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Winning Christ

James Brown

As each of us saints of God were in a state of losing our souls, the wisest soul-winner of all time (Proverbs 11:30) revealed Himself to us in salvation and thereby won our souls to Himself. We enjoy singing a refrain of a song written in 1894 by Manie Ferguson:

*That Man of Calvary has won my heart from me.
Has died to set me free;
Blessed Man of Calvary.*

During those early days after we were converted to Christ, all seemed so fresh and glorious. The heavy burden of sin and dread of its consequences having been lifted from us granted us emotional weightlessness when compared to the heaviness of previous soul trouble. But given time, owing to unforeseen attacks from Satan, the world, and our own natural desires, we began to lose sight of our Redeemer. Like the Shulamite maiden in the Song of Solomon 5:6, we felt as if our Beloved had "withdrawn Himself and was gone". Our lack of experience with the Lord had caught us off guard and led us to a state of complacent ease or even disobedience. So instead of repentance by acknowledging our departure, we may have expressed our bewilderment by lamenting His departure, using the maiden's words of panic, "I sought Him but could not find Him. I called Him but He gave no answer". Our prayers went unanswered, as the ceiling seemed like brass. We may have felt alone, even surmising that the Lord had left us to ourselves. And perhaps he may have, as loving chastisement (Hebrews 12:6), temporarily withdrawn Himself, since we hadn't been counting all things, including the glory of our past victories and achievements, as loss and dung (Philippians 3:7-8). Self-glory in the presence of Christ is no glory (1 Corinthians 1:29 and Proverbs 25:27) and in view of Galatians 6:14, we can be assured when we glory in ourselves, we are neither glorifying, nor winning Christ.

In Philippians 3:4-6, the humble apostle Paul recounts all the things he might place his confidence in

about himself. But, as he states in verses 7-8, those are the very self-gaining accomplishments he needed to release so that he might "win Christ". By this statement he acknowledges the possibility of losing Him, not his salvation, but *Him*, meaning the fuller knowledge of and identification with Him. Paul expressed legitimate concerns about himself (and so we ought also to do) in that it was possible for him, or anyone, to become "a castaway" regarding his service and testimony for God (1 Corinthians 9:27) or "make shipwreck concerning the faith", (as told to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:19-20) regarding doctrinal error. These concerns were stated by Paul in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 10:12, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall".

Now confronted with what it meant for Paul, as well as what ought to be for each of us, to win Christ, he endeavors to explain this in Philippians 3:10-14. In verse 8, he gives a hint of the key to this sort of winning "the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord". This is more than mere head knowledge in terms of mental assent to declared facts. This is unique experiential knowledge and a deepening of our relationship with Christ that passes through several stages of spiritual development and maturity as Ephesians 4:15 states, whereby we "may grow up into Him". Verse 9 of Philippians 3 links to verses 10-14 showing faith to be the means by which all is to be apprehended.

In Phil. 3:10, Paul once again states that his number one desire is "to know Him". In that same verse, he states two things that are imperative for him to know: 1) the power of His resurrection and 2) the fellowship of His sufferings. Watchman Nee, in his book, "Song of Songs" states that these two "knowledges" that Paul seeks to pursue, depend first of all upon the initial establishment of the relationship with Christ through conversion, followed by an increasingly deeper knowledge, the power of His resurrection, and yet deeper, to know (by experience) the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul delighted to retell his Acts 9 Damascus Road experience when Christ revealed Himself to Paul. Paul counts Himself blessed to have been born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:8-10) having met the Lord Jesus after His resurrection and ascension back to heaven. He writes often of "the newness of life" (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the death of the old man, putting on the new man (Ephesians 4:22-24 and Romans 6:1-11) emphasizing the importance of recognizing that our new life is granted to us on the resurrection side of Christ's great sacrifice for sin, and as such, we are to enjoy all the many spiritual benefits we've been loaded with, that are listed in the entire first chapter of Ephesians.

Regarding his apprehension of all this, Paul admits that he has not yet fully grasped these matters in a perfect way, yet he reaches forth (v.13) and presses toward (v. 14) the high mark of the calling of God, which is to increase his apprehension of both the power of Christ's resurrection and entrance into the fellowship of His sufferings. Note that all that pertains to the power of his Lord's resurrection involves so many blessings: peace with God, acceptance in the Beloved, so great salvation from the power and penalty of sin with the assurance of sins forgiven, a home in heaven awaiting, to be part of a holy and royal priesthood, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with His 9-fold fruit to be displayed in the believer's life and much more. All is positive for the believer.

But there's another side to this matter of winning Christ and it comes with a cost: the fellowship of His sufferings. Is it possible, dear brethren, that we know Christ on the grounds of His sacrifice and even advance

to a certain level of crossing the Jordan River into Gilgal in our experience to enjoy some, but likely not all, of what God has provided for us? God forbid we should be content to remain on the wilderness side of the Jordan to comfortably stagnate with Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. If we link the crossing of the Jordan with personally apprehending the power of the Lord's resurrection, are we willing, once there, to progress toward the even higher calling of discipleship which involves suffering for our Lord's namesake? The Lord describes what this means in Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me". Also, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:16). Certainly, Paul knew what it meant to suffer as a Christian (Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Do we? This fair question isn't asked of us all by the writer of this article, but by the One we hope to win. May each of us be found, in some measure today and for the rest of our short earthly journey, "winning Christ". He deserves our reaching forth, and pressing toward, that high mark.

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Thank you

The Doctrine of Christ

H. C. G. Moule

(from "The Cross and the Spirit", commentary on Galatians)

What does the Epistle say to us about the blessed Name of our Lord Jesus Christ?

We notice first the general fact that the Name appears everywhere. The Epistle contains 149 verses. In these there are at least 45 explicit mentions of our Lord Jesus; that is, one for every three or four verses on an average. And these figures give an imperfect impression; for many of the mentions are such that they not only mark points but cover surfaces, running out into statements about the Lord which can again be subdivided into others. This alone is nobly significant, this ubiquity of Christ in the texture of the Epistle. And I hardly need remind you how characteristic it is not of the Epistle to the Galatians only but of the New Testament Scriptures generally. As we read them with that suggestion in our minds, we shall indeed receive an ever-deepening impression that Christianity is in fact Jesus Christ; the Lord is His own Gospel; subject matter even more than Teacher.

Coming to details, we find some hints here, and we find such hints more fully in many other places of the Epistles, of the human biography of the Lord. We find Him (4:4), "when the fullness of time was come"—when the ideal occasion had arrived, foretold and prepared, and He was "sent forth" by the Father, evidently from a pre-existent glory—we find Him "becoming, born, of woman." Here is an allusion which certainly does not of itself inform us of the virginity of His sacred Mother, but

equally certainly falls in with it. And the next phrase there, "come to be under law," indicates not only His human but His Israelite parentage; as, of course, does also 3:16, where the Christ is the "seed of Abraham"; so, too, 3:29, "if ye belong to Christ, ye are Abraham's seed." This, however, is a point almost superfluous, as it is already obviously implied in the term "Christ" itself. Then we have repeated allusions to the fact of His Death; that word so familiar to us that we, and our hearers, only too often fail to realize its abiding mystery and glory. Assuredly no *a priori* and imagined Gospel, conceiving, if it could do so, of a holy Incarnation, would have gone on to make the grand sequel of that Incarnation to be—not a life of splendid and omnipotent achievement, but a death of violence, shame, and indescribable distress. Yet this is just what the true Gospel does. It utterly denies us leave to contemplate the Incarnation out of spiritual reference, in its first regard, to the Cross and Passion. So here we have the incarnate Lord dying (2:2), "If by law is righteousness, Christ *died* for nothing." And His death is crucifixion: (2:20); "I have been nailed to the *Cross* with Christ"; (5:11), "the stumbling-block of the *Cross*"; 6: 12, "persecution with reference to the *Cross* of Christ"; (6:14), "exultation in the *Cross* of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which (or, of whom) to me the world has been crucified, and I have been crucified to the world." Then, consequent on the Death, is the Resurrection; (1:1), "God the Father raised Him from the dead": (2:20) "Christ in me liveth."

One detail of His biography seems slight in itself, but it has manifold importance as we consider it. Quite incidentally, in a purely narrative statement of his own action, St. Paul mentions his having seen (1:19), "James, the brother of the Lord." It is as simple and natural a mention as if he had said, "I saw Timothy," or "I saw Sergius Paulus." But think for a moment what it suggests; the recency, and the absolute reality of the human biography of the Christ. Not now to discuss the question of what the "brotherhood" was between James and the Lord, it was *some* purely human relationship, whether of blood or of convention, which might just as well have subsisted between other two Palestinian men. As such, the allusion carries us far up beyond the natural range of myth and legend; it places us at once where we can hold intercourse with people who were not only contemporaries of Jesus, but shared a home with Him, and were classed and ranked with Him in human life. Placed immediately beside allusions to the eternal and divine side of His existence, how striking this is! As we shall see immediately, St. Paul pours out, all over the Epistle, allusions to this same Person which assign, to say the least of it, a superhuman character and power to Him. Quite passing-ly and naturally he speaks of Him as, concurrently with the Eternal Father, sending down "grace and peace" upon the human soul; as being the ultimate and inmost secret of all spiritual life for the world. Yet also he was just James' Brother. May we not say with reasonable confi-

dence, with a faith which feels fact beneath its steps, that this astonishing collocation, so calm, so unexcited, so unforced, one limb of it stated in just the same fact-like tone as the other, can be explained only by fact? Is not this entirely unlike the manner of invention, conscious or unconscious? Written down within thirty years of the Crucifixion (and how luminous a retrospect is thirty years to a man in middle life!) this reference to the family of Nazareth, made without an effort, in the same breath with adoring references to the divine operations and prerogatives of a Member of that family, makes material for much thankful and reassuring thought.

But we turn now more directly to the assertions of the superhuman, the divine, aspect of Jesus Christ and His work. We find Him first, then, to be more than man: for (1:1) Paul is "an Apostle *not* by means of *men*, but by means of Jesus Christ." Again (1:12), Paul received and was taught "his Gospel" *not* as "transmitted *by man*, but by Jesus Christ's unveiling," *i.e.*, as the context assures us, by means of an unveiling of truth effected by Jesus Christ. More explicitly still, we find Him "the Son of God," and so designated in connections which fully justify us in saying that the phrase implies a Filiation which means part and lot in the eternal Nature: 1:15, "It pleased God to unveil His Son in me," as a mystery needing the Infinite Hand to lift its veil, and let it shine into the depths of the human soul for its salvation. Again, 2:20, "What I live in the flesh, I live in, under the condition and surroundings of, my faith in, my reliance on, the Son of God." Again, 4:4, "God sent out" (as from the recess of the eternal Presence) "His Son, made of a woman." So before us shines that fair and wonderful light of the Gospel, the eternal Sonship of Him who is also born of woman. It is not only (if "only" may be reverently said in such a connection) that GOD becomes man; it is the SON of God. And the words carry with them, let us note, not only an announcement of wonder and glory, but an insight into the very heart of divine love. I know not if it is with others commonly as it is with me; but I must confess for myself, with humble thankfulness, a peculiar power upon faith and love in just this word, "the Son of God," when I ponder it in connection with the question of personal salvation. It carries with it, to the believing sinner, a supreme guarantee of welcome to the heart of the FATHER. It reveals to me something of the internal love of God for God, and then it carries down to me, in the Christ, incarnate, sacrificed and glorified, nothing less than that very love. I am in the Son; what must I not be to the Father?

This great Son of God appears in the Epistle in the exercise of many functions. He is the autocratic Master of His follower; Paul is "Christ's bondman" (1:10); he "bears in his body the servile brand of the Lord Jesus"; he is shown by the scars of persecution to be not a self-reliant hero but the bought property of his Redeemer (6:17). Christ's disciples are "His," belonging to Him: "If ye are Christ's" (3:29): "They that are Christ's"

(3:24). On the other hand, He is such to them that, as we have seen, being His bondmen they are also, equally, wonderfully, sons of God in Him the Son: 3:26, "You are all God's sons by means of your faith in Christ Jesus": 4:4, 5, "God sent forth His Son that we might get (as our intended portion), our filial adoption." And 4:7, "So thou art no more a bondman but a son, and if a son, an heir." Such again is this wonderful Christ that His redeemed are not only in His possession, or under His protection; they are "in Him"; words significant of a union profound and vital, illustrated elsewhere by the imagery of the Head and Limbs, which is here only implied. The Churches in Judea are "in Christ," (1:2). All believers are "one" as it were one compound *personality*, because their Head is one (3:28). "In Him" is the sphere where faith works by means of love (v. 6). Those who are baptized in His name are "clothed with Him," involved in Him (3:27). "In Him" resides our justification (2:17), as much as to say, we must be in Him to get the acceptance which He has won for us. "In Him" His servants have a sacred liberty (2:4).

And all this blessing for us has been dearly won for us by Him in whom we are so richly to enjoy it. All through the Epistle, as we have already seen in part, runs this red line of atoning and redeeming Passion (1:4), "He gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins that He might take us out of this present age so evil." He lifts us, as it were, above its grasp, so that we are in it and not in it, kept from its evil while enabled in face of it to walk with God; free in the profound peace of the pardon He has won, and in the inward power of the Spirit which also is ours because He died in order to pour the gift of Pentecost upon us. Would we enjoy that life of emancipation, and live "in the flesh" (2:20) yet as "taken out of the world so evil"? It must be by faith in Him, not as He appears in *any* of His characteristics but specially in *this*, that "He loved me, and gave Himself over on my behalf" (2:20). Would we estimate the awfulness and the love of His dying work aright? We are to remember that when He died (3:13), "Christ bought us out from the curse, the death-warrant, of the law, becoming on our behalf a curse" (tremendous words, which would have been denounced as a parody on truth if they were not as a fact found in Scripture); "for it stands written, Accursed is every one who is hung on tree." Nothing short of this was the condition precedent to our receiving the blessing of Abraham, and the promise of the Spirit.

We note, by the way, how unconscious Scripture is of the repugnance of some of its interpreters to a so-called "commercial theory of salvation." Twice over does St. Paul here use the words translated "He bought out" (3:14, 4:5). For him, such is the Lord's dying work in expiation and in satisfaction, that from one great side it not only *can*, it *must*, be imaged by the transactions of the marketplace; the paying down by Him of infinitely valuable consideration that we, altogether on that account, may be released. And the party to whom here the

consideration is paid down is surely the Law, violated by us, satisfied by Him for us. In other words, the mystery of His Passion and Death had reference to the awful claims of eternal Holiness with its categorical commands. It dealt so with them that we, because of that Passion, and because of it alone in the sphere of legal righteousness, find the grasp of the Law's arrest and bondage upon us relaxed, and walk out free.

Let us not forget further that the imagery points on its other side to that sacred bondage which alone is perfect freedom. For what does it say? Not, "He *delivered* us" (as indeed He did), but, "He *bought us out*." Our release is so effected that by the very act we are acquired, appropriated, possessed. "Not your own, for you were bought for value." "Whether we live therefore or die, we *belong* to the Lord."

This process of our deliverance by the Son of God is put before us, again, in this Epistle as our Justification. See 2. 16, "Knowing that man does not get justification in consequence of works of law, but only by means of faith in Jesus Christ, we too believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified in consequence of faith in Christ . . . But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, etc." And again, 3:11, "That in law no one gets justification before God, is evident; because 'The just in consequence of faith shall live.' " And again, 3: 24: "The law was our paedagogus up to Christ, that we might be justified in consequence of faith." And again, 5:4: "You disconnected yourselves from Christ, such of you as are getting justification in law; from grace you fell. For we by the Spirit, in consequence of faith, are looking out for the hope of righteousness." If I at all understand these last pregnant words, they mean that we are looking out, with an expectation sure and certain, for future glory, as the issue of "righteousness," namely, of our acceptance for Christ's sake, our justification in Him. Of course I have regard in this interpretation to the large context of St. Paul's language elsewhere, especially in the Roman Epistle (see e.g., Rom. 3:21-24). But I think this is amply enough to secure the interpretation, in view of the *context* of Galatians 5:5. He is thinking here not of our condition, but of our position; the Lord's winning for His people this wonderful "extradition" to Him, from under the curse of the Law, into the smile and sunshine of reconciliation with the Lawgiver. There they stand, His purchased property, His much more than amnestied, His Welcomed and acclaimed, members and brethren; embraced for His sake, and in union with His person (see 2:17). And standing there, on the ground where penitent reliance is their foothold, they look up from thence, and, in the same reliance, see the Gate Beautiful from the Hills Delectable, rejoicing, as the justified, in "hope" of glory. For "whom He justified, them He also glorified."

It is almost needless to point out that, as in the more extended discourses of Romans, so in these briefer lines, we have the word *dikaion* used in its only proper reference. It has to do with law, and tribunal, and

a sentence proclaiming that the law is satisfied, and that the accused is accepted by the Lawgiver. "To justify" is a word (we need continually to remember this and to explain it) not of internal condition but of relative position. It denotes not our subjective amendment or cleansing, in the region of will, but our objective acquittal, in the region of law. Only the acquittal is more than acquittal, for it is welcome, it is acceptance. So complete and magnificent is the reason why, the procuring cause, the price paid, the glory of the substituted Sin-bearer, that the sentence of the law, through the lips of the Lawgiver, upon those who (considered in themselves) merited only its "curse," is not merely, "You may go." It is, "You must come." It is a welcome to the embraces of the Judge, and to adoption into His wonderful home.

Very instructive, by the way, is the manner in which in this Epistle the two conceptions of Justification and Adoption are never confused, but—collocated and treated in living relation. Perfectly separable in idea, they are profoundly connected in spiritual fact. And their *nexus* is our Lord Jesus Christ, and our union with Him by faith. He is at once the Son of God and the Sin-bearer for man. And the benefit for us of both His two characters is appropriated and realized by faith. And faith's revealed efficacy is that it puts us into union with Him, in all He is for us. As we are guilty, it puts us into union with Him who has perfectly satisfied eternal Law as our Representative. But we are also aliens, and He is also the beloved Son. Therefore it also puts us into union with Him in filiation. And so the affiance which receives from the Judge the gift of His more than acquittal receives also, in the same act, from the Father, the gift of His adoption into sonship.

Only in the briefest way need I point out the practical import of the words "faith" and "believe" in all this connection. Assuredly their great outstanding idea is reliance, affiance, the taking the Trustworthy One at His word. The whole purport of the Epistle leads that way, to say nothing now of the ample proof of such a reference from our Lord's own use, always, of the words *pistis* and *pisteuein* in the sense of personal trust. From one viewpoint then "faith" is the simplest thing in the world; and happy the soul which remembers this, and acts upon it, in life and in death. From other sides it is the most profound and pregnant thing in the world. As exercised by a sinner in view of His Redeemer crucified and glorified, what does it not connote? It is by its very act a confession of self-condemnation and self-abandonment; and it is by its very act a confession of the glory and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. It repudiates utterly all moral merit in itself. By its very nature, faith looks out from and forgets itself; it is occupied with its Object. Salvation by faith is salvation wholly by Christ trusted.

In closing this section of our Studies, I note in passing a detail or two in the Apostle's doctrine of Christ.

v. 1, "Christ made us free"; He is the Liberator obviously from the bondage of condemnation, the internal slavery of the unforgiven and alienated. On

the other hand, He is the Lawgiver; 6:2, "Fulfill the law of Christ." His liberty is on the other side order and loyalty; His freedmen are also, from the point of view of His blessed will and rights, His subjects, aye, His bondmen. Only, His law is now not only the categorical precept, but the formative power.

Lastly, 4:19: "Till Christ take shape in you." Here is formative power indeed; and it is not an abstraction but a Person. This wonderful Christ, so absolutely One in Himself, so multifarious in His function for us, appears here as living and moving in His disciple, who on the other part lives and moves in Him. He is "Christ, which is our life." And the moral and spiritual development of the Christian is accordingly expressed in this wonderful term, of the development of Christ in him. The Indweller is there, and as it were grows in His dwelling, and fills it more and more. And so the plastic dwelling takes His shape. "The life of Jesus is manifest in the mortal flesh."

Men of God Series Abraham, the Friend of God

Alan Davidson

God called him, "Abraham My friend" (Isa. 41:8). We read that "The LORD appeared unto him" seven times. Such were his home conditions that the Lord could draw near unto him as "He sat in the tent door" (Gen. 18:1). "The LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18:17). A friend is one whom we can share intimate secrets, disclose purposes, enjoy closeness and walk alongside knowing that he is dependable. A knowledge of God, not a display of gift, is essential for the path of faith. The altar, the tent and the well were features of the life of the pilgrim patriarch in his fellowship with God.

THE PATH OF FAITH

"By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). He left "Ur of the Chaldees". He left Hur, the moon god; he looked up at the "stars". He crossed the Euphrates; his descendants were to be like "Sands of the sea". A man of clear vision, we read six times that "He lifted up his eyes and looked". He dwelt in a tent; "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

The Lord taught us that; "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). We live in this world but we are not part of it, we are passing through as strangers and pilgrims. We are to forsake the

world, not improve it. We are to leave it, not mend it. Worldliness is a great hindrance to spiritual progress.

It has often been pointed out that:

Abraham was *hindered* by Terah, the old man (Gen. 11:32)

He was *harassed* by Lot, the worldly man (Gen. 13:7)

He was *hurried* by Sarah, the flesh (Gen. 16:2)

He went out: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy fathers house" (Gen. 12:1). This was a repeat of his initial call to leave Mesopotamia. The Lord, "Called him alone" (Isa. 51:2). Salvation is a personal transaction. The path of faith requires intimate, individual fellowship with God.

Men of God are tested. Abraham was tested with the RICHES of Sodom (Gen. 14:23), Joseph – to RULE his own passion, Moses – with REBELLION in the camp, David – in his hour of RELAXATION and Peter – as to the REPROACH of Christ. A man or woman is never truly known until he or she is truly tested. R.C. Chapman said that before salvation he was afraid to die: after salvation he was afraid to live. Do we dwell in the misty lowlands of unbelief or rise to the lofty peaks of faith? Do we paddle in shallow swamps of carelessness or launch out in dependence upon God? This closeness to God is developed in our prayer life. We need preaching men; we need praying men and women. Get to know God for yourself, His Person, Power, Promises and Purposes. This is the key to progress in the Path of Faith.

It is often a lonely path and always a costly path. "Lot went with him" (Gen. 12:4). Lot went with the man who went with God. Lot eventually abandoned tent life and settled in a house in Sodom, (Gen. 19:2). Is our Christian life second hand, do we just accompany others, in the assembly are you just a passenger?

He went down: In a time of famine, "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen. 12:10). He had three defections when he seemed to lose sight of the promises. He said, "They will kill me" (Gen. 12:12). How could they kill him when the "seed" that God had so often promised had not yet been born?

He went up: "Abram went up out of Egypt" (Gen. 13:1). He went up to "Bethel" (Gen. 13:3 – the House of God). He went back to where it all went wrong. Failure need not be final. Too often saints leave and they do not come back. When repentance and confession is evident, God will forgive and restore.

He went on: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Gen. 13:17). "The Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12:6). "The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land" (Gen. 13:7). The opposition had doubled. In chapter 13, we also read for the first time about "strife" and "brethren" (Gen. 13:8). The first problem dealt with at Corinth is contentions (1Cor. 1:11). Division allows the enemy to strengthen.

Abraham, the Friend of God was:-

A MAN OF FAITH – He went out but did not know where (Heb. 11:8). He believed God would grant the promised seed but he did not know how (Acts 7:5). He was willing to offer up Isaac but he did not know why (Heb. 11:17).

A MAN OF SEPARATION – God made many promises about what He would give to Abram, yet he spent most of his life giving things up. He gave up Ur (world), Terah (his father, Acts 7:4), Lot (worldly man), Ishmael (carnal man), Isaac (his only son, Gen. 22:2) and even parted with his beloved Sarah ("Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" Gen. 23:2). All who will live in faith following the greatest example of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, will find it is a lowly life of separation and self denial.

A MAN OF PURITY – In the energy of the flesh, he produced Ishmael, (Gen. 16:16). In Genesis 17:5 God changed his name to Abraham, the father of many nations and gave him the sign of the circumcision of the flesh to verify the everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:13).

A MAN OF HUMILITY – "He bowed himself toward the ground" (Gen. 18:2); "Abraham fell upon his face" (Gen. 17:17); "Which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). God will lift us up if we get low enough. 'Keep low if you desire to grow', is spiritual advice.

A MAN OF RULE – God said "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). How unlike the family of Lot. Sarah could call Abraham "lord" as he called God "Lord" four times (Gen. 18:27-32). In the Bible, we only see glimpses of the lives of great men as they appear in public. God knew about the home life of the "Friend of God". When Abraham was hidden from public view things were right before God at home.

A PRINCELY MAN – God promised to give him the land yet for one hundred years, he passed through possessing none of it except a burying place for his dear wife. For that he weighed out the price; "Four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant" (Gen. 23:16). As the man of faith passed through, the heathen of the land testifies and said; "Thou art a mighty prince among us" (Gen. 23:6). "And Abraham journeyed, going on still..." (Gen. 12:9). We shall consider him at the following locations:-

MOREH "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem (Sychar, John 4), unto the plain (oaks) of Moreh" (Gen. 12:6). "And there builded he an altar unto the LORD" (v7); "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent" (v8). For one hundred years, from seventy five to one hundred and seventy five, Abram's tent of camels hair was searched by storm and sand. Separated from his family and his country: he passed through the land; he paid his way with his faithful Sarah by his side; he arranged the marriage of his son to preserve him from

the heathen; there was no foundation in his tent; the only things which he built were altars.

MAMRE "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre (fatness), which is in Hebron (fellowship), and built there an altar unto the LORD" (Gen. 13:18). There was *faith* in his walk, *fatness* in his soul, *fellowship* with God and *fragrance* in his worship. His altar went up (praise), his well went down (provision), his tent was for moving on (as a pilgrim).

MORIAH "Get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2). When his hopes were high, after twenty five years of waiting, he now had been granted the promised seed. He was familiar with God's voice. Character is moulded by discipline. Nearness to God is very costly. He is now to enter into God's thoughts as to offering up human sacrifice. God looked down the long corridors of time, He saw, "The place afar off", God, "Spared not His Own Son" (Rom. 8:32). "The friend of God", must walk a lonely pilgrimage. Abraham went out from the *relationships* of his former life (Heb. 11:9). He yielded the *right* of first choice (Gen. 13:9). He *refused* the riches of Sodom (Gen. 14:23) and he grieved as he cast out the bondwoman and her son (Gen. 21:10-11). Finally, "He that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son" (Heb. 11:17). All Abraham had left was God and the Word of God.

He learned that the Blessor (God) was greater than the blessing (the seed). "Abraham rose up early in the morning". This was a GOING OUT INTO THE UNEXPLAINED. A GOING ON TO THE UNEXPLORED. A GOING UP TO THE UNEXPECTED. God told him, WHO ("thine only son, Isaac"), WHAT ("A burnt offering"), WHERE ("Moriah"), WHEN ("Third day"). A day, a night, a day, a night, "the third day". It was a long journey but God never told him WHY. Trials are the allotment of God's dear people. Tests are often unexpected. Trouble comes suddenly. At Calvary it was asked, "Why, what evil hath He done?" (Luke 23:22). At the cross the Lord Himself asked, "Why ... Me?" (Psa. 22:1).

"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah Jireh" (God will see, God will provide – Newberry) (Gen. 22:14). In prison Paul said, "But my God shall supply all your need (provide for, fulfil every need of yours) according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). God's peace is better than knowing the reason why. God wanted Abraham, his faith, his heart, more than his greatest blessing, his only son. This is the last record, the highest point, of God speaking directly to Abraham.

MACHPELAH "Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah" (Gen. 23:19). The path of faith led by the oak of Moreh, the plain of Mamre, the mountain of Moriah. Now we see him at MACHPELAH – which means "double, the place of two doors". Abraham believed there was a door in and a door out; a way in and a way out of death. Abraham

believed in resurrection. He offered Isaac; "Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). Sarah had been his faithful wife, sharing his pilgrim tent as they tramped the path together. She died aged one hundred and twenty seven. Now he is left lonely. "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her". This is the first record of a man weeping. Resurrection will end all sorrows. We "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1Thess. 4:13).

God is pleased to be called, "The God of Abraham" (Matt. 22:32), "The friend of God" (James 2:23). The Princely Pilgrim has passed on his way to his fatherland beyond the stars. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

The Cry of the Suffering Christ

W. J. Hocking

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? why art Thou far from My salvation, from the words of My groaning? My God I cry by day, and Thou answerest not; and by night, and there is no rest for Me: and Thou art holy, Thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:1-3)

In Psalm 22 we have one of the many Old Testament prophecies which refer directly to our Lord Jesus Christ. This one, however, is distinguished from the rest because it foretells facts concerning His unique and unfathomable sufferings which are not to be found in other predictions. Here we have them in all their simple, solemn, and pathetic sweetness from the lips of the Holy Sufferer Himself.

Three Outstanding Messianic Psalms

Many Psalms give glimpses of Jehovah's Anointed One Who was to come, but three of them are conspicuous among the rest by the vivid details of His sufferings which they make known beforehand. Besides Psalm 22, there are Psalm 69 and Psalm 102. All three foretell in words of song the amazing pathway of the Hope of Israel laughed to scorn by all who saw Him and the Saviour of men without a place to lay His head. Each of the three Psalms presents its own particular phase of the sufferings of Christ followed by its appropriate sequel, but the one which touches our affection and devotion most deeply is Psalm 22.

The theme of Psalm 69 is the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ as He unflinchingly bore the reproach of Jehovah in the face of those who hated Him without a cause.

High and low were His enemies. Those that sat in the gate spoke against Him, and He was the song of the drunkards. "Save Me, O God," He cried, "for the waters are come into My soul." Jehovah heard and

answered, as the latter part of the Psalm shews. God will bring righteous and overwhelming retribution upon the ungodly generation that rejected and crucified their Messiah. The sufferings caused by the enmity of man are followed by the righteous judgment of those who caused those sufferings.

Psalm 22 is differently framed, and its theme is unique. Here, though the sufferings depicted are far deeper and more poignant, the result for man is not judicial but merciful. Not a word is uttered about wrath and judgment for man. Indeed, one might almost call Psalm xxii. the nearest approach in the Old Testament to the revelation of the super-abounding grace of God in the New. Instead of thunderbolts of wrath from God falling upon those who maltreated the Messiah, the Psalm ends with praise arising to God from all mankind. The sufferings of Christ will yield what the whole world has never yet rendered to God—united and universal praise. Now, there is praise from a few here and a few there; but, the Psalm views a time when all the world will be rejoicing in God and giving Him what is due to His name, giving Him, in fact, what man's tongue was designed to render—intelligent and heartfelt praise. And "in that day" all the "kindreds of the nations" will worship before Jehovah of Israel in consequence of the sufferings of Christ which are set forth in the prophetic monologue of this Psalm.

Psalm 102 also celebrates the sufferings of Christ. There Messiah is presented in His humiliation among and by men and in His invariable attitude of meek and lowly submission to whatever was the will of God. The Psalm is called "the prayer of the afflicted when He is overwhelmed." In His infinite greatness, Christ "emptied Himself," and obediently took the poor man's place in a world of self-sufficiency and self-exaltation. He was forsaken of men, and left to mourn "as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." In His distress, Messiah cried, "O My God," desiring that He might not be taken away in the midst of His days. Thereupon Jehovah vindicates His suffering and outcast Son (vers. 24-27). Though the days of His humiliation, might be shortened, was He not the Creator of the earth and the heavens? All creation perishes, but Messiah abides unchanged continually, the Same "yesterday and today and for ever." Thus, the prayer of the afflicted One is answered by a divine witness to the Intrinsic glory of His person; and the passage is quoted in Heb. i. 10-12 as a crowning testimony to the glory of the eternal Son, by Whom God spoke to men in New Testament days.

Sufferings and Praises

In Psalm 22, however, the sufferings of Christ are from God. Forsaking by God is expressed in its opening stanzas, and affords the key to the whole Psalm. The ferocity of men appears as in other Psalms, but the abandonment of the Messiah of Israel by the Holy One of Israel is, as it must necessarily be, the predominating

features of the prophecy. Moreover, it is the Holy Sufferer Himself Who confesses that He is forsaken by His God. He Who endured it describes it. He is, indeed, the Speaker throughout this Psalm. And as He records His own sufferings, so He declares the praises to God that follow as their effect. We learn that propitiation or atonement being accomplished, the earth, in due course, will become full of praises to God.

You will recollect how beautifully this combination of propitiation and praise is portrayed in Leviticus 16 by the blood and incense. There the great work of Christ's atonement is foreshown in type. The blood of both the bullock and the goat is taken from the court of the tabernacle into the most holy place and sprinkled there upon and before the mercy-seat. Aaron enters that most holy place where Jehovah's presence rests enthroned upon the mercy-seat with blood and incense. The sprinkling of the blood of sacrifice in the required manner is accompanied by the fragrant fumes rising from the burning incense and affording a sweet odour to Him Who sits between the cherubim. Thus the type illustrates how the incense of praise is intimately associated with the propitiation Christ made in respect of our sins. His atoning work is the abiding basis for the believer's worship now, and for the homage of all men in the millennial day and kingdom.

As we are reminded, the Father "seeketh" worshippers; and if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been constituted worshippers on the basis of the propitiatory work of the Lord Jesus, and the Father seeks that we worship Him as we are thereby entitled to do. What then can we offer to God the Father that will be acceptable? Shall we bring any material offering in our hands? Shall we bring anything in our hearts springing from our own natural affections and efforts? You surely know that we can find nothing in ourselves worthy of His acceptance.

Where then as worshippers shall we find what is sure to be acceptable to God the Father? Everything that concerns the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is well-pleasing to the Father. And if one subject concerning Him is more acceptable than another, it is that which relates to His sufferings and death, whereby "God was glorified in Him." As worshippers, therefore, we need to have in our hearts a clear sense of the vast work of atonement accomplished upon the cross when He, the blessed Son of God, Who knew no sin, was "made sin for us" by God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Scripture often refers to Christ's atonement in easy words that even an infant may recite, but how profound and unfathomable is their full significance! They are, however, for us to meditate upon continually, allowing the Holy Spirit to develop and enlarge their meaning and implication before our eyes so that our hearts may break forth in worthier songs of praise as we remember that the holy, perfect, sinless Son Of God was upon the cross "made sin for us" by God. We cannot fully

understand the profound doctrine, nor need we do so in order to worship God. But when we are before God in "the holiest of all" and recall that the death of Christ is the most notable Occurrence in the world's history and that something was done there and then of immeasurable value and requiring no repetition, then songs of irrepressible praise will swell within us. The incense of acceptable praise will ascend to the eternal throne.

Let us bear clearly in mind that in this Psalm we hear the words of Christ Himself addressed to God. Most of us are familiar with the bitter cry which forms the forefront of the Psalm and provides the keynote to its pervading theme. We read, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Here the pathetic words occur prophetically. In the Gospels they are found historically. Matthew and Mark record that the Lord uttered them upon the cross. In the depths of His anguish, the Lord used the words, having the fullest sense of their profound significance and also the knowledge that the prophecies of Psalm xxii. were being fulfilled in Himself. At the due moment He had appeared in the world for the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In this work, the Blessed One stood alone—the God-forsaken One. This awful experience He Himself proclaimed aloud that whosoever would might hear—"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" As so often, those who heard did not understand His speech. They said, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him." That this crucified One should thus address God in heaven was beyond their comprehension. The fact is that therein lies the central truth of the propitiation which Christ made for our sins and for the whole world.

This occasion is, I believe, the first time that we read in the Gospels of our Lord using the words, "My God," when addressing Him. The Son was constantly in communion with the Father, hearing His word and doing His commandments. In converse with His Father, we read of Him answering and saying, "I praise Thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in Thy sight" (Matt. 11:25, 26).

This communion of the Son with the Father was unbroken, not only during His public ministry when He was preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the sick, and doing His multitudinous deeds of mercy among men, but also, as you will remember, during that solemn midnight hour in Gethsemane. There the Lord was alone, apart from His disciples, prostrate upon the ground, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Yet in this agony of anticipation, the Blessed One was not altogether alone. As He said to His disciples earlier that night, Ye "shall leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). Throughout His "strong crying and tears," communion with the Father was unbroken. "Abba, Father," He cried. "O My Father, if it be possible . . ." "O

My Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." Knowing fully what the Father's will had decreed for the morrow, the obedient Son acquiesced in Gethsemane as He had always done. "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

But here the Lord is speaking from the cross. It is now not "My Father" as in the garden, but "My God." The question of sin has arisen, and God, Who is Judge of all, is the appropriate name of address. God is the righteous governor of the world. His nature is opposed to sin, and His essence demands the punishment of sin. There can be no communion between holiness and unholiness, between light and darkness. And there, Him Who knew no sin God had made sin for us. In the consciousness of sin-bearing, and of being "made a curse for us," He exclaimed, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

So our Lord in the midst of His suffering for sin confessed Himself forsaken by His God, but still addressed Him as "My God." This relationship of Jesus subsisted from His earliest infancy. In this very Psalm, He declares, "Thou art My God from My mother's belly" (ver. 10) From the manger in Bethlehem right onwards He the perfect and blessed Man, recognized God as the One Whom He obeyed and on Whom He depended. But here it was a time of noontide darkness, and there was an immeasurable difference. His God in Whom He trusted had forsaken Him! and Why?

Christ had come into the world to take the place of the unholy and unrighteous under the judgment of the Righteous and Holy God. He Himself was the Holy One. "That Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," the angel said to Mary (Luke 1:35). The very demons in Capernaum said to Him, "I know Thee Who Thou art: the Holy One of God." And what charge did Peter lay against the Jews after Pentecost? "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just" (Acts 3:14). It was the fact that the Lord Jesus had been presented to His people as the Holy One. And when the apostle referred to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:27), quoting from Psalm 16:10, he said, "Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption."

But here Christ, the Holy One, acknowledges His God as the Holy One: "O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not . . . but Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." What is the explanation? The Holy One was the sin-bearer. The Just One stood in the place of the unjust. "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree." Oh, deepest of all deepest depths! Oh, profoundest of all unravelled mysteries that this should be! The human heart stands still in silent awe before the impenetrable veil for ever screening from mortal gaze the Saviour in that dread hour. One only was there in the darkness and in the shadow of death. He alone can speak of it. He has spoken. His words are before us. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken ME?"

We cannot understand this cry of anguish wrung from the heart of Christ, nor fathom its import. Apart from its interpretation, however, we possess the truth and blessedness of the fact through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit. Our faith lays hold of this poignant utterance of the suffering Christ. It tells us of the price paid for our redemption. It measures for us the value of the sacrifice made upon the cross for our sins and for the glory of God in respect of them. The Holy Christ was forsaken by the Holy God!

Hence, the more we meditate upon this great cry in the presence of the Lord from Whose lips it came, the more we learn of His atoning work. Then He was standing where He had never stood before—beneath the weight of our guilt and of God's wrath against it. During His life of ministry, He was not bearing our sins, as some wrongly imagine. It was upon the tree that He bore our sins in His own body, as Peter tells us. There He suffered for us, for our forgiveness, for our redemption, that we might be brought to God, that the blessings of God in all their fullness might flow unhindered into our souls.

But there is another aspect of the work of atonement that we must never forget. Because of man's sin God's glory was at stake. God's eternal attribute of justice was in question. Was God the Holy One Who abhorred sin? or was He One Who would favour sin and overlook its due penalty? The Lord Jesus supplies the answer in His Person, and upon the cross He upheld the immutable holiness of God. There He declared in the ears of the universe, "Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel," witnessing to that holiness by the confession of His own abandonment.

The Holy Sufferer had been made sin and was deserted, left alone because of it. In His agony Christ called aloud to His God. "My God, My God," He said. The repetition means much—deep emotion, pressing need. When Abraham stood at the altar on which Isaac lay bound, holding aloft the knife to slay his only son, the angel of Jehovah called, Abraham, Abraham. Twice the father's name was called from heaven. There was urgent need for the patriarch to hearken. Not a moment must be lost. More urgent still was the cry of the blessed Lord. He was in the depths of His anguish, submerged beneath the waves of divine wrath against sin; and the cry rang out in the desolate waste, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Walking with God

William Cowper

Oh! for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.

Return, O holy Dove, return!
Sweet the messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made thee mourn
And drove thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.

Tomorrow

He was going to be all that a mortal could be -
Tomorrow;

No one should be kinder nor braver than he -
Tomorrow;

A friend who was troubled and weary he knew
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it, too;
On him he would call and see what he could do -
Tomorrow.

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
Tomorrow;

And he thought of the folks he would fill with delight -
Tomorrow;

It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;
"More time I'll have to give others," he'd say -
"Tomorrow."

The greatest of workers this man would have been -
Tomorrow;

The world would have known him had he ever seen -
Tomorrow;

But the fact is he died, and he faded from view,
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do -
Tomorrow

(author unknown)

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Joel Portman

The Church Which is His Body

The Local Assembly

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. A mystical entity | A physical entity |
| 2. No outward testimony on earth | All outward testimony on earth |
| 3. No member can be severed | Anyone may have to be "put away" |
| 4. Gender unrecognized | Gender clearly recognized |
| 5. Unaffected by Satan | Can be affected by Satan |
| 6. Full unity in the Body | Can be marked by divisions |
| 7. Never can be defiled | Can be defiled |
| 8. Never can cease to exist | Can cease to exist |
| 9. Exists for eternity after inception | Ceases to exist at the rapture |
| 10. Never all together until the rapture | All are to meet together regularly |
| 11. Received by God to enter | Received by the assembly to enter |
| 12. The Lord preserves it faultless | Brethren seek to preserve it |
| 13. Public preaching not its function | Public preaching one of its functions |
| 14. Lord takes care of it | Responsible men are to care for it |
| 15. No personal fitness to enter it | Sound in life and doctrine to enter |
| 16. Never unsaved in it | May be unsaved in it |

IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THESE DISTINCTIONS

1. Spared from Confusion in **Interpretation**: How could we interpret such texts as Matt. 18: 16-17 or Rev. 1:4,2:5 etc.?
2. Spared from Confusion in **Application**: Speaking of the persecuted church of China or etc.!
3. Spared from Confusion in **Reception**: Do assemblies receive into the fellowship on the ground of being in the one body?
Or on the basis of genuine fellowship?
4. Spared from Confusion in **Discipline**: How could the truth of discipline be carried out without these distinctions?
I Cor. 5:13, Matt. 18:15-20

IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY FOR:

1. Purposes of God:
 - Glorifying of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - Displaying of the divine order in Headship
 - Spiritual growth & development in the Saints
2. Blessing of His Saints:
 - Safety--I Cor. 5: 5, 12-13
 - Strength--I Cor. 14:3,31; I Thess. 3:8
 - Security--I Thess. 4:9
3. Lessons for Angels: I Cor. 11:10, Eph. 3:10

SOME PURPOSES FOR THE CHURCH (BODY AND/OR LOCAL ASSEMBLY)

Acts 15:13-18

1. Have a body composed of those who recognize greatness of Christ through Divine Revelations
Matt. 16:13-16, Acts 8:37 (Eunuch's confession)
2. Have companies of believers confessing Him in Worship, Practical recognition of Lordship, Testimony
Matt. 16:16, 18:20, 1 Cor. 1:3, Acts 9:14, 2 Cor. 1:23, 2 Tim. 2:22, 1 Pet. 1:17
3. Display God's Power to uphold and preserve despite opposition of Satan
Matt. 16:18, 28:18-20
4. Provide sphere where Divine authority can be recognized and carried out on rebellious earth conditions
Matt. 16:19, 18:19
5. Be a means by which God displays His manifold Wisdom and Grace
Eph. 3:6-10
6. Provide a venue for Christian Fellowship and Function of Corporate Priesthood
"priesthood" involves worship, giving thanks, praise, all function toward the Lord
7. Be an instrument to further missionary work to reach the lost.
Acts 13:1-4. All missionary/gospel exercise in NT found in fellowship with local assembly.