

John - Commentaries by R. Beacon

Bible Treasury: Volume 19, John 6:68, Thoughts on (6:68)

It is interesting to note how, on more than one important occasion, both before and after the resurrection, Peter was privileged to give definite expression to some cardinal and pre-eminent truth. Incidentally we are reminded, if need be, that no slight honor was reserved in the counsels of God for the apostle of the circumcision. As at Pentecost he was the spokesman of the eleven, and proclaimed to the house of Israel that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36); so it was his, before our Lord suffered, to make the great confession (Matt. 16:16), that He, Who loved to speak of Himself as the Son of Man, was the Christ, the Son of the living God—a doctrine than which none is more central in the whole range of Christianity. Our Lord, as we know, at once declared that this great truth was the rock on which He would build His church. Nor was this the sole occasion on which Peter thus emphasized both the Messiahship and the divinity of the Lord Jesus. He makes the same confession in John 6, after having uttered the words more immediately the subject of the present paper. It would seem that, on this subsequent occasion, it was rather in connection with individual need ("Lord, to whom shall we go?"), whereas in Matthew the words had a corporate significance. With these prefatory remarks (not superfluous perhaps, inasmuch as a lurking and half-unconscious disparagement of the apostle Peter is not uncommon), I pass to our verse.

The time was critical. It was one of those occasions, not rare in the fourth Gospel, when our blessed Lord's deity and manhood seem equally in evidence. At others, one or other may seem uppermost, though these twin threads of gold and silver are indissolubly intertwined. Nor can any essay to gauge that mystery without being baffled and confounded. "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken." Our Lord, accordingly, had just uttered the profound words as to the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood—clearly communion with His death (vers. 51-56), as before with His incarnation (vers. 32-50)—and had thereby estranged many who had seemed to follow Him, but who were stumbled by this "hard saying."

To us, who are familiar with and rejoice in this most precious truth, it is not easy to enter into the feelings of Jews, who had been forbidden by God Himself to eat blood, and to whom therefore of all men this doctrine was most startling. Yet did the Lord most emphatically declare that otherwise they had no life in them. This was the stumbling-block. In fact these words, when not spiritually understood by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, have ever been either abused by superstition or caviled at by unbelief. Here indeed "in the days of His flesh" unbelief prevailed, and so the Lord asks of the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Weighty words in truth, for did they not suggest the infinite loss in which such abandonment would involve them, as, on the other hand, it is clear that our Savior's human spirit valued their ministrations? Did He not subsequently say, "Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptations"? (Luke 22:28.) Thus in another aspect we see the mingling of the divine and the human in that inscrutable Presence. And so, in words of earnest deprecation, Simon Peter replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life." Surely this too had been revealed to the apostle by the Father in heaven, and was doubtless remembered by him long afterward, when he declared, with pathetic emphasis, that they had followed no "cunningly devised fables," but were eye-witnesses of Christ's majesty.

Science is well in its own sphere; nor is it wise, because of some fancied opposition to the word of God, to challenge, with inadequate mental equipment, fact if indubitable. Time was when pious men would have staked the credit of the Bible on the supposed flatness of the earth! On the other hand, we may rest assured that any conclusion of science, that traverses the explicit language of scripture, is and must be erroneous. For as has often been remarked, scientific facts are one thing, inferences are quite another. Another thing to be borne in mind, and recently pointed out by a writer (who, always eloquent, is not always equally sound), is, that engrossment with some special study is not the way to have correct views on men and things in general, least of all on what concerns the life to come. Persons so absorbed, he says, are apt to see nothing but their peculiar hobby, and seem to be afflicted with a kind of atrophy as to what is outside their individual line. This witness is true. Shall we therefore depend upon such for a decision affecting our eternal welfare—upon men who, after all, discern but fragments of truth, and whose minds may "degenerate into mere machines for grinding out general laws"? Such, at any rate, was the remarkable confession of one of them.

And this leads to the question, Is the intellect the highest part of man? Are not moral elements, on the contrary, above what is merely intellectual? It is not necessary to be a theologian to see this. How says the most eminent of recent poets, "I trust we are not wholly brain, magnetic mockeries." How vain then to anchor one's soul on what at best is but fragmentary, where not positively misleading. I say not that such leaders may not be judicially blinded. The safe and excellent way is to believe God's word because it is His, knowing that difficulties, and mystery here and there, are rather proofs of its divine origin. At any rate to reject revelation on the ground of mystery is surely illogical. I suppose we ourselves, spirit, soul, and body—are a mystery in one sense: is it not "nearer to us than hands and feet?"

Science therefore can have no direct word on what concerns man's eternal interests. Of course she may speak as handmaid, and sometimes with some effect, as when, for instance, it is shown that the darkness at the crucifixion can have been occasioned by no eclipse, which a mere tyro in astronomy knows can only happen when the moon is full. Or, again, by specific knowledge some ancient manuscript is deciphered, which may shed important light perhaps on a disputed passage of the New Testament. But yet science is un-moral, so to speak. It has no direct connection with what concerns the soul. Moreover, is it not often tentative only? How fatuous then and worse to depend upon so shifty a guide in relation to the life to come!

Shall we then have recourse to art and culture? Shall we emulate the Greek spirit? Alas! is it not abroad all around us? Not that it is wrong to love beautiful color, or musical notes; it is fatal to deify beauty. This was what the Greeks did, and moderns imitate with infinitely less excuse. On the other hand, bare Puritanism is not Christianity. For it is significant that when the Holy Spirit would portray that which is brightest and holiest in heaven, He employs as symbols that which is accounted most lovely on earth, it matters not whether it be the breastplate of Aaron,

or the foundations of the Holy City. Clearly then the evil does not consist in appreciating what is lovely in its proper sphere, but in making it an end. A vain dream!

But what of philosophy, said to be "divine by its votaries," and "full of nectared sweets" but coupled with "vain deceit" by the Spirit of God? Will this give us peace? Truly the scripture adds "falsely so-called," but even when legitimate, philosophy, and science, and art, are impotent in man's extremity. And is it not notorious that some of those who have discoursed most eloquently on morality, &c., have been most unhappy, where indeed they have not sunk below ordinary decency? Let us not be too hard upon the Socrates and Platos. They groped in the dark, and often with noble aspirations) the True Light had not yet shone. But no such apology can be extended to those who reject God's living oracles, and prefer the first man to the second. Surely it is not surprising that modern systems should reach lower depths than ancient ones (witness spiritualism, theosophy, and similar enormities), inasmuch as they have given up the true God. Alas ! such will increase to more ungodliness. But at least such doctrines as these testify that no mere materialism will satisfy the human heart. Hence the believer may well reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Whether it be things excellent in their own place, or things essentially evil, all leave an aching void. Science is cold, and "Art is long," and the end draweth near. What matters it if we have truly heard those words of eternal life? Do they not point out "an anchor for the soul both sure and steadfast"? "The words that I speak unto you," said the Saviour, "they are spirit and they are life." All other voices are like the idle wind. B. B., JNE.

Bible Treasury: Volume N4, Four Witnesses, The (5:32-40)

The Lord Jesus, as a Divine Person, was His own adequate witness: "Though I bear record of myself," He says, "yet is my record true" (John 8:14). But here He presses on the Jews the important fact that, apart from His own, the testimony to His paramount and exclusive claims is fourfold. In truth, it was not possible that the testimony to Christ should proceed from Himself alone. The record of such as could produce no corroborative witness must be, He tells us in this chapter, self-condemning. And then the blessed Lord informs His hearers who His witnesses are. First the Baptist, then the supreme testimony of the Father, thirdly the Son's works, and lastly the scriptures—the three last, needless to say, unfaltering; the first marked by the short-coming inseparable from men. But this was at a later day, when John the Baptist apparently yielded for a moment to the depressing influences of his prison-house, and sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He really were the Messiah.

This seems indubitable, and the words of our Lord in reply, "Go and tell John," do not bear out the surmise of some that he sent his disciples to Christ for their sakes alone. Yet had his testimony been most clear and cogent, befitting one who was a burning and a shining lamp, as the Lord (reversing the position, and bearing witness to His "Messenger") calls John in this chapter. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29 & 36). Is it not striking that the one who was sent in Elijah's spirit and power, in a spirit of judgment and condemnation of evil, should be the first to point to the Lamb of God as the Sin-bearer? So it was "one of the seven angels that had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues" that showed to another John the bride, the Lamb's wife. So the Christ, the King of Judah, came "meek, and sitting upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass": there is, as one has said, "the meekness of the Lion of Judah, and the wrath of the slain Lamb."

Next comes the greater witness of the Father, notably evidenced at our Lord's baptism, where indeed we see the three Persons of the Trinity manifested, and likewise at a later day on the Mount of Transfiguration, when a voice came from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." But no doubt our Lord was alluding to His baptism on this occasion. It was not the last voice from heaven to sustain Him for we read in chapter xii. of this Gospel how there came an answer to His cry that the Father would glorify His name. That cry was answered; the immediately preceding one, "Father, save me from this hour," was, one might almost say, recalled by the Holy Sufferer; and so the Father witnesses.

The works constitute the third witness, or "signs," as they are so habitually called in John's Gospel. And this naturally links them with testimony. Jesus did a beginning of "signs" in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory. The other words, used in scripture to describe our Savior's mighty works, viz, "wonders," and "powers," point to certain essential characteristics of His operation. It is natural that He whose very name is "Wonderful" (Isa. 9:6) should do "wonders;" as also that "power" should proceed from Him who is the Mighty God, as we read in the same passage of the great evangelical prophet. When Christ speaks of "virtue" going out of Him, in the case of the woman with the issue of blood, the word in the Greek means "power" (Νvαπτc). It is not the same word as in Matt. 28:18, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." There it should be "authority." So likewise in John 1:12, "To them gave he authority", or title, &c.

But though our Lord's works be both "powers" and "wonders," neither of these characteristics seems to be what the Holy Ghost would bring most prominently before the believer's mind, but rather that they be regarded as "signs" (σημεῖα). The Latin-English word "miracle," as is obvious, directs attention more to their strangeness and surprising character, and it is somewhat unfortunate that Christ's works should be habitually designated by so inadequate a term.

It is interesting too, and somewhat confirmatory of the above reflections, that when the Holy Spirit characterizes the evil works and miracles of antichrist, they are called "lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 9), though "signs" is also among the designations. More corroborative is the verse, "all the world wondered after the Beast." At any rate, though Christ's works are sometimes called "signs" alone, and "powers" alone, they are never called "wonders" alone. "Signs" then they are preeminently, signs of the presence of One greater than Moses, greater than Solomon, and greater than the temple. They were the suited, appointed, and inalienable concomitants of the Incarnation.

Here a wide vista opens out, for all those works of beneficent healing (two only of Christ's miracles were destructive, of the fruitless fig tree, and of the unclean swine, for which there were wise and right reasons—contrast the many judicial miracles of Moses) have each their special place in setting forth the varied glories and the different aspects of the work of the Divine Redeemer. And they are living now.

Lastly, we have the testimony of the scriptures. At a later day the Lord, unto the favored two who journeyed to Emmaus, expounded in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. "All things had to be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the

Psalms” concerning Himself. We, happily, need no assurance that so it is, and that both in O.T. and in N. T., implicitly or explicitly, all points to Christ-sacrifice and sacred vessel, an Abel, an Isaac, and a David. In short, the scriptures testify of Him, and, as the Lord bore witness to John the Baptist (who ought even to have borne unwavering witness to Him), so He vindicates the holy scriptures with the finality of His word. The Pharisees admitted they told of eternal life, yet neglected them in all but a superficial and mechanical interest. It was but an otiose acceptance, not an honest belief. Had they believed Moses, they must have believed Christ and believed in Him too, which is a further thing.

Moderns (sad to say, but alas! the too notorious fact) are bolder than the Jews; for they (professing Christians) deny that the Bible contains words of eternal life. The spirit of criticism has become a craze, almost a mania of unbelief. There is legitimate criticism, no doubt; but how little of this latter-day variety is such? It was strikingly remarked in a recent defense of God's word, that no spirit is more unlike the spirit of the Bible than the modern critical spirit. This witness is true. The critics seem incapable of seizing the vital force and divine beauty of the scriptures. But it is strikingly in accord with what is written, that the “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Meanwhile the hungry sheep are not fed, while those who take the place of teachers, if not shepherds, would reduce God's word to the level of a literary phenomenon. But, as was finely said by a preacher recently deceased, “Jesus is not a phenomenon; He is bread: Christ is not a curiosity; He gives the water of life.” And in the scriptures alone is the truth concerning Him, and they, not the church, nor the creeds (useful as these may be when sound), are the sole and authoritative standard. Thus as they have a double function (for directly they do bear witness to the Christ), they also contain the record of His wonderful “signs,” and of the supreme testimony of the Father. “Him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27). R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume 18, Unwritten Things Which Jesus Did, The (21:25)

John 21:25

“There are also many other things which Jesus did.” And since He did them, clearly they were not aimless, but had a divinely ordained purpose. It might be asked why they are not recorded if such questioning were not anticipated in the selfsame verse. The answer is, that a complete account, as one has said, would be practically infinite. “The world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” Nor is this oriental hyperbole. The figurativeness of the language is obvious; but, as in all appropriate imagery, the symbolical setting serves to press home the truth symbolized not only more forcibly than plain matter-of-fact language, but as something transcending the literal force of the image itself. In this case the theme is infinite, and is therefore susceptible of infinite treatment.

These “many other things,” including doubtless the “many other signs” mentioned in the previous chapter, are indeed unknown to us save as to their general character; but we know that they must have been marked by the same divine grace and stainless holiness, by the same moral glory, that stamped all that the Son of God wrought. They were probably called forth by some need or some sorrow. But we can go no farther—would wish to go no farther; for, as another has put it excellently well, “The silence of God is to be respected in the next place to His utterance.” Still, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost notes the fact that there were “many other things” done by our blessed Lord, it is plainly incumbent on us to heed it. The renewed heart indeed dwells with delight on this thought, and the spiritual mind recognizes its fitness. For that life of ceaseless self-sacrifice could not but be the occasion of other deeds of mercy than those that are recounted in the Gospels, numerous and unfathomable as the latter are. Those lips, “replenished with grace,” must have distilled many an unrecorded benediction; those hands, uplifted in blessing, when the risen Lord ascended, mark the end, and yet not the end, of an unwearying course of love.

But if, in the wisdom of God, many a deed of mercy, many a word of comfort, or, may be, of holy indignation is unrevealed. It by no means follows that such must ever remain a mystery. May not eternity give scope for the unfolding of these “many other things” which have been already “seen of angels”? At any rate it is and must be profitable to ponder every statement of scripture, and not least when the Lord Jesus Himself is the direct theme. Direct or indirect object, we know He must always be. And so again, and yet again, each time we read the passage, we love to be reminded that we have a record only of “parts of His ways.”

Still, although we have in no wise an exhaustive history of our blessed Lord's life on earth, yet we do possess a full and perfect revelation. If a merely human writer of eminence is capable of making such judicious selection from the sayings and doings of a great man as to present, on the whole, a duly proportioned portrait, leaving out nothing essential, it would be strange if the Spirit of God could do less. Nay, contrariwise, as we are well aware, even the ablest human histories are liable at times to be one-sided, and we hear a Macaulay, musing in sober mood, that as “science is a blind man's guess,” so “history is a nurse's tale.” Such after all are human chronicles spite of all excellences and the best intentions. But in that word, whereof God is the real Author, and which He has “magnified above all His name” (and if this be true of the Old Testament, not less surely of the New), we are presented with a perfect picture of the Son of God. On the one hand there is a true perspective, on the other divine accuracy of detail, where detail was the object of the Spirit. Now one Evangelist only relates a suited truth, or parable, or miracle; now the same incident is recounted by two, or three, or even by the four.

In short, the object of the Holy Ghost is told us by John in the 20th chapter of his Gospel. “These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.” Enough and more than enough for this, be it said reverently; yet not too much for “our learning” (Rom. 15:4), not too much for “doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), though we are often slow to work that inexhaustible mine. How little have we explored, but what of the still smaller portion we have, so to speak, made our own! We do oftentimes but touch the fringe of the divine teaching, and the most diligent are but as spiritual Newtons, gathering pebbles on the boundless shore. Yet, such is His grace, merely to “touch the hem of His garment.” is fraught with richest blessing.

To conclude, our Lord's ministry, whether by word or deed, whether recorded or unrecorded, was that which He could not but perform. He could not but work His own works, which miracles indeed were, even as they were the works of the Father that sent Him (John 9:4). And while each sign bore witness of Him, of Whom all the prophets had spoken, yet indisputably they derived their chief luster from Him, Who wrought them. Let us not forget that He is “this same Jesus” (Acts 1:11) now and for, evermore. R. B. Junr.

It seems difficult to imagine how any thoughtful mind among believers can miss the majesty of these words. There are indeed writings merely human that are not without a certain elevation, as they are permeated with a charm that appeals to the cultivated intelligence. But how great the contrast between the choicest utterances of the princes of literature and the unique sublimity of the holy scriptures! The difference is as great as in the circumstances that call them forth. It must at any rate be granted, even by a skeptic, that, supposing Christ to have been what He claimed to be, all His words and acts are consistent with His being God incarnate. And more than this, all that is written about Him in the four Gospels, all that is written in the Acts and the Epistles, is stamped with the same consistency. Nay, what, on any other hypothesis, becomes of the innumerable predictions in the Old Testament, that point onwards to a coming Savior? Whittle down your conception of the nature of Christ, and you are confronted with a bewildering enigma. Bow to Him as "the Word made flesh," and all is plain—not to speak of the incalculable blessing to the soul that does bow.

Now in none of our Lord's words is there greater sublimity than in those that head these remarks. We, to whom, by God's grace, Christ is everything, hear them echoing over the sad tumult of nearly nineteen centuries, and, like sounds of true music clearly caught amid discordant noises, they ring out sweet and clear to-day. And they have a voice for to-day. We do not, I think, dwell enough on these great events in our Lord's history here below. Undoubtedly the atonement must ever occupy the central place, when we think of our deep need. Without that "precious death" it were vain to plead the incarnation, indispensable and supreme as that fact is. But we do well to ponder every now and again both the resurrection and ascension. The latter event indeed might have followed at once on the former but for God's purposes of grace. And undoubtedly the blessed Lord at once passed into "the holiest" after He had "dismissed His spirit" (Matt. 27:50). But the ascension was the crowning act of God in vindicating His beloved Son. It is also true that Christ ascended by His own act. "I ascend." Here we have the divine majesty and sublimity of the passage.

I do not dwell at length upon the occasion of these great words of our Lord. We know that Mary Magdalene, in her most commendable love, would have detained the Savior, not knowing that by her, as by the church at large in the sequel, Christ was to be known only after a heavenly sort. No contradiction between our Lord's manner here, and His permission subsequently to the other women to hold Him by the feet. For did not these typify how Israel will know Christ in the millennium? But Mary's was a higher privilege, though then she might hardly realize it. And so the Lord utters the magnificent words; "I ascend," &c. And is there not exquisite beauty in the fact that "Father" comes before "God"? It is doubtless the same divine hand that wrote, by the same John, "grace and truth." The tenderer relation comes first. Still, as more than one has remarked, it is not "our Father," nor "our God." That could not be. Whatever the grace, never can the interval between the Creator and the creature be bridged—not in that sense. The Lord could tell His disciples in that most comprehensive prayer, which He gave them, "When ye pray, say our Father." But His is a unique Sonship, though doubtless at the same time there is an emphasizing of the truth that His God and Father is also ours.

But where in the whole range of human writings, ancient or modern, can anything be found approaching these words? I speak not of mere grace and charm of diction, wherein moderns are only gratified if they can equal the ancients, but in subject-matter. Doubtless there are touches of true pathos as well as sound and lofty sentiments on the vanity of human life in ancient and modern classics. But where is there assurance? where comfort and anchorage for the soul? It is well known that there is none. How could there be? "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought," sang a great but wayward poet. Nay, but the Christian sings most sweetly in his brightest joys. For this we have to thank Christ alone. His was the sorrow, the unfathomable pain. It is easy to write about it. It is less easy to enter into it, and to shape one's life according to it. But at least it is something, spite of shortcoming abundant, to love beyond all else these and like words of our Lord, words that are said to us as truly as to Mary of Magdala—to us, who have not, like her, seen Him in His humiliation, but who, like her, are to see Him in His glory, and be with Him, when we too have ascended to the Father. R. B. Junr.

Bible Treasury: Volume 19, John 1:14, Thoughts Suggested by (1:14)

It is well to be jealous of any mere intellectual appreciation of the word of God. For undoubtedly, even in the case of those who are truly converted, there is a danger of mind and fancy being gratified at the expense of heart and conscience. It is admitted of course that the intelligence must play a necessary part in the apprehension of any statement, secular or sacred, as it is also true that the poetic temperament will not blind the soul to heavenly glories, where sin is judged and Christ is paramount. Only let us realize that the Bible is God's voice to us, "quick and powerful," and "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). Then indeed shall we be slow to indulge an uncontrolled fancy; and, on the other hand, distrusting self, we shall not miss the needed blessing and refreshment.

Now it is hardly necessary to say we are not concerned with those who take merely a literary interest in the Bible. There are those we know, who do indeed discover a moving and pathetic story in such a history as that of Joseph, but nothing beyond; as they see merely a tale of sweet and inimitable naturalness in that of Ruth. Clearly no spirituality is necessary for this, as in fact those who see no more in these histories are in general infidel. This is not the danger to which believers, as a rule, are exposed. The latter are well aware that these Old Testament narrative are not of any "private interpretation," any more than prophecy is, but that they point with undeviating constancy to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our danger, on the contrary, is to rest too much in our apprehension of the admirable variety and fullness of these precious types, and in our possibly keen appreciation of them, without much practical result as to our ways. It is the same with the material symbols of the Levitical economy as with those of a personal character. It is one thing, for instance, to note with what exquisite precision the Holy Spirit enjoins the blue, and the scarlet, and the purple, according as heavenly character, earthly grandeur, or royal dignity were to be symbolized by the coverings of the mystic furniture of the Tabernacle; it is quite another to be formed and molded by the varied teaching of these different scriptures.

But the dangers attending the study of the New Testament are somewhat different. As the “very image of the things” is there unfolded with divine clearness and exactitude, there is a directness of statement which leaves less room for ingenious and far-fetched interpretations, and there is less risk perhaps of the imagination running wild. Doubtless there are snares of another kind, more purely intellectual as with the Gnostics of old, and more subtle.

Witness too some recent vagaries, not confined to one quarter, with regard to our Lord's Person. The fact is that there are snares for imaginative and intellectual alike, and both can find material in either division of the Book of God. Yet, while we should judge self unsparingly, it is becoming to cherish simplicity, equally free from legal bondage and from self-confidence. Indeed they are not wise who are always analyzing their feelings—an occupation as unhealthy in spiritual as in physical matters. Hence it is enough to have pointed out a danger before turning to a verse than which there is none sublimer or more majestic even in the fourth Gospel—so simple in its language, so profound in its significance.

Simple language, profound meaning—do not these words sum up the characteristic features of St. John's Gospel, as of his Epistles? Whether his aim were to enforce the great truth that Jesus is the Christ, as in the Gospel, or that the Christ is Jesus, (Whom they had seen and handled) as in the first Epistle, clearly no complicated arguments were necessary in order to “declare what he had seen and heard.” We know that there are arguments, and indignant ones, though most suitable in their season, in the writings of the apostle Paul. Burning words and sharp remonstrance were necessary at times from one who had the “care of all the churches,” and who was jealous with a godly jealousy for the honor of Christ. But in the Gospel of John how different it all is. And yet he was a “son of thunder;” nor is the remark of Augustine inapt that John begins his Gospel with a peal of spiritual thunder. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” But all is calm and reposeful in the manner; the thunder is not in the collision of earth-born clouds, but in the majesty of the revelation. He who declared the eternal life that was with the Father, speaks in accents that breathe the calmness of the Son's own divine dignity and glory. The Word was (ἦν) God; but we read further that the Word was made (ἐγένετο) flesh. Already a touch of pathos in the announcement of His Incarnation; no exemption from human vicissitudes, though wholly apart from sin. And so He “tabernacled” here for some three and thirty years, most of which, as we know, were spent in holy seclusion, whence God has not thought fit to withdraw the veil, but of which more may be known (who can tell?) in the coming day. We are permitted one or two glimpses of exquisite loveliness (Luke 2); and then the silence of almost twenty unrecorded years. But even of the three years of that wonderful ministry, only some of the miracles and some of the sayings are told us; there are the “many other signs,” and the “many other things” that “are not written in this book.” So He displayed His glory, not only those moral perfections that could not be hidden, but each miracle, as the one in Cana of Galilee, manifested the majesty of His Person to such as had eyes to see.

But there is more. It is glory as of an Only-begotten with a Father. And indeed, though doubtless the apostles raised the dead, and did other miracles—not to speak of the greater (spiritual) miracles they wrought after Christ had gone to the Father—yet in truth there was a stamp of peculiar dignity in our Lord's own works and words. For He alone could and did touch the leper without being defiled, as on the same occasion, with full consciousness of His divinity, He said, “I will” —fitting words for One, Who could say “I am.” He answered the governor nothing, so that Pilate marveled. The people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, saluted Him, when He had just come down from the Holy Mount; the glory still lingered that had been so dazzling at the transfiguration. And so we might recall many an incident situation described in the Gospels, where the splendor of His divine Sonship seemed to pierce the veil.

Yet surely are we, who by grace rest in Him, not less, but more, favored than those who had His bodily presence. R. B. Junr.

Bible Treasury: Volume N9, John 16:28 (16:28)

While scripture as a whole forms a complete circle of truth, a single verse may present, as it were, a “perfect round.” Notably is it so with the passage under consideration.

After commending His disciples for having believed that He came forth from beside (παρά) God, or the Father, as some give it, our Lord enlarges the statement and utters the wondrous words, “I came out (ἐκ) from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father.” The whole of the Savior's work on earth is thus divinely summarized, and the wheel, if I may be permitted the expression, comes full circle. Let us note one or two points of contrast. There is, to begin with, the well-known antithesis of the Father and the world, not less absolute and vivid than that of the Son and the devil, the Holy Spirit and the flesh. The Lord says, “I leave (ἀφήμι) the world,” a word that certainly suggests the abandoning of that which had so utterly failed to appreciate Him. So in John 14:19, the Lord says, “The world seeth me no more.”

Next, we have the identity of essence of the Father and the Son in the expression “out of the Father” (ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς) in marked contrast with the παρά τοῦ Πατρὸς or παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ of the previous verse. This last, of course, implies the session of the Son at God's right hand, to which He returns. “I go to the Father” (πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα). Again, the tense (ἐξήλθον) employed to describe where our Lord came from, denotes the act of coming forth, while in the statement, “I have come” (ἐλήλυθα) abiding results are as clearly thrown into strong relief. The Lord has come into this world, and so the world can never be as if He had not come. Momentous are the consequences for believer and unbeliever. And, lastly, we have in “I go” (πορεύομαι) a word suggestive of solemn, ordered, and stately progress back to the Father.

R.B.

Bible Treasury: Volume N8, John 16:28 (16:28)

Before looking at this verse as a whole, I would briefly point out the distinctive force of three Greek prepositions, meaning “from” in a general way, and occurring frequently in this Gospel in connection with statements by our Lord Himself as to His divine glory before the incarnation. Such statements are found in chaps. 8, 16 and 17. The Greek words referred to are ἀπὸ, ἐκ and παρὰ. The first means “away from,” the second “out of,” and the third, “from beside.” Also the first implies separation or distance, the second points to Christ’s identity of essence with the Father, while the third puts in strong relief the temporary break in His session by the side of the Father in heaven. Of course the Lord never ceased to be “the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). Both statements are divinely true. It is only when they are superficially or unspiritually viewed that there may seem to be antagonism in the various aspects of divine truth. Moreover, all the colored rays; to put it figuratively, blend in one complete beam of white light. But we shall now see which of the three prepositions are used in the verse before us.

I follow the text approved by Bishop Westcott, whose remarks in loco are as instructive as they are luminous. In the previous verse (27) the Lord had said that He came forth from (παρὰ) God or the Father, as Westcott gives the text. In ver. 28 Christ adds, “I came out from (ἐκ) the Father.” If this reading be correct, the force undoubtedly is that not only did our Lord, in becoming flesh, temporarily vacate His seat of coequal honor by the Father’s side, but would impress on the disciples the fact that in essence He Was identical with the Father. It would almost seem that the disciples, though expressing themselves as grateful for the plainness of their Master’s speech, hardly rose to any realization of the heights from which He had descended. This is perhaps indicated by their use of the word ἀπὸ in verse 30, which, as we have said, looks simply at the separation involved in the incarnation, and might be used, one may venture to say, in regard to a merely angelic visitant to this earth.

But, whether indicated by the preposition ἀπὸ or not, we know that not till after the resurrection had the apostles a due conception of the incomparable dignity of the One who had tarried with them. Then at length they knew likewise that “he that descended was the same also that ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10). But now they simply say, “We believe that thou camest forth from (ἀπὸ) God.” Thus all three little words are used, if not in the text, at any rate in the context. Truly such diversity is not without design. The Evangelist was not a mere lover of varying phrase like our King James 1. This must suffice for what I hope may not be considered too microscopic a scrutiny for the ordinary reader. Now for the verse itself.

Truly nothing more majestic can be found even in this Gospel than the words we are seeking to consider. They are, as one has said, a complete summary of our Lord’s mission. Note how the Savior’s declaration is bounded by the words “the Father.” They are the poles on which it is not fanciful to say the entire statement turns. We may read it a thousand times, and yet merely touch the fringe of its profound significance. Yet will it become growingly luminous as the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Jesus and shows them unto us. To such verses as these it is said that devout souls have been known to shut themselves up, closing their ears for a time to all other sayings of the Bible, even of the Lord Himself, if so be they might more adequately drink in something of their inexhaustible fullness. And whatever may be thought of such exclusive heed, when listening so attentively to the Master’s voice, the discordant words of men, aye, sometimes of saints, will be less audible. Moreover, to return to a figure used above, the cloven rays are inseparable, if momentarily divided in short, all the truth hangs together, and one aspect calls up another.

The disciples then thank the Lord for the plainness of His declaration, and that He no longer spoke in parables. In fact, the Lord spoke as they could bear it, as He still speaks to us through His word. But by way of contrast with the clearness of revealed truth I would quote the language of an illustrious poet of the Victorian period—and I quote it because the words came to my mind the other day in reading our verse—who, in describing the passing of his mythical hero, says, “From the great deep to the great deep he goes” —words not deficient in majesty, but, spite of their large impressiveness, vague and indefinite. Probably they are intentionally so; for high poetry loves the element of mystery and universality. Often indeed such language conveys a sense of immensity and infinity, not would it be fair to pin down the poet to a denial of the faith because of this line in the Arthurian idyll. Yet it is by way of contrast I quote the line, as said above, and to mark how its shadowy vagueness differs from the lucid words, like clear shining after rain, of the inspired page. There is definiteness, needless to say, in all Scripture, for it is the Holy Ghost who speaks; and what He says about the Son must be definite indeed. And so, as the Lord came forth from the Father, He goes to the Father. The circle is complete.

But it is not only the prepositions that are noteworthy in this verse; the verbs are equally striking. “I leave,” “I am come,” “I go.” Note the difference of tense. The force is this. Though the Lord was about to leave the world and go to the Father, yet the words, “I am come” imply that the world could not be, after the advent, the same as it was before. The statement, “I am come” implies abiding consequences; indeed it is only one word in the original Greek, the tense used being that which invariably and most emphatically, and in a way beyond the powers of English, signifies present and perpetual result. It undoubtedly points to responsibility on the part of men for what they had seen and heard; also, too often but superficially, when there was not hatred and antagonism. Again, the word “I leave” (ἀφίημι) has the undoubted force of “leaving a thing to itself, of withdrawing a controlling power, exercised before” (Westcott), and is seen strikingly in the fourth chapter of this Gospel, where we read, in ver. 3, “Jesus left (ἀφῆκε) Juda.” I do not say how far we should press this latent meaning in the Greek term, but it is discernible by every scholar, and felt to be just by every spiritual mind conversant with the story. Lastly, the word for “I go” (πορεύομαι) carries with it the sense of proceeding solemnly, deliberately, and steadfastly to a destined goal.

I have spoken of the definiteness of Scripture in contrast with the vagueness of man’s surmises as to things beyond the natural sphere. Here human ideas must be vague; nay, they are not seldom of that character even in human science when men attempt to pierce behind phenomena into the causes that produce them. But it may be granted that science in other respects is often marvelously definite, and admirable for the affairs of this life. Nay, so definite is it, that a distinguished English R.C. has very forcibly pointed out the difference between the definiteness loved by scientific men and the haziness which they, and alas! not a few so-called theologians affect when speaking of the Bible. But I had better give, as a penultimate paragraph, Faber’s thoughts in his own eloquent words—

“In our own times it is the fashion of men to develop, as they phrase it, the human features in Christ. They talk, in the empty, pedantic grandiloquence of the day, of exhibiting and producing the human element in Jesus. Thus to an unbelieving people religion has neither facts nor doctrine in the strict sense of those words, but only symbols and views. In astronomy men delight in making the dubious nebula resolve itself into the lucid separateness of individual stars; but in theology they reverse this process. Thus they are fain to superinduce vagueness over what has once been clear, so as to make theology a shapeless nebular light, about which they can theorize and conjecture as they please, finding in its huge spiral convolutions or the lineaments of its rugged edges such fantastic likenesses as made the men of old give

their names to the constellations. Now whence this love of vagueness in the matter of religion, joined with a craving for definiteness in all other departments of human knowledge, but from a desire to evade the yoke of faith without the inconvenient boldness of publicly rejecting it.”

Such is the remarkable language of a distinguished divine, who, I believe, left the Church of England for that of Rome, and extracted from a work called “Bethlehem.” But it is not so much his righteous denunciation that one desires to be uppermost in the mind as these words of our Lord Himself in the 28th verse of St. John’s Gospel—words full of sublimity, and uttered with serene calm just before He suffered.

R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume N6, John 16:8-11, Thoughts on (16:8-11)

The recorded discourses of our Lord immediately preceding His Passion are in point of length in marked contrast with the sayings of the risen Savior. The latter are extremely brief, as we know, and largely of what I may perhaps call an official character, whether mandatory, as “Go and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19), or declaratory, as “Whosoever’s sins ye remit, they are remitted” (John 20:23). Once or twice, a gentle rebuke was conveyed, as to Thomas, and to the travelers to Emmaus. But we have no details of what the Lord said on these occasions. It is true we are told how He expounded unto the two disciples, in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. But we have not the exposition (how we should prize it!), though we do read that their hearts burned within them while He opened unto them say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye have become dull of hearing. For, when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye again have need that one teach you the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:11-14).

We are not to suppose that the study of this subject, or of any other set before us in the scriptures, would be devoid of profit for us or in any way reserved or interdicted. On the contrary “all scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished to every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). There is a difference however between such an one and a “babe.” The teacher if wise will follow the way of God’s Spirit in imparting or communicating. The faithful and wise servant will give the household meat in due season. Angels are at home in glory, they belong to it, but man by reason of sin is shut out, and comes short of God’s glory and must, in his guilty condition be kept at a distance for his own safety—as see Gen. 3:24, Ex. 19:21-25 etc. All that was shut in and covered by the mercy seat witnessed to God’s goodness and His abundant resources for His people’s need, but alas! these had been met by fresh rebellion on man’s part.

The cherubim of glory were represented, in the sanctuary, as looking intently into the ark as though they would learn what that could be in the ark which made it possible for God to go on in grace with such a rebellious people. In the temple, which Solomon builded, the cherubim are represented in quite a different position. In the tabernacle, their attitude spoke of reverent meditation and inspection— “and the cherubim shall stretch forth [their] wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces [shall look] one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be” (Ex. 25:20). The governmental ways of God with His people were known to angels; indeed we see them often used in God’s government of Israel. Again and again, we read of the angel of Jehovah, making his appearance at critical moments in their history. Angels knew well that Israel had broken the law before even its reception, that they had despised the manna and revolted against the priesthood; yet were these memorials in the ark, and although the people were as bad as ever, God went on with them in patient grace. The glories of Christ were thus represented, but surely the yearly sprinkling of the blood upon and before the mercy seat, pointed beforehand to the sufferings which Christ should endure, and by which alone the infinite resources of grace, now revealed in Jesus Christ, could be realized by man for blessing. Are not these some of the things which “angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12)?

But the cherubim in Solomon’s temple were so placed as to suggest a distinctly different thought. “And the wings of the cherubim [were] twenty cubits long, one wing five cubits reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing five cubits reaching to the wing of the other cherub. And [one] wing of the other cherub five cubits reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing five cubits joining to the wing of the other cherub. The wings of these cherubim spread themselves forth twenty cubits” (thus exactly filling up the breadth of the inner sanctuary); “and they stood on their feet, and their faces were toward the house” (2 Chron. 3:11-13 margin). They are here represented, not as looking into the ark with the judicial action proper to them in suspense, but, from their place in the inner sanctuary looking forth upon the priests in their service before the vail, then upon the outer court worshippers, and finally, looking on with perfect complacency to a world purified by judgment and ultimately brought into complete subjection to the God and Father. This will be the millennial age under the reign of Christ the Son of David. Even then man will not have right of access within the inner sanctuary as now.

In that order of worship which God established upon earth there was then this remarkable witness to fullness of grace—God in Christ anticipating, and meeting in righteousness, man’s sin against every successive revelation which pointed to Christ, providing for him in his poverty, and giving light upon his path. But with it all the “way into the holiest was not made manifest.”

The inspired writer of this Epistle is seeking to bring the saints to a deeper realization of what the work of Christ had secured for them, and in which was everything to inspire confidence. They had to do with God Himself as revealed in His Son, not with angels however exalted. The high priest of old went but once a year into the holiest. Our great High Priest has gone in—into heaven itself—in all the value of His own finished work, and has not yet come out, as He will, in the day when His earthly people shall be blessed in the land from which they are now outcasts. In the meantime we are exhorted to approach boldly “the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace for seasonable help.”

(To be continued)

Bible Treasury: Volume N5, John 16:27-28, Thoughts on (16:27-28)

The Lord had much to tell His disciples of the Father. But hitherto, as He says in ver. 25, He had spoken to them in proverbs, as they were able to bear it. Then He went on to say that the hour was coming when He would speak to them plainly of the Father. Clearly this hour dawned at Pentecost, and it is interesting to see how what we have here accords with the statement in Acts 1:1. "All that Jesus began, both to do and to teach." In the one passage we have the clear intimation that our Lord would instruct His servants at a coming hour; in the other the blessed fact is implied in the striking word "began," which is far from being otiose, as indeed naught in holy scripture is or could be. In short it marks the continuity of what our Lord did on earth with what He did after His resurrection and ascension.

Hereby we learn incidentally how impossible it is to isolate the persons of the Godhead. If "in the days of His flesh" the Savior cast out demons by the finger of God (Luke 11:2), by the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28); if through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God; if again, it was through the Holy Spirit that He gave commandment unto His chosen apostles, it is equally true that what the Spirit revealed at and after Pentecost was virtually revealed by the Son. "I shall show you plainly of the Father" (ver. 25).

But, if that fuller revelation still tarried a while, the Lord does tell the disciples in the clearest language truth concerning Himself which it was of all consequence that they should know, and which it was supremely blessed to hear from His own divine lips. Needless to say, it is also truth most instructive for us to ponder. I allude now to the closing sentence of ver. 27, and to ver. 28. Let us read the passage as it is more accurately given in the R. V. "I came forth from the Father. I came out from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father." The careful reader will note some difference between the above and the A.V. In the first place "Father" is found instead of God in the first statement; secondly, there is the distinction of "came forth from," and "came out from." Together they give us the fullness of the truth. As one has said, "no phrase could express more completely unity of essence than the original of these words." Nor was it the first time that the blessed Lord had held such language. In the eighth chapter of this Gospel we read (ver. 42), "I came forth from (ἐκ as here in ver. 28), and am come from God" —words wholly inexplicable and unintelligible except as a statement of the essential Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is "very God of very God." And how blessed, as remarked above, to have all this truth as to His person from Himself. The former expression "I came forth from(παρὰ) the Father" implies the leaving of the Father's side; the latter, "I came out from (ἐκ) the Father," points as we have seen to the true Sonship of the Savior.

It is also interesting to notice that there is a third preposition (ἀπὸ) found in the 30th verse of the sixteenth chapter, and also in the third of the thirteenth. It is sufficient to point out that as distinguished from παρὰ it marks the separation involved in the Incarnation while the latter word emphasizes the fellowship between the Father and the Son. And all these wonderful shades of meaning are conveyed in the original with a directness and a simplicity that I suppose no other language but Greek is capable of. It is matter of common knowledge that this tongue is unique in its powers of subtle precision. Learned men may praise the accuracy of Plato, and cleverness of Aristotle; the believer, learned or unlearned, can feel and admire the profound and striking accuracy of the Scriptures of God.

"I leave the world, and go unto the Father." Thus does the blessed Lord return to Him from whom He came. True He was always the Son of man who is in heaven. But divine intimacy could not be enjoyed when the sinless One was made sin during those three hours of supernatural darkness. Then and then only does He say, "My God, My God." "Father" precedes and follows in the well-known utterances on the Cross, whereby God can in very deed be the Father of all who believe in His Son. "Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).

The consideration of points like these leads us perhaps into what may be called side-tracks of the truth. They may possibly not come within our purview when expounding the broad principle of evangelical or ecclesiastical doctrine. They may suggest the microscope rather than the telescope, but they are none the less highly illuminative. R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume 19, John 16:27, Thoughts on (16:27)

"The Father himself loveth you." There is no thought in this little paper of dwelling upon the important announcement with regard to Christian prayer, marking a great dispensational change, which was the occasion of our Lord's uttering the words just quoted. And there is the less need for attempting it, that it has been abundantly unfolded by abler pens. Nevertheless it may be doubted whether believers are as a rule sufficiently alive both to the intrinsic greatness of this favor on the part of God the Father, and also to its far-reaching consequences.

And first, if the conjecture be just a word or two as to the cause of this failure which perhaps is not far to seek. Is it not connected with the fact that the children of God are but human, and consequently feeble oftentimes in appropriating their vast inheritance? "There remaineth much land to be possessed" is as necessary a reminder as ever it was in Joshua's days. But this lack of apprehension may even be due to pre-occupation with other truths, with that perhaps which is not only good but paramount, as the love of Christ Himself, which clearly no Christian can estimate too highly. Yet surely to forget the love of the Father is no necessary consequence of occupation with that of the Son. Rather is it that we are one-sided, and that nothing is rarer than perfect equipoise in appreciation of truth. But in fact no truths of Holy Scripture are antagonistic; for all are centered in Christ, Who is the Truth. Accordingly, as we apprehend Him in His person and in His work, so shall we in like measure realize every resultant blessing, not the least being the love of the Father. And thus intelligent appreciation of our Lord Jesus will, ipso facto, quicken our spiritual sensibility to all He has accomplished, even in gaining for us His Father's love and complacency.

For while it must not be forgotten (and this is another aspect of the truth) that love to the world was in God Himself as such (John 3:16), and needed no prompting, yet this love of the Father is consequent upon the affection produced in the believer's heart to Christ, because of what the Lord Jesus is and what He has done. And so further we learn, as the Lord goes on to tell the disciples, that it is because they had loved Him that the Father's love had been thus drawn out.

On the other hand when it is a question of the church, we read that Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). Such are the varied aspects of the divine love, distinct, but, it is needless to say, exquisitely consistent, as indeed is the whole body of revealed truth.

Now in a manner it is intelligible that Christians should be specially impressed by the love of the Lord Jesus, when they meditate, or praise, or pray. For though we have not with us that corporeal presence, having neither heard, nor seen with our eyes (save by those of faith) nor contemplated, nor our hands handled, "that which was from the beginning," as did the first disciples, yet we have the priceless record; and He, the Son of Man, has "drawn us with the cords of a man." We can picture Him in the Temple, on the Mount of Transfiguration, in Gethsemane; we hear His words (such as man never spake before) of encouragement, of benediction, of rebuke of all that was opposed to His own stainless holiness; for us too He is no impalpable abstraction, but "the Man Christ Jesus." Our salvation, again, is secured by no fulfillment of philosophic precepts (although the only true philosophy be wrapt up in Christianity, that wisdom to be spoken among them that were perfect, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:6), but by faith of Christ, faith in His atoning blood, in His glorious resurrection, even as His person is to be worshipped and adored; for, Stupendous as are His works, He Himself is greater than all He has wrought: in other words, all is inestimable because of His being "God manifest in the flesh."

But God the Father! Unto what heights of majesty do we here ascend! We think of the High and Holy One, Who inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy, and of the inaccessible light. Nor is it unwholesome to remind ourselves again and again that God is infinite in holiness as in power. For such reflection need in no wise dim our perception of the characteristic relationships into which grace has introduced us in Christ, one of which, viz., the love of the Father, it is the aim of this paper to enforce. And that this is nothing recondite, no exclusive appanage of the mature believer, is plain; for the beloved apostle says, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." Also the peculiar beauty of this passage is well-known. For, if the little children were entitled to know the Father; and that the Father loved them, the fathers could know nothing higher than Him "Who was from the beginning." So that it is precisely the young believer who is characterized as entering into that aspect of the divine love which might have seemed the special portion of the most advanced. For God delights to show the power of His grace just where the objects are weakest. And so it ever is under the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). The "ministration of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8) exceeds in grace as in glory.

And, if one of the consequences of thus entering into "the love the Father hath bestowed on us" (1 John 3:1), be to quicken the spiritual energies to more earnest adoration of Him Who seeketh worshippers (John 4:23), surely it will in no wise detract from the glory due to our blessed Lord, Who equally with the Father and the Holy Ghost is worthy of supreme homage. But, seeing that our Lord deemed it not unnecessary to remind His disciples of the Father's love, we may well seek to encourage our own hearts in the enjoyment of it in however inadequate a manner.

R. B. Junr.

Bible Treasury: Volume 19, John 16:9, Thoughts on (16:9)

It is not the part of wisdom to deny, but rather freely to acknowledge, that fragments of truth, more or less numerous, are to be found in the ancient philosophies and religious systems. Undoubtedly such are often accompanied by much folly, and perhaps seem all the brighter because of the surrounding darkness. Still they bear eloquent testimony to the fact that God created man upright, whatever his subsequent degeneracy through the fall. But when these philosophers stepped beyond the praise and vindication of morality, it is clear they encountered a serious difficulty, inasmuch as everything of what may be called a constructive character must obviously have been only so much speculation. In other words they could claim no authority, no "Thus saith the Lord," even if reason (which for the most part it did not) led them up to the conviction of a Supreme Being. Hence one great and broad line of demarcation between the heathen systems and Judaism, which was a revelation of God. The former, even where most incrustured with sound moral notions, when consequently they were at their best, offered, it is needless to say, no anchorage for the soul, being in truth but the surmises of men. Such were the doctrines of Stoics and Epicureans, of Socrates and Plato, and, in more remote antiquity, of Confucius. At their worst these systems were a conglomerate of poetical romancing, e.g. the mythologies of Greece, or they were the monstrous dreams of orientalism: the former beautiful, the latter grotesque, but both corrupt.

But when we come to the New Testament, we have a line still broader and more striking, in that Christianity is not merely a divinely-given unfolding of truths that deeply concerned mankind, as was the Hebrew dispensation, but God revealed in full personality, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In short, as has been often remarked, the religion of Christ is Himself. It is not merely that He speaks with authority, as Moses did, and as heathen teachers could not; but, though the humblest of men and the meekest, He ever enforces His own claims as absolute and unquestionable. He is not merely the prophet like unto Moses, though far greater, come down to inaugurate a loftier system, to exhibit a sublimer abnegation, but He was—is—Himself the center and circumference, the Alpha and Omega, of all that He did and taught. We hear from His own lips that it is in vain to pretend to honor the Father without honoring the Son. Such is our Lord Jesus Christ; and as the Father attested, so the Holy Spirit sealed.

Nor in any portion of Holy Scripture does our Lord more emphatically enforce His claims than in the verse under consideration. The Holy Ghost, we read, would reprove or convict (or haply afford demonstrative proof to) the world "of sin, because they believe not on Me." It is not because men are base, or deceitful, or immoral, not because of any specially heinous form of violence or corruption, not for one sin, as men count it, singled out of the dark catalog of human misdeeds; but "of sin, because they believe not on Me." Nor is it hard to understand the reason of our Lord's solemn statement. Clearly unbelief as to Himself, and the refusal of His claims, whether openly aggressive, or coolly indifferent, is the crowning sin of which the human heart can be guilty. Not that in these words of Christ there is any palliation of human evil. If by the law was the knowledge of sin, and by the commandment sin became exceedingly sinful, how much more so when He came, Who was "full of grace and truth," Who is the truth! What would not the truth and the light make manifest? But when the truth was manifested in its most winning form, that of grace, only to be rejected, evidently sin is not only seen at its blackest because confronted with perfect holiness, but the unbelief that will have none of God's remedy becomes necessarily the sign of utter sinfulness and blindness. We have, as it were, a climax of wickedness in the rejection first of righteousness as under the law, then of the fullness of truth in Christ, nay, of "grace and

truth," grace pre-eminently, but grace made living and energetic by its intimate union with truth. No wonder then if it is written, "Of sin because they believe not on Me."

How belief in the Son becomes effectual to the salvation of the soul is not the point in this verse. We know it is by His death, and that our Lord is not more surely the Way, the Truth, and the Life, than the propitiation, even as He came "by water and by blood." But His person is the theme here as the supreme object presented to mankind, and in Whom the Father was to be seen. How admirably in keeping is this verse of John, the latest, with the "Come unto Me" of the earliest Evangelist! one mark out of a myriad of the deep harmonies of the word of God. While critics are occupied in discovering (sometimes, it is to be feared, trying to discover) difficulties and discrepancies in the letter, the humble child of God, better so engaged, will find beauty upon beauty, token upon token, of its incomparable accuracy, in proportion to the diligence of his search, and the reality of his self-distrust.

Finally, we may note that our Lord uttered these words after having declared His manifold offices of mercy and benefaction. He had already said, in words of living power, "I am the Living Bread," "the Light of the world," "the Resurrection and the Life," "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," "the Good Shepherd," "the True Vine." May we not liken these glories to so many glowing colors into which the white light of His Deity is refracted in the prism of the Gospels? At any rate in the majestic words, "I am," which occur so often in John, His Godhead is implicitly conveyed. How great then, unless they repent, the loss of those, whom the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, because they believe not on the Son of God!

R. B. Junr.

Bible Treasury: Volume N7, In That Day (14:20)

It is interesting to note the threefold character of this great utterance of our Lord. Numbers, we know, play an important part in the communication of divine truth, and not least the number three, which has been called, not too fancifully, the 'numerical signature' of the Godhead, implicit in the Ter Sanctus, the Holy, Holy, Holy, of Isaiah 6. Again, Christ speaks of Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and Paul exalts the three abiding virtues—Faith, Hope, and Love. Here, no doubt, the same number points, as always, to completeness—completeness of doctrine and completeness of blessing. "At that day," says the Savior, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you."

"At that day." This began at Pentecost, and, though the knowledge then revealed will not reach its maturity till hereafter, when we shall know as we are known, yet surely it has deepened much since that wonderful epoch, notably perhaps during the last seventy years or so; at any rate in intelligent realization by the saints of God. Yet we must not forget, in calling attention to Philadelphian recovery of truth, that the reality of it may often, by God's grace, have been enjoyed where there was little or no power of conscious entering into it. But, be that as it may, we proceed to note that twice more in the course of these last words of the Lord He refers to "that day," viz., in vers. 23, 26 of the sixteenth chapter of this Gospel of John; the point in the former verse being apparently that the disciples would be so illuminated by the Holy Spirit as not to need to ask for the solution of perplexing mysteries, whereas in the latter the announcement is made that they will ask in His name. Again in verse 26 the word rendered "ask" is linked with the idea of supplication (αἰτήσασθε) while in ver. 23 it is the word that a seeker after knowledge would naturally use (ἔρωτήσατε). The lesson to be drawn, as pointed out by an eminent divine no longer living (Bishop Westcott), seems to be that fullness of knowledge would be followed by fullness of prayer. In fact, as has been finely said, "the fullness of knowledge leads to fullness of prayer." At any rate, no knowledge can lessen the need of prayer; rather must it make such need more imperative, lest there be lack of humility. Moreover, as we know, supplication was to be made in the Name of the Lord—a new thing, as the Lord tells the disciples in chap. 16:24. For, exquisitely beautiful and comprehensive (a model of what prayers should be) as is the prayer that at an earlier date our Lord gave the disciples at their request, there was no asking as yet in His Name, nor could there be.

But let us look at each section of the verse somewhat in detail, if briefly and cursorily. The threefold character has already been noted. We may now note the order of the statements. We find then that what is absolute and transcendent comes first. It would be true, if nothing else followed, though it be the foundation of what follows. "Ye shall know," says the Lord, "that I am in my Father." Here we have most emphatically objective truth, on which it is of all importance to be sound, i.e., truth that in itself is altogether outside ourselves. If we were non-existent, if there were no ransomed sinners, no church, still the Son would be in the Father. He ever was in the Father. Even on earth He was the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father. Here no doubt the fact is enforced as the basis of our blessing. But still its objective character should be carefully remarked. It would be equally true if, to use the modern and rather colloquial phrase, we did not "come in" at all. Yet still this sublime fact would abide. It is indeed one of the most salient and glorious characteristics of Christianity that it consists of facts. Merely human religions can only give us speculations, dreams, imaginations. Such are the lucubrations of philosophers and poets alike, the former never rising above their perplexed controversies, the latter now and then giving hints of something nobler and higher, but vague and hopeless as to any real attainment, as it was all bound to be. But how different is our "most holy faith," which is founded upon the impregnable rock of divine knowledge and certainty. So the Lord says, "Ye shall know," ye shall with ever deepening appreciation know that "I am in my Father." Needless to say, none can ever sound the depths of this great mystery, but we bow our heads in grateful adoration, as we enter further and further by the Holy Spirit's aid into the blessedness of the revelation. And while such words of our Lord are unlike any other words, unlike in their simplicity as in their profundity, we can at least see how fittingly and reassuringly this great truth takes precedence in the declaration by the Lord of this threefold doctrine. For it is, as we have seen, the basis of what follows, and to which we pass on.

"Ye in me." Here we have Christian position or standing, as it is called, as in the first statement the position of Christ is defined—a position that implies how He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and seated at His right hand, and that for our blessing among we know not what more universal results of the counsels of God (and the work of Christ) into which we are incompetent to enter, as reverence would forbid, whatever the spirit of speculation would say. For speculation must be vain when not actively pernicious. And in such matters the wisest man knows nothing more than a child, unless God is pleased to reveal His mind. But this by the way. Here, as we know, reference is made to the standing of believers, with which, theoretically, at least, we are so familiar. For does it not belong to that department of truth

which those known as “Brethren” were largely instrumental in recovering? The Epistles to the Romans and to the Ephesians are, as we know, to a great extent but a commentary on these three words, as they severally concern the individual and the church. It is without doubt an aspect of Christianity that many pious souls most inadequately enter into, though not to be separated from the practical side, in short, with what is known as “state,” with which the verse concludes. For indeed the three truths herein presented are as essentially connected as inseparable, as they are literally linked together. While all revelation hangs together in harmonious union, especially must this be the case with doctrines that our Lord has placed in close association. Doubtless when the perception of any one of them is weakened and dimmed, the others are in like degree. So it is, as one has said, with faith, hope, and love. Weaken one and you enfeeble the energy of the others.

Lastly, the Lord says, “And I in you.” Now we come to what is purely subjective, and what all who are truly converted must in their measure realize. They may have little appreciation of the sublime truth that the Son is in the Father, but a feeble conception of standing in Christ; but none can fail, if they believe at all, to feel within, the comforting or the reproving influence of the Spirit of Christ. Yet we may confidently say that what the Lord has joined together spiritually He intends to be realized synchronously (if I may use this word for want of a simpler). It must be at least as true of spiritual things as of natural. This point I would press, the other being the precedence taken by objective truth, by which one means, to put it briefly, the transcendent side of revelation.

R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume N3, John 14:23, A Word on (14:23)

The faith of the believer rests on no hypothesis, but on the sure word of God; moreover he “hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10). But it has frequently struck one that any thoughtful mind, starting merely with the statement that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, must see how fully and minutely all scripture corresponds with it. Nothing, it would seem, could hinder such a conclusion but the sad fact, of which the Bible also assures us, that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. For, assuming the Divine Personality of our Lord, we find every act, every word of His, to be in keeping with His claims. On the one hand there is in Christ a supreme dignity infinitely above man; on the other, a lowliness and accessibility that are the perfection of human nature absolutely free from stain.

Now not the least convincing of these accumulated evidences of our Lord's Divinity are often found in the simplest of His sayings, where the truth as to His Person is not the less palpable because it is implied rather than stated in so many words. Direct statements of His Sonship are numerically overwhelming; but not less weighty are the hidden touches, if we may so call them, as in the verse under consideration. “We will come unto him and make our abode with him.” Here the Lord couples Himself with the Father in the most striking way. He does so of course because He could also say, “I and My Father are one”; but, as remarked above, there is in the text in John 14 the peculiar cogency that attaches to implicit statements. And this is the more noteworthy when we reflect that our Lord Jesus never couples Himself with His disciples when it is a question of approaching God. When He gave Peter instructions for obtaining the stater for the temple service money, He graciously said, “Lest we offend them” (the collectors of the tribute); but after His resurrection, and when the disciples were, at the impending outpouring of the Holy Ghost about to enter a higher sphere of blessing, our Lord says, “My Father and your Father, My God and your God” —never, as has been well remarked, “Our God.” How could He?

The practical truth conveyed in this wonderful verse is well-known to the readers of the Bible Treasury. Undoubtedly the making it good in the soul is another matter. We know the condition, and that in order to it Christ's word must be cherished, not isolated fragments, but His word in all its far-reaching import. But it will be so kept, if and as we love Him. For so the Savior assures us in this very verse. However the immediate thought of the writer is the implicit doctrine of the incarnation in the word “we.” And at which shall we marvel most, the grace that led to such condescension, or the majesty of Him Who uttered these divine words? R. B.

Bible Treasury: Volume 19, John 14:9 (14:9)

There are innumerable incidents in the Bible, which, although they may not bear directly on central doctrines or upon the great principles of dispensational truth, are nevertheless most instructive and often peculiarly precious. The most conspicuous of these are naturally such as concern our blessed Lord—His ways, His words, or His silence. Side-lights these, so to speak, but not less luminous than the central rays. To pursue the figure, one might compare the broad stream of dispensational truth of divine doctrine generally to beams of undivided light, whereas in these minute touches we have the blue and the purple and the scarlet of the refracted ray. In short, each has its own place and beauty, as the Holy Spirit alone can lead our hearts into the enjoyment of both. The great doctrines of Christianity, we know, are of supreme consequence; nor are those to be trusted who affect admiration of the lovely traits disclosed in a Joseph or Daniel, and still more in Christ Himself, while they slur over or ignore the emphatic warnings of the scriptures as to sin and coming judgments. But when the conscience has bowed to the solemn truth, and the heart believed, and the mouth confessed, then truly we do well to mark every attitude of the Son of God, and to note every word that fell from the lips of Him, “Who spake as never man spake.” Such are found especially in the scriptures that seem, not so much to unfold truth about Him, as to present Himself.

Hence I propose to dwell for a moment upon part of the verse indicated in the heading of this paper: not on the whole of it; nor, as intimated above, in its central aspect. The great truth, that the Lord Jesus is the sole Revealer of the Father, cannot indeed be enforced too frequently. It is insisted upon by our Lord in emphatic words in the verse before us; it is stated with wonderful precision and majesty in the first and third of the synoptic Gospels. It is always supposed, whatever the special doctrine under consideration. The revelation of the Father by and in the Son is without controversy the keystone of the entire arch of revealed truth.

But the object now is of less wide and far-reaching compass, though what it may gain in limitation is balanced by the necessity for peculiarly reverent handling. Indeed the writer might almost apologize for attempting any more than just calling attention to the words themselves—so

closely do they touch the very sanctuary, if one may so say, of the Lord's Person. Comment too often tends to enfeeble, and that in proportion to the loftiness of the theme. Most of all is this the case in dwelling, not so much on the doctrine or even the works, but on the words and manner of the Son of God. Yet after all the record is divine, and so cannot be touched by the infirmity of human language.

"Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip"? They were but a brief period, the years of that holy ministry—the time was short even if we reckon from our Lord's birth. He was crucified just a little past the age when a Jew was considered to have attained full manhood. But to Him (and what spiritual mind can wonder?) it was a long time—long to bear the contradiction of sinners, if not the slowness of heart of His chosen. Nor is this the only occasion on which we learn indirectly what this world must have been to Him, Whose natural home was heaven, but Who had emptied Himself of every glory save that alone which was inseparable from Him,—the glory of His infinite moral perfectness. "How long shall I be with you, and suffer you?" was His exclamation as recorded by Mark, when pursuing His course of beneficent healing. And how much "virtue" must have proceeded from the blessed Lord during those wonderful years! Time indeed is rightly measured by the work accomplished and the sacrifices endured, and the love expended, even in the case of a mere man. He lives longest who serves God. There may be much activity that is merely beating the air. But how infinitely filled up with good works (but which He showed them from the Father) was the life of the blessed Son! It was not merely the "sinless years, that breathed beneath the Syrian blue," but the untiring self-surrender of the Word made flesh, the Servant-prophet, but withal Jehovah. Moreover (but here silence is more becoming than words), did not the shadow of His coming passion lie before Him? "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50)!

See then the contrast of Philip, tenderly but unhesitatingly rebuked by Christ for not having known Him. Does it not teach us for the hundredth time how inadequate is human exactitude and reflectiveness in matters that must be spiritually discerned? For we have evidence that Philip was exact and observant as a man, and, perhaps we might add, as a saint. He it was (as an eminent writer¹ has remarked) who so clearly defined the characteristics of the Messiah to Nathanael, who was convinced that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not suffice for the hungry multitude, nay, who recommended Nathanael to come and see for himself the wonderful Person, with whom he had made acquaintance. It was not the impulsive Peter or the despondent Thomas who failed in this respect, but the very apostle who seemed particularly observant. Thus all must be the Holy Spirit, or it is vain. We note too a touch of pathos in the Lord's words, underlying the grandeur of the truth He declared and which He emphatically was—and is.

Unlimited truly are the virtues that open out for learning in reading and meditating on the pages of scripture. It has often struck the writer that we do not dwell as much as we might on what may be called the objective aspect of sacred incidents, particularly such as are recorded in the Gospels. Have we not here, as it were, an endless gallery of divine portraits? Thus it is wise to neglect no part of Holy Writ, to study and ponder again and yet again the great doctrines of individual salvation, of the church, the coming of the Lord and the kingdom; but not to overlook that inmost shrine of blessed truth, which reveals most nearly the ways and words of our adorable Lord. R. B., Jr.

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