

COUNSEL



**LETTERS TO THE
SEVEN CHURCHES —THYATIRA**

MEN AND WOMEN AROUND THE LORD (PART 3)

HUMAN APPEALS OR DIVINE CALL

EXPOSITORY PREACHING

THE LORD FROM HEAVEN

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

HEZEKIAH (PART 1)

November — December 2006

It was essential for our salvation that there be a man to represent the human race before God and to deal with the problem of sin.

Someone has observed, "Facts are stubborn things." This is likely what D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones had in mind when he wrote these words:

"The Christian faith is not a philosophy, it is not merely a teaching. It is based on a series of historical events. The teaching derives from and is grounded in the historical events. That can never be emphasized too much, because this is the point at which our faith differs from every so-called religion. All religions are teachings; this is an event and historical happening before it is a teaching; it is an announcement of events, of actions and of facts." (*Romans—Atonement and Justification*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1971, pgs. 40, 41.)

One of the irrefutable and unchangeable facts of history is that God has become a Man. This actually happened. The fact of it is beyond dispute. This truth is the cornerstone of the gospel of salvation. If the perfect Man had not come, there would be

no salvation. Paul writes, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

We needed a man. It was essential for our salvation that there be a man to represent the human race before God and to deal with the problem of sin. An angel could not represent us nor be a substitute. Even God Himself, remaining in deity, could not act to us contrary to His righteous character and overlook sin. The gap must be bridged. We needed a man.

We needed a perfect man. William Burnett writes in his article in this issue of Counsel, *The Lord from Heaven* these words: "The sinlessness of Christ is a truth that is largely unchallenged in evangelical circles. Most recognize that to be our Saviour and Sacrifice, He needed to be without sin. But the truth of His impeccability goes further, and emphasizes that our Lord Jesus was not only sinless, but incapable of sinning. There was nothing in the Lord Jesus that could respond to the temptations of sin." If our Lord Jesus Christ had any sin, He could not die for others, He would have died for His own sin. But we know beyond all doubt that the man Christ Jesus was that perfect man.

We needed a willing man. A man and a perfect man would have done us no good unless He was willing to die for us. The Lord Jesus Christ came to do His Father's will (Heb. 10:7). It was His very food (John 4:34). This captures our attention when we think that He knew the Father's will in every detail. In other words, He

knew full well what was going to be involved in carrying out that will and without hesitation or reservation went to the full extent of the death of the cross. He was a willing man.

We needed an approved man. He was accepted by God and the authorized agent of salvation. At the beginning (John 1:32), during (Matt. 17:5), and end (John 12:28) of His public ministry there was the official confirmation from His Father that He was approved.

We needed a successful man. He finished the work of salvation. Nothing was left undone. Nothing could be improved upon. Nothing needed to be changed. It will never need to be repeated. "It is finished" was His cry. He was successful in every way.

We needed a resurrected man. When our Lord rose from the dead it was a bodily resurrection. (Another stubborn fact of history by the way.) Luke records His words, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have" (Luke 24:39). His words, His promises, His offer of eternal life can be completely trusted because they are proven by His resurrection.

We needed a glorified man. He is a man in glory today! This great mystery is beyond our comprehension. The Son of God became a man and will remain so forever.

The Man, Christ Jesus. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Brian Gunning
St. Catharines, Ontario



COUNSEL

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Part 4 Letters to the 7 Churches — Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

The fourth in this series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor is addressed to the assembly gathered to the Lord's name in the city of Thyatira. It was situated about 40 miles south-east of Pergamum and lay around 40 miles from the coast of the Aegean Sea in modern Turkey. It was a kind of 'frontier' town being near the borders with Lysia and Mysia. In those days it was rather small and yet it received the longest letter of the seven! The modern town of the 21st century is called Akishar and currently has a population of around 160,000 people. Today, the area is known for its tobacco production (meeting nearly 10% of the demand in Turkey) and for its high quality olives and olive oil. In New

Testament times the business activities included, among others, weaving, dyeing, tanning and pottery. In consequence of the varied nature of work there were many trade guilds in the town and to be a successful businessman one normally had to join the appropriate guild to trade and fraternize with its members. These guilds often arranged dinners where the food would be offered to idols before consumption by the members and the after-dinner entertainment would usually include gross acts of immorality by performers brought in specially for the occasion and in which guild members, apparently, enthusiastically participated. This, of course, presented difficult choices for some of the Christians as to whether they should, for the sake of their busi-

ness, join the guild and therefore be associated with its activities or risk trying to scrape a living outside the organization. Thyatira was renowned for its purple dye and we recall that Lydia who lived in this city is described in Acts 16 as a "seller of purple." There is some dispute as to where the purple (scarlet?) dye came from. Some claim that it came from an Aegean sea snail which excreted a yellow fluid which, when exposed to sunlight, became purple in colour. However, as Thyatira was so far from the sea this is perhaps unlikely and it is more feasible that the dye came from the locally grown madder plant, the flowers of which when crushed became purple. Either way, Thyatira and purple dye are forever linked.

Politically, the town was not important and it usually associated itself with Pergamum when issues of Empire arose. It is also said to be one of the first towns in the world to use money for trade and very ancient coins have been found there. There is not much to be seen today of old Thyatira as the modern town has been built on top of the ancient one but here and there evidence of the past can be seen in the form of stones with inscriptions and the remains of pillars, etc. It is thought that the church meeting there may have been formed through the work and testimony of Lydia following her conversion.

Introduction (v. 18)

Uniquely in these letters, the Lord refers to Himself as "the Son of God"; indeed this is the only mention of that title in the whole of Revelation. It emphasizes deity. It is always necessary to remember that where the gathering of God's

assembly tolerates wrong teaching, as in Thyatira, such is not only an attempt to change the structure and teaching of the church but is a strike against the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of the many facets of deity only two are mentioned here. These also appeared in chapter 1 where the Lord is described as *"like unto the Son of Man."* His eyes, elsewhere described as *"washed with milk and fitly set"* (Song 5:12), are here powerfully defined as being *"like unto a flame of fire."* Such language is suggestive of great intensity and ultimate perception. As fire burns all in its path so the eyes of the Son of God discover and expose everything in the assembly. Nothing can be hidden from Him, neither does He overlook anything though it may, seemingly, be quite insignificant. His feet are as fine brass. Fine brass, though an alloy, is of great strength and durability. Feet may speak of movement but also of power and authority as in the case of Abram in Genesis showing that wherever the feet walk a claim is made to the possession of the ground trodden. Mention may also be made of the words spoken by the Lord in John 13, *"hath lifted up his heel against me"* showing the great power in the feet of a man. Considering the eyes and the feet it is clear that the Son of God claims the assembly as His own and closely observes its people and their actions. When they move away from what He desires, judgement becomes inevitable. "Sooner or later the feet will stamp out what the eye finds intolerable."

Commendations (v. 19)

The recognition of that which was commendable at Thyatira is fulsome and the Lord is careful to encourage them by compiling a list of the qualities seen that He approves of.

Included are works, charity, service, faith and patience. *"Thy works"* may refer to the practical acts of kindness shown to the saints. These were born out of love for the Lord and were also expressed in love to the believers. Where Ephesus had left its first love, Thyatira had nurtured its love for the Lord. The subsequent errors of judgement were certainly not an expression of lovelessness. *"Thy service"* would indicate ministry and perhaps refer to more spiritual activities than practical ones. *"Thy faith"* indicates the personal convictions held by members of

As fire burns all in its path so the eyes of the Son of God discover and expose everything in the assembly!

the assembly and *"thy patience"* suggests continuance and perseverance in these, even in the face of active opposition. These qualities were important then and still are today. Wherever possible we should seek to emulate them to the glory of God.

Condemnations (vv. 20-23)

Following such welcome approval of the activities of many of the believers, we may be somewhat shocked at the boldness of the condemnation that is now launched in their direction. While it may not be clear to us nearly 2000 years after the letter was written what the problems really were, we are left in no doubt whatsoever of their seriousness and unacceptability. This condemnation is the most severe in the whole series of letters. So, what might have been the cause? At the center is Jezebel. Is she a real person or is this a name used to represent a system? She is described as *"that woman"*; she called herself a prophetess (indicat-

ing that she was no such thing). She taught wrong doctrine and seduced others into sin. She had been given opportunity to repent but spurned the offer. She was shortly to be cast into a *"bed of tribulation"* and *"killed with death."* It is difficult to see how a system could do such things and suffer punishment in such a fashion, so I believe that she was an individual in fellowship in the Thyatiran assembly who, although a woman whose rightful place was one of subjection, forced herself upon the assembly. Because of her power, attractiveness,

popularity and forceful personality the leadership was unable to contain the results that followed her actions. These included but were hardly limited to wrong doctrine, the worship of idols and fornication (perhaps physical as well as spiritual). Her activities were probably in private rather than in public and by inference and criticism rather than by formal teaching. Fornication is characterized by deceitfulness and eats away at the testimony and spiritual strength of those ensnared. The fact that she had time or *"space"* to repent manifests the grace of God and suggests that she knew exactly what she was doing yet arrogantly chose to go on with it. Her judgment is inevitable. In fact, unknown to her, it has already commenced; *"Behold I am casting"* is the thought here. She, deservedly, is to be dealt with by the Lord, and unfortunately those she influenced will be too, though they are given another opportunity to repent before the Lord comes.



There are many lessons here and of some at least we should take note. To be in assembly fellowship is a great honour and it is the responsibility of the leadership, in so far as they can, to keep the unsaved, those who teach wrong doctrine, and persistent troublemakers out of that fellowship. In reception and in judgment we often examine the men closely and take the view that the sisters will give us no trouble. Beware! Again, it is relatively easier to deal with public error than it is with private teaching, criticism and insinuation. Once these are recognized, they need to be judged and if the elders cannot or will not then the Lord will. When it takes place, His judgment will be recognized by the church, and by other churches, and all do well to direct their lives and words in view of it.

Instructions (vv. 24-25)

The instruction is addressed to *“the rest in Thyatira,”* that is those in the fellowship who were not involved in the evil. The *“doctrine”* and *“the depths of Satan”* are linked to expose and emphasize the tragic nature of the Jezebel influence. Those not associated

with her or her disciples are encouraged to hang in there. It will not be easy, but they should remember it is the Lord's assembly and He can be trusted to handle the problem. The exhortation is to hold fast, and the phrase *“till I come”* is more likely to mean His coming in judgment rather than at the rapture. Clearly, while the latter may describe the character and hope of those who do hold fast, the saints in Thyatira did not live to see the rapture but many may have witnessed the judgment of Jezebel in their lifetime. While Jezebel may not be her real name she nevertheless displayed the same characteristics of that wretched woman so named in the Old Testament. She too had a weak husband unable to cope with her demands and activities, allowing himself to become ensnared in them. Believers today who find themselves in assemblies where much is tolerated, or taught that which is not according to Scripture should, with faith in God, continue in the certain knowledge that judgment is coming and indeed may already be in train. *“Hold fast,”* or *“You be there when I come”* is the Lord's instruction.

Conclusions, vv. 26-29

The promises are to the *“overcomer”* indicating that no matter the extent of the difficulties in the assembly, it is possible to overcome and the Lord expectantly anticipates that there will indeed be overcomers. Today we are perhaps more likely to see quitters or those who leave and go elsewhere. When the Lord comes they may not be where He wanted them to be! For overcomers who stick it out to the end, there will be an enhanced position in the administration of the millennial reign. They will exercise the power that was not appropriate to use in the assembly in the midst of its difficulties. They will be closely linked to the exercise and outworkings of divine power in the breaking to shivers of those who dare to resist and in the gathering together of those who acquiesce to the power of God, all in accordance with the Father's purpose. And, in addition, they will be given the morning star. The morning star is associated with the commencement of a new day or, figuratively, with a new era. It is symbolic of God in authority. It is the Lord Himself, but see Revelation 22:16 where it is also described as *“bright”* indicating transparency and purity as opposed to the deceitfulness and darkness of those involved, even in a small way, with the wicked woman Jezebel and her schemes. Verse 29 is a reminder that all should learn from the problems in Thyatira and endeavour to avoid them recurring elsewhere.

Roy Hill
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Human Appeals or the DIVINE CALL?

A striking feature of the mission work which originated from Antioch, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, is the smallness of its beginnings and the limited character of its development. In view of the Lord's commission to His disciples to go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature, the work might, naturally speaking, have been expected to proceed on a much vast-er scale than was actually the case. God is never in a hurry. To the human mind His mode of operation frequently seems surprisingly slow, and for this reason His children are sometimes tempted to hasten things forward according to their own consideration of what He might be likely to do. To endeavour to anticipate God is to court disaster. To act without the guidance of the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit, who always acts in conformity thereto, is to open the way for Satan to take the advantage he ever seeks to obtain. Abraham and Sarah sought to hurry God by bringing about the fulfillment of His promise according to their natural counsels, with resulting trouble, strife and confusion, both in their home-life and among their descendants, and with such long-lasting effect that even today the national animosity between Jews and Arabs forms one of the most serious political problems in the middle East. God's apparent delays are but the fulfillment of His unfailing purposes. He ever works according to plan. His designs are carried out with such precision that the antagonism of

His enemies and even the interference of His would-be followers can never frustrate the accomplishment of His counsels. Nay, He takes up the efforts of His foes to hinder, and uses them to bring about the ends He has in view.

How strange it seems to the natural mind, when considering the appalling spiritual needs of humanity in the first century of this era, that the countries, for instance, of Asia Minor and Greece should be reached with the gospel in such an entirely unassuming and apparently slow manner! A couple of missionaries, acting, indeed, upon the call and under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, go forth from Antioch, first to Cyprus, and from thence to one or two provinces of Asia Minor. The gospel is preached, Jews and Gentiles are converted, churches are formed in certain centres, and after a comparatively brief period of such service, carried on amidst difficulties, opposition and persecution, consequently upon Satanic hostility, Jewish prejudice and Gentile resistance, the labourers return to Antioch "*from whence they had been committed to the grace of God.*" There they tarry "*no little time with the disciples*" (Acts 14:28). The first battle for the faith having been fought and won in Jerusalem, the missionaries prepare to go forth on another journey.

This time they separate, Barnabas taking Mark to Cyprus, Paul choosing Silas, and going through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches (15:41). With a third added

to them, the latter two missionaries are led by the Spirit to cross to the continent of Europe. Again we are struck with the small beginnings made and the gradual development. Here is a whole continent lying in darkness, nations hitherto without heralds of the Cross to bear the message of light and life. Here are peoples, until lately possessed of a high degree of civilization, giving eloquent evidences of the fact that natural education and enlightenment, instead of effecting moral and spiritual amelioration, tended the rather to render man more skilled in the practice of vice, with the result of national and civil degradation and despair. Who would not naturally be inclined to think that the

The spread of the gospel is not to be left to a few individual missionaries who are specially called to pioneer work, it is the responsibility of the churches where these are formed.

churches established in Asia might have been organized to conduct an aggressive evangelistic campaign to meet the urgent need, and reach across into Europe in a combined attack upon the strongholds of Satanic power? How entirely different were the means adopted by the Holy Spirit! God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, neither are man's ways

lency of the power might be of God and not of man" (2 Cor. 4:7). The Saul's armour method ever appeals to the devisings of the flesh; it is unavailing to meet the spiritual forces of darkness. The Divine arrangements are the most unexpected and unlikely to the carnal mind. It is the foolish things, the weak things of the world, that God has chosen, so as to put to shame the

were formed, and developed under Divinely appointed elders. From the southern province of Achaia, Paul, unable to fulfil and earnest longing to return to Thessalonica, writes two letters to the church there, the first of his epistles in the New Testament, save perhaps that to the Galatians. In these, as in all his other Epistles, as we have noticed in the Acts, there

There was no humanly arranged effort to meet the tremendous needs of other lands.

Everything was done by the Spirit of God.

his ways! Only one labourer is now called from these churches. There is no addition from those in Syria and Judaea. The call of Timothy was the result of the definite leading of the Spirit of God. Through the gift of prophecy, exercised very probably on the part of the Apostle himself while at Lystra, the young man was signalized as one whom the Lord had chosen for missionary work in the regions beyond (see 1 Tim. 1:18, R. V., margin). This was but the culmination, in his case, of an early and constant training in the Scriptures, and a godly and devoted life and service which gained the approval and commendation of the elder brethren of the assemblies in the district.

There was no appeal to the churches by the missionaries to send out labourers. There was no humanly arranged effort to meet the tremendous needs of other lands. Everything was done by the Spirit of God. There was an entire absence of sensationalism or human advertisement. The physical instruments were not mighty and attractive to the human view. The treasure was in earthen vessels *"the excel-*

lency of the power might be of God and not of man" (2 Cor. 4:7). The Saul's armour method ever appeals to the devisings of the flesh; it is unavailing to meet the spiritual forces of darkness. The Divine arrangements are the most unexpected and unlikely to the carnal mind. It is the foolish things, the weak things of the world, that God has chosen, so as to put to shame the

wise and the strong, *"the base things of the world, and the things that are despised...yea, and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are: that no flesh should glory before God"* (1 Cor. 1:28-29). In that manner, under the distinct guidance of the Lord, was the gospel sent into Europe. The course of events recorded in Acts 16 bears much the same complexion as that which we have already noticed in the previous narratives. The cases of conversion are remarkable rather for their variety than for their number. At Philippi, however many were comprised in the phrase *"the brethren"* in verse 40, the number can have been only few compared with the population. A larger number turned to God in Thessalonica, and again in Berea. In Athens there were just one or two cases. Amidst the darkness and degradation of Corinth the grace of God met with a somewhat greater response. The Lord had much people there.

Yet in every place Christ's description of His true followers as a *"little flock"* still applied.

In Greece, as in Asia, churches

is an absence of appeal to churches for missionaries to go forth to other lands. This in no way implies that the need did not weigh upon the apostle's heart. The spiritual condition both of Jew and Gentile pressed heavily upon him. He made himself *"servant to all that he might gain the more."* He became *"all things to all men,"* that he might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9:22). No one could have been more diligent and earnest in his missionary work than this passionate-hearted, whole-souled, deeply-devoted man. And in this he is an example to us all.

Nor again is there any suggestion that the churches were not stirred to a sense of their responsibilities relating to the gospel. The church at Thessalonica, doubtless inspired by the example and influence of the apostles, had sounded forth the word of life through the whole country. What was true of them should be true of all. The spread of the gospel is not to be left to a few individual missionaries who are specially called to pioneer work, it is the responsibility of the churches where these are formed. Again and

again the apostle appealed to the churches which were the outcome of his missionary service, to pray for him and his fellow-missionaries, when they had left them for the regions beyond. As those who were in partnership with the blessed enterprise, they were kept informed of what God was doing elsewhere, and they learned to take a definite part in praying for and helping in the work of the missionaries. This is the responsibility—the privilege of us all. But the teaching of the New Testament is against an effort to call for men and women to go forth to the mission field by means of general appeals, accompanied by stirring accounts of the needs of the heathen. There is a danger in so doing. It is likely to work simply upon the emotions, and to create an impression that the existence of a need constitutes a call to go. The call to go forth is today as much the work of Holy Spirit in the hearts of those whom He chooses as it was in the first century. It is incumbent upon us to avoid adopting methods which would anticipate His work and be the means of hastening any to other lands under a misconception, or a failure to discern the will of God.

The argument that, because there are large numbers of believers and churches in a certain country or district, while other regions of earth are lying in heathen darkness, Christians in the former should go forth in numbers to meet the needs of the latter, has no Scriptural basis.

How careful we need to be to have the assurance that we are in the current of the Lord's will, and are in fellowship with Him in His counsels, before we make general statements or give statistics by way of stirring up Christians to go forth in the

Lord's work!

The whole course of apostolic missionary enterprise confirms the statement in Acts 15:14, that the purpose of God in the present age is "to take out from among the Gentiles a people for His Name." This goes far to explain the facts to which we have called attention regarding the character and effects of the work of the gospel as recorded in the New Testament. In the coming day it will be found that not one member of the Church, the Body of Christ, will be missing. The course of procedure by which the whole company is being formed lies within the wisdom, counsels and actings of God. The work of raising up missionaries is His and His only. To this end our Lord enjoined upon us to pray the Lord of the harvest "that He may send forth labourers into His harvest."

The consequences of this kind of appeal for fresh workers may be serious indeed. For anyone to engage in missionary work as a result of anything not endorsed by the teaching of the Word of God, is, as has been well said, an intensely grave mistake, "Not only for his or her own sake, but for the sake of those whom the Lord has thrust forth, for it involves much hindrance to the work, in hampering other labourers in their service, and oft-times causing divisions and other difficulties."

W. E. Vine

W. E. Vine is most widely known for his work 'Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words' a classic dictionary for English readers in understanding the meaning of most words used in the New Testament. Mr. Vine was an outstanding Bible expositor and served for many years with 'Echoes of Service' a missionary service organization in the U.K.

**God is never
in a hurry.
To the human
mind His
mode of
operation
frequently
seems
surprisingly
slow, and
for this
reason His
children are
sometimes
tempted to
hasten things
forward
according
to their own
consideration
of what He
might be
likely to do.**

Men and Women Around the LORD PART 3

WELCOME AT THE TEMPLE

We are considering men and women that surrounded the Lord Jesus at His birth, at the time of starting His public ministry and at the time of His departing this world. We have seen so far that God chose these people out of a minority that not only did not condone the commonly held erroneous views of the day, but also withstood them. They were men and women who were characterized by a commitment to the Word of God and a patient waiting for the coming of Messiah.

The time had come for the Lord to be presented to God in the temple at Jerusalem, according to the Law of Moses. The poverty of the family was obvious as seen in the offering they could afford (Luke 2:24).

Who was there to welcome the newborn King of the Jews to the temple? Amazingly, it was not a high level delegation of the Sanhedrin, the highest religious authority in the land at the time. Nor was it a whole group of priests who ministered before God on behalf of the people. None of *“the princes of this world”* (1 Cor. 2:8) were there to welcome Him for they could not have known the wisdom of God in sending Him into the world. God’s choice was two elderly saints, Simeon and Anna—unknown to most of the people, but well-pleasing to Him.

SIMEON (Luke 2:25-35).

This aged man was in Jerusalem at the time. He was most likely of the

tribe of Judah. It has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he was not going to die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Was it revealed to him as well that his meeting with the Christ was to take place in Jerusalem? We cannot be absolutely sure. The Scriptures, however, leave us in no doubt as to this man’s relationship to the Holy Spirit. First, we read of him that the Holy Spirit was upon him (v. 25). He also received that revelation concerning Messiah by the Holy Spirit (v. 26) and when the time was come for the presentation of the Lord the same Spirit led him to the temple (v. 27). His life and conduct seem to have been controlled by the Holy Spirit. In this regard this Old Testament saint puts a lot of us to shame. Unlike Simeon the New Testament believer has the privilege of being constantly indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). We have been sealed by Him, the Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13); He is the earnest of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14); He graciously guides us into all truth (John 16:12); and by Him we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

All these great privileges should encourage us, out of appreciation for what He does for us, to take up the responsibility of being filled by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). That is to say, being controlled by Him and avoiding grieving Him by a disorderly life and conduct (Eph. 4:30). We must also be sensitive to His guidance so that we may not quench Him when He wishes to use us (1 Thess. 5:19).

Often these truths are well-known to us as head knowledge, when we should desire to live by them so that we may be more Christ-like, fruitful to the glory of our Saviour. Oh, how much do we learn from aged Simeon!

Of his personal piety we read that he *“was just (righteous) and devout”* (v. 25). Like the rest of the remnant, he was standing on a higher moral ground.

Furthermore, with his fellow believers at the time, he was looking forward to the coming of Messiah—described here as *“awaiting the consolation of Israel”* (v. 25). This would be accomplished only through the coming of the Promised One. God was pleased to share His plans with this elderly saint because *“The secret of the Lord is with those that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant”* (Ps. 25:14). Therefore, when Simeon took up the Baby in his arms he realized that the long waited promise had now been fulfilled. For he saw in that Baby the Lord’s salvation (Heb. *Yeshua*). This word is often used in the Old Testament to identify the person of the Lord with His salvation (Isa. 12:2-3, 62:11). And here the aged Simeon seems to declare that Jehovah did not send an angel or archangel to be the Saviour of the world, but came in Himself in the person of His Son.

Simeon’s knowledge of God’s plan of salvation becomes even clearer as we read his words, *“A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel”* (v. 32). Did the Lord give this

aged saint an insight into the truth of the universality of the gospel of His salvation? Or *“Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes of the Gentiles also”* (Rom. 3:29). The prophet Isaiah records the words of Jehovah to His perfect Servant, Messiah: *“I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth”* (Isa. 49:6).

Simeon’s words in verse 34 regarding the turmoil in Israel and her rejection of Messiah were certainly prophetic. But we are amazed at his insight into the sufferings of Messiah when we read his words to Mary in verse 35. The concept of a suffering Messiah was not acceptable to the average Jew; it was a truth that the Saviour had to explain, later on, to the two disciples on the Emmaus road how He must first suffer and then enter into glory (Luke 24:26).

What a remarkable giant of the faith was Simeon, worthy indeed to welcome the Saviour into this world.

ANNA (LUKE 2:36-38)

Anna was an exceptional woman; she was a daughter of Asher. She was the only Israeli mentioned in the New Testament who was not of Judah, Benjamin or Levi. The mere mention of the name of her tribe is clear evidence that the “Ten Lost Tribes” were not really lost. God had a remnant even among them including this godly prophetess.

As one who welcomed the Lord at His presentation at the temple, her tribal and family history and her own life style are of great interest to us. Her devotion to God and her keen anticipation of the coming of Messiah put her in company with the other ones we have been considering.

The tribe of Asher was settled by Joshua in the coastal area in the

northwest part of the land. According to both prophecies of Jacob (Gen. 49: 20) and Moses (Deut. 33: 24), they were given a land of plenty. They were blessed with corn and oil. Moreover they were leading a peaceable existence. There is no mention of wars, battles or conflict in their land. However, the Bible does not mention any great leaders, judges or prophets that came out of Asher.

For a mere seven years of her life Anna must have enjoyed the blessings of married life in the land of plenty in the north. But soon wid-

the Saviour as she spoke of Him (v. 38). Her words were addressed to a company of believers with whom she fellowshiped. How many were they? We don’t know, but they all were *“looking for the redemption of Jerusalem”* (v. 38). In other words, for the coming of the redeemer Himself.

Once again, how do we measure up to these saints? How is our worship life? How often do we testify of our Lord to others? And is He always the theme of our fellowship with other believers? What lessons can we learn from this brief report

Who was there to welcome the newborn King of the Jews to the temple? Two elderly saints, —unknown to most, but well-pleasing to Him.

owhood brought an end to this. As a true daughter of Abraham, not just Asher, she forsook her kindred and family, as well as her land of plenty to reside in Jerusalem, the city of the Great King. From there on and for the rest of her life *“She departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day”* (v. 37). Her total devotion to the God of Israel is a shining example in the dark scene of departure from Him at the time.

How much have I left for Christ’s sake? And how much adversity am I willing to endure for His cause? We ought to examine ourselves before Him.

When the time for which she waited so long came, we read *“She coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord”* (v. 38). The word likewise points to the fact that she was following the example of Simeon in blessing the Giver for the gift of the Saviour (v. 28). She was a true worshipper.

She then gave her testimony about

of this aged saint?

Anna was also a prophetess. This is remarkable since her tribe never produced a prophet in all of their history, but we see her here as prophetess specially chosen by God to meet and to welcome the One to whom all the prophets *“Give witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43). What an honor afforded by God to a worthy saint as Anna was? Of her it could truly be said, *“Them that honour me I will honour”* (1 Sam. 2:30).

I wonder have I done my best
for Jesus,
Who died upon the cruel tree?
To think of His great sacrifice
at Calv’ry
I know my Lord expects the best
from me.
—Ensign Edwin Young

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Hezekiah Part 1

2 Chronicles 29:1-19

When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, conditions within the kingdom were desperate. In chapter 28:19 it is recorded of his father, Ahaz, *“he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD.”* In his days the house

the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.” It is a noble thing when the life of a saint can be held forth as a pattern for others to follow, as is the case with David here; or when a servant of God can say to those amongst whom he has

Lord? In verse 1 mention is made of his mother: *“Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah.”* Had she an influence for good upon his life? Some think she most likely did, and that her father, Zechariah was possibly one of the two faithful witnesses named in Isaiah 8:2 or even the Zechariah who had guided Uzziah in the early days of his reign, and mentioned in 2 Chronicles 26:5. Others suggest that to the influence of his mother there was likely added the help of the prophet Isaiah. While we can only speculate about the early influences in Hezekiah's life, over the centuries many children have been given cause to thank God, for a godly mother, and for godly teachers, who sought to direct them in paths that are right before God an upbringing that is not to be despised.

Knowledge of God's Word and purpose of heart ... are surely essential if we desire ... the commendation of God.

of God had been shut, and the nation was under the heel of the king of Assyria. But the history of Hezekiah demonstrates that despite the failure of the preceding years there could yet be recovery and revival; Hezekiah was used by God to that end. May we have the faith to believe that we could likewise be used to similar effect, if we are yielded to God and ready to follow the example of this godly king.

The commendation he received

In 2 Kings 18:5-6 it is recorded of him that *“He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him”* (see also 2 Chron. 31:20-21.)

Hezekiah was but 25 when he came to the throne, but while his natural father was Ahaz, when it came to spiritual matters, he took his lead from his ancestor David so that verse 2 of our passage says, *“he did that which was right in the sight of*

laboured, as Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:7, “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you”; or when it can be said of elders, as in Hebrews 13:7, *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow.”*

It is interesting that of only two of the kings of Judah is it recorded that they did according to *“all that David their Father had done,”* Hezekiah is the first, Josiah is the second, and both stand associated with great days of revival. But why does the Holy Spirit, in speaking of the godly character of these two men, take us back to David? We might suggest two reasons. First, David is described as being *“a man after God's own heart”* (1 Sam. 13:14), that surely is a man who is worthy to follow. Secondly, in taking us back to David He is taking us back to how things were at the beginning, and there cannot be true revival without that character.

What was it that led Hezekiah to do what was right in the sight of the

It is a noble thing when the life of a saint can be held forth as a pattern for others to follow

While we might be unsure about the early influences in his life, two things are indicated in the chapter that definitely did have a bearing upon Hezekiah's subsequent behaviour, for which he was so highly commended.

First, it is evident that Hezekiah had acquired a knowledge of God's Word. His words to the priests and Levites in verse 11 indicate that he was familiar with the pattern of service for the Levitical priesthood. The

narrative, and his actions, in verse 25 manifest that he had knowledge of the commands of David, Gad and Nathan, concerning the temple service, while from verse 30 it is clear he had knowledge of the Psalms and of their employment in praise to the Lord. He had knowledge of these things despite the fact that the temple had been closed by his fa-

do well to consider our own commitment to the house of God in its present character and expression, namely our commitment to the local assembly. Hezekiah was interested in seeing the doors open and worked to that end. Have we a desire to see the doors opened? Open for the prayer meeting, the ministry meeting, the gospel meeting?

the king traces the decline of earlier years. But notice particularly what is said about the house of God in verse 7: *"they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel."* We might summarize it like this: no sign of activity, doors shut; no sense of testimony, the lamps

He knew there was work that it was not his to do, he ... did everything he could to encourage those to whom those ministries were given.

ther, ceasing its service and songs. So where did he get this knowledge from? Not presumably by observation, but surely by reading God's Word. Have we read it today?

Secondly, linked to his knowledge of God's Word, there was specific purpose of heart. In verse 10 Hezekiah says *"it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel."* Knowledge of God's Word and purpose of heart, a powerful combination, and one that is surely essential if we desire to receive the commendation of God.

The commencement he made

Verse 3 says *"He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them."* On the surface it might not have seemed a very dramatic thing to open the doors of God's house, but we should remember it was contrary to the trend of preceding years, and it demonstrated where Hezekiah's priorities lay. The house of the Lord in Hezekiah's day was a material house, the temple at Jerusalem, whereas today it is a spiritual house, (see 1 Peter 2:5 and Hebrews 3:6,) but nevertheless we

The counsel he gave

While Hezekiah could open the doors of the house, there were things that were not his prerogative to do, and Hezekiah recognized that. So verse 4 says, *"And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street."* We do well to remember that in regard to the assembly no one person has all the gifts, no one man can do all the work or meet all the needs, that we therefore need one another, if the ministry of the assembly is not to suffer, and its needs be met.

While Hezekiah knew there was work that it was not his to do, he nevertheless did everything he could to encourage those to whom those ministries were given. While we do not all have the same ministry, we certainly all should be seeking to stimulate interest in the house of God and its service, and to encourage one another in the work given to us.

Broadly speaking Hezekiah counselled the Levites to do two things, to sanctify themselves, then to sanctify the house and both are recorded in verse 5. The need for that becomes very evident in verses 6-9 as

out; no savour of worship, neither incense nor burnt offering.

What would be necessary if recovery was to be seen?

First, personal sanctity: *"Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves"* (v. 5). That is where it must begin; with the people themselves (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16). Secondly they were to sanctify the house, *"sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place"* (v. 5). They were to remove everything that was defiling in the house.

There will not be revival without these two things, and having given the counsel, Hezekiah says, *"My sons, be not now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that ye should minister unto Him and burn incense"* (v. 11). It is one thing to be given counsel, but another to act in the light of it. Here Hezekiah's call was met with a ready response as recorded in verses 12-17 and all was accomplished in sixteen days. Here were preparations that led to revival, and the principles are still applicable today.

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Expository Preaching

The word “expository” doesn’t occur in the New Testament, but a word that could be translated “*expound*” occurs four times in the book of Acts. It is used in Acts 11:4; 18:26 and 28:23, always in the sense of explaining something. Stephen uses this same word when he refers to Moses being “*cast out*” (Acts 7:21). The New King James renders it this way: “*When Moses was set out.*” The little ark was discovered among the bulrushes, they brought it to the princess, and Moses was set out. He had been hidden, but now he was exposed to view so that others saw him. To expound then is to take what is hidden, open it up and make it clear. That’s what Ezra did: “*They gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*” (Neh. 8:8). What the audience heard was clear!

It is based on a passage of Scripture

The first and foundational feature of expository preaching is that it is biblical in its content. We see it in Ezra who was “*expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes in Israel*” (Ezra 7:11) and “*had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*” (Ezra 7:10). And Paul urged Timothy: “*Be diligent to show yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). Since God had seen fit to communicate His message in written form, these men were responsible to understand that communication and to share it with others.

It does not follow that all biblically based messages are expository. Expository preaching is not the linking together of related Scriptures into a

message, nor is it a survey of a passage, nor is it going through a section of Scripture and commenting on various statements. It is an attempt to come to grips with a particular passage of Scripture as a unit, in its context, and then communicate what is being said in that passage. The passage may be a book, a chapter, a paragraph or even a verse. What is important is not the length of the pas-

Take what is hidden ... and make it clear.

sage but that the message preached relates to a particular passage.

There are advantages in this for the preacher. He is obliged to investigate the passage in its context. Also, he must listen to what Scripture is saying and allow it to dictate what is to be preached, thus placing himself under its authority. Moreover, it sets limits for him in that he is guided by the passage and in a sense constrained by it. If he has an idea, but it’s not in that passage, then it’s irrelevant for this particular message. He may in the course of preaching that message go elsewhere in Scripture, but only to validate or illustrate what is taught in the passage under consideration, not to get another idea.

Exposition is often easier on the audience. Jumping from one Scripture to another can be confusing; whereas, if the preacher sticks with a passage, takes his audience through it and explains what it means, the hearers are better able to follow him and to revisit the Scripture and bring to mind what was said.

It faithfully interprets the passage

The first task of the preacher is to understand what the text means. In this connection, it is worth remembering what another has said: “What is not clear to me before I preach will certainly not be clear to anyone else when I’m finished!” “*Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.*” To “*seek*” means to look into something carefully with a view to knowing it. This wasn’t something that came easily, but required that Ezra prepare his heart to seek it.

The same was true of Timothy in that Paul writes to him about “*driving a straight furrow, in your proclamation of the truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15), as the New English Bible puts it. It suggests a farmer setting his eye on a target at the other side of the field and moving towards it, thus cutting a straight furrow. It involves an overall grasp of Scripture so that we have a broad appreciation of the truth and of how Scripture fits together. But it also involves a careful attention to the details, the words used, the phrases, the context, and the thought flow.

This calls for integrity and a willingness to submit our pre-suppositions to what Scripture says. We are not to read into the text what we feel or believe or would like to say. John Stott refers to this as imposition, not exposition.¹ Our objective is to let Scripture speak. Eric Alexander said it well: “The Scripture is not our servant so that we use a text to say something we want to say. Rather we are Scripture’s servants to allow Scripture to say through us what God has to say.”²

It deals with the passage as a unit

Expository preaching is not exegetical; it is not a collection of disjointed ideas; it is not a verse-by-verse commentary. It treats the passage under consideration as a unit and sees how the various parts contribute to the unit. Therefore, it is not enough that we look at the details and come to understand the words and phrases although that has to be done. But the real challenge for the expository preacher is this: What is the point of this passage? How do the various details contribute to that? How am I to explain it? How am I going to structure a message? Some maintain that we shouldn't preach on a passage unless we can summarize the main idea in one sentence. Whether we would go that far or not, we

of God directing in the presentation of a message. But the Holy Spirit is able to assist in the preparation as well as in the presentation, and we should look to Him to do both.

It applies to teaching the passage

John Stott writes about the preacher as a bridge builder⁴, someone who lives in two worlds and reaches out to both. He lives in the world of the biblical text: that involves thinking about what it meant to the people to whom it was first written and attempting to understand it in its context. He also lives in the world of today with real people in real situations with real problems. It is not a question of being biblical or contemporary; he must be both. The message must be biblical but must do

It encourages a systematic approach to preaching

Many fine preachers have not and do not teach the Scriptures systematically. C. H. Spurgeon apparently didn't. It may have had something to do with the fact that when he was a youngster (so the story goes), he listened to a preacher who droned on through the Epistle to the Hebrews for years. Spurgeon wrote: "I don't know what it did for the Hebrews, but it sadly bored one Gentile lad."

On the other hand, Martin Lloyd-Jones preached for fourteen years on the Epistle to the Romans! I don't doubt that there was great blessing in this for those who were privileged to hear him.

Every assembly can benefit from a basic diet of systematic, chapter-by-chapter exposition of Scripture. Among the benefits of this are the following: over time there is a comprehensive, balanced coverage of Scripture; it helps prevent us from following fads or our own hobby horses; it forces us to deal with the subjects that arise in the text, including awkward subjects that we might be tempted to ignore; and it allows us to deal with sensitive topics as they come up, and none can take issue with the preacher for doing so, because he is dealing with the passage assigned to him.

Endnotes

1. John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, p.126
2. Eric Alexander, *Plainly Teaching the Word*, at the Spiritual Life Convention in Toronto, in 1989
3. Eric Alexander, *Plainly Teaching the Word*, at the Spiritual Life Convention in Toronto, in 1989
4. John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, p.135

The message must ... do more than pass on information. It is ... something which relates to the listeners and motivates them to respond appropriately.

need to treat the passage as a unit and give attention to structuring our remarks so that what we have to say fits together and comes across as an integrated message.

Clearly this calls for considerable time and effort. People used to say of Alexander McLaren, the great 19th century expositor, that he had a golden hammer with which he used to tap a text and it fell into three divisions. Eric Alexander observes, "It is more likely that he spent a great deal of time meditating on the text, and that the structure and clarity of his address was the product of an enormous amount of hard work."³ Some might object that such preparation potentially interferes with the Spirit

more than pass on information. It is a message, something which relates to the listeners and motivates them to respond appropriately.

On occasions Ezra had the joy of seeing his audience respond positively (Neh. 8). They realized that Scripture taught something that they had not been adhering to, and they sought to put that right.

Of course, the response is not always positive. Paul reminds Timothy of that. The message may have a disturbing element, exposing wrong doing and calling for corrective action. It may not be what the audience wishes to hear, but Timothy was still to preach it (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

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The Lord From Heaven

The Gospel according to John begins with the statement, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). In referring to the “Word,” John is speaking about the Lord Jesus, and from this opening statement we learn that the “Word” was eternal in His being—in the beginning; distinct in His personality—with God; and that He was God. Later in this same chapter John makes another statement which embraces all of the truth of the incarnation as described by Matthew and Luke, when he says, *“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14). From this we learn that the one who came to Bethlehem was none other than the same “Word” described in John 1:1 who *“was God”* and that in His coming, He did not surrender anything of His deity.

The Lord Jesus was the eternal Son of God, but in incarnation He became something that He had not been before—*“Son of Man”*—while still retaining His Deity. An appeal to Numbers would help to illustrate the point. The Ark was the symbol of the presence of God in the midst of His people, but when the Ark was in transit, all that men saw was the covering of blue. Inside the coverings, the Ark was the same as it always had been when enshrined in the Holy of Holies, bathed in the Shekinah glory. So it is with

Christ. He remained what He ever had been, but is now covered in the veil of flesh (Heb. 10:20). John wrote, *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14). The poet has so beautifully captured this moment of Incarnation when he wrote:

Christ by highest heaven adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the virgin’s womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate deity.

The Link Between Deity and Humanity

Now, in considering the person of Christ, we must recognize that there are mysteries into which we cannot, yes, dare not enter. The apostle writing to Timothy said, *“and without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh...”* (1 Tim. 3:16). Unless we recognize that the truth regarding the deity and humanity of Christ is shrouded in mystery, we will find ourselves treading where we ought not to tread, and analyzing when we ought rather to be worshiping. Indeed, this is where most of the heresies associated with the person of Christ have found their origin—where proud human intellect has probed beyond what has been revealed about Him, and that which can be known or un-

derstood about Him, by mortal men. Human intellect is quite incapable of grasping the union between deity and humanity, and there we must rest.

We must also recognize that the link between His humanity and His deity is seamless. We cannot begin to isolate the one from the other for whatever reason. He was at one and the same time God, and Perfect Man. If we begin to divide Him into two different parts—the human and the divine—before long we will find ourselves in the quicksands of error. However, even though we do see through a glass darkly, and will always find this great truth beyond our meagre intellectual capacity, there are certain things that Scripture does reveal, and while they may not fully explain the mystery, it will help us to avoid some of the pitfalls that are current in our day, and it is these that we wish to consider in this article.

Some Differences Between Our Humanity and the Humanity of the Lord Jesus

The Lord Out of Heaven

The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians makes the statement, *“the first man [Adam] is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from Heaven”* (1 Cor. 15:47). The importance of this statement cannot be

over-emphasized, because here we learn that, although the Lord came into humanity, He did not come as we came, through Adam, but that His humanity was of an entirely different order. It is quite incorrect to say, "Jesus was just one of us." He was a man, but a perfect man, who was also God.

The Holy Spirit has been careful to protect this truth by using language which shows that He was not just "one of us," but that rather we learn as follows—"God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Again, we read, "...and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). William MacDonald writes, "Take careful notice that the Lord did not come in sinful flesh itself, but in the likeness of sinful flesh" and further "...but by

tion to a fleshly link, but in relation to those who have been sanctified by Him. We read, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified [are] all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11). We are not "His brethren" by virtue of our humanity, but through the new birth.

Holy

The angel speaking to Mary concerning the birth of the child said, "The angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This does not simply mean that He would live a holy life—and He did—but this is teaching us He was the holy one from all of eternity, (see Isa. 6) and that He carried this into humanity. This is one

and who never sinned.

John tells us, "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). There never was a single moment of deviation from the path of His Father's will and pleasure. At His public annunciation by the Jordan the Father broke the silence and said, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Again, on the Mountain of Transfiguration we hear the Father declare His continuing pleasure in His Son with the words, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matt. 17:5). Witnesses from earth and heaven testify to His sinless character. Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man." The dying thief said, "This man has done nothing amiss." The centurion standing by the cross said, "Certainly, this

We must also recognize that the link between His humanity and His deity is seamless.

coming into the world in human form, He resembled sinful humanity."¹ W. E. Vine writes, "There is both identification and contrast here; identification in regard to flesh, but contrast in regard to sin, and both points are stressed here."² Professor F. F. Bruce writes: "To say that the Son of God came 'in sinful flesh,' would imply that there was sin in Him, whereas, [as Paul puts it elsewhere] He "knew no sin" (1 Cor. 5:21). Hence He is described as coming "in the likeness of sinful flesh."³

Some have noted that it is said concerning Him, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11) and have taken this to mean that in becoming man He became one of us. However, this statement is not made in rela-

of the unique glories that belonged to Christ—He was holy. There was time when Adam was innocent, but we never read about Adam being holy in his nature and character. Here we are reminded that the humanity of Christ was different from ours. He had not partaken of Adam's fallen nature, so unlike ourselves, He was not "born in sin and shapen in iniquity." Paul writing to the Corinthians reminds them, "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47). This was an attribute of His deity that was also present in His incarnation—He was HOLY.

Sinless

The Lord Jesus was the only human being to cross the stage of time,

was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Matthew and Mark add that He also said "Truly this was the Son of God." In the same way that God demanded that the Passover Lamb and all the Levitical offerings had to be "without blemish," it was absolutely essential for the Lord to be sinless. His death on the cross would have been meaningless, if the Lord Jesus had sinned but once. But He was not only holy, He was sinless.

Impeccable

The sinlessness of Christ is a truth that is largely unchallenged in evangelical circles. Most recognize that to be our Saviour and Sacrifice He needed to be without sin. But the truth of His impeccability goes further, and

emphasizes that our Lord Jesus was not only sinless, but incapable of sinning. There was nothing in the Lord Jesus that could respond to the temptations of sin. This is why the writer to the Hebrews wrote, *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15) or more correctly, the latter phrase should be translated *“apart from sin.”* The Lord Jesus speaking to His disciples said, *“Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me”* (John 14:30). Also, the writers of the New Testament combine their efforts to remind us concerning this unique characteristic of Christ when we read, *“who knew no sin”* (2 Cor. 5:21); Again, *“who did no sin”* (1 Pet. 2:22), and *“and in Him is no sin”* (1 Jn. 3:5). Apart from these references, the strongest argument for the impeccability of the Lord Jesus lies in the fact that He was God. To conceive of God being able to sin is reprehensible, and so also with the Lord Jesus.

Some would dispute this truth, saying that He could not have been a genuine man, unless He was capable of experiencing all that we experience in the way of temptation. Let me say again, that the Lord was a real man, but with this difference, He was of a different order and had none of Adam’s potential to sin. He was *“the Lord out of heaven.”* The Lord was indeed tempted with all the intensity that Satan could bring to bear, but never from within, always from without, and lest we might think that this isn’t a real test, keep in mind that angels strengthened Him after such moments of crisis and trial in His life.

We stand in awe at the manifestation of His moral glory seen in His holy, sinless, and impeccable humanity.

Perfect in His Knowledge

Christ, who was perfectly God and perfectly man at one and the same time, retained all of the characteristics of deity in His person, including His omniscience. Concerning Him, it could be said in the days of His flesh, *“A greater than Solomon is here.”* Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived could not compare with Christ. We are told concerning Him, *“In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col. 2:3).

Certain verses of Scripture have been interpreted as being opposed to Him having perfect knowledge and understanding in His lifetime or even in heaven. This comes from failure to recognize the seamless

of His Deity and His Humanity. For example, regarding the statement of the Lord Jesus, Mark wrote, *“Of that day and [that] hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father”* (Mk. 13:32). Some construed this to mean that Christ was limited in knowledge. No! What is being said here relates to the division of responsibilities in the Godhead, without any suggestion of inferiority or ignorance between them. The Son is indicating that this matter lies in the area of the Father’s administration and not His, even if He knew the time, it was not His to declare.

William MacDonald has written, *“This verse has been taken by the en-*

emies of the gospel to prove that Jesus was nothing but a man with limited knowledge. It has also been used by sincere but misguided believers to demonstrate that Jesus emptied Himself of the attributes of deity when He entered into the world as a man. Neither of these interpretations is true. Jesus was and is both God and man. He had all the attributes of deity and perfect manhood.”⁴

But some may say, *“Isn’t it true, that at birth Jesus was a real dependent baby, and that He went through the normal phases of learning to walk, talk and read etc?”* Indeed we read concerning Him, *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”* (Luke 2:52).

In the same way that God demanded that the Passover Lamb and all the Levitical offerings had to be “without blemish,” it was absolutely essential for the Lord to be sinless.

How could He possibly know all things at this stage of His development? Here we meet with a mystery that defies human analysis. But one thing is clear, that even at this stage, He was God. Even whilst Mary’s arms held Him up, His arms upheld the universe that He had made. Even at this stage, all the attributes of His deity were present, including His omniscience. This is a great mystery, where we must desist from enquiry, and bow our hearts in worship and praise. *“God was manifest in the flesh.”*

Perfect in His Service and Obedience

John’s Gospel, which portrays Christ the eternal Son of God, reminds us of the complete satisfac-

tion that God derived from the life of the Lord Jesus in this scene. We have already referred to the Father's declaration of pleasure by the Jordan and on the Mount of Transfiguration, and this continued all during His life. Here are some of the references that endorse this fact:

- Jesus saith unto them, *"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work"* (John 4:34).
- *"The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise"* (John 5:19).
- *"I can of Mine own self do nothing...because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me"* (John 5:30).
- *"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak"* (John 12:49).
- Matthew also records: *"Father if Thou be willing, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done"* (Mt. 26:39).

These references establish without question the complete submission of the Son to the will of the Father. Unfortunately, some have used these verses to detract from the deity of the Lord Jesus, by suggesting that they show that the Lord in humanity was not able to do certain things, and that at times He had a problem with obedience to the will of the Father. Such thoughts are reprehensible. What these verses teach is that the Son would never do anything independent from the Father, and not that He was impotent in Himself in the service of God. Also some have taught that the prayer of the Lord in Gethsemane shows that He had problems with obedience to the will

of the Father (Matt. 26:39). It must be emphasized that the Lord never deviated from the will of the Father nor was there any resistance in the Perfect Servant to the Father's will. William MacDonald has written so capably regarding Gethsemane, "Lest we think this prayer expressed reluctance or a desire to turn back, we should remember His words in John 12:27-28, *"What shall I say? Father save Me from this hour? But for this purpose came I to this hour..."* The prayer was not intended to illicit an answer, but to teach us a lesson that there was no other way by which God could justify guilty sinners than for Christ the sinless Saviour to die as our Substitute."⁵

Conclusion

The following observations are taken from the above text:

- *"Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh..."* (1 Tim. 3:16)
- The Lord Jesus was fully God and fully man at one and the same time, and the link between His humanity and deity is completely seamless. He was perfect. All the attributes of deity were with Him from the moment of conception. *"In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col. 2:9). These truths defy human analysis.
- Even as Mary's arms upheld Him, His arms upheld the vast universe He had created.
- The humanity of the Lord Jesus differed from ours. He was holy, sinless and impeccable. He was the *"Lord from Heaven,"* and did not come from the Adamic stock.
- As the Perfect Servant of Jehovah, He did the will of the Father without reservation or resistance.

In concluding this short study, one is conscious that the person of Christ defies analysis and that if we are wise, we will refrain from attempts to do so. It is hoped that these thoughts might be proactive in delivering some from errors concerning the person of Christ that are arising in our day, and helping others who struggle with the problems that error has raised. It is hoped that the final result will be that we will be the more conscious of the inscrutability of His person. It is so true what the hymn writer wrote :

In Thee most perfectly expressed,
The Father's glories shine,
Of the full deity possessed
Eternally divine.

But the high myst'ries of His name,
An angel's grasp transcend,
The Father only, glorious claim,
The Son can comprehend.
—Josiah Conder

Footnotes

1. Believer's Bible Commentary, p. 1709
2. Collected Writings of W. E. Vine, Vol. 1 Romans 8:3
3. Romans by F. F. Bruce
4. Believer's Bible Commentary pg 1357
5. Believers' Bible Commentary pg.1303

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- The Believer's Bible Commentary by W. MacDonald
- What the Bible Teaches—Romans by F. Stallon.
- Collected Writings of W. E. Vine—Romans
- Romans by F. F. Bruce
- Romans by J. N. Darby
- Strong's Concordance
- On-Line Bible Program and associated commentaries

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Faith's Expulsive Power

Faith came singing into my room,
And other guests took flight;
Fear and Anxiety, Grief and Gloom
Sped out into the night;
I wondered that such peace could be,
But Faith said gently, "Don't you see?
They really cannot live with me."

—Elizabeth Cheney