

'Discourse on the Bread of Life pt.1' Ch. 6:22-40

by Charles Alexander

In this sermon, Charles Alexander explores the profound spiritual significance of Christ as the Bread of Life, emphasizing the necessity of faith and labor in the pursuit of eternal life.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:10, John 6:27-53, Romans 3:3, Romans 11:33, Ephesians 1:4, Philippians 2:10

Topics: "Eucharist Theology", "Faith Alone"

Description

Charles Alexander delves into the profound significance of John's omission of the institution of the Lord's Supper in his gospel, attributing it to inspired deliberation to dispel any notion of carnal efficacy in the bread and wine. He emphasizes Christ's discourse on the Bread of Life in John 6, where Jesus refers to Himself as the Bread of Life to be consumed by faith for eternal life, countering any idea of sacramental virtues. Alexander highlights the doctrine of the last ordinance as anticipated in Christ's words, emphasizing the spiritual nature of Christ's sacrifice and the need for faith and repentance for salvation.

Transcript

It is surely a fact of high significance that John alone of the four evangelists omits any reference in his gospel to the institution of the memorial feast at the Last Supper. He makes no reference to the breaking of the memorial bread or the giving of the testamentary cup. This is all the more remarkable because John gives us more information about events in the Upper Room than any of the other three. He devotes five entire chapters to the paschal night: Chapter 13, in which is narrated the washing of the disciples' feet; Chapters 14-16, in which he records the entire Upper Room discourse of the Lord in His parting counsels before going forth to Gethsemane; and Chapter 17, in which is recorded the Covenant Prayer of Christ when about to take His departure. Why no mention of the institution of the Lord's Supper?

The answer is found in Christ's discourse on the Bread of Life recorded only by John, in Chapter 6. This discourse spoken to the Jews who followed Him across the lake after the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand contains a sevenfold reference to Himself as the Bread of Life to be eaten by faith in order to the obtaining of everlasting life (see verses 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58). In four of these verses, the Lord adds the figure of drinking to eating; and the first of this series, verse 53, is sealed, by the use of the double "Amen" or "Verily"--"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." The following three verses each enlarge upon the eating and

drinking of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man.

So unparalleled an utterance requires deep attention. We have no doubt in our own mind that the omission from John's Upper Room account, of any reference to the broken bread and testamentary cup was an example of inspired deliberation to expel any lingering notion of some carnal efficacy in the substance of the bread and wine, which Satan has erected into one of the most destructive of all errors in the history of the Church.

John, who wrote a generation after the other gospels were in circulation (probably in the reign of Domitian in the closing years of the first century, as we believe the Book of Revelation makes clear), was given to see, the first signs of antichristian error; and in his Gospel he purposely omitted what the other Evangelists had already set down and just as purposely supplied what the other three had omitted, so that by diligent comparison of the accounts the Church might come to the true doctrine of the paschal ordinance-- "This is my body...This is my blood...."

In short, John gives us the DOCTRINE of the last ordinance as anticipated in the very words of the Son of God when presenting Himself to the unbelieving nation as the Bread of Life sent down from heaven.

Here it is made abundantly plain that "the flesh profiteth nothing." The words spoken by Christ are "spirit and life" (verse 63). This was in reply to the remonstrance of the carnal Jews, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"; and the bewilderment of many of His nominal disciples, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (verses 52 and 60).

BAPTISM OF CHRIST UNRECORDED BY JOHN

All the circumstances make it abundantly plain that any idea of a special virtue being imparted in what we know as "The Lord's Supper" must be rigorously rejected. As befits the "spiritual gospel" which John was inspired to write, all idea of the conveyance of spiritual grace by carnal means is carefully excluded, and it should be cause for reflection by all who are beguiled by the idea of sacramental virtues that John as carefully avoids all historic reference to the actual baptism of Christ in chapter 1 as he does to the inauguration of the Lord's Supper in chapter 13. In chapter 1 a careful reading will show that any direct reference to the baptism of Christ in the Jordan is carefully excluded, although all the other parts of the record are there as described in the earlier three evangelists; and although additional matter is included not reported by the others, John does not mention the baptism of Christ. So with the Upper Room events, John takes us there and records the whole of the Lord's address to the apostles, concluding with the Prayer of the New Covenant (chapter 17), and goes so far as to mention the supper, but records not a word of the inauguration of the memorial feast.

He who does not see in this singular fact an inspired and silent protest against the sacramentalism, which by the art and craft of the Evil One was destined to overwhelm the historic church in the course of the ages, must not be capable of seeing very far. Antichrist has used baptism and the Lord's Supper to supplant the Word by substituting the sacramental virtues of the font and the altar, and the error rages in our day with unabated strength far beyond the Pope's domain.

It was Zwingli who in Reformation times saw so clearly that the 6th chapter of John was the answer to a thousand years of sacramental error. In his dispute with Luther, he challenged the entire fabric of the heresy of externalism by the words of the Lord in John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

Luther, apprehensive of the outcome of the encounter, had previously chalked upon the table covering the Latin words of the institution of the Supper, "HOC EST CORPUS MEUM"--"This is my body," and in exasperation swept the covering from the table and waved it in Zwingli's face. We enter not into the mystery of that providence which permitted Luther (that great servant of Christ) to betray so obvious a weakness and to refuse the hand of his brother Reformer at the end of the interview, but we simply record the fact to show how ready is the human heart even in the best of men to confuse flesh and spirit and fall under the charm of religious externalism.

Christ just as plainly said in John 6, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood..." as later at the paschal feast He declared, "This is my body...This is my blood." But as He made it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt in the former place that His words were to be understood only in a spiritual sense; so, in the latter place, only a mind overborne by the weight of centuries of false teaching could allow a meaning which involved the carnal mastication of the body of Christ or any of the contingent variations and modifications with which Reformers and their successors have tried to teach two opposites in one phrase.

There is added justification therefore for our conviction that when the Lord said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit...", He was referring not to baptismal water but to the prophetic emblem of the Holy Ghost taken from Ezekiel 36:25-26, where water and Spirit are conjoined in one statement making clear that the one is the symbol of the other.

Into the general question of the mode and purpose of Christian baptism we do not, enter here, as it is not the purpose of our passage in John 6. Our present object is simply to safeguard faith from the inroads of the flesh and to claim that in John's gospel this is exquisitely done in such a way as not to invalidate the sign while rigorously suppressing the abuse thereof.

THE FIGURE SEVEN IN THE LORD'S DISCOURSE

We turn now more particularly to our Lord's discourse on the Bread of Life sent down from heaven (John 6), arising out of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. As we should expect in so spiritual and prophetic a writer as John, there is a careful preservation of the usual numerical features which mark so many of the Lord's discourses--features which we ought to expect in the utterances of One Who is the Everlasting Word, all whose sayings bear the hallmark of completeness and finality. The figure 7 enters prominently into the discourse.

We find a sevenfold reference to the fact of Christ's having come down from heaven. There is also the sevenfold reference (already the subject of our comments above) to the "eating" of His flesh as the Bread of Life. In addition, the numeral four comes into prominence--the number which indicates in the Scriptures the idea of universality. Four times the Lord uses the phrase; "I will raise him up at the last day" (see verses 39, 40, 44 and 54). Likewise, there are the four "double Amen's" of verses 26, 32, 47, and 53.

The first double Amen from Him Who is the AMEN, the Fulfiller of all the Wisdom, of God and the Bearer of the Divine Name, commences this historic discourse:

"Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed"

(John 6:26-27).

The words have a far-reaching design. There is an immediate application to the Jewish nation, which He was then addressing in the representative people who were before Him, the witnesses of that, great miracle of the loaves and fishes which fully evinced who He was and what was His purpose in coming into the world. Israel then (and now) was taken up with religious externalism and the temporal benefits of the "most, favored nation." To them, their Jewish origin had no spiritual significance. Even their conception of the coming of Messiah had no reference to their sins, but only to their worldly convenience, and advantage. To them, a divine Redeemer meant no more than a national deliverer such as Jephtha or Samson, who rid them of the temporal inconvenience of foreign oppression, or even as Moses, who fed their bellies with manna in the wilderness. See their remark a few verses lower down: "What sign shewest thou then that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert: as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Their answers showed plainly the fatal error under which the nation for so long had labored. They did not look beyond the sign. This brought in the Lord's second Amen, Amen: "Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven."

But we return to the Lord's opening statement and His warning to the unbelieving nation, bound helplessly in their carnal conceptions of truth and in the consequent blindness of unbelief. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that which endureth unto everlasting life...."

Here is a word for Jew and gentile, for Calvinist and Arminian, for all men alike. The Jew expected bread without labor at the appearance of Messiah. Many a professing Christian, with better notions of divine grace, nevertheless displays the same indolence in things spiritual and divine. There is a theology of the Sovereignty of God which endorses human indolence. It is a bad theology. More people are destroyed by spiritual indolence than by any other means, and none ever enter heaven unless they are in earnest about Christ. Those, who substitute theological points for earnest, persistent, tireless seeking after Christ and His Word will not be accounted great in the Kingdom of Heaven. The paramountcy of faith in the justification of the sinner is not inconsistent with "laboring" for it in the sense in which Christ speaks.

If Christ is the true "Promise" made to Abraham and to Israel, if Christ is the Kingdom and Christ the Way, then were the Jews in fatal error in supposing that the Messianic kingdom which they awaited could be obtained and realized without labor and wrestling. Equally in error are those prophetic theories (so fondly accepted in Christian circles) which in the face of history and in face of the words of Christ reassure the Jew that he will have the kingdom yet on no other score than that he is a Jew. "Labour...for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life," says Christ to Jew and gentile of any and every age.

The Kingdom of Heaven (that is, the Messianic kingdom long promised by the prophets and which Christ came at His first advent to establish) is always invisible, spiritual and to be taken by faith alone. "The kingdom of God is within you." "The violent take it by storm." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." These are always the Savior's terms. There is no faith without repentance and no repentance without faith. There is no righteousness without hunger and thirst for it, no conversion without meekness and simplicity, no eating of the bread of life without "laboring" for it.

No one obtains the "world" of grace and redemption except those who forsake this present evil world like Abraham, who was not mindful of the country whence he came out because he sought another, that is, a heavenly (Hebrews 11).

Faith is wrestling, as Jacob at the ford, who said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

Some may say, "This cannot be the gospel, for the gospel is without human effort or work. It is sovereign and free."

True, but when the Savior said, "Labour for it," He was not speaking of the labor of merit, but, the ardent, earnest seeking for it to the exclusion of all else. The Calvinist who defines God's sovereign and electing grace, in terms of the imposing of faith upon a soul in a state of passivity is as much in error as the earnest Arminian preacher who "offers Christ" to the hearer without any significant reference to that deep penitence for sin, without which there can be no faith.

"Labour not therefore, for the bread which perishes, but labour for the bread which endures to everlasting life." Indolence destroys the soul, as Solomon taught long ago.

"I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth and thy want as an armed man" (Proverbs 24:30-34).

Divine sovereignty does not transgress its own laws, and never does it endorse indolence or carelessness. "Watch and pray," says the Saviour, "lest ye enter into temptation." Peter heard this in the solemnities of the Garden, but he did not heed and fell instantly into temptation.

A CONTINUING PROCESS

To labor for the bread which endures to everlasting life is a continuing process throughout the Christian life. How many of those who read these lines have read their Bibles this day? With what ardor and eagerness have they this day sought Christ and longed for a glimpse of His glory and grace? How much of this world's seeking (however lawful in its place) have they brought under rigorous discipline that they might grasp after the Word of Life sent down from heaven?

"Labour... for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

"Which the Son of Man shall give unto you."

At His hand alone, then, is this eternal benefit received. The soul has to do with Christ, however much the office of preacher is needed to present Christ in all His grace and sufficiency. In the end, the soul must go to Christ in order to receive.

There is a clear reference in Christ's words to those which by His Spirit He imparted many centuries before to Isaiah: "Wherefore do ye spend your 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" (Isaiah 55:2).

In thus identifying Himself with the prophecy, He names Himself as the only source and means of eternal life and thus demonstrates His claim to be of the Godhead. There is a peculiar force in these words, "Which the Son of Man shall give unto you."

The title "Son of Man" is taken from Daniel 7, verse 13. The vision of the Four Monarchies (Chaldea, Persia, Greece and Rome) under the symbols of the four great beasts is followed in that chapter by the appearance of Christ to take the dominion for ever: "Behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven...and there, was, given him dominion, and glory and a kingdom...His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

The use of the term, "Son of Man," therefore was a specific claim by Christ to be the Person of the prophecy, the all-conquering Redeemer before whom all powers, seen or unseen, must fall, whose kingdom and dominion are everlasting.

The Jews could not fail to perceive the daring nature of the claim, reinforced as it was by the miracle to which they had been witness the previous day (the feeding of, the five thousand) and His subsequent miraculous crossing of the sea.

Surely, Christ referred to this when in verse 36 of our chapter He rebuked the Jews with the words, "But I said unto you that ye also have seen me and believe not."

Identifying Himself with Daniel's prophecy was an unmistakable declaration that He was, the Messiah, the King of Heaven, the Beloved One of the Ancient of Days. As Son of Man, He is the champion of the people of God, their defender, representative and mediator with the Father.

THE SEALING OF THE SON

The connection with the prophecy is the more to be perceived in the further words of Christ, "for him hath God the Father sealed." The sealing of the Son of God to be the Son of Man, the Savior of His people, is the sealing of appointment and dedication beforehand to the task. Daniel's prophecy shows that Christ was so appointed, not only those many centuries before, but even from the eternal moment in the counsel of the Holy Trinity before the world was, to fulfil in time the task to which Deity had set Himself--the task of manifesting the Divine glory and wisdom in redemption.

Christ's declaration to the Jews showed that the Incarnation did not involve any defect of knowledge. The task to which He was eternally dedicated was ever with Him, as when a boy in the temple; He rebuked Joseph and Mary with the remarkable words, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Latent in the same glorious verse (John 6:27) is also the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. In the words, "God the Father," He plainly implies that there must be One who is God the Son; and though the Holy Spirit is not named here, His mysterious operation is implied in that eternal "sealing" of Christ. For the Holy Spirit is the Seal of God. By the Holy Spirit the elect are "sealed" unto the day of redemption. 'Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,' writes Paul to the Ephesians. So He is the Father's seal upon the Son. "The Father hath hung His Seal and Bull upon the son" (Martin Luther).

JEWISH UNBELIEF PROVOKED

The subsequent dialogue with the Jews arose out of the impact made upon the hearers that they must "Labor" for the bread which endures to everlasting life.

"What must we do to work the works of God?" is their ignorant inquiry, their attention always being focused on the merit of their own works.

"This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent," is Christ's reply. No merit here, just the paramountcy of faith in the Kingdom of God. Their Messiah could only be recognized, received, and adored by faith. Their Abrahamic birth-certificate was not enough.

Their unbelief is now provoked, and they quickly reveal the state of their hearts. "What sign shewest thou that we may see and believe? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

This their error sprang from their complete incompetence to recognize the One standing before them. They were "children in whom is no faith." "Bread from heaven" signified to them the satisfaction of a carnal appetite. They understood not the text they quoted and its prophetic purpose. How then could they recognize in Him who stood before them the Bread of Life sent down from heaven? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven."

Dignified and emphasized by the "double Amen," this word of Christ declares plainly the special relationship of Christ in the Godhead and also the purpose for which He came into the world.

"My Father" is a deliberate claim to be the Eternal Son of God. It would be highly improper for any man then, or now, to use the pronoun for the first person singular to describe his relationship with God. "Our Father which art in heaven...." Yes, indeed, but not "my Father." The Spirit of Christ crying in our hearts "Abba, Father" denotes the Spirit of adoption sealing to us our new relationship to God in Christ (Romans 8), but it remains improper for the individual believer to use the possessive first person as Christ does here. The Jews well understood that such a claim constituted a title to deity: "He said that. God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

The Scottish Calvinists of the 18th century held that the words of Christ to the unbelieving multitude, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven," gave them the right to address gospel overtures promiscuously to all men.

Let no one suppose that it was an easy thing for Christ to tell the Jews that it was His prerogative to give life to the world. The hand extended to us is a pierced hand. The Bread of God sent down from heaven was not as the manna in the wilderness, a mere benefaction from the granaries of heaven. This bread which Christ gives is HIMSELF, offered upon redemption's altar, crucified, dead and buried. With awful deliberation Christ unveils His own fate as He declares in advance of the Cross that the bread He will give is His own flesh, which He gives for the life of the world. Seven times He proceeds to tell the unbelieving crowd that salvation consists in the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood.

Let the soul bow itself before this mystery of love giving itself for the undeserving and bringing life from death. Let the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, the putting to shame in the judgment hall, and the ghastly expiation of sin's guilt at the cross speak for the price which love was willing to pay in order that sinners might live.

The empty response of the Jewish audience, "Lord, evermore give us this bread," is in stark contrast with all that was involved in the bestowal of that bread. They knew not, and cared not, that only by stupendous suffering and sacrifice could that bread be given to them, and that only by the "labor" of repentance, faith, earnest seeking and desiring and forsaking all that they had could they receive it.

Nor did these time-serving Jews perceive the grace of God in that statement of Christ, "For the bread of God is he that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (verse 33). Had their ears been open they would have felt the impact of that word, "the world." The manna in the wilderness was for the twelve tribes. The bread from heaven was not Israel's exclusive benefit. There never was any intention that the coming of Christ should be a mere promise of blessing to the Jews. The PROTEVANGELIUM from which all prophecy proceeds (that the seed of the woman should bruise and break the kingdom and power of Satan, (Genesis 3:15) could never be confined to one insignificant nation. The deliverance was to be as worldwide as the usurpation. Christ did not come down from heaven to give life and salvation to the Jew, with gentile added by courtesy of the people of the old covenant and as a compensation to Christ for the unbelief of those to whom it was originally sent. The New Testament church, in which all the tribes and kindreds of mankind commingle, was not an afterthought of providence or a makeshift and strictly temporary expedient to fill the gap made by Jewish unbelief. The Church of the New Testament supersedes the temporal privileges of the Old Testament people and is in itself THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD (Ephesians 3:10-11).

The fall of Israel must needs be permanent. There can be no revival of Jewish privilege or precedence, or the nature of the Church would be unhinged. The "election of grace" precedes all history. Paul tells us that the choice was made in Christ "before the foundation of the World" (Ephesians 1:4).

Hence the universality of the Protevangelium and the words of the Savior 'the bread of God is he which came down from heaven and giveth life unto the world.'

We must insist upon the principle of prophetic interpretation, because much more depends upon it than merely the establishment of a theory. The Galatian and Ephesian epistles were specifically written to teach the spiritual nature of the new covenant established in Christ and the end of genealogical privilege or distinction.

Always, the new order set up by Christ is the final form of the Kingdom of God on earth, and therefore the whole range of Old Testament prophecy must belong to the Church. It is one of the most destructive heresies of this age to teach otherwise, and this false theory lies at the rest of the inability of this Age to produce in any quantity worthy expositors of the Word of God.

WHAT IT MEANS TO "COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN"

Verse 33 of our chapter contains the first of the seven occurrences of the Lord's saying that He had "come down from heaven."

In the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament, to "come down from heaven" means a divine descent from the throne of all power and glory to execute some design of grace or judgment. It is a word descriptive of deity in the movement of divine omnipotence and sovereign purpose, and in applying the expression to Himself Christ makes a supreme and absolute claim to deity.

In Genesis 11, verses 4 and 7, we find it recorded that God "came down" to see the city and tower (Babel) which men built; and he declared, "Let us go down and confound, their language."

In Genesis 18, verse 21, God declares, "I will go down now, and see whether they (in Sodom) have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me."

To Moses in Exodus 3:8, God declares, "I have seen the affliction of my people and I am come down to deliver them."

At Sinai (Exodus 19:20) God "comes down" upon the mount with fearful tokens of fiery majesty to promulgate His holy law.

The psalmist (Psalms, 18:19) tells us that when he cried unto the Lord in his distress God "bowed the heavens and came down."

We have our eye also on that 20th chapter of Revelation, so relevant to the times in which we live, in which the gospel triumph of Christ in His victory over death and the grave, sin and Satan, is portrayed in the symbol of an Angel (surely Christ Himself, the Angel--or Messenger--of the Covenant, as in Malachi 3:1) coming down from heaven to bind and restrain Satan's power during the last, and greatest era of world history--that era which began with His first Advent two thousand years ago and which will end with His second Advent, which (for aught we know to the contrary) may now be imminent.

This glorious era must end, according to Revelations 20, with that "little season" of Satan's unloosing wherein the atheistic and heathenish forces of Satan's doomed empire rise up for the last time (as they now appear to be risen up) to menace and threaten and destroy the last remnants of divine testimony amongst mankind (as they now endeavor to do), but at the last moment must be robbed of their prey when fire (judgment) descends from God out of heaven and devours them.

Let all proud philosophers and rulers beware--all atheistic and evolutionary scientists--all those blind moles who in dens of false scholarship burrow their way through the Bible to cast out, destroy, and devour the Word of God--all politicians and educationists who ignore the laws of God--all rulers and advocates of Sodom and Gomorrah who intend to bring back, again into our once-Christian society their ancient filthiness to destroy all that is moral and upright and pure and of good report, to discredit the righteous and to blame the good and mangle the reputation and defame the name of the dear children of God, as the ungodly go on their way of lust, worldly pleasure and defiance of God's holy laws.

The judgment of God slumbers long and is longsuffering, but in the end the omnipotent Lord will tread down the wicked. "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath: he will fill the places with the dead bodies (of his foes) and wound the heads over many countries" (Psalm 110).

Here, however, in our passage in John 6, the Lord "comes down from heaven" for another and milder purpose, who yet shall come down in a day of universal judgment "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In John's account in chapter 6, He comes down in gospel grace and mercy: "The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world."

Paul tells us he had received his apostolic power and authority not for destruction but for edification.

When men reject the gospel and refuse Him who came down from heaven not to destroy but to save, what means will there be at the last to save the guilty as they stand speechless before the One who was despised, rejected, crucified, now enthroned in divine splendor?

Our Lord now goes further and declares that His errand of mercy is not His own private affair but the eternal purpose of the Godhead--"I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him

that sent me." Three times in three verses He repeats this statement (John 6:38-40). In Psalm 40, the Son speaks through David in anticipation of His "coming down from heaven" in the gospel--"Lo, I come to do thy will, O God."

Christ therefore came by the will of the Father to do the will of the Father, as He says in John 4, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work."

Failure to perceive this has led to much inept and misleading sermonizing, in which Christ is represented as volunteering to take the sinner's part against an angry God, whereas "God so loved that he gave his only begotten Son." And John elsewhere bids us behold the love of God: "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). (1 John 3:1; 4:9)

The grave distortion of the Father's part in the atonement is shown in the almost universal misconception which prevails as to the meaning of the Savior's cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." (See our pamphlet on "The Concert of the Trinity.") (Editor's note: see 022 & 023)

With what eagerness and delight the Son looked forward to the day when through Him the Father's eternal will and pleasure would be realized, though that realization meant His own humiliation and the anguish of the cross.

What Christ suffered and endured was not by decree of His own will but of the Father's will, except that in the bosom of the Godhead His will was always the Father's will. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him"; "God hath made him to be sin for us (who knew no sin) that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (Isaiah 53:10 and 2 Cor. 5:21).

Everywhere the initiative in redemption is attributed to the Father, yet there is, and can only be, one will in the Godhead. There is one God in three Persons.

So great a decree--so great a sacrifice--such obedience unto death- could have only one result: the salvation of all whom the divine foreordination provided in the Counsel of Eternity as the Son's everlasting reward.

"ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVETH ME SHALL COME"

Mystery profound reigns here, but there can be no mistaking the import of the repeated statement by the Son that "all whom the Father had given" to Him should be eternally saved.

The idea that divine election is a device for keeping out of heaven a multitude of souls who would otherwise choose to go there is an invention of either ignorance or prejudice. The object of election is not to prevent the salvation of any, but to ensure the salvation of "a great multitude which no man can number."

Hence, Christ, who lived in the will of the Father, in complete possession of the Father's mind, asserts: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39).

It is significant that the Lord makes these definitive statements on divine election in view of the unbelief of Israel (represented in the multitude gathered to hear Him).

Israel, who received the manna at the time of Moses, now refuses the bread of life sent down from heaven (and as a nation still refuses). "I said unto you that you also have seen me and believe not" (John 6:36).

What then? Must Christ leave heaven and lay aside His glory to assume the curse and shame of the cross all in vain? Is there not to be a sure reward for His obedience, His Merit, His holy abandonment to the Father's will? Will the unbelief of Israel make the faith of God (the gospel) of none effect? (Romans 3:3)

"Not so," says Christ. The reward of the Son is sure. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me...." (See also John 10:29 and seven times in John 17).

It is impossible by any artifice of language to alter the fixed and deliberate significance of these words, that just as surely as God sent the Son to be the Savior of "the world" so surely will the uttermost of the predestined host of the redeemed "come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads"

(Isaiah 35).

The Bible doctrine of the election of grace is inescapable, and those who oppose it do so by reserving for the sovereign will of man that which belongs to the sovereign will of God.

This is not the place to enter into a full theological examination of predestination, but in the context of Christ's words to unbelieving Israel the requirements of the divine mercy and wisdom demand that grace should "reign" in eternal sovereignty in the leading to Christ of a redeemed Bride that the heavenly Bridegroom should have the fulness of love's reward.

Not by the human will does Christ receive His due, yet not without the human will, for it is unthinkable that any should ever be brought to glory who has no desire to be there and who does not as willingly consent to "go with this man" as Rebekah consented to go with Abraham's servant to a husband she loved but had never seen, yet whose tokens in the jeweled pledges placed upon her by the faithful messenger (the Holy Spirit in type) assured her in advance that there was a place for her at his side for ever. "I will go," says Rebekah when the question was put, and truly bride never went to husband more willingly.

So the soul says, as the impulse of divine love thrills through its awakened being, "I will go"--and this is WILL, glorious and free. Yet the willingness to go is only aroused because of a prior will, a firm decree, a counsel of everlasting wisdom, a covenant in the mysterious counsel of the Godhead from all eternity, a decree without beginning and without ending.

THE NATURE AND BEING OF GOD

For brethren, here we stand on the borders of a vast universe of mystery--the Nature and Being of God. We can enter but a little way into this territory, for our comprehension is feeble and we see but through a glass darkly. Perhaps the doctrine of God is the least considered of all doctrines, whether in the pulpit or in the study or in the halls of learning.

To put the idea of God in the strait-jacket of human comprehension is a feature not confined to those who, argue for a liberty in man's will inconsistent with the facts of creation's meaning and purpose. There is no region of absolute liberty anywhere in creation, and even in the Godhead liberty is a mysterious

subordination of the Son to the Father in the all-yielding love of the Spirit. "Not my will," He cries, "but thine be done"--even to awful death and curse.

In short, the only liberty in the universe is the liberty of love. Augustine once said, "The best thing that man can say about God is to be silent about Him."

Again, another has strangely but wisely said, "Of God Himself can no man think. By love He may be gotten and holden, but by thought, never."

This we know that God is holy LOVE, and even His anger is not an emotion in contrast with love but the repulsion of His holy Being of Love to that which is unholy.

Nothing "begins" with God. God is a Being without a history, not subject to the limitations of time, but belonging to the Eternal NOW, which has neither past nor future. To put God in the spectrum of time and space is to deny His Godhead by imposing a limitation upon Him--and God is unlimited, measureless, "immense," the "I AM," the "I AM THAT WHICH I AM."

As the timeless, ever-present Originator of all things, He cannot be subject to history since history proceeds only from Him as the consequence in time and space of His own eternal and changeless wisdom and All-Knowing, projecting into created "time," His own immutable, changeless, predestined counsel and purpose. What we know as "the end" is an ever-present reality with God, wrapped up in "the beginning."

God never "begins" to plan or purpose anything. His counsel is as eternal as Himself so that the event, in time-history, of Christ's atoning death is spoken of in terms of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Truly, the purpose of redemption is as surely fixed in its accomplishment, as when God spoke the PROTEVANGELIUM in the Garden--"It (the Seed of the woman) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The Shiloh whom Jacob foresaw in his dying moments (Genesis 49:10), the Star whose rising was foretold by Balaam (Numbers 24:17), the King eternal whom David saw and worshipped in enraptured rhythms, the Suffering One of Isaiah 53, the Smitten Shepherd of Zechariah, the Angel of the Covenant foretold by Malachi--all represent that Word which was in the Godhead, the consummation of divine love, the expression of the divine wisdom, and the realization of the eternal purpose to display Himself in all His manifold wisdom to an intelligent world consisting of endless circles of adoring angels and redeemed men.

There never could be any doubt as to the number and identity of the redeemed. They were not "given" to Christ as nonentities whose names were to be determined in the course of time by their own sovereignty, with a helpless deity waiting in the wings to record results.

The moral liberty of angels and men is exercised within the boundaries of the divine wisdom. None attain the eternal realm of the blessed without desiring it, and none fail of eternal life save those who choose death and hate the light.

The fate of the wicked is from themselves. The joy of the redeemed is by that same sovereign choice of God which appointed to Isaac his bride. It is a false evangelism which makes the sinner the ultimate target of all the divine striving. Not the sinner, but Christ, is the consummation of the divine purpose; and Christ

must have His Bride. "From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride. With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died."

Nevertheless in such a situation fraught with such consequences, the soul of man is not a pawn in a game, nor the toy of providence. The consequence of a moral creation was a mortal fall, and the work of redemption was a wrestling with the problem of creation itself. And the agony of the Godhead in Christ is the deepest mystery of all.

Not without pain and sorrow, tears and crying, agony and shame, must God wade through oceans of blood--His own--to achieve the fulfillment of His life and replenish the new creation with light, life, peace, and fulness of joy and love. He must be reverently allowed by faith to achieve the glorious end in His own matchless way.

At the judgment seat none will complain that it was a decree which excluded him from bliss, for that would be to make God the only sinner in the universe, and Satan's plot would therein be realized. The awakened conscience of wicked men and devils will approve at the last the righteousness of the holy decrees of God so that creation will be unanimous in this one great thing: "That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2).

Christ will reign as surely in hell as He does in heaven, and it will be Satan's hell and the hell of wicked men to acknowledge this and taste the eternal bitterness of defeat.

The rich man of the gospel story asked for the compassionate ministrations of the righteous whom he had despised, and finding this impossible solicited aid for his brethren still in the world that they might not come to such an end as his. Satan certainly does not reign in hell, for hell is his prison, not his domain. Nor are the souls of lost men his prisoners, for in them the fires of conscience still speak for God and truth, and the compassion they never showed on earth is a lively element in their torment.

All things therefore serve the glory of God, and there is a warranty written into creation that the will of God should finally and always prevail. What is the promise of the coming Redeemer in Genesis and throughout the Old Testament but the supreme example of divine predestination? That Christ must die and that He must not die in vain but should have that for which He suffered is as certain a destiny as the life of God itself.

There is no need to fear the doctrine of God's eternal choice, when the alternative is total human apostasy.

As to that which determines the divine choice of the elect, it lies within "the good pleasure of His will," and if there is anything more it is not revealed. One thing is certain, and that is that it involves nothing of human merit but is all of grace.

All mysteries will be solved in eternity. Till then the soul leans upon the Apostle's conclusion of the whole matter: "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? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

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