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STUDIES IN
THE SERMON
ON THE MOUNT



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STUDIES IN
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



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BY

OSWALD CHAMBERS

Author of

"Shade of His Hand," "Baffled to Fight Better,"

"Biblical Psychology," etc.

"We may all be disciples. Why should we not be scholars of the one Teacher? Come, let Him lure thee—give up all other teachers and hear this Teacher sent from God."

LONDON:
SIMPKIN MARSHALL, LTD.
STATIONERS' HALL COURT, E.C.4

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Fourth Edition.

NOV 16 1948

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE ALDEN PRESS (OXFORD) LTD., OXFORD

INTRODUCTION

IN order to understand the Sermon on the Mount, it is necessary to have the mind of the Preacher, and this knowledge can be gained by anyone who will receive the Holy Spirit (see Luke XI. 13, John XX. 22, Acts XIX. 2). The Holy Ghost is the only expounder of the teachings of Jesus. The one abiding method of interpretation of the teachings of Jesus is the Spirit of Jesus in the heart of a believer applying His principles to the particular circumstances in which he is placed. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, says Paul, that you may *make out* what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Beware of placing Our Lord as Teacher first instead of as Saviour. That tendency is prevalent to-day, and it is a dangerous tendency. We must know Him first as Saviour before His teaching has any meaning for us, or before it has any meaning other than that of an ideal which leads to despair. Fancy coming to men and women with defective lives and defiled hearts and wrong main-springs, and telling them to be pure in heart! What is the use of giving us an ideal we cannot possibly attain? We are happier without knowing it. If Jesus is only a Teacher, then all He can do is to tantalise us by erecting a standard we cannot come anywhere near. But if we know Him first as Saviour, by being born again from above, we know that He did not come to teach us only: *He came to make us what He teaches we should be.* The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is having His way with us.

The Sermon on the Mount must produce despair in the natural man ; and that is the very thing Jesus means it to do, because immediately we get to despair we are willing to come to Jesus as paupers and to receive from Him. "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—that is the first principle of the Kingdom. So long as we have a conceited, self-righteous notion that we can do the thing if God will help us, God has to allow us to go on until we break the neck of our ignorance over some obstacle, then we are willing to come and receive from Him. The bedrock in Jesus Christ's Kingdom is poverty, not possession ; not decisions for Jesus Christ, but a sense of absolute futility—"I cannot begin to do it." Then, says Jesus, "Blessed are you." That is the entrance, and it does take us a long while to believe we are poor. The knowledge of our own poverty brings us to the moral frontier where Jesus Christ works.

N.B.—The Conscious and Subconscious mind.

Every mind has two compartments—conscious and subconscious. We say that the things we hear and read slip away from memory, they do not really, they go into the subconscious mind. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring back into the conscious mind the things that are stored in the subconscious. In studying the Bible never go on the line that because you do not understand it, therefore it is of no use. A truth may be of no use to you just now, but when the circumstances arise in which that truth is needed, the Holy Spirit will bring it back to your remembrance. This accounts for the curious emergence of the statements of Jesus ; we say—"I wonder where that word came from." "He shall bring back to your remembrance the things I have said unto you." The point is—will I obey Him when He does bring it back ? If I discuss the matter

with someone else, the probability is that I will not obey. "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. . . ." Always trust the originality of the Holy Spirit when He brings a word back.

Bear in mind this twofold aspect of the mind, there is nothing supernatural or uncanny about it, it is simply a knowledge of how God has made us. It is foolish, therefore, to estimate only by what you consciously understand at the time. There may be much you do not begin to grasp the meaning of, but as you go on storing your mind with Bible knowledge, the Holy Spirit will bring back to your conscious mind the word you need and apply it to your particular circumstances. These three things always work together—my moral intelligence, the spontaneous originality of the Holy Spirit, and the setting of a life lived in communion with God.



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STUDY No. 1.

HIS TEACHING AND OUR TRAINING.

Matthew V. 1-24.

(1) **DIVINE DISPROPORTION.** Matthew V. 1-12.

(a) The "Mines" of God. vv. 1-10 (cf. Luke VI. 20-26).

(b) The Motive of Godliness. vv. 11-12.

(2) **DIVINE DISADVANTAGE.** Matthew V. 13-16.

(a) Concentrated Service. v. 13.

(b) Conspicuous Setting. vv. 14-16.

(3) **DIVINE DECLARATION.** Matthew V. 17-20.

(a) His Mission. vv. 17-19.

(b) His Message. v. 20.

(1) **DIVINE DISPROPORTION**, vv. 1-12. Our Lord began His discourse by saying—"Blessed are . . .," and His hearers must have been staggered by what followed. According to Jesus, they were to be blessed in every condition which from earliest childhood they had been taught to regard as a curse. Our Lord was talking to Jews, and they believed that the sign of the blessing of God was material prosperity in every shape and form, and yet Jesus says—"Blessed are you for exactly the opposite. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are they that mourn."

(a) **The "Mines" of God.** vv. 1-10.

The first time you read the Beatitudes they appear beautiful and simple and unstartling statements, and they

go unobserved into the subconscious mind. We are so used to reading the sayings of Jesus that they slip over us unheeded, they sound sweet and pious and wonderfully simple, but in reality they are like spiritual torpedoes that burst and explode in the subconscious mind, and when the Holy Spirit brings them back to our consciousness we realise what startling statements they are. The Beatitudes, for instance, seem merely mild and beautiful precepts for unworldly people but of very little use for the stern world in which we live. We soon find, however, that they contain the dynamite of the Holy Ghost, they explode like a spiritual "mine" when the circumstances of our life require them to do so, and rip and tear and revolutionise all our conceptions.

The test of a disciple is obedience to the light when these things come to the conscious mind. It is not that I hunt through the Bible for some precept to obey (Jesus Christ's teaching never leads me to take myself as a moral prig); but that I live so in touch with God that the Holy Spirit can continually bring some word of His and apply it to the circumstances I am in. I am not brought to the test until the Holy Spirit brings the word back.

It is not a question of applying the Beatitudes literally, but of allowing the life of God to invade you by regeneration, and then of soaking your mind in the teaching of Jesus which slips down into the subconscious mind; by and bye a set of circumstances arises when one of His statements emerges, and instantly you have to decide whether you will accept the tremendous spiritual revolution that will be produced if you do obey this precept of Jesus. If you do obey it, your actual life becomes different; and you find you have the power to obey it if you will. That is the way the Holy Spirit works in the heart of a

disciple. The teaching of Jesus comes with astonishing discomfort to begin with, because it is out of all proportion to our natural way of looking at things ; but Jesus puts in a new sense of proportion and we have slowly to form our walk and conversation on the line of His precepts. Remember that our Lord's teaching applies only to His disciples.

(b) The Motive of Godliness. vv. 11-12.

The motive at the back of the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount is love for God. Read the Beatitudes with your mind fixed on God, and you will realise their neglected side. Their meaning in relationship to men is so obvious that it scarcely needs stating, but the Godward aspect is not so obvious. "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—towards God. Am I a pauper towards God? Do I know I cannot prevail in prayer ; I cannot blot out the sins of the past ; I cannot alter my disposition ; I cannot lift myself nearer God? Then I am in the very place where I am able to receive the Holy Spirit. No man can receive Holy Spirit who is not convinced he is a pauper spiritually. "Blessed are the meek"—towards God's dispensations. "Blessed are the merciful"—to God's reputation. Do I awaken sympathy for myself when I am in trouble? Then I am slandering God because the reflex thought in people's minds is—How hard God is with that man. It is easy to slander God's character because He never attempts to vindicate Himself. "Blessed are the pure in heart"—that is obviously Godward. "Blessed are the peace-makers"—between God and man, the note that was struck at the birth of Jesus.

Is it possible to carry out the Beatitudes? Never ! Unless God can do what Jesus says He can, give us the Holy Spirit who will re-make us and bear us into a new

realm. The essential life of the saint is simplicity, and Jesus makes the motive of godliness gloriously simple, viz: Be carefully careless about everything saving your relationship to Me. The motive of a disciple is to be well-pleasing to God. The true blessedness of the saint is in determinedly making and keeping God first. Herein lies the disproportion between Jesus Christ's principles and all other moral teaching: Jesus bases everything on God-realisation, while other teachers base everything on self-realisation.

There is a difference between devotion to principles and devotion to a Person. Jesus never proclaimed a cause; He proclaimed personal devotion to Himself—*For My sake*. Discipleship is based not on devotion to abstract ideals, but on devotion to a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, consequently the whole of the Christian life is stamped by originality. Whenever the Holy Spirit sees a chance of glorifying Jesus, He will take your whole personality, and simply make it blaze and glow with personal passionate devotion to the Lord Jesus. You are no longer devoted to a cause nor the devotee of a principle, but the devoted love slave of the Lord Jesus. No man on earth has that love unless the Holy Ghost has imparted it to him. Men may admire Him and respect Him and reverence Him, but no man can *love* God until the Holy Ghost has shed abroad that love in his heart (see Romans V. 5.) The only Lover of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Holy Ghost.

Jesus puts all this blessedness of high virtue and rare felicity on the ground of—*For My sake*. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.” It is not suffering for conscience' sake, or for convictions'

sake, or because of the ordinary troubles of life, but something other than all that—*For My sake*.

“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake.” Jesus did not say—Rejoice when men separate you from their company because of your own crochetty notions—but when they reproach you *for My sake*. When you begin to deport yourself among men as a saint, they will leave you absolutely alone, you will be reviled and persecuted. No man can stand that unless he is in love with Jesus Christ, he cannot do it for a conviction or for a creed, but he can do it for a Being whom he loves. Devotion to a Person is the only thing that tells; devotion to death to a Person, not devotion to a creed or a doctrine.

“Who that one moment has the least descried Him,
Dimly and faintly, hidden and afar—
Doth not despise all excellence beside Him,
Pleasures and powers that are not and that are.

Ay, amid all men bear himself thereafter
Smit with a solemn and a sweet surprise,
Dumb to their scorn and turning on their laughter
Only the dominance of earnest eyes.”

(2) DIVINE DISADVANTAGE. vv. 13-16.

The disadvantage of a saint in the present order of things is that he has to make his confession of Jesus not in secret, but glaringly public. It would doubtless be to our advantage from the self-realisation standpoint to keep quiet, and nowadays the tendency is growing stronger to say—Be a Christian, live a holy life, but don’t talk about it. Our Lord uses as illustrations the most conspicuous

things known to men, e.g., salt, light, and a city set on a hill, and He says—Be like that in your home, in your business, in your church ; be conspicuously a Christian for ridicule or for respect according to the mood of the people you are with. Again in Matthew X. Our Lord taught the need to be conspicuous proclaimers of the truth and not to cover it up for fear of wolfish men. (vv. 26-28.)

(a) **Concentrated Service.** v. 13.

Not *consecrated* service, but *concentrated*. Consecration would soon be changed into sanctification if we would only concentrate on what God wants. Concentration means pinning down the four corners of the mind until it is settled on what God wants. The literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount is child's play ; the interpretation by the Holy Spirit is the stern work of a saint, and it requires spiritual concentration.

"Ye are the salt of the earth." Some modern teachers seem to think Our Lord said "Ye are the *sugar* of the earth," meaning that gentleness and winsomeness without curativeness is the ideal of the Christian. Our Lord's illustration of a Christian is salt, and salt is the most concentrated thing known. Salt preserves wholesomeness and prevents decay. It is a disadvantage to be salt. Think of the action of salt in a wound and you realise that. If you get salt into a wound, it hurts, and if God's children get amongst those who are "raw" towards God, their presence hurts. The man who is wrong with God is like an open wound, and when salt gets in it causes annoyance and distress and he is spiteful and bitter. The disciples of Jesus in the present dispensation preserve society from corruption. The "salt" causes excessive irritation which spells persecution for the saint.

How are we to maintain the healthy salty tang of saint-

liness? By remaining rightly related to God through Jesus Christ. In the present dispensation, Jesus says, the kingdom of God is within you without observation, men are called on to live out His teaching in an age that will not recognise Him, and that spells limitation and very often persecution. This is the day of the humiliation of the saints; in the next dispensation it will be the glorification of the saints, and the Kingdom of God will be outside as well as inside men.

(b) **Conspicuous Setting.** vv. 14-16.

The illustrations Our Lord uses are all conspicuous viz., salt, light and a city set on a hill. There is no possibility of mistaking them. Salt to preserve from corruption has to be placed in the midst of it, and before it can do its work it causes excessive irritation which spells persecution. Light attracts bats and night moths, and points out the way for burglars as well as for honest people: Jesus would have us remember that men will certainly defraud us. A city is the gathering place for all the human driftwood that will not work for its own living, and the Christian will have any number of parasites and ungrateful hangers-on. All these considerations form a powerful temptation to pretend we are not salt, to put our light under a bushel, and to cover our city with a fog. But Jesus will have nothing in the nature of a covert disciple.

"Ye are the light of the world." You cannot soil light, you may try to grasp a beam of light with the sootiest hand, but you leave no mark on the light. A sunbeam may shine into the filthiest hovel in the slums of a city but it cannot be soiled. A merely moral man or an innocent man may be soiled in spite of his integrity, but the man who is made pure by the Holy Ghost cannot be soiled, he is as light. Thank God for the men and women who are

spending their lives in the slums of the earth, not as social reformers to lift their brother men to cleaner styles, but as the light of God, revealing a way back to God. God keeps them as the light, unsullied. If you have been covering your light, uncover it! Walk as children of light. The light always reveals and guides, and men dislike it and prefer darkness when their deeds are evil. (John III. 19-20.)

Are we the salt of the earth? Are we the light of the world? Are we allowing God to exhibit in our lives the truth of these startling statements of Jesus?

(3) DIVINE DECLARATION. vv. 17-20.

(a) His Mission. vv. 17-19.

"I am come . . . to fulfil." An amazing word! Our shoes ought to be off our feet and every common sense mood stripped from our minds when we hear Him speak. In Him we deal with God as man, the God-Man, the representative of the whole human race in one Person. The men of His day traced their religious pedigree back to the constitution of God, and this young Nazarene Carpenter says—I am the constitution of God, consequently to them He was a blasphemer.

Our Lord places Himself as the exact meaning and fulfilment of all Old Testament prophecies. His mission, He says, is to fulfil the law and the prophets, and He further says that any man who breaks the old laws because they belong to a former dispensation, and teaches men to break them, shall suffer severe impoverishment. If the old commandments were difficult, Our Lord's principles are unfathomably more difficult. Our Lord goes behind the old law to the disposition. Everything He teaches is impossible unless He can put into me His Spirit and re-

make me from the inside. The Sermon on the Mount is quite unlike the Ten Commandments in the sense of its being absolutely unworkable unless Jesus Christ can re-make us.

There are teachers who argue that the Sermon on the Mount supersedes the Ten Commandments, and that because we are not under law but under grace it does not matter whether we honour our father and mother, whether we covet, etc. That, in practical application, is sentimental dust-throwing. To be not under the law but under grace does not mean I can do as I like. It is surprising how easily we can juggle ourselves out of Jesus Christ's principles by one or two pious sayings repeated often enough. The only safeguard is to keep personally related to God. The secret for all spiritual understanding is to walk in the light, not the light of my convictions, or of my theories, but the light that God is in. (1 John I. 7.)

(b) His Message. v. 20.

"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Think of the most upright man you know, the most moral, sterling, religious man (e.g., Nicodemus was a Pharisee, so was Saul of Tarsus—"blameless" according to the law)—who has never received the Holy Spirit, and Jesus says you must exceed his righteousness, i.e., you have to be not only as moral as the most moral man you know, but infinitely more—to be so right in your actions, so pure in your motives, that God Almighty can see nothing to blame.

Is it too strong to call that a spiritual torpedo? These statements of Jesus are the most revolutionary statements human ears ever listened to, and it needs the Holy Ghost to interpret them to us; the shallow admiration for Jesus

Christ as a Teacher that is taught to-day is of no use.

Who is going to climb that "hill of the Lord?" To stand before God and say—My hands are clean, my heart is pure? Who can do it? Who can stand in the eternal light of God and have nothing for Him to blame in him? Only the Son of God, and if the Son of God is formed in me by regeneration and sanctification, He will exhibit Himself through my mortal flesh. That is the ideal of Christianity—"that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

Your disposition, says Jesus, must be right to its depths, not only your conscious motives but your unconscious motives. Now we are beyond our depth. Can God make me pure in heart? Blessed be the Name of God, He can! Can He alter my disposition so that when circumstances reveal me to myself, I am amazed? He can. Can He impart to me His nature until it is identically the same as His own? He can. That and nothing less is the meaning of His Cross and Resurrection.

"Except your righteousness *exceed*. . . ." The righteousness of the scribes and Pharises was right not wrong; that they did other than righteousness is obvious, but Jesus is talking here of their *righteousness* which His disciples are to exceed. What exceeds right doing if it be not right being? Right being without right doing is possible by refusing to enter into relationship with God, but that cannot exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus' message here is that unless we exceed their righteousness in doing (the Pharisees were nothing in being), we shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven. The monks in the Middle Ages refused to take the responsibility of life, all they wanted was to be and not to do and they shut themselves away from the world,

that does not exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. People to-day want to do the same by cutting themselves off from this and that relationship. If Our Lord had meant exceed in being only, He would not have used the word "exceed," He would have said—"Except your righteousness *be otherwise than*. . . ." You cannot exceed the righteousness of the most moral man you know on the line of what he does, but only on the line of what he *is*.

The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount must produce despair in the natural man; if it does not, it is because you have paid no attention to it. Pay attention to Jesus Christ's teaching and you will soon say—"Who is sufficient for these things?" "Blessed are the pure in heart." If Jesus Christ means what He says, where am I in regard to it? *Come unto Me*—says Jesus.

STUDY No. 2.

ACTUAL AND REAL.

Matthew V. 21-42.

- (1) **THE ACCOUNT WITH PURITY.** Matt. V. 21-30.
 - (a) Disposition and Deeds. vv. 21-22.
 - (b) Temper of Mind and Truth of Manner. vv. 23-26.
 - (c) Lust and License. vv. 27-28.
 - (d) Direction of Discipline. vv. 29-30.
- (2) **THE ACCOUNT WITH PRACTICE.** Matt. V. 31-37
 - (a) Speech and Sincerity. v. 33.
 - (b) Irreverent Reverence. vv. 34-36.
 - (c) Integrity. v. 37.
- (3) **THE ACCOUNT WITH PERSECUTION.** Matt. V. 38-42.
 - (a) Insult. vv. 38-39.
 - (b) Extortion. v. 40.
 - (c) Tyranny. vv. 41-42.

A man cannot begin to take in anything he has not begun to think about, consequently until a man is born again what Jesus says does not mean anything to him. The Bible is a universe of revelation facts which have no meaning for me until I am born from above, when I am born again I see in it what I never saw before. I am lifted into the realm where Jesus lives and I begin to see what He sees. (John III. 3.)

By Actual is meant the things we come in contact with

by our senses, and by Real is meant that which lies behind, the things we cannot get at by our senses. (cf. 2 Cor. IV. 18.) The fanatic sees only the real and ignores the actual; the materialist looks only at the actual and ignores the real. The only sane Being who ever trod this earth was Jesus Christ because in Him the actual and the real were one. Jesus Christ does not stand first in the actual world, He stands first in the real world; that is why the natural man does not bother his head about Him—"the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him." When we are born from above we begin to see the actual things in the light of the real. We say that prayer alters things, but prayer does not alter actual things half so much as it alters the man who sees the actual things. In the Sermon on the Mount Our Lord brings the actual and the real together.

(1) THE ACCOUNT WITH PURITY. vv. 21-30.

Our Lord in these verses is laying down the principle that if men are going to follow Him and obey His Spirit, they must lay their account with purity. No man can make himself pure by obeying laws. Purity is not a question of doing things rightly, but of the doer on the inside being right. Purity is difficult to define, it is best thought of as the state of heart just like the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. Purity is not innocence; innocence is the characteristic of a child, and although, profoundly speaking, a child is not pure, yet his innocence presents us with all that we understand by purity. Innocence is a beautiful thing in a child's life, but men and women ought not to be innocent, they ought to be tested and tried and pure. No man is born pure, purity is the outcome of conflict.

The pure man is not the man who has never been tried, but the man who knows what evil is and has overcome it. The same with virtue and morality, no one is born virtuous and moral, we are born un-moral. Morality is always the outcome of conflict, not of necessity. Jesus Christ demands that purity be explicit as well as implicit, that is, my actual conduct, the actual chastity of my bodily life, the actual chastity of my mind, is to be beyond the censure of Almighty God—not beyond the censure of my fellow men, that would produce Pharisaism, I can always deceive the other fellow. Jesus Christ has undertaken by His Redemption to put in me a heart so pure that God can see nothing to censure in it. That is the marvel of the Redemption—that Jesus Christ can give me a new heredity, the unsullied heredity of the Holy Spirit, and if it is there, says Jesus, it will work out in actual history.

In Matthew XV. Our Lord tells His disciples what the human heart is like—"Out of the heart proceed. . . ." and then follows the catalogue. We say—"I never felt any of those things in my heart," and we prefer to trust our innocent ignorance rather than Jesus Christ's penetration. Either Jesus Christ must be the supreme authority on the human heart or He is not worth listening to. If I make conscious innocence the test, I am likely to come to a place where I will find with a shuddering awakening that what Jesus said is true, and I will be appalled at the possibility of evil in me. If I have never been a blackguard, the reason is a mixture of cowardice and the protection of civilised life; but when I am undressed before God I find that Jesus Christ is right in His diagnosis. So long as I remain under the refuge of innocence, I am living in a fool's paradise. There is always a reason to be found

in myself when I try to disprove what Jesus says.

Jesus Christ demands that the heart of a disciple be fathomlessly pure, then unless He can give me His disposition, His teaching is tantalising ; if all He came to do was to mock me by telling me to be what I know I never can be, I can afford to ignore Him. But if He can give me His own disposition of holiness, then I begin to see how to lay my account with purity. Jesus Christ is the sternest and the gentlest of Saviours.

The Gospel of God is not that Jesus died for my sins only, but that He gave Himself for me that I might give myself to Him. God cannot take from me goodness, He will take from me badness, and will give me for it the solid goodness of the Lord Jesus. (See 2 Cor. V. 21.)

(a) Disposition and Deeds. vv. 21-22.

Our Lord is using an illustration that was familiar to the disciples. If a man disregarded the common judgment, he was in danger of being brought into an inner court, and if he was contemptuous with that court, he was in danger of the final judgment. Jesus uses this illustration of the ordinary exercise of judgment to show what the disposition of a disciple must be like, viz., that my motive, the place I cannot get at myself, must be right—the disposition behind the deed, the motive behind the actual occurrence. I may never be angry in deed, but Jesus demands the impossibility of anger in disposition. The motive of my motives, the spring of my dreams, must be so right that right deeds will naturally follow.

In Psalm CXXXIX the Psalmist is realising that he is too big for himself, and he prays—O Lord, explore me, search me out, and see if there be any way of grief in me, trace out the dreams of my dreams, the motives of my motives,

make those right, and lead me in the way everlasting. Deliverance from sin is not deliverance from conscious sin only, it is deliverance from sin in God's sight, and He can see down into a region I know nothing about. By the marvellous Atonement of Jesus Christ applied to me by the Holy Spirit, God can purify the springs of my unconscious life until the temper of my mind is unblameable in His sight.

Beware of refining away the radical aspect of Our Lord's teaching by saying that God puts in something to counteract the wrong disposition, that is a compromise. Jesus never teaches us to curb and suppress the wrong disposition; He gives us a totally new disposition, He alters the mainspring of action. Our Lord's teaching can only be interpreted by the new Spirit which He puts in; it can never be taken as a series of rules and regulations.

A man cannot imitate the disposition of Jesus, it is either there or it is not. When the Son of God is formed in me, He is formed in my human nature, and I have to put on the new man in accordance with His life and obey Him, then His disposition will work out all the time. We make our character out of the disposition we have. Character is what we make, disposition is what we are born with, and when we are born again we get a new disposition. A man must make his own character, but he cannot make his disposition, that is a gift. Our natural disposition is gifted to us by heredity; by regeneration God gives us the disposition of His Son. Jesus Christ is pure to the depths of His motives, and if His disposition can be formed in me, then I see how I can lay my account with purity. "Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again." If I will let God alter my heredity, I will become devoted to Him, and Jesus Christ has gained a disciple. Many of

us who call ourselves Christians are not devoted to Jesus.

Our Lord goes behind the old law to the disposition. Everything He says is impossible unless He can put into me His Spirit and re-make me from the inside, then I begin to see how it can be done. When a man is born from above, he does not need to pretend he is a saint, he cannot help being one. Am I going to be a spiritually real man or a whitewashed humbug? Am I a pauper in spirit or conceited with my own earnestness? We are so tremendously in earnest that we are blinded by our earnestness and never see that God is more in earnest than we are. Thank God for the absolute poverty of spirit that receives from Him all the time.

There is only one way in which as a disciple you will know that Jesus has altered your disposition, and that is by trying circumstances. When you are brought into trying circumstances, instead of feeling resentment, you will experience a most amazing change on the inside. When circumstances put you to the test you will say—"Why, bless God, this is an amazing alteration, I know now that God has altered me, because if that had happened before I would have been sour and irritable and sarcastic and spiteful, but now there is a well of sweetness on the inside which I know never came from myself." The proof that God has altered our disposition is not that we persuade ourselves He has, but that we prove He has when circumstances put us to the test. Instead of the criticism of Christians being wrong, it is absolutely right. When a man says he is born again, he is put under scrutiny, and rightly so. If we are born again of the Holy Ghost and have the life of Jesus in us by means of His Cross, we have to show it in the way we walk and talk and transact all our business.

(b) **Temper of Mind and Truth of Manner.** vv.
23-26.

Our Lord in these verses uses another illustration familiar in His day. If a man was taking a paschal lamb to the priest as an offering and remembered he had leaven in his house, he had to go back and take out the leaven before he brought his offering. We do not carry lambs to sacrifice, but the spiritual meaning of the illustration is tremendous, it emphasises the difference between reality and sincerity.

If when you come to the altar, says Jesus, there you remember your brother has ought against you, don't say another word to Me, but go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Jesus does not mention the other person, He says—*You* go. He does not say—Go half way ; first go. There is no question of your rights.

Talk about practical home-coming truth ! That hits us where we live. A man cannot stand as a humbug for one second before Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes you sensitive to things you never thought of before. Never object to the intense sensitiveness of the Holy Spirit in you when He is educating you down to the scruple ; and never discard a conviction. If it is important enough for the Holy Spirit to have brought it to your mind, that is the thing He is detecting.

The test Jesus gives is not the truth of our manner but the temper of our mind. Many of us are wonderfully truthful in manner, but our temper of mind in God's sight is rotten. The thing Jesus alters is the temper of mind. If when you come to the altar, there you remember—Jesus does not say—There you rake up something in your mind, that is where Satan gets hold of embryo Christians and makes them hyper-conscientious ; but if at the altar

there you remember. . . The inference is that the Holy Spirit brings it to your memory, never check it, say—Yes, Lord, I recognise it, and obey Him at once no matter what the humiliation is. It is impossible to do it until God has altered your temper of mind ; but if you are a saint you find you have no difficulty in doing what otherwise would be an impossible humiliation. The disposition which will not have the Son of God rule is the disposition of my claim to my right to myself ; that, and not immorality, is the essence of sin : I will possess my right to myself in this particular matter. But if my disposition has been altered, I will obey Jesus at all costs.

Watch the thing that makes you morally snort. If you have not had the temper of your mind altered by Jesus, when the Holy Spirit brings something to your memory to be put right, you will say—No, indeed, I am not going to make it up when I was in the right and they were in the wrong, they will say—I knew I would make you say you were sorry. Unless you are willing to yield absolutely your right to yourself on that point, you need not pray any more, there is a barrier absolutely higher than Calvary between you and God. That is the temper of mind in all of us until it has been altered. When it has been altered, the other temper of mind is there that makes reconciliation as natural as breathing, and to our astonishment we find we can do what we could not do before. Instantly you obey, you find the temper of your mind is real. Jesus makes us real, not only sincere. The people who are sincere without being real are not hypocrites, they are perfectly earnest and honest and desirous of fulfilling what Jesus wants, but they really cannot do it, the reason being that they have not received the One who makes them real, viz., the Holy Spirit.

Jesus brings men to the practical test. It is not that I say I am pure in heart but that I prove I am in my deeds ; I am not only sincere in manner but sincere in the attitude of my mind. All through the Sermon on the Mount the same truth is brought out. "Except your righteousness *exceed* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. . . ." We have to fulfil all the old law and do much more, and the only way it can be done is by letting Jesus alter us on the inside, and by remembering that everything He tells us to do we *can* do. The whole point of Our Lord's teaching is—Obey Me, and you will find you have a wealth of power on the inside.

(c) **Lust and License.** vv. 27-28.

Our Lord goes to the root of the matter every time with no apology. Sordid? Frantically sordid, but sin is frantically sordid, and there is no excuse in false modesty or in refusing to face the music of the devil's work in this life. Jesus Christ faced it and He will make us face it.

Our natural idea of purity is that it means according obedience to certain laws and regulations, but that is apt to be prudery. There is nothing prudish in the Bible. The Bible insists on purity, not prudery. There are bald shocking statements in the Bible, but from cover to cover it will do nothing in the shape of harm to the pure in heart, it is to the impure in heart that these things are corrupting. If Jesus Christ can only make us prudish, we should be horrified if we had to go and work amongst the moral abominations of heathendom, but with the purity Jesus Christ puts in He can take us where He went Himself, and make us capable of facing the vilest moral corruption unspotted, kept pure as He is Himself. We are scandalised at social immoralities because our social sense of honour is upset, but are we cut to the heart when we see a man

live in pride against God? When the Holy Ghost is at work He puts in a new standard of judgment and proportion.

Remember that every religious sentiment that is not carried out on its right level carries with it a secret immorality, you are privately immoral if not publicly. That is the way human nature is constituted, whenever you allow an emotion that you do not carry out on its legitimate level, then it will react on an illegitimate level; grip it on the threshold of your mind in a vice of blood and allow it no more way. You have no business to harbour an emotion the conclusion of which you can see to be wrong.

God does not give a man a new body when he is saved, he has the same body but a new disposition. God alters the mainspring, He puts love in the place of lust. What is lust? I must have it at once—the impatience of desire. Love can wait seven years; lust can't wait two seconds. Esau and his mess of pottage is a picture of lust; Jacob serving for Rachel is a picture of love. In these verses lust is put on the lowest level, but remember, lust runs from the lowest basis of immorality right up to the very height of spiritual life. Jesus Christ penetrates right straight down to the basis of our desires. If ever a man is going to stand where lust never strikes him, it can only be because Jesus has altered his disposition. It is impossible unless Jesus Christ can do what He says He can. A disciple has to be free from the degradation of lust, and the marvel of the Redemption is that Jesus can free him from it. Jesus Christ's claim is that He can do for a man what he cannot do for himself. Jesus does not alter our human nature, it does not need altering, He alters the mainspring, and the great marvel of the salvation of Jesus is that He alters heredity. Lust is the impatience of desire; license

means—I will do what I like and care for no one ; liberty means—I have the power to do what is right.

Do you see how we are growing? The disciples were being taught by Jesus to lay their account with purity. Purity is too deep down for us to get to naturally. The only exhibition of purity is the purity in the heart of Our Lord, and that is the purity He implants in us, and He says we will know whether the purity is there by the temper of mind we exhibit when we come up against things which before would have awakened in us lust and self-desire. It is not only a question of possibility on the inside, but of a possibility that shows itself in performance. That is the only test there is, “ he that doeth righteousness is righteous.” (1 John III. 7.)

(d) Direction of Discipline. vv. 29-30.

If God has altered the disposition, where is the need for discipline? Yet in these verses Our Lord speaks of very stern discipline, to the parting with the right hand and the eye. The reason for the discipline is that our bodies have been used by the wrong disposition, and when the new disposition is put in, the old physical case is not taken away, it is left there for us to discipline and make it an obedient servant to the new disposition. (Romans VI. 19.)

“ And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” What does that mean? It means absolute unflinching sternness in dealing with the right things in yourself that are not the best. “ The good is the enemy of the best ” in every man, the bad never is, but the good that is not good enough. Your right hand is not a bad thing, it is one of the best things you have got, but, says Jesus, if it offends you in developing your spiritual

life, if it hinders your following My precepts, cut it off and cast it from you. Jesus Christ talked rugged truth, He was never ambiguous, and He says it is better to be maimed than damned, better that you should enter into life lame in man's sight and lovely in God's than that you should be lovely in man's sight and lame in God's. It is a maimed life to begin with, such as Jesus describes in these verses; otherwise we may look all right in the sight of our fellow men, but remarkably twisted and wrong in the sight of God.

One of the principles of Our Lord's teaching which we are slow to grasp is that the only basis of the spiritual is the sacrifice of the natural. The natural life is neither moral nor immoral, I make it moral or immoral by my ruling disposition. Jesus teaches that the natural life is meant for sacrifice, we can give it as a gift to God, which is the only way to make it spiritual. (See Romans XII. 1-2.) That is where Adam failed, he refused to sacrifice the natural life and make it spiritual by obeying God's voice in it, consequently he sinned, the sin of taking his right to himself. Why should God make it that the natural has to be sacrificed to the spiritual by me? God did not. God made it that the natural had to be transformed into the spiritual by obedience; sin made it that the natural had to be sacrificed, which is very different. If you are going to be spiritual, you must barter the natural, sacrifice it. If you say, I do not want to sacrifice the natural for the spiritual, then, Jesus says, you must barter the spiritual. It is not a punishment but an eternal principle. This line of discipline is the sternest that ever struck mankind, there is nothing more heroic and grand than the Christian life. Spirituality is not a sweet tendency towards piety in people who have not enough life in them to be bad; spirituality is the possession of the life of God which

is masculine in its strength, and He will make the most corrupt, twisted, sin-stained life spiritual if He be obeyed. Chastity is strong and fierce, and the man who is going to be chaste for Jesus Christ's sake has a gloriously sterling job in front of him.

When Jesus has altered your disposition, you have to put your body into harmony with the new disposition, to get the body to exercise the new disposition, and it can only be done by stern discipline, discipline which will mean cutting off a great many things for your own spiritual life's sake. There are things that are to you as your right hand and your eye, but you dare not use them, and the world that knows you says—How absurd you are to cut off that, whatever is there wrong in a "right hand?" and they will call you a fanatic and a crank. If a man has never been a crank or a fanatic, it is a pretty sure sign that he has never begun seriously to consider life. In the beginning the Holy Spirit will check your doing a great many things that may be perfectly right for everyone else, but not right for you. No one can decide for another what is to be cut off, and you have no right to use your present limitation to criticise someone else.

Be prepared to be a limited fool in the sight of others, says Jesus, in order to further your spiritual character. If I am only willing to give up wrong things for Jesus Christ, never let me talk about being in love with Him. We say—Why shouldn't I?—there is no harm in it. For pity's sake, go and do it, but remember that the construction of a spiritual character is doomed once you take that line. Anyone will give up wrong things if he knows how to, but am I prepared to give up the best I have got for Jesus Christ? The only right a Christian has is the right to give up his rights.

(2) THE ACCOUNT WITH PRACTICE. vv. 31-37.

Practice means continually doing that which no one sees or knows but myself. Habit is the result of practice, by continually doing the thing it becomes second nature. The difference between men is not a difference of personal power, but that some men are disciplined and others are not. The difference is not the degree of mental power, but the degree of mental discipline. If I have taught myself how to think, I have mental power *plus* the discipline of having got it under way. Beware of impulse. Impulsiveness is the characteristic of a child, but it ought not to be the characteristic of a man, it means he has not disciplined himself. Undeterred impulse is undisciplined power.

Every habit is purely mechanical, and whenever we form a habit it makes a material difference in the brain. The material of the brain alters very slowly, but it does alter, and by repeatedly doing a thing a groove is formed in the material of the brain and it becomes easier to do it again, until at last you become unconscious of doing it. When we are regenerated, by the power and the presence of God we can reform every habit that is not in accordance with His life. Never form a habit gradually, do it at once, do it sharply and definitely, and never allow a break. We have to learn to form habits according to the dictates of the Spirit of God. The power and the practice must go together. When we fail it is because we have not practised, not brought the mechanical part of our nature into line. If I keep at it practising, what I practise becomes my second nature, then in a crisis I find that not only does God's grace stand by me, but also my own nature. The practising is mine not God's and the crisis reveals whether or not I have been practising. The reason we

fail is not the devil, but inattention on our part arising from the fact that we have not disciplined ourselves.

vv. 31-32. Marriage and money form the elemental constitution of personal life and social life. They are the touchstone of reality, and around these two things the Holy Spirit works all the time. Marriage is one of the mountain peaks on which God's thunder blasts souls to hell or on which His light transfigures human lives in the eternal heavens. Jesus Christ faces fearlessly the question of sin and wrong, and He teaches us to face it fearlessly. There is no circumstance so dark and complicated, no life so twisted, that He cannot put right. The Bible was not written for babes and fools, it was written for men and women who have to face hell's facts as well as heaven's facts in this life. If Jesus Christ cannot touch those lives which present a smooth face but have a hideous tragedy behind, what is the good of His salvation? But, bless God, He can. He can alter my disposition, alter the dreams of my dreams, until lust no longer dwells there.

(a) Speech and Sincerity. v. 33.

Sincerity means that the appearance and the reality are exactly the same. Remember, says Jesus, that you have to stand before the tribunal of God, not of men; practise the right kind of speech, and your Father in heaven will back up all that is true. If you have to back it up yourself, it is of the evil one. You have no right to call in anyone to back it up, your word ought to be quite sufficient, whether men believe you or not is a matter of indifference. Refrain your speech until it conveys the sincerity of your mind. Until the Son of God is formed in me I am not sincere, I am not even honest, but when His life comes into me, He makes me honest with myself

and generous and kind towards others. We all know men whose word is their bond, there is no need for anyone to back up the word, the character and the life are sufficient.

There is a snare in being able to talk easily about God's truth because frequently that is where it ends, if you can get a good expression for truth the danger is you will know no more. Most of us can talk piously, we have the practice but not the power. Jesus is saying let your conversation spring from such a basis of the Holy Spirit that everyone who listens is built up by it. Unaffected sincerity always builds up ; corrupt communication makes you feel mean and narrow. There are men who never say a bad word yet their influence is devilish. Don't pay attention to the outside of the platter, pay attention to the inside and practise the speech that is in accordance with the life of the Son of God in you, and slowly and surely your speech and your sincerity will be in accord.

(b) Irreverent Reverence. vv. 34-36.

In Our Lord's day the habit was common, as it is to-day, of backing up ordinary assertions with an appeal to the name of God. Jesus checks that, He says never call on anything in the nature of God to attest what you say, speak simply and truly, realising that truth in a man is the same as truth in God. To call in God as a witness to back up what you say is nearly always a sign that what you are saying is not true. If you can find eight or more reasons for the truth of what you say, it is proof that what you say is not strictly true, if it were, you would never have to find the reasons to prove it. Jesus Christ puts in a truthfulness that never takes knowledge of itself.

Irreverent reverence is what Our Lord checks, talking flippantly about those things which ought only to be mentioned with the greatest reverence. I remember an

Indian woman who got wonderfully saved, she was an ugly woman but at the pronouncement of the name of Jesus Christ, her face was transfigured, the whole soul of the woman was in reverent adoration of her Lord and Master.

(c) **Integrity.** v. 37.

Integrity means the unimpaired purity of the heart. God can make our words the exact expression of the disposition He has put in. Jesus taught by example and precept that no man should stand up for his own honour but only for the honour of another. Our Lord was never careful of His own honour—"He made Himself of no reputation;" men called Him a glutton and a wine-bibber, a madman, devil-possessed, and He never opened His mouth; but immediately they said a word against His Father's honour, He not only opened His mouth but He said some terrible things. (See Mark XI. 15-18.) Jesus Christ by His Spirit alters our standard of honour, and a disciple will never care about what people say of him, but he will care tremendously what people say of Jesus. He realises that his Lord's honour is at stake in his life, not his own honour. What is the thing that rouses you? That is an indication of where you live.

Scandal should be treated as you treat mud on your clothes. If you try and deal with it while it is wet, you rub the mud into the texture, but leave it till it is dry and you flick it off with a touch, it is gone without a trace. Leave scandal alone, never touch it.

Let people do what they like with your truth, but never explain it. Jesus never explained anything, we are always explaining, and we get into tangles by not leaving things alone. We need to pray St. Augustine's prayer—"O Lord, deliver me from this lust of always vindicating myself."

Our Lord never told His disciples when they made mistakes, they made any number of blunders, but He went on quietly planting the truth, and He let mistakes correct themselves.

In the matter of praise, when I am not sure of having done well I always like to find out what people think ; when I am certain I have done well, I don't care an atom whether folks praise me or not. The same thing with regard to fear, we all know men who say they are not afraid, but the very fact they say it, proves they are. We have to learn to live on the line of integrity all through.

Another truth we do not sufficiently realise is the influence of what we think over what we say. A man may say wonderfully truthful things, but what he thinks is what tells. It is possible to say truthful things in a truthful manner and to tell a lie by thinking. I can repeat to someone else what I heard you say, word for word, every detail scientifically accurate, and yet convey a lie in saying it because the temper of my mind is different to the temper of your mind when you said it. A lie is not an inexactitude of speech, a lie is in the motive. I may be actually truthful and an incarnate liar. It is not the literal words that count but their influence on others.

Suspicion is always of the devil and is the cause of people saying more than they need to say, and in that aspect it " cometh of evil." If you submit children to a sceptical atmosphere and call in question all they say, it will instil the habit of backing up what is said—Well, ask him if you don't believe me. Such a thought would never occur to a child naturally, it only occurs when the child has to talk to suspicious people who continually say—Now I don't know whether what you are saying is true. The child gets the idea that it does not speak the truth unless someone

backs it up. It never occurs to a pure honest heart to back up what it says, it is a wounding insult to be met with suspicion, and that is why from the first we ought never to submit a child to suspicion.

(3) ACCOUNT WITH PERSECUTION. vv. 38-42.

(a) Insult. v. 38-39.

If a disciple is going to follow Jesus, he must lay his account not only with purity and with practice, but also with persecution. The picture Our Lord gives is not familiar to us. In the East a slap on the cheek is the greatest form of insult, its equivalent with us would be spitting in the face. Epictetus, a Roman slave, said that a slave would rather be thrashed to death than flicked on the cheek. Jesus says—If any man smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. The Sermon on the Mount indicates that when we are on Jesus Christ's errands, there is no time to be taken in standing up for ourselves. Personal insult will be the occasion in the saint of revealing the incredible sweetness of the Lord Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount hits where it is meant to hit, and it hits every time. Jesus says—Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, as My representative, pay no attention, i.e., show a disposition equivalent to turning the other cheek also. Either Jesus Christ was mad to say such things or He was the Son of God. Naturally, if a man does not hit back it is because he is a coward; supernaturally, it is the manifestation of the Son of God in him, both have the same appearance outwardly. The hypocrite and the saint are the same in the public eye, the saint exhibits a meekness which is contemptible in the eye of the world, that is the immense humiliation of being

a Christian. My strength has to be the strength of the Son of God, and He was "crucified through weakness." Do the impossible, and immediately you do, you know that God alone has made it possible.

These things apply to a disciple of Jesus and to no one else. The only way to interpret the words of God is to let the Holy Spirit interpret them for you. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring back to our remembrance what He has said, and His counsel is—When you come across personal insult, not only don't resent it, but make it the occasion of exhibiting the Son of God.

The secret of a disciple is personal devotion to a personal Lord, and a man is open to the same charge as Jesus was, viz., that of inconsistency, but Jesus was never inconsistent to God. There is more than one consistency. There is the consistency of a little child, a child is never the same, always changing and developing, a consistent child; and there is the consistency of a brick wall, a petrified consistency. A Christian is to be consistent only to the life of the Son of God in him, not consistent to hard and fast creeds. Men pour themselves into creeds, and God Almighty has to blast them out of their prejudices before they become devoted to Jesus. "The expulsive power of a new affection" that is what Christianity supplies. The reality of the life of the Son of God in you must show itself in the appearance of your life.

The miracle of regeneration is necessary before we can live the Sermon on the Mount. The Son of God alone can live it, and if God can form in me the life of the Son of God, as He introduced Him into human history, then I can see how it can be done, and that is Jesus Christ's message—Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again. (cf. Luke I. 35.)

(b) **Extortion.** v. 40.

Another unfamiliar picture to us, but it had a tremendous meaning in Our Lord's day. If a man's cloak and coat were taken from him as the result of a law suit, he could get back the loan of the coat to sleep in at night. Jesus uses the illustration to point out what we are going to meet with as His disciples. If they extort from you anything while you are on My service, let them have it, but go on with your work. If you are My disciple, says Jesus, you have no time to stand up for yourself. Never insist on your rights. The Sermon on the Mount is not—Do your duty, but—Do what is not your duty. It is never your duty not to resist evil, that is only possible to the Son of God in you.

(c) **Tyranny.** vv. 41-42.

Under the Roman dominance, the soldiers could compel anyone to be a baggage carrier for a mile. Simon the Cyrenian is a case in point, the Roman soldiers compelled him to be baggage carrier for Jesus. Jesus says if you are My disciple, you will always go the second mile, you will always do more than your duty, there will none of this spirit—Oh well, I can't do any more, they have always misunderstood and misrepresented me, but you will go the second mile, not for their sake but for Jesus Christ's sake. It would have been a sorry look-out for us if God had not gone the second mile with us. The first thing God requires of a man is to get born from above, then when he goes the second mile for men it is the Son of God in him Who does it. The only right of a Christian is the right not to insist on his rights. Every time I insist on my rights I hurt the Son of God. I can prevent the Son of God being hurt if I take the blow myself, but if I refuse to take it, it goes back on Him. (cf. Col. I. 24.)

v. 42 is an arena for theological acrobats, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." That is the statement either of a madman or of God Incarnate. We always say we do not know what Jesus means when we know perfectly well He means something which is a blunt impossibility unless He can re-make us and make it possible. Jesus brings us with terrific force straight up against the impossible thing, and until we get to the place of despair we will never receive from Him the grace that enables us to do the impossible thing and manifest His Spirit.

These statements of Jesus revolutionise all our conceptions about charity. Much of our modern philanthropy is based on the motive of giving to the poor man because he deserves it, or because we are distressed at seeing him poor. Jesus never taught charity from those motives, He says—"Give to him that asketh thee," not because he deserves it, but because I tell you to. The great motive in all giving is Jesus Christ's command. We can always find a hundred and one reasons why we should not obey Our Lord's commands because we will trust our reasoning rather than His reason, and our reason does not take God into calculation. How does civilisation argue? Does this man deserve what I am giving him? Immediately you talk like that, the Spirit of God says—Who are you? Do *you* deserve more than other men the blessings you have got?

"Give to him that asketh thee." Why do we always make it mean money? Jesus makes no mention of money. The blood of most of us seems to run in gold. The reason we make it mean money is that that is where our heart is. Peter said "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee." God grant we may understand that the

spring of giving is not impulse nor inclination, but the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—I give because Jesus tells me to.

The way Christians wriggle and twist and compromise over this verse springs from infidelity in the ruling providence of our Heavenly Father. We enthrone common sense as God and say—It is absurd, if I give to everyone that asks, every beggar in the place will be at my door. Try it. I have yet to find the man who obeyed Jesus Christ's command and did not realise that God restrained those who beg. If you try to apply these principles of Jesus literally without the indwelling Spirit, there will be no proof that God is with you, but once get rightly related to God and let the Holy Spirit apply the words to your circumstances, and you will find the restraining hand of God, for if ever God's ruling is seen, it is seen when once a disciple obeys what Jesus commands.

STUDY No. 3.

INCARNATE WISDOM AND INDIVIDUAL REASON.

Matthew V. 43-48, VI.

- (1) **DIVINE RULE OF LIFE.** Matthew V. 43-48.
 - (a) Exhortation. vv. 43-44.
 - (b) Example. v. 46.
 - (c) Expression. vv. 47-48.
- (2) **DIVINE REGION OF RELIGION.** Matt. VI. 1-18.
 - (a) Philanthropy. vv. 1-4.
 - (b) Prayer. vv. 5-15.
 - (c) Penance. vv. 16-18.
- (3) **DIVINE REASONINGS OF MIND.** Matt. VI. 19-24.
 - (a) Doctrine of Deposit. vv. 19-21.
 - (b) Doctrine of Division. vv. 22-23.
 - (c) Doctrine of Detachment. v. 24.
- (4) **DIVINE REASONINGS OF FAITH.** Matt. VI. 25-34.
 - (a) Careful Carelessness. v. 25.
 - (b) Careful Unreasonableness. vv. 26-29.
 - (c) Careful Infidelity. vv. 30-32.
 - (d) Concentrated Consecration. vv. 33-34.

We live in two universes, the universe of common sense in which we come in contact with things by our senses, and the universe of revelation with which we come in contact by faith. The wisdom of God fits the two universes

exactly, the one interprets the other. Jesus Christ is the expression of the Wisdom of God. If I take the common sense universe and discard the revelation of Jesus, I make what He says foolish because He talks from the revelation universe all the time. Jesus Christ lived in the revelation world which we do not see, and until we get into His world we do not understand His teaching at all. In Him we find that the revelation universe and the common sense universe were made one, and if ever they are to be one in me it can only be by receiving the heredity Jesus had, viz., Holy Spirit.

In the common sense universe the faculty required is intellectual curiosity, but when we enter into the domain from which Jesus Christ talks, intellectual curiosity is ruled out and moral obedience takes the absolute place. "If any man will do His will, he shall know. . . ." If I am going to find out the secrets of the world I live in, I must work at it. God does not encourage laziness, He has given me instruments whereby I have to explore this universe and it is done entirely by intellectual curiosity; but when I come to the domain Jesus reveals, no amount of studying or curiosity will avail me one atom, my ordinary common sense faculties are of no use, I cannot see God or taste God, I can dispute with Him, but I cannot get at Him by my senses at all, and common sense is apt to say there is nothing other than this universe. How am I to get into contact with this other universe to which Jesus belonged and from which He talks? I come in contact with the revelation facts of God's universe by faith wrought in me by the Spirit of God, then as I develop in understanding, the two universes are slowly made one in me. They never agree outside Jesus Christ.

An understanding of Redemption is not necessary to

salvation any more than an understanding of life is necessary before we can be born into it. Jesus Christ did not come to found religion, nor did He come to found civilisation, they were both here before He came ; He came to make us spiritually real in every domain. In Jesus there was nothing secular and sacred, it was all real, and He makes His disciples like Himself.

(1) DIVINE RULE OF LIFE. V. 43-48.

In these verses Our Lord lays down a Divine rule which we by His Spirit have to apply to every circumstance and condition of our lives. Our Lord does not make statements which we have to follow literally ; if He did we should not grow in grace. In the realm of God it is a spiritual following, and we have to rely on His Spirit to teach us to apply His statements to the various circumstances in which we find ourselves.

(a) Exhortation. vv. 43-44.

Our Lord's exhortation here is to be generous in our behaviour to all men whether they be good or bad. The marvel of the Divine love is that God exhibits His love not only to good people but to bad people. In Our Lord's parable of the two sons we can understand the father loving the prodigal son, but he exhibits his love to the elder brother also, to whom we feel a strong antipathy. Beware of walking in the spiritual life according to your natural affinities. We all have natural affinities, some people we like and others we do not ; some people we get on well with and others we do not. Never let those likes and dislikes be the rule of your Christian life. " If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship

one with another," i.e., God gives us fellowship with people for whom we have no natural affinity.

(b) **Example.** v. 45.

Woven into Our Lord's divine rule of life is His reference to our Example, and our Example is not a good man, not even a good Christian man, but God Himself. We do not allow the big surprise of that to lay hold of us sufficiently. Jesus nowhere says—Follow the best example you know, follow Christians, watch those who love Me and follow them; He says—Follow your Father which is in heaven—that you may be good men? That you may be lovable to all men? No, "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," and that implies a strong family likeness to Jesus. The Example of a disciple is God Almighty and no one less, not the best man you know, not the finest saint you ever read about, but God Himself.

"That ye may be the children of your Father in heaven." Our Lord's exhortation is to love our fellow men as God has loved us. The love of God is not like the love of a father or of a mother, it is the love *of God*. "God commendeth His own love toward us." (Romans V. 8, R.V.) The love of God is revealed in that He laid down His life for His enemies, now, says Jesus, love your fellow men as God has loved you. As a disciple of Jesus, identify yourself with God's interests in other people, show to the other man what God has shown you, and God will give you ample opportunity in your actual life to prove that you are perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies." Again I want to emphasise the fact that the teaching of Jesus does not at first appear to be what it is. At first it appears pious and

lukewarm and beautiful, but before long it becomes a ripping and tearing torpedo, it splits to atoms every preconceived notion a man ever had. It takes a long time to get the full force of Our Lord's statements. "I say unto you, Love your enemies." An easy thing to do when you have not got any—an impossible thing to do when you have. "Bless them that curse you"—easy to do it when no one is cursing you, but impossible when some one is cursing you, "Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that spitefully use you." It is easy to do all this when you have no enemies, when no one is cursing you or persecuting you, but suppose you have an enemy who slanders and annoys and systematically vexes you, and you read Jesus Christ's statement—"I say unto you, *Love your enemies*"—how is it going to be done? Unless Jesus Christ can re-make me from the inside, His teaching is the biggest mockery human ears ever listened to. Talk about the Sermon on the Mount being an ideal! Why, it would rend a man with despair—the very thing Jesus means it to do, for if once we realise that we cannot love our enemies, we cannot bless them that curse us, we cannot come anywhere near the standard revealed in the Sermon on the Mount, then we are in a condition to receive from God the disposition that will enable us to love our enemies, to pray for those that spitefully use us, to do good to those that hate us.

"I say unto you, Love your enemies." Jesus does not say—Love everyone. The Bible never talks vaguely, it always talks definitely. People talk about loving "mankind" and loving the "heathen"; Jesus says—Love your enemies. Our Lord does not say—*Bless* your enemies, He says—*Love* your enemies. He does not say—*Love* them that curse you, He says—*Bless* them that curse you.

Do good to them that hate you, not *bless* them. He does not say—*Do good* to them that despitefully use you, He says—*Pray* for them that despitefully use you. Each one of these commands is stamped with sheer impossibility to the natural man. If you reverse the order Jesus puts it in, you can do it with a strain, but keep it in the order He puts it in, and I defy any man on earth to do it unless he has been regenerated by God the Holy Ghost. When a man does love his enemies, he knows, and everyone else knows too, that God has done a tremendous work in him.

(c) **Expression.** vv. 46-48.

The expression of Christian character is not good doing, but God-likeness. It is not sufficient to do good, to do the right thing, you must have your goodness stamped by the image and superscription of God, it is supernatural all through. The secret of a Christian's life is the supernatural made natural by the grace of God. The way it works out in expression is not in having times of communion with God, but in the practical details of life. The proof that we have been regenerated is when we come in contact with the things that create a buzz, we find to our astonishment we have a power to keep wonderfully poised in the centre of it all, a power we had not before, a power that is only explained by the Cross of Jesus.

v. 48 is a re-emphasis of v. 20. The perfection of v. 48 refers to the disposition of God in me—"Ye shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (R.V.) not in a future state, but — You shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect if you let Me work that perfection in you. If the Holy Spirit has transformed you on the inside, you will exhibit not good human characteristics, but divine characteristics in a human being. There is only one type of holiness and that is God's holiness, and

Jesus puts as our example God Almighty. How many of us have measured ourselves by that standard, the standard of a purity of heart in which God can see nothing to blame ?

May this Divine rule of Our Lord's bring us to the bar of the standard of Jesus. His claim is measured by these tremendous statements of His. He can take you and me, He can take the vilest piece of broken earthenware, and can fit us exactly to the expression of the Divine life in us. It is never a question of putting statements of Our Lord in front of us and trying to live up to them, but of receiving His Spirit and finding that we can live up to them as He brings them to our remembrance and applies them to our circumstances.

God grant we may get on to the courageous range of faith that is required. "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect"—and men will take knowledge of me that I *am* a good man? Never. If ever it is recorded of me—"What a good man that is"—I have been a betrayer somewhere. If I fix my eyes on my own whiteness I will soon get dry rot in my spiritual life. All my righteousness is as "filthy rags" unless it is the blazing holiness of Jesus in me uniting me with Him until I see nothing but Jesus first, Jesus second and Jesus third. Then men take knowledge of me, not what a good man I am, not what a wonderful whiteness I have, but that Jesus has done something wonderful in me. Keep always at the Source of spiritual blessings—Jesus Christ Himself.

In v. 30 Our Lord said "it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell," i.e., He is referring to a *maimed* life. In v. 48 He says—Be ye therefore *perfect* as your Father in heaven is perfect. Is my Father in heaven maimed? Has He a right arm cut off, a right eye plucked

out? In v. 48 Jesus completes the picture He began to give in v. 30. Our Lord's statements embrace the whole of the spiritual life from beginning to end. In Matt. V. 29-30 He pictures a maimed life; here He pictures a full-orbed life of holiness. Holiness means the perfect balance between my disposition and the laws of God. The maimed life is the characteristic at the beginning, and if you have not had that characteristic, it is questionable whether you have ever received the Holy Spirit. The entrance into Life means what the world calls fanaticism. The swing of the pendulum makes you go to the opposite extreme of what you were in the life of the world, and you have to begin the life with God a maimed soul. We are so afraid of being fanatics: would to God we were as afraid of being "fashionless." A thousand times rather be fanatics at the beginning than poor fashionless creatures all our lives, limp and useless. May we get on to the line where we are willing to cut off the right arm, to pluck out the eye, to enter into Life a hirpler, maimed, cutting off whatever it may be, no matter how beautiful. And, blessed be the Name of God, we shall find that He brings to a full-orbed unity every life that will obey Him.

Always make allowances when people first enter into Life, they have to enter it on the fanatical line. The danger is to stay too long in the fanatical stage. If fanaticism steps over the bounds, it becomes spiritual lunacy. At the beginning of the life in grace you have to limit yourself all round, right things as well as wrong; then when God begins to bring you out of the light of your convictions into the light of the Lord and you prefer to remain true to your convictions, you become a spiritual lunatic. Walking in the light of convictions is a necessary

stage, but there is a grander, purer, sterner light to walk in, viz., the light of the Lord.

How impatient we are, when we see a life born from above of the Spirit and the necessary limitations and severances and maimings going on, we will try and do God's work for Him, and God has to rap us sharply over the knuckles and say—Leave that soul in My care. Always allow for the swing of the pendulum in yourself and in others. A pendulum does not swing rightly at first, it begins with a tremendous swing to one extreme and only gradually gets back to the right balance, and that is how the Holy Spirit brings the grace of God to bear in our lives. "I do not frustrate the grace of God," says Paul.

(2) DIVINE REGION OF RELIGION. VI. 1-18.

In Ch. V. Our Lord demands that our disposition be right with Him in our ordinary natural life lived to men ; in Ch. VI. He deals with the domain of our life lived to God before men. The main idea in the region of religion is—Your eye on God, not on men.

(a) Philanthropy. vv. 1-4.

It was inculcated, as it were, into the very blood of the Jew to look after the stranger (see Deut. XV. 7-8, Lev. XIX. 9-10), and in Our Lord's day the Pharisees made a tremendous show of giving, they gave from the play-acting motive, that they might have "glory of men." They would put their money in the boxes in the women's court of the Temple with a great clang which sounded like a trumpet. Jesus says—Now don't give in that way, their motive is to be seen of men, to be known as generous givers, and "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward,"—i.e., that is all there is to it.

Briefly summed up, these verses mean—Have no other motive in giving than to please God. In modern philanthropy the motives we are “egged on” with are—It will do them good, they need the help, they deserve it. Jesus never brings out that aspect in His teaching; He allows no other motive in giving than to please God. In Ch. V. He says—Give because I tell you to, and here He teaches us not to have mixed motives. It is very penetrating to ask ourselves this question—What was my motive in doing that kind act? We will be astounded at how rarely the Holy Spirit gets a chance to fit our motives on to be right with God, we mix the motive with a hundred and one other considerations. Jesus makes it steadily simple—one motive only, your eye on God; if you are My disciple, you will never give with any other motive than to please God. The characteristic of Jesus in a disciple goes much deeper down than doing good things, it is that he is good in motive because he has been made good by the supernatural grace of God.

“Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,” i.e., do good until it is an unconscious habit of the life and you don’t know you are doing it, you will be covered with confusion when Jesus Christ detects it. “Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren ye have done it unto Me.” That is Our Lord’s magnanimous interpretation of kind acts that people have never allowed themselves to think anything of. Get into the habit of such a relationship to God that you do good without knowing you do it, then you will no longer trust your own impulse, or your own judgment, you will trust only the inspiration of the Spirit of God. The mainspring of your motives will be the Father’s heart,

not your own, the Father's understanding, not your own. Once get rightly related to God, and He will use you as a channel through which His disposition will flow.

(b) **Prayer.** vv. 5-15.

Prayer, says Jesus, is to be looked at in the same way as philanthropy—your eye on God not on men. Watch your motive before God, have no other motive in prayer than to know Him. The statements of Jesus about prayer which are so familiar to us are revolutionary. Call a halt one moment and ask yourself—Why do I pray? What is my motive? Is it because I have a personal secret relationship to God that no one knows but myself?

The Pharisees had to pray so many times a day and they took care that they happened to be in the midst of the city when the hour for prayer came, and then in an ostentatious manner they would give themselves to prayer. Jesus says—Be not as the hypocrites are, their motive is to be known as praying men, and verily they have their reward. Our Lord did not say it was wrong to pray in the corners of the streets, but He did say it was wrong to have the motive to be seen of men. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret," i.e., get a place to pray where no one imagines that is what you are doing, shut the door and talk to God in secret. It is impossible to conduct the life of a disciple without definite times of secret prayer. You will find that the place to enter in is in your business, as you walk along the streets, in the ordinary ways of life, when no one dreams you are praying, and the reward comes openly, a revival here, a blessing there. The Scotch have a proverb—"Aye keep a bittie to yersel," and as you go on with

God you learn more and more to maintain this secret relationship with God in prayer.

When we pray we give God a chance in the unconscious realm of the lives we pray for. When we get into the secret place, it is the Holy Ghost's passion for souls that is at work, not our passion, and He can work through us as He likes. Sects produce a passion for souls, the Holy Spirit produces a passion for Christ. The great dominating passion in the New Testament is for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus also taught the disciples the prayer of patience. If you are right with God and God delays the manifested answer to your prayer, don't misjudge Him, don't think of Him as an unkind friend or an unnatural father or an unjust judge, but keep at it, your prayer will certainly be answered for "everyone that asks receives." "Men ought always to pray and not to faint," i.e., cave in. Your heavenly Father will explain it all one day, He cannot just now because He is developing your character.

In v. 8 Jesus goes to the very root of all prayer—"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him." Common sense says—Then why ask Him? Prayer is not getting things from God, that is a most initial stage; prayer is getting into perfect communion with God, I tell Him what I know He knows in order that I may get to know it as He does. Pray because you have got a Father, says Jesus, not because it quietens you, and give Him time to answer. If the life of Jesus is formed in me by regeneration and I am drawing my breath in the fear of the Lord, the Son of God will press forward in front of my common sense and will change my attitude to things. Most of us make the blunder of depending on our own earnestness and not on God at all, it is confidence in Him

that tells. (1 John V. 14). All my fuss and earnestness, all my gifts of prayer, are not of the slightest use to Jesus, He pays no attention to them. If I have a gift of prayer, may God wither it up until I learn how to get my prayers inspired by God the Holy Ghost. Do I rely on God or on my own earnestness when I pray? God is never impressed by my earnestness, I am not heard because I am in earnest, but only on the ground of Redemption, I have "boldness to enter into the holiest *by the blood of Jesus*" and no other way.

"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of." Remember, says Jesus, your Father is keenly and divinely interested in you, and prayer becomes the "blether" of a child to his father. Our Lord took nothing and no one seriously but His Father (we are inclined to take everything and everyone else seriously saving God), and He teaches us to be children before men but in earnest before our Father in heaven. Notice the essential simplicity of Our Lord's teaching all through—right towards God, right towards God.

(c) **Penance.** vv. 16-18.

Penance is to put myself into a strait jacket for the sake of disciplining my spiritual character. Physical sloth will upset spiritual devotion quicker than anything. If the devil cannot get at us by enticing to sin, he will get at us by sleeping sickness spiritually—Now you cannot possibly get up in the morning to pray, you are working hard all day and you cannot give that time to prayer, God does not expect it of you. Jesus says God does expect it of you. Penance means doing a hardship to my body for the sake of developing my spiritual life. Put your life through discipline but don't say a word about it, "appear not unto men to fast." Jeremy Taylor said that men hang

out the sign of the devil to prove there is an angel inside, i.e., they wear sad countenances and look tremendously severe to prove they are holy men. Jesus taught His disciples to be hypocrites—"wash your face," i.e. never allow anyone to imagine you are putting yourself through discipline. If ever I can tell to others the discipline I put myself through in order to further my life with God, from that moment the discipline becomes useless. Our Lord counsels us to have a relationship between ourselves and God that our dearest friend on earth never guesses. When you fast, fast to your Father in secret not before men, don't make cheap martyrs of yourselves, and never ask for pity.

When you are going through a time of discipline, pretend you are not going through it, "appear not unto men to fast." The Holy Spirit will apply it to each one of us, there are lines of discipline, lines of limitation, physical and mental and spiritual, when the Spirit says—you must not allow yourself this and that. The ostensible fasts on the outside are of no use, it is the fasting on the inside that counts. Fasting from food may be difficult for some, but it is child's play compared to the fasting for the development of God's purpose in your life. Fasting means concentration. Five minutes' heeding of what Jesus says and solid concentration on it, and there would be transactions with God that would end in sanctification.

Be not as the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. May God destroy for ever the grief that saps the mind, and the luxury of misery and morbid introspection that men indulge in in order to develop holiness, and may we bear the shining faces that belong to the sons of God. "They looked unto Him and were radiant,"

(3) DIVINE REASONINGS OF MIND. vv. 19-24.

It is a fruitful study to find out what the New Testament says about the mind. The Spirit of God comes through the different writers with one steady insistence to stir up our minds (e.g., Phil. II. 5, 2 Peter I. 12-13.) The only way Satan can get in as an "angel of light" is to those Christians whose hearts are right but whose minds are not stirred up. Our Lord in these verses deals with the mind, how I am to think and to reason about things. Unless we learn to think in obedience to the Holy Spirit's teaching, we will drift in our spiritual experience without any thinking at all. All the confusion arises when we try to think and to reason things out without the Spirit of God.

(a) Doctrine of Deposit. vv. 19-21.

The Holy Spirit teaches us to fasten our thinking on God, then when we come to deal with property and money and everything to do with matters of earth, He reminds us that our real treasure is in heaven. Every effort to persuade myself that my treasure is in heaven is a sure sign that it is not. When my motive has been put right, it begins to put my thinking right.

"Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven," i.e., have your banking account in heaven not on earth, lay up your confidence in God not in your common sense. It is the trial of your faith that makes you wealthy; and it works like this: every time you venture out on the life of faith you will come across something in your actual life which seems to contradict absolutely what your faith in God says you should believe. If you go through that trial of faith, laying up your confidence in God not in your common sense, you will gain so much wealth in your

heavenly banking account, and the more you go through the trial of faith the wealthier you become in the heavenly regions, until you go through difficulties smilingly and men wonder where you have got your wealth of trust from.

It is a trial of faith all through. The conflict of the Christian is not a conflict with sin but with the natural life being turned into the spiritual life. The natural life is not sinful; the disposition that rules the natural life is sinful, and when God alters the disposition we have to turn the natural life into the spiritual by a steady process of obeying God, and it takes spiritual concentration on God to do it. If you are going to succeed in anything in this world, you must concentrate on it, practise at it, and the same is true spiritually. There are many things you will find you cannot do if you are going to be concentrated on God, things that may be perfectly legitimate and right for others but not right for you if you are going to concentrate on God. Never let your narrowness of conscience condemn the other man. Maintain the personal relationship, see that you are concentrated on God for yourself, not concentrated on your convictions or your point of view, but on God. Whenever you are in doubt about a thing, push it to its logical conclusion—Is this the kind of thing that Jesus Christ is after or the kind of thing Satan is after? Immediately your decision is made, act on it.

(b) Doctrine of Division. vv. 22-23.

The eye is the symbol for conscience in a man who has been put right by the Holy Spirit. A single eye is essential to correct understanding. One idea runs all through Our Lord's teaching—right with God, first, second and third. If I am born again of the Holy Ghost, I do not persuade myself I am right with God, I *am* right with Him because I have been put right by the Holy Spirit. Then if I walk in

the light as God is in the light, that keeps my eye single, and slowly and surely all my actions begin to be put into the right relationship, and everything becomes full of harmony and simplicity and peace.

No one has a single motive unless he has been born from above, we have single ambitions but not a single motive. Jesus is the only One who had a single motive, and when His Spirit comes into me the first thing He does it to make me a man with a single motive, a single eye to the glory of God. The one motive of Jesus is to turn men into sons of God, and the one motive of a disciple is to glorify Jesus.

“If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” Darkness is my point of view, my right to myself; light is God’s point of view. Jesus taught clearly the line of demarcation between light and darkness, the danger is that these divisions get blurred. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, said Jesus.

(c) Doctrine of Detachment. v. 24.

Jesus says we cannot serve God and mammon. A man of the world disbelieves that, he says—With a little subtlety and wisdom and compromise (it is called diplomacy or tact), we can serve both. The devil’s temptation to Our Lord to compromise, to fall down and worship him, is repeated over and over again in Christian experience. I have to realise that a division as high as heaven and as deep as hell must be made between the Christian and the world. “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” What is mammon? The system of civilised life which organises itself without any consideration of God.

This doctrine of detachment is a fundamental theme of Our Lord's, it runs all through His teaching. You cannot be good and bad at the same time ; you cannot serve God and make your own out of the service ; you cannot make "honesty is the best policy" a motive, because immediately you do you cease to be honest. The riddling the Spirit of God puts a man through is the sternest on earth—Why are you a student for the ministry, a missionary, a preacher of the Gospel? There is one consideration only—I have to stand right with God, to see that that relationship is the one thing that is never dimmed and all other things will right themselves. Immediately that relationship is lost sight of, multitudes of motives begin to work and you get worn out. Never compromise with the spirit of mammon. When you get right with God, you become what is contemptible in the eyes of the world. Put into practice any of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and you will be treated with amusement at first, then if you persist, the world gets annoyed and detests you. What will happen, for instance, if you carry out Jesus Christ's teaching in business? Not quite so much success as you bargained for.

This is not the age of the glorification of the saints, but the age of their humiliation. Are you prepared to follow Jesus outside the camp, the special camp you belong to ?

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Stand absolutely true to God's line of things. Thank God for everyone who has learned that the dearest friend on earth is a mere shadow compared to Jesus, it is dominant personal passionate devotion to Him, and only in Him are all other relationships in life right. (cf. Luke XIV. 26.) This is not ordinary integrity, it is supernatural integrity, a likeness to your Father in heaven. In the beginning of your spiritual life, make allowances for the swing of the pendulum.

It is not by accident, but by the set purpose of God, that in the reaction we go to the opposite extreme of all we were before. God breaks us from the old life violently, not gradually, and only brings us back into the domain of men when we are right with Him so that we are "in the world" but not "of it." When we are matured in godliness then God trusts us, and trusts His own honour to us, by placing us where the world, the flesh and the devil may try us, knowing that "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

(4) DIVINE REASONINGS OF FAITH. vv. 25-34.

Faith is my personal confidence in the Being whose character I know but whose ways I cannot trace by my common sense. The reasonings of faith mean the practical working out in my life of my implicit determined confidence in God. Common sense is mathematical; faith is not mathematical, faith works on illogical lines. Jesus places the strongest emphasis on faith, and especially on faith that has been tried. Faith tests a man for all he is worth, he has to stand in the common sense universe in the midst of things which conflict with his faith, and place his confidence in the God Whose character is revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ's statements reveal God as a Being of love and justice and truth: the actual happenings in my immediate circumstances seem to prove He is not, will I remain true to the revelation that God is good? Will I remain true to His honour no matter what happens in the actual domain? If I will, I shall find that God in His providence makes the two universes, the universe of revelation and the universe of common sense, work out in perfect harmony. Most of us are pagans in a crisis,

we think and act like pagans, only one out of a hundred is daring enough to bank his faith in the character of God.

The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience. In the spiritual world discernment is never gained by intellect; in the common sense world it is. If a man wants scientific knowledge, intellectual curiosity is his guide; but if he wants insight into what Jesus teaches, he can only get it by obedience. If things are dark to me spiritually, the reason is there is something I won't do. Intellectual darkness comes by ignorance; spiritual darkness comes because of something I don't intend to obey.

(a) Careful Carelessness. v. 25.

Jesus does not say that the man who does not think about anything is blessed, that man is a fool. Jesus says—Be carefully careless about everything saving one thing, your relationship to God. That means I have to be studiously careful that I am careless about how I stand to self-interest, to food, to clothes, for one reason only—because I am set on minding my relationship to God. Many people are careless about what they eat and drink and they suffer for it, they are careless about what they put on and they look as they have no right to look, they are careless over property and God holds them responsible for it. What Jesus is saying is that the great care of the life is to put the relationship to God first and everything else second. Our Lord teaches the complete reversal of the reasonings of a practical sensible person, viz., don't make the ruling factor of your life what you shall eat and what you shall drink, but make the one point of your life zealous concentration on God. The one dominating abandon of the life is to be concentration on God, conse-

quently every other carefulness is careless in comparison. In Luke XIV. 26 Our Lord is laying down the conditions of discipleship, and He says that the first condition is personal, passionate devotion to Himself until every other devotion is hatred in comparison to love for Jesus.

"Take no thought for your life. . . ." Immediately we look at these words of Jesus, we find them the most revolutionary of statements. We argue exactly the opposite way, even the most spiritual of us—I *must* live, I *must* make so much money, I *must* be clothed and fed—that is how it begins, the great concern of the life is not God, but how I am going to fit myself to live. Jesus says—Reverse the order, get rightly related to Me first and see that you maintain that as the great care of your life, and never put the concentration of your care on the other things. It is one of the severest disciplines to allow the Holy Spirit to bring us into harmony with the teaching of Jesus in these verses.

(b) Careful Unreasonableness. vv. 26-29.

To be careful of all that the natural man says we must be careful over, Jesus declares to be unreasonable in a disciple. "Behold the fowls of the air. . . ." "Consider the lilies of the field." Jesus uses the illustration of the birds and the flowers not by accident, He uses it purposely in order to show the utter unreasonableness from His standpoint of being so anxious about the means of living. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Imagine the sparrows and blackbirds and thrushes worrying about their feathers, Jesus says they don't trouble about it at all, the thing that makes them what they are is not their thought about it, but the thought of the Father in

heaven. A bird is a hard working little creature, but it does not work to stick the feathers on itself, it obeys the law of its life and becomes what it is. Jesus Christ's argument is—Concentrate on the life I give you, and you are perfectly free for all the other things because your Father is watching the life on the inside. Maintain obedience to the Holy Spirit, who is the real principle of your life, and He will supply the "feathers" for you, you are much better than a sparrow.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." It is useless to mistake careful consideration of circumstances for that which produces character. You cannot produce the life on the inside by watching the outside all the time.

Consider the lily, it obeys the law of its life in the surroundings in which it is placed, and Jesus says, as disciples, consider your hidden life with God. Pay attention to the Source and God will look after the outflow. Imagine a lily hauling itself out of its pot and saying—I don't think I look exactly right here. The lily's duty is to obey the law of its life where it is placed by the gardener. Watch your life with God, says Jesus, see that that is right and you will grow as the lily. We are all inclined to say—I would be all right if only I were somewhere else. There is only one way to develop spiritually, and that is by concentration on God. Don't bother whether you are growing in grace or whether you are of use to others: believe on Me. "Consider the lilies, how they grow"—they simply *are*. Take the sea and the air and the sun and the stars and moon, all these *are*, and what a ministration they exert! So often we mar God's designed influence through

us by our self-conscious effort at being consistent and useful. It looks unreasonable to expect a man to consider the lilies, but it is the only way he can grow in grace. Jesus Christ's argument is that the men and women who are concentrated on the Father in heaven are those who are the fittest to do the work of the world. They have no ulterior motive of looking after circumstances in order to produce a fine character. It cannot be done that way. How am I going to grow in the knowledge of God? By remaining where you are, and by remembering that your Father knows where you are and the circumstances you are in, keep concentrated on Him and you will grow like the lily spiritually.

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" Jesus talks from the implicit domain. How many people by taking thought are born into the world? You cannot get at the spring of natural life by common sense reasoning, and when you deal with the life of God in your soul, remember, says Jesus, that your growth in grace does not depend on your watching it, but on your concentration on the Father in heaven.

Notice the difference between the illustrations we use in talking of spiritual growth and the illustrations Jesus uses. We take our illustrations from engineering enterprises, from motor cars, aeroplanes, etc., things that compel our attention. Jesus Christ took His illustrations from His Father's handiwork, from sparrows and trees and birds, things that none of us dream of noticing. We are all breathless and passionate and in a hurry. Jesus says you may think till all is blue, but you cannot add one inch to your height that way, and you cannot possibly develop yourself spiritually in any way but the way I tell you, viz., concentration on God.

Our Lord's counsel to His disciples is—Be like the lily and the star. When a man gets born from above he is inclined to become a moral policeman, an intolerable spiritual prig, one who unconsciously presents himself as better than other men. Who is the man who has influenced me most? The man who has buttonholed me, or the man who lives his life as the stars in the heaven or the lily of the field, perfectly simple and unaffected? Those are the lives that mould us, our mothers and wives and friends who are of that order, and that is the order the Holy Ghost produces. If you want to be of use, get rightly related to Jesus and He will make you of use unconsciously every moment you live, the condition is believing on Him.

(c) **Careful Infidelity.** vv. 30-32.

Supposing Jesus tells you to do something that is an enormous challenge to your common sense, what are you going to do—hang back? Once get your nerves into the habit of doing a thing physically and you will do it every time until you break the habit deliberately; and spiritually it is the same, you will get up to what Jesus wants over and over again, and every time when it comes to the point, turn back (like a man baulking a hurdle), until you break the habit and resolutely abandon. Jesus Christ demands of the man who trusts in Him the same reckless sporting spirit that the natural man exhibits in his life. If a man is going to do anything worth while, there are times when he has to risk everything on a leap, and in the spiritual world Jesus demands that I risk everything I hold by my common sense and leap into what He says. Immediately I do, I find what He says fits on as solidly as my common sense.

In following Jesus it is a risk absolutely, a yielding clean over to Him, and that is where our infidelity comes

in, we will not trust what we cannot see, we will not believe what we cannot trace. Then it is all up with my discipleship. The great word of Jesus to His disciples is "Abandon." When God has brought me into the relationship of a disciple, I have to venture on His word, to trust entirely to Him and watch that when He brings me to the venture, I take it.

Jesus sums up common sense carefulness in a person indwelt by the Spirit of God as infidelity. After you have received the Spirit and you try and put other things first instead of God, you will find confusion. The Holy Spirit presses through and says—Where does God come in in this new relationship? in this mapped-out holiday? in these new books you are buying? The Holy Spirit always presses that point until we learn to make concentration on God the first consideration. It is not only wrong to worry, it is real infidelity because it means I do not think God can look after the little practical details of my life, it is never anything else that worries us. Notice what Jesus said would choke the word He puts in—the devil? No, the cares of this world. That is how infidelity begins. It is the little foxes that spoil the vines, the little worries always. The great cure for infidelity is obedience to the Spirit of God. Refuse to be swamped by the cares of this world, cut out non-essentials and continually revise your relationship to God and see that you are concentrated absolutely on Him. The man who trusts Jesus in a definite practical way is freer than anyone else to do his work in the world, free from fret and worry, he can go with absolute certainty into the daily life because the responsibility of his life is off him and on God. Once I realise the revelation Jesus gives that God is my Father and that I can never think of anything He will forget, then worry is impossible.

(d) Concentrated Consecration. vv. 33-34.

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God"—"But, supposing I do, what about this thing and that? who is going to look after me? I would like to obey God, but don't ask me to take a step in the dark." We enthrone our common sense as almighty God and treat Jesus Christ as a spiritual appendage to it. Jesus Christ hits desperately hard at every one of the institutions we bank all our faith in naturally. The sense of property and of insurance is one of the greatest hindrances to development in the spiritual life. You cannot lay up for a rainy day if you are trusting Jesus Christ.

Our Lord teaches that the one great secret of the spiritual life is concentration on God and His purposes. We talk a lot about consecration, but it ends in sentimentalism because there is nothing definite about it. Consecration ought to mean my definite yielding of myself over as a saved soul to Jesus and concentrating on that. There are things in actual life that lead to perplexity, and I say—I am in a quandary and I don't know which way to take. "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind," says Paul, concentrate on God, so that you make out what is His will. Concentration on God is of more value than personal holiness. God can do what He likes with the man who is abandoned to Him. God saves us and sanctifies us, then He expects us to concentrate on Him in every circumstance we are in. "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." When in doubt, haul yourself up short and concentrate on God, and every time you do, you will find that God engineers your circumstances and opens the way perfectly

securely, the condition on your part is that you concentrate on God.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.” At the bar of common sense Jesus Christ’s statements are those of a fool ; but bring them to the bar of faith and the word of God, and you begin to find with awestruck spirit that they are the words of God.

STUDY No. 4.

CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.

Matthew VII. 1-12,

(1) CHRISTIAN CHARACTERISTICS. vv. 1-5.

- (a) The Uncritical Temper. v. 1.
- (b) The Undeviating Test. v. 2.
- (c) The Undesirable Truth Teller. vv. 3-5.

(2) CHRISTIAN CONSIDERATENESS. vv. 6-11.

- (a) The Need to Discriminate. v. 6.
- (b) The Notion of Divine Control. vv. 7-10.
- (c) The Necessity for Discernment. v. 11.

(3) CHRISTIAN COMPREHENSIVENESS.

- (a) The Positive Margin of Righteousness.
 - (b) The Proverbial Maxim of Reasonableness.
 - (c) The Principal Meaning of Revelation.
- } v. 12.

“ And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, . . . ” Peter is writing to those who are the children of God, those who have been born from above, and he says—Add, give diligence, concentrate. “ Add ” means all that character means. No man is born with character ; we make our own character. When a man is born from above he has a new disposition given to him, not character ; neither naturally nor supernaturally are

we born with character. Character is what a man makes out of his disposition as it comes in contact with external things. A man's character cannot be summed up by what he does in spots, but only by what he is in the main trend of his existence. When we describe a man we fix on the exceptional things, but it is the steady trend of the man's life that tells. Character is that which steadily prevails, not something that occasionally manifests itself. What we do steadily and persistently makes character, not what is exceptional or spasmodic, that is something God mourns over—"thy goodness is as a morning cloud," He says. In Matthew VII. Our Lord is dealing with the need to make character.

(1) CHRISTIAN CHARACTERISTICS. vv. 1-5.

(a) The Uncritical Temper. v. 1.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged." Criticism is part of the ordinary faculty of a man, he has a sense of humour, i.e., a sense of proportion, and he sees where things are wrong and pulls the other fellow to bits; but Jesus says, as a disciple, cultivate the uncritical temper. In the spiritual domain, criticism is love gone sour. There is no room for criticism in a wholesome spiritual life. The critical faculty is an intellectual one, not a moral one. If criticism becomes a habit it will destroy the moral energy of the life and paralyse spiritual force. The only Person who can criticise human beings is the Holy Spirit. No human being dare criticise another human being, because immediately he does he puts himself in a superior position to the one he criticises. A critic must be removed from what he criticises. Before a man can criticise a work of art or piece of music, his information must be complete,

he must stand away from what he criticises as superior to it. No human being can ever take that attitude to another human being, if he does he puts himself in the wrong position and grieves the Holy Spirit. If a man is continually criticised, he becomes good for nothing, the effect of the criticism is to knock all the gumption and power out of him. Criticism is deadly in its effect because it divides a man's powers and prevents his being a force for anything. That is never the work of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost alone is in the true position of a critic, He is able to show what is wrong without wounding and hurting.

The temper of mind that makes me lynx-eyed to see where others are wrong does not do them any good, because the effect of my criticism is to paralyse their powers, which proves that the criticism did not come from the Holy Ghost. I have put myself into the position of a superior person. Jesus says a disciple can never stand off from another life and criticise it, therefore He advocates an uncritical temper, "Judge not." Beware of anything that puts you in the superior person's place.

The counsel of Jesus is to abstain from judging. This sounds strange at first because the characteristic of the Holy Spirit in a Christian is to reveal the things that are wrong, but the strangeness is only on the surface. The Holy Spirit does reveal what is wrong in others, but His discernment is never for purposes of criticism, but for purposes of intercession. When the Holy Spirit reveals something of the nature of sin and unbelief in another, His purpose is not to make me feel the smug satisfaction of a critical spectator—Well, thank God, I am not like that ; but to make me so lay hold of God for that one that God enables him to turn away from the wrong thing. Never

ask God for discernment, because discernment increases your responsibility terrifically ; and you cannot get out of it by talking, but only by bearing the life up in intercession before God until God puts him right. " If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." (1 John V. 16.) Our Lord makes no room for criticism in the spiritual life, but He does make room for discernment and discrimination.

If we let these searchlights go straight down to the root of our spiritual life we will see why Jesus says—Don't judge, we won't have time to. The whole of the life is to be lived in the power of God so that He can pour through the rivers of living water to others. Some of us are so concerned about the outflow, that it dries up. We continually ask—Am I of any use? Jesus tells us how to be of use—Believe in Me, and out of you will flow rivers of living water.

" Judge not, that ye be not judged." If we let that maxim of Our Lord's sink into our heart we will find how it hauls us up. " Judge not "—why we are always at it! The average Christian is the most penetratingly critical individual, there is nothing of the likeness of Jesus about him. A critical temper is a contradiction to all Our Lord's teaching. Jesus says of criticism, apply it to yourself, never to anyone else. " Why dost thou judge thy brother? . . . for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Whenever you are in the critical temper, it is impossible to enter into communion with God. Criticism makes you hard and vindictive and cruel, and leaves you with the flattering unction that you are a superior person. It is impossible to develop the characteristics of a saint and maintain the critical attitude. The

first thing the Holy Spirit does is to give you a spring-cleaning, and there is no possibility of pride left in a man then. I never met a man I could despair of after discerning what there lies in me apart from the grace of God. Stop having a measuring rod for others. Jesus says regarding judging—Don't judge; be uncritical in your temper, because in the spiritual domain you can accomplish nothing by criticism. One of the severest lessons to learn is to leave the cases we do not understand to God. There is always one fact more in every life of which we know nothing, therefore says Jesus—Judge not. It is not done once for all, we have to be always remembering that this is our Lord's rule of conduct.

(b) The Undeviating Test. v. 2.

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." This statement of Our Lord's is not a haphazard guess, it is an eternal law and it works from God's throne right down. (See Psalm XVIII. 25-26.) The measure I mete is measured to me again. Jesus puts it here in connection with criticism. If you have been shrewd in finding out the defects of others, that will be exactly the measure meted out to you, that is the way people will judge you. "I am perfectly certain that man has been criticising me." Well, what have you been doing? Life serves back in the coin you pay; you are paid back not necessarily by the same person, but the law holds good—"with what judgment ye judge, *ye shall be judged.*" And it works with regard to good as well as evil. If you have been generous, you will meet with generosity again through someone else; and if you mete out criticism and suspicion to others, that is the way you will be treated. There is a difference between retaliation and retribution.

According to Our Lord, the basis of life is retribution, but He makes no room for retaliation.

In Romans II. this principle is applied still more definitely, viz., what I criticise in another I am guilty of myself. Every wrong I see in you, God locates in me ; every time I judge you, I condemn myself. " Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest : for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself ; for thou that judgest doest the same things." God does not look at the act, He looks at the possibility. To begin with, we do not believe the statements of the Bible. For instance, do I believe that what I criticise in another I am guilty of myself? I can always tell sin in another man because I am a sinner. The reason I can see hypocrisy and fraud and unreality in others is that they are all in my own heart. The great danger is to call carnal suspicion the conviction of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost convicts men, He convicts for conversion, that men might be converted and manifest other characteristics. I have no right to put myself in the place of a superior person and tell them what I see that is wrong, that is the work of the Holy Ghost.

The great characteristic of the saint is humility. I realise to the full that all these sins and others would have been manifested in me but for the grace of God, therefore I have no right to judge. Jesus says—Don't judge, because if you do, it will be measured to you again exactly as you have judged. Which one of us would dare stand before God and say—My God, judge me as I have judged my fellow men? We have judged our fellow men as sinners; if God judged us like that we would be in hell. God judges us through the marvellous Atonement of Jesus Christ.

(c) **The Undesirable Truth Teller.** vv. 3-5.

The kind impudence of the average truth teller is inspired of the devil when it comes to pointing out the defects of others. The devil is lynx-eyed for things he can criticise, and we are all shrewd in pointing out the mote in our brother's eye. It puts me in a superior position—I am a finer spiritual character than you. Where do you find that characteristic? In the Lord Jesus? Never. The Holy Ghost works through the saints unbeknown to them, He works through them as light. If this is not understood, you will say—That preacher or that teacher seems to be criticising me all the time. He is not, it is the Holy Spirit in the preacher discerning what is wrong in you.

The last curse in your life as a Christian is the person who becomes a providence to you, he is quite certain you cannot do anything without his advice, and if you don't heed it you are sure to go wrong. Jesus ridiculed that notion with terrific power—"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." "Thou hypocrite," literally—play actor, one whose reality is not in keeping with his sincerity; a hypocrite is one who plays two parts consciously for his own ends. When you find fault with other people you may be quite sincere, yet Jesus says in reality you are a fraud. There is no getting away from the penetration of Jesus. If I see the mote in your eye, it is because I have a beam in my own. It is a most homecoming statement.

If I have let God remove the beam from my own outlook by His mighty grace, I will carry with me the implicit sunlight confidence that what God has done for me He can easily do for my brother, because he has only a splinter, I had a log of wood! This is the confidence God's salva-

tion gives you, you are so amazed that God has altered you that you can despair of no one. Oh yes, I know God can undertake for you, you are only a little wrong, I was wrong down to the remote depths of my mind, I was a mean, prejudiced, self-interested, self-seeking person, and God has altered me, therefore I can never despair of you or of anyone. These statements of Our Lord's save us from that fearful peril of spiritual conceit—Thank God I am not as other men, and also make us realise why such a man as Daniel bowed his head in vicarious humiliation and intercession—I have sinned with Thy people. That call comes every now and again to individuals and to nations.

(2) CHRISTIAN CONSIDERATENESS. vv. 7-11.

Consider how God has dealt with you and then consider that you do likewise.

(a) The Need to Discriminate. v. 6.

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” Jesus is inculcating the need to examine carefully what you present in the way of God's truth to others. If you present the pearls of God's revelation to unspiritual people, He says they will trample the pearls under foot—not trample you under their feet, that would not matter so much, but they will trample the truth of God under their feet. These words are not human words, but the words of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit alone can teach us what they mean. There are some truths that God will not make simple. The only thing God makes plain in the Bible is the way of salvation

and sanctification, after that my understanding depends entirely on my walking in the light. Over and over again men water down the word of God to suit those who are not spiritual, and consequently the word of God is trampled under the feet of "swine." Ask yourself—In what way am I flinging God's truth to unspiritual swine? Be careful Jesus says, how you give God's holy things to "dogs," i.e., a symbol of the folks on the outside; don't cast your holy things before them nor give the pearls of God's truth to men who are swine. Paul mentions the possibility of the pearl of sanctification being dragged in the mire of fornication, it comes through not respecting this mighty caution of Our Lord's. Some points in your experience you have no right to talk about. There are times of fellowship between Christians when these pearls of precious rarity get turned over and looked at, but if you flaunt them for the means of converting people without the permission of God, you will find what Jesus says is true, they will trample them under their feet.

Our Lord never tells us to confess anything but Himself. "He that confesseth *ME* before men." Testimonies to the world on the subjective line are always wrong, they are for saints, for those who are spiritual and understand; but your testimony to the world is Our Lord Himself, confess Him—He saved me, He sanctified me, He put me right with God. It is always easier to be true to your experience than to Jesus Christ. Many a man spurns Jesus Christ in any other phase than that of his particular religious ideas. The central truth is not salvation nor sanctification nor the second coming; the central truth is nothing less than Jesus Christ. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Error always comes in when we take something Jesus Christ does and preach it as the

truth. It is part of the truth, but if you take it to be the whole truth you become an advocate of an idea instead of a Person, the Lord Himself. The characteristic of an idea is that it has the ban of finality. If you are only true to a doctrine of Christianity instead of to Jesus Christ, you drive home your idea with sledge hammer blows, and the people who listen to you say—Well, that may be true, but they resent the way it is presented. When you follow Jesus, the domineering attitude and the dictatorial attitude go, and concentration on Jesus comes in.

(b) The Notion of Divine Control. vv. 7-10.

By the simple argument of these verses Our Lord urges us to keep our minds filled with the notion of God's control behind everything and to maintain an attitude of perfect trust. Always distinguish between being possessed of the Spirit and forming the mind of Christ. Jesus is laying down rules of conduct for those who have the Spirit. Notion your mind with the idea that God is there. Once the mind is notioned along that line, when you are in difficulties it is as easy as breathing to remember—Why, my Father knows all about it. It is not an effort, it comes naturally. Before, when perplexities were pressing, you used to go and ask this one and that, now the notion of the Divine control is forming so powerfully in you that you simply go to God about it. You will always know whether the notion is at work by the way you act in difficult circumstances. Who is the first one you go to? What is the first thing you do? The first power you rely on? It is the working out of the principle indicated in Matthew VI. 25-34, God is my Father, He loves me, I can never think of anything He will forget, why should I worry? Keep the notion strong and growing of the control of God behind all things. Nothing happens in any particular unless

God's mind is behind it, then I rest perfectly confident. There are times when God cannot lift the darkness, but trust Him. Jesus said God will appear at times like an unkind friend, but He is not: He will appear like an unnatural father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge but He is not. The time will come when everything will be explained. Prayer is not only asking, it is an attitude of heart that produces an atmosphere in which asking is perfectly natural, and "everyone that asks receives."

A man will get from life everything he asks for, because he does not ask what his will is not in. If a man asks of life to make him wealthy, he will get wealth, or he was playing the fool when he asked. "If ye abide in Me," says Jesus, "and my words abide in you, ye shall ask *what ye will*, and it shall be done unto you." We pray pious blether, our will is not in it, and then we say God does not answer; we never *asked* Him for anything. Asking means that my will is in it.

You say—But I asked God to turn my life into a garden of the Lord, and the first thing that happened was the ploughshare of sorrow, and instead of getting a garden I have got a wilderness. God never gives the wrong answer, He had to turn the garden of your natural life into ploughed soil before He could turn it into a garden of the Lord, He is putting the seed in now. Let God's seasons come over your soul, and before long you will have a garden of the Lord.

We need to discern that God controls what we ask. We bring in what Paul calls "will worship." Will is the whole man active, there are terrific forces in the will. The man who gains a moral victory by sheer force of will is the most difficult man to deal with afterwards. The

profound thing in man is his will, not sin. Will is the essential element in God's creation of man; sin is a perverse disposition which entered into man. At the basis, the human will is one with God, covered up by all kinds of desires and motives, and when we preach Jesus the Holy Spirit excavates down to the basis of the will, and the will turns to God every time. We try to attack men's wills; Jesus says—Lift Me up, and I will push straight to the will. When Jesus talked about prayer He never said—If your human will turns in that direction. He put it with the grand simplicity of a child—*Ask*. We bring in our reasoning faculty and say—Yes, but, . . . Jesus says—"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

(c) **The Necessity for Discernment.** v. 11.

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" But remember that you have to ask things that are in keeping with the God whom Jesus Christ reveals, things in keeping with His domain. God is not a necromancer, He is after the development of the character of a son of God. If I want to know the things of a man, I can get at them by the "spirit of man which is in him," but the things of the Spirit of God are "spiritually discerned."

The discernment needed here is the habitual realisation that every good thing I have has been given to me by the sheer sovereign grace of God. Jesus says—Get this reasoning incorporated into you—How much have you deserved? Nothing, everything has been given to you by God. Then may God save us from the mean accursed economical notion that we must only help the people who deserve it. One can almost hear the Holy Ghost shout

in the heart—Who are you that you talk like that, did *you* deserve the salvation God has given you, did *you* deserve to be filled with the Holy Spirit? It is all done by the sheer sovereign mercy of God, then be like your Father in heaven, says Jesus, have a perfect disposition like His. “Love as I have loved you.” It is not done once for all, it is a continual stedfast growing habit of the life.

Humility and holiness always go together. Whenever hardness and harshness begin to creep into the personal attitude towards one another, we may be certain we are swerving from the light. The preaching must be as stern and true as God’s word, never water down God’s truth ; but never forget when you deal with others that you are a sinner saved by grace, no matter where you stand now. If you stand in the fulness of the blessing of God, you stand there by no other right than the sheer sovereign grace of God. Then, says Jesus, if you, an evil being, saved by grace, can do such kind things to others, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?

Over and over again we blame God for His neglect of people by our sympathy with them, we may not put it into words but by our attitude we imply that we are filling up what God has forgotten to do. Never have that idea, never allow it to come into your mind. In all probability the Spirit of God will begin to show that it is because we have neglected what we ought to do that people are where they are. **T**he great craze to-day is socialism, and men are saying that Jesus Christ came as a social reformer. Nonsense! We are to be social reformers, Jesus Christ came to alter us, and we try to shirk our responsibility by putting our work on to Him. What

Jesus does is to alter us and put us right, then these principles of His will instantly make us social reformers. They will begin to work straightway where we live, in my relationship to my father and mother, to my brothers and sisters, my friends, my employers or employees. Consider how God has dealt with you, says Jesus, and then consider that you do likewise to others.

(3) CHRISTIAN COMPREHENSIVENESS. v. 12.

Christian grace comprehends the whole man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*, and with all thy *soul*, and with all thy *mind*, and with all thy *strength*." Salvation means not only a pure heart, an enlightened mind, a spirit put right with God, it means that the whole of man is comprehended in the manifestation of the marvellous power and grace of God; the whole man, body, soul and spirit is brought into fascinating captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. An incandescent mantle illustrates the meaning, if the mantle is not rightly adjusted, only one bit of it glows, but get the mantle adjusted exactly, and when the light comes the whole thing is comprehended in a blaze of light; and every bit of our being is to be absorbed until we are one glow with the comprehensive goodness of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Some of us have goodness in spots.

(a) The Positive Margin of Righteousness.

The limit to the manifestation of the grace of God in me is my body, and the whole of my body. We can understand the need of a pure heart, of a mind rightly adjusted to God and a spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but what

about the body? That is the margin of righteousness in me. We make a divorce between a clear intellectual understanding of truth and its practical outcome. Jesus never made such a divorce, He takes no notice of our fine intellectual conceptions unless their practical outcome is shown in reality.

There is a great snare in the capacity to understand a thing clearly and to exhaust its power by stating it. Over-much earnestness blinds the life to reality, earnestness becomes our god. We bank on the earnestness and zeal with which things are said and done, and after a while we find that the reality is not there, the power and presence of God are not being manifested, there are relationships at home or in business or in private that show when the veneer is scratched that we are not real. To say things well is apt to exhaust the power of doing them, so that a man has often to curb the expression of a thing with his tongue and turn it into action, otherwise his gift of facile utterance will prevent his doing the things he says.

(b) The Proverbial Maxim of Reasonableness.

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Our Lord's use of this maxim is positive, not negative. *Do* to others whatsoever ye would that they should do to you—a very different thing from not doing to others what you don't want them to do to you. What would I like other people to do to me? Well, says Jesus, do that to them; don't wait for them to do it to you. The Holy Ghost will kindle your imagination to picture many things you would like others to do to you, it is His way of telling you what to do to them—"I would like people to give me credit for the generous motives I have;" well, give them credit for having generous motives. "I would like that people should

not pass harsh judgments on me," well, don't pass harsh judgments on them. "I should like other people to pray for me;" well, pray for them. The measure of my growth in grace is my attitude towards other people. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," says Jesus. Satan comes in as an angel of light and says—But you must not think about yourself. The Holy Spirit will make you think about yourself, because that is His way of educating you as to how to deal with others. He makes you picture what you would like other people to do to you, and then says—Now you go and do those things to them. This verse is Our Lord's measure for practical ethical conduct. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Never look for right in the other man, but never cease to be right yourself. We always look for justice in this world, but there is no such thing as justice. Jesus says—Never look for justice, but never cease to give it. The stamp all through Our Lord's teaching is that of the impossible—unless He can make me all over again, and that is what He came to do. He came to give any man a new heredity to which His teaching will apply.

(c) The Principal Meaning of Revelation.

Jesus Christ came to make the great laws of God incarnate in human life, that is the miracle of God's grace. We are to be written epistles, "known and read of all men." There is no room whatever in the New Testament for the man who says he is saved by grace but who does not produce the graceful goods. Jesus Christ by His Redemption can make my actual life in keeping with my religious profession.

In our study of the Sermon on the Mount it would be like a baptism of light to allow the principles of Jesus to

soak right down to our very make-up. His statements are not put up as standards for us to attain; God re-makes us, puts His Holy Spirit in us, then the Holy Spirit applies the principles to us and enables us to work them out by His guidance.

STUDY No. 5.

IDEAS, IDEALS, AND ACTUALITY.

Matthew VII. 13-29.

(1) TWO GATES, TWO WAYS.

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 - (b) My Utmost for His Highest.
 - (c) A stoot heart tae a stae brae.
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An idea reveals what it does and no more. If you read a book about life, life looks simple ; but go out and face

the facts of life and you will find they do not come into the simple line laid down in the book. An idea works like a searchlight, lighting up what it does and no more ; but daylight reveals a hundred and one facts the searchlight had not taken into account. An idea is apt to have the ban of finality about it—the “ tyranny ” of an idea.

An ideal embodies our highest conceptions, but it contains no moral inspiration. To treat the Sermon on the Mount as merely an ideal is misleading. There is nothing of the ideal about it, it is a statement of the working out in actuality of Jesus Christ's disposition in the life of any man. A man gets ashamed of not being able to fulfil his ideals, and the more upright he is, the more agonising is his conflict—I won't lower my ideals, he says, although I can never hope to make them actual. No man is so laboured as the man with ideals he cannot carry out. Jesus Christ says to such—“ Come unto Me, and I will give you rest,” i.e., I will “ stay ” you, put something into you which will make the ideal and the actual one. Without Jesus Christ there is an unbridgeable gap between the ideal and the actual, the only way out is a personal relationship to Him. The salvation of God not only saves a man from hell, but alters his actual life.

(1) TWO GATES, TWO WAYS. vv. 13-14.

Our Lord continually used proverbs and sayings that were familiar to His hearers and put an altogether new meaning into them. Here He used an allegory that was familiar in His day, and lifted it by His inspiration to embody His patient warnings.

Always distinguish between warning and threatening. God never threatens ; the devil never warns. Warning is

a great arresting statement of God's, inspired by His love and patience. This throws a flood of light on the vivid statements of Jesus, such as those in Matthew XXIII. Be careful how you picture Jesus when you read His terrible utterances. Read our Lord's denunciations with Calvary in your mind. Jesus is stating the inexorable consequence—"How can you escape the damnation of hell?" There is no element of personal vindictiveness.

It is the great patient love of God that puts the warning. "The way of transgressors is hard." Go behind that statement in your imagination and see the love of God; God is amazingly tender, yet He cannot make the way of transgressors easy. God has made it difficult to go wrong, especially for His children.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate. . . ." If a man tries to enter into salvation in any other way than Jesus Christ's way, he will find it a broad way, but the end of it is distress. Erasmus said it took the sharp sword of sorrow, and difficulties of every description, heartbreaks and disenchantments to bring him to the place where he saw Jesus as the altogether lovely One, and, he says: "When I got there I found there was no need to have gone the way I went." There is the broad way of reasonable self-realisation; but the only way to a personal knowledge of eternal redemption is strait and narrow. Jesus says—"I am the way."

There is a difference between discipleship and being saved. A man can be saved by God's grace without being a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship means a personal dedication of the life to Jesus. Men are saved so as by fire, they have not been worth anything to God in their actual lives. Go and *make disciples*, said Jesus. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount produces only despair in a

man who is not born again. If Jesus came to be a Teacher only, He had better have stayed away. What is the use of teaching a human being to be what no human being can be—to be continually self-effaced, to do more than his duty, to be disinterested, to be perfectly devoted to God? If all Jesus came to do was to teach men to be that, He is the greatest taunter that ever presented any ideal to the human race. But Jesus came primarily and fundamentally to regenerate men; He came to put into any man the disposition that ruled His own life, and immediately that comes into a man, then the teaching of Jesus begins to be possible. All the standards He gives are based on His disposition.

Notice the apparent unsatisfactoriness of the answers of Jesus. He never once answered a question that sprang from a man's head, because those questions are never original, they always have the captious note about them. The man with that type of question wants to get the best of it logically. In Luke XIII. 24 a certain devout man asked Jesus a question—"Lord, are there few that be saved?" And Jesus replied—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate," i.e., see that your own feet are on the right path. Our Lord's answers seem at first to evade the issue, but He goes underneath the question and solves the real problem. He never answers our shallow questions but deals with the great unconscious need that makes them arise. When a man asks an original question out of his own personal life, Jesus answers him every time.

(a) All Noble Things are Difficult.

Our Lord warns that the devout life of a disciple is not a dream, but a decided discipline which calls for the use of all our powers. No amount of determination can give

me the new life of God, that is a gift ; where determination comes in, is in letting that new life work itself out according to Christ's standard. We are always in danger of confounding what we can do and what we cannot do. We cannot save ourselves, nor sanctify ourselves, nor give ourselves the Holy Spirit ; only God can do that. Confusion continually recurs when we try to do what God alone can do, and try to make out that God will do what we alone can do. We imagine that God will make us walk in the light ; God will not, we must do the walking. God gives us the power to walk, but we have to see that we use the power. God puts the power and the life into us and fills us with His Spirit, now we have to work it out, not *work* our salvation, but *work it out* ; and as we do we realise that the noble life of a disciple is a gloriously difficult one—a difficulty that rouses us up to overcome it, not a difficulty that makes us faint and cave in.

It is always necessary to make an effort to be noble. Jesus never shields a disciple from fulfilling all the requirements of a child of His. Things that are worth doing are never easy. On the ground of Redemption the life of the Son of God is formed in my human nature and I have to put on the new man in accordance with His life, and that takes time and discipline. "Acquire your soul with patience." Soul is my personal spirit manifesting itself in my body, the way I reason and think and look at things. Jesus says that a man must lose his soul in order to find it.

We deal with the great massive phases of Redemption—that God saves men by sheer grace through the Atonement, but we are apt to forget that it has to be worked out in practical living among men. "Ye are My friends," says Jesus, therefore lay down your life for Me, not go through the crisis of death, but lay out your life deliberately for

Me, take time over it. It is a noble life and a difficult life. God works in me to do His will, only I must do the doing ; and if once I start to do what He commands, I find I can do it, because I work on the basis of the noble thing God has done in Redemption.

(b) My Utmost for His Highest.

God demands of us our utmost in working out what He has worked in. We can do nothing towards our redemption, but we must do everything to work it out in actual experience on the basis of regeneration. Salvation is God's " bit," it is complete, I can add nothing to it, but I have to bend all my powers to work out His salvation. It requires discipline to live the life of a disciple in actual things. " Jesus knowing that He was come from God and went to God . . . took a towel . . . and began to wash the disciples' feet." It took God Incarnate to do the ordinary menial things of life rightly, and it takes the life of God in me to use a towel properly. This is Redemption being actually worked out in experience, and we can do it every time because of the marvel of God's grace.

" If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments." Jesus puts that as the test of discipleship. The motto over our side of the gate of life is—All God's commands I can obey. I have to do my utmost as a disciple to prove that I appreciate God's utmost for me, and to learn never to allow " I can't " to creep in. " Oh I'm no saint, I can't do that." If that thought comes in, we will be a disgrace to Jesus. God's salvation is a glad thing, but it is a holy, difficult thing that tests us for all we are worth. Jesus is bringing many *sons* to glory and He won't shield us from the requirements of sonship. He will say at certain times to the world, the flesh and the devil—Do your worst, I know

that "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." God's grace does not turn out milksops, but men and women with a strong family likeness to Jesus Christ. Thank God He does give us difficult things to do! A man's heart would burst if there were no way to show his gratitude. I beseech you, says Paul, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice. . . .

(c) **A stout heart tae a stae brae**, i.e., a strong heart to a difficult hill. The Christian life is a holy life; never substitute the word "happy" for "holy." We certainly will have happiness, but as a consequence of holiness. Beware of the idea so prevalent to-day that a Christian must always be happy and bright—"keep smiling." Preaching along that line is merely the gospel of temperament. If you make the determination to be happy the basis of your Christian life, your happiness will go from you; happiness is not a cause but an effect that follows without striving after it. Our Lord insists that we keep at one point, our eyes fixed on the strait gate and the narrow way, which means pure, holy living.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." It seems an amazingly difficult thing to do to put on the yoke of Christ, but immediately you do put it on, it makes everything easy. At the beginning of the Christian life it seems easier to drift, to say "I can't," but once you do put on His yoke, you find, blessed be the Name of God, that you have the easiest way after all. Happiness and joy attend, but they are not your aim, your aim is the Lord Jesus Christ, and God showers the hundredfold more on you all the way along.

In order to keep a stout heart to the difficult braes of life, watch continually that worry does not come in. "*Let not your heart be troubled,*" is a command and it means

that worry is sinful. It is not the devil that switches folks off Christ's way, but the ordinary steep difficulties of daily life, difficulties connected with food, and clothing, and situations. The "cares of this world," said Our Lord, will choke My word. We have all had times when the little worries of life have choked God's word and blotted out His face to us, enfeebled our spirits, and made us sorry and humiliated before Him—more so even than the times when we have been tempted to sin. There is something in us that makes us face temptation to sin with vigour and earnestness, but it requires the stout heart that God gives to meet the cares of this life. I would not give much for the man who had nothing in his life which made him say—I wish I was not in the circumstances I am in. "In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world"—and you will overcome it too, you will win every time if you bank on your relationship to Me. Spiritual grit is what we need.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate." I can only get to heaven through Jesus, no other road ; I can only get to the Father through Jesus, and I can only get into the life of a saint the same road.

(2) TEST YOUR TEACHERS. vv. 15-20.

In these verses Jesus tells His disciples to test preachers and teachers by their fruit. There are two tests—one is the fruit in the life of the preacher, and the other is the fruit of the doctrine. The fruit of a man's own life may be perfectly beautiful, and at the same time he may be teaching a doctrine which if logically worked out would produce the devil's fruit in other lives. It is easy to be captivated by a beautiful life and to argue that therefore

what that life teaches must be right. Jesus says—Be careful, test your teacher by his fruit. The other side is just as true, a man may be teaching beautiful truths and have magnificent doctrine while the fruit in his own life is rotten. We say that if a man lives a beautiful life, his doctrine must be right; not necessarily so, says Jesus. Then again we say because a man teaches the right thing therefore his life must be right; not necessarily so, says Jesus. Test the doctrine by its fruit and test the teacher by his fruit. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," the freedom of the nature will work out.

"By their fruits ye shall know them." You do not gather the vindictive mood from the Holy Ghost; you do not gather the passionately irritable mood from the patience of God; you do not gather the self-indulgent mood and the lust of the flesh in private life from the Spirit of God. God never allows room for any of these moods.

We find that as we study the Sermon on the Mount we are badgered by the Spirit of God from every standpoint, in order to bring us into a simplicity of relationship to Jesus Christ. The standard is that of a child depending on God.

(a) Possibility of Pretence. v. 15.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Our Lord here is describing dangerous teachers, and He warns us of those who come clothed in right doctrine but inwardly their spirit is that of Satan.

It is appallingly easy to pretend. If once we get our eyes off Jesus, pious pretence is sure to follow. 1 John I. 7 is the essential condition for the life of the saint—"If we

walk in the light *as God is in the light*," i.e., with nothing folded up, nothing to hide. Immediately we depend on anything other than our relationship to God, the possibility of pretence comes in, pious pretence, not hypocrisy (a hypocrite is one who tries to live a twofold life for his own ends and succeeds), but a desperately sincere effort to be right when we know we are not.

I have to beware of pretence in myself. It is an easy business to look what I am not ; it is easy to talk and to preach, and to preach my actual life to damnation. It was realizing this made Paul say—" I keep under my body . . . lest that by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." The more facile the expression in words, the less likely is the truth to be carried out in life. A preacher has a peril that the listener has not, the peril of being able to express a thing, and the expression reacts in the exhaustion of never doing it. That is where fasting has to come in—fasting from eloquence, from fine literary finish, from all that natural culture makes us esteem, if it is going to lead us into a hirpling walk with God. " This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Fasting is much more than doing without food, that is the least part, it is fasting from all that manifests self-indulgence. There is a certain mood in us all which delights in frank speaking, but we never intend to do what we say, we are " enchanted but unchanged." The frank man is the unreliable man, much more so than the subtle, crafty man, because he has the power of expressing the thing clean out and there is nothing more to it.

(b) Place of Patience. v. 16.

" Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" This warning is

against over-zealousness on the part of heresy-hunters. Our Lord would have us bide our time. Luke IX. 53-55 is a case in point. Take heed that you do not allow carnal suspicion to take the place of the discernment of the Spirit. Fruit and fruit alone is the test. If I see the fruit in a life showing itself as thistles, Jesus says you will know the wrong root is there, for you do not gather thistles off any root but a thistle, but remember that it is quite possible in winter time to mistake a rose tree for something else unless you are expert in judging. So there is a place for patience, and Our Lord would have us heed it. Wait for the fruit to manifest itself and don't be guided by your own fancy. It is easy to get alarmed and to persuade myself that my particular convictions are the standard of Christ, and to condemn everyone to perdition who does not agree with me; I am obliged to do it because my convictions have taken the place of God in me. God's Book never tells us to walk in the light of convictions, but in the light of the Lord.

Always distinguish between those who object to your way of presenting the Gospel and those who object to the Gospel itself. There may be many who object to your way of presenting the truth, but that does not necessarily mean that they object to God's making them holy. Make a place for patience. Wait before you pass your verdict. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Wrong teaching produces its fruit just as right teaching does if you give it time.

(c) Principle of Performance. vv. 17-18.

"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." If I say I am right with God, the

world has a perfect right to watch my private life and see if I am ; if I say I am born again, I am put under scrutiny, and rightly so. If the performance of my life is to be steadily holy, the principle of my life must be holy, i.e., if I am going to bring forth good fruit, I must have a good root. It is possible for an aeroplane to imitate a bird, and it is possible for a human being to imitate the fruit of the Spirit. The vital difference is the same in each: there is no principle of life behind. The aeroplane cannot persist, it can only fly spasmodically ; and my imitation of the Spirit requires certain conditions which keep me from the public gaze, then I can get on fairly well. Before I can have the right performance in my life, I must have the principle inside right—I must know what it is to be born from above, to be sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost, then my life will bring forth the fruit. Fruit is clearly expounded in the Epistles, and it is quite different from the gifts of the Spirit, or from the manifest seal of God on His own word, it is the "*fruit* of the Spirit." Fruit-bearing is always mentioned as the manifestation of an intimate union with Jesus. (John XV.)

(d) **Power of Publicity.** vv. 19-20.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Jesus makes publicity the test, He lived His own life most publicly (see John XVIII. 20). The thing that enraged Our Lord's enemies was the public manner in which He did things, His miracles were the public manifestation of His power. To-day people are annoyed at public testimony. There is no use saying—Oh yes, I live a holy life, but I don't say anything about it. Then you certainly don't, for the two go together. If a thing has its root in the heart of God, it will want to

be public, to get out, it must do things in the external and the open, and Jesus not only encouraged this publicity, He insisted on it. For good or bad, things must be dragged out. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." It is God's law that men cannot hide what they really are. If they are His disciples it will be publicly portrayed. In Matthew X. Jesus warned His disciples what would happen when they publicly testified, but, He says, don't hide your light under a bushel for fear of wolfish men; be careful only that you don't go contrary to your duty and have your soul destroyed in hell as well as your body. "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Our Lord warns that the man who will not be conspicuous as His disciple will be made to be conspicuous as His enemy. As sure as God is on His throne, the inevitable principle must work, the revealing of what men really are.

One of the dangers of the Higher Christian Life movement is the hole-and-corner aspect—you must have secret times alone with God. God drags everything out to the sun. Paul couples sanctification and fornication, meaning that every type of high spiritual emotion that is not worked out on its legitimate level will react on a wrong level. To be in contact with external facts is necessary to health in the natural world, and the same thing is true spiritually. God's spiritual open air is the Bible. The Bible is the universe of revelation facts, if I live there my roots will be healthy and my life right. There is no use saying—"I once had an experience"; the point is—where is it now? Pay attention to the Source, and out of you will flow rivers of living water. It is possible to be so taken up with conscious experience in religious life that we are of no use at all.

(3) APPEARANCE AND REALITY. vv. 21-29.

Our Lord makes the test of goodness not only goodness in intention, but in the active carrying out of God's will. Beware of confounding the appearance and reality, of judging only by the external evidence. God honours His word no matter who preaches it. The men Jesus refers to in v. 21 were instruments, but an instrument is not a servant. A servant is one who has given up his right to himself to the God whom he proclaims, a witness to Jesus, i.e., a satisfaction to Jesus wherever he goes. The baptism of the Holy Ghost turns men into the incarnation of what they preach, until the appearance and the reality are one and the same. The test of discipleship as Jesus is dealing with it in this chapter is fruit-bearing in godly character, and the disciple is warned not to be blinded by the fact that God honours His word even when it is preached from the wrong motive. (See Phil. 1-15).

The Holy Spirit is the One who brings the appearance and the reality into one in me; He does *in* me what Jesus did *for* me. The mighty redemption of God is made actual in my experience by the living efficacy of the Holy Ghost. The New Testament never asks us to *believe* the Holy Spirit, it asks us to *receive* Him. He makes the appearance and the reality one and the same thing. He *works in* my salvation and I have to *work it out*, with fear and trembling lest I forget to, and, thank God, He does give us the sporting chance, the glorious risk. If I could not disobey God, my obedience would not be worth anything. The sinless perfection heresy is that when I am saved I cannot sin, that is a devil's lie. When I am saved by God's grace, God puts into me the possibility not to sin, and my character from that moment is of value to God

because I can disobey Him. Before I was saved I had not the power to obey, but when He has planted in me on the ground of Redemption the heredity of the Son of God I have the power to obey, consequently the power to disobey. The walk of a disciple is a gloriously difficult one, but a gloriously certain one. On the ground of the perfect Redemption of Jesus, I find that I can begin now to walk worthily, i.e., with balance. John "looked upon Jesus *as He walked*. . ." Walk is the symbol of the ordinary character of the man, no show to keep up, no veneer. "I perceive that is a holy man of God which passeth by us continually."

(a) Recognition of Men. v. 21.

"Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Human nature is fond of labels, but a label may be the counterfeit of confession. It is so easy to be branded with labels, much easier in certain stages to wear a ribbon or a badge than to confess. Jesus never used the word "testify," He used a much more searching word—"confess." "He that *confesseth* Me before men." The test of goodness is confession by doing the will of God. If you do not confess Me before men, says Jesus, neither will your heavenly Father confess you, and immediately you do confess, you must have a badge, if you don't put one on, others will. Our Lord is warning that it is possible to wear the label without the goods, possible for a man to wear the badge of being His disciple while he is not. Labels are all right, but if we mistake the label for the goods we get confused. If the disciple is to discern between the man with the label and the man with the goods, he must have the spirit of

discernment, viz., the Holy Spirit. We start out with the honest belief that the label and the goods must go together, they ought to, but Jesus warns that sometimes they get severed, and we find cases where God honours His word although those who preach it are not living a right life. In judging the preacher, He says, judge him by his fruit.

(b) Remedy Mongers. v. 22.

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?" If I am used to cast out devils and to do wonderful works, surely I am a servant of God? Not at all, says Jesus. Does my life bear evidence in every detail? Our Lord warns here against those who utilise His words and His ways to remedy the evils of men while they are disloyal to Himself. "Have we not prophesied in Thy name . . . cast out devils . . . done many wonderful works"—not one word of confession of Jesus, one thing only, they have preached Him as a remedy. In Luke X. Our Lord told the disciples not to rejoice because the devils were subject to them, but to rejoice because they were rightly related to Himself. We are brought back to the one point all the time—an unsullied relationship to Jesus Christ in every detail, private and public.

(c) Retributive measures. v. 23.

"And then will I profess unto you, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity." In these solemn words Jesus says He will have to say to some Bible expositors, some prophetic students, some workers of miracles—"Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." To work iniquity is to twist out of the straight, these men have

twisted the ways of God and made them unequal. "I never knew you"—you never had My Spirit, you talked the truth and God honoured it, but you were never *of* the truth. "Depart from Me,"—the most appallingly isolating and condemning words that could be said to a human soul.

Only as we rely and recognise on the Holy Spirit do we discern how this warning of Our Lord's works. We are perplexed because people preach the right thing and prove that God blesses the preaching, and yet all the time the Spirit warns No, no, no. Never trust the best man or woman you ever met, trust only the Lord Jesus. "Lean not to your own understanding;" "put not your trust in princes;" put not your trust in any one but Jesus Christ. This warning holds good all the way along. Every character if taken as a guide leads away from God. We are never told to follow in all the footsteps of the saints, but only in so far as they have obeyed God. "Follow my ways which be in Christ." Keep right with God; keep in the light. All our panics, moral, intellectual and spiritual come along that line, whenever we take our eyes off Jesus we get startled—There is another man gone down, I did think he would have stood right. *Look unto Me*, says Jesus.

(4) THE TWO BUILDERS. vv. 24-27.

The emphasis in vv. 24-27 is laid by Our Lord on *hearing* and *doing*. He has given us His disposition, and He demands that we live as His disciples; how are we going to do it? By hearing My words and doing them, says Jesus. I only hear what I listen for. Have I listened to what Jesus has to say? Have I paid any attention to finding out what He did say? Most of us don't know what He said. If

we have only a smattering of religion, we talk a lot about the devil ; but what hinders me spiritually is not the devil half so much as inattention. I may *hear* the sayings of Jesus, but my will is left untouched, I never *do* them. The understanding of the Bible only comes from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit making the universe of the Bible real to me.

(a) **Spiritual Castles.** v. 24.

We speak of building "castles in the air," that is where a castle should be, whoever heard of a castle underground! The problem is how to get the foundation under your castle in the air so that it can stand upon the earth. The way to put foundations under our castles is by paying attention to the words of Jesus. I may listen and read, and not make much of it at the time, but by and bye I shall come into circumstances when the Holy Spirit will bring back to me what Jesus said—am I going to obey it? Jesus says the way to put foundations under spiritual castles is by hearing and doing "these sayings of Mine." Pay attention to His words, and give time to do it. Try five minutes a day with your Bible. The thing that influences you most is not the thing you give most time to, but the thing that springs from your own personal relationship, that is the prime motive that dominates you.

"Ye call Me Master and Lord : and ye say well ; for so I am"—but is He? Think of how we back out of what He says! "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." We say that is all very well up to a certain point, and then we abandon it. If you do obey the words of Jesus, you are sure to be called a fanatic. The New Testament associates shame with the gospel (see Romans 1. 16, 1 Peter IV. 12-13).

(b) **Stern Crisis.** v. 25.

Our spiritual castles must be conspicuous, and the test of the building is not its fair beauty but its foundations. There are beautiful spiritual fabrics raised in the shape of books and of lives, full of the finest diction and activities, but when the test comes, down they go. They have not been built on the sayings of Jesus, but built altogether in the air with no foundation under them.

Build up your character bit by bit by attention to My words, says Jesus, and when the supreme crisis comes, you will stand like a rock. The crisis does not come always, but when it does come, it is all up in about two seconds, there is no possibility of pretence; you are unearthed immediately. If a man has built himself up in private by listening to the words of Jesus and obeying them, when the crisis comes it is not his strength of will that keeps him, but the tremendous power of God—"kept by the power of God." Go on building up yourself in the word of God when no one is watching you, and when the crisis comes you will find you stand like a rock; but if you have not been building yourself up on the word of God, you will go down no matter what your will is like. All you build will end in disaster unless it is built on the sayings of Jesus; but if you are doing what Jesus told you to do, nourishing your soul on His word, you need not fear whatever the crisis is.

(c) **Supreme Catastrophe.** vv. 26-27.

Every spiritual castle will be tested by a threefold storm—rain, floods and wind: the world, the flesh and the devil, and it will only stand if it is founded on the sayings of Jesus. Every spiritual fabric that is built *with* the sayings of Jesus instead of being founded on them, Jesus calls the building of a foolish man. There is a tendency in all of us to appreciate the sayings of Jesus with our intellects

while we refuse to *do* them, and everything we build will go by the board when the test comes. Paul applies this in 1 Cor. III. 12-13—"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." It has all to be tested by the supreme test.

All that I build will be tested supremely, and it will tumble in a fearful disaster unless it is built on the sayings of Jesus. It is easy to build *with* the sayings of Jesus, to sling texts of Scripture together and build them into any kind of fabric. But Jesus brings the disciple to the test—You hear My sayings and quote them, but do you *do* them—in your office, in your home life, in your private life? Notice the repulsion you feel towards anyone who tries to build *with* the sayings of Jesus. Our Lord makes no room for having some compartments holy and other compartments not holy, the whole thing must be radically built on the foundation.

(d) **Scriptural Concentration.** vv. 28-29.

This summing up is a descriptive note by the Holy Spirit of the way in which the people who heard Jesus were impressed by His doctrine. Its application for us is not What would Jesus do? but, What did Jesus say? As I concentrate on what He said, I can stake my immortal soul on His words. It is a question of scriptural concentration, not of sentimental consecration. When Jesus brings a thing home by His word, don't shirk it, e.g., something your brother has against you (Matt. V. 42) some debt, something that presses—if you shirk that point, you become a religious humbug. The Holy Spirit's voice is as gentle as a zephyr, the merest check, and you say,

But that is only a tiny detail, it is much too trivial for the Holy Spirit to mean that; it is just that point, and at the risk of being thought a fanatic you must obey. When you are beginning to walk in the right way with God, you will find the spirit of self-vindication gets unearthed, trying to fulfil what Jesus says brings it to the light. What does it matter what anyone thinks of you so long as Jesus thinks it is the right thing to do—so long as you can hear Him say—“ Well done, good and faithful servant ” ?



BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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