

The Unequal Yoke

—C. H. Mackintosh

Introduction

The following pages are a partial reprint of an article by this title contained in the Miscellaneous writings of C. H. Mackintosh. Here we only present his comments on the ecclesiastical aspect of the unequal yoke.

The unequal yoke in Ecclesiastical matters

No one who sincerely desires to attain, in his own person, or promote in others, a purer and more elevated discipleship, can possibly contemplate the Christianity of the present day without an indescribable feeling of sadness and heaviness. Its tone is so excessively low, its aspect so sickly, and its spirit so enfeebled, that one is, at times, tempted to despair of anything like a true and faithful witness for an absent Lord. All this is the more truly deplorable when we remember the commanding motives by which it is our special privilege ever to be actuated. Whether we look at the Master whom we are called to follow, the path which we are called to tread, the end which we are called to keep in view, or the hopes by which we are to be animated, we cannot but own that, were all these entered into and realized by a more simple faith, we should assuredly exhibit more ardent discipleship. "The love of Christ," says the apostle, "constrains us." This is the most powerful motive of all. The more the heart is filled with Christ's love, and the eye filled with His blessed person, the more closely shall we seek to follow in His heavenly track. His footmarks can only be discovered by "a single eye"; and unless the will is broken, the flesh mortified, and the body kept under, we shall utterly fail in our discipleship, and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Let not my reader misunderstand me. It is not here, by any means, a question of personal salvation. It is quite another thing. Nothing can be more basely selfish than — having received salvation as the fruit of Christ's agony and bloody sweat, His cross, and passion — to keep at as great a distance from His sacred person as we can without forfeiting our personal safety. This is, even in the judgment of nature, deemed a character of selfishness worthy of unmingled contempt; but when exhibited by one who professes to owe his present and his everlasting all to a rejected, crucified, risen, and absent, Master, no language can express its moral baseness. "Provided I escape hell-fire, it makes little matter as to discipleship." Reader, do you not, in your inmost soul, abhor this sentiment? If so, then earnestly seek to flee from it, to the very opposite point of the compass; and let your truthful language be, Provided that blessed Master is glorified, it makes little matter, comparatively, about my personal safety. Would to God that this were the sincere utterance of many hearts in this day, when, alas, it may be too truly said that, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). Would that the Holy Spirit would raise up, by His own resistless power, and send forth, by His own heavenly energy, a band of separated and consecrated followers of the Lamb, each one bound, by the cords of love, to the horns of the altar — a company, like Gideon's three hundred of old, able to confide in God and deny the flesh. How the heart longs for this! How the spirit, bowed down at times beneath the chilling and withering influence of a cold and uninfluential profession, earnestly breathes after a more vigorous and wholehearted testimony for that One who emptied Himself and laid aside His glory, in order that we, through His precious bloodshedding, might be raised to companionship with Him in eternal blessedness!

Now, amongst the numerous hindrances to this thorough consecration of heart to Christ which I earnestly desire for myself and my reader, "the unequal yoke" will be found to occupy a very prominent place indeed. "Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers; for what participation [is there] between righteousness and lawlessness? or what fellowship of light with darkness? and what consent of Christ with Belial, or what part for a believer along with an unbeliever? and what agreement of God's temple with idols? for ye are [the] living God's temple; according as God has said, I will dwell among them, and walk among [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be to me a people. Wherefore come out from the midst of them, and be separated, saith [the] Lord, and touch not [what is] unclean, and I will receive you; and I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to Me for sons and daughters, saith [the] Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Under the Mosaic economy, we learn the same moral principle. — "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with [seed of] two sorts, lest the whole of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the produce of thy vineyard, be forfeited. Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of mixed material, [woven] of wool and linen together" (Dt. 22:9-11; see also Lev. 19:19).

These Scriptures will suffice to set forth the moral evil of an unequal yoke. It may, with full confidence, be asserted that no one can be an unshackled follower of Christ who is, in any way, "unequally yoked." He may be a saved person, he may be a true child of God — a sincere believer, but he cannot be a thorough disciple; and not only so, but there is a positive hindrance to the full manifestation of that which he may really be, notwithstanding his unequal yoke. "Come out,... and I will receive you... and ye shall be to Me for sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." That is to say, Get your neck out of the unequal yoke, and I will receive you, and there shall be the full, public, practical manifestation of your relationship with the Lord Almighty. The idea here is evidently different from that set forth in James — "Of His own will begat He us, by the word of truth." And also in Peter — "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by [the] living and abiding Word of God." And again in 1 John — "See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called [the] children of God." So also in John's Gospel — "As many as received Him, to them gave He [the] right to be children of God, to those that believe on His name; who have been born, not of blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God." In all these passages, the relationship of sons is founded upon the divine counsel and the divine operation, and is not set before us as the consequence of any acting of ours; whereas in 2 Corinthians 6 it is put as the result of our getting out of the unequal yoke. In other words, it is entirely a practical question. Thus in Matthew 5 we read, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, [bless those who curse you,] do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who [insult you and] persecute you, that (*in order that*) ye may be [the] sons of your Father who is in [the] heavens; for he makes his sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust." Here too it is the practical establishment and public declaration of the relationship, and its moral influence. It becomes the sons of such a Father to act in such a way. In short, we have the abstract position or relationship of sons founded on God's sovereign will and operation; and we have the moral character consequent upon and flowing out of this relationship which affords just ground for God's public acknowledgment thereof. God cannot fully and publicly own those who are unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for, were He to do so, it would be an acknowledgment of the unequal yoke. He cannot acknowledge "darkness," "unrighteousness," "Belial," "idols," and "an infidel." How could He? Hence, if I yoke myself with any of these, I am morally and publicly identified with them, and not with God at all. I have put myself into a position which God cannot own, and, as a consequence, He cannot own me; but if I withdraw myself from that position — if I "come out and be separate"— if I take my neck out of the unequal yoke — then, but not until then, can I be publicly and fully received and owned as a "son or daughter of the Lord Almighty."

This is a solemn and searching principle for all who feel that they have unhappily gotten themselves into such a yoke. They are not walking as disciples, nor are they publicly or morally on the ground of sons. God cannot own them. Their secret relationship is not the point; but they have put themselves thoroughly off God's ground. They have foolishly thrust their neck into a yoke which, inasmuch as it is not Christ's yoke, must be Belial's yoke; and until they cast off that yoke, God cannot own them as His sons and daughters. God's grace, no doubt, is infinite, and can meet us in all our failure and weakness; but if our souls aspire after a higher order of discipleship, we must only bow our heads beneath the shame and sorrow thereof, looking to God for full deliverance.

Now, there are four distinct phases in which "the unequal yoke" may be contemplated: the domestic, the commercial, the religious, and the philanthropic. Some may be disposed to confine 2 Corinthians 6:14 to the first of these; but the apostle does not so confine it. The words are, "Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers." He does not specify the character or object of the yoke, and therefore we are warranted in giving the passage its widest application, by bringing its edge to bear directly upon every phase of the unequal yoke; and we shall see the importance of so doing ere we close these remarks, if the Lord permit...

The author then treats the unequal yoke first in the domestic domain, then in the commercial domain. We will bypass these two sections. Thirdly, he deals with the unequal yoke in the religious sphere. This is our concern in this excerpt of his treatise, and so we continue there:

In glancing for a moment at the religious phase of the unequal yoke, I would assure my reader that it is by no means my desire to hurt the feelings of any one by canvassing the claims of the various denominations around me. Such is not my purpose. The subject of this article is one of quite sufficient importance to prevent its being encumbered by the introduction of other matters. Moreover, it is too definite to warrant any such introduction. "The unequal yoke" is our theme, and to it we must confine our attention.

In looking through Scripture we find almost numberless passages setting forth the intense spirit of separation which ought ever to characterize the people of God. Whether we direct our attention to the Old Testament, in which we have God's relationship and dealings with His earthly people, Israel, or to the New Testament, in which we have His relationship and dealings with His heavenly people, the Church, we find the same truth prominently set forth, namely, the entire separation of those who belong to God. Israel's position is thus stated in Balaam's parable, "Lo, [it is] a people that shall dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Their place was outside the range of all the nations of the

earth, and they were responsible to maintain that separation. Throughout the entire Pentateuch they were instructed, warned, and admonished as to this; and throughout the Psalms and the Prophets we have a record of their failure in the maintenance of this separation, which failure, as we know, has brought down upon them the heavy judgments of the hand of God. It would swell this little paper into a volume were I to attempt a quotation of all the passages in which this point is put forward. I take it for granted that my reader is sufficiently acquainted with the Bible, to render such quotations unnecessary. Should he not be so, however, a reference in a concordance to the words, "separate," "separated," and "separation" will suffice to lay before him at a glance the body of Scripture-evidence on the subject. The passage just quoted from the book of Numbers is the expression of God's thoughts about His people Israel: "The people shall dwell *alone*."

The same is true, only upon a much higher ground, in reference to God's heavenly people, the Church — the body of Christ — composed of all true believers. They, too, are a separated people.

We shall now proceed to examine the ground of this separation. There is a great difference between being separate on the ground of what *we* are and of what *God* is. The former makes a man a *Pharisee*; the latter makes him a *saint*. If I say to a poor fellow-sinner, "Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou," I am a detestable Pharisee and a hypocrite; but if God, in His infinite condescension and perfect grace, says to me, I have brought you into relationship with Myself in the person of My Son Jesus Christ, therefore be separate and holy from all evil; come out from among them and be separate; I am bound to obey, and my obedience is the practical manifestation of my character as a saint—a character which I have, not because of anything in myself, but simply because God has brought me near unto Himself through the precious blood of Christ.

It is well to be clear as to this. Pharisaism and divine sanctification are two very different things; and yet they are often confounded. Those who contend for the maintenance of that place of separation which belongs to the people of God, are constantly accused of setting themselves up above their fellow-men, and of laying claim to a higher degree of personal sanctity than is ordinarily possessed. This accusation arises from not attending to the distinction just referred to. When God calls upon men to be separate, it is on the ground of what He has done for them upon the cross, and where He has set them, in eternal association with Himself, in the person of Christ. But if I separate myself on the ground of what I am in myself, it is the most senseless and vapid assumption, which will sooner or later be made manifest. God commands His people to be holy on the ground of what He is: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." This is evidently a very different thing from "Stand by thy self: I am holier than thou." If God brings people into association with Himself, He has a right to prescribe what their moral character ought to be, and they are responsible to answer thereto. Thus we see that the most profound humility lies at the bottom of a saint's separation. There is nothing so calculated to put one in the dust as the understanding of the real nature of divine holiness. An utterly false humility springs from looking at ourselves — yea, such humility is, in reality, based upon pride, which has never yet seen to the bottom of its own perfect worthlessness. Some imagine that they can reach the truest and deepest humility by looking at self, whereas it can only be reached by looking at Christ.

"The more Thy glories strike mine eye,
The humbler I shall be."

This is a just sentiment, founded upon divine principle. The soul that loses itself in the blaze of Christ's moral glory is truly humble, and none other. No doubt we have a right to be humble when we think of what poor creatures we are, but it only needs a moment's just reflection to see the fallacy of seeking to produce any practical result by looking at self. It is only when we find ourselves in the presence of infinite excellency that we are really humble.

Hence, therefore, a child of God should refuse to be yoked with an unbeliever, whether for a domestic, a commercial, or a religious object, simply because God tells him to be separate, and not because of his own personal holiness. The carrying out of this principle in matters of religion will necessarily involve much trial and sorrow; it will be termed intolerance, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, exclusiveness, and such like; but we cannot help all this. Provided we keep ourselves separate upon a right principle and in a right spirit, we may safely leave all results with God. No doubt the remnant in the days of Ezra must have appeared excessively intolerant in refusing the co-operation of the surrounding people in building the house of God, but they acted upon divine principle in the refusal. "And the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building the temple to Jehovah the God of Israel; and they came to Zerubbabel and to the chief fathers, and said to them, We would build with you; for we seek your God, as ye; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up hither." This might seem a very attractive proposal — a proposal evidencing a very decided leaning toward the God of Israel; yet the remnant refused, because the people, notwithstanding their fair profession, were, at heart, uncircumcised and hostile. "But Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the chief fathers of Israel said to them, Ye have nothing to do *with us* to build a house to *our* God, but *we alone* will build to Jehovah the God of Israel" (Ezra 4:1-3). They would not "plow with an ox and ass" — they would not "sow their field with mingled seed" — they kept themselves separate, even though by so doing they exposed themselves to the

charge of being a bigoted, narrow-minded, illiberal, uncharitable set of people.

So also in Nehemiah we read, "And the seed of Israel *separated themselves* from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (Ch. 9:2). This was not sectarianism, but positive obedience. Their separation was essential to their existence as a people. They could not have enjoyed the divine presence on any other ground. Thus it must ever be with God's people on the earth. They must be separate, or else they are not only useless, but mischievous. God cannot own or accompany them if they yoke themselves with unbelievers, upon any ground or for any object whatsoever. The grand difficulty is to combine a spirit of intense separation with a spirit of grace, gentleness, and forbearance; or, as another has said, "to maintain a *narrow circle* with a *wide heart*." This is really a difficulty. As the strict and uncompromising maintenance of *truth* tends to narrow the circle around us, we shall need the expansive power of *grace* to keep the heart wide, and the affections warm. If we contend for truth otherwise than in grace, we shall only yield a one-sided and most unattractive testimony. And on the other hand, if we try to exhibit grace at the expense of truth, it will prove, in the end, to be only the manifestation of a popular liberality at God's expense — a most worthless thing.

Then, as to the object for which real Christians usually yoke themselves with those who, even on their own confession, and in the judgment of charity itself, are not Christians at all, it will be found in the end that no really divine and heavenly object can be gained by an infringement of God's truth. *Per fas aut nefas* — by any means — can never be a divine motto. The means are not sanctified by the end; but both means and end must be according to the principles of God's holy Word, else all must end up in confusion and dishonour. It might have appeared to Jehoshaphat a very worthy object to recover Ramoth-Gilead out of the hand of the enemy; and moreover, he might have appeared a very liberal, gracious, popular, large-hearted man, when, in reply to Ahab's proposal, he said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and *we will be with thee* in the war." It is easy to be liberal and large-hearted at the expense of divine principle; but how did it end? Ahab was killed, and Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped with his life, having made total shipwreck of his testimony.

Thus we see that Jehoshaphat did not even gain the object for which he unequally yoked himself with an unbeliever; and even had *he* gained it, it would have been no justification of his course. Nothing can ever warrant a believer's yoking himself with an unbeliever; and therefore however fair, attractive, and plausible the Ramoth expedition might seem in the eye of man, it was, in the judgment of God "helping the ungodly, and loving them that hate the Lord" (2 Chr. 19:2). The truth of God strips men and things of the false colours with which the spirit of expediency would deck them, and presents them in their proper light; and it is an unspeakable mercy to have the clear judgment of God about all that is going on around us: it imparts calmness to the spirit, and stability to the course and character, and saves one from that unhappy fluctuation of thought, feeling, and principle which so entirely unfits him for the place of a steady and consistent witness for Christ. We shall surely err if we attempt to form our judgment by the thoughts and opinions of men; for they will always judge according to the outward appearances, and not according to the intrinsic character and principle of things. Provided men can gain what they conceive to be a right object, they care not about the mode of gaining it. But the true servant of Christ knows that he must do his Master's work upon his Master's principles and in his Master's spirit. It will not satisfy such a one to reach the most praiseworthy end unless he can reach it by a divinely appointed road. The means and the end must both be divine. I admit it, for example, to be a most desirable end to circulate the Scriptures — God's own pure, eternal Word; but if *I could not* circulate them save by yoking myself with an unbeliever, I should refrain, inasmuch as I am not to do evil that good may come.

But, blessed be God, His servant can circulate His precious book without violating the precepts contained in that book. He can, upon his own individual responsibility, or in fellowship with those who are really on the Lord's side, scatter the precious seed everywhere, without leaguering himself with those whose whole course and conduct prove them to be of the world. The same may be said in reference to every object of a religious nature. It can and should be gained on God's principles, and only thus. It may be argued, in reply, that we are told not to judge — that we cannot read the heart — and that we are bound to hope that all who would engage in such good works as the translation of the Bible, the distribution of tracts, and the aiding of missionary labours, must be Christians; and that therefore, it cannot be wrong to link ourselves with them. To all this I reply that there is hardly a passage in the New Testament so misunderstood and misapplied as Matthew 7:1 — "Judge not, that you may not be judged." In the very same chapter we read, "Beware of false prophets;... by their fruits ye shall know them." Now, how are to "beware" if we do not exercise judgment? Again in 1 Corinthians 5 we read, "For what have I [to do] with judging those outside also? ye, do not ye judge them that are within? But those without God judges. Remove the wicked person from amongst yourselves." Here we are distinctly taught that those "within" come within the immediate range of the Church's judgment; and yet according to the common interpretation of Matthew 7:1 we ought not to judge anybody; that interpretation, therefore, must needs be unsound. If people take, even in profession, the ground of being "within," we are demanded to judge them. "Do not ye judge them that are within?" As to those "without" we have naught to do with them, save to present the pure and perfect, the rich, illimitable, and unfathomable grace which shines, with unclouded effulgence, in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

All this is plain enough. The people of God are told to exercise judgment as to all who profess to be "within"; they are told

to "beware of false prophets"; they are commanded to "try the spirits"; and how can they do all this if they are not to judge at all? What, then, does our Lord mean, when He says, "Judge not"? I believe He means just what Paul, by the Holy Spirit, says, when he commands us "do not judge anything before [the] time, until the Lord shall come, who shall also both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and shall make manifest the counsels of hearts; and then shall each have [his] praise from God" (1 Cor. 4:5). We have nothing to do with judging motives, but we have to judge conduct and principles; that is to say, the conduct and principles of all who profess to be "within." And, in point of fact, the very persons who say, "We must not judge," do themselves constantly exercise judgment. There is no true Christian in whom the moral instincts of the divine nature do not virtually pronounce judgment as to character, conduct, and doctrine; and these are the very points which are placed within the believer's range of judgment.

All, therefore, that I would press upon the Christian reader is, that he would exercise judgment as to those with whom he yokes himself in matters of religion. If he is at this moment working in yoke or in harness with an unbeliever, he is positively violating the command of the Holy Spirit. He may be ignorantly doing so up to this; and if so, the Lord's grace is ready to pardon and restore; but if he persist in disobedience after having been warned, he cannot possibly expect God's blessing and presence with him, no matter how valuable or important the object which he may seek to attain. "Obedience is better than sacrifice, attention than the fat of rams."

At this point Br. Mackintosh continues to consider how also the aspect of philanthropic efforts needs the scrutiny of the Lord's instructions regarding the unequal yoke. This part, too, we will not present now. Rather, we will end with our brother's closing remarks.

May the Holy Spirit clothe His own Word with heavenly power, and make its edge sharp to pierce the conscience, that so the saints of God may be delivered from every thing that hinders their "running the race that is set before them." Time is short. The Lord Himself will soon be here. Then many an unequal yoke will be broken in a moment; many a sheep and goat shall then be eternally severed. May we be enabled to purge ourselves from every unclean association and every unhallowed influence, so that when the Lord Jesus returns, we may not be ashamed, but meet Him with a joyful heart and an approving conscience.

The Prophecy of Micah (6)

—R. Been, Sr.

"But it shall come to pass in the end of days[that] the mountain of Jehovah 's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and the peoples shall flow unto it" (Micah 4:1).

This verse continues the thought of the last verse of chapter 3, that speaks of the *destroyed* house. Here is mention of the *restored* house. As in so many other places in Scripture, we find here also that God's governmental ways with Israel never end definitely with judgment. Rather, after the judgments they eventually lead to a time of restoration and glory in the future.

Then the rule over all nations of this world will be put into the worthy hands of Christ; not through the judgment over His enemies, but through His redemptive work. This redemption, both of things and of persons, is based on the blood of Christ (Col. 1:20-22). Scripture gives us the glorious prospect of Christ's future earthly reign. We need to keep in mind, however, that its basis is the work He accomplished on the cross. There Satan, who had the power of death, has been conquered. A result of this that he will soon be cast out of the heavenlies into the earth (Rev. 12:7-9). A second result will be seen after the judgment over the armies of the nations at the Lord's appearing. Then Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years, so that he can no longer deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-3). A third result will be that Satan will be cast into the lake of fire after the thousand years (Rev. 20:10). In chapter 2:12-13 the prophet Micah had announced the future gathering of the remnant of the two and ten tribes. Now he describes in verses 1-8 of the fourth chapter the glorious centre of the Christ's reign. That centre will be Mount Zion, where the King, the true David, will establish His throne. Jerusalem will be the capital of this world-domination. There the King of glory, the true Solomon, will have His throne. Israel, formed out of the remnants of the ten and two tribes, will then as one nation be closest to this governmental centre, just as the Assembly will have such a place of nearness to the heavenly throne.

Verse 1 is naturally symbolic. Great and high mountains in Scripture are pictures of mighty earthly kingdoms. Mountains are large realms, hills the minor ones (Ps. 68:16-17; Dan. 2:35; Rev. 17:9-10). Verse 1, therefore, says that the kingdom of

the great King of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be exalted far above all the then still existing kingdoms. This is in full agreement with the prophecy of Daniel (2:44).

Micah says: "It shall come to pass in the end of days..." The expression, "in the end of days" (actually, "in the last end of days") occurs often in the Old Testament and always refers to the time immediately before the appearance of the Son of man with power and great glory. In the New Testament the expression "in the last days" occurs as well, but then it refers in general to the last days of our present dispensation (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet.3:3). Verses 1-3 of Micah 1 occur nearly identically in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 2:2-4). Much controversy has centred on the question who of these two prophets was the actual author. To believers who maintain the authorship of the Holy Spirit and complete inspiration, this question is not of great importance. Due to the import of these words they had to be written by two prophets, be it with or without changes or additions, just as the Holy Spirit desired. This often happens in the four Gospels.

"And many nations shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and Jehovah's word from Jerusalem" (v. 2).

The glory and honour of the realm of peace will find expression in the flow of nations and peoples going there. As vassal states they will turn to Israel. In Scripture the nations are also depicted as waters (Rev. 17:15). The word "flow" is, therefore, here well chosen. After the horrendous devastation resulting from the Lord's judgments, Christ will establish His kingdom in might and power. Hereby the then still existing nations will be attracted. They desire to learn from such a King about His ways, they want to walk in His paths. What a contrast with the hatred for Jews existing today.

Then, Jerusalem will be the capital of the world and the centre of all justice, every law. When it says, Out of Zion will go forth the law, it does not mean the law of Moses, but the governmental law, the constitution of the kingdom of the Son of man. The Lord Jesus did already mention this constitution at the start of His public ministry on earth. True, Moses and the prophets did speak much about the coming of the kingdom, but they did not give its constitution. That is the task of the King Himself. The word of the Lord will then be the guideline for Israel and the nations. Then it will be fulfilled, though not yet in perfection: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Perfection will only be found on the new earth.

"And he shall judge among many peoples, and reprove strong nations, even afar off; and they shall forge their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-knives: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (v. 3).

Justice and righteousness will reign over the entire earth; it will not yet dwell there. Christ, the Ruler of the worldwide realm will judge among many peoples and reprove strong nations, even in far away countries. If a conflict arises between two nations, He will settle it. Would a people oppose Him, He will chastise them. All peoples will be able to dwell in safety, just as Israel did in Solomon's days. War arsenal will be forged into agricultural machinery. To put it a little more in words of today: The funds of the war and defence budget that become available will be used for agriculture and other peaceful purposes. The crazy armament race of our time will then belong to a dark past. Then there will be peace everywhere among the nations through Him who is greater and mightier than Solomon in his days. How do people in our days long for a time in which war is no longer taught! Especially when they think of the horror of modern weaponry!

For the sake of completeness we point here to the entirely opposite charge of the prophet Joel, who says that the nations should beat their ploughshares into swords, and their pruning-knives into spears. This is because Joel speaks of the terrible battle that will precede the realm of peace, during which the Lord will destroy His enemies (Joel 3:10).

"And they shall sit every one under his vine, and under his fig-free; and there shall be none to make [them] afraid: for the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken [it]" (v. 4).

This is figurative language indicating the rest and safety that the people will enjoy during the realm of peace. During the reign of Solomon this had been the case as well, though in a short and weak way. Then, too, Israel and Judah lived peacefully under vine and fig tree (1 Ki. 4:25). The prophet Zechariah says that the Israelites will invite each other under the vine and the fig tree (Zech. 3:10). This rest and safety is assured because the Lord of hosts has said so. Here it is not Jehovah, but the true Commander of all the host of armies.

"For all the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god; but we will walk in the name of Jehovah, our God for ever

and ever" (v. 5).

This verse is a comparison. It does not mean that the peoples during Christ's realm of peace will walk each in the name of his god, for then the name of the Lord will be known over the whole earth (Isa. 2:18-21; Zeph. 3:9). Also, chapter 4:2 says the very opposite. The verse simply means that just as previously the peoples walked consistently in the name of their god, so during the Millennium Israel will unchangeably have the name of the Lord as their banner. Never again will Israel serve the strange gods who had caused it to fall, but only the Lord. It will in this devoted service not be surpassed by the nations, but will be excel in it. The nations will only know God for a short time, but Israel has known Him since the days of redemption out of Egypt.

"In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and Jehovah shall reign over them in mount Zion, from henceforth even for ever " (vv. 6-7).

These verses are a direct pronouncement by the Lord Himself. The future gathering of the remnant out of all Israel is announced here. In chapter 2:12-13 we find a similar pronouncement. There is, however, a difference between these two Scriptures. In chapter 2:12-13 this remnant is seen as being on its way to the rest with one who breaks through in the lead. In chapter 4:6-7 they are presented as having reached the rest, their King having taken His throne.

Further, we see in verse 6-7 how merciful the upper-Shepherd is for His crippled sheep who had been driven away. It is true, He Himself had brought evil, disaster over them, but that was not because He found pleasure in doing so. The evil had come as a result of the sins of the nation.

"And thou, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, yea, the first dominion shall come, — the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem" (v. 8).

Near Bethel lay the place Migdol-Eder — tower of the flock. It was a cast-up hill with a tower, used as a safe gathering place for cattle. From the tower the watchmen could see every approaching danger. Once, Jacob with his great amount of cattle had also camped there (Gen. 15:21). King Uzziah, who also had much cattle and who loved agriculture, had caused similar towers to be built in the wilderness (2 Chr. 26:9-10). The word translated hill is Ofel., which also means stronghold. Actually it says therefore: "strength of the daughter of Jerusalem."

Just as the cattle was safe around the protecting and strengthened tower of Migdol-Eder, so Jerusalem would be the place of rest and safety for Israel. The earlier, blessed reign of king David would return there, but then much greater and under the reign of the true David. Israel would share in this.

We, therefore, find in verses 1-8 of this chapter a beautiful vista of the Millennial glory of Christ's peaceful government. The rule of Christ governs the whole earth, His might surpasses that of all other nations. Jerusalem and the temple will be the centre of this government. Divine order will rule upon earth. The criteria for government will come from Jerusalem. There will be peace everywhere. War will no longer be taught. There will be rest and safety for all peoples.

To be cont'd

Christian Liberty (2)

—Notes (somewhat revised) of an address by A.W.

In the previous issue we presented three Christian privileges: Christians are justified by the grace of God alone; the Holy Spirit has been given them purely through grace; they are sons of God. These three privileges constitute the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free and in which we must stand fast.

We can easily imagine someone saying: "Yes, I am quite clear as to all that. No shadow of doubt crosses my mind as to my justification, my being one of God's sons or to my having received the Holy Spirit. The difficulty I feel relates to my everyday life and walk. I want to be different from what I am. I would like my heart to be constantly engaged with the Lord Jesus, to love Him more and to serve Him better. I would love to be a brighter Christian, a burning and shining light, but all my endeavours end in failure, and I am disappointed and discouraged."

In all this we can deeply sympathize. We well remember when it was so with ourselves. We, too, longed to have been like Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word, and like John who leaned on the Saviour's loving breast. But our desires were not fulfilled, and we wondered what the meaning of it all could be. Then we began to fear the Lord Jesus did not love us as we thought He did. How could He go on loving one with so many failures? Surely, we said, our cold-heartedness and lack of devotedness must affect His love toward us. We longed for someone to help us when like that. Perhaps some young Christian is saying as he reads this, "You have just touched the spot. Help me if you can on these lines."

Read, then, the second text at the head of this paper (Gal. 5:16). Read it attentively. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." Mark also the verse which follows (Gal. 5:17). Observe the two antagonistic forces, flesh and Spirit: these are contrary, and both dwell in the Christian. The Spirit's indwelling does not alter the character of the flesh; that evil principle remains unchanged. And its works are manifest. Look at the number of them and at their awful nature as described in verses 19-21. Such is the flesh and such its works.

But how shall the flesh be kept in check and its works denied? By walking in the Spirit, as our text tells us. There is no other way. What is it then to walk in the Spirit? It is to be under His control and direction; it is to mind His things. In Romans 8:5 we read, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." Here are two classes. You, if you are a Christian, belong to the latter. Therefore your heart is now to be engaged with "the things of the Spirit." These are the unseen and eternal things on which we fix our earnest gaze (2 Cor. 4:18). They are the "things which are above, where Christ sitteth" — things "which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). These are the things ministered unto us in the Holy Scriptures, and particularly in the apostolic Epistles of the New Testament. With these the Holy Spirit would occupy our thoughts, and in being thus occupied, other and harmful things touch us not. If a mother hears that her child has been knocked down by a car she does not stop to admire beautiful things in shop windows, for a more powerful matter controls her heart and mind. If a babe, when mother's eyes are turned away, seizes a sharp knife by the blade, then, instead of attempting to take it from the child, the mother dangles some pretty object before its eyes and the child, in its eagerness to have it, drops the knife and the danger is gone. In the same way the Holy Spirit engages us with His things, and especially with Christ Himself in glory. In result the desires of the flesh are not fulfilled, and we grow more like Christ in being occupied with Him.

There is one further word I would add. "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Was such an exhortation needed? Yes, for the flesh can use even Christian liberty to stir up strife. Now, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22,23). These are precious qualities which shone in their unclouded beauty in Christ Himself when here below. Yet, the fruit of the Spirit could not be seen everywhere in the Galatian assemblies. They were not at peace among themselves. It is more than probable they were having heated discussions on points of doctrine introduced by the law teachers from Jerusalem. But even those who were being carried away by law should remember that "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. 5:14). Biting and devouring one another could only end in their being mutually consumed. Solemn word. Divine love preserves from such withering, blighting conduct. "By love serve one another."

It was on that memorable night when the shadows of the cross were falling fast across the path of our blessed Lord that He gathered His own around Himself and bade them love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34). In the outside world there might be sorrow, persecution, hatred, and death; but within, in that inner circle of His own, they were to love as He had loved. Have we given earnest heed to that word? Is love to all saints the badge by which we are known as His disciples? Without it the most perfect ecclesiastical order, the richest spiritual gifts, the vastest stores of knowledge are nothing (1 Cor. 13). All these might be possessed and boasted of by a Laodicean assembly — "rich, and increased with goods, and having need of nothing." Christ was outside knocking at a closed door (Rev. 3:17-20).

Let us then stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and let us also walk in the Spirit. And may we not forget the word that bids us by love to serve one another.

The End

Outline for Bible Study (78)

159. Philip And The Eunuch. — Acts 8:4-40

Outline

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|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. The preaching in Samaria | Acts 8:4-13 |
| 2. The laying on of the hands | Acts 8:14-17 |
| 3. The wickedness of Simon | Acts 8:18-25 |
| 4. The Eunuch | Acts 8:26-40 |

Explanation

1. The Lord Himself had sent out Philip to preach, just as He had sent Stephen. They were instruments of the Holy Spirit, who gives His gifts to whom He will (1 Cor. 12:11; cf. Eph. 4:11). Many Samaritans accepted Philip's message with joy, (Cf. Jn. 3:11; 4:1; 4:39-42!) and were baptized. Simon, a magician linked to demons, outwardly accepted Christ and was baptized also, but he did it for financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8-9).

2. Though they believed and were baptized, the Samaritans did not yet receive the Holy Spirit. The apostles came from Jerusalem and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Then, after the apostles laid their hands upon them, they received the Holy Spirit. By their act, the apostles declared themselves one with the Samaritan Christians. It was an open demonstration that the old barrier between Jews and Samaritans was not present among those who had accepted Christ.

3. Simon presented a danger for the Church, but the Holy Spirit revealed him as a tool of Satan. Offering spiritual gifts or offices for money is still called *simony* today. Simon's heart was blinded and hardened by the lust for money.

4. Then Philip was ordered to go to a deserted roadway. He could easily have objected, but he was faithful and obedient. "Obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22-23). All servants of the Lord ought to submit to the leading of their Lord. What grace of God to use us as instruments for the salvation of souls, though we were once enemies of God! The eunuch served Queen Candace of Ethiopia as Secretary of the Treasury. He was rich, but without peace and without hope. He sought peace in the Jewish religion at Jerusalem. However, not religion, but only the Lord Jesus gives peace. The Saviour cared about the Eunuch, who had travelled far and bought an expensive scroll. Humbly the eunuch begged Philip to come up in his chariot and teach him (Mt. 5:6; Prov. 8:17; Isa. 55:1). The verse from Isaiah brings a clear gospel message: Christ died to give peace to the guilty sinner (Isa. 53:4:8). The eunuch heard, believed, and found peace (Ps. 32:1,2). In baptism he confessed his faith in Jesus and entered into the fellowship of the believers. The eunuch probably was the instrument of the conversion of many of his compatriots.

This account shows God's wonderful grace toward men. As soon as the eunuch was baptized, his outside support, Philip, was caught away. Only Christ remained for his heart (Mt 17:8), and this caused him to go "on his way rejoicing."

Lesson

To preach the gospel, they did not have to go to college or be appointed by men, but they had the fellowship of their fellow believers (Acts 13:1-3; cf. Gal. 1:1; 2:9). So also now the Lord sends forth His servants. They went out preaching the gospel and the Lord went with them (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21). In a short time the gospel had won Samaria for the Lord. All Jewish efforts had never been able to accomplish this. How powerful are God's Word and Spirit! (Eph. 2:14-16).

Simon is a serious example for all who pretend to be Christian for the sake of gaining one or the other advantage.

In Jerusalem, the queen of Sheba had found what her heart desired. In her days, Solomon, with his wisdom and glory, was a type of Christ. Now, however, Christ was rejected and crucified, therefore the temple service had no longer any value. Peace with God could no longer be found there.

160. The Conversion Of Saul. — Acts 9:1-30; 22:3-16; 26:9-18

Outline

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|------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Saul a persecutor of the Church | Acts 9:1-2 |
| 2. His conversion | Acts 9:3-18 |
| 3. His testimony concerning Christ | Acts 9:19-25 |

4. Barnabas brings him to Jerusalem Acts 9:26-31

Explanation

1. After the stoning of Stephen, Saul became a furious persecutor of the Church. He spread persecution and death even in foreign cities. Nevertheless, God in His mercy saved him because he did it in ignorance (1 Tim. 1:12-13). The last words and death of Stephen may well have stirred up the heart and conscience of Saul (Acts 26:14).

2. The Lord, appearing to him from glory, halted him before he reached Damascus. Perplexed by the words, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," Saul fell to the ground, his will broken and pride conquered. Blinded through the glory of Christ, he was led into Damascus. His physical blindness resembled his spiritual state. God gave Saul unmistakable proof of His care for him: in a vision he saw the visit of Ananias who knew all that had happened to him. Ananias initially objected because of Saul's enmity — as if the Lord did not know that. Graciously, the Lord answered him and told him the address where he could find Saul. The Lord is concerned with the minute details of each man's life: "Behold, he is praying." Saul must have prayed before, but not in a way pleasing to God. God does not hear the prayers of self-righteous men, He listens, however, to the supplication of the lost sinner. In God's message to Ananias, the nations are mentioned first, then Israel.

3. Saul believed, regained sight, and was baptized. After the Lord had put him in the dust, He, in grace, fitted him for His service (cf. Isa. 6:5-8; Acts 26:15-18). Now Saul preached with great liberty that Jesus is the Son of God, thus presenting Christ's personal, eternal glory. Peter had preached that God had raised the rejected Messiah and made Him Lord and Christ. The Jews sought to kill Saul, but the disciples helped him to flee to Jerusalem. What he had done to others, now happened to him (Acts 9:16)!

4. In Jerusalem, Barnabas, a man full of love, was concerned about Saul and quieted all fears. After Saul's conversion a time of peace arrived for the disciples. The believers were edified, walked in the fear of the Lord, and increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson

On the way to Damascus Saul learned that:

- a. The Jewish rulers stood in open enmity against God.
- b. Saul himself had until now fought against God.
- c. Jesus, whom he had hated, was God's Son, enthroned in heaven at the right hand of God.
- d. The believers he persecuted were God's people, even one with Christ, their glorified Head.
- e. The nations, all non-Jews, would share in all the blessings in Christ (Acts 26:17,18; Eph. 3:1-12).

Saul would be the carrier and minister of a new testimony. Israel, God's earthly people, would be set aside and replaced by a people called from all the nations of the earth, that would be blessed and united to Christ, its glorified Head in heaven.

Paul had seen Christ glorified (not as the apostles, who saw Him in His humility), thus his gospel is the gospel of the glory of the Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). He had not known Christ according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16). Having been a witness of the glory, he longed to partake of Christ's sufferings. With Peter, the order was reversed (1 Pet. 5:1).

Paul called himself: the chief of sinners; a display of the long-suffering of God (1 Tim. 1:15-16); the least of the saints; and the least of the apostles. Yet, as "an elect vessel" (Acts 9:15) he laboured more than others (Eph. 3:8; 1 Cor. 15:9-10). He also was "one born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8), because his conversion was like that of the future remnant. They, too, will believe after they have seen the Lord (cf. Thomas — Jn. 20:29; Zech. 12:10).

To be cont'd