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## **Christ: Image and Firstborn**

*E. W. Rogers*

Any interpretation of Scripture which does not give due regard to precise accuracy in the matter of inspired words and tenses is certain to be inadequate, if not erroneous. It becomes, indeed, specially serious when it has to do with the Person of the Lord. By reason of His inscrutability, strict adherence to the statements of Scripture is imperative. It will be observed that in Colossians 1:15 the present tense of the verb "to be" is employed—He "is the image of the invisible God," and in Hebrews 1:3 the present participle is used, "Who, being the brightness of His glory," etc. Each statement denotes what Christ is essentially and eternally—the former passage presenting Him as possessed of that glory which He had with the Father before the world was; and the latter passage stating that which was eternally true as to the unoriginated glory of the Son. In neither case should the verbs be read in the sense that although there was a time when He was not so He is now the Image of the Invisible God, and the Express Image of His Person, for then the verbs required would have been "He became" and "Having become." The context of Hebrews 1 is plain. "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Person": the one verb "being" is thus attached to both items, "brightness" and "image," and indicates what He essentially, unchangeably and eternally is.

Therefore, it must not be asserted, as some have done, that the "brightness of His glory" relates to what He eternally was, and "express image" to what He ultimately became. Such an interpretation fails to take cognizance of the fact that the two phrases are linked together by the one verb. Furthermore, the terms of Scripture should not always be explained by the modern equivalent of the same words. We must not "try to interpret the heavenly and eternal in terms of the earthly and temporal." It is failure here that has resulted in the

recent errors concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ. Bible terms must be interpreted in the light of Bible doctrine and analogous usage in other parts of Scripture. Thus the term "image" (although in modern usage and in some parts of Scripture it denotes that which does not perfectly represent the original) in relation to Christ stands for that which renders visible the invisible, and gives the observer to see the unseen archetype.

A reference to Hebrews 10:1 will show that "image" sometimes denotes "no mere outline or projection of the form but the full and perfect representation of the substance." Colossians 1:15 affirms that Christ is the Image, God is the archetype. So that when Christ was on earth He could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." The Greek word translated "image" in Colossians 1 is altogether different from that translated "express image" in Hebrews 1:3. This latter denotes the impress that is made by a seal "showing only, exactly and fully what the seal is as to its device. Thus the Lord Jesus, not only in incarnation but eternally, was the Image; the Impress, showing not partially but fully, not approximately but exactly and completely, what the Father is."

It is true that the Lord Jesus manifested God in Incarnation, but it would not be in agreement with the verbs used in these two verses to say that that Manifestation began with such Incarnation. Whatever manifestation of God there has been at any time has always been through the Son. No man hath seen God at any time: He dwells in light unapproachable; but the Eternal Son has always been and ever will be the Declarer of God. Creation itself, as to which the Son was the Divine Agent (Colossians 1:18) is part of the manifestation of God's power, for it should be well noted that verse 16 is explanatory of verse 15, as is shown by the word "For." This verse explains not merely the fact that

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Christ is the Firstborn of all creation but that He is also the Image of the invisible God. Creation, the theophanies, the various appearances of the Divine glory in Old Testament days, etc., are all included in God's manifestation through the Son. If Adam was made "in the image of God," that image must have then existed; that Image was Christ, thus showing that He was, as such, eternally, prior to creation.

### Firstborn

Now concerning the term "Firstborn." A reference to Deuteronomy 21:16 and Psalm 89:27 will make it plain that the meaning of this term is not primogeniture, but "priority and superiority." "Firstborn of all creation" does not mean that Christ is part of creation, seeing that "by Him" it was all brought into being (Colossians 1:16), but that, as to it, He was before it and above it (v. 17). The term does not apply to the Lord, therefore, as some have supposed, exclusively in Incarnation. It is true that when He became man He came into His own creation as Firstborn, but that position did not originate with His manifestation here. It existed before He created anything; it would have been true that He was First-born of all creation had He not become man. It was a position given Him by the Father, so that we may say that had He not even created anything at all, He would still have been the Father's Firstborn. Creation and redemption have each served to display that position of superiority and honor which is held by the Son. As to creation He is Firstborn, and as to His brethren, who have been redeemed by His blood, He is also Firstborn among them (Romans 8:39).

## Conscience

*W. Hoste*

**I**t would be correct, I believe, to say that a conscience was the only thing our first parents got by the Fall; and of course man has a conscience still, though its voice, through repeated disregard, may become very weak, or indeed be silenced. But it will make itself heard one day. The actual

word "conscience" does not occur before the Fall, nor indeed in the Old Testament at all except in the doubtful marginal reading of Ecclesiastes 10:20. But though the word is not there, the working of conscience is referred to in Romans 2:15, the Gentiles' "conscience also bearing witness," surely a retrospective reference. Possibly we have a reference to this very conscience in the devil's words in Eden, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"—the knowledge of sin without avoiding it, and the knowledge of good without attaining it. If this be a correct definition, it is clear our first parents had no conscience before the Fall. Conscience has been compared to a sun-dial, which will only work in sunlight. By any other light, at night say, you can make it say what time you like. Someone has defined conscience as "something supernatural within the natural" or "the Divine Imperative in the soul." Like the sun-dial, it will only work correctly if enlightened by the Word of God. The Lord warned His disciples that the time would come when men, in killing them, would think they were doing God service: that is, with a perfectly easy conscience. Thus a man may have "an easy conscience" and do wrong, like Saul of Tarsus, who thought he ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jesus Christ. In John 8:9 the accusers "were convicted of their own consciences"; they knew they were not without sin in this respect, and they were aware that God knew it too.

Then a conscience may be weak: that is, excessively morbid and punctilious, through not being enlightened, as those in Romans 14 who would not eat certain meats owing to religious scruples. Our Lord's accusers would not go inside the law-court at Jerusalem "lest they should be defiled" (see John 18:28). A conscience may be evil through not being purged by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:22), and good through being purged by that blood from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14), or as it is described in verse 9, "perfect as pertaining to the conscience." But when we read in chapter 10:2 that the worshipers once purged should have "no more conscience of sins," we are not of course to understand that they are not conscious of evil within or of failure without, still less that they have no conscience: but that they see that the sacrifice of Christ has so fully met all God's holy claims, that He is

"Servant of God, speak out the Word Thy Master bids thee tell;  
He knows the need, He fits the dart, He bids thee wing it well.  
Along its way with all thy might; Once gone, He guides it true,  
He fastens it as He sees best, Nor leaves results to you.  
Yours to be quiet, to hear His voice, Then speak with power divine,  
Listen or not the people may, He says, 'The Word is Mine.'"

fully satisfied as to the sin question, and they are satisfied too. They rest where He rests. Then again, a man's conscience may become defiled through sinning with a high-hand (Titus 1:15), or "seared with a hot iron" through sinning repeatedly against the light (1 Timothy 4:2). We ought to live "in all good conscience," that is, with a tender and enlightened conscience. We ought also to "exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man."

**Nothing will make you like Christ but what comes from Christ; it is no use trying to brush up old Adam, or make yourself holy without going to Christ constantly; if you would be like Christ, you must walk with Him, live upon Him and make Him your Alpha and Omega.**

## Demonstrations of Faith

*T. D. W. Muir*

Hebrews 11:8-21

We are considering the greatness of Abraham. God had said to him in promise of blessing, "I will make thy name great," and we found the way in which he became great was the way found in the New Testament, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. He that will be great among you, let him be the servant of all." The way that the world takes to make men great is by exalting them, but God's way is the opposite. You remember how Hannah, after she had given Samuel to the Lord went away with a song (although you would wonder how she could sing then), and in that song she says, "The Lord bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." The valley of humiliation is the road to greatness.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a parody on the Pilgrim's Progress and called it the Celestial Railway. In the Pilgrim's Progress you remember the Pilgrim was entertained in the House Beautiful by the Three Graces, and his experience in their company helped him when he got further on his way. He afterwards went through the Valley of Humiliation, and his experiences there were very different

from what he had enjoyed in the home of the Three Graces. But in Hawthorne's story the pilgrim goes by a Railway and he goes through with comfort. One man in the train, who had been reading Bunyan's book, asked the conductor how long it would be before they reached the Hill Difficulty and the House Beautiful for he had some questions to ask of the Three Graces. The answer was, "Oh, we have improved all that! We have run a tunnel through the Hill Difficulty and used the debris to fill up the Valley of Humiliation, on the other side." His thought is that, in the modern way of looking at things religious, there is neither difficulty nor humiliation. There is no exercise and no trouble. But this is not God's way. When God took Abraham from his home He cut him adrift and separated him from all that he had been brought up to. Like Paul, who said, "I have been crucified to the world, and the world has been crucified to me." The world looks on me as a dead one, and I look at the world as a dead thing. God did that for Abraham. He went out, and never went back again. You remember when he wanted a wife for his son he made his servant swear that he would not take his son down into Mesopotamia, but to go and bring a wife for his son from that land. All this is for our instruction. You cannot go with the world and expect God to bless you. You must break with the world, and find yourself alone with God.

The three men whose names we have in the portion we read — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bring before us different lessons.

### Abraham

Abraham brings before us the believer, the man of faith, who cuts himself adrift and goes with God. Verse 8: "By faith." What do you mean, by faith? Is it a feeling, or do we have a word from God? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If I have only a feeling, or if I am following a man, that is not faith but credulity. There are thousands today in Detroit who are followers of men. These people believe men, but the men are deceiving them. Faith has its foundation on the Word of God. Did Abraham have any word from God? He had heard God say, "Get thee out of thy country," and he went, not knowing whither he went, and that which impelled him was simple faith in God and His word. If at any time he took a retrospect he would come back to this fact, "God said and I obeyed." That is faith, and that is where Abraham began.

There was another thing. God promised that Abraham would have a seed that would inherit the earth and be a blessing to all the earth. The years passed by and the fulfillment of the promise did not come, but one day God led him out and pointed to the stars of Heaven, and said, "So shall thy seed be." I was reading in the Epistle to the Romans, and, as I always do, I looked at the Revised Version to see what differences there are between the two Versions, and I noticed that while the Authorized Version

says (Romans 4:19), "He considered not his own body now dead," the Revised Version puts it the opposite way, "He considered his own body now as good as dead." He considered his own age, and that of his wife, and the improbability of his ever having a son; he looked at the facts in the face, and looking at them in the face he believed God. Why? Because he believed that God was able. He believed that God was the God of resurrection. What is the greatest miracle in the Bible, greater than the creation of the world? It is that One went into death and came out of death that He might be the Saviour of believers. Everyone that is saved for ever, will forever owe all that he has to that death and resurrection. We believe it and rest our souls in that fact for time and eternity. That was what Abraham believed. He believed that God was able to raise the dead.

Note that God does not say, "He that believed is saved," for that would make us go back always to a date on which we believed. It is true of course that there was a time when we first believed. But God says, "He that believeth." A believer is a man who, by the very habit of his spiritual life, daily believes in God. Just as a child when it gets life, must renew its life daily by nourishment in food and drink, so is it in regard to our life. We began with believing, but it goes on day by day.

The second great trial of Abraham's life was when he had to put that son on the altar, when he was about twenty-five years of age, if the chronology we have is correct. Oh, those years of planning and arranging for Isaac to do for him and make him worthy of the place God had given him; those years in which he had made known to Isaac all that was before him. Now the order comes like a thunder-clap; but he obeys by faith. By faith he left the land of his fathers; by faith he got a son in spite of nature; and now by faith he offers up that son. This test did not come upon him the first day after he believed, but years after when his faith had grown. Faith is like a child at its birth; life is there but the child is so weak. You take it by the hand, and the little hand is limp; but you come back in a few years and you find a strong lusty boy, and later still you have a man, able to reason and speak what he knows. The progress you notice is great, but it was little by little that it grew strong. Abraham was a believer at the first, and he grew; and so with us. When we first believed we were so weak. Our faith was like touching the hem of His garment — an act that required no strength; so little and so weak, and so easy. But there is growth and development after test and test, until the crowning test, as in Abraham's case. When Abraham was climbing up that hill, he said, "I know that God is able to give me back Isaac, back again even from the dead." How do we know this? He said to the young men that accompanied him on the journey, "Abide ye here with the ass and I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you." And so he kept the faith and went on forward, step by step, knowing that God would give Isaac

back again even if his body was reduced to ashes.

### **Isaac**

And now let us look at Isaac. He also was an heir with Abraham of the same promises, and he dwelt in a tent as his father did. Isaac also brings before us the believer, but he is the type of a believer as a son in a family. He was the son of Abraham. Isaac is brought before us in the Scriptures as a son, and we are sons. Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name." Faith makes us sons. Like Abraham we believe in the God of resurrection.

But how much exercise of faith do we see in Isaac? Isaac was a quiet sort of man. He dwelt in a tent, but he did not always live in Mamre. You remember he went down to the land of the Philistines to dwell, but he could not settle down there. The child of God has trouble in settling down. As in Isaac's case, there is always someone filling up the wells. But he got back at last to Beersheba, the well of the oath, and he lived there to the day of his death. When God writes his history in the New Testament, He does not have much to say, except that he blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. You remember that in the obtaining of the blessing there was the crookedness manifested by Jacob. In spite of that Isaac seems to have grasped the fact that it was God's mind, and that is all that God notes in the Book of Hebrews.

### **Jacob**

And what about Jacob? God put him in the line of faith. God leaves many names of great men out of this history. The name of Solomon is not even mentioned. When He puts in Jacob's record here, what does He mention? Does He speak of Jacob's wonderful dream, or of the time when he overcame Esau, or when he prevailed with the Angel? None of these, rather, "When he was a-dying he blessed both the sons of Joseph, leaning on the top of his staff." Now we read Genesis 32:10. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan and now I am become two bands." He began with a staff, the pilgrim's utensil, that which is of great importance to a pilgrim; and when he returned to the land he could look on two great bands of camels, and cattle, and servants, and children. Now when he comes to bless the two sons of Joseph he crosses his hands, putting the right hand on the head of the younger and the left on the head of the elder. This is the only thing that God picks out to speak of Jacob.

Now there is another 11th of Hebrews being written. Shall we be even mentioned in it? There were many Old Testament men left out of the Book of Hebrews, and the only thing that God finds to speak of in Isaac and Jacob is the last acts of dying men. But there Jacob gets back to his

pilgrim way, leaning on the head of his staff.

We are walking through a scene that is at its best a wilderness. It seems other than that many a time, but it is in God's sight only a wilderness, and may we have God's help to see it so.

**It is natural for children to depend on their father for what they want. If they want a pair of shoes, they go and tell him; if they want bread, they go and tell him. Do you want spiritual bread? Go tell God of it. When the Devil tempts you, run home and tell your heavenly Father; go, pour out your complaints to God; this is natural to children — if any wrong them, they go and tell their father.**

### **“Me First”**

*R. Surgenor*

When quoting favorite verses from the Bible, it is always profitable and interesting to consider the context in which those verses were recorded. We often quote Luke 19:10, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost,” and immediately our mind goes to the episode of Zacchaeus at the sycamore tree. Quoting John 3:16 immediately draws our mind to that memorable night when Nicodemus came to the Lord. We come across the same thing when we quote Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Our minds immediately go to the Philippian Jailor and his awakening and conversion.

However there are some verses quoted quite often, yet we are oblivious to the surroundings that accompany that verse. How often have you heard brethren quote at the Lord's supper Luke 9:58? “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” What occasioned the Lord to utter such words? If I were to ask you where and why and to whom did the Lord speak thus, what would your answer be? There certainly was a reason for such a statement wasn't there? The Lord never babbled or rambled when He spoke. Every single word, every single phrase was carefully and divinely spoken. Even the ungodly officers of the Temple had to confess; “Never man spake like this Man” (John 7:46).

David exclaimed; “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalms 12:6).

When the Lord spoke these words, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head,” Luke gives the impression that the Lord was walking through a Samaritan village, but Matthew says that the Lord had just performed a miracle on Peter's wife's mother, and was on His way out of the city of Capernaum to depart by ship to the other side (Matthew 8:19–22). Multitudes had gathered and as He headed for the ship, a man, who was a scribe, approached him. He seemed to be all taken up with the Lord Jesus and was quite enthusiastic. Have you ever met people like that? There are people that can suddenly become quite fervent. They are on fire. But their fervency is like the crackling of thorns under the pot – it fizzles very easily.

Notice the first man's words to the Lord. “Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest” (Luke 9:57) I would take this scribe to be an impulsive individual. He may have been avaricious (greedy for gain) too. The Lord had done many things in Capernaum. It was there that He spoke of Himself as the bread from heaven (John 6:51). He had healed the centurion's servant there, and also the nobleman's son. He had wrought many mighty works there (Matthew 11:23). Perhaps this scribe thought it would be to his advantage to join the Lord and thus fall into prominence and many blessings. But God searches the heart and whatever this man's thoughts were, they were all known to the Lord, the all-knowing One.

The Lord never enlists on false pretenses. He made known the cost to this scribe. Notice His heart-searching words. “Foxes have holes.” These sly little creatures dig a hole just deep enough, so that when they lay in it, their back is level with the ground. That hole is a resting place for them. “And birds of the air have nests.” They too, have a place where they can rest for the night. Then the Lord draws the contrast, saying, “But the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” All of a sudden the scribe sees that there is no excitement, glamour, or great success in such a life as the Lord was living. The Lord speaks of Himself as the Son of man; a Hebrew phrase, expressive of humiliation and debasement; and, on that account, He applied that phrase to himself. He uses it also to point out the incarnation of the Son of God, according to the predictions of the prophets, having been made a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5); the Son of man coming in a future day with the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13). His miracles proved His divinity, but His expression “Son of man” expressed the certainty of His incarnation.

Thus, this man in his rashness, had failed to count the cost. There was no “bed of roses” involved in following the Lord. The Lord made known the cost first. Thinking twice, the man looks back to a fine bed, a comfortable

home, and three good meals a day, and suddenly he disappears. No more is mentioned of him, or seen of him.

When preaching the gospel to the lost, it is a great mistake to paint a rosy picture, as if salvation will iron out all one's problems and give them a better materialistic life than they ever had before. Sinners need to be warned about their sin, but they also need to understand the cost of receiving Christ as their Lord. Paul exhorted the new-born saints "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The words of the Lord Himself are very plain. "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (The meaning is, loving them more than Him, giving them a place above Him). And whosoever doth not bear his cross, (mainly the cross of reproach and suffering for His Name's sake) and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-33). Sinners need to be warned to forsake all their sin. They should be told that receiving Christ will bring "crosses" into their lives. They must be made to consider, is it worth it? When this method is employed in the preaching of the gospel, very few false professors will be the result. When a person sensibly weighs up the consequences of being saved, only a deep conviction of sin will drive him to Christ for salvation. The faithful gospel preacher makes the facts very plain, and many of his audience, being made aware of the consequences of salvation, one by one drop by the wayside.

There have been men, who becoming concerned about their souls, have been told by their wives that if they profess to be saved they will divorce them. Irregardless, they professed Christ, counting Him more worthy than their marriage. Years ago in New England a young Roman Catholic girl attended gospel tent meetings. She was aware of the consequences, and upon professing Christ as her Saviour, was immediately put out of her home by her angry father. She had counted the cost. Christ meant more to her than family ties and a comfortable home. There have been Islamic sinners, convicted of sin through the gospel, and who have received Christ, only to be slain with the sword by their own family. They counted the cost. Christ was

more important to them than their own life. In a sense, salvation cost these people something. Their salvation was very precious to them. When that condition prevails, there follows implicit obedience to the claims of Christ. Today we are living in times of "easy profession." The sad result is that since the sinner was "easily saved," since he sacrificed practically nothing to make his profession, he consequently holds divine truths very lightly. Since his salvation cost him little, his appreciation is little. This is not always the case, but it is the general rule.

I realize that God has had times of "revival" where a tremendous work is wrought. Such events were more prominent in former days, but in our day it seems that we have entered the "day of small things," where a few here and a few there are saved in a gospel series. I know that all things are possible with God, but I am concerned when I hear excited reports of a great number of sinners "getting" saved during a gospel series. In the first place, it is improper to exclaim that "they GOT saved," for no one receiving such a report can be sure of that until they see the fruit of the Spirit manifesting itself in the professor. The old preachers used to say, "Time and the devil will tell." It is far more scriptural to say that they PROFESSED to be saved. Then months later, as you observe their lifestyle, you may be able to say that you believe they are saved, or you might have to say, I think that they missed it.

In our day, when a great number profess in a series, three questions enter my mind. **One** – was the preaching of such a nature as to simply stir the emotions? **Two** – was sin, judgment, hell fire, and the absolute need of repentance faithfully preached nightly? **Three** – was the audience informed of the cost in professing Christ, that there would be a cross to bear? In the presentation of the gospel, let us be more concerned in the **quality** of professions rather than in their **quantity**.

Now two more men come on the scene. I term them "ME FIRST" individuals. "And He said unto another, "Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer **me first** to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-60).

Unlike the first man, instead of approaching the Lord, the Lord approached him with these words, "Follow Me." However, following the Lord was not the most important thing in this man's life. Family ties prevailed. His dear father was old, and the day of his death was perhaps near. So, when asked to follow the Lord, he replied, "Lord, suffer (allow) ME FIRST to go and bury my father." The fact was not that his father lay a corpse, for if that were the case Jewish custom would have him buried the same day of his death, before sundown. Oh no, that wasn't the case at all. What this man placed first was his old father. He thought it more important to stay at home until the day of his father's death, whether it be a week, a month, or even a few years.

He was not willing to set domestic ties aside, but he was willing to let family social duties interfere with his duties to Christ. In contrast to this, at the call of God, Abram went out, leaving his country, kindred, and his father's house (Genesis 12:1). What a cost! "By faith Moses when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24-25). That move on his part cost him worldly wealth and fame, but his eye of faith looked beyond all of that and thus he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (vs. 26).

Let me ask you, do you put your family before the Lord? I know a sister who wanted to please the Lord in her dress, but her carnal husband insisted that she have that "young look." He insisted that she cut and fashion her hair, wear makeup, jewelry, and dress immodestly. One wonders if the man had divine life. She succumbed to his carnal demands, and put her husband first, above Christ her Lord. "Me first." How sad!

I remember having meetings at a certain place and one night a whole family, who had been attending, were missing. I thought perhaps that sickness had overcome them, so I inquired. The report was very saddening. It so happened that there was a program at their children's school in which they were involved. The parents forsook the meeting to see their children perform. In the first place, they were wrong in allowing their children to be involved in extracurricular school activities. They had placed their children above the Lord. "Me first." What kind of training is this for children? In reality they were being taught that the public school was more important than God's assembly. If God visits them later with salvation, what will their attitude be toward the assembly? How will they appreciate the importance of the gathering when they have been trained the very opposite? Scripture tells us, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Perhaps parents that place Christ second in their family have another version that reads like this; "Train up a child in the way he **would** go: and when he is old, we hope that he will depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6-the Me First Version). Let us be careful to give our loved ones all the attention, love, and care possible, but never at the expense of placing our Lord in second place.

In the 1970's the Lord afforded me a most wonderful experience. There was a heavy burden on my heart to minister to God's assembly in Steubenville, Ohio. Plans were made for a series on the Tabernacle, which would take a few weeks. However, my dear father took sick in Florida and was to undergo an operation the very week I was to commence my meetings. I felt a responsibility to be with my father, a widower. I was torn between two opinions. The more I prayed about the situation the more I

was burdened to go to Steubenville rather than to Tampa. My father contacted me and told me that if the Lord was laying the Steubenville assembly so heavily upon my heart that I had better go, and not come down to be with him. In fact, he even warned me about going against the will of God for the sake of a father.

Upon commencing the meetings, things began to happen immediately. It was almost unbelievable! The little assembly was stunned, for the hall was packed! That past summer I had been pioneering about 90 miles away in Fairmont West Virginia, and about 160 strangers were attending the tent meetings, which lasted for nine weeks. Some of those Fairmont people drove all the way to Steubenville to attend the Tabernacle meetings! Folks in the immediate neighborhood also helped to fill the hall. None of us believers had ever seen the like. God was working. There had been a very godly man in that assembly named Andrew Cousley. When he died, he mourned the fact that his son David was not saved. Now who do you think showed up to those ministry meetings? David Cousley! Not only that, there was a sister in the assembly who was married to an unsaved surgeon, who practiced in the Steubenville hospital. He had been hostile to the gospel, but would you believe it, he too showed up to those meetings. Let me tell you, those meetings were like the days of heaven upon earth (Deuteronomy 11:21). It wasn't hard to weave the gospel into the ministry, for the Tabernacle has many gospel applications. I think that you know what I am going to say next. Yes, both those men professed to be saved and lived to prove it afterward. They were never talked to, they were never even approached. No pressure was placed upon them. God saved them while the preaching was in progress. I believe that the doctor was in his 60's, and David Cousley was 72 or 74.

*(continued)*

**A Christian can never lose by humility or gain by pride. He conquers by yielding, gains by living, and overcomes by submitting; for then God takes his part, vindicates his honor, and brings forth his righteousness as the light.**

**Remember that in every quarrel, the person who has been least to blame is generally the most ready to be reconciled; try your own heart by this rule.**

*Though Christ can be grieved at a thousand things in us that no eye but His can see, yet none so easily pleased as He by our little endeavours of love.*

## Christ; Answer to Legalism

*Joel Portman*

The news that Paul received from Galatia caused great consternation to the apostle. Those assemblies that he had seen established through the preaching of the gospel were being subverted from the truth by some who had come from Jerusalem, teaching the believers things contrary to the grace of God and rejecting Paul's apostolic authority. Recognizing the seriousness of teaching that perverted the gospel of the grace of God (1:7), and would take them away from the liberty that they had enjoyed in Christ (1:6, 5:1), he took up his pen to write this epistle to restore them to the position that they had once occupied when they first believed in the Lord Jesus and were saved. Paul's pathway was always dogged by those "Judaizers", or Legalists, who tried to ensnare believers once again in the bondage of legal requirements to keep the law, including circumcision, in order to be accepted by God or to maintain His favor. This early epistle was written to counteract this direct attack on the gospel of Christ, and to reestablish in their hearts the fact that they had received, by trusting Christ, the fullest possible blessing that one could have, namely salvation and sanctification through having received the Holy Spirit (3:2-5). They were lacking nothing, and needed nothing more; and certainly law-keeping could not add anything to them, but rather, it would bring them into bondage and hinder their enjoyment of Christ as well as their spiritual growth (5:16-18).

### What is Legalism?

Legalism falls into three normally accepted categories. The first is what was being taught to these believers in Galatia, namely, that they were required to submit to the Mosaic law and its ordinances in order to be saved. They were teaching that the law "was to be rigidly enforced on heathen converts, who were to be permitted only through the gate of virtual proselytism to enter into full communion with the church." (Eadie, "Commentary on Ephesians"). According to this view, legalism is the teaching that faith in Christ is not enough for salvation, but that one must add law-keeping in order to be saved. Paul addresses this immediately in this

epistle, emphasizing that such teaching is worthy of divine judgment (1:7-9). Anything that adds to or requires anything more than Christ and faith in Him for salvation must be summarily rejected and condemned. Such teaching still prevails in our day, (including teaching that a person must be baptized in order to be saved). This virtually negates the sufficiency of the work of Christ, robs Him of His glory as Savior, and ruins the grand truth of the gospel of God's grace.

Another variation on legalism is the teaching that a person must keep the law or observe certain religious ordinances in order to maintain salvation. This doesn't negate justification by faith per se, but it affects the perfect standing that a believer in Christ enjoys on that ground. It also is saying that sanctification, or spiritual growth and separation, can only be attained by observance of such rules or laws. Paul rejects that as well in ch. 5, as he emphasizes that it is not by law-keeping that one attains spiritual growth or expresses the fruit of the Spirit, but rather by walking in the Spirit (5:16), being led by His control (5:18), and living in His power (5:25).

A subtle form of legalism can also creep in, when believers invent or employ rules (man-made or from the Bible) by which they judge others for what they do or fail to do. That is not to say that Christians should not be obedient to the teaching of the Word of God. We believe that the more exercised that a person is to know the will of God, the more clearly he or she will seek to express obedience to it in their lives. However, it is to say that we need to be careful to avoid a judgmental attitude or a critical spirit of other believers who may not conform to a standard that we might personally hold. This aspect, sadly, might be seen in any body of Christians, but such teaching as Romans 14 and other passages would forbid us acting in this manner. One may not be actually legalistic, but it is possible to have a legalistic attitude toward others.

### Christ as the Answer

In every epistle, the Holy Spirit presents Christ Jesus in a unique manner. This reflects the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture in that such presentations are directly related to the condition or problem that is being addressed in each one. The philosophical reasonings of men are not needed, nor the introduction of other opinions as the means of solving wrong conditions that might exist. It is the realization that Christ is given to supply every need that one has, whether in salvation, separation, supply, or spiritual growth, and that proper apprehension and appropriation of Him is essential. That is not to set aside the work of the Holy Spirit but to emphasize that it is a fresh and full apprehension of Christ that will cure the majority of wrongs among believers.

Here, in Galatians, He is seen as the One who meets the challenges of legalism. Notice these direct refer-

ences to our blessed Lord and His work.

### **1. Delivered by Christ (1:4).**

There are three references to “world” in Galatians, using two different words. This passage speaks of our deliverance from the present evil “age”. We learn that it is through His Personal Sacrifice (“Himself” in contrast to the sacrifices under the law) that a believer is delivered, or rescued, from his sins. That is something that was never accomplished by law; the law only made one more conscious of his sins, but never brought about deliverance from them. Then we learn that in that great sacrificial work, He has delivered (rescued) us out of this present evil age. In the context of the epistle, while “age” can refer to the entire environment of varying opinions and principles that operate among men, it seems that this is primarily with reference to the world age of religious ideas and attempts based on the legal principle (though it can be widened in its significance). So it was a Purposeful Sacrifice. A deliverance has been effected through His work that has removed us from sin’s penalty and power and which has also accomplished the “will of our God and Father” (New Translation, Darby) to rescue us from identification and domination by the spirit of this age that attempts to placate and achieve righteousness apart from Christ alone. It was a Pleasing Sacrifice accomplished to fulfill God’s will.

### **2. Identified with Christ (2:20).**

Paul, countering Peter’s example in Antioch (2:11-14), reasserts the principle of justification by faith apart from works of law, and then follows by declaring that to teach law-keeping as necessary would be a return on his part to those things that he had been combating (2:18). He had died to the law and now lived unto God in Christ. This verse follows by giving the reason for that change. He declares that when Christ was crucified, it was under the law that was used to condemn Him, so that Paul was also crucified to the law with Christ. The life that he was now living since that moment was being lived by the faith of the Son of God, not by attempting to maintain the law’s standards as before. So that he was now identified with Christ in that judicial death that he suffered and was now living with Christ, linked with Him in a new and different life upon a new basis altogether. At this point we learn that Paul saw that he was separated from the law through his identification with Christ in His death and resurrection; in 6:14, we find that he was separated in the same manner from the world and its attractions.

### **3. Redeemed by Christ (3:13).**

In Galatians 3:2-9, Paul reminds the Galatians that the blessing that God promised to Abraham and also in the Old Testament wasn’t received by them on the grounds of the law, but through faith (v. 2), and all the resultant blessings that they enjoyed were theirs on the same ground. Then in

v. 10, he reminds them that failure to obey the law perfectly only brought with it a curse and resulted in God’s judgment. God’s lasting principle is that “the just shall live by faith,” not by the principle of outward conformity to laws. The two were mutually exclusive, and that is emphasized in this verse. The curse of a broken law that had not been kept was that which caused the suffering of Christ, as He interposed Himself between us and that judgment, receiving it in Himself so that we might be liberated from it. It is only through what He accomplished in the depths of His sorrow and suffering on the cross that the promised blessing could come to us (v. 14), and only on the ground of faith. For them to revert to a renewed attempt to keep the law would only result in their loss and constant failure to attain what God desired for them by His grace. Israel, under the law, never attained it, nor would any others, if they were attempting the same course. All was in Christ, as He suffered on our behalf to deliver us from that curse.

### **4. Received Sonship in Christ (4:4-5).**

Following the passage that details the purpose of the law (3:22-25) in its function as a child-guardian for the nation of Israel up to the time of the coming of Christ, we read that in the completion of those times in God’s purpose, at last, God sent His Son. He entered perfect humanity (“born of a woman”) and was subject to that same law as an Israelite. But it was not to permanently continue under that condition, but it was rather to purchase and deliver those who were under that law. His was a perfect humanity and He sinlessly kept the law in a way that other men never had, and then suffering under it on the cross, He paid the full price to ransom and deliver those who were in that state. His was a perfect work to deliver, but more than that, the purpose was to bring believers, who were in a state of infancy and childhood under the law (4:1-3), to the point of son-placing. Now they are true sons, acknowledged by God as such and receiving all the privileges of sonship, with the evidence being that the Spirit of His Son is in our hearts and thus causes a positive response to our heavenly Father.

### **5. Separated to Christ by the Cross (6:14).**

Paul concludes this stern epistle of warning by reminding them of the folly of following those who only desired to boast in the numbers of those that had been won to their persuasion (6:12-13). It wasn’t for the spiritual good or blessing of the believers that these men were thus engaged. It was rather for the purpose of gaining followers and diminishing the stature and authority of the apostle Paul. On the other hand, Paul could say that his only source of glory or boasting was in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. That term embraces the entirety of the work on the cross by which believers are liberated from sin’s power and from the law’s dominion. It also implies that through that act, a believer is brought under the authority of the “Lord Jesus

Christ,” and thus identified with a different Master and Lord. It was the essence of the new creation (v. 15) in contrast to what was identified with the old.

How precious and valuable it is to see that Christ and His work on our behalf has granted to us a condition and position that is far superior to that which was ever experienced by those who acted under the principle of law-keeping. Our sufficiency is entirely in Him, and He has brought believers into a relationship with Divine persons that is being developed through the on-going work of the Holy Spirit. May we grasp this truth and appreciate even more the fullness of blessing that is ours in Christ!

No cup of poison is so deadly as that mingled cup of law and grace, of works and faith, which is presented to men by false teachers, instead of the Gospel of the grace of God. Yet, alas, this do men gladly receive, and eagerly drink, seeking to satisfy conscience.

## Ephesus and Laodicea

Each assembly addressed in Revelation 2, 3 had different characteristics. Along with the prophetic aspect that they represent, we remember that they were actual assemblies that existed in John’s life. As we focus our attention on the assemblies in Ephesus and Laodicea, which are the first and last of the group of seven, we can notice some contrasts as well as some similarities that should serve as a warning to believers today.

Both assemblies were evidently carrying on the pattern of scriptural gathering, both gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and both maintaining practices that were outwardly consistent with that pattern. The Lord says nothing about failure in that area, but as we see what He does address, we sense that there were fundamental flaws in each one.

In Ephesus, the Lord speaks of their Activity. They were orthodox in beliefs, laboring in their works, intolerant of evil, and maintaining the truth. But theirs was an Activity without Love, because they had abandoned their “first

love.” We quickly learn that an assembly may maintain a full schedule of activity, gospel work, outreach programs and other exercises without maintaining the fervency of love for the Lord that is most essential.

In Laodicea, we discover that in their activity and various functions, there was evident Apathy without Concern. Unaware of their true state before the Lord and blind to their true condition, they were blithely going on, thinking that all was well and meeting His approval. This was likely a worse state to be in than that of Ephesus, and the Lord expressed His disdain and disapproval for all.

Ephesus shows us the problem when Christ is not **Preminent**, and Laodicea manifests the condition when Christ is not **Present**. Could it not be that the first state results in the last? If Christ is not preminent in our hearts and if all is not being done out of a burning love for Him, will it not eventually result in His being left outside, with the machinery of assembly activity going on as if all is well and that there are no problems?

There was a coldness of heart in Ephesus which grieved the Lord very deeply. He commended them for what was being done for Him and for their faithfulness to the truth. But the one great thing that He had against them (not “somewhat”, but “this I have against thee. .”) was that their service lacked the force that would maintain it and direct it toward the object of honoring His blessed Name. He must be the driving force, love for Him must be the supreme purpose, and His person must be the principal object in all our lives and service. If not, then the result will inevitably be the Laodicean condition. Service continues and work goes on, but the Lord is standing outside the entire sphere of their activity and longing to be received by any and all who would desire His presence above all. The sad condition that existed in Laodicea, which the Lord points out, is that they were totally unaware of their true state as He was seeing it. Self-deception reigned! Self-satisfaction and contentment was in control! May we be careful lest this be our state as well as we move toward the end of these days.

The Lord appealed to Ephesus to Remember and Repent. They needed to get back to the condition that once controlled their lives and motivated their service. This is often what we need as well. May our hearts respond to His loving appeal and be warmed afresh in the fires of devotion to Him. His appeal to Laodicea wasn’t to the body of believers but to the individual, the one who recognized that their condition was galling to the Lord. It wasn’t an appeal to come out, as in 18:4 regarding Babylon. It was an appeal to Receive Him personally, to enjoy fellowship with Him intimately, and to enjoy His presence in reality. May we heed His appeal to our hearts as well!