

2 Corinthians - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 2, Unequal Yoke, The

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

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

Now, amongst the numerous hindrances to this thorough consecration of heart to Christ which I earnestly desire for myself, and my reader, "the unequal yoke" will be found to occupy a very prominent place indeed. "Be ye not unequally yoked together (ετεροζυγουντες) with unbelievers: for what partnership (μετοχη) hath righteousness with unrighteousness? (or rather lawlessness-ανομια) and what communion (κοινωνια) hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath a believer with an unbeliever? (απιστου) And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will

be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:14-18) Under the Mosaic economy, we learn the same moral principle. "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts as of woolen and linen together: (Deut. 22:9-11; Lev. 19:19). These scriptures will suffice to set forth the moral evil of an unequal yoke. It may, with full confidence, be asserted that no one can be an unshackled follower of Christ who is, in any way, "unequally yoked." He may be a saved person—he may be a true child of God—a sincere believer; but he cannot be a thorough disciple; and not only so, but there is a positive hindrance to the full manifestation of that which he may really be, notwithstanding his unequal yoke. "Come out ... and I will receive you ... and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." The idea here is evidently different from that set forth in James: "Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth." And also in Peter, "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth of r ever." And again, in 1 John: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." So also, in John's gospel, "But, as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." In all these passages, the relationship of sons is founded upon the divine counsel and the divine operation, and is not set before us as the consequence of any acting of ours; whereas, in 2 Cor. 6 it is put as the result of our getting out of the unequal yoke. In other words, it is entirely a practical question. Thus, in Matthew 5 we read, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; in order that (ὅπως) ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven, because he causeth his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust." Here, too, it is the practical establishment and public declaration of the relationship, and its moral influence. It becomes the sons of such a Father to act in such a way. In short, we have the abstract position of relationship of sons founded upon God's sovereign will and operation; and we have the moral character consequent upon, and flowing out of, this relationship which affords just ground for God's public acknowledgment of the relationship. God cannot fully and publicly own those who are unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for, were He to do so, it would be an acknowledgment of the unequal yoke. He cannot acknowledge "darkness"—"unrighteousness"—"Belial"—"idols"—and "an infidel." How could He? Hence, if I yoke myself with any of these, I am morally, and publicly, identified with them, and not with God at all. I have put myself into a position which God cannot own, and, as a consequence, He

cannot own me; but if I withdraw myself from that position—if I "come out and be separate"—if I take my neck out of the unequal yoke, then, but not until then, can I be publicly and fully received and owned as a "son or daughter of the Lord Almighty." This is a solemn and searching principle for all who feel that they have unhappily gotten themselves into such a yoke. They are not walking as disciples, nor are they publicly or morally on the ground of sons. God cannot own them. Their secret relationship is not the point; but they have put themselves thoroughly off God's ground. They have foolishly thrust their neck into a yoke which, inasmuch as it is not Christ's yoke, must be Belial's yoke; and until they cast off that yoke, God cannot own them as His sons and daughters. God's grace, no doubt, is infinite; and can meet us in all our failure and weakness; but if our souls aspire after a high order of discipleship, we must, at once, cast off the unequal yoke, cost what it may, that is, if it can be cast off; but if it cannot, we must only bow our heads beneath the shame and sorrow thereof, looking to God for full deliverance.

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

1.

And, first, then, let us consider the domestic or marriage yoke. What pen can portray the mental anguish, the moral misery, together with the ruinous consequences, as to spiritual life and testimony, flowing from a Christian's marriage with an unconverted person? I suppose nothing can be more deplorable than the condition of one who discovers, when it is too late, that he has linked himself, for life, with one who cannot have a single thought or feeling in common with him. One desires to serve Christ; the other can only serve the devil; one breathes after the things of God; the other sighs for the things of this present world; the one earnestly seeks to mortify the flesh with all its affections and desires; the other only seeks to minister to and gratify these very things. Like a sheep and a goat, linked together, the sheep longs to feed on the green pasture in the field, while, on the other hand, the goat craves the brambles which grow on the ditch. The sad consequence is that both are starved. One will not feed on the pasture; and the other cannot feed upon the brambles, and thus neither gets what his nature craves, unless the goat, by superior strength, succeeds in forcing his unequally yoked companion to remain amongst the brambles, there to languish and die. The moral of this is plain enough; and, moreover, it is alas 4 of but too common occurrence. The goat generally succeeds in gaining his end. The worldly partner carries his or her point, in almost every instance. It will be found, almost without exception, that, in cases of the unequal marriage yoke, the poor Christian is the sufferer, as is evidenced by the bitter fruits of a bad conscience, a depressed heart, a gloomy spirit, and a desponding mind. A heavy price, surely, to pay for the gratification of some natural affection, or the attainment, it may be, of some paltry worldly advantage. In fact, a marriage of this kind is the death knell of practical Christianity, and of progress in the divine life. It is morally impossible that any one can be an unfettered disciple of Christ with his neck in the marriage yoke with an unbeliever. As well might a racer in the Olympic or Isthmian games have expected to gain the crown of victory by attaching a heavy weight or a dead body to his person. It is enough, surely, to have one dead to sustain, without attaching another. There never was a true Christian yet, who did not find that he had abundant work to do in endeavoring to grapple with the evils of one heart, without going to burden himself with the evils of two; and, without doubt, the man who, foolishly and disobediently, marries an unconverted woman; or the woman who marries an unconverted man, is burdened with the combined evils of two hearts; and who is sufficient for these things? One can most fully count upon the grace of Christ for the subjugation of his own evil nature; but he certainly cannot count, in the same way, upon that grace, in reference to the evil nature of his unequal yoke-fellow. If he have yoked himself ignorantly, the Lord will meet him personally, on the ground of full confession, with entire restoration of soul; but, in the matter of his discipleship, he will never recover it. Paul could say, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disapproved of." (αδοκιμος) And he said this, too, in immediate connection with "striving for the mastery." "Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one obtaineth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate (self-controlled -εγκρατευεται) in all things; now, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air," etc. (1 Cor. 9:24-27.) Here, it is no a question of life or salvation, but simply one of "running in a race," and "so running that we may obtain," not life, but "an incorruptible crown." The fact of being called to run assumes the possession of life, for no one would call upon dead men to run in a race. I have gotten life, evidently, before I begin to run at all, and, hence; though I should fail in the race, I do not lose my life, but only the crown, for this and not that was the object proposed to be run for. We are not called to run for life, inasmuch as we get that not by running but "by faith of Jesus Christ" who by His death has purchased life for us, and implants it in us by the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost. Now, this life, being the life of a risen Christ, is eternal, for He is the eternal son; as He says Himself in His address to the Father, in John, "Thou hast given him power over all -flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." This life is not conditional. He does not give us life, as sinners, and then set us to run for it as saints, with the gloomy foreboding, that we may lose the precious boon by failing in the race. This would be to "run uncertainly," as many, alas! are trying to do, who profess to have entered upon the course, and yet they know not whether they have life or 'not. Such persons are running for life, and not for a crown; but God does not set up life at the goal, as the reward of victory, but gives it at the starting post, as the power by which we run. The power to run, and the object of running are two very different things; yet they are constantly confounded by persons who are ignorant of the glorious gospel of the grace of God, in which Christ is set forth as the life and righteousness of all who believe on His name; and all this, moreover, as the free gift of God, and not as the reward of our running.

Now, in considering the terribly evil consequences of the unequal marriage yoke, it is mainly as bearing upon our discipleship that we are looking at them..I say, mainly, because our entire character and experience are deeply affected thereby. I very much question, if any one can give a more effectual blow to his prosperity in the -divine life, than by assuming an unequal yoke. Indeed, the very fact of so doing proves that spiritual decline has already set in, with most alarming symptoms; but as to his discipleship and testimony, the lamp thereof may be regarded as all but gone out, or if it does give an occasional faint glimmer, it only serves to make manifest the gloom of his unhappy position, and the appalling consequences of being "unequally yoked together with an unbeliever."

Thus much as to the question of the unequal yoke in its influence upon the life, the character, the testimony and the discipleship of a child of God. I would now say a word as to its moral effect, as exhibited in the domestic circle. Here, too, the consequences are truly melancholy. Nor could they possibly be otherwise. Two persons have come together, in the closest and most intimate relationship, with tastes, habits, feelings, desires, tendencies, and objects diametrically opposite. They have nothing in common, so that, in every movement, they can but

grate one against the other. The unbeliever cannot, in reality, go with the believer, and if there should, through excessive amiability, or downright hypocrisy, be a show of acquiescence, what is it worth in the sight of the Lord who judges the true state of the heart in reference to Himself? But little indeed; yea, it is worse than worthless. Then again, if the believer should, unhappily, go, in any measure, with his unequal yoke-fellow, it can only be at the expense of his discipleship, and the consequence is, a condemning conscience, in the sight of the Lord; and this, again, leads to heaviness of spirit, and, it may be, sourness of temper, in the domestic circle, so that the grace of the gospel is, by no means, commended, and the unbeliever is not attracted or won. Thus it is, in every way, most sorrowful. It is dishonoring to God, destructive of spiritual prosperity, utterly subversive of discipleship and testimony, and entirely hostile to domestic peace and blessing. It produces estrangement, coldness, distance, and misunderstanding; or, if it does not produce these, it will, doubtless, lead, on the part of the christian, to a forfeiture of his discipleship and his good conscience, both of which he may be tempted to offer as a sacrifice upon the altar of domestic peace. Thus, whatever way we look at it, an unequal yoke must lead to the most deplorable consequences.

Then, as to its effect upon children, it is equally sad. These are almost sure to flow in the current with an unconverted parent. " Their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." There can be no union of heart in the training of the children; no joint and mutual confidence in reference to them. One desires to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; the other desires to bring them up in the principles of the world, the flesh, and the devil: and as all the sympathies of the children, as they grow up, are likely to be ranged on the side of the latter, it is easy to see how it will end. In short, it is an un-seemly, unscriptural, and vain effort to plow with an "unequal yoke," or to "sow the ground with mingled seed"; and all must end in sorrow and confusion.

I shall, ere turning from this branch of our subject, offer a remark as to the reasons which generally actuate Christians in the matter of entering into the unequal marriage-yoke. We all know, alas! how easily the poor heart persuades itself of the rightness of any step which it desires to take, and how the devil furnishes plausible arguments to convince us of its rightness-arguments which the moral condition of the soul causes us to regard as clear, forcible, and satisfactory. The very fact of our thinking of such a thing, proves our unfitness to weigh, with a well-balanced mind and spiritually-adjusted conscience, the solemn consequences of such a step. If the eye were single (that is, if we were governed but by one object, namely, the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ), we should never entertain the idea of putting our necks into an unequal yoke; and, consequently, we should have no difficulty or perplexity about the matter. A racer, whose eye was resting on the crown, would not be troubled with any perplexity as to whether he ought to stop and tie a hundred-weight round his neck. Such a thought would never cross his mind; and not only so, but a thorough racer would have a distinct and almost intuitive perception of everything which would be likely to prove a hindrance to him in running the race; and, of course, with such an one, to perceive, would be to reject with decision. Now, were it thus with Christians, in the matter of unscriptural marriage, it would save them a world of sorrow and perplexity; but it is not thus. The heart gets out of communion, and is morally incompetent to "try the things that differ"; and, when in this condition, the devil gains an easy conquest, and speedy success in his wicked effort to induce the believer to yoke himself with "Belial"-with "unrighteousness"-with "darkness"-with "an infidel." When the soul is in full communion with God, it is entirely subject to His word; it sees things as He sees them, calls them what He calls them, and not what the devil or his own carnal heart would call them. In this way, the believer escapes the ensnaring influence of a deception which is very frequently brought to bear upon him in this matter, namely, a false profession of religion on the part of the person whom he desires to marry. This is a very common case. It is easy to show symptoms of leaning towards the things of God; and the heart is treacherous and base enough to make a profession of religion, in order to gain its end; and not only so, but the devil, who is "transformed into an angel of light," will lead to this false profession, in order thereby the more effectually to entrap the feet of a child of God. Thus it comes to pass that Christians, in this matter, suffer themselves to be satisfied, or at least profess themselves satisfied, with evidence of conversion which, under any other circumstances, they would regard as utterly lame and flimsy. But, alas! experience soon opens the eyes to the reality. It is speedily discovered that the profession was all a vain show, that the heart is entirely in and of the world. Terrible discovery! Who can detail the bitter consequences of such a discovery-the anguish of heart-the bitter reproaches and cuttings of conscience -the shame and confusion-the loss of peace and blessing -the forfeiture of spiritual peace and joy-the sacrifice of a life of usefulness? Who can describe all these things? The man awakes from his delusive dream, and opens his eyes upon the tremendous reality, that he is yoked for life with "Belial." Yes, this is what the Spirit calls it. It is not our inference, or a deduction arrived at by a process of reasoning; but a plain and positive statement of Holy Scripture, that thus the matter stands in reference to one who, from whatever motive, or under the influence of whatever reasons, or deceived by whatever false pretenses, has entered into an unequal marriage-yoke.

O, my beloved Christian reader, if you are in danger of entering into such a yoke, let me earnestly, solemnly, and affectionately entreat of you to pause first, and weigh the matter in the balances of the sanctuary, ere you move forward a single hair's breadth on such a fatal path! You may rest assured, that you will no sooner have taken the step, than your heart will be assailed by hopeless regrets, and your life embittered by unnumbered sorrows. **LET NOTHING INDUCE YOU TO YOKE YOURSELF WITH AN UNBELIEVER.** Are your affections engaged? Then, remember, they cannot be the affections of your new man; they are, be assured of it, those of the old or carnal nature, which you are called upon to mortify and set aside. Wherefore, you should cry to God for spiritual power to rise above the influence of such affections; yea, to sacrifice them to Him. Again, are your interests concerned? Then remember, that they are only your interests; and if they are promoted, Christ's interests are sacrificed by your yoking yourself with "Belial." Furthermore, they are only your temporal, and not your eternal interests. In point of fact, the interests of the believer and those of Christ ought to be identical; and it is plain, that His interests, His honor, His truth, His glory, must inevitably be sacrificed, if a member of His body is linked with "Belial." This is the true way to look at the question. What are a few hundreds, or a few thousands, to an heir of heaven? "God is able to give thee much more than this." Are you going to sacrifice the truth of God, as well as your own spiritual peace prosperity, and happiness, for a paltry trifle of gold, which must perish in the using of it? Ah, no! God forbid! Flee from it, as a bird from the snare, which it sees and knows. Stretch out the hand of genuine, well-braced, whole-hearted discipleship, and take the knife and slay your affections and your interests on the altar of God; and then, even though there should not be an audible voice from heaven to approve your act, you will have the invaluable testimony of an approving conscience and an ungrieved Spirit-an ample reward, surely, for the most costly sacrifice which you can make. May the Spirit of God give power to resist Satan's temptations!

It is hardly needful to remark, here, that in cases where conversion takes place after marriage, the complexion of the matter is very materially altered. There will then be no smittings of conscience, for example; and the whole thing is modified in a variety of particulars. Still there will be difficulty, trial and sorrow, unquestionably. The only thing is that one can, far more happily, bring the trial and sorrow into the Lord's presence when he has not deliberately and willfully plunged himself thereinto; and, blessed be God, we know how ready He is to

forgive, restore, and cleanse from all unrighteousness, the soul that makes full confession of its error and failure. This may comfort the heart of one who feels he has sinned in this matter; and for one who has been brought to the Lord after marriage, the spirit of God has given specific direction and blessed encouragement, in the following passage: " If any brother have an unbelieving wife, and she think proper to dwell with him, let him not put her away: and if any woman have an unbelieving husband, and he think proper to dwell with her, let her not put him away (for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean, but now are they holy) ... for what knowest thou, O wife, if thou shalt save thy husband? or what knowest thou, O husband, if thou shalt save thy wife" (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

2.

We shall now consider " the unequal yoke" in its commercial phase, as seen in cases of partnership in business. This, though not so serious an aspect of the yoke as that which we have just been considering, inasmuch as it can be more easily got rid of, will, nevertheless, be found a very positive barrier to the believer's testimony. When a Christian yokes himself, for business purposes, with an unbeliever-whether that unbeliever be a relative or not-or when he becomes a member of a worldly firm, he virtually surrenders his individual responsibility. Henceforth the acts of the firm become his acts, and it is perfectly out of the question to think of getting a worldly firm to act on heavenly principles. They would laugh at such a notion, inasmuch as it would be an effectual barrier to the success of their commercial schemes. They will feel perfectly free to adopt a number of expedients in carrying on their business, which would be quite opposed to the spirit and principles of the kingdom in which he is, and of the Church of which he forms a part. Thus he will find himself constantly in a most trying position. He may use his influence to christianize the mode of conducting affairs; but they will compel him to do business as others do, and he has no remedy save to mourn in secret over his anomalous and difficult position, or else to go out at great pecuniary loss to himself and his family. Where the eye is single there will be no hesitation as to which of these alternatives to adopt; but, alas! the very fact of getting into such a position proves the lack of a single eye; and the fact of being in it argues the lack of spiritual capacity to appreciate the value and power of the divine principles which would infallibly bring a man out of it. A man whose eye was single could not possibly yoke himself with an unbeliever for the purpose of making money. Such an one could only set, as an object before his mind, the, direct glory of Christ; and this object could never be gained by a positive transgression of divine principle. This makes it very simple. If it does not glorify Christ for a Christian to become a partner in a worldly firm, it must, without doubt, further the designs of the devil. There is no middle ground; but that it does not glorify Christ is manifest, for His word says, "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Such is the principle which cannot be infringed without damage to the testimony, and forfeiture of spiritual blessing. True the conscience of a Christian, who transgresses in this matter, may seek relief in various ways-may have recourse to various subterfuges-may set forth various arguments to persuade itself that all is right. It will be said that "we can be very devoted and very spiritual, so far as we are personally concerned, even though we are yoked, for business purposes, with an unbeliever." This will be found fallacious when brought to the test of actual practice. A servant of Christ will find himself hampered in a hundred ways by his worldly partnership. If in matters of service to Christ he is not met with open hostility, he will have to encounter the enemy's secret and constant effort to damp his ardor and throw cold water on all his schemes. He will be laughed at and despised-he will be continually reminded of the effect which his enthusiasm and fanaticism will produce in reference to the business prospects of the firm. If he uses his time, his talents, or his pecuniary resources, in what he believes to be the Lord's service he will be pronounced a fool or a madman, and reminded that the true, the proper, the rational way for a commercial man to serve the Lord is to " attend to business, and nothing but business;" and that it is the exclusive business of clergymen and ministers to attend to religious matters, inasmuch as they are set apart and paid for so doing. Now, although the Christian's renewed mind may be thoroughly convinced of the fallacy of all this reasoning-although he may see that this worldly wisdom is but a flimsy, thread-bare cloak, thrown over the heart's covetous practices-yet who can tell how far the heart may be influenced by such things? We get weary of constant resistance. The current becomes too strong for us, and we gradually yield ourselves to its action, and are carried along on its surface. Conscience may make some death-struggles but the spiritual energies are paralyzed, and the sensibilities of the new nature are blunted, so that there is no response to the cries of conscience and no effectual effort to withstand the enemy; the worldliness of the Christian's heart leagues itself with the opposing influences from without-the outworks are stormed, and the citadel of the soul's affections vigorously assaulted; and, finally, the man settles down in thorough worldliness, exemplifying, in his own person, the prophet's touching lament, " Her Nazarites were purer than snow they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick " (Lam. 4:7,8). The man who was once known as a servant of Christ a fellow-helper unto the kingdom of God-making use of his resources only to further the interests of the gospel of Christ, is now, alas! settled down upon his lees, only known as a plodding, keen, bargain-making man of business, of whom the apostle might well say, " Demas hath forsaken me, having loved the present age " (των υυυ αιωνων).

But, perhaps, nothing so operates on the hearts of Christians in inducing them to yoke themselves commercially with unbelievers as the habit of seeking to maintain the two characters of a Christian and a man of business. This is a grievous snare. In point of fact there can be no such thing. A man must be either the one or the other. If I am a Christian my christianity must show itself, as a living reality, in that in which I am; and, if it cannot show itself there, I ought not to be there; for, if I continue in a sphere or position in which the life of Christ cannot be manifested, I shall speedily possess naught of Christianity but the name, without the reality-the outward form without the in-ward power-the shell without the kernel. I should be the servant of Christ, not merely on Sunday, but from Monday morning to Saturday night. I should not only be a servant of Christ in the public assembly, but also in my place of business, whatever it may happen to be. But I cannot be a proper servant of Christ with my neck in the yoke with an unbeliever; for how could the servants of two hostile masters work in the same yoke? It is utterly impossible; as well might one attempt to link the sun's meridian beams with the profound darkness of midnight. It cannot be done; and I do, therefore, most solemnly appeal to my reader's conscience, in the presence of Almighty God, who shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ, as to this important matter. I would say to him, if he is thinking of getting into partnership with an unbeliever, FLEE FROM IT! yes, flee from it, though it promises you the gain of thousands. You will plunge yourself in a mess of trouble and sorrow. You are going to "plow" with one whose feelings, instincts, and tendencies are diametrically opposed to your own. "An ox and an ass" are not so unlike, in every respect, as a believer and an unbeliever. How will you ever get on? He wants to make money-to profit him-self-to get on in the world; you want (at least you ought to want) to grow in grace and holiness-to advance the interests of Christ and His gospel on the earth, and to push onward to the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. His object is money; yours, I trust, is Christ: he lives for this world; you for the world to come: he is engrossed with the things of time; you with those of eternity. How, then, can you ever take common ground with him? Your principles, your motives, your objects, your hopes are all opposed. How is it possible you can get on? How can you have aught in common? Surely all this needs only to be looked at with a single eye in order to be seen in its true light. It is impossible that any one whose

eye is filled, and whose heart is occupied with Christ, could ever yoke himself with a worldly partner, for any object whatsoever. Wherefore, my beloved Christian reader, let me once more entreat you, ere you take such a tremendous step—a step fraught with such awful consequences—so pregnant with danger to your best interests, as well as to the testimony of Christ, with which you are honored—to take the whole matter with an honest heart, into the sanctuary of God, and weigh it in His sacred balance. Ask Him what He thinks of it, and hearken with a subject-will, and a well-adjusted conscience, to His reply. It is plain and powerful—yea, as plain and as powerful as though it fell from the open heavens—be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

But, if, unhappily, my reader is already in the yoke, I would say to him, disentangle yourself as speedily as you can. I am much mistaken if you have not already found the yoke a burdensome one. To you, it were superfluous to detail the sad consequences of being in such a position; you doubtless, know them all. It is needless to print them on paper or paint them on canvass to one who has entered into all their reality. My beloved brother in Christ, lose not a moment in seeking to throw off the yoke. This must be done before the Lord, on His principles, and by His grace. It is easier to get into a wrong position than to get out of it. A partnership of ten or twenty years' standing cannot be dissolved in a moment. It must be done calmly, humbly, and prayerfully, as in the sight of the Lord, and with entire reference to His glory.

may dishonor the Lord as much in my way of getting out of a wrong position, as by getting into it at the first. Hence, if I find myself in partnership with an unbeliever, and that my conscience tells me I am wrong, let me honestly and frankly state to my partner, that I can no longer go on with him; and having done that, my place is to use every exertion to wind up the affairs of the firm in an upright, a straightforward, and business-like manner, so as to give no possible occasion to the adversary to speak

reproachfully, and that my good may not be evil spoken of. We must avoid rashness, headiness and highmindedness, when apparently acting for the Lord, and in defense of His holy principles. If a man gets entangled in a net, or involved in a labyrinth, it is not by bold and violent plunging he will extricate himself. No; he must humble himself, confess his sins before the Lord, and then retrace his steps in patient dependance upon that grace which can not only pardon him for being in a wrong position, but lead him forth into a right one. Moreover, as in the case of the marriage yoke, the matter is very much modified by the fact of the partnership having been entered into previous to conversion. Not that this would, in the slightest degree, justify a continuance in it. By no means; but it does away with much of the sorrow of heart and defilement of conscience connected with such a position, and will also, very materially, affect the mode of escape therefrom. Besides, the Lord is glorified by, and He assuredly accepts the moral bent of the heart and conscience in the right direction. If I judge myself for being wrong, and that the moral bent of my heart and conscience is to get right, God will accept of that, and surely set me right. But if He sets me right, He will not suffer me to do violence to one truth while seeking to act in obedience to another. The same word that says, "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," says, also, "render, therefore, to all their dues"—"owe no man anything"—"provide things honestly in the sight of all"—"walk honestly toward them that are without." If I have wronged God by getting into partnership with an unbeliever, I must not wrong man in my way of getting out of it. Profound subjection to the word of God, by the power of the Holy Ghost, will set all to rights, will lead us into straight paths, and enable us to avoid all dangerous extremes.

3.

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

In looking through Scripture, we find almost number-less passages setting forth the intense spirit of separation which ought ever to characterize the people of God. Whether we direct our attention to the Old Testament—in which we have God's relationship and dealings with His earthly people, Israel—or, to the New Testament, in which we have His relationship and dealings with His heavenly people, the Church, we find the same truth prominently set forth, namely, the entire separation of those who belong to God. Israel's position is thus stated in Balaam's parable, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned amongst the nations." Their place was outside the range of all the nations of the earth; and they were responsible to maintain that separation. Throughout the entire Pentateuch, they were instructed, warned and admonished as to this; and, throughout the Psalms and the Prophets we have the record of their failure in the maintenance of this separation, which failure, as we know, has brought down upon them the heavy judgments of the hand of God. It would swell this little paper into a volume were I to attempt a quotation of all the passages in which this point is put forward. I take it for granted that my reader is sufficiently acquainted with his Bible, to render such quotations unnecessary. Should he not be so, however, a reference in his concordance to the words, "separate," "separated," and "separation," will suffice to lay before him, at a glance, the body of scripture evidence on this subject. The passage just quoted, from the Book of Numbers, is the expression of God's thoughts about His people Israel: "The people shall dwell ALONE."

The same is true, only upon a much higher ground, in reference to God's heavenly people, the Church—the body of Christ—composed of all true believers. They, too, are a separated people. We shall now proceed to examine the ground of this separation. There is a great difference between being separate on the ground of what we are, and of what God is. The former makes a man a pharisee; the latter makes him a saint. If I say to a poor fellow-sinner, "stand by thyself, I am holier than thou," I am a detestable pharisee and a hypocrite; but if God, in His infinite condescension and perfect grace, says to me, "I have brought you into relationship with Myself, in the person of My Son Jesus Christ, therefore be holy and separate from all evil; come out from among them and be separate." I am bound to obey, and my obedience is the practical manifestation of my character as a saint—a character which I have not because of anything in myself, but simply because God has brought me near unto Himself through the precious blood of Christ. It is well to be clear as to this. Pharisaism and divine sanctification are two very different things; and yet they are often confounded. Those who contend for the maintenance of that place of separation which belongs to the people of God, are constantly accused of setting themselves up above their fellow men, and of laying claim to a higher degree of personal sanctity than is ordinarily possessed. This accusation arises from not attending to the distinction just referred to. When God calls upon men to be separate, it is on the ground of what He has done for them in the cross, and where He has set them, in eternal association with Himself, in the person of Christ. But, if I separate myself on the ground of what I am in myself, it is the most senseless and vapid assumption which will sooner or later be made manifest. God commands his people to be holy on the ground of what He is: "Be ye holy, for I

am holy." This is evidently a very different thing from stand by thyself, I am holier than thou." If God brings people into association with Himself, He has a right to prescribe what their moral character ought to be, and they are responsible to answer thereto. Thus we see that the most profound humility lies at the bottom of a saint's separation. There is nothing so calculated to put one in the dust as the understanding of the real nature of divine holiness. It is an utterly false humility which springs from looking at ourselves-yea it is, in reality, based upon pride which has never yet seen to 'the bottom of its own perfect worthlessness. Some imagine that they can reach the truest and deepest humility by looking at self, whereas it can only be reached by looking at Christ. "The more thy glories strike mine eye, the humbler I shall be." This is a just sentiment, founded upon divine principle. The soul that loses itself in the blaze of Christ's moral glory, is truly humble, and none other. No doubt, we have a right to be humble when we think of what poor creatures we are; but it only needs a moment's just reflection to see the fallacy of seeking to produce any practical result by looking at self. It is only when we find ourselves in the presence of infinite excellency, that we are really humble. Hence, therefore, a child of God should refuse to be yoked with an unbeliever, whether for a domestic, a commercial, or a religious object, simply because God tells him to be separate, and not because of his own personal holiness. The carrying out of this principle, in matters of religion, will necessarily involve much trial and sorrow, it will be termed intolerance, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, exclusiveness, and such like; but we cannot help all this. Provided we keep ourselves separate upon a right principle and in a right spirit, we may safely leave all results with God. No doubt, the remnant, in the days of Ezra, must have appeared excessively intolerant, in refusing the cooperation of the surrounding people in building the house of God; but they acted upon divine principle in the refusal. " Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel, then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him, since the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assur, which brought us up hither." This might seem a very attractive proposal-a proposal evidencing a very decided leaning toward the God of Israel; yet the remnant refused, because the people, notwithstanding their fair profession, were, at heart, uncircumcised and hostile. " But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel." (Esther 4:1-3.) They would not yoke themselves with the uncircumcised-they would not " plow with an ox and an ass "-they would not " sow their field with mingled seed "-they kept themselves separate, even though, by so doing, they exposed themselves to the charge of being a bigoted, narrow-minded, illiberal, uncharitable set of people.

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

Then, as to the object for which real Christians usually yoke themselves with those who, even on their own confession, and in the judgment of charity itself, are not Christians at all, it will be found, in the end, that no really divine and heavenly object can be gained by an infringement of God's truth. Per fas aut nefas can never be a divine motto. The means are not sanctified by the end; but both means and end must be according to the principles of God's holy word, else all must eventuate in confusion and dishonor. It might have appeared to Jehoshaphat a very worthy object, to recover Ramoth Gilead out of the hand of the enemy; and, moreover, he might have appeared a very liberal, gracious, popular, large-hearted man when, in reply to Ahab's proposal, he said, " I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war." It is easy to be liberal and large-hearted at the expense of divine principle; but how did it end? Ahab was killed, and Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped with his life, having made total shipwreck of his testimony. Thus we see that Jehoshaphat did not even gain the object for which he unequally yoked himself with an unbeliever; and even had he gained it, it would have been no justification of his course.1 Nothing can ever warrant a believer's yoking himself with an unbeliever,- and, therefore, however fair, attractive, and plausible the Ramoth expedition might seem in the eye of man, it was, in the judgment of God, " helping the ungodly, and loving them that hate the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:2). The truth of God strips men and things of the false colors with which the spirit of expediency would deck them, and presents them in their proper light; and it is an unspeakable mercy to have the clear judgment of God about all that is going on around us: it imparts calmness to the spirit, and stability to the course and character, and saves one from that unhappy fluctuation of thought, feeling, and principle which so entirely unfits him for the place of a steady and consistent witness for Christ. We shall surely err, if we attempt to form our judgment by the thoughts and opinions of men; for they will always judge according to the outward appearance, and not according to the intrinsic character and principle of things. Provided men can gain what they conceive to be a right object, they care not about the mode of gaining it. But the true servant of Christ knows that He must do his Master's work upon his Master's principles, and in his Master's spirit. It will not satisfy such an one to reach the most praiseworthy end, unless he can reach it by a divinely-appointed road. The means and the end must both be divine. I admit it, for example, to be a most desirable end to circulate the Scriptures-God's own pure, eternal word; but if I could not circulate them save by yoking myself with an unbeliever, I should refrain, inasmuch as I am not to do evil that good may come. But, blessed be God, His servant can circulate His precious book without violating the precepts contained in that book. He can, upon his own individual responsibility, or in fellowship with those who are really on the Lord's side, scatter the precious seed everywhere, without leaguering himself with those whose whole course and conduct prove them to be of the world. The same may be said in reference to every object of a religious nature. It can and should be gained on God's principles, and only thus. It may be argued, in reply, that we are told not to judge-that we cannot read the heart-and that we are bound to hope that all who would engage in such good works as the circulation of the Bible, the distribution of tracts, and the aiding of missionary labors, must be Christians; and that, therefore, it cannot be wrong to link ourselves with them. To all this I reply, that there is hardly a passage in the New Testament so misunderstood and misapplied as Matthew 7:1: " Judge not, that ye be not judged." In the very same chapter we read: " Beware of false prophets by their fruits ye shall know them." Now, how are we to " beware," if we do not exercise judgment? Again, in 1 Cor. 5 we read: " For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are -within? But them that are without, God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Here we are distinctly taught, that those "within" come within the immediate range of the Church's judgment; and yet, according to the common interpretation of Matt. 7:1, we ought not to judge anybody; that interpretation, therefore, must needs be unsound. If people take, even in.

profession, the ground of being "within," we are commanded to judge them. "Do not ye judge them that are within?" As to those "without," we have naught to do with them, save, to present the pure and perfect, the nth, illimitable, and unfathomable grace which shines, with un-clouded effulgence, in the death and resurrection of the Son of God. All this is plain enough. The people of God are told to exercise judgment as to all who profess to be "within"; they are told to "beware of false prophets"; they are commanded to "try the spirits": and how can they do all this, if they are not to judge at all? What, then, does our Lord mean, when He says, "Judge not"? I believe He means just what St. Paul, by the Holy Ghost, says, when he commands us to "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). We have nothing to do with judging motives; but we have, to judge conduct and principles; that is to say, the duct and principles of all who profess to be "within." And, in point of fact, the very persons who say, "We must not judge," do themselves constantly exercise judgment. There is no true Christian in whom the moral instincts of the divine nature do not virtually pronounce judgment as to character, conduct, and doctrine; and these are the very points which are placed within the believer's range of judgment.

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

4.

We have only now to consider the philanthropic phase of the unequal yoke. Many will say, "I quite admit that we ought not to mingle ourselves with positive unbelievers in the worship or service of God; but, then, we can freely unite with such for the furtherance of objects of philanthropy—such, for instance, as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, reclaiming the vicious, in providing asylums for the blind and the lunatic, hospitals and infirmaries for the sick and infirm, places of refuge for the homeless and houseless, the fatherless and the widow; and, in short, for the furtherance of every-thing that tends to promote the amelioration of our fellow-creatures, physically, morally, and intellectually." This, at first sight, seems fair enough; for I may be asked, if I would not help a man, by the road-side, to get his cart out of the ditch? I reply, certainly; but if I were asked to become a member of a mixed society for the purpose of getting carts out of ditches, I should refuse—not because of my superior sanctity, but because God's word says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." This would be my answer, no matter what were the object proposed by a mixed society. The servant of Christ is commanded "to be ready to every good work"—"to do good unto all"—"to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction"; but then it is as the servant of Christ, and not as the member of a society or a committee in which there may be infidels and atheists and all sorts of wicked and godless men. Moreover, we must remember that all God's philanthropy is connected with the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the channel through which God will bless—that the mighty lever by which He will elevate man, physically, morally, and intellectually. "After that the kindness and philanthropy (φιλανθρωπια) of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:4-6). This is God's philanthropy. This is His mode of ameliorating man's condition. With all who understand its worth, the Christian can readily yoke himself, but with none other.

The men of the world know naught of this, care not for it. They may seek reformation; but it is reformation without Christ. They may promote amelioration; but it is amelioration without the cross. They wish to advance; but Jesus is neither the starting-post nor the goal of their course. How, then, can the Christian yoke himself with them? They want to work without Christ, the very one to whom he owes 'everything. Can he be satisfied to work with them? Can he have an object in common with them? If men come to me and say, "we want your co-operation in feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked, in founding hospitals and lunatic asylums, in (feeding and educating orphans, in improving the physical condition of our fellow mortals; but you must remember that a leading rule of the society, the board, or the committee formed for such objects, is, that the name of Christ is not to be introduced, as it would only lead to controversy. Our objects being not at all religious, but undividedly philanthropic, the subject of religion must be studiously excluded from all our public meetings. We are met as men, for a benevolent purpose, and therefore Infidels, Atheists; Socinians, Arians, Romanists, and all sorts can happily yoke themselves to move onward the glorious machine of philanthropy." What should be my answer to such an application? The fact is, words would fail one who really loved the Lord Jesus, in attempting to reply to an appeal so monstrous. What! benefit mortals by the exclusion of Christ? God forbid! If I cannot gain the objects of pure philanthropy, without setting aside that blessed one who lived and died, and lives eternally for me, then away with your philanthropy, for it, assuredly, is not God's, but Satan's. If it were God's, the word is, "He shed it on us abundantly THROUGH Jesus Christ," the very one whom your rule leaves entirely out. Hence your rule must be the direct dictation of Satan, the enemy of Christ. Satan would always like to leave out the Son of God; and, when he can get men to do the same, he will allow them to be benevolent, charitable, and philanthropic. But, in good truth, such benevolence and philanthropy ought to be termed malevolence and misanthropy, for how can you more effectually exhibit ill-will and hatred toward men, than by leaving out THE ONLY ONE who can really bless them for time or for eternity. But what must be the moral condition of a heart, in reference to Christ, who could take his seat at a board, or on a introduced? It the condition that that name must not be introduced? It must be cold indeed; yea, it proves that the plans and operations of unconverted men are of sufficient importance, in his judgment, to lead him to throw his master overboard, for the purpose of carrying them out. Let us not mistake matters. This is the true aspect in which to view the world's philanthropy. The men of this world can "sell ointment for three hundred pence, and give to the poor;" while they pronounce it waste to pour that ointment on the head of Christ! Will the Christian consent to this? Will he yoke himself with such? Will he seek to improve the world without Christ? Will he join with men to deck and garnish a scene which is stained with His Master's blood? Peter could say, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk." Peter would heal a cripple by the power of the name of Jesus; but what would he have said, if asked to join a committee or society to alleviate cripples, on the condition of leaving that name out altogether? It requires no great stretch of imagination to conceive his answer. His whole soul would recoil from such a thought. He only healed the cripple for the purpose of exalting the name of Jesus, and setting forth its worth, its excellency, and its glory, in the view of men; but the very reverse is the object of the world's philanthropy; inasmuch as it sets aside His blessed name entirely, and banishes Him from its boards, its committees, and its platforms. May we not, therefore, well say, "Shame on the Christian who is found in a place from which his Master is shut out." 'Oh! let him go forth, and, in the energy of love to Jesus, and by the power of that name, do all the good he can; but let him not yoke himself with unbelievers, to counteract the effects of sin by excluding the cross of Christ. God's grand object is to exalt His Son—"that all should honor the Son even as

they honor the Father." This should be the Christian's object likewise; to this end he should "do good unto all;" but if he joins a society or a committee in order to do good, it is not "in the name of Jesus" he acts, but in the name of the society or committee, without the name of Jesus. This ought to be enough for every true and loyal heart. God has no other way of blessing men but through Christ; and no other object in blessing them but to exalt Christ. As with Pharaoh of old, when the hungry Egyptians flocked to his presence, his word was "go to Joseph;" so God's word to all is, "come to Jesus." Yes, for soul and body, time and eternity, we must go to Jesus; but the men of the world know Him not, and want Him not; what, therefore, has the Christian to do with such? How can he act in yoke with them? He can only do so on the ground of practically denying his Savior's name. Many do not see this; but that does not alter the case for those who do. We ought to act honestly, as in the light; and even though the feelings and affections of the new nature were not sufficiently strong in us to lead us to shrink from ranking ourselves with the enemies of Christ, the conscience ought, at least, to bow to the commanding authority of that word, BE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS.

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

C. H. M.

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 81. The Observance of Days

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have been asked by a friend, "What do you think of the observance of days?" We answer in the language of the Apostle, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you." But let it not be supposed that "the Lord's Day" is here referred to. That day stands upon its own divine and independent foundation, and must be honored and loved by every Christian.

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5). If this passage were understood, it would settle a thousand questions as to days, ordinances, rites and ceremonies, legal righteousness, and all questions as to law. All these things belong to man in the old creation, and have no place in the new at all. But the believer is not in the old creation, but in the new. He is united to Christ, the Head of the new creation. Christ is his life, his righteousness, his object, his hope, his all. In the old creation, man belongs to death; in the new creation, death belongs to man. All things are become new, and all things are of God.

Short Papers, Judgment Seat of Christ, The

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We have lately received communications from various friends, in which they earnestly seek light as to the solemn subject of the judgment seat of Christ; and as it is more than probable that many others may be exercised on the same point, we are unwilling to give it a hasty notice in our answers to correspondents.

One dear friend writes thus: "I am, at present, in a difficulty. It is this: a very dear friend has, for some time past, been very unhappy in the thought that, at the judgment seat of Christ, every secret thought and every motive of the heart will be made manifest to all there. She has no fears or doubts as to her eternal salvation, or the forgiveness of her sins; but she shrinks with horror from the thought of having the secrets of her heart manifested to all there."

Another writes as follows: "Remembering those blessed and eternally-important truths in John 5:24 John 1:7-9, ii. 12; Heb. 10:1-17, I wish to know how you understand the following texts, which I shall transcribe in full, in order to point out the particular words to which I refer.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.' (2 Cor. 5:10.) 'So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.' (Rom. 14:12.) But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.' Col. 3:24, 25.

"It is on the above texts that I am anxious to be correct as to interpretation and application; and I have thought it probable that you would not regard it as trespassing on your time, if I were to ask your opinion on the subject."

We have been much interested, of late, in looking into the various reasons of the perplexity which seems to prevail in reference to the solemn subject of "The judgment seat of Christ." The very passages which our correspondent quotes are so plain, so pointed, and so definite on the question, that we have only just to take them as they stand, and allow them to have their due weight upon the heart and conscience. "We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ." "Every one of us must give account of himself to God." "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong he hath done."

These are plain statements. Should we desire to weaken their force—to blunt their edge—to turn away their point? God forbid! We should rather seek to make a holy use of them by keeping a pressure upon nature, in all its vanities, lusts, and tempers. The Lord intended we should use them thus. He never intended that we should use them, in a legal way, to shake our confidence in Christ and his full salvation. We shall never come into judgment as to our sins. John 5:24; Rom. 8:1; 1 John 4:17, are conclusive as to that point. But then our services must

come under the Master's eye. Every man's work shall be tried of what sort it is. The day will make everything manifest. All this is very solemn, and should lead to great watchfulness and carefulness as to our works, ways, thoughts, words, motives, and desires. The deepest sense of grace, and the clearest apprehension of our perfect justification as sinners, will never weaken our sense of the deep solemnity of the judgment seat of Christ, or lessen our desire so to walk as that we may be accepted of Him.

It is well to see this. The apostle labored that he might be accepted. He kept his body under lest he should be disapproved of. Every saint should do the same. We are already accepted in Christ, and as such, we labor to be accepted of Him. We should seek to give every truth its proper place, and the way to do this, is to be much in the presence of God, and to view each truth in immediate connection with Christ. There is always a danger of making such a use of one truth as, practically, to displace some other truth. This should be carefully guarded against. We believe there will be a full manifestation of every one and everything before the judgment seat of Christ. Everything will come out there. Things that looked very brilliant and praiseworthy, and that made a great noise amongst men, down here, will all be burned up as so much "wood, hay, and stubble." Things that were blazed abroad, and made use of to surround the names of men with a halo of human applause, will all be submitted to the searching action of "the fire," and, it may be, very much of them reduced to ashes. The counsels of all hearts will be made manifest. Every motive, every purpose, every design will be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. The fire will try every man's work, and nothing will be stamped as genuine save that which has been the fruit of divine grace in our hearts. All mixed motives will be judged, condemned, and burnt up. All prejudices, all erroneous judgments, all evil surmisings concerning others—all these and such like things will be exposed and cast into the fire. We shall see things then as Christ sees them, judge them as He judges them. No one will be better pleased than myself to see all my stubble consumed. Even now, as we grow in light, knowledge, and spirituality, as we get nearer and liker to Christ, we heartily condemn many things which we once deemed all right. How much more shall we do so when we stand in the full blaze of the light of the judgment seat of Christ?

Now, what should be the practical effect of all this upon the believer? To make him doubt his salvation? To leave him in a state of uncertainty as to whether he is accepted or not? To make him question his relationship to God in Christ? Surely not. What then? To lead him to walk in holy carefulness, from day to day, as under the eye of his Lord and Master—to produce watchfulness, sobriety, and self-judgment—to super induce faithfulness, diligence, and integrity in all his services and all his ways.

Take a simple illustration. A father leaves home for a time, and, when taking leave of his children, he appoints a certain work to be done, and a certain line of conduct to be adopted during his absence. Now, when he returns, he may have to praise some for their faithfulness and diligence, while he blames others for the very reverse. But does he disown the latter? Does he break the relationship? By no means. They are just as much his children as the others, though he faithfully points out their failure and censures them for it. If they have been biting and devouring one another, instead of doing his will; if one has been judging another's work instead of attending to his own; if there has been envy and jealousy instead of an earnest hearty carrying out of the father's intentions—all these things will meet with merited censure. How could it be otherwise?

But then some, like our correspondent's friend, 'shrink with horror from the thought of having the secrets of the heart manifested to all there.' Well, the Holy Ghost declares that "The Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart: and then shall every man have praise of God." 1 Cor. 4: 5 He does not say to whom they shall be manifested; nor does this, in the least, affect the question, inasmuch as every true-hearted person will be far more deeply concerned about the judgment of the Master than about the judgment of a fellow-servant. Provided I please Christ, I need not trouble myself much about man's judgment. And, on the other hand, if I am more troubled about the idea of having all my motives exposed to the view of man than I am about their being exposed to the view of Christ, it is plain there must be something wrong. It proves I am occupied about myself. I shrink from the exposure of "my secret motives." Then it is very plain that my secret motives are not right, and the sooner they are judged the better.

And, after all, what difference would it make, though all our sins and failures were made manifest to everybody? Are Peter and David a whit less happy because untold millions have read the account of their shameful fall? Surely not. They know that the record of their sins only magnifies the grace of God, and illustrates the value of the blood of Christ, and hence they rejoice in it. Thus it is in every case. If we were more emptied of self and occupied with Christ, we should have more simple and correct thoughts about the judgment seat as well as about everything else.

May the Lord keep our hearts true to Himself in this the time of His absence, so that when He appears we may not be ashamed before Him! May all our works be so begun, continued, and ended in Him, that the thought of having them duly weighed and estimated in the presence of His glory may not disturb our hearts'. May we be constrained by the "love of Christ," not by the fear of judgment, to live unto Him who died for us and rose again! We may safely and happily leave everything in His hands, seeing He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree. We have no reason to fear, inasmuch as we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. The moment Christ appears we shall be changed into His image, pass into the presence of His glory, and there review the past. We shall look back from that high and holy elevation, upon our course down here. We shall see things in a different light altogether then. It may be we shall be astonished to find that many things, of which we thought a great deal down here, will be found defective up there; and, on the other hand, many little things which were done in self-forgetfulness, and love to Jesus, will be sedulously recorded, and abundantly rewarded. We shall also be able to see, in the clear light of the Master's presence, many mistakes and failures which had never before come within the range of our vision. What will be the effect of all this? Just to evoke from our hearts loud and rapturous hosannahs to the praise of Him, who has brought us through all our toils and dangers, borne with all our mistakes and failures, and assigned us a place in His own everlasting kingdom, there to bask in the bright beams of His glory, and shine in His image forever.

We shall not dwell further on this subject, just now; but we trust sufficient has been said to relieve the minds of those dear friends who have consulted us on the point. We shall ever regard it as a happy service to communicate with our readers on any question which may happen to present difficulty to their minds. We can truly say, our desire is that the Lord would make this little Magazine a channel of help and blessing to the souls of His people everywhere, and that the name of the Lord Jesus may be magnified.

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 4, Reconciliation, The Ministry of: Part 1

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

(2 Cor. 5:18-21.)

The fifth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians takes rank amongst the very weightiest sections of inspiration. Its closing lines contain the special thesis of the following pages; but, ere we proceed to handle it, we must call the reader's attention to some most interesting and important points presented in the course of the chapter.

And, first of all, let us dwell, for a moment, on the opening sentence, "We know." In it we have the language of christian certainty. It does not say, "We hope." Still less does it say, "We fear," or "We doubt." No; such language would not express that unclouded certainty and calm assurance which it is the privilege of the very feeblest child of God to possess. And yet, alas! how few, even of the children of God, enjoy this blessed certainty—this calm assurance! Many there are who look upon it as the height of presumption to say, "We know." They seem to think that doubts and fears argue a proper condition of soul—that it is impossible for any one to be sure—that the most we can expect is to cherish a vague hope of reaching heaven when we die.

Now, it must be admitted that if we ourselves had aught to do with the ground of certainty or assurance, then it would indeed be the very height of folly to think of being sure; then, assuredly, our hope would be a very vague one. But, thanks be to God, it is not so. We have nothing whatever to do with the ground of our certainty; it lies entirely outside of ourselves, and must be sought only and altogether in the eternal word of God. This renders it so blessedly simple. It makes the whole question hinge upon the truth of God's word. Why am I sure? Because God's word is true. A shadow of uncertainty or misgiving on my part would argue a want of authority or security in the word of God. It really comes to this. Christian certainty rests on the faithfulness of God. Before you can shake the former, you must shake the latter.

We can understand this simple principle by our dealings with one another. If my fellow man makes a statement to me, and I express the smallest doubt or misgiving, or if I feel it, without even expressing it, I am calling in question his truthfulness or credibility. If he is a faithful, competent authority, I have no business to entertain a single doubt. My certainty is linked with his credibility. If he is a competent authority, I may enjoy perfect repose as to the matter concerning which he has spoken. Now, we all know what it is to receive in the most unqualified way, the testimony of man, and to repose with calmness therein. It is not a question of feeling, but of receiving, without a single question, a plain statement, and resting on the authority of a competent witness. Well, then, as we have it in the First Epistle of John, "If we receive the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater." So also our Lord said to the men of His time, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John 8) He appeals to the truth of what He says, as the reason why, or the ground on which He expected to be believed.

This, christian reader, is a very weighty principle, and one which demands special attention on the part of all anxious enquirers, as also on the part of all who undertake to deal with such. There is a strong and constant tendency to look within for the ground of assurance—to build upon certain feelings, experiences, and exercises, either past or present—to look back at some special process through which we have passed, or to look in at certain impressions or convictions of our own minds, and to find in these the ground of our confidence—the warrant for our faith. This will never do. It is impossible to find settled peace or calm repose in this way. Feelings, however true and real, change and pass away. Experiences however genuine, may prove defective. Impressions and convictions may prove utterly false. None of these things therefore can form a solid ground of christian certainty. This latter must be sought and found in God's word alone. It is not in feelings—not in experiences—not in impressions or convictions—not in reasonings—not in human traditions or doctrines, but simply in the unchangeable, eternal word of the living God. That word which is settled forever in heaven, and which God has magnified above all His Name, can alone impart peace to the mind and stability to the soul.

True, it is only by the gracious ministry of the Holy Ghost, that we can properly grasp, and ever hold fast the word of God; but still it is His word, and that word alone, that forms the ground of christian certainty, and the true basis and authority for the Christian in the entire range of practical life and action. We cannot be too simple as to this. We can only adopt the opening sentence of our chapter, and say, "We know," when we take God's word as the all-sufficient ground of our personal confidence. It will not do to be, in anywise, propped up by human authority. Thousands of the people of God have been made to taste the bitterness of leaning upon the commandments and doctrines of men. It is sure to end in disappointment and confusion, sooner or later. The edifice which is built upon the sand of human authority must fall at some time or other; whereas that which is founded on the rock of God's eternal truth shall stand forever. God's word imparts its own stability to the soul that leans upon it. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried atone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." Isa. 28:10.

As is the foundation, so is the faith that builds thereon. Hence the solemn importance of seeking to lead souls to build only upon God's precious word. Look at the anxiety of the apostle Paul, in reference to this matter.

Hear what he says to the Corinthians who were in such danger of being led away by human headship and human authority. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." 1 Cor. 2:1-5.

Here is a grand model for all preachers and teachers. Paul declared the "testimony of God," nothing more, nothing less, nothing different. And not only so, but he delivered that testimony in such a way as to connect the souls of his hearers immediately with the living God. Paul did not want the Corinthians to lean upon him; nay, he "trembled" lest they should be tempted to do so. He would have done them a grievous wrong had he, in any wise, come in between their souls and the true source of all authority—the true foundation of confidence and peace. Had he led them to build upon himself, he would have robbed them of God, and this would have been a wrong indeed. No marvel therefore that he was among them "in fear and in much trembling." They were evidently very much prone to set up and follow after human leaders, and thus miss the solid reality of personal communion with, and dependence upon, the living God. Hence the jealous care of the apostle in confining himself to the testimony of God; in delivering unto them only that which he had received of the Lord (see 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3.); lest the pure water should suffer in its passage from its source in God to the souls of the Corinthians—lest he should, in the smallest degree, impart the color of

Ms own thoughts to the precious truth of God.

We see the same thing in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. " For this cause also," says the faithful servant of Christ, " thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (Chap. ii. 13.) Had the apostle been thinking of himself, had he been seeking his own things, he would have been glad to obtain influence over the Thessalonians, by linking them on to himself, and leading them to lean upon him. But no; he rejoices in seeing them in having connection—in direct and realized association, with God Himself. This is always the effect of true ministry, as it is ever the object of the true minister. Unless the soul be livingly linked with God, there is really nothing done. If it be merely following men—receiving what they say, because they say it—an attachment to certain preachers or teachers because of something in their style and manner; or because they seem to be very holy, very separated, or very devoted—all this will come to naught. Those human links will soon be snapped asunder. The faith that stands, in any measure, in the wisdom of men will prove hollow and worthless. Nothing will prove permanent—nothing will endure, but that faith which rests on the testimony and in the power of the only true God.

Christian reader, we earnestly invite your attention to this point. We do indeed feel its importance at the present moment. The enemy is seeming diligently to lead souls away from God, away from Christ, away from the Holy Scriptures. He is seeking to get them to build on something short of the truth. He does not care what it is, provided it is not Christ. It may be reason, tradition, religiousness, a human priesthood, fleshly pietism, holiness in the flesh, sectarianism, morality, good works, services so called, human influence, patronage, philanthropy; anything short of Christ, short of God's word, short of a lively, personal, direct faith in the living God Himself.

Now, it is the sense of this pressing home upon the heart that leads us to urge with earnestness upon the reader the necessity of being thoroughly clear as to the ground on which he is, at this moment, standing. "We want him to be able to say, in the face of all around him, " / know." Nothing less than this will stand. It will not do to say, " I hope." No; there must be certainty. There must be the ability to say, " We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This is the language of faith—the language of a Christian. All is calm, clear, and sure, because all is of God. There may be an "if" with regard to "the earthly house." It may be dissolved, it may crumble into dust. All that belongs to this scene may bear the stamp of death; it may change and pass away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever, and the faith that grasps and rests upon that word partakes of its eternal stability. It enables one to say, " I know that I have." Naught but faith can say tins. Reason can only say, "I doubt;" superstition, " I fear;" only faith can say, " I know and am sure."

An infidel teacher once said to a dying woman, whom he had indoctrinated with his infidel notions, " Hold fast, Mary." What was her reply? "I can't hold fast, for you have never given me anything to hold by." Cutting rebuke! He had taught the poor woman to doubt; but he had given her nothing to believe; and then when flesh and heart were failing, when earthly scenes were passing away, and the dread realities of eternity were crowding in upon her soul's vision, infidelity altogether failed her; its wretched cobwebs could afford no refuge, no covering, in view of death and judgment. How different the condition of the believer—of the one who, in all simplicity of heart and humility of mind, takes Ms stand on the solid rock of Holy Scripture! Such an one can calmly say, " / am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

(To be continued, if the Lord will)

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 1, Absent From the Body: Part 2

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

This leads us, naturally enough, to our third reference, which occurs in the second epistle to the Corinthians, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. (For we walk by faith not by sight.) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Chap. v. 4-8.

Here, then, we have the case of any poor, groaning, burdened saint, looking forth from a crumbling, dissolving tabernacle, and sighing to get away. Not that the unclothed state is the proper object of hope. Let no one imagine this. The believer looks to the moment in which he shall be clothed upon with a glorified body like the body of Jesus. In other words, he waits for the glorious appearing of the Son from heaven. Still, it would be happy, at any moment, to lay aside a body of death, and be present with the Lord. It is far happier to wait for the day of glory, in the bosom of our loving Lord, than in this dark and dreary world. Hence, the apostle says, " We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." That moment which, to an unconverted man, is death, with all its terrors, is, to the saint, simply a laying aside of all that hinders his communion with Christ. It is just getting rid of all that is mortal. What very different work the Roman soldiers did for the two thieves! They sent one to be with Jesus, and the other to that place where hope never comes. How deeply important it is for each of us to possess the confidence that, in our case, to be "I absent from the body," is to be " present with the Lord!" How truly appalling—how unspeakably dreadful—the condition of those who, when absent from the body, must be present with the devil and his angels!

IV. Let us, in conclusion, look at our fourth and last quotation, which we shall find in that lovely epistle to the Philippians: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Chap. 1. 23.) Here, a laborious workman looks up from amid his golden fields of labor, and breathes forth his ardent desire to get away into his Master's presence. He is in a strait. His spirit longs to depart, but he casts his affectionate eye upon those who would so sorely feel his loss, and the thought of them checks his desire. " Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh," he says to his beloved Philippians, " is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith." What thorough devotedness! He longs to be in heaven, but he is

needed on earth, and therefore he is ready to remain. So far as he is concerned, it was "far better" to depart; but so far as others were concerned, it was "more needful" to remain; and hence, he, being full of the spirit of Christ, was ready to sacrifice himself for their profit.

Now, if my reader will just group these four scriptures together, he will not only have before his mind all that is given in the New Testament in reference to the souls of those who have departed in the faith of Christ; but he will also see that the Holy Ghost has presented the subject in such a way as to meet every possible condition in which a Christian can be found—every aspect in which he can be contemplated. In Luke 23 we see one just saved and forthwith taken to heaven. In Acts 7 we see one who was permitted to suffer martyrdom for the name of Jesus. In 2 Cor. 5 we see a groaning, burdened Christian, longing to lay aside his poor crumbling tabernacle, and be present with the Lord. In Philip, 1. we see a laborious workman, with many precious sheaves around him, looking up and sighing to find his place at his Master's feet.*

This gives great fullness, completeness, and beauty to this most interesting theme. And let my reader note, distinctly, that there is not a shadow of foundation for the idea entertained by some, that the soul is in a state of sleep while the body is in the grave. Indeed, one might reasonably suppose that, even though we had not such an overwhelming body of scripture evidence on the point, this strange idea would carry with it its own refutation. Who could admit aught so monstrous as the notion of a spirit asleep? Ah! no; the Lord Jesus did not say to the thief, "Today shalt thou be asleep." Stephen did not commit his spirit to sleep, but into the hands of his Lord. The apostle does not say, "We are willing rather to be asleep;" or, "Having a desire to be asleep, which is far better." One can only wonder how such an idea could have found a place in any rational mind. Blessed be God, His word teaches us, most clearly, that, should it be His holy will that we leave this world previous to the glorious advent of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our place will be with Himself, in that bright and blessed world above, where sin and sorrow are unknown, there to enjoy uninterrupted communion with the One who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and there to await that moment when "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 11. Various Conditions of The Life

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

We would recommend our correspondent "Martha," to study carefully the first five chapters of Second Corinthians. In them she will find "the life" which is communicated to the believer presented in various conditions, either in our mortal bodies down here, amid the circumstances of our daily path; or "absent from the body, present with the Lord;" or, finally, "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."

A more interesting theme could hardly be suggested to the spiritual mind. The introduction of this "life" alters the character of everything. It is not by any means a question of "circumstances," as our correspondent seems to think. I may have been a servant at the time of my conversion, and I may continue to be a servant afterward, filling the same place and discharging the same duties; but I now do these things in the power of a new life, and for an entirely new object. If this truth be not laid hold of, the daily life of hundreds of the Lord's people would be the merest commonplace drudgery. But the new life changes everything. It enables us to see things as God sees them, to think of them according to His judgment, to feel them according to the sensibilities of the divine nature. Hence, "we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." The new nature sends forth its aspirations after the proper sphere of its being and feels the weight of this lower atmosphere to be heavy indeed. We believe that all the afflictions and trials, exercises and conflicts, to which the Apostle alludes in those early chapters of Second Corinthians, are the result of the energy and the exhibition of the new life. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body for which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:10-18).

We earnestly commend this entire subject to the prayerful consideration, not only of our correspondent, but of every Christian reader. It is one of uncommon interest and practical importance.

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