplexing ways, He warms our hearts by the assurance that He is in full control, and the results are in His hands.

On August 8, 1529, Luther and his wife were both sick, overwhelmed with dysentery, sciatica, and a dozen other maladies. Luther said, “God has touched me sorely, and I have been impatient: but God knows better than we whereto it serves. Our Lord God is like a printer, who sets the letters backwards, so that here we must so read them; when we are printed off, yonder in the life to come, we shall read all clear and straightforward. Meantime we must have patience.”

This is the confidence we have in the living God. We know that He is able, that He does all things well, and

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that we can rest and rejoice in His omnipotence.

The only kind of Christianity which is real and true is supernatural Christianity, the faith which Scripture presents us in God the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. This Biblical faith does not eliminate our problems. In fact, it tells us that God often increases them. But while it does not eliminate our problems, it does answer them and does give us victory in and through Jesus Christ.

We can pray to a living God, confident that we can ask and receive, because He is a prayer-hearing God who changes things. To worship any other kind of god is foolishness and a waste of time. No matter how noble the faith may be, it is superstitious if it has not reality, if the god worshipped is futile and irrelevant. But our God is able, omnipotent and almighty: heaven and earth are full of the majesty of His glory.

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord

sitteth King for ever. The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace. (Ps. 29)

PROVIDENCE

April 27, 1954

Good morning, friends. Every now and then somebody tries to tell me that everything is useless, because all life is determined by the politicians, or by heredity, environment, capitalists, labor unions, or somebody else. Naturally, a minister has to be polite, so I can't always say exactly how I feel about such opinions, although I do assert human responsibility as against this excuse-making.

This morning, I'd like to try to answer that question: Who runs things, anyhow? Who or what is it that ultimately pulls the strings and makes things work? Most ideas on the subject are as old as man, and can be summed up in two philosophies of ancient Greece, Epicureanism and Stoicism. The Epicureans said that the universe is ruled by chance, not purpose. There is for them no real meaning to life, and man is too little to give any purpose to it. The Stoics said that fate ruled all things, and man was utterly helpless against his fate. Most of our ideas today can be summed up under either one of these philosophies: chance and fate are believed to rule all.

Against this is the Christian doctrine of providence. Faith in providence is an assertion of belief that there

is purpose in all things, that God operates in and through all things to bring them to their appointed end. Providence involves the preservation of all things in terms of the divine plan, the concurrence or cooperation of God in every event, so that at no point is He ever absent or not in rule, and, finally, His government in and through every event and thing.

Can we believe in providence? Well, if we can't believe in providence, we can't believe in anything. There is creative purpose at work in all things, the will of God for that creature or creation. When I got into my car this morning, I did so with a purpose, a specific purpose. When God created, He created with purpose, not aimlessly, and all things reveal that purpose.

Now let's turn our minds to something else for a few minutes, before we continue our discussion of providence. Two Saturday nights ago, when I should have been working on the last touches for my Sunday sermons, I got involved in a book on spiders and spent considerable time browsing through it. This one item especially appealed to me. A census of spiders was made in a field of rough grass in Sussex, England, and it showed the amazing spider population of over 2 1/4 million to the acre. On this basis, it was estimated that the spider population of England and Wales is 2 1/5 billions, which, at the very least, eat annually an insect population whose weight is greater than the entire human population of England and Wales. If the spiders did not destroy these insects, men could not survive.

This is interesting enough, but something further occurs to me, and I consider it even more tremendous a fact. The insects these spiders eat each have their

appointed purpose, and they fulfill it, only to be kept within the bounds and within usefulness by the spiders. In turn, the spiders are kept down by other creatures, birds, for example. So each does its appointed work, and has some natural check placed upon it to preserve the balance of nature.

All of this speaks, not of fate or chance, but of design, purpose, and providence, and that design and purpose reaches to the smallest details of creation. Scripture tells us that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Our Lord declares that not a sparrow falls, but our Father in heaven knows it; and the Lord told Job of His delight in all His creation.

There is a vast and magnificent purpose in all creation, and any notion of chance in the face of it seems utter stupidity. Scripture asserts that God's providential control is over the universe at large, over the physical world and brute creation, over the affairs of nations, over man's birth, life, and death, and his outward success and failure, over things seemingly accidental or insignificant, in the protection of the righteous, in supplying the wants of God's people and in answering prayer, and in the exposure and punishment of the wicked.

Thus the answer to the question, who runs things? is, "God in His providence does." To the claim that

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everything is useless, and there is no point in life, the answer is that everything is purposive, and there is a point to everything, but nothing is understandable, neither the spider nor man, unless we begin with God. He it is who gives meaning to all of life. Take away faith in Him, and you have nothing, and everything very definitely does become useless. This applies not only to life around us, but to ourselves. Our lives have meaning only in terms of Him and His purpose for us: if we forsake Him and His purpose for us, we forsake the sanity of life with meaning. To believe in God is to believe in providence, and to believe in providence is to believe that our life has purpose and direction even in spite of ourselves and our shortcomings, and that God works concurrently in us to that determined and glorious end.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith declares it: God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even unto the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy. (Chap. 5:1)

As our Lord stated it (Matt. 10:29–31): “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

THE WORD OF GOD

June 8, 1954

Good morning, friends. I'd like to discuss this morning something the world has never had a shortage of, words. Most of us have a problem with words, because we hear too much and talk too much.

Some time ago, we dealt in part with the meaning of language. We saw that for many pagan cultures, magic and speech are closely related and often identical. Words have a binding power to such peoples and can even kill. A witchdoctor speaks, and a man dies because he has been condemned by his word. This seems at first glance far removed for us. We say that a native who is killed by a word is victim to the power of suggestion and insist that such magic is superstition. And yet the reason why we talk too much is that we believe in the same kind of magical power of words. We believe that saying will make it so, and therefore speak when our conscience tells us that silence is the course of wisdom. We are more ready to talk than to work, and place more faith in words than in God, because we are so much more ready to talk than to pray.

Why are we like this? It goes back to the old Adam in all of us, to our original sin. The temptation in the Garden of Eden was this: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing

(or determining) good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). Man was tempted to be as God, whose sovereign and omnipotent word creates and recreates all things. God said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). Our Lord said, “I will; be thou clean” (Matt. 8:3), and the leper’s disease vanished. Being God, His word is almighty and creative.

Man, in his rebellion and sin, sets himself up as his own god and tries to determine all things. And man in his rebellion tries to justify himself. All his language, therefore, is tainted by his sin and by his desire for self-justification. This is true, in part, even of the Christian, in whom the old Adam is never dead. Thus man’s word is never to be trusted; it is never wholly free from sin and self-justification and always tends to gravitate towards these two things, sin and self-justification. Our readiness to talk rather than to pray is proof of this fact: we try to be as God, and we therefore are readier to resort to words than to prayer, to ourselves, basically, rather than to the Lord.

It is for this reason that God’s revelation of Himself can never be left into man’s hands to handle according to man’s word. God speaks to us directly and without any tainted intermediary in Scripture, in the Bible. Any attempt to tamper with the directness of the Bible’s word is to attempt to destroy it. If we say that the Bible

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is the record of God's revelation rather than revelation itself, we take away its directness. If the Bible merely contains the word of God instead of being the Word of God as such, then we have to hunt through the Bible for God's speaking, and then wonder if it is really there, if the Bible is, after all, a completely human book. To remove the security of an infallible Bible is to destroy the Christian faith, to subvert God's word and place man's word in its place.

If, after all, we have to locate God's word somewhere in the Bible amidst a lot of miscellaneous data, then we are the judges, self-appointed, but still judges, judges over God. If God's word is God's word only when we recognize it to be so, then our basic and ultimate authority and god is our own judgment and reason, not the God of Scripture. God and His Word can be judged by no man: they judge us. If we insist on giving our minds a right of judgment over God's word, we declare that we are the ultimate authority, and only that which meets our intelligence has a right to existence! Basically, it is a question of whose word is authoritative: my word or God's word?

The catechisms ask concerning Scripture:

S.C. Q. 2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

S.C. Q. 3: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to

believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

L.C. Q. 4: How doth it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

A. The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation; but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very Word of God.

Scripture is our authoritative teacher. In Paul's words, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

THE DECREES OF GOD

June 29, 1954

Good morning, friends. This morning I'd like to talk about the decrees of God. What are they? When we say that God decrees something, what do we mean? The Shorter Catechism answers it like this:

A. 7. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

At first glance, this seems to be something very remote from our lives, but it actually has a meaning and application which reaches down into every fiber and nerve of your life and mine.

Simply stated, it tells us this, that the Lord is God, that God rules over all things, and not chance. You and I sit down frequently and try to plan our lives. We figure on so much time for work, and so much time for play. We budget and plan our finances, and decide that a certain sum will have to be set aside monthly for set payments, leaving us a specific sum of money for other purposes. We earnestly and sincerely try to plan our lives, but of course the trouble is that they don't plan well. Unexpected things happen, events which we cannot control, and neither our time nor our money prove our

own. Illness or extra expenses wipe out all our planning, and sometimes years of hoping. Then we start planning and hoping all over again. It has its value; it gives us minor victories which would be impossible without planning, but we always know that we can never control every factor in our lives or in our work and world. We plan, but events outside our control continually compel us to alter and adjust our planning.

If God's planning were like our planning, then most of God's creation would have to be outside His control and moving under chance. It would make chance more important than God, because God's plans would be liable to change if events overruled His planning. We know that this is not so: there is no chance in this world. As James, the brother of our Lord, declared at the Council of Jerusalem, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). God's planning is perfect planning: it leaves nothing to chance, and neither man nor events but only God controls the course of the plan.

What does this mean for us? It raises, of course, some questions about how to reconcile God's decree and human freedom and responsibility. Such questions we cannot answer: we do not have the mind to grasp all their implications. But this one thing we know, that to

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believe in a God who is in full control gives meaning to every moment and every act in our lives. Nothing that happens to us is senseless or meaningless. The world is not out of hand, or God out of the driver's seat. He is in full and absolute control. This means that there is a purpose to all things which faith and patience can discern and trust in.

Every one of us suffers things and undergoes trials and tribulations which sorely try our spirits. It would make life senseless and cruel if we could believe no more than that these things were meaningless and chance acts. But if we can believe, as we are asked by Scripture to believe, that all these things are a part of God's decree and have a meaning in terms of Him, then we know that nothing is senseless or wasted in our lives or in all creation. Then we know that there is an eternal purpose in and behind all things, and our strength is in trusting in God and His workings. It enables us to say, although I do not know why these things have happened to me, I believe in the love and purpose which stands behind them and brought them to me. Because the Lord planned this, I know that His purpose is to His eternal glory and to my strengthening and fulfilling in Him. With Paul we can say, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

IMMANUEL (PSALM 46)

November 30, 1954

Good morning, friends. Each year, from Thanksgiving to Christmas, the American Bible Society sponsors a daily Bible reading program, encouraging people to read the Scriptures daily. This is a most worthy program. “A vague intention to read the Bible drifts into nothingness until you really make a day by day beginning.”

Our Bible reading for today is Psalm 46, the psalm which inspired Luther’s great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The psalm reads thus:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered

his voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. (Ps. 46:1–11)

The date and authorship of this psalm is unknown to us, but one thing stands out clearly. The psalm was written in a time of international crises, wars, and tremendous natural disasters. We are told that “the heathen raged, and the kingdoms were moved.” Frightening earthquakes added to these political upheavals, to give a total picture of a completely unstable world. The earthquakes were such that some mountains were carried into the midst of the sea, and the seas roared and pounded under the impetus of storm and quake. The other mountains seemed as though they would be carried away either by the floods or the continuing quakes. Not only the world of man and nations, but the very ground beneath men’s feet was unsteady. Men could well wonder if life would go on, or if there would be any surviving such a gigantic combination of disasters.

Their mood was perhaps like that of many people today, who feel that each day seems only to move the world deeper into a gigantic horror and make the ground less steady beneath man’s feet.

But in the midst of all these horrors we hear the

voice of faith sing out in Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (v. 1)

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. (v. 2)

The refrain of the psalm gives the reason for this confidence: The Lord of Hosts is with us. God is with us, is their exultant cry. This refrain gives us in substance one of the names of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity: this name is Immanuel, which means, "God with us." To the prophet Isaiah, and a remnant deeply disturbed over the moral decline of the nation, nothing seemed more lonely than their lot. They were, they felt, alone in a sea of evil. To them God gave not only His promise of the coming of His Son, but a name of that Son which describes the triune God in His relation to His people, Immanuel, God with us. It is this faith which Psalm 46 declares and celebrates.

And this same faith is our strength and joy, for our God is not a God afar off, but closer to us than we are to ourselves. We feel alone in the privacy of our heart's ache, desire, and hope, but God sees more of us than we see of ourselves, and He loves us in spite of all our sin and shortcomings. Thus, in the fullest sense of the word, He is indeed Immanuel, God with us.

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In contrast to the floods of the world, the raging, destroying torrents, the psalmist speaks of “a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God” (v. 4). The city of God is His church, His people, and the silent river which feeds and sustains them is the presence of God among His people. This is the decisive fact: not the turmoil of the nations and of nature, but God Almighty governs and directs the course of history. God is not a God afar off, remote to the plight of His people and alien to all human history. He is Immanuel, God with us, and He summons us and commands that we cease troubling ourselves. He declares: “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (v. 10).

The God who spoke these words had only a handful of Jewish believers in the entire world of that day, but He boldly declared the conversion of the heathen, and His worldwide exaltation. These things are being realized now. His promise is that they will be fulfilled in His eternal Kingdom. His assurance is that every step is under His providential government and that all along the way, He is our Immanuel, God with us.

We can therefore joyfully sing with the psalmist: “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (v. 11).



THE PROPHETIC OFFICE OF CHRIST

October 19, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the sad facts concerning our faith is that so many believers are so ignorant about the things of God and yet satisfied with their ignorance. If an American citizen were to say that all he knows about Eisenhower is that he has some kind of government job in Washington, we would set him down as a thoroughly ignorant man and a poor American. Now, many Christians are just as ignorant about Jesus Christ and His position in the divine government.

This morning we shall begin a study of the offices of Christ. *First* of all, we need to look briefly at the question, who is Jesus Christ? The answer of Scripture is clear-cut and without hesitancy: the man who walked the roads of Palestine some centuries ago was a man who was fully man and yet at one and the same time was divine, very God of very God, “two distinct natures, and one person.” That same person lives today and is our Lord and God and our only Redeemer.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks two questions at this point and gives us clear and specific answers:

Q. 23: What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

Q. 24: How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in the revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

From this the prophetic office of Christ becomes clear. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God to us through whom we come to know as much of the will of God as is needed for us to know. In short, through Christ we know God.

One of the fundamental assertions of Scripture is that no man has ever seen God at any time, nor can any man see Him. God is beyond our conceiving or imagining: our little minds cannot begin to grasp the meaning of the idea of God. God is not a man as we are, but God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Man would have to be God to be able to comprehend God, and this we definitely are not. We cannot truly understand ourselves: how can we hope to comprehend God?

This predicament of man is answered by God in Christ. As John declared, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the second person of the Trinity manifest in the flesh. As Jesus told Philip, "he that hath

seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Jesus Christ we see, know, and meet God Himself. Thus Jesus Christ as prophet speaks for God, not in vision, and at times only as with the Old Testament prophets, but fully and completely.

The image of God in which man was created consists of knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion. In Christ, man is restored to the realm of true knowledge. Since God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and since “All things were made by him [Jesus Christ]; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3), then it is clear that nothing in this world has any meaning apart from God its Creator and His purpose. We cannot understand the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, nor trees and flowers except in terms of God the Creator and His creative purpose. Neither can we understand our own lives apart from the Lord and His will. In Christ, then, we are restored to true knowledge. He became our wisdom. As the true and final prophet, the full voice of God, He speaks for God to us, and we can never truly know anything unless we know it in Him.

Christ speaks to us in His prophetic office by means of His Word, the Bible, and through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of truth,” guides us into the

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understanding of His Word, and, accordingly, “into all truth” (see John 16:13).

Because Christ is the fullness of God the Father, no true Christian can believe in additional or further revelations. Scripture is full and complete in its revelation of God and His will as far as is needful for our salvation. In Christ, we have the complete revelation, we have the full and final speaking for God, and nothing can improve on that, or add to or detract from it. In the words of Scripture:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners
spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,
whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom
also he made the worlds. (Heb. 1:1–2)

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



THE PRIESTLY OFFICE OF CHRIST

November 9, 1954

Good morning, friends. A few weeks ago we began an examination of the work of Christ as mediator between God and man. We saw that Christ was and is our mediator “in the estate both of his humiliation and exaltation” as prophet, priest, and king.

This morning, we shall consider Christ as our great high priest.

First of all, what was a priest? A priest was man’s representative with God, a man who approached God by means of sacrifice in order to make intercession for his people. He was the people’s representative, or ambassador, so to speak, to God. He was, therefore, the exact opposite of a prophet. A prophet was God’s representative to man, a priest man’s representative to God.

The work of the priest was twofold: *first*, to offer sacrifice to God, and *second*, to make intercession with God for man. Sacrifice was therefore basic to all priestly function; a sizable portion of the Bible is exclusively concerned with sacrifice, and none of it is truly understandable apart from sacrifice.

First of all, there is no worship without sacrifice. What we sacrifice to and what we sacrifice for, that is our true God. If we sacrifice primarily for our own sakes and for our objectives, then we are our own little gods. There is no worship without sacrifice, and sacrifice indicates the nature and area of our faith and life.

Second, God cannot be approached except by sacrifice. The sacrifice with which we must approach Him is ourselves. But anything other than an unblemished and pure sacrifice is an offense to God. The only sacrifice acceptable to Him is a holy one. Man cannot offer himself as a sacrifice to God because he is unclean and sinful. Moreover, because we are by nature sinful, and our basic worship is a worship of ourselves, our will and our wishes, we are under God's condemnation and judicial sentence of death. But God in His mercy provides a way out for us, by giving us both a perfect priest and a perfect sacrifice, even Jesus Christ, who as our great high priest offered Himself as the unblemished sacrifice to God. God was approached in sacrifice through the Old Testament ritual, which typified Christ, and now and to the end of time by Jesus Christ, our high priest. As members of Jesus Christ, we stand in the presence of God, innocent because He is innocent, righteous because He is righteous, just because He is just. When we by faith become members of His mystical body, we have His nature imputed to us in justification, and given to us progressively in sanctification.

Third, because we are now members of Jesus Christ, we are able to make an acceptable sacrifice of ourselves through Him. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and ask Him to destroy our nature and make His nature all in all in us.

Thus sacrifice and atonement constituted the *first* work of Christ as priest. His *second* task is as an intercessor. Christ daily intercedes for us with God, by mediating our prayers and needs. God the Son pleads our cause with God, while God the Holy Spirit pleads God's cause with us (see Berhkof, p. 401). Even as the Holy Spirit keeps us ever mindful of God's claims on us, and His requirements, so Christ intercedes for us with God. In Christ's intercessory prayers in the New Testament, we see Him praying for the elect who have not yet come to Him to be brought to a state of grace, for the daily forgiveness of sins for His people, their protection from temptation, for their sanctification, for their closer walk with God, for their daily needs, and for their final and perfect inheritance in heaven.

This is the glorious fact of the priestly office of Christ. It means that we who by faith are members of His mystical body have a voice in the very heart and mind of God, an efficacious voice who "ever liveth to make intercession for" us (Heb. 7:25).

In the words of the Westminster Larger Catechism:

Q. 44. How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of his people; and in making continual intercession for them.

**WHAT WE
SACRIFICE TO
AND WHAT WE
SACRIFICE
FOR, THAT IS
OUR TRUE GOD.**



THE KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST

November 16, 1954

Good morning, friends. We have been examining, these past few weeks, the work of Christ our Redeemer, both in His estates of humiliation and exaltation, as prophet, priest, and king.

Christ executes the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

Christ executes the office of a priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

This morning, we shall consider His kingly work as our Redeemer. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.” (WSC A.26)

Thus we see that Christ our King has a threefold task. The *first* is to subdue us to Himself. This is no small task. We tend to be satisfied with ourselves. We are ready for all changes except that fundamental one, which

strikes at our ego and our very existence. We are ready to accept God and His ways provided He will accept us and our ways. We say to Him, "I am thine, O Lord, but my will be done." We want God, but too often on our own terms and not on His. We need to be broken and harnessed to the will of God, but instead we yearn to harness the Almighty to our will. Is it any wonder that Christ the King must subdue us in order to rule us?

His Kingdom over us originates, not in the act of creation but, in the act of redemption. No one is a citizen of His Kingdom by virtue of his status as a man, but only by his status as a redeemed man. The Kingdom of Christ is a spiritual Kingdom, not a natural one. The Kingdom is both present and future. It reigns in our hearts today and asserts itself in the wholly providential course of all history. It is future also in that it will culminate in a great and eternal Kingdom in which dwelleth righteousness. And no man has any part in that Kingdom who has not been subdued by Christ.

The *second* task of Christ the King is in ruling and defending us. When we are subdued by Christ, then we are ruled and defended by Him. The function of a king is to defend his own, and Christ the King defends

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OUR KING.**



His own and does it without fail. He defends us, *first* of all, from ourselves, for we have no more deadly enemy than our own nature. Against our wayward hearts and wandering feet, we have the sure defense of Christ the King. He defends us also by correcting us in our sins, and in preserving and supporting us in all trials and temptations. He rules us by daily governing all our actions and making them work together for good. In ruling and defending us, He manifests Himself as our King.

The *third* task of Christ the King is restraining and conquering all His and our enemies. The world, the flesh, and the devil are by His sovereign will restrained and conquered. One area of His conquest is the universe. Christ is King over the universe and shall continue as its King to the end of time. At that time, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, a change shall take place in that divine economy:

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

The kingship of Christ over the universe will end when total victory is attained and the last enemy, death,

is destroyed. Then the kingship will be returned to God the Father, that God may be all in all. The purpose of Christ's Kingdom over the universe is redemptive, to redeem mankind and restore the original kingship of man over creation. Man was created to have dominion under God, and Christ restores this dominion of man over the universe. His kingship over the redeemed is eternal, and the new creation heightens its glory and scope.

Thus it is that Christ executes the office of a king by subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies. He is indeed King of kings and Lord of lords.

THE CROSS

September 18, 1956

Good morning, friends. Ask any group of Christians to name their favorite hymns, and the likelihood is that a high percentage of those hymns will be concerned with the cross. At first glance, it seems curious that most joyous singing should deal with an emblem of death and shame. For the cross was very definitely an instrument of death and shame, representing the brutal and disgraceful punishment reserved for criminals by the Roman Empire. And yet it is in this cross we glory, the cross of Christ, an empty cross, signifying His victory over death and over sin.

What does the cross of Christ mean to us, and why is it our source of joy and our glory? *First* of all, it signifies Christ's victory for our sakes. Jesus Christ, very God of very God, became very man of very man, both fully divine and fully human. As the sinless one, He rendered unto God a perfect obedience for our sakes. As the sin-bearer, He took the penalty of death for our sakes, dying as a criminal on the cross. As the Son of God, He arose from the dead and became the fountainhead of a new humanity, a new human race, made up of all who accept Him as Savior, to whom

He gives victory over sin and death. The cross, therefore, means salvation to us and new life in Christ Jesus. It means membership in the new humanity and entrance into a life of fulfillment and hope.

Second, the cross means something central to us in our inner experience and our spiritual growth. We are born into the old humanity of Adam, and it is our nature to sin and our destiny to die. When we accept Christ by faith as our Savior, we die judicially to the old Adam. However, our subsequent life in Christ requires our sanctification, the negative aspect of which involves the mortification of the old Adam in us. In plain language, this means that we die to our hopes and plans after the flesh, and die as well to all our claims, in order to live to Christ and recognize only His hopes and plans, and only His claims. The cross means that we are constantly dying to the old Adam in us and being resurrected to the new man, Jesus Christ. There is never a hope in Adam that we die to that is not met with the resurrection of a greater hope in Christ. There is never a plan or a claim in Adam which we surrender without finding through Christ's resurrection a truer plan and a substantial claim. Thus, the cross means both a constant defeat, surrender, and death for

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us, and at the same time, a growing victory, power, and resurrection. The cross, therefore, is a fitting symbol of our hopes and joys, and a true subject of Christian song, since it embodies the essence of our salvation.

Third, the cross means also the inescapable decision of life. No man can escape the cross. He will either bear the cross of his sinful natures with all its lies and frustrations, or he will bear the glorious and victorious cross of Christ. Men desire a good life, and a royal one, but it has been well stated that, “no cross, no crown,” no Christ, no victory. We either accept the life-giving cross of Jesus Christ, or we find ourselves progressively oppressed and crushed by the death-dealing cross of our own nature. Which cross will you carry?

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
 All to leave and follow Thee;
 Destitute, despised, forsaken,
 Thou, from hence, my all shall be:
 Perish every fond ambition,
 All I've sought, or hoped, or known;
 Yet how rich is my condition,
 God and heaven are still my own!
 (Henry Francis Lyte, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken,” 1825)

Beneath the cross of Jesus
 I fain would take my stand—
 The shadow of a mighty rock
 Within a weary land;
 A home within the wilderness,
 A rest upon the way,
 From the burning of the noontide heat,
 And the burden of the day.
 (Elizabeth C. Clephane, “Beneath the Cross of Jesus,” 1868)

THE EASIEST QUESTIONS

September 8, 1953

Good morning, friends. I know this is a poor time of the morning, especially after a holiday, to start asking any questions, but I'd like to deal with some easy questions for a few minutes this morning. I don't like easy questions, because generally they're the hardest to answer. They're easy to ask, but answering them is another matter. Children can ask some about almost everything under the sun, and we can recall asking the same questions years ago—but we still don't know the answers.

You can sum up most of these easy questions with hard answers in a single word: *why*? Why does God do things the way He does? Why must I suffer as I have been suffering? Why must I go through the things that are ahead of me? Why did *this* have to happen to me? We can't help asking these questions. Christ as the perfect and representative man asked it for all of us on the cross, when, in His dying agony, He cried out, "My God, my God, *why* hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). "My God, my God, *why*? He asked that for all of us, as He was dying for us. And it's still our question.

Some of us this morning are asking it with more intensity than others, are we not? As we face this

problem or trial that confronts us, our souls are harrowed by the prospect, and we cry out, why? If Christ asked that question as our representative, it gives us the right to ask it too. *He* had every reason to ask that question. He was the one perfect and sinless man, and yet He suffered as no man has, before or since. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa. 53:3). He suffered although He was without sin. We suffer, often because of our sins, or our rashness, or our blindness. Why did He have to suffer?

He who was God in the flesh suffered as the representative man for our sakes. *God asks nothing of us which He is unwilling to undergo Himself as a man.* And so, in the person of His Son, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, God was tempted, suffered, was lonely, and died. On our behalf, He asked the question, “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and for our sakes *He answered it with His own life.* What it adds up to is this: If God was ready to die on the cross for us in the person of His Son, He certainly will do more than abandon us. More than that, He will care for us, and has given us the sure and certain assurance, “I will never

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leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). So that we may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6). We cannot always understand why God does things in a certain way, or why He allows or ordains certain things to happen to us, but we can always understand this: that He loves us and will not leave us comfortless.

When Christ cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” it meant this: that He, who had become sin for us, took upon Himself our punishment, and gave us His life and holiness. Therefore, we who believe Him are never again forsaken by God but are eternally with Him, now and in the world to come. *As long as God is God, we can never be forsaken.* We can be in great difficulties: we can be in very real trouble: we may not be able to see any light on the road ahead: but we are never forsaken. It is still easy to ask, “*Why?*” but God gave a hard answer to that question on the cross, the answer of His own life. The only answer we can give to the same easy question is to give our lives to Him who is the answer. Then, even in our difficulties, we have the confidence of His presence and guidance. In the words of one man,

I do not know why God has brought me here
 Into this place of sorrow, tears, and woe.
 The very cross I dreaded most is near.
 The hour comes when I must rise and go.
 I do not understand why easier roads
 Are closed to me who prayed so long.
 I only know that yesterday the loads
 I dreaded He took up, and gave me song.

He led me here and blessed me in new ways.
How can I doubt His goodness then?
He who blessed me in my yesterdays
Will bless me yet beyond my kin.

(poem by RJR)

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

(William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," 1773)

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

April 13, 1954

Good morning, friends. It was ages ago, that on Palm Sunday, a man entered Jerusalem riding a young donkey, deliberately fulfilling a prophecy of several hundred years to declare Himself the divine king, not only of Israel, but of the universe. He was the Son of God, and so declaring Himself, entered on Monday into the Temple, giving it a housecleaning of its hypocrites and frauds, as the divine landlord, coming to claim His own.

Since this is Tuesday morning, let's glance briefly at what happened on that Tuesday of Holy Week, long ago. This was the last day of His public ministry, a day of public debate with the Pharisees, the teaching of parables, and the discussions with His disciples concerning the end of the age and the end of the world. One point is of special interest: in the closing verses of Matthew 22 our Lord used a psalm of David to prove from the testimony of that king the preexistence of the Son of God. Thus two things stand out in Jesus's claim concerning Himself. *First* of all, He declared that He always was, that He had an infinite and eternal existence

that was identical with the life of God. *Second*, He declared that the whole purpose of His earthly sojourn could be summed up in the cross, that He had, in fact, come to give His life a ransom for many, to deliver them from the power of sin and death.

These two points are important: take them away and you have no Jesus who can be identified with the man who lived in Galilee and went to Jerusalem to die. That man claimed to be God in the flesh and declared that His death would change the nature of man. He declared, and His disciples witnessed to it, that He would rise again from the dead in the same body with which He was crucified. Either that man's claims were right, or else He was a poor fool deserving to be pitied or locked up, rather than worshipped. We cannot remake Him to suit ourselves: we have to be remade to suit Him.

If we accept Him on His own claims, we find increasingly that in Him we have power over sin. That's an obvious fact which only the willfully blind can deny. The *second* part of our victory in Christ is not nearly so obvious, however, and that's our victory over death. Let's put it this way: if Jesus Christ died for us, to free us from the power of sin and death, then He died the death which we had to die, that is, as rebels against God. Thus, the penalty is paid for. Now we can ask the question which comes naturally to our minds: if He died for us, why do we have to die? After all, every one of us is still facing death. We are free from the power of sin, that we can recognize, but we still die for all that. Why must we also die? The answer is clear-cut: our death is not a penalty or punishment for sin, but rather "an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal

OUR DEATH IS NOT A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN BUT AN ABOLISHING OF SIN AND DEATH. BECAUSE IT DELIVERS US INTO ETERNAL LIFE. DEATH COMPLETES THE WEARING PROCESS OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE.



life” (Kuyper, p. 99; see also Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 42).

As long as we are in this world, we are never fully free from the power of sin and the power of death. There is in us the old Adam, with its continuing perversity. Around us there is the constant tension of a world constantly trying to commit suicide while it screams for more life. We see everything changing, and yet remaining basically the same, tainted and perverted before God. The world’s tomorrows come, but they appear only as a bigger concentration of the nightmare yesterdays. And man, created in the image of God, hears deep calling unto deep within him and cries out, “O,

wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

Our life in this world, and the world itself, is a body of death to us. It promises paradise but can never deliver it, and for this reason it is deceptive and fraudulent. We can never find here something which is elsewhere. Our true life is not here: it is hid with Christ in God. Only as we see this purpose and object of life, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, do we see this world in its proper perspective and are able to get from it the joy that it can yield. We no longer expect too much from it, but we

expect more from the Lord.

Now, let's look again at our question, why must we die, since Christ died for us? The answer is this: even as we must die to ourselves, so we must eventually die to this world and this life in order to obtain the fullness of life. Our death is not a punishment for sin but an abolishing of sin and death, because it delivers us into eternal life. Death completes the weaning process of our spiritual life. In our lifetime, you and I have thus far been weaned from a number of things; each time, the process was painful or trying, but the results, wonderful. It is so with death, which crowns our days and gives us our diploma from this school of the world and time. For Christians, death is a grace which leads to the fullness of life. Therefore we can say with joy,

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He is risen indeed, and has delivered us from the body of this death.

CREATION AND THE CREATOR

July 20, 1954

Good morning, friends. Some time ago, a survey of American religious opinion turned up the curious but rather meaningless fact that about 98 percent of all Americans believe in God. I call this a meaningless bit of data, because the survey itself made it clear that the word *God* meant different things to different people. For some it means no more than an idea of the potentiality in the universe; for others it means only nature; for others it means a supreme being of very limited power. What many people call *God* is not even remotely to be compared with what Scripture reveals to us concerning God.

The only God worth believing in is a God who is truly able, a God who is omnipotent, all-powerful, and ruler in and over all things. We cannot believe in such a God unless we also accept Him as Creator. The first verse of the Bible tells us that “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Hebrews 11:3 declares that, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” True faith involves, therefore, the belief in God as Creator.

We are told by Scripture that neither the world nor anything in it is self-existent or eternal, that God in the beginning created the elements of the world out of nothing and brought them immediately and by His sovereign word to their present form. Scripture also declares that God made all things good, and He made them for His own purpose and glory. Creation was the work of the Trinity, the work of God the Father (1 Cor. 8:6), of God the Son (John 1:2-3), and of God the Spirit (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4), and of God the Father through the Son (Heb. 1:2), and God the Father through the Spirit (Ps. 104:30).

Some people feel that this doctrine of creation is hopelessly out of date and completely unscientific. They prefer to believe in various hypotheses or theories of a developing, emergent or evolving universe although such a faith has only this reason behind it: it gives an answer to the problem of creation that avoids God. This is the basic reason for the theory rather than any evidence.

If we do not believe in God as Creator, in God's creation by His word of all things out of nothing, immediately and completely, we cannot believe in the God of Scripture or have the comfort and faith which Biblical faith alone can give.

Why is this article of faith so important, and why

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is Biblical faith undermined wherever anyone attempts to assert the Christian faith in God without likewise declaring Him to be Creator in the fullest sense of the word?

Let's face the question carefully and clearly. If the basic elements and components of the universe always existed, and if they developed into their present form on the basis of their own potentiality, then two eternal and self-existent beings exist, God and the universe. If the universe developed itself, then it is subject only to its own laws and is independent of any outside control. God then becomes an outsider to the universe and unable to act on it or change any part of it, because the universe is independent of Him and is its own sovereign. It then becomes useless to believe in God, because He is an outsider to the world and an outsider to ourselves and our problems. If the universe evolved itself, then it is a law unto itself, and God is a stranger to it and helpless before it. You can believe in such a universe and still believe in God, but your God is a helpless God as far as your needs are concerned.

On the other hand, if God made all things, as the first chapter of Genesis tells us He did, then He is Lord and Sovereign over all with all things dependent on His providence and grace. Then, instead of being an outsider to our lives, He, our Creator, is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Our history moves only in terms of Him, in terms of creation, providence, regeneration, and judgment. All creation and all man's history only serve to work out the purposes and decrees of God. God the Creator can speak to us, because we are the work of His hands; God the Creator can sustain us,

because the government is on His shoulders, not in the hands of creation or the creature. He can regenerate us, because it is His image we bear and for His glory, and He shall judge us, because the only criterion and purpose of history is His will and His glory. God's motives are not outside of Himself, nor are they dependent on creation or man, but only on Himself. As the psalmist says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:1-3).

This sovereign Creator God is the only God who can hear and answer prayer, because He alone is sovereign and all-powerful.

The Larger Catechism reads thus:

Q. 14. How doth God execute his decrees?

A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will.

Q. 15. What is the work of creation?

A. The work of creation is that wherein God did in the beginning, by the word of his power, make of nothing the world, and all things therein for himself, within the space of six days, and all very good.

For this our God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death. (Ps. 48:14)

IN HIS IMAGE

July 6, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the saddest facts about us is that we are more interested in ourselves than in the more important things of life. We tend to be readier to study psychology, which tells us about our ways, than to study theology, which deals with God's ways. This tells us, of course that there is something wrong with us, that we are basically self-centered, more interested in ourselves than in all heaven and earth.

Why are we like that? Were we made that way? Did God the Creator make us so? The Shorter Catechism asks the question, "How did God create man?" (WSC Q. 10) and then tells us that we were created in His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion. If we were created in God's own image, as Scripture tells us, then we were not originally created self-centered, weak and sinful, but as men and women ordained to think God's thoughts after Him, to perform His will and to delight in His way.

The image of God in man is not a physical appearance, shape, or form, nor is it man's soul or mind as such. The image of God is knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion; these are the things which characterize God: His knowledge is perfect and complete, His righteousness total, His holiness beyond

our conceiving, and His dominion absolute and unbroken.

We were created by God to exercise the functions of His image under His Word and purpose. But man rebelled against God and tried to set up shop on his own. His slogan was, “Every man his own god,” which was a total submission to the temptation, “You will be like God” (Gen. 3:5 NIV). Now, this is the reason why all of us are by nature self-centered, why we are more interested in ourselves than in the rest of the world, and why we enjoy talking more about ourselves than about God. Some people are ready to tell you all about their dreams, their hourly aches and pains, Junior’s precious ways, their troubles with the monthly payments, and so on and on, but ask them about their faith in God, and they’ll resent the question. After all, they’ll tell you, my religion is my own private business. Well, it doesn’t make sense to me. As far as I can see, our aches and pains, dreams and payments are all very private affairs, and yet we spend quite a bit of time making them public every day. On the other hand, God is a very truly important public matter, the only truly important one and the basic one. Individually and collectively, we stand or fall in terms of Him.

Then why do we make ourselves a public matter and of God a private affair? Is it not because we rate ourselves as more important, and unconsciously and instinctively see ourselves as God? We feel that the world should hear and know of the details of our life because life would not be full or complete without that proclamation. This is how we function in our capacity as little gods.

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But the tragedy is that our rebellion against God has marred and broken His image in us. We can never have true knowledge of anything unless we begin with God as Creator. Any other attempt to establish knowledge gives us only a world which is meaningless and monstrous and knowledge itself a curse. Apart from God, there is no true righteousness, only self-righteousness, a disgustingly false and hypocritical thing. As for holiness, it is more remote than the stars to man apart from God. All man's attempts to recreate holiness by pomp and circumstance, through magnificent services and rituals,

through beauty and art, only leads to a greater mockery and a more obvious failure. The higher we build up our pretensions, the more obvious our weakness becomes.

As for dominion, man clearly has lost that. Man no longer has dominion over the world, over his own area of activity, or over himself. Self-control is a major public and private problem. It is a mental problem as well, and men, having lost control over their lives, find it hard to retain a hold on sanity and readily surrender to a helpless withdrawal from this world that will not submit to them.

Thus the image of God in man is clearly broken, obviously shattered. Man is unable to be that which he

was intended to be. But God does not leave us helpless this way. He comes to us in Christ to recreate a fallen humanity. By faith in Christ we are regenerated in the image of God, and this recreation is made perfect in the world to come. Paul reminds us of the nature and privilege of our regeneration in the image of God, saying:

Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. (Col. 3:10)

Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph. 4:24)

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge [or rule, or have dominion over] the world? (1 Cor. 6:2)

THE CHIEF END OF MAN

June 1, 1954

Good morning, friends. Different people have at different times proposed lists of key moments in history, each according to his presuppositions. For me, one of the great landmarks of history is the Westminster Assembly, which met between 1643 and 1652 and whose work provided the moral and spiritual backbone of subsequent British and American history. One of the products of that assembly was the Shorter Catechism, the first statement of which is one of the best known in all literature. To the question, “What is the chief end of man?” this great answer is made: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.”

We are told very clearly that man was made for a purpose and can only be understood in terms of that purpose, which is the glory of God. Man is not an end in himself but an instrument to be used to a specific purpose.

Let’s look at it this way: Supposing I buy—and I’m doing some very tall supposing here—a new car, take it out to the end of the pier and expect it to act like a boat just because it’s a good car. The result, of course, will be an obvious failure, and I’ll end up with no car at all. Or supposing I have some sawing to do, and try

to use a hammer for the job, or some hammering to do, and try to use a saw. The stupidity of such confusion is transparent.

But this is the kind of thing we are constantly attempting to do with ourselves. We were created for a purpose, made into a precision tool designed for a specific function, and yet we try to use ourselves for everything except that particular job. The function for which God created us is His service and glory, and to apply our lives to any other task is to misuse ourselves and evade our responsibility.

At the heart of the frustration of modern man is this realization: no matter what he does, he doesn't fit. He can't find himself in all his seeking and his activity because in all these things he is running away from his created function, the glory of God. We shall never find ourselves until we have first of all found the Lord, nor shall we truly live until we begin to live for Him. As Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

The purpose of our lives, therefore, is understandable only in terms of God, and the more we try to live to ourselves, the more meaningless and frustrating our lives will be. The more we live to ourselves, the less alive we are. We must deny ourselves in order to live. As Jesus declared, we must lose our life in order to find it (Matt.

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10:39). This is the paradox at the heart of life, and yet it is clear and understandable when we see God as our Creator and recognize that “of him, and through him, and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36). He is the source of all life, purpose, meaning, and function. Therefore Paul enjoined us, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Since man’s chief end is to glorify God, all activity outside of God is a standing still, it is a waste of life and of time and constitutes a living death. On the other hand, all activity under God is freed from futility and has the assurance of perfect results. Because we now function in Him and under His grace, we have the assurance that He blesses our most feeble faithfulness and gives it a harvest. As a result, Paul urges us to greater service, declaring, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

There is more, however, than this to the promise given to us when we live according to our creation purpose. Our chief end is not only to glorify God, but also to enjoy Him forever. This is the surest dimension of Christian faith, one of the quickest ways to recognize true living in the Lord. The man who lives according to the purpose for which he was created knows the joy of fulfillment in Christ and the victory of His presence even amidst outward defeat.

How do we enjoy God? By obedience to Him, by closeness in fellowship, by living in Him and for Him, and by living in this great assurance that our life and

labor is not in vain in the Lord. To enjoy God is to know Him in the person of His Son Jesus Christ and to recognize the redeeming love that is present in Him.

Only when we truly enjoy God can we truly enjoy life, because it is only then that we are reconciled with ourselves. God in Christ has made reconciliation with us, and in that peace we find peace with man and with ourselves. Then we have life, and have it more abundantly, for “He that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:12). When He stills that warfare within us that constantly threatens our souls, He gives us a life that has victory and joy. When man lives according to his chief end, the result for him is this joy and victory. Nothing in life has anything for him apart from the Lord. As the psalmist declared, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Ps. 73:25–26).

What is the chief end of man?

Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

MAINTAINING THE SURFACE

February 7, 1956

Good morning, friends. For many people, not only beauty, but all life is only skin deep. Integrity, honesty, and character are no more than appearances, and a man's acceptability is to be judged in terms of his tailor and his social manners.

Man desires to live on surface appearances only; he wants the world to accept him as he appears to be. His whole life is devoted to the cultivation of a successful appearance in all its ramifications.

The derivation of our word *person* and *personality* is from the word *persona*, meaning "mask," and referring to the masks worn by actors in the ancient Greek drama. And indeed the word is still apropos, in that for most people, their person and personality is dedicated to the proposition that the real creature must be masked by the person who fronts for the self, who acts as the public representative for the inner man. This inner man believes in selfishness, for example, and lives only in terms of it, but the person who is the mask, the public representative, piously affirms a faith in love, cooperation, unselfishness, and sharing. We want the world to accept the public mask, but we want satisfaction for the inner man's self-centered demands. Yet we dare

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not live openly except in terms of the mask. We want the world to accept our appearance and ask no questions.

Such a man prefers to take the world and its peoples as they appear to be, and ask no embarrassing questions. Life is much more livable all the way around if masks and hypocrisies are honored and no pretenses destroyed. Of course, such a man enjoys some mild debunking, because it gives him pseudo-wisdom, a smug satisfaction that he is superior because he is in the know. But his self-consciousness only accentuates his hypocrisy and reveals more clearly his evasion of all truth and reality.

The nature of all such men is revealed in their approach to God. Living in terms of appearances only, they expect God to accept their appearances and justify them accordingly. In other words, they ask God to accept each man, not as he is, but as he appears to be. No man can be justified as he is; therefore, men demand that God accept a substitute for themselves: either words, wisdom, mystical experience, racial standing, or a like substitute. Men hate everything that threatens surface appearance, and therefore, in spite of their pious masks, they hate God because He destroys all masks and lays bare all sin

in its essential perversity and rebellion. Because these masked men demand appearances, they therefore seek out and build churches that will bless and approve of surface appearances and justify them, and of the building of such churches there is no end. The church then itself becomes a mask for pious evil and an appearance used in an attempt to delude God and man. The true church which wages war against all appearances becomes a troublemaker and a public enemy to all masked men. But all the efforts of the masked men are futile. In the words of the gospel, “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

The Lord destroys all masks, all appearances, and we either surrender them voluntarily, acknowledging that we are by nature sinners and then accepting His gracious salvation, or they are stripped from us to our confusion, shame, and judgment. When we receive His saving grace, we are given a new inner man, now no longer a perverse rebel against God, but a new creature in Christ. Now no surface appearance can equal the inner glory, and our happy function and responsibility becomes one of revealing to the world that which is the glorious reality of our lives, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).



THE APPEAL

December 7, 1954

Good morning, friends. Our Bible reading today is Isaiah 55, the prophet's great appeal to men to leave their frustration and dissatisfaction and find rest and refreshment in God's everlasting grace and mercy:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his

way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. (Isa. 55:1–13)

What the prophet Isaiah offered to the peoples in this great invitation is clearly stated in the fourth verse. It is the Suffering Servant, the Messiah or Christ of God, who through His death will bring abundant pardon to many. These are “the sure mercies of David” (v. 3), i.e., the blessings so surely promised to David whose fullness is seen only in Jesus Christ.

Man’s forgiveness is always uncertain and imperfect. Man can comfort us in our affliction and sorrow, or

speak to our soul's guilt and frustration, and encourage us movingly at times, but what man gives is superficial, and it does not change our lives. It only enables us briefly to forget our predicament, only to have it later return with renewed force. Our only true ground for hope is in God and His Christ, for He alone will abundantly pardon and completely cleanse. He will wipe out our guilt and frustration as surely as the rain falls from heaven.

To have this peace of God, we are summoned to forsake our way and our thoughts. This, of course, is exactly what we hate to do. We want our way plus God, and He refuses to permit this situation. Man is inclined to protest, why should I give up my way and my thinking? Why can't I be permitted to go my own way and still have God's blessing and peace? God's answer to this is clear-cut: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (vv. 8-9).

Our thinking is completely incompatible with God's thinking, and our ways with His ways. Our life is conditioned, as Jesus said, by such matters as these: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (see Matt. 6:25). Our life moves in terms of ourselves; God's thoughts and ways, in terms of His eternal purpose. We are called upon to forsake our life for His in order that we might really live.

As it is now, we are wasting our lives, Isaiah said, spending money for that which is not bread (v. 2), i.e., we work for that which does not satisfy, and go through

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life hungering and thirsting for life but never really tasting it.

In the face of all this, our only hope is in God in Christ. Living in Him, we shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace; nature itself will share in our happiness (v. 12). What was a thorn to us before will become a lovely fir tree, and the brier a myrtle tree (v. 13), because our life now is in a new world in Christ, the fullness of which we shall

inherit at the end of time.

Can this really happen to us? We have God's word that it cannot be otherwise, for He says,

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (v. 11)

THE COVENANT

August 31, 1954

Good morning, friends. We have a habit at times of using a familiar word or expression for years without fully understanding its meaning. One such Biblical word is *covenant*. The Bible has much to say about covenants, and the two parts of Scripture are called the Old and New Testaments or Covenants.

The word *covenant* in Scripture has a root meaning which means to cut or divide, and the usual meaning of covenant has reference to a covenant of blood.

In the strict sense of the word, it refers to a blood brotherhood between two men. Two men who were both independent and equal, having a great affection one for the other, would agree to become blood brothers. After the ritual shedding and mingling of blood, they became closer to one another than to any other relationship. They had a mutual obligation to guard one another from treachery and peril, and to be ready to lay down their lives for one another. For a man to be faithless to his covenant ties was unthinkable: it made him an outcast and a worthless man. When a man made a covenant of blood, he had, as it were, a new nature: he took in the life of his new brother and henceforth had a tie of love that superseded all other ties and required of him a life that

had a new orientation.

Now, obviously, the word *covenant* in the strict sense, as requiring two independent and equal contracting parties, cannot apply to a covenant between God and man, between Creator and creature. The great and infinite God cannot be equated with the frail creature man. And yet Scripture calls the relationship of God to man a *covenant*, but in this case a covenant of grace and promise. In Psalm 89:28, the word *covenant* is equated with mercy.

Thus God in His infinite mercy makes a covenant with man. The meaning I think now begins to appear more clearly. The God of grace makes Himself man's blood brother and says that in His mercy, He will redeem man and do so by willingly laying down His life for man.

This Jesus Christ did for the sons of the covenant. As our blood brother, having assumed our nature in His incarnation, He fulfilled His covenant obligation by dying for us and sharing with us the fruits of His victory over sin and death. To all who are covenanted to Him by faith, He gives a new nature and a new life.

This new nature, being His life in us, means abiding communion with Him. At the Last Supper, He "took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:27-28). Our participation in the sacrament of communion means that we rejoice in our new life in Christ. We recognize that in ourselves we are dying men, but in Him we have an eternal and incorruptible life and inheritance.

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Let's look again at the primitive ritual of blood brotherhood. When two men became blood brothers, the ties that bound them to each other made them responsible for the other person's family as well. Since they had a common life, they now had a common family.

The same is true of God's covenant with us. We are taken into the family of God, "made partakers of the divine nature," and we share in the privileges of

the household of God as sons and heirs by the adoption that is ours in the covenant. In like manner, when we by faith enter into the covenant of God in Christ, our family becomes God's family. This is true even where only one of the parents are Christian, for, as Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7, the unbelieving mate is sanctified in the wife or husband who believes, and the children are accounted holy. This means that children of believers are under the covenant of God and the blessing of the Holy Spirit and are to be accounted as the Lord's until with maturity they specifically reject the covenant and pass out from under its jurisdiction.

This is our great privilege in Christ, that our children are born into the household of faith and the covenant of their God. The promises of the covenant are not only to us but to our children and to as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Adults can only enter this covenant voluntarily by

faith and confession of Christ. Children are born into it. However, as Paul says, they are not all Israel who are of Israel; the children of believers are not all children of the promise.

Let's take another glance at the primitive ritual of blood brotherhood. The relationship was under certain obligations or laws, and the ceremony was concluded by the exchange of gifts. The law of the covenant is the Word of God, written on the tables of our hearts through the indwelling presence, and the gift of the covenant is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the covenant promises and privileges and eternal life. Our gift must be our lives as a living sacrifice to the covenant God, our time, our substance, our all.

The covenant of a gracious God makes of us, who are poor, blind, and hungry, men and women who are heirs of all things in Christ. The covenant gives us nourishment, and it gives us life. Its fitting symbol is a table of communion, around which the family of God gathers to receive the gifts of the covenant.

If we are not enjoying the privileges of the covenant, it is because we are guilty of refusing to partake of the table that is spread before us even in the presence of our enemies, as Psalm 23 points out. Draw nigh, then, and share in the richness of the covenant God.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever amen. (Heb. 13:20–21 NKJV)



THE WILL TO DIE

August 24, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the more significant facts about man is that he often has a driving will to die. Life is so dear to most of us that we find it difficult to comprehend that anyone should be possessed of a will to die, and yet the fact has had abundant documentation from modern psychiatry, and other studies.

Men have different ways of showing this self-destructive impulse. With some, it is seen in alcoholism, and in much drinking there is this latent suicidal impulse, a desire to drown part of one's life by smothering the mind and conscience with liquor. With others, it is seen in gambling. The gambler inevitably loses, and he knows it; if he wins, he feels that he must continue because, we are told by Dr. Bergler, he has a desire to lose, to ruin himself and to inflict punishment on himself. The dope addict, the reckless driver who flirts with death, these, and others like them, are characterized by a will to die.

This, of course, is not normal. We are told that this destructive impulse is a "deep-rooted desire for self-punishment." Now, this is a most important point to the Christian thinker. What modern studies, both

psychiatric and psychosomatic, reveal is that man punishes himself when he feels that he has transgressed or is likely to transgress. In other words, a deep-rooted sense of guilt drives people to self-destructive activities and to reckless chance-taking because they thereby unconsciously punish themselves for their sins of thought, word, or deed.

The men who are responsible for these studies are in the main not Christians and would perhaps object to a Christian interpretation of their data, but even they are often compelled to borrow the language of theology to explain their data.

What does this desire for self-punishment point up for us as Christian thinkers?

First of all, it testifies eloquently to the fact that man was created in the image of God. Although that image is broken by the fall of man, yet it witnesses against man and makes punishment inevitable. Man knows that the penalty for the transgression of God's law is death, and, having transgressed, is tormented by an impulse to death. He denies God with his lips, but he punishes himself in unconscious obedience to the divine ordinance against sin. We cannot escape from God, since He created us, every nerve and fiber of our body

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witnesses to Him and for His law against the rebellion of our lips and mind. We may deny His judgments, but we only end up by fulfilling them against ourselves.

Second, man's impulse to self-punishment declares emphatically that sin must be atoned for. There is no escaping the demands and requirements of justice. Atonement must be made, our Lord affirmed, to the very last penny. Any man who does not find his redemption and release from the power and penalty of sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ will be caught in the deadly and hopeless task of self-atonement, and its only result is futile self-punishment.

Sin must be paid for, and the atonement will be made either by Jesus Christ, or we will pay for it by our own self-inflicted impulse to punishment and death.

We live today in the midst of a generation which is driving itself to death. Its fevered and feverish activities seem to have this common purpose, to blot out mind and memory, to escape from life, to punish body and soul, and to escape above all from the accusing inner voice which is the image of God in man.

But when by faith we escape from this vicious defeat by finding our atonement in Jesus Christ, we are made free indeed. We can then say with the apostle, that "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21), because in either estate we have the blessedness of His peace and victory. We are no longer driven; we are now led in peace and joy, and the burden of our guilt is taken away.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith declares:

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once

offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him. (WCF 8:5)

To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation. (WCF 8:8)



WISHFUL THINKING (JAMES 1:14)

January 31, 1956

Good morning, friends. Daydreaming and wishful thinking are familiar characteristics of our human makeup; they are a front and a façade with which we try to handle the uncomfortable facts of reality without offense to our ego. Wishful thinking manifests itself not only in our mind's inner play, but in its outward tastes. The current appetite for violence in literature, in periodicals and press, in art and in entertainment, is a vital index to the violent and destructive nature of man's wishful thinking today. More than that, it is the shadow of tomorrow and an urgent warning that we must keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life. Before the Nazis took over in Germany, they were preceded by a generation whose literary appetite was geared to violence, and the Nazis acted out in life what their fathers had acted out in wishful thinking. Before the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia and began their program of total erosion of man's past, they were preceded by the Nihilists, Anarchists, and others who dreamed a world into existence which destroyed themselves and others with them. It has

been fitting that most of the revolutionary heroes of Russia have died violent deaths in prisons and slave camps: their daydreams came home to roost.

But let's look at home, into your heart and mine. What does wishful thinking mean in our lives? Hallesby (*God's Word for Today*, p. 280) has defined it as "thinking which does not follow the law of logic but the impulses of our whims and desires." In all such thinking, therefore, we not only attempt to change the reality of things, but also our relation to that reality. We not only falsify the world we live in, but ourselves also. We lie about what life is and also about what we are. Hallesby has further pointed out that "in the hour of temptation wish-thinking occurs in its completest form." All such thinking is a lie, and usually our lies deceive us first of all. Inevitably, the liar begins to live his life, and what may have begun as an attempt to deceive others actually deceives him most of all. Thus, the wishful thinker begins to live out his dream, to work out his lie, and the result is that he walks headlong into sin and then blames God for making it inevitable. And in a sense, sin is inevitable for the wishful thinker, because for him life has ceased to be the service of God and has become instead the realization of his own dream. And the dream will not remain safely buried: it insists instead on burying everything in the life of man

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that opposes its realization.

Hence it is that James wrote, “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). It is our lusts, our dreams, that draw us into temptation. As John Donne put it, we tempt Satan to tempt us; we move into a situation where temptation and sin become inevitable and then blame God for placing us there.

Since we are tempted when we are drawn away by our own lust, then our temptations are a good index to our wishful thinking. A man’s temptations therefore are closely linked to his daydreams and are a step towards realizing them. And sin is active not only in the realization but in the conception, in the wishful thinking itself.

It is for this reason that Scripture urges us to bring every thought into captivity to Christ, because when every thought is brought into His command, then the fulfillment is not sin but sanctification, not temptation but strength, not evasion but responsibility. Wishful thinking enthrones our desires, but we are commanded instead to enthrone Christ in our hearts: He leads us, not into temptation, but He delivers us from evil and gives us victory in Him.

SHORTCUTS

March 13, 1956

Good morning, friends. Some years ago, a woman remarked to me that she had wasted much of her life in looking for shortcuts to everything. She had looked for shortcuts to God, to happiness, to her heart's desires, to all things, and only ended up that much further away from her objectives.

Her experience is a commonplace one. People constantly look for shortcuts, and a good way to start a new religious group, cult, or sect is to offer a new shortcut to God. Now, all these shortcuts have one common characteristic: they propose to bypass and eliminate from your life all unhappy problems, all unpleasant subjects, all trying experiences, and deliver you, sweet and untroubled, to God Himself. But the unhappy fallacy in all such thinking is this: no man who tries to be delivered from life can be delivered to God. Only as we meet all of life's experiences can we be prepared to meet the God who gives them. Sin and suffering, tragedy and death, these are not things which religious faith should help us to avoid but rather help us to meet. To meet God, therefore, we must meet all of life victoriously, and this we cannot do apart from Jesus Christ. There is no way to God which can eliminate

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Him without disaster to itself. Jesus said, “I am the way” (John 14:6), the only road to God; more, He said, “I am the door” (John 10:9), the only entrance to God, “for no man cometh to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). No shortcut to God leads anywhere but to ruin when it eliminates the whole of life experienced in and with Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man. In Him and His atoning mediation, we can meet all of life without running away, because all is transformed, all is under the divine providence. “Every valley shall be exalted, and every

mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isa. 40:4).

What about shortcuts to happiness? Here again, we too often want one side of life only, and insist on our right to reject the other. But our capacity for happiness is always in proportion to our capacity to receive all of life from the hand of God. The most truly happy people are those who can accept both sorrow and happiness, and in everything give thanks to God.

It is our temptation too often to be content merely with praying for blessings and for happiness. We have so much to ask God for, and we ask it, often and impatiently, wondering at His delay and His failure to

answer. God declared, long ago, “I set before you ... a blessing ... if ye obey” (Deut. 11:26–27). The condition of blessing, therefore, is an obedient heart, a heart that seeks God’s will and increasingly delights in it. There is no shortcut to happiness which can eliminate faith and obedience.

It is thus obvious that shortcuts are by no means the way to life. The richness of life is in living all of it under God. The result of such living is made clear by the psalmist when he declares that such a man “shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Ps. 1:3). There is no promise of immunity from storm, of protection from unhappiness, grief, or sorrow. Nowhere does God promise us such a life in this world. This assurance, however, is clear-cut, that when our lives are rooted in God through Jesus Christ, whatsoever we do shall prosper in terms of God’s eternal purpose and our eternal joy.

The sacrament of the Lord’s Table witnesses to this wholeness of life. The end of the sacrament is the sanctification of the saints, their growth in the Lord, the blessing of the whole of their lives with the strength, joy, or peace of the Lord. And yet the way to that blessed result is the acceptance of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, our own dying to the old Adam in us, or willingness to become living sacrifices in Christ Jesus, and our obedience to the Lord. Our Redeemer stated it very simply when He said, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:24).



SIN

July 13, 1954

Good morning, friends. There is one subject most of us would lay modest claims to being authorities on—the subject of sin. Most of us feel that we know a great deal about sin, and some people would even be insulted if you suggested that they know very little about the subject. And yet, the strange fact is that although we are all full of the subject, very few of us really know what sin is. In a way, this isn't too strange. After all, we can be full of apple pie without knowing what went into the piecrust, what kind of apple was used, and how long it was baked. If we are full of apple pie, it isn't because we know everything there is to know about it, but because we like it and it agrees with us.

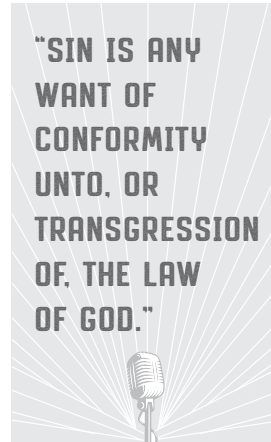
The question then confronts us, what is sin? Most people give an obviously wrong answer. They define sin as murder, lying, stealing, adultery, extortion, lasciviousness, drunkenness, and like things. None of these things is sin itself: they are sins, not sin. Just as Santa Cruz is a part of the United States, so these particular sins are fragments of sin, or even better, products of sin. These individual sins are fruits of a tree whose life is pervasive and extensive, whereas the fruits are particular and limited.

You and I can be free of these individual sins. We can be innocent of murder, lying, stealing, and like overt sins, and still be guilty of sin itself, and still be sinners of as dark a hue as any murderers' row or death cell has ever seen. For sin is vastly more dangerous than sins, less easily detected, and more deeply rooted.

What, then, is sin itself? It is yielding to the temptation to be as God, knowing, i.e., determining good and evil. Adam's sin was that he tried to be his own god, deciding for himself what was right and wrong, and this is the temptation of all of us. It is more than our temptation: it is our nature.

The Shorter Catechism Q.14 answers the question "What is sin?" with the simple definition: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." Instead of delighting in conformity to God's law, sin demands that God and man conform to us. We feel that we are the center of creation and that all things must revolve around us. Instead of conforming to God's law, we try to be lawmakers ourselves. Thus sin is more than isolated acts: it is our nature apart from God. It is the old Adam in us that constantly rebels against God and frets with impatience at His ways because it believes inwardly that its ways are superior to God's ways.

You and I can overcome sins. We can be victorious over an urge to steal, lie, murder, or covet, but these little victories are nothing compared to our total frustration as



we face the problem of sin. That we can never overcome. To overcome sin by ourselves is like trying to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps. Only God Himself can deliver us from the power and penalty of sin. And that's exactly what He does in Jesus Christ.

What we can never do, that He does for us. By giving us a second nature, His own life, He gives us a power greater than ourselves to enable us to overcome ourselves. Our confidence as Christians is this, that in Christ we have a life that is holy, righteous, and victorious. Our second nature is now Jesus Christ and eternal life. Having this as our inheritance, we can easily let go of that one painfully limited life that was ours in sin. The more we see Christ and live in Him, the easier it is to die to ourselves in order to enter more fully into that better life.

Unfortunately, however, sin dies hard in us, and its roots extend into every corner of our being. We know and live the new life in Christ, and yet we find ourselves unwilling to die inwardly and thus share more fully in that new life.

But the happy fact is this, that our salvation rests not on our willingness or the success of our inward struggle with sin, but rather on the grace of God. And this makes our victory over sin a sure thing. It gives us certainty in our daily walk, for we have God's infallible Word and almighty power underwriting our redemption and release from the power of sin. We can rejoice with Paul that:

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. 8:2)

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. (1 John 5:4)

EFFECTUAL CALLING

November 22, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the problems that bother us is our changeability. Even those who imagine themselves to be the steadiest of persons must reckon with a very persistent change of disposition and taste over a period of years. The songs which ten years ago were to us the height of feeling and moved us most deeply, today may leave us cold. Our favorite foods of yesterday hardly rate attention now. Friends whom we could hardly live without, we meet today with a touch of embarrassment and an apology for not having seen them lately.

The reason for all of this is simple: we are constantly changing, in some things, for the better, in others, for the worse, and, in most instances, neither for better or for worse, but merely changing. Our lives are bound up in change. Time changes all things, and certainly we are no exception. Physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, we change. We call those people steady whose changes are gradual rather than sudden, but, whatever we call them, they change.

All this raises a very pertinent religious question. Since we are constantly changing, what if we change our faith? After all, if here as elsewhere we are subject to

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US UNTO
HIMSELF.**



change, then a man, who today believes he is a saved person, can tomorrow forget his faith and be eternally lost. Today we may delight in Scripture reading, in prayer, and in worship, but tomorrow we may hate it. If we are changeable creatures, then even our faith can change and leave us without salvation.

Now, there are some people who believe that this is so, that persons who today are saved may tomorrow be forever lost because they changed their faith. They believe that there is no security in our faith and in our salvation until death overtakes us in the act

of faith. Thus, a man never knows until he dies whether or not he will manage to hang on to his faith and be saved.

Now, this seems a most logical point of view, but the people who hold it neglect two all-essential factors. *First* of all, they make faith into a work of man whereby he qualifies himself for salvation when, according to Scripture, faith is the gift of God. If our salvation depends on our act of faith, or on anything we do, then salvation is essentially our work and depends basically on us. Then it is nothing more or less than our own doing that saves us: it is, in short, man who saves himself. But to say this is to deny the whole Christian teaching and belief and to nullify the meaning of Scripture.

Second, faith is not a work or an act of man but the gift of God. Because man is changeable, anything which depends on him is certain to be insecure. Salvation therefore is never secure, either in this life or the next, if it depends on man. Our salvation is secure precisely because it does not depend on us but on the Lord. Our salvation cannot be rendered void, because no act of man can override an act of God. Man can alter what man does, but man cannot act against God, nor can he nullify the acts of God. Our salvation is therefore secure and inalienable because it is the gift of God and not our own faith or work.

This is the doctrine known as eternal security or effectual calling.

Effectual calling means that God chooses us and calls us, justifies and adopts us, guides us into sanctification and receives us unto Himself. The change which comes about with our regeneration is not a human change which is in itself subject to change: it is an act of God. As the Lord declared,

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (Ezek. 36:26–27)

Thus our salvation is God working in and through us. As Paul stated it, “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes it thus:

Q. 31: What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Q. 32: What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

A. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which, in this life, do either accompany or flow from them.

SANCTIFICATION

July 31, 1956

Good morning, friends. The familiar accounts of the attempts of hermits and monks to achieve holiness reveal both an intensity of effort and a continuing frustration. Benedict, to overcome the temptations of the world he had fled from, made himself a bed of briars and thorns and rolled in it until his body was one great sore, but as soon as the pain abated even momentarily, he was again at the mercy of his temptation. Cirita burned his flesh to the bone to overcome his lust, but, after the burning, continued to burn with his sin. Godric spent night after night in an icy river to calm his fiery temper with his nightlong freezing, but still failed to gain victory. The monastic victory was a barren one: it substituted for strength of temptation a half-dead body, and for victory, evasion. The monks and hermits sought sincerely to overcome temptation, but failed because the basic premise of their struggle was not Christian but pagan. They relied on their willpower, on self-confidence, for victory and consequently met defeat and added sin to sin. The Bible discourages all such self-confidence and declares it hopeless: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov. 26:12). "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth

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take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

These men were trying to sanctify themselves by their own effort of will and therefore failed. Our regeneration, our rebirth, is the act of God. Our sanctification, our growth in holiness and righteousness, is God’s continuing act in us. Our sanctification is never complete in this life, but it is victorious. We have the

assurance of God that sin shall not have dominion over him who has been regenerated and justified.

The desert monks met with frustration in their quest for holiness because this conception of sanctification was essentially negative and humanistic. It was something they accomplished by means of avoiding temptation. They were wrong in their self-confidence as they were wrong in their means. They ran from all human society to escape wine, women, and song; but the worst encounter was not their struggle with these things, but with their own souls. They ran away from particular sins but carried the principle of sin in their own being. It was not men, wine, or women that tempted them, but their own sinful hearts. It was not, therefore, a matter of evading things but having a new nature, having the life of Christ in their being.

Sanctification means in part self-knowledge, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, whereby our self-confidence is shattered and our reliance on God’s grace furthered. Sanctification thus means growth in

the truth, in knowledge, as well as in grace; the two go hand in hand. God through sanctification applies both the death and resurrection of Christ unto us. And He applies the death of Christ to our lives, He exposes our old Adam and reveals to us clearly what we are, so that we seem almost in our eyes to be losing holiness rather than gaining it. Our old nature and our sin are crucified and buried, and this continues until death, when the old Adam in us, judicially dead from the time of our justification, becomes now fully dead. But God also applies the resurrection of Christ unto us, whereby we are constantly renewed after the inward man, recreated in God's image, in knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion, and established increasingly in Christ as we die progressively to sin. We are sanctified because we have been justified.

The Westminster divines, in answer to the question "What is sanctification?" (WLC Q. 75), answered thus:

Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life.

ADOPTION

August 21, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of the most glorious doctrines of Scripture is the doctrine of adoption. It is difficult to understand why more attention is not given to a fact so magnificent in its implications for man. It defines the Christian's relationship to God.

The natural relationship of all men to God is that of creatures, created in God's image, but nevertheless essentially creatures. The Bible gives no real foundation to the common belief in the universal fatherhood of God. Rather, it speaks of only one natural Son of God, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of adoption into sonship is the great New Testament addition to the plan of salvation and the constant source of joy to the apostles. Verse after verse speaks of this great privilege:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. (Eph. 1:5)

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Gal. 4:4-5)

But as many as received him,
to them gave he power to
become the sons of God.
(John 1:12)

No mature understanding of the meaning of salvation is possible without this doctrine. Dr. Gordon C. Clark has well defined the significance of adoption by a simple illustration. If a state governor pardons a criminal who has been guilty of very serious crimes, his act of pardon by no means gives the criminal a clean bill of health for all subsequent activities. The man is, after all, still capable of further criminal activities and still subject to further sentence and judgment. Nor does he go a step further and receive the criminal into his household as an adopted son.

But this is precisely what God does. Salvation begins with the great and glorious fact of forgiveness of sins. But this forgiveness, our justification, whereby Christ's perfect obedience and full satisfaction is imputed to us and received by faith, is a judicial act and does not change our nature of itself but for the fact that God's justification includes justifying faith, the fruit of regeneration. We are given a new nature, are born again, and this means that our forgiveness is accompanied by a changed nature so that we now see God's face instead of fleeing from Him. This new nature is then seen to work out its calling under God, and this is sanctification.

But, in addition to this, God receives us into His

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own household as adopted sons, a privilege which can never be reversed or annulled, which makes of us heirs to all God's creation, providential care, and future glory, and gives us the glory of being partakers of the divine nature. Adoption gives us a new name, God's name, so that our hearts cry out to Him through the Spirit, saying, Abba, Father. Adoption gives us the protection and care of children of a perfect and omnipotent Father. Adoption gives us, moreover, the privilege of discipline and chastisement by a loving and all-wise Father. To some, this may seem a strange privilege, but actually it constitutes one of the central privileges of sonship. Apart from Him, we suffer without meaning and cruelly under the blows of men and events. With Him, we have the confidence that all our suffering works to our good and our glory in Him. Adoption therefore is the fullness of our salvation, the full manifestation of the glorious liberty of our salvation. In brief, it is, in the words of the Westminster Divines (WLC A. 74):

Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.

BRANDS

July 7, 1953

They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. (Ps. 125:1-2)

Back in the Intermountain country from which I came, the last few weeks have been busy ones. In early spring, the cattle are turned out on the range just as soon as the snow disappears. Then as summer gets under way, and the wobbly-legged calves have put on weight and become sturdy and frisky, roundup time begins. Back in that Indian country, everyone packed up and moved into the hills, and a little village of tents sprang up somewhere in the mountains, close to a spring. The boys were in paradise, riding their cow horses up to Fawn Creek, Sheep Creek, or Summit Creek for some trout fishing, or going after deer and sage hen on the slopes round about. Near every tent was a campfire, over which thick steaks were broiling and pan fried bread cooking, and often the friendly invitation from the old Indian women, "Stop in and have a bite." It was roundup time.

Over by the corral, the buckaroos had a hot sagebrush fire going, heating up branding irons. Others were getting blackleg shots ready for injection, and, as the calves were brought in one by one, they were earmarked, wattled, and branded for life.

When they finished with the calf, and he raced off bawling for his cow, he bore the permanent marks of ownership. A trained buckaroo could now spot him anywhere, and, with a glance at his ears, neck, or side, identify him with ease. He was now branded for life.

According to the Bible, we, all of us, carry a brand that marks us clearly and plainly to everyone. We can look around and spot the life and character of other men and women readily: we see the pretense and hypocrisy: we see them kidding themselves as to how wonderful they are, and we pity their blindness. The brand mark shows all too clearly for us to miss. The question, then, is this: which brand do we wear?

The old cowboy song pictures all of us heading for the last roundup. At the end of the trail, the great range boss separates the cows that bear his brand from the strays. It is a good picture even though it is a humbling one.

We hate to think of ourselves as branded. Everybody else we spot and classify. We mark them out as safe to do business with, or as crooked, as a good friend, or a backbiting, double-minded gossip. In self-defense and

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out of common sense, we have to discriminate between persons. We can't trust them all, or be confiding in all. But we hate to think of ourselves as classified or marked by men and women; and we tend to rebel at the idea of God doing the same. But the whole point of Christianity is that He does.

One of the things which used to amaze me was the way cowmen could spot their own cattle. Many a time I saw a cowman spot an old cow, no different to my eyes than any other white-faced Hereford in the hundred or more milling around, and remark, "There's one of mine: she's dry now. Got her out of one of the drought cows I bought." Or he'd say of a stray and yet unbranded calf he hadn't seen since shortly after its birth, "That's my calf, born out of this or that heifer." I used to ask, how in the world can you tell? They all look alike to me! He'd say: "I KNOW MY OWN."

That's an especially telling answer, because the Bible tells us that Christ says the same thing about us: "I know my own, and call them by name" (see John 10:14). Of others, He says: "Depart from me. I know you not. You are strays in my outfit" (see Matt. 7:23).

How well does He know you and me? Can He call us by name?

Paul had once been a self-righteous Pharisee who felt he belonged to God because he kept the law, went to church, and was always zealous for the cause, but it was only after he saw his self-righteousness and put his faith in Christ rather than himself that he could honestly say: "I bear in my body the brand of the Lord Jesus Christ" (see Gal. 6:17).

The Bible is full of talk about branding, sometimes

translated in English as sealing or marking. It talks about the brand of Cain, the murderer and wanderer, who made his own will his law. Ezekiel talks about the brand of the hypocrite, who pretends to be holy and secretly sighs after sin. And John talks about the mark of the beast, the mark of men who give themselves readily and easily to everything in this world except Christ. Their minds and lives are highways, open to all kinds of traffic except the right kind. They have time for everything except the Lord. They can give time to trivialities by the year, but nothing as important as God can be allowed to take a minute. They're always hurrying and never getting anything done that matters, ready to believe anything except that which counts. This is the kind of life which marks all of us until the summer roundup puts us out of the herd and puts the brand of Christ on us. Then we belong to something else and our life has a purpose and carries the mark of God's ownership.

Let's look at our lives and see whose brand it is that shows on us.



WHAT IS FAITH?

August 10, 1954

Good morning, friends. In recent weeks we have been discussing certain doctrines which many people would consider both remote and abstract. A common opinion has it that we can believe as we please, as long as we have the proper spirit. In other words, your religion is not important; your attitudes are. You can be a Buddhist or a Mohammedan, a modernist or an orthodox Christian, and it doesn't make any difference as long as your heart is right, i.e., as long as you have the proper spirit, as long as you have faith.

This opinion is a very popular one, unfortunately. It involves a total religious bankruptcy and a very markedly absurd conception of faith. After all, what is faith? In itself, faith is nothing and has no value whatsoever. Unless there is a knowledge, understanding, and appropriation of truth behind it, one's faith could be in foolishness and a hindrance.

Let's put it on a practical and homely basis. If I believe that I have a thousand dollars in the bank, my faith is foolishness unless I actually do have that money. Every action on the basis of a false faith involves not only foolishness but danger. For me to write in good faith a check on a nonexistent bank account is to

invite serious trouble no matter how firm my faith is. I know a kindly man, now locked up in a mental institution, who earnestly believes that he is a very wealthy rancher with vast holdings in two states and several million in various banks. He is sufficiently convincing in his faith to convince people of it whenever he is released, with the result that bad checks are written which

bounce and end up in his reconfinement. His faith does not make his checks good, and to compare him and his faith with that of a man who can write a good check is foolishness. In like fashion, we cannot equate a man with faith in a false religion with a man having true faith. Having faith as such, or a proper spirit, or sincerity is not enough.

A valid faith must therefore be founded on knowledge, and the knowledge must support the conclusions of faith. To have faith in God means not only to believe that He is, but to know Him in His revelation. Faith is nothing in itself; no man has ever been saved on account of his faith, but only through his faith, or by means of his faith. As Machen has expressed it, "Faith is merely the means which the Holy Spirit uses to apply to the individual soul the benefits of Christ's death."

Thus faith is not some quality of the soul, a proper spirit, or good attitude. Faith is, according to the Bible, "the substance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1).

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Faith therefore is the actual apprehension and partial possession now of things which ultimately are beyond us. This means that to have faith in Jesus Christ is to have faith in a person who is beyond us, and unseen to us. He is our hope for the future and for all eternity, and yet we have not seen Him or touched Him. But true faith is the substance of these things also, and it means not only knowing Him in the future but having Him today in our lives. If we have Christ in our lives in truth and in power, we do not have His fullness, but we do have His substance. To have faith in Christ means also to have Christ. To believe in a heaven to come for us means also to have the substance of that heaven, though not its fullness today. If we believe that God grants peace and love to His people because He is our peace, and He is love, then we reveal the substance of that peace and love in our daily living. If our faith is in a godless world or in a world gone out of the Almighty's controls, then we show the substance of that faith in uncertainty, instability, and fretting.

Thus we see that, *first* of all, faith presupposes knowledge; *second*, that it is the substance of things hoped for, the essence of things not seen; and *finally*, we must see that faith is not "doing something" but rather receiving something. Faith, in itself the working of God in us, means that we receive the Lord and His salvation as a gift. Faith is not an act on our part but a receiving by us of God's act in Jesus Christ.

The Shorter and Larger Catechisms read thus:

Q. 30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption

purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Q. 72. What is justifying faith?

A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness therein held forth, for the pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

Q. 73. How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness.

SAVING FAITH

August 28, 1956

Good morning, friends. Religious faith is frequently recommended in popular magazines as a cure-all for the sickness of society, and it is assumed that man's problems and burdens would all disappear if we only believed. But believed what? Here the writers usually become vague. They insist that faith is the answer, but they will not specify faith in what. Very often such people will continue by saying that various churches and even religions should all work together without quibbling about points of doctrine and articles of faith. The fallacy of all such thinking can be illustrated by reference to a football league. Would it be possible for eight teams to constitute a league if one insisted on six-man football, another eleven, one banned all passing, another insisted on the right to change rules at will, while yet another declared that its own rules permitted them to do what they pleased, as long as they were sincere? The result, of course, would be no football at all. A common and uniform set of rules must prevail before teams can meet, or a single team can be assembled.

In like manner, faith is meaningless unless it is specific and true, and, for the Christian, saving faith is true Christian faith and none other. In the words of The

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Westminster Confession, “By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true, whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaketh therein” (WCF 14:2). Thus, faith in fairies or in false gods is never true or saving faith. The only valid faith is that which relates itself specifically and accurately to reality.

Thus, the Bible is the means of faith. In the words of Paul, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The Bible is never the object of faith but rather the means of faith. Christ, and through Christ the triune God, is the object of faith.

Faith is not merely an act of the will, nor an act of the reason, an assent to true teaching, but an act of the whole person whereby he surrenders himself to and leans on Christ for his salvation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, by means of the Word, strengthened in us by the Word, the sacraments, prayer, and a Christian walk. The Westminster Confession declares that “the principal acts of saving faith are, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.”

Faith brings us into personal union with Christ so that Christ now lives in us, and we in Christ. Luther says:

Faith must be purely taught: namely, that He and thou art made as it were one person: so that thou mayest boldly say, I am now one with Christ, that is to say, Christ’s righteousness, victory and life are

mine. And again, Christ may say, I am that sinner: that is, his sins and his death are mine because he is united and joined unto me and I unto him. For by faith we are so joined together that we are become one flesh and one bone, we are members of the body of Christ, flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones: so that this faith doth couple Christ and me more nearly together than the husband is coupled to his wife.

These beautiful words emphasize an important aspect of faith. Too often men feel alone in their faith, placed in difficult circumstances under an obligation to live peacefully that limits their resistance while increasing their burden. To be in Christ means often to be under trial. But that is not all. Christ is involved in all of our lives: we are never alone. Our burden is His burden; our problem is His problem; and our deliverance is His deliverance. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:2, 11).

More than that, because Christ is with us, saving faith has always as its magnificent dimension, hope, "embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come" (WCF 14:2). We knew that "tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:3-5). "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The life of faith is a life of hope, a life of promise, and a life of realization, because it is a life lived in Christ and in the glory of His saving power.

OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

September 3, 1956

Good morning, friends. A much misunderstood Biblical word is *repentance*. For many people, repentance means being sorry for one's sins. But sorrow is not repentance. Many people are sorry for their sins because their consequence has been trouble, not because they hate sin itself. True repentance means, *first of all*, hating sin; *second*, it involves a change of direction, a turning away from sin and a walking towards God and a trust in Him; and, *third*, an active obedience to the Lord. Repentance and conversion are the same words, derived from the same Biblical declarations, but conversion has in our day lost its original meaning, which is to turn back, to change directions, and has become identified instead with regeneration, being born again. When God by His saving grace regenerates a man, that new life reveals itself immediately in repentance. Repentance is therefore the fruit of a changed life, the outcome of regeneration.

Gordon H. Clark speaks of repentance as a lifelong process, an aspect of repentance which we too seldom consider, but which is nevertheless central. Too often repentance is left to the sinner newly coming to Christ. Certainly, such repentance is all-important. The sinner

needs to be told that all sin is under the condemnation of God, but that no sin is so great as to bring condemnation to the truly repentant. We are called upon to make confession to God, not to men, privately and not publicly. The confession must be specific, but it need not be detailed or exhaustive. It is not total or exhaustive confession that secures forgiveness of sins, but the grace of God, which extends pardon to the humble and the contrite heart. If we have offended others, we

need to seek their forgiveness also by a simple confession of our offense, but again it is not the act of confession or its particulars which are of value, but the repentant heart.

But repentance does not end with our salvation. It is a continuing result of it. Because our sanctification is not complete, and because we daily err in our obedience, we need daily in prayer to seek forgiveness. Repentance is a lifelong process, and its outcome is continuous growth in grace and in holiness.

Another outcome of repentance is blessedness or happiness. The psalmist tells us:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile ... I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the

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iniquity of my sin ... Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. (Ps. 32:1–2, 5, 10–11)

Happiness is the outcome of repentance, because the repentant man walks in the confidence not only of forgiveness but in the growing joy of victory. Past sins and temptations become the means of present grace towards future victory. According to John Bunyan, “Temptations, when we meet them at first, are as the lion that roared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them we shall find a nest of honey within them.” Repentance unto life, therefore, becomes for us not only a saving grace but sustaining grace. It turns to the Lord in the confidence of His love and care, and of His grace unto victory in our lives. It can say, in the words of a Hindu Christian:

If there is aught of worth in me,
It comes from Thee alone;
Then keep me safe, for so, O Lord,
Thou keepest but thine own.
(Narayan Vaman Tilak, 1861–1919)

THE MEANING OF PURITY

January 10, 1956

Good morning, friends. Since purity is a Christian requirement, it is important for us to understand the meaning of the word *purity* as it is used in the Bible, particularly in its basic language, Hebrew. Our English word *pure* comes to us from the Latin *purus*, meaning clean, and for us our basic conception of purity is colored by this Latin derivation. Thus, when we read the word *pure* in the Bible, we naturally tend to think in terms of its Latin and English meaning rather than its Biblical significance. For us, therefore, pure means clean, untouched, unspotted, virginal. For us, it is something as yet unmarred by the world's grime and filth, untouched by sin and temptation, and serenely virginal in its existence.

Such is the English meaning, and although there are hints of the meaning of *clean* in some words used for purity by the Hebrew, by and large it is not its normal significance. Several words are used in the Bible which are given a common translation into English as *pure*. These words mean clear, chosen, liberty, beaten, free, acquitted, refined, tried, and separated.

Thus, when Psalm 19:8 says that every "commandment of the Lord is pure," it means that every com-

mandment is clear, and more than that, light-giving, like the sun (Song of Solomon 6:10).

Psalms 12:6 points clearly to the meaning of pure when it declares, “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” Thus purity involves a burning away of dross and a cleansing by fire, a separation from self and falsehood.

When Daniel 7:9 speaks of the Ancient of Days whose hair is like “pure wool,” it tells us that His hair is white or gray, i.e., aged. But the word used for pure here means free, innocent, acquitted, ideas which, instead of being associated with unspotted childhood as in English, are here associated with unlimited age and experience.

Again, when 1 Kings 5:11 speaks of “twenty measures of pure oil,” it means twenty measures of beaten (rather than crushed) oil, the oil being extracted by beating.

These few illustrations are enough to indicate the radical difference between our common English conception of purity and the Biblical doctrine of purity. The English word tends to assume that purity is a condition inherent in certain things from the beginning; our common assumption relates the word *pure* to the

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words *virginal* and *unspotted*. For us, purity can be pictured as a little, newborn lamb, or a pink-fresh baby.

The Biblical concept of purity assumes instead an original impurity, and purity comes about as a result of a process of refinement, choosing, separation, cleansing, beating, burning, and freeing. To be pure in the Biblical sense, one is more likely to be old and experienced, tried in the fire of affliction, burned and cleansed by temptation met and eventually overcome, beaten by experiences until the dross in our being is purged from us, and separated out of our selfhood and falsehood for the Lord's use. Thus, purity is not something we lose as we grow up, but something we struggle to gain, by the grace of God, throughout life's trying experiences and through life's experiences. Thus, instead of being a past fact, purity is for the Christian a present struggle and burning, and a future victory.

The Lord chooses us, that is, purifies us, in the furnace of experience received from the hand of the Lord and in His Spirit. As Isaiah reported it, the Lord's declaration is clear-cut concerning His people: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10).



GOD'S EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

January 24, 1956

Good morning, friends. One of our persistent illusions is the hope that our education can be an easy process. Because schoolrooms are now frequently beautifully inviting, and textbooks attractive, we assume that education can be reduced to a harmless process. It never works out that way. Education involves, in the truest sense, a reshaping of our lives, and to reshape body and soul is a painful process. Thus, while man tries to make education harmless and ineffective, God frankly deals with us and with all the rigorous honesty that education requires.

God knows, certainly, that we are lazy people, and that much of our activity is lazy activity, the purpose of which is to run away from life's more basic demands of us. Left to ourselves, we are inclined to take God and His Word casually and comfortably. We readily weaken the force of all His requirements and insist that God's will for us must be a cushioned call and a preferential rating.

God's answer to this is to destroy our complacency. Moreover, He permits Satan to sift us like wheat (Luke

22:31). The sifting of wheat is a strenuous process; the sifting of men is far more rigorous. It involves a shaking of their innermost being, the opening of their lives by fear and dread, and a total helplessness as they feel the power of Satan surround them. But we can never truly know and fear God until we have also known and feared Satan. Until the enormity and power of evil and sin become vivid and real to us, we are not ready to cast away our self-sufficiency and to throw ourselves into the hand of God.

Our Lord told Peter, who boasted of his strength, that Satan would sift him; then, after the sifting, strength would come, and Peter would then have this responsibility: “strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). This Peter later did, and his letters served to strengthen the early church by preparing them for the reality of testing and trial, for the reality of God’s educational process.

“The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” (WSC A:1) This is our educational goal, and before it can be attained, our self-glorification is destroyed, and all our attempts to enjoy other things ahead of the Lord are turned to frustration and grief. The Lord’s hand must be seen in all our lives, and His overwhelming power realized in order that we might live in the urgency, not of our needs, but of His will. As

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Paul said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

All these things we are ready to understand in dealing with our children, but we are reluctant to understand in God's dealings with us. We fail to recognize that we are only grown up children, and the worst babies are adults. We are too often sorry babies who refuse to be men while insisting that God treat us like angels. Before we are weaned and can walk, we make our demand for wings, and, gaining nothing, begin to doubt the wisdom of God. The more readily we receive the education, the more readily we assume the responsibility and privilege that goes with it.

Moffatt translates Hebrews 12:11 thus: "Discipline always seems for the time to be a thing of pain, not of joy; but those who are trained by it reap the fruit of it afterwards in the peace of an upright life."

If we fail to receive God's educational process with peace, patience, and consecration, then the "root of bitterness" grows up in us to contaminate everything in and around us. We receive it therefore as God gives it, as grace and love, and having so received it, receive also the results of that gift, strength, joy, and victory in and through Jesus Christ.



“LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED”

December 14, 1954

Good morning, friends. There are some chapters of Scripture that have worked their way into the hearts of untold numbers of people in an especially close way. One such passage is our reading for today, John 14. Let's listen to what our Lord has to say in this chapter:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him,

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man

love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. (John 14:1–31)

The substance of this chapter is our Lord's answer to four questions by His disciples. He had announced that He was leaving them, and they were greatly disturbed. Thomas asked, "Lord, wither goest thou?" and was told he could not follow as yet. The Lord was going to open the way to the Father's many mansions and give them the fullness of His Kingdom, eternal life.

Thomas asked the second question, "How can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way, the

truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” The only approach to God the Father is through Jesus Christ. The only way to know God is to know Jesus Christ. The truth, Jesus declared, is not something abstract, not a series of miscellaneous facts nor experimental data. The truth is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ.

The third question came from Philip, who asked, “Show us the Father.” Jesus’s answer was a reprimand: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” In other words, Jesus declared that He was God incarnate. To see Him was to see God. Jesus is God in the flesh, and His own insistence was that this identification with God be full and complete.

The fourth question came from Judas, not Iscariot, who wanted to know how Jesus planned to continue to be with them but not with the world. Jesus declared His union with His people as one body and their identification in this act of grace. Jesus will always be present with His people because, according to His promise, He became one with them. We are as a consequence near to God because we are members of His body.

Our Lord therefore declared: “Let not your heart be troubled,” because as members of Him we are members in that great and ultimate victory. The prince of this world comes and has no claim over us because of our membership in Christ. The true victory is not over Rome, or over any human enemy, but over the old Adam in us, over sin and death. And this victory Jesus Christ gained for us. The little things which trouble us

and which we are greatly upset about are here today and gone tomorrow. None of them have any standing against eternity. Real peace comes in victory over ourselves, and this victory is ours only in Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled," He immediately told them how to find peace. This is what He said: "Believe in God, believe also in me." When we believe in Him according to His Word, He gives us His victory, His comfort, and His peace.

He says to us: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (v. 27).

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“WHAT CAN THE RIGHTEOUS DO?”

October 26, 1954

Good morning, friends. A very appropriate psalm for these troubled times is Psalm 11. It was written by David under very difficult and trying circumstances. Although not many realize it, the nation had passed into the hands of evil and unscrupulous men. King Saul and his associates were unreservedly committed to evil although the nation continued as before, unaware of the extent of the change in the government. David’s popularity had apparently waned, and his great victory forgotten. As a result, there were many who felt that his cause was hopeless, and they gave David some practical advice: run for the mountains and save your own skin. These men are aiming for you, and they aim to destroy you. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (v. 3).

There are many people who have uttered that same cry in our own day. Many asked that question, for example, during the Kefauver hearings of a few short years ago. Those hearings, and others as well, revealed a hidden and unobserved network of organized crime across the nation, an evil government behind many

local governments. Around us, we see, as well, an indifference to the things of the Lord, to Scripture, and the Ten Commandments. We see the nation pursuing security and indifferent to truth, more concerned with prosperity than with righteousness. And, worst of all, we see that men do not see conditions which daily grow more obvious. We can thus understand the feeling of David's good but pessimistic friends, who said, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" To them, the solution was clear: run for the mountains, save your own skin, and forget the whole thing.

The answer of David to this advice was unhesitating: "In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" (v. 1). David was forced for a while to flee to the mountains, but not to escape from the struggle for righteousness but only to continue it. This was his confidence:

The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. (Ps. 11:4-5)

Thus David gave a twofold answer to those who said, "What can the righteous do?" The righteous, he declared, can put their trust in the Lord. This means that they can have confidence in the sure and infallible justice of God. The courts of this world are always faulty and all too often corrupt, but the final decision is not in their hands. Over and above and beyond all the courts of this world is the great and supreme court of Almighty God, and there are no appeals against or reversals of His judgments. And God hates evil in all its

manifestations: “The wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth” (v. 5). There is no triumph for evil, because all its seeming victories have God’s judgment of reversal against them. “What can the righteous do?” They can put their trust in the Lord, who alone reigns, and who will ultimately confound all unrighteousness.

The second thing that the righteous can do is this: they can continue to be righteous. This is their strength and their assurance of victory. “For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright” (v. 7). The outlook of faith is one of sure and certain assurance. The pervasive and masked character of evil is hard to take, upsetting to see, and often leads us to pessimistic views. We are tempted to agree with the good friends of David who asked, “What can the righteous do?”

But David’s declaration stands: “God is in the generation of the righteous” (Ps. 14:5). He is present among them to defend them and strengthen them. Every defeat He turns into good; every victory He crowns with His blessings.

History witnesses to the grace and power of God. Again and again, the Lord has turned defeat or trouble into victory. What a dark moment for the church, when, only a handful, it was persecuted by Saul and made to fly for refuge to other cities. And Paul, then called Saul, journeyed with companions toward Damascus, and had authority and command from the High Priest that

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he might bring them bound, men and women, unto Jerusalem (see Acts 9:2). But at that moment the Lord instead bound Saul hand and foot by His sovereign grace and delivered him to the church a new man.

But the Lord is mindful of His own; He remembers His children ... Bow down before Him, ye mighty. For the Lord is near us.

(Felix Mendelssohn, "The Lord Is Mindful of His Own," n.d.)

O rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee thy heart's desires ... Commit thy way unto Him, and trust in Him, and fret not thyself because of evil doers.

(Felix Mendelssohn, "O Rest in the Lord," 1846)

RESPONSIBILITY

May 4, 1954

Good morning, friends. Every now and then I get into an argument with someone who says it makes no difference what he does, that he is his own boss and can do exactly as he pleases. Usually such people are afraid that I'm going to tell them what to do, something which is not my business, and they do their best to declare their complete independence of God and man.

Well, I've never seen the man yet who was able to secede from the universe with any success. Try as they may, they still continue to live in the same world as we do, and that world is one of interdependence rather than independence. Every day, we depend on each other: on the butcher, grocer, electrician, gas producer, farmer, policeman, carpenter, and a hundred and one other men in the discharge of their various duties. We depend, in all our living, on one another.

All this is obvious, of course, so let's push a little further. Our interdependence is not limited to our physical life. Emotionally and socially, we require the presence of others. There are times, of course, when we may want a little isolation, but basically, we require fellowship. Solitary confinement is the severest punishment for criminals. The reasons why we require the presence of other people are several, but among

the most important is this: in our thinking, feeling, and being, we are never in isolation; we are a part of a group; we show our age and generation, not because we are products of society, but because our very life is society, community, and interdependence. We talk to others because communication is a necessity of our nature. We thrive in proportion to the love we are able to give and receive, because our happiness increases as our interdependence and fellowship grows. In every man, mankind is present with all its potentialities and all its problems. We can talk about mankind and humanity only because of this common nature of man which makes us all akin. Man is society, he is mankind, and God, in creating him, declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Socially and emotionally, man's life is one of interdependence. Thus, it is of utmost importance, since our lives are wrapped up in each other, what we do, for we cannot live to ourselves, nor can we limit the consequences of our actions to ourselves.

As a result, people who say that they can do exactly as they please, and that their life is their own business, forget that our life is a common life, that is, a shared life, and that at no point can we secede from the universe and sidestep our responsibility to God and to man. To try to do so is to be as foolish as the man who some years ago left Joppa for a brief journey across the Mediterranean Sea. As the old, wooden sailing vessel met with bad weather, the ignorant native became sick, and began to chop a hole underneath his berth and into the ship's side. When another passenger became upset at the chopping, the poor fool protested, "What difference does it make to you? The hole I'm chopping is under my berth." The

obvious answer, of course, was that the hole would sink the ship and all of them with it.

Every private act has its social consequence. You and I can never secede from this consequential universe for a single moment or for a single act. We are at every point in our lives responsible persons, and to be responsible is to be dependent and interdependent. We are responsible to our fellow men because our lives are interrelated to theirs, and we are supremely responsible to God because He only is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. God has no responsibility towards us: His relationship to us is not one of obligation but of pure grace and mercy. It is we who are responsible to Him. For this reason, Paul said, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living" (Rom.14:7-9). "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom.14:12).

This means that we are entirely the Lord's, having no authority over our life or death. We are doubly His by virtue of creation and redemption, and our life is one of responsibility and accountability.

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All creation reveals a mutual interdependence and a fullness of dependence upon God. Total dependence means total accountability, and therefore Paul declares that every act that does not spring from faith is sin (see Rom. 14:23).

Finally, to be responsible is to be in Christ, who perfectly discharged the duty of man to man, and the obligation of man to God. In Him our responsibility to God is fulfilled, and we are given the peace and freedom that comes with a debt discharged. In Him, we have the power to reveal this grace of God in our dealings with men and to show forth the life of the responsible Son of Man as He lives in us. In ourselves, we are rebels against all things; in Christ, we become responsible men. This is our strength, and He is our peace.



OBEDIENCE

(EPHESIANS 6)

December 21, 1954

Good morning, friends. Our Scripture reading this morning is Ephesians 6. Paul has something to say that needs to be said quite strongly and bluntly in our day. This is what he says:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in

heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. (Ephesians 6:1–24)

Paul begins by speaking of the necessity of obedience. This certainly is a necessity in our time. Obedience and discipline are sadly lacking on the current scene. The emphasis in our day is on self-expression, rarely on obedience. A psychiatrist who recently made a survey of 19,000 juvenile court cases found in all these youngsters one common factor, a lack of any real sense of responsibility. The answer to this, he felt clearly, was discipline (see Paul Mallon: *The Ease Era*).

Obedience, declares Paul, is basic to all godly society. It begins in the home in the life of the children and the parents, each obedient in his place and function. It extends to our work and to our role as citizens as well, and essentially as well as ultimately to God. We are required to be obedient, not to please man or to protect ourselves, but to please God. We are required to be obedient because there are differences in position and in authority, but, at one and the same time, we must recognize that with God there is no respect of persons, and therefore no position or authority gives any man increased rights over others, but rather only increased responsibility.

Obedience and discipline are necessary from the human point of view because they prepare us for life's

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conflicts, and every life has its warfare, and every life its struggles. The life geared to self-expression finds only frustration in struggle, but the life trained in discipline and obedience finds strength and peace through the struggle.

When all obedience is grounded in the basic obedience to God, and all discipline is godly discipline, then we have a strength which is more than human strength: it is the power of God.

Paul summons us to this kind of strength when he says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (v. 10). To put on the whole armor of God means to receive His Word and obey Him, to know His salvation, and to walk in His Holy Spirit.

This source of our strength is not in nature; it is only in God through Christ. We need this supernatural strength to live by, because ours is basically a supernatural struggle against demonic persons and forces.

To draw this strength, we must pray, not only for ourselves but for one another. We must feel that the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ are our needs, and real prayer means business, has a sense of urgency, arises on any and every occasion, and is by the aid of the Holy Spirit. And this last is central: for the basic discipline in our lives is the power of the indwelling Spirit. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

And so, in the words of Paul, "Grace be with them all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen" (Eph. 6:24).

"IT IS MORE BLESSED"

May 10, 1955

Good morning, friends. There are some statements in the Bible which would do us a great deal of good if we repeated them daily. They bluntly declare truths which our human nature prefers to overlook, or finds unappealing to its tastes.

One such declaration is our Lord's statement: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul quotes these words in Acts 20:35, as the guiding principle of his own life and service and the ground of his own personal happiness.

This statement certainly runs counter to your feelings and mine. As far as our human nature is concerned, we definitely and unmistakably feel that it is far more blessed to receive than it is to give. All our thinking concerning happiness is bound up with a series of expectations, with things we expect to receive or have given to us. Our happiness begins, we believe, when we receive certain things which we spend our days hoping and praying for. When I get this and that, we say to God and to ourselves, then I'll be happy, then I'll be able to serve Thee better, then my life will have the measure of richness I hope for. This is our idea of blessedness.

Now, our Lord by no means despised receiving. He

made no attempt to undervalue it or deride it. The plain implication of the statement is that it is indeed blessed to receive, and we are urged to make all our wants and wishes known to God. Our Lord said, “ask ... that your joy may be full” (John 16:24), and Scripture makes it clear that God wants us to enjoy the blessedness of receiving, and that God Himself delights in receiving from us, even though He has no need of anything which we might offer.

To receive gifts from friends and loved ones is a delight and a blessing. To receive answers to prayer is blessedness itself. It is indeed blessed to receive, our Lord declared, but it is more blessed to give.

In our heart of hearts, all of us know this. We know that the happiest, the most blessed of men are those who major in giving rather than in receiving. They are the persons whom we love most and enjoy most. We would like to see the world populated by such persons, but, as in so many other things, we want other people to be good so that it will be easier for us to be what we are, without changing.

It is all too easy to recognize and apply a truth to others: we need to apply it to ourselves. For you and for me, while there is happiness in receiving, there is a greater happiness obtainable in giving. If this is not true, then God is a liar, and God cannot lie.

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We cannot always have the blessedness of getting what we want. God has not obligated Himself to give you and me all that we ask for, or do with us and for us what we want. There is, of course, no Christian so poor who has not received and received richly from God, but many believers still are left in difficult and trying circumstances, with no answer to their cry for deliverance. During the last war, many a believer lost his life, or his sight; many a praying wife, her husband; many a father and mother, their only child. They prayed, and that blessed receiving was denied them. And such things go on daily. On the one side of us are persons whose prayers are answered marvelously and miraculously; on the other are equally faithful Christians whose prayers are not answered with a blessed receiving. The reason rests in the wisdom and providence of God, which no man can fathom or question.

But to all there is open this higher happiness, the blessedness of giving in the name and person of Jesus Christ. Even when we have nothing else to give, we can still and always give ourselves. Thus happiness is never a closed door to us: it never depends on the receiving of certain things. It depends, rather, on fulfilling the life of Christ in us, to give as we have been given to by God, with full measure, heaped up and running over.

This morning you and I have certain hopes and expectations in our hearts, things which we hope that we will receive, by the grace of God. May God grant us these things, for there is joy in having them come to us. But you and I need, this morning and every morning, "to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

“WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM”

January 4, 1955

Good morning, friends. Recently, when I was in the home of two friends for their golden wedding anniversary, they named Psalm 37 as their favorite Scripture passage. This is a discerning preference, and one born of Christian experience. Let's listen to David's psalm and understand why:

Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little

while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The LORD shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment,

and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him. (Ps. 37:1-40)

What David here deals with and answers for all of us is that vein of perversity in life which plagues us all. We see evildoers flourishing and the righteous struggling to hold their own, and we become fretful with God and impatient of Him. We notice, as David did, “the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree,” while we find ourselves hindered and frustrated in things small and near to us. In the face of all these things, we wonder, “Where is God, and what is He doing?”

All our rebelliousness is basically a rebellion against God. This does not mean that we must be silent and unresisting in the presence of evil and unjust conditions. We have a moral obligation to work for righteousness and justice under God. But we are called upon to “cease from anger and forsake wrath,” and to do what we do in perfect faith in God’s providence, to “rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him.”

The heart of this assurance is this:

Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

(vv. 3–5)

Notice what these verses say. There is no promise of escape from the problems that confront us, no promise that this world will become an easy street for us. Rather, they assure us that we can, if we trust and wait on Him, know a peace and fullness greater than the world can give. More than that, the desires of our heart shall come to pass as a result of two things, the very things that cause us to suffer, plus waiting patiently on the Lord. Indeed, God makes all things work together for good to them that love Him, who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Then the psalm promises something further. Its chorus might be called the promise that the meek “shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Who are these blessed meek, of whom our Lord also spoke in His beatitudes? The Biblical word *meek* means tamed. We are the blessed meek, when we are tamed by God, and our rebellious

nature rests in the Lord and waits patiently for Him.

The blessed meek inherit the world in this life and in the world to come. Their life alone has the flavor and quality of true life here and now. Other people try to live and find life, and only find it escaping them. The blessed meek live. Then, for the meek, time only draws them closer to eternity, and the sufferings of this present life are not to be compared with the joys of eternity. To the meek, the tamed of God, belongs the Kingdom.

This psalm, thus, requires four duties of us:

1. Fret not. Do not trouble yourself regarding the mysteries of God's providence.
2. Trust. Rest in the Lord. He permits these things for His purpose and our final good in Him.
3. Wait patiently.
4. Do good.

In so doing, we become tamed of God. Our Lord's promise to us is this, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

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THE HABIT OF SELF-JUSTIFICATION

January 11, 1955

Good morning, friends. One of the bad habits that all of us share in some degree is the habit of self-justification. This is a weakness we condemn in others and reprimand in our children and yet are ourselves too frequently guilty of. Moreover, self-justification is more than a weakness: it is a sin.

First of all, what do we mean when we speak of self-justification? Very simply stated, it means excusing ourselves. But it involves much more than an excuse: it involves also the basic belief on our part that what we do is excusable because we are basically justified in our way of life and our course of action. We may agree that the particular action under question is questionable and even wrong. But when any particular sin is weighed against us, we feel that the balances are overwhelmingly on the side of justice because our own justifiable life outweighs any particular sin. In other words, self-justification means that we insist on excusing ourselves for our sins because we refuse to believe that they tell the whole truth about us: the truth, we insist, is something much better and far finer, and must be considered as the

determining factor. Because we are good people, we feel that our incidental sins can be and should be overlooked.

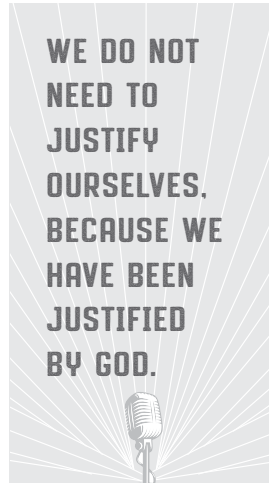
But what the Bible says about us is very different. It declares that all of us, without exception, can be described only as sinners. Our human nature is characterized by rebellion against God and the desire to be as God. The essence of our speech is not truthfulness but hypocrisy, and the desire to

be thought of as better than we actually are. This is the old Adam in us, and the old Adam is a pretender and a masquerader. His life consists of pretenses and masks: he is constantly hiding behind a lie which he insists is the truth, and running away from the truth, which he calls a lie.

Self-justification therefore involves a denial of God's truth concerning human nature, and His bill of indictment against man.

In the face of all this, the Christian should have a different answer. We do not need to justify ourselves, because we have been justified by God. To be justified by God means that we accept His charges against us: we recognize that we are sinners in rebellion against God. We place our trust, not in any fancied self-righteousness, but in the righteousness of God.

This means we live without illusions concerning ourselves but with faith concerning God. It means distrusting ourselves and trusting God. We see no need



for making excuses: we admit the fact of our sinfulness and point to our freedom and justification in Jesus Christ.

The sinner is haunted by the continual need for self-justification. His whole life becomes involved in a hypocrisy of pretense and evasion, in an attempt to convince himself and the world that he is a basically good man and excusable on those grounds. The Christian has a better excuse, a better justification, Jesus Christ, who assumes the sin and guilt in our stead and cancels it by His cross, and who makes us members of Him, so that we have by His sanctifying presence, our indwelling justification.

When we as Christians make excuses and try to justify ourselves, we are living, not in Christ, but in ourselves, in the old Adam. Our foolish self-justification is nothing compared to the continuing and abiding grace of God in Christ. As the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chap. 11:5) declares, "God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified."

The Westminster Larger Catechism summarizes the matter in these words (A. 70):

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and receiveth by faith alone.

WHO IS INFALLIBLE?

January 18, 1955

Good morning, friends. Recently I spent a few disturbing minutes with a state official whose attitude I found very distressing. The man was an official of character and integrity, an honest man and deservedly respected for his work. And yet I felt and so still feel that there is something dangerous about this man and all such men, because he believed that the law does not make a mistake.

Such an attitude, of course, is not new. The Bible speaks of “the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (Dan. 6:8), and which “may no man reverse” (Esther 8:8). It was an infallible law against which there was no appeal and no recourse. This attitude is not limited to antiquity. Nations constantly tend to divinize their law and to regard themselves as the infallible interpreters of the divine will. Marxist Communism makes the dictatorship of the proletariat the expression of the divine working of history, while in our America, many people blasphemously assert that the will of the people is the will of God, and the voice of the people the voice of God.

Nor is this assertion of infallibility limited to governments only. Churches also make this claim. They

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assert that God speaks through the leader of their church, or that the voice of the presbytery is the voice of the Holy Spirit, and make many like assertions which directly or indirectly lay claim to infallibility.

All such attitudes, whether in church or state, are dangerous to the extreme, because man is a sinner, and the most obvious fact about him is his fallibility, his likelihood to sin, to err, to fail, to wander, and to lie. For man to assert his infallibility in any of his actions or institutions is a preposterous claim and a monstrous sin, because man is a creature who sins and dies, and God alone is infallible.

One common trait is to be found in all persons who lay claim to infallibility either for themselves or for their institutions. All of them, without exception, either underrate, bypass, or deny outright God's own infallible Word, the Bible. They will defend the authority of men while they deny the authority of God's Word. They will assert the supremacy of their institutions and bypass the sole supremacy of God's Word. They will fight zealously in defense of their infallibility and lie to defend it, while they sneer and deride God's infallible Word.

Against all this we must assert that man, in all his doings and all his institutions, is a creature and a sinner born to die, and that God alone is infallible and His Bible is our authority. To accept anything less as our final authority is to destroy all standards other than our own will.

Man needs a final authority. Without it, he has no standard. And man cannot make his emotions the final authority, because they are given to foolishness and error. Neither can man make his reason or his will the arbiter of final authority, because man's reason and will are tainted and corrupted by sin. They have as their orbit the narrow confines of man's limited world, which he can see only through the eyes of sin. Man can never produce authority: all his attempts to do so, only destroy authority and supplant it with self-will.

Thus, we must assert, with the Westminster divines in the Confession of Faith (Chap. 31:3),

All synods or councils, since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both.

As the Larger Catechism teaches (A. 3 and A. 4):

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.

The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation: but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very Word of God.

"THE LORD DIRECTETH"

April 5, 1955

Good morning, friends. Now and then, when we pause briefly to look back on our lives, we realize that our lives have been so very different from what we once expected. Perhaps, in sorting through some old papers, we run across a long-forgotten picture of ourselves, and it brings back a sudden rush of memories. We realize how young we were then, and how little we knew, and yet how high our hopes and pride were as we looked to the future. Perhaps we wonder: will the future be as unexpected as the past has been? More than that, will it be as definitely beyond our shaping and control?

Years ago, we had a hopeful picture of what our future would be: the present hour finds us very different from that picture. Will tomorrow be as impossible for us to design as today has been?

Yet, in a very real sense, we are today what all our yesterdays have made us. We are responsible and cannot evade the responsibility for our present situation and our present state. And yet, when we press our accountability to the limit, something still escapes us. We are not omnipotent, we are not all-powerful, and all our attempting to shape our lives leaves something lacking.

A long time ago, a man faced this same mystery concerning his own life. He had begun with such rich promise, only to fall into abject foolishness and emerge at the end with a sad and humble wisdom. Looking back, Solomon remarked, as Proverbs 16:9 gives it: “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.” Moffatt translates it thus: “A man thinks out his plans, but the Eternal controls his course.”

Let’s examine the meaning of that verse. “A man thinks out his plans,” but with what results? The most careful planner finds his life a frustrating thing to deal with: so much of it escapes his planning. And even when the little he can plan has so many loose ends, that planning is a sure guide to frustration if a man tries to be comprehensive about it. James, the brother of our Lord, had this to say about our planning, as Moffatt translates it:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to such and such a city; we shall spend a year there, trading and making money”—you who know nothing about tomorrow! For what is your life? You are but a mist, which appears for a little and then vanishes. You ought rather to say, “If the Lord will, we shall live to do this or that.” But here you are, boasting in your proud pretensions! All such boasting is wicked. (James 4:13–16)

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Yes, “a man thinks out his plan,” but because man is not omnipotent, nor can man control or shape all the factors in his life, he cannot control his course. Now, this would leave man in a fearful predicament if there were no control whatsoever to rule and overrule in his life. But, as Solomon pointed out, “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.” “A man thinks out his plans, but the Eternal controls his course.”

Because our lives have failed to develop as we planned that they should does not mean that they are without direction or purpose. As long as we walk in faith, as members of Jesus Christ, we are part of a total plan which makes all things work together for good. And if the Lord has brought defeat to your plans and mine, it is only because He has a better one which must and shall prevail. The Lord directs, and His leadings are sure and infallible. In the words of Samuel Rodigast’s old hymn:

Whate’er my God ordains is right:
Holy His will abideth;
I will be still whate’er He doth;
And follow where He guideth;
He is my God; though dark my road,
He holds me that I shall not fall:
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.
Whate’er my God ordains is right:
He never will deceive me;
He leads me by the proper path:
I know He will not leave me.
I take, content, what He hath sent;
His hand can turn my griefs away,
And patiently I wait His day.

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
Though now this cup, in drinking,
May bitter seem to my faint heart,
I take it, all unshrinking:
Tears pass away with dawn of day
Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,
And pain and sorrow shall depart.
Whate'er my God ordains is right:
Here shall my stand be taken;
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
Yet I am not forsaken.
My Father's care is round me there;
He holds me that I shall not fall:
And so to Him I leave it all.

(Samuel Rodigast, "Whate'er My God Ordains Is Right," 1675)

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord
directeth his steps. (Prov. 16:9)

"SIFTED IN A SIEVE"

March 8, 1955

Good morning, friends. One of the things which we must constantly bear in mind, when we read Scripture, is that we must take God at His word. If we believe only as far as it pleases us, then all we accept is our own word, because we establish as true only that which is acceptable to us.

With this in mind, let's look at a verse which says something we especially need to hear, Amos 9:9: "For, [behold] lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn [or grain] is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth."

This verse, of course, deals specifically with God's dealing with Israel, but it declares a principle of God's procedure which is equally true of His dealing with us. This is the process of sifting.

Obviously, Israel was in for a rough time. To be sifted in a sieve means to be broken until the chaff is removed from the grain and completely separated. Hebrews speaks of this same divine process, declaring that God's purpose is "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12:27). The

apostles, in Acts 14:22, made it clear that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

Most Christians prefer to think of life in Christ as all sweetness and light. Some actually try to believe that the Christian’s privilege is to be freed from tribulation. But God’s very specific purpose with us, who are His good seed or grain, as it were, is to sift us so that the chaff may be separated from us. And it would take a bold and foolish person to claim that he has no chaff in his life and therefore needs no sifting.

The storms and troubles of this world, and your personal problems and mine, are God’s sifting of us, and must be accepted as such, in faith, patience, and humility. History is God’s mighty sieve, separating the chaff from the wheat.

But there is more to this verse than the promise of sifting. With this promise of tribulation comes the strange and yet reassuring declaration: “yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.”

The Lord’s sifting promise is a guarantee that we shall be shaken and broken, but with it comes the great promise: there shall be no loss in this process—only gain.

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Now, both these facts seem incredible to us, and perhaps hard to believe, but we are asked to believe them, *first*, that God will sift us, and we cannot evade the sifting and shaking which will separate the chaff from the wheat, and, *second*, that God will not allow the least of us to fall or to suffer permanently as a result of this process. Its outcome will be only gain.

In view of this, we can indeed give assent to the words of an old seventeenth-century hymn:

Give to the winds thy fears;
 Hope and be undismayed;
 God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,
 God shall lift up thy head.

Through waves, and clouds, and storms,
 He gently clears thy way;
 Wait thou His time; so shall this night
 Soon end in joyous day.

Leave to His sovereign sway
 To choose and to command;
 So shalt thou, wondering, own His way,
 How wise, how strong His hand!

Far, far above thy thought
 His counsel shall appear,
 When fully He the work hath wrought
 That caused thy needless fear.

(Paul Gerhardt, "Give to the Winds Thy Fears," 1656, trans. John Wesley in Collections, 1737)

HE THAT WALKETH IN DARKNESS

May 26, 1954

Good morning, friends. One of the shortcomings we all share is the tendency to be so set in our ways and outlook, that we can see nothing else, even when we are looking at it. Because of this failing, we can read a passage in Scripture dozens of time without having its meaning penetrate our heart and mind: we are already so certain what must be there, we cannot actually see what is before us.

One such statement can be found in Isaiah 50:10–11: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks [ed., firebrands, ERV]: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

This is such an unusual definition of the man of faith that at first glance we miss it entirely. Who is the man who trusts and obeys? Isaiah declares that it is “he that walketh in darkness and hath no light.”

There is something in us all that rebels against this. We feel that once we believe in the Lord we should be entitled to a certain amount of light, and some go so far as to claim it. But, when we come right down to it, we are people who walk in darkness. We cannot see beyond the present. The next minute, day, and year are total darkness to us. We can have a faith great enough to move mountains, but we still cannot see beyond the present nor do other than walk in darkness.

More than that, we walk in darkness concerning yesterday and today. The heartaches come to us, the sudden and cruel parting of death, and we do not understand. We see misery and suffering that shrivels the imagination and wonder why these things had to happen. We look back on our lives and find the same questions arising within us. Why did the Lord raise these hopes and never meet them? Why did He leave us without an answer when we cried out in prayer for some hopeful sign? Why was everything a total darkness and an utter silence?

We not only walk in darkness but are forbidden to kindle ourselves a light. To us it seems only common sense, but we are told that all who kindle a torch and try to surround themselves with light and to walk in that light shall lie down in sorrow. The hand of God will be against us if we try to light a torch.

What is the meaning of this strange and surprising passage? We know that we walk in darkness: why is it wrong to try to walk in light? Why is it that the inevitable result of trying to light ourselves a torch is sorrow?

To walk in darkness means this: to walk in faith. On

the other hand, Isaiah declared, to try to light a torch against the darkness is to try to walk by sight. And it can't be done. None of us are able to walk by sight. Both life now and time tomorrow are a mystery to us. To claim sight, to claim that we have a torchlight that opens up the darkness, is to claim something which man cannot have. It is a false claim which inevitably leads to sorrow.

It is hard for Christians to accept this situation. We tend to feel that our faith should somehow inspire God to reciprocate by disclosing a few mysteries we don't quite understand. But, when God instead tells us that the test of faithfulness is simply to walk in darkness, we are upset by the seeming unfairness of it all.

However, we cannot make faith mean anything more than faith without converting it into something else. We need, instead, to accept humbly our darkness and to pray for His presence as we go through it.

And that, of course, is why we are required to walk in darkness. If we were not forced to walk by faith only, we would not reach out into the darkness for the hand of God. We would not ask Him to hold us fast and lead us through the world's midnight.

To walk in darkness, therefore, is to walk by faith only. It means that we recognize that no man is sufficient unto himself, and least of all ourselves.

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Be grateful, therefore, for the dark. God had His purpose in providing for it, and it was this, that we might be drawn closer to Him. By nature, we tend to drift away. But the Lord by darkness draws us to His side. As we walk with Him, we can well say with John Newton:

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.
(John Newton, "Amazing Grace," 1779)

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING

April 19, 1955

Good morning, friends. One of the interesting facets of human history has been the attempt of man to find a key to understanding. Man has, age after age, tried, both philosophically and scientifically, to understand all things in terms of a master concept. One of the things which made Albert Einstein of such central significance to our generation was the contribution he made to a master concept. His unified field theory gave an interpretation to the time, length, breadth, and width of this universe which enabled man to make vast strides towards the understanding and control of material energy. And yet, important as Einstein's contribution was, it was no true master concept. It indeed comprehended to an extent the meaning of material energy, but there is more to man and creation than material energy, and a master concept which goes no further is no true key to understanding.

In Proverbs 28:5 we have, very simply expressed, a master concept, a key to understanding, which goes beyond matter to interpret the very essence of man's life. This is what Solomon said, "Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things."

The *first* point made by this proverb is that there is a relationship between faith and understanding. A man's life and character is an index to the capacity of his understanding. The wicked man cannot fathom the meaning of judgment or justice. God's dealings with man are beyond him and only confuse and bewilder him. In other words, spiritual confusion involves also intellectual and moral confusion. There is a measure to which we fall short of the Lord's requirements of us, we are to that same extent incapable of understanding His dealings with us. We are bewildered and rebellious.

The *second* point made by Solomon is that "they that seek the Lord understand all things." When the end of our lives is living in terms of faith in the one living God, we gain the knowledge, in every situation of life and in the face of all things, of the meaning of all things. When our personal life has a divine foundation, we are able to understand the workings of God. It is the judgment or justice of God which is the stumbling block to the natural man; but it is this very same thing, the judgment and justice of God, which provides a key of understanding to the faithful. What naturally makes us rebellious, by the grace of God serves also to open the eyes of our understanding. That which alienates the world from God, draws us closer to Him. What to the natural man is a curse, becomes to the believer a blessing. In faithfulness and trust, we are blessed, and the eyes

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of our understanding opened. Thus it is that Scripture declares that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Our Lord declared, “If any man will do his (i.e., God’s) will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17).

This is our key to understanding, faith and trust in the Lord. Of such believers, John wrote, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 John 2:20). In other words, all believers, the whole church, by virtue of its faith, its indwelling Holy Spirit, has spiritual knowledge which enables it to meet and interpret the events of life and become victorious in the face of adversity.

Faith, therefore, is the key to understanding. Men who try to walk by sight are men who walk blindly. They cannot see one step ahead or one hour into the future. But men, who walk instead by faith, walk with confidence in the dark, knowing they have a guide and knowing that all things are under the providential rule and purpose of their Lord and guide. The eyes of our understanding are opened when we surrender our human sight. In the words of Moffatt’s translation of Ephesians 1:17–23:

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, grant you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation for the knowledge of himself, illuminating the eyes of your heart so that you can understand the hope to which He calls us, the wealth of his glorious heritage in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of his power over us believers—a power which operates with the strength of the might which he exerted in raising Christ from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly sphere, above all the

angelic Rulers, Authorities, Powers, and Lords, above every Name that is to be named not only in this age but in the age to come—he has put everything under his feet and set him as head over everything for the church, the church which is his Body, filled by him who fills the universe entirely.

WHEN GOD ASKS

April 26, 1955

Good morning, friends. There are times in our lives when God asks very difficult things of us. We are compelled to surrender loved ones, especially strong hopes, the fruit of our labors, and other things which we have no heart to give up. We are all familiar with this kind of experience. Sometimes it seems as though life consists mainly of a process of taking away things from us, until life itself goes. We lose youth and maturity, and all the hopes associated with both, and sometimes the small things we comfort ourselves in are themselves taken away.

Sometimes we are inclined to wonder and ask, why does God take so much from us? Why does He ask for so continual a sacrifice?

The book of Exodus gives us a telling answer to the crying of our heart. In Exodus 19, we see Israel before Mount Sinai, preparing itself for the renewal of the covenant made originally with Abraham. Up to this point, God has demonstrated His faithfulness: He took a slave people in Egypt, and rescued them, destroying the power of Egypt; He led them miraculously across the Red Sea as on dry land, fed them with manna in the desert, and gave them water out of the rock. Only now does He make a demand of Israel. God declares:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exod. 19:4-6)

Herein a remarkable fact concerning God's dealing with us is made apparent: before God asks anything of us, He first of all gives us far more than He will ever ask for. We receive far more than we are ever required to give. In actuality, the whole process is one of continual enrichment: we are given to that we might give, and in the measure that we give humbly and in faith, the next demand is preceded by a richer gift. As our Lord pointed out, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

Instead, therefore, of viewing life as a continual taking away, we need to regard it instead as a continual investment by faith. We are asked to commit our whole life to God by faith, and to yield our daily tasks to Him in trust, confident that our giving away of ourselves is an investment in God's Word. Our Lord declared that those who seek to save their own lives shall lose them, and those who lose them for the Lord's sake shall save them. The results of this investment will be revealed in eternity. Paul declared, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done,

whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The Greek text reads, more accurately, that on that day we shall receive back the works of our faith. It is not merely a receiving, it is a receiving back of our investment, now giving us a hundredfold and a thousandfold return.

The answer to our heart’s complaint, therefore, is that God asks because He has already given and will continue giving throughout all eternity. God gives us far more than we realize, and often far more than we are able to receive, and asks of us that we in return by faith invest in His faithfulness.

In view of this, instead of complaining, we need to echo the praises of saints before us, and raise the glad song:

My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy majesty how bright!
How beautiful Thy mercy seat
In depths of burning light!

(F. W. Faber, “My God, How Wonderful Thou Art,” 1848)

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NO VACANCIES

December 22, 1953

Merry Christmas, friends. Since this is nativity week, let's turn our attention this morning to that small-town story from Imperial Rome. Two weary travelers once pulled into that town in the early evening after a long and hard journey. They hadn't been anxious to travel, but the trip was a matter of necessity. Every man had to return to his birthplace, register for the imperial census, and there they were now, but there was no room for them at the inn. The town's one hotel had a no-vacancy sign out—sorry, all filled up—and they had no place to rest their weary flesh.

Probably Joseph made the rounds in Bethlehem, calling on old friends to ask for a night's lodging, saying, "My wife Mary is going to have her baby tonight, and we have no place to stay."

He no doubt received many friendly answers. "Joseph it's good to see you, man. I've missed you here in Bethlehem. I certainly wish I could put you up for the night, but I have two uncles and three cousins in town for the registration, and we're all filled up."

Perhaps another said, "It's a rotten situation, Joseph. They sure fouled up this registration. You know I'd put you up if I could. By the way, how's business

up in Nazareth? Things have been pretty slow here until this registration deal came along, and there's no permanent trade in that sort of thing."

Another may have suggested: "You'll find someone down the street, perhaps, who'll have room. I've got too many relatives in town for the week to help. Let me know if there's anything else I can do."

And so Mary and Joseph settled down for the night in the barn by the inn, and there Jesus was born. No one had room for God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, when He came to this earth.

There was no one to help Mary that evening, as she gave birth to her firstborn son. Joseph probably helped all he could, but how much help is a husband in such circumstances? At any rate, when it was all over, it was Mary who wrapped the babe in swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger.

The world's greatest miracle took place in a barn, with the world indifferent to it.

I wonder if the same thing isn't happening all too often today among us. Like Joseph's friends, we have our good excuses. But the truth is this: there is no room for Him at the inn of our hearts.

Our souls are busy inns that have no room for the Lord. We have time for everything else, but too little time for Him.

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We say, “I couldn’t give another hour to the church, or to Bible study. I really am all for Christianity, but I just don’t have the time to spare.” Or else, we declare, “I’m all for missions, but I can’t give another dollar to that church. There are too many demands on my money, and I couldn’t find a loose dollar anywhere.”

We mean well, of course—or so we tell ourselves and everyone else, but the plain fact is that our lives are all filled up, and so we turn the Lord away to make room for our trivialities. Most of us are busier than God wants us to be or intended us to be. We have time and room for everything excepting Him, who should come first. Will you have room and time for Jesus Christ this Sunday morning?

We can be thankful for one thing: although too often there is no room for Him at the inn of our hearts, He always makes room for us.

He summons His guests and bids His servants stop the wayfarers and passersby to urge them in. He brings in the lame, the halt, and the blind, and has men search the highways and byways for more guests to bring in. We say, sorry, no room, and He says, more room, still more room for thee. The contrast has well been drawn by the familiar words of Emily Elliott’s hymn, “Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne” (Vesper Chimes, 134).

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
 When Thou camest to earth for me;
 But in Bethlehem’s home was there found no room
 For Thy holy nativity.
 O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
 There is room in my heart for Thee.

Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,
Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
But of lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,
And in great humility.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest
In the shade of the forest tree;
But Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God,
In the deserts of Galilee.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Thou camest, O Lord, with the living word
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn,
They bore Thee to Calvary.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
At Thy coming to victory,
Let Thy voice call me home, saying
"Yet there is room,
There is room at My side for thee."

My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,
When Thou comest and callest for me.

THE AUTHOR

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians as well as a pastor to two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an educational organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the *Chalcedon Report* and his numerous books spawned a generation of believers active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. Until his death, he resided in Vallecito, California, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian Faith into action.

THE MINISTRY OF CHALCEDON

CHALCEDON (kal-SEE-don) is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested ministers, scholars, and laymen who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and churches. Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: "Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...." This formula directly challenges every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative: Christ alone can announce that, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for it sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the One who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1). The Chalcedon Foundation publishes books under its own name and that of Ross House Books. It produces a magazine, *Faith for All of Life*, and a newsletter, *The Chalcedon Report*, both bimonthly. All gifts to Chalcedon are tax deductible. For complimentary trial subscriptions, or information on other book titles, please contact:

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