

Index of Articles:	Page
Adam and Christ	1
Devotion to Christ	3
The Gospel, pt. 2	4
The Greatness of Christ	6
The Two Sauls	8
Declension	10

Adam and Christ

Joel Portman

When we consider our Lord Jesus Christ in His blessed Person and Holy Humanity, we find many who the Scripture uses to illustrate His life in its different aspects, but all fail to measure up to His standard of perfection in walk and ways. Many are those who are types of Christ, but they also cannot effectively do more than give glimpses into the true reality of what He was, while living among men in this defiled world. We are never exhorted to emulate those men, unless, like Paul, they were imitators or suggestions of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), but we are exhorted to become like Christ, to follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:21), and to keep our eyes fixed on Him as the pattern for a life that pleased God.

In this article, we would like to compare the first man, Adam, with the second man, Christ. The first man begat a generation of offspring who were begotten in his likeness (Gen. 5:3), all were sinners since their father had sinned, and all were under the curse of death. Our Lord Jesus began a race of men who were not given physical life, but rather spiritual life. Those who are His sons are no longer constituted sinners, but are saints, possessing and enjoying eternal life with the prospect of fuller and infinite blessings that will result.

Adam was the head of the first creation, and all born since are identified with him as their federal head (Rom. 5:19). As such, they fall under his condemnation with the result that they are in a condition of spiritual death and separation from God. By contrast, our federal

head, Christ, is the "last Adam", for there will never be another creation to supersede His, the new creation. All who form part of that new creation are no longer under condemnation, but He, as Head, endured condemnation in their place and has imparted unto them the "justification unto life" (Rom. 5:18). It is in Him that He is bringing many sons unto glory (Heb. 2:10), and they are seen already glorified in His purposes and through His work (Rom. 8:30).

Adam sinned by yielding to the temptation that he received through his wife from the serpent as an agent of Satan. It was through such an intermediary that he was tempted, but the Lord Jesus was directly exposed to the temptations of the devil, not in a garden, but in the wilderness. The temptation that caused Adam to fall was to take for himself what was not actually his, to reach for something that the LORD God had reserved for Himself. He was not satisfied with the abundance of what God had provided him, but grasped for something higher for himself. However, we read concerning our Lord Jesus, that "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross....." (Phil. 2:6-8). In the wilderness, He expressed complete contentment with the pathway that God had determined for Him, even to the point of refusing to turn the stones into bread to meet His physical needs after fasting forty days. Adam had no physical need for the forbidden fruit, for he had the abundance of "the fruit of all the trees of the garden" save one (Gen. 2:16).

Adam's sin involved exercising his own will against God's; even when tested in a small item that was forbidden, he failed to respond with perfect obedience so as to display his submission to God's will. Sin always involves some exercise of our own will regardless of the will of God. This human characteristic was

"Truths for our Day"

is a monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to be a help to believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Editor and Publisher: Joel Portman
1200 Forest Glen Ct. SE,
Cedar Rapids, IA, 52403
Write to: mail@truthsforourday.com

All issues of "Truths for our Day" are available by clicking on the link below. This will take you to the index:

[Truths For Our Day](#)

Please read this notice:

You are permitted to reprint any issue of "Truths for our Day" that you desire, either for yourself, or to share with other believers. However, if you wish to copy an individual article, we will forward your request to the copyright owner of the article to request his permission. For this reason, the format of the publication is locked to prevent unauthorized publication of articles that the author would prefer to reserve. Please do not copy them in any other way. We want to respect the ownership of all those who have written articles.

We also hope you will let others know about "Truths for our Day" and encourage them to subscribe as well. They can do so by simply sending an e-mail to mail@truthsforourday.com

Thank you

never seen at any moment in the life of Christ. His was more than an outward obedience; it was more, since it was His delight, His joy, His devoted purpose at all moments, even to the point of death (Heb. 10:5-9, Ps. 40:6-8), even from eternity when He stepped into time. All men seem to have a limit to their obedience, a point that is determined by how much it will cost. But with Him, His obedience was proven up to the point of death, even "death of cross." (Phil. 2:8). There is no question or difficulty to understand why heaven's portals would open and the voice of God was expressed with Divine approval (Mt. 3:17, 17:5). Adam's sin brought sorrow to the heart of God and ruin to God's creation. Christ's obedience brought pleasure to His heart and honor to His Name. He alone could say without any question, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4).

The only act of disobedience that Adam could commit, he did commit; but He who had all things in His power and had all things belonging to Him, Who had made them all and Whose they will be one day, refused to disobey in the slightest point of life. It is amazing how perfectly Christ voluntarily limited the exercise of His own will, and how perfectly that early purpose of His life to "be about my Father's business" (Lk. 2:49) continued without abatement for over 33 years of perfection.

Adam's sin expressed his selfish desires; it was what seemed right to Eve, pleasing to the eye, desirable, and providing a source of personal satisfaction. Selfishness has dominated the human race ever since. What a delight to see One whose delight was the please the Father, coming not to please Himself, but rather to please Him who sent Him. There was no expression of selfishness in His life as He served His God (as slave) and men (as a servant). What an example for us in our Christian experience!

Much more could be said to emphasize the contrast between Adam and Christ, all of them emphasizing the superlative character of the head of the new creation as contrasted with the one of the old. We can add that Adam's sin brought sorrow, a sorrow which seemed to be magnified in the life of Christ as He shed real

tears over a man's death (John 11:35), a city's doom (Lk. 19:41) and a world's evil deed involving His real suffering (Heb. 5:7) . His compassion for the sorrowing and suffering was real. He "bore our sins and carried our sorrows" Isaiah could say (Isa. 53:4), in words which were applied to Christ (Matt. 8:17).

Adam's sin resulted in the curse, but Christ's obedience resulted in blessing, both of them affecting multitudes of souls. Adam's sin brought sweat of the brow (Gen. 3:19), and in a far greater sweat than physical was that which coursed down the Savior's brow in the garden, "blood-like sweat" (Lk. 22:44). Adam's sin resulted in thorns of the ground, and those thorns were found bound around and pressed into the lovely brow of the obedient sin-bearer. Adam's sin introduced suffering into a before perfect scene, but all the suffering that man has reaped as a result is not to be compared with that which the Savior endured when hanging on the tree. Man's sin brought dust and dryness to which his body would return, but the psalmist prophet could say "thou hast brought me into the dust of death," (Ps. 22:15). We see the contrast that is presented to us in Holy Scripture, and that contrast only emphasizes the superlative greatness of the Last Adam. We bow with worship before Him and say with the bride (Song 5:10) "Yea, He is altogether lovely, the chiefest (standard bearer) among ten thousand."

The ways of Christ in the days of His flesh are the true pattern for His people.

Devotion to Christ. . .. as Jonathan to David

1 Samuel 18:1-4

This seems to have been the first meeting between David and Jonathan, so far as Scripture records. This is interesting, because it follows David's victory over the giant in the valley of Elah in ch. 17, and it illustrates to us that it is only after the victory of our Lord over Satan at the cross that we likewise would know

Him as our Savior and Lord or have any responsive devotion of heart to Him.

As David returned, having been victorious over their great foe, many, like Saul, were glad and could rejoice in his victory over an enemy who was too strong for them. But there was one among the rest, and to him the Victor was more important than the victory. Saul received David into his house, but Jonathan took him into his heart. One might link that with the line of the hymn that says,

"He looked on me,
I looked on Him,
and we were one forever."

That day was the beginning of a friendship that was to last a lifetime. From that time on, the two of them were as one in heart. "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David." What a picture of true conversion to Christ that results in lasting devotion to Him! "Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul," (v. 3).

Love is always active and will display itself in deeds. Such was the case with this love that Jonathan had for David. "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garment, even to his sword and to his bow and to his girdle," (v. 4). One might well ask, "Why would he express such a whole-hearted surrender to David?" Here is the answer, "He loved him as his own soul." He had far greater delight to see David clothed in his own garments than he would have had if he had been wearing them himself.

We sing a hymn sometimes, "All for Jesus, All for Jesus," sometimes with little understanding of what we are truly singing, but Jonathan would have sung more consistently, and fully realizing the import of the words, "All for David." We also sing, "I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend," and then come to the words, "Nought that I have mine own I'll call, I'll hold it for the Giver," but if it came to our own time and money, it would be no more pleasant than a visit to the dentist for a tooth extraction. One has said that we, the Lord's people are just a set of hypocrites, but it may be more accurate and kind to say that we often talk and act hypocritically. Each of us can examine our own hearts to see if this is not

true, when we sing hymns that, if we were truly honest, we would do far better to keep silent, and instead let those sing who are honest in their words.

The love that reaches its utmost in simply singing, "My Jesus, I love Thee," is not really love at all. Love will make sacrifices for its object; Jonathan's love for David did that, but in doing it, he didn't seem to consider it a sacrifice at all. He rejoiced to see David wearing the garments of a king's son, those which he might have been wearing himself.

We can find fault with Jonathan because he wasn't with David in the stronghold, in the cave, or in the other places where he was fleeing from Saul. However, before we do, let us ask if we would do more than he? Possibly Jonathan and David felt that he would be more help to David in the king's house, giving information to David regarding Saul's purposes. It is evident that Jonathan endured much humiliation and even Saul's attempts on his life, while there in the king's house and speaking for David. It reminds us of Nicodemus in the Sanhedrin in John 7:50. One in the presence of the enemy and speaking for one who is despised and rejected will always be the object of their opprobrium and abuse.

Paul seems to be the Jonathan of the New Testament, though there are many others, like John, who were also faithfully devoted to their Savior and Lord, even to the point of death for His sake. From that day when Saul met Christ on the road to Damascus, he held nothing back from expressing faithfulness and love for His Lord. He was fully devoted to Christ and showed it in his life-long occupation that was centered on Him to such an extent that he could truly write, "For me, to live, is Christ; and to die is gain."

The grace that transformed that proud Pharisee from being an enemy of Christ and His people into one who became a faithful Lover of the Lord Jesus can yet transform self-centered men and women into those who, like Jonathan, are wholehearted in their devotion and love to the Lord Jesus.

The Gospel, pt 2

Larry Steers

Possession of Spiritual Gift

We trust that it is abundantly clear from what has already been written that all believers must have a burden for the souls of our fellow travelers to eternity. While this may seem to be a pointed statement it must also be recognized that all brethren are not gifted to occupy the platform. The preaching of the glorious gospel must not only be inspired but interesting. It is the responsibility of overseers to insure that those placed on the gospel platform can preach. Overseers must recognize that other brethren are gifted for other areas of assembly responsibility. We would not want to fly on a plane piloted by a brick layer. The brick layer may do an excellent job laying bricks but not flying planes. This is a principle that operates in our lives every day. In the spiritual sphere the same is absolutely true. Use the gift which the Holy Spirit has given for the purpose for which it was bestowed.

How often has the excuse been heard that we do not want to offend a brother so we give him his turn and the saints groan.

The writer had numerous student teachers in his classroom. For every student I had to write an evaluation that would bear consequences for the rest of their lives. At the end of the evaluation was a question I had to answer for every student. The question: Would you want this student teacher to teach your children?

Overseers in an assembly must do the same. However, when it is determined that a brother can function profitably in another area he should be encouraged to develop and use the gift the Holy Spirit has given him for the profit of the saints.

May I make a suggestion here. When the Holy Spirit has raised up a humble brother who preaches a stirring gospel, give him ample opportunity to develop his gift. We seem to have unwritten rules which are very strange. For example it seems that there must be a different speaker every Lord's day evening. Consequently those with a gift in many Assemblies speak a limited number of times in a year. Break the unwritten custom and have the gifted

**Give because you love to give—
as the flower pours forth its perfume.**

brother speak more often even perhaps several Lord's days in a row. Taking turns is not helpful when the issue is the careful presentation of the gospel.

A very pertinent illustration of the above is found in Numbers 4 involving the responsibilities of the Kohathites, Gershonites and the Merarites in the taking down and setting up of the tabernacle. Each group was appointed by God for a specific duty and was content to allow the other two groups to perform their labor of love. They did not step into the sphere of responsibility of the others.

The Kohathites bore responsibility for the holy things (Num. 4:20). This was their Divinely appointed service and burden (Num. 4:19). They remind us of the teachers in the New Testament.

The Gershonites (Num. 4:24, 3:26, 4:26) cared for the curtains, the hangings and the cords. They symbolize the shepherds.

The Merarites (Num. 4:31) had the heavy work and looked after the boards, bars, pillars, sockets and cords. They represent the evangelists of the New Testament.

It will be carefully noted that there was a clear division of labor with each responsible with for certain aspects of service relating to the tabernacle. Each did their work appointed them by God. This should characterize a New Testament Assembly. Each doing a work they have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to do.

Prerogative of the Holy Spirit

Here we will seek to emphasize what has already been written but as it relates specifically to the herald of the cross.

In his consideration of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12:11, the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians "But all these worketh that one and the same Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will". Again, while all believers have a gift, all do not have the same gift or the same degree of a specific gift. Each believer is a steward, accountable to the Lord for the development and exercise of the gift bestowed. The sovereign Holy Spirit gave some "evangelists" (Eph. 4:11). The gift here is the person. Only one man is identified in scripture as an evangelist. He is Philip, the evangelist (Acts 21:8); however the word "evangelist" in Eph. 4:11 is a

plural word. Only one man being identified as an evangelist would suggest the rarity of the gift. However, one would never question that Paul was a real evangelist.

Timothy was encouraged to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). While this is specifically to Timothy, all believers can be engaged in this great work. Our Lord exhorted "go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Our little world may be the neighbors around us, children in a Sunday School class, business associates, and school friends. We appreciate greatly the sacrifice fellow Christians have made in leaving their homeland to take the gospel further afield as missionaries. But every believer is a missionary and must redeem every opportunity to speak for their Lord.

But our great concern is for the Lord's Day evening Gospel Meeting and those who preach.

Preparation of the Preacher

The maturing of spiritual gift is not a process of osmosis. It might be partially illustrated by the experiment you likely witnessed in the science classroom. A potato was cut in half. One half was placed in a small amount of colored water and left overnight. By the next day the colored water had soaked through the potato and entirely filled it.

While a young brother may have a gift, the "principle of osmosis" assumes he knows how to prepare a message and how to deliver it. He must receive guidance and council as the gift develops. Elders should give instruction in the fundamental truths of the gospel and the preparation of the message. Again, this is not a process of osmosis. . . "stand up and preach". A little help, a hand on the shoulder to encourage, a word of council and instruction on how the message could improve. The young brother needs to listen with thankfulness to the interest of elder brethren.

Eventually the young brother may be encouraged to rent a building for gospel meetings or a work with children but always in fellowship with the assembly.

There is a long range view. The Lord did instruct "The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of

the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37–38).

Personal Life of the Servant

Paul reminded the Philippians "let your conversation (manner of life) be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:7). Our Lord taught his disciples "let your light so shine before men" (Matt. 5:16).

A carefully lived life in the fear of God speaks loudly to those we meet each day. The key word is "carefully". There are hindrances that insidiously creep into lives that limit our power with God.

We live in a world that has no time for spiritual issues. From the pen of the aged apostle John, in his 90's, comes a commendation for the young men of his day who had overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:13,14). John is thankful for their spiritual strength and for the Word of God which dwelt in them (1 John 2:14). But just over the horizon John sees a danger, Satan's last attack. To these young men in John's day and today he sounds the alarm. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15). The world in 2016 is still one of Satan's devices designed to lure a believer from living a life honoring to Christ. Satan has the world designed for the believer to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Hence time which could be used for profitable Bible Study is squandered. Precious time spent in prayer becomes less. On the gospel platform such a brother may make a speech but exercised saints realize there is no power with God.

When God was preparing a man, Abraham, to leave Ur of the Chaldees to become a pilgrim and a stranger, He called him alone (Isa. 51:2). Moses spent forty years in the wilderness alone with God before leading Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 3:1). When the sons of Jesse were summoned to the house to meet Samuel, the future King of Israel was alone with the sheep (1 Sam. 16:11). John the Baptist knew what it was to spend time in the wilderness (Matt. 3:1). Paul experienced the loneliness of Arabia (Gal. 1:17). The Lord was in the wilderness for forty days.

How essential for the herald of the cross to be alone with God and to be in a right

condition of soul. His earnest prayer is "Search me O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting (Psa. 139:23-24). He must be a clean vessel, empty of self without a cloud between his soul and God. His life must commend the message he proclaims.

The Greatness of Christ

(author unknown)

"I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" Rev. 22: 13.

There is portrayed to us in this short, simply worded, yet striking verse that which commands our attention, calls forth our praise, and bows us in worship. These things are descriptive of some of the all-varied glories of Him who has captivated our hearts and won them for God Jesus! Precious Name! embracing as it does His down stooping grace and pathway of infinite perfection; of complete submission to, and concert with, the will of God; devotion to the Father and superlative grace to men. Well said were those adoring words:

"Thy Name encircles every grace
Which God as Man could shew;
There only could He fully trace
A life divine below."

The heart, reveling in the fragrance of that name which is as "ointment poured forth," delights to contemplate some of the higher mysteries of the fame of Him who bore it, our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Only Begotten and Well-Beloved Son.

"Alpha and Omega"

The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, depict the speaking of God, bringing before us the glory of our Lord as the Word. He who in the beginning was with God, a distinct Person; and was God, co-eternal and co-equal, was fully competent to express God whenever expression was called for. Every communication of

God to the creature was through the Word.

If the prophets were used in times past in the partial speaking of God they spoke by the Spirit of Christ which was in them (1 Peter 1:11 and 1 Peter 3:19). In these last days God has fully spoken in the Son (Son-wise), and thus we learn that Christ, as the Alpha and Omega, is the One in whom God is declared; in Him the eternal life, the life of God has been manifested; He is the WORD (John 1: 1), and He is the WORD of LIFE (1 John 1:1). The Lord Jesus is He by whom God has been revealed in the fullness of His nature as Light and Love. The eternal life which all believers have—a life which has the distinctive character that it is “with the Father,” has been manifested in Him. All blessedness has been brought near to man, by revelation, in Him the Eternal Word.

If we contemplate the holiness of God which necessitates the removal in judgment of everything that is contrary to it—everything that has refused divine blessing in whatever way it has been presented—this too finds its expression in the Alpha and Omega. Revelation 19:11-16, gives us a glimpse of heaven opened that we might behold One who is Faithful and True, who judges and makes war in righteousness, coming out of heaven to smite the nations and to tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty, and His Name is called “the Word of God.” Whether God is expressed in grace or judgment, He is so expressed in Him who is the Eternal Word, the Alpha and Omega—Jesus.

“The Beginning and the End”

This conveys the thought of activity or doing. The work of creation is, in Scripture, ascribed to the Son. He was ever the Agent of the activity of the Godhead. The universe sprang into being by the Word of His power. “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). He is the Beginning, the Originator of every created thing. The creation of man was the outcome of divine counsel. God, Elohim—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—equally participated therein, but the act of creating is attributed to the Son. He is the Beginning and

He is the End. He is the Object for whom all are created. He, the Son, was appointed “Heir of all things” in eternal purpose; this necessitated the creation of all things. He shall yet be honored throughout the bounds of creation. Then, too, as to the New Creation, He is the Beginning, who is the Firstborn from among the dead, and the end in view is “that in all things He might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:16-18). Hear His Word in John 4:34, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work.” In John 17:4, anticipative of the accomplishment of redemption's work, “. . . I have finished the work that Thou gavest me to do;” and also in John 19:30, when hanging on the Cross, “It is finished.” Creation, Redemption, and Judgment are the work of Him who is the Son, Jesus, the Beginning and the End.

“The First and the Last”

The speaking of God, the doing of God, have found an avenue for fruition by Him, and now, in this expression we consider that which sets Him forth in the glory and majesty of His being. He is the great “I AM” (Isaiah 41:4; Isaiah 44:6; Isaiah 48:12). What He is in His own being—beyond all that has been revealed—is indicated in this appellation, “the First and the Last.” As the One who entered man's estate in lowly guise, in whom God has spoken and acted, the devil has attacked Him and has sought to bring Him, in the creature's estimation, down to the level of the creature! Some there are who will own Him as Creator and Redeemer—but a creature still! The blasphemy of it! To say this of Him, even though He be described by such as the highest creature in the universe, is a denial of the teaching of the Word of God and an insult to Him majesty. He is the Christ, “Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” (Romans 9:5). He is the Self-Existent One, Almighty, Eternal One. In Manhood He is saluted in terms of equality, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” God salutes God! O, the glory and the mystery of the Person of Jesus. He said of Himself, “Before Abraham was I AM” (John 8:58).

Then, too, the Holy Spirit in John 12:41, records “These things saith Esaias, when he saw His glory and spake of Him.”

Read these precious Scriptures of truth—John 8:12 and Hebrews 1—meditate on their threefold testimony to Him whom men despise and slight, the Son become Man, our Lord Jesus Christ—“the FIRST and the LAST.” Rejoice that the Scripture cannot be broken! Whilst all this was true of Him and presented in testimony to men—the glory of His Person, His Work, and His Word—did He meet with united acclamation? Nay! John 10:19; John 9:16; and John 7:43, witness that they divided on what He said, what He did, and who He is. Praise God if through grace our eyes have been opened as the man in John 9. Being introduced to the Son of God believing, we bow at His feet, we worship Him—“The Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

The Spirit of God would deepen in us the appreciation of Christ as the One in whom the Speaking—Doing—and Being of God is presented to us in this amazing Scripture.

“The mention of Thy Name shall bow
Our hearts to worship Thee;
The chiefest of ten thousand Thou,
Whose love has set us free.”

The Law was magnified by Christ, and made honorable; and therefore God in His righteousness must magnify for ever Christ and His members with Him.

R. C. Chapman

The Two Sauls

Wm. Rodgers

Read: 1 Sam. 8:11-17; 10:23; 15:19,23; 18:9; 19:1; 26:21; 28:16; 31:4; Acts. 13:22; 26:19; 1 Cor. 4:10; 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:2; 12:15; Gal. 1:13; 2 Tim. 4:6, 7, 17.

These Scriptures throw into sharp contrast in many respects two well known Bible characters, one in the Old Testament, the other in the New Testament. Both of these men bore the same name, “Saul,” both were Israelites, and both belonged to the same tribe, namely, Benjamin. The contrast is seen all through their records, but most of all it is seen in their respective ends. The one died a suicide, the

other a martyr. Or, the difference may be expressed in another way; for of the O.T. Saul we read in Acts. 13 that God “removed him,” while his namesake in the N.T. was able to say at his end, “I have finished the course.”

Still more impressive perhaps are the statements made as to God’s relationship with each man at the close of his career. King Saul’s confession in 1 Sam. 28:15 “God is departed from me and answereth me no more,” while the Apostle in 2 Tim. 4:17 was able to assert, “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me.” Both their histories are set in the Word of God for our learning, the one by way of warning, the other by way of example. That of King Saul has at times been made a bone of contention as to whether he was what we speak of as a “saved” man or not; but which ever view one takes, the warning for us remains. Personally, I feel that certain of the statements made of him are such as would not be true of any saved person, not even of a backslider. Of such a one it might become true that the Lord would see fit to “remove” him, as He removed certain members of the Corinthian Church. But could it be said that the Lord had “departed” from him and “had become his enemy”? Or could it be said of any saved person, “Because thou hast rejected the Word of the Lord. He hath also rejected thee”? (1 Sam. 15:23).

However this may be, we have in the O.T. Saul a man who seemed to make a good start, and yet who ended very badly, and of this he is not the only example in the Bible. There are others, alas, from King Solomon on the one hand, to Judas Iscariot, on the other, whose records bring to mind the proverb quoted by King Ahab, “Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off” (1 Ki. 20:11). How often in our own experience we have been woefully disappointed in some, of whom at their beginning we had high hopes, but who later turned aside from the path entirely. As the route of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan was marked by a line of the graves of those who were overthrown in the wilderness, so our own wilderness journeying has also been marked. Some, like Solomon, have backslidden from what they once were, and some, like Judas, have proved that they never had real life at all. What a contrast to these,

however, is the course of Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul! His was a course of steadfastness and progress. He had a good beginning, a good middle, and a good finish. He could ever say, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark"; and as we have already seen, he could at last say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course." He could at all times say, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

But a good end is ever the product of the other two—the good beginning and the good middle, and the contrast in these two Sauls was manifest a long time before we come to their deaths. Even before the O.T. Saul is introduced by name, the prophet Samuel placed before the people the character their desired king would have. In 1 Sam. 8 the expression, "HE WILL TAKE," is used of him no less than six times. He was to be a selfish man, one who would take all and give nothing. In this he has many successors. Paul had on one occasion to say, "All seek their own." But when we look at the Apostle himself what a difference we find! He could assert, as in 2 Cor. 12, "I will gladly spend and he spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." Yea, he could wish himself "accursed from Christ," if by that means his brethren of Israel could be brought into blessing.

When we come to the actual story of Saul's life in 1 Sam. 15 we find him deliberately disobeying the command of God concerning Amalek—keeping back the best of the spoil and sparing the leader. On the other hand, Paul could claim that in every part of his course, as well as at its beginning, he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Yet again, Saul in 1 Sam. 18:9, and onward, was consumed with personal jealousy of David, but though Paul was jealous over his converts, it was not with personal jealousy, but with godly jealousy, or jealousy for God's glory. Even when men of a different stamp were preaching Christ "of envy and strife," supposing that they were adding affliction to his bonds, instead of being jealous, he could say, "Nevertheless Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice and will rejoice." As a result of Saul's jealousy, he became a persecutor; but all the

persecution done by Paul was in his unconverted days, and was due, not at all to personal jealousy, but to a mistaken zeal for God.

Even in personal appearance, the two men seem contrasted. Saul of the O.T. is introduced to us as "a choice young man and goodly", who was taller by more than a head than any of the people; while of the Apostle they "His bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

Incidentally, it may be noted that another and more immediate contrast with King Saul, lies in the character of David, the king who succeeded him, and of whom God in Acts. 13:22, after speaking of Saul's removal said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will." Thus the disobedient king gave place to the obedient one; the selfish king who would "take" all, to one who "perceived that the Lord had established him king... for His people Israel's sake" (2 Sam. 5:12); and who in the unselfishness of his heart, would say in the hour of plague and danger, "These sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand be against me" (2 Sam. 24:17).

The outstanding contrast, however, between Saul and David lies in their attitude to inquiring of the Lord. Almost a dozen times in David's history we read of him doing this, and any mistakes he made were made at times when he failed to do so. The first of these was at the bringing up of the Ark, concerning which he is said to have consulted with his chief captains, but not with the Lord. Later, there came a period of which it is said, that "The counsel of Ahithophel . . . was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God . . . both with David and with Absalom," and this ended in the Absalom rebellion. Finally, we have the numbering of the people concerning which, not only did David not inquire of God, but persisted even in face of the opposition of Joab and other captains.

But Saul all through his course made little of such inquiry. In the very first story we have of him, when his servants suggested an inquiry through Samuel about the lost asses, he considered a quarter shekel (about 6d.) ample payment for such. Later, in his impatience he sought to inquire irregularly, and later

still broke off an inquiry unfinished when the Philistines were drawing near. Then by slaying the priests he cut himself off from that means of inquiring (the Urim), and at the end he turned to the witch of Endor. "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the Word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; AND ENQUIRED NOT OF THE LORD: therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse" (1 Chron. 10:13, 14). Thus to the very end the Holy Spirit Himself preserves the contract between these two kings.

In all that we have considered what lessons there are for us today! Let us see to it that we profit by them.

(from Assembly Testimony, May/June 1959)

Declension

Acts 7:30-41

The history of Israel's declension, as given by Stephen, contains a lesson of solemn import to our souls; because it is the history of so many backslidden Christians, and it will be the history of apostate Christendom at the close of the present age. It was a seven-fold declension, and the successive steps of their downfall are often repeated in our own day, while they certainly remain to be repeated in a large and humiliating exhibition of the utter failure of man before the coming of Christ.

The first step was disobedience. Speaking of Moses, Stephen says, "To whom our fathers would not obey." Refusing to hearken to God's accredited messenger, they refused to hearken to God Himself, and thus commenced a career which ended in their complete national overthrow and debasement. So it is still with those who have forsaken the fountain of living waters to hew out for themselves broken cisterns that hold no water. They began their downward course by some act of disobedience, and, failing to confess and forsake their sin, they were prepared to go still further astray from God.

The second step was rejection of divine authority: "But thrust him from them." In thrusting Moses from them, they thrust Jehovah away, saying in effect, "We will not have Him to reign

over us." Disobedience leads on, as certainly as water runs down hill, to a contemptuous disregard and open defiance of God's commands, as thousands who once confessed the name of Jesus could testify.

The third step in the path of sin and shame is a return in affection to the world: "And in their hearts turned back again into Egypt." When God is disobeyed and thrust away, the soul longs for the world, and for worldly pleasures, because it has nothing else. It must seek some object to satisfy its desires, and all that is left to it is that which lies in the wicked one (1 John 5:19).

The fourth step in their decline was the expression of a desire to have other gods in place of the true God whom they had disowned, "Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us." It has been well said that "man is a religious animal," and, if he departs from the God of the Bible, he will ask those whom he has recognized as priests to invent another god, more suited to his depraved tastes and worldly lusts.

The fifth step was a bolder reach in iniquity and a deeper degradation, for "they made a calf in those days." At first, conscience, not yet wholly extinct, did not permit them to go further than to say to Aaron, "Make us gods"; but that led them on to make for themselves a calf, sinking lower and lower until the God of glory was gladly given up for a four-footed beast.

Sixth, "they offered sacrifice unto the idol." Forgetful of the blood that redeemed them out of Egyptian bondage; forgetful of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; forgetful of the grace that promised to place them at the head of the nations, they stooped to the disgusting wickedness of offering sacrifice to a senseless piece of metal. What will not the professed Christian do, when he leaves the Savior?

Seventh, "they rejoiced in the works of their own hands." Beginning with disobedience, they crowned their sin by glorying in their own achievements, and were thus ripe for the judgment that overtook them. The Lord keep us from disobedience; from defiance; from worldliness; from the wish that our spiritual leaders should make for us objects of adoration; from the invention of false gods; from the worship of idols; from self!