

John - Commentaries by John Thomas Mawson

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, Fatherhood of God, The (8:42)

Address by Walter B. Westcott

“If God were your Father” (John 8:42).

It is not the fashion in this present age to denounce sin and warn men of judgment to come and the wrath of God. To a very large extent, the conception of the day is that this was all very well in the days of our Puritan forefathers, but great advance has been made since then, and such a God as they were trained to fear must be cast out of twentieth century theology; instead there is preached a loving All-Father who could not banish men from the joys of heaven and consign them to the woes of Hell; for if an earthly parent shrinks from punishing his child, and often forgives the most wayward when the crucial time for deciding his fate arrives, how can it be supposed that God — “our Heavenly Father” — could skew less mercy than one of His failing creatures?

That this is a very popular conception of God today can be readily proved by quotations from many of the prominent preachers. The following extracts from recent utterances will suffice.

1. “The heart of the Age is panting for brotherhood; but is not this the very core of the gospel of Jesus? Brothers, because God is our common Father.”
2. “In the fullness of time God sent His Son. It is the only way the Father can do, and it is the only way the Father can tell you about His Fatherhood. He sent the Elder Brother... so that He can bring us back... He will be our ideal, He will be our motive power.”
3. “The meanest, most despicable man that ever lived is, after all, a child of God.”
4. “God’s Fatherhood is the main article in Jesus’ message.”
5. “There is only one religion of Humanity, that which centers in a man revealing the love of God, a Son who links us to His Father and our Father, a Brother who binds us to Himself and to one another as brothers, that is the religion of mankind.”

Are these statements true? Let us test them by the New Testament Scriptures. We must have authority, for the mind of man is so constituted that unless it is held in by authority there is no limit to its speculations, and if it is merely a matter of opinion, one opinion is as good as another, and nobody can say what is true, and what is not true. Therefore I propose to take the New Testament Scriptures as my authority. In them we read:

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us;

For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device “ (Acts 17:24-29)

This scripture states very plainly that in one sense we are the handiwork of God and so constituted that we are entirely dependent upon Him, and to use Paul’s words “IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING” that is to say in the sense of creatures in relation to a Creator, we are dependent upon God. We are members of one family that owes its origin to God. One sweeping statement that God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth does away with all race distinctions.

There are those who look down upon the colored races. Granted that they live in degradation, in sin, (that which we avoid, largely by reason of what others would say of us), yet their very the Bible, thus proving the value of the Word of God. It is perfectly clear that God has made all nations, whether they be black or white, as in Malachi: “HAVE WE NOT ALL ONE FATHER?” We all trace our origin back to Adam. We all derive our existence from, and are sustained by, a Creator God. In that sense we may speak of God’s parental interest in us, but in that sense alone is there any ground for the current conception of the Fatherhood of God. Men have abused that passage of Scripture. Their argument is that we stand by our natural birth in relation to God who has the keenest interest in all His children, and will suffer no harm to come to them.

That God is a Creator who has indeed the keenest interest in the welfare of all His creatures is a very comforting thought, and it is true that He has been working behind the scenes for the blessing of the man He placed upon the earth, but it does not follow that all are His “children”; for as we shall see on looking into Scripture, the expression, “children of God” covers a great deal more than the thought of origin in the sense of being the creation of His hand.

That "the meanest man that ever lived is, after all, a child of God," is a statement without support in the Scriptures. If we are all children of God by nature, there are some conclusions that must result from these premises. For instance, there is no room for the old-fashioned doctrine of the fall, for if the fall means anything it means that man, placed in innocence in the garden of Eden, fell from his estate and was placed at an infinite distance by sin from God. So great was that distance that a barrier was placed at once to prevent man getting back into the garden of innocence and delight by a flaming sword turning every way at the entrance of it. If we be all the children of God, then the doctrine of the fall must be abandoned.

In addition to the fall must be dismissed the necessity for the new birth. If we are all children of God by nature, what need is there for the new birth? What need to be born from above if even the most degraded be children of God? With the new birth must be abandoned the doctrine of the atonement, for if men are children of God by nature, why should they need to be redeemed from sin and all its consequences, for is not God good, kind, loving; would He not be as good to His children as an earthly father? We must banish the thought that Christ died as a sacrifice, and regard His death as an example to show how far a man can go in suffering for his principles, instead of as an atoning death by which propitiation has been made for sin. Further, and finally, must go the truth of eternal punishment. As a matter of fact, usually the first thing given up by a professing Christian who goes astray on these lines, is the doctrine of eternal punishment. It has been given up far and wide, and you may vainly search in Christendom (save here and there) for any reference to it as an article of the Christian faith.

The popular doctrine is that God is a Father, and we are His children; He cares for us. He looks down upon us with pity, sees us surrounded by temptations, and His great heart of compassion goes out to us, and it is impossible to conceive that God would be so cruel as to sentence His creatures to a lost eternity, for He is like unto us, who, as fathers, would be only too glad to overlook the failings of our children. Such are the reasonings of today, and if the Fatherhood of God as a common conception be admitted to be true, we must give up all those doctrines I have named and others too.

Let us turn to Scripture:

"Jesus saith unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My Word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:42-44).

There is a very definite statement made by the Lord Himself: "If God were your Father ye would love Me."

That is a great test. Do all those who believe in the "Fatherhood of God" love the Son of God? It is a proof of the relationship with the Father, that everyone who can truly call God his Father, loves Jesus, not a person conceived in the imagination of men, but the One whose character and life on earth is recorded for us in the gospels. Put that test to those today who propound the conception of the Fatherhood of God. If God were your Father you would love Him.

You find a similar thought in 1 John 3:8, to, 13:

"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."

These statements trace things to their source, and divide the human family into two companies. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil."

If all were the children of God how can it be said that there are children of God and children of the devil? and how can all men be brothers when the apostle says "Marvel not if the world hate you." If all men are brethren, who represent the world? "Marvel not if the world hate you," clearly distinguishing between "the brethren" and "the world." Who are the brethren? They are all true believers in Christ on the face of the earth, and they have nothing in common with the world, and the world is in opposition to them as they are true to their calling and position.

So you get two companies — the brethren in Christ, and the world that is opposed to the brethren, and has no interest in their welfare. You must get rid of "the world" or "the brethren" entirely if all men form part of one common brotherhood in the ordinary acceptance of the term.

At this point I might refer to the thought that "God sent the elder brother." That is to say that Christ is looked upon as the elder brother, having come into this world in incarnation and become a man like other men, a member of the human race, to help us out of our difficulty, and to develop what was good in us that we might be made suitable to God. That is utterly unsupported by Scripture. You never find Christ addressed or referred to as the elder brother. It is not until resurrection that He addresses people directly as His brethren. When they pressed round Him on earth and said "Thy mother and Thy brethren" desire "to speak with Thee," He looked around and said, "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother." But He did not actually address any company of people directly as His brethren until He had been raised from the dead, and by His atoning sacrifice had redeemed a company to Himself and to His God, whom He could righteously call His brethren; of a new order altogether, and not connected with Him by nature's ties, or by a common humanity.

The Lord had said before His death "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." As a result of that death He has those who are linked up with Him forever. In resurrection, not in incarnation, is this new and eternal connection formed. Moreover, the harvest is as the seed cast into the ground; the truth is that those whom the Lord calls "brethren" have a new nature and life, the same nature and life as He possesses; they are linked up with Him in His life and position, and not He with them in their old life and position.

I find that the apostles and early Christians addressed Christ as Lord, and I believe every Christian today who understands the dignity and glory of the Person of Christ will refrain from speaking of Him as the elder brother, but will prostrate himself before Him and call Him Lord. Because He calls us brethren are we to abuse His grace by calling Him brother? If the King of England were to call me by my Christian name, should I turn round and address him in the same familiar manner? There must be respect even with an earthly monarch. How much more, then, should there be reverence toward the King of Kings?

Now let us turn to John 1:10-14.

“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not.

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.’

Now it is impossible, if we accept the truth of the New Testament Scriptures, to overlook a statement so distinct as that “He came unto His own and His own received Him not. But as many as received HIM, to them gave He power to become the sons of God,” and to none others. These people were not born after the natural order (of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man), as people would have us to believe who speak of the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God; but they were born of God.

Have you received Christ? Have you believed on His name? If so, you are in the family of God; you are one of the children of God. If you have not received Christ, if you have not believed, you have neither part nor lot in this matter, But you may enter into the family by believing. If you have not believed Christ you are not one of the children of God.

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26).

“For ye are all the children of God” — shall we stop there? Men of degraded life, men who despise the Word of God and reject the Savior, it matters not, ye are all the children of God That seems a wonderful toleration. People plead for toleration. They say we must consider other people’s opinions, and make allowance for others. There is a false toleration abroad today against which we must protest. It behooves us to stand by the truth and to refuse that false toleration that will embrace error and say, “Ye are all the children of God.” But the Word of God guards it very clearly. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” That settles it once for all. The children of God we are if we have faith in Christ Jesus, and no others have any right to take the title.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1, 2).

Now we come to the part one delights in. Behold the manner of love — not the idea of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, a degradation of the truth — but the true Fatherhood of God. The love of the Father that He has bestowed upon all those who have received His Son into their hearts, “that we should be called the children of God.” There is a wonderful charm in this blessed truth, that we, as we live here, are truly, if we believe in Christ, the children of God. The world around does not understand us in this character. Men meet us in business; they know us in that character, but as the children of God we are a mystery to them. They do not understand the One who came from God. When He was here amongst men He was completely misunderstood in all His words and ways.

There is a gulf fixed by the death of Christ between those who trust in Christ and those who reject His claims; and that gulf will widen until it becomes impassable, and the world will wonder when they see those whom they have disregarded down here conformed to the image of God’s own Son. We are going on to that day of splendor, of glory, and even down here we are basking in the sunshine of a Father’s love, in the very family of God, led by the Spirit of God. The Father looks down upon us and there is nothing He will not do for us, because we have trusted in Christ and are part of that great family that is linked with Christ.

We need to see what the truth really is, and it is patent on the face of Scripture, that only those who are born of God and have trusted in Christ, are really and truly entitled to call themselves children of God. And it is the privilege and responsibility of such, not by magnifying their differences, but by magnifying all that they have in common, to make the bonds of love which bind them in this true brotherhood stronger and more manifest.

It is argued that the idea of the Fatherhood of God is contained in the parable of the prodigal (Luke 15). Luke’s Gospel presents man as having sprung from God’s creative hand (3:38), as we have seen from Acts 17:24-29; but by his sin and rebellion he had become dead and lost to God; and it is thus he is viewed in this Scripture.

It is blessedly true, as the parable teaches, that any poor prodigal sinner who comes back to God in true repentance will be welcomed with all the love that beats for him in the heart of God, and the delight of the prodigal will be eclipsed by the deep, deep joy that the Father finds in his return. But the whole truth cannot be taught in any single parable: for instance, there is no mention of atonement, or of many things that are essential if you want to get an idea of the truth as a whole. The parable perfectly presents the one part of the truth intended to be illustrated, namely, the joy of God in the sinner’s return, but does not in any way sanction the popular error we are considering.

One does not want to be argumentative about these matters, but I think we should face the general trend of things today. I am persuaded that behind a great deal of the giving up of the truth of God, is based this false conception of the Fatherhood of God. But there are those who know what it is, having received Christ, to be in the family of God, to embrace all those who are in the family of God, and their destiny is to be conformed ‘to the image of God’s Son; having this hope they are purified from the world, its attractions and snares, and are daily being

conformed to the One whose likeness they will bear in the coming day of glory.

Answers to Correspondents, John 5:21 (5:21)

T.M. — “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. — We do not think what is here said as to the Father refers to” His work in souls in Old Testament times. “In the first place “raising” the dead is not a work in the soul, and secondly, we do not think there is any point of time in the passage at all. The statements are characteristic. What is true of the Father, as to the essentially divine power here spoken of, is true also of the Son, who is co-equal with the Father, and exercises quickening power in respect of “whom He will,” albeit taking the place in manhood of a recipient, even as to that which belongs to Him in His own proper rights as a divine Person (see the connection of the statements in this verse with those in the two verses preceding).

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, Spirit of Truth, The (14:16-17)

H. D. R. Jameson

“I will pray the Father; and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of Truth: whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).

In chapters 13 to 16 of John’s Gospel, we have the words of instruction and comfort addressed by our blessed Lord to His sorrowing disciples in view of the period of His present absence on high. In each of these chapters, save the first, the coming of the “Spirit of Truth” is presented in differing connections: let us look a little now at His coming as presented in the 14th chapter in the verses above quoted.

Jesus was going away; He could not abide with the disciples forever: the claims alike of infinite love and infinite holiness necessitated His departure in a way they could not then understand, and sorrow filled their hearts. But He would pray the Father, and in response to that prayer the Father would send to them another Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth; and, mark, He abides with us forever. How precious to know that His presence with us today is the immediate result of the prayer of Jesus on our behalf!

The title given to the Holy Spirit here as “The Spirit of Truth” is full of significance, occurring as it does just after the Lord Jesus had spoken of Himself as “the Truth” (verse 6). Christ is “the Truth”: in Him God is fully declared; and, moreover, in the light of the full shining forth of God in Him, all things are seen in their true relative positions. In Christ therefore the whole range of truth is presented objectively before us for the faith of our souls.

But this is infinite, and hence we can understand the need of a power within commensurate with the greatness of the revelation without and this we have in the Spirit of Truth in us and with us; for the Spirit of Truth is the power and light and witness in us subjectively of all that Christ is objectively as “the Truth.” (He is more indeed than the power of it, for, on the subjective side, He is the thing itself. He is “Truth” — 1 John, 5:6).

Now the coming of the Spirit of Truth, as presented in this scripture, brings immediately to view, in the most striking contrast, two distinct and sharply defined circles, namely, the “world” and the “you.” His coming and presence marks out these two circles in a distinction the one from the other which is vital and eternal. They cannot overlap.

There is on the one hand the “world”: it does not, indeed cannot, receive the Spirit of Truth, for it “seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him.” On the other hand in blessed contrast we have the “you”: the divine circle here on earth where the Spirit dwells. Of these it can be said “ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you.”

“In” is an explanation setting forth the way the Spirit would be with them: He was not to be external to themselves, as Jesus was whilst with them, but He would be with them by being in them. But the great thought in the passage is that whereas Christ could not remain with them, the Spirit of Truth, who was to come, would abide with them forever.

He would be with them moreover as the Spirit of Truth. In the “world” there is not one ray of divine light, but in the divine circle here on earth (the “you” of this verse) the truth and light of God are known, enjoyed and set forth; for there the Spirit of Truth dwells, maintaining in the hearts of all in that circle the glorious light of Him who is — “the Truth.”

We have before us then but the two circles, the world on the one hand and the Christian circle on the other; and this brings us in the very simplest and most elementary way to what is collective. “He dwelleth with you”: that is the divine circle on earth. Though every believer is indwelt, yet we are not indwelt by the Spirit as so many isolated units; the whole Christian company is in view.

Now this truth is of the greatest practical importance and worthy of earnest attention and consideration, for if we would have the unhindered gain of the Spirit’s presence here, our minds must have the same outlook as His, and our service contemplate no smaller circle than that in which He dwells, and which is the sphere of His marvelous operations — that wide and blessed circle within the everlasting affections of Christ in whose Name He comes (vs. 16).

The Lord grant it may be so, for His Name’s sake!

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, “Part With Me”: The Constancy of the Heart of Christ About His Own (13:1-10)

M. C. Gahan

The Constancy of the Heart of Christ About His Own

John 13:1-10

1. Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.
2. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him:
3. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God:
4. He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself.
5. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.
6. Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?
7. Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.
8. Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not thou halt no part with Me.
9. Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.
10. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

In this and the three following chapters of the Gospel of John, the Lord has historically reached the last stage of that journey that was about to close in the solemn darkness of the cross. In the very antechamber of death He gathers His own, as it were to relieve the tension upon His spirit by pouring out the thoughts of His heart in connection with the day that His resurrection was about to usher in. "In that day ye shall know," etc. (John 14-20). The day of His actual presence with His disciples was to be exchanged for a day of separation from them and provision must needs be made to meet this contingency. The constancy of the heart of Jesus towards His own could admit of nothing less. He was about to provide for the objects of His love by the very fact of His going away and preparing a place for them in the Father's house, and by coming again to take them unto Himself. But that was future. What about the interval period, whether long or short?

The answer to that question, solved by incarnate divine love, is presented in chapter 13; it was to be "part with" Him in spirit until place with Him in the Father's house should fill up the full cup of mutual enjoyment in the heart of Christ and the hearts of His own.

The chapter opens with the prospect that lay before the Lord, and the pressure which lay upon His spirit; the former, that He was going to the Father, the latter, the circumstances and solitude of His own, consequent upon His departure. Having loved them He loved unto the end, and for them His love provided that which should be ample compensation for the solitude involved in His absence, even the enjoyment of "part with" Him in spirit, and the means by which this could be maintained in holy reality.

The perfect simplicity of the incident which the Lord selected to set forth the provision necessary to the accomplishment of the desires of His heart is arresting, but more so the perfect grace which made Him bend in lowly service to His disciples.

The towel, the basin, and the water were more familiar to the eastern mind in those days than now, but in the hands of Jesus they symbolized the inauguration of that service that was only to close with the translation of the saints to the Father's house.

Peter was unacquainted with the thoughts of Christ on behalf of His own and swayed like a pendulum from one extreme to another, saying: (1) "Thou shalt never wash my feet," and, (2) "Lord not my feet only but also my hands and my head." The Lord replies in terms that served to tranquillize Peter's impulsive spirit, reminding him that effective bath-washing calls for nothing more than the washing of the feet. It meant spiritually that while effective cleansing through the operation of the Word, as "born of water," transforms the moral being of the man at new birth, as distinguished from atonement for sin and sins through the blood of Christ, yet by coming into contact in his daily walk with the spirit, principles, language, and motives of a defiled world, the believer contracts defilement which must be removed if part with Christ in the place into which He has now entered is to be enjoyed.

This does not imply that sinless perfection is essential to fellowship with the Son in heaven, but rather furnishes the means by which the Lord Himself in lowliest of grace, applies the word in cleansing, separative, renewing power to the heart that has become sensible of the chilling and lowering effects of worldly atmosphere and influences; and that with a view to lifting it again into touch with Himself in glory, and heavenly things; thus resuming the temporarily interrupted current of that which is involved in "part with Me."

But this service of lowly grace is assumed to be occasional and intermittent. It is clear that the heart of Christ could never find its full divine satisfaction in a ministry that simply partook of the nature of negating and annulling the defiling effects of "this present evil world." There remained the positive ministry of redemption's glorious results; the things that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. 2, 9); "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and "the riches of His glory" (Eph. 3:8,16); "the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); "the high (heavenly) calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). Into all these great realities the Lord would have His people enter.

But the incident of feet-washing recalls the type of the laver, standing between the altar of burnt sacrifice and the door of the tabernacle, where the priests were ceremonially required to wash hands and feet, preparatory to entering the tabernacle or temple, in which the full glories of Jehovah shone forth for the satisfaction of those who were entitled to enter there: for "in His temple every whit of it uttereth His glory" (marg. Psa. 29:9). The "cloths of service" mentioned in Exodus 31 to, immediately after the laver, in all probability did service in this connection, closing the ceremonial circumstances of washings, preparatory to the priests' entrance into the scene in which everything spoke of and displayed the glory of Jehovah, and bringing them as cleansed from what we may assume to be involuntary defilement, — for sacrifice was provided for transgression — into touch with those things which were "the example and shadow of heavenly things" and the "patterns of things in the heavens" (Heb. 8:5; 9:23).

In the type the laver was but preparatory to contact with the glories of Jehovah's house, so here the Lord passes from the incident of feet-washing to the revelation of glories of which those of tabernacle or temple were but shadows. Nor is there any delay, save to wait, patient to the last, upon the movements of Judas, that is, until he "having received the sop went immediately out," — out into the night. Those feet so recently washed in lowly grace by the Lord and Master, now hurry Judas to the betrayal of his Lord and his own appalling doom. The moral night of darkness into which Judas stepped out of that upper room, one may well conceive, has never been paralleled in the history of a soul.

But what about those within? It could not be night where He was, of whom tabernacle and temple were but shadows, and where glories were revealed which were infinitely greater than the material glories that once dazzled priestly eyes. For, now that Judas is gone out, Jesus introduces immediately to those who were really "His own," the glories connected with His death and resurrection and ascension. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him" (vss. 31-32). And from that point He passes on to unfold the glories, privileges, and blessings, of which the following chapters are full, without pause or interruption, save for interrogation here and there from the amazed disciples, until the climax of all is reached in the closing verses of John 17.

Thus was the Lord's heart set free to open up its treasured secrets to those He loved, and who, in spite of all their failures, were true at heart to Him and here He is "minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man," fitting His people, by the way of the laver, for part with Him in all that belongs to "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24) where He now appears "in the presence of God for us."

And this feet-washing, this service of lowly grace (which we too are privileged to render one towards another, as enabled of Him — v. 14) He will continue to exercise towards us until the moment shall come when such service will no longer be necessary, because the redeemed shall have reached the place where the street of the city shall be of "pure gold, as it were transparent glass," where "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth," and where the laver shall give place to the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 21 and 22.).

These were untrodden paths as yet for the beloved disciples, and utterly unintelligible to them (ch. 14: 5, 8, 22; 16:17, 18, 29, marg. "parable"); but the pressure of the glory that lay beyond the cross was apparently upon the spirit of Jesus, at the threshold of which glory the Spirit, "the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost," was to be given, who should bring all things to their remembrance "whatsoever I have said unto you" (chap. 14:26). So for a moment, as though it were through a rift in the storm-cloud that was about to burst upon the devoted head of Jesus, a beam of the glory that belonged to the day of a glorified Christ and the given Spirit shone out with dazzling effect on the vision of the disciples, ere, for an hour, the Sun of all their hopes set in darkness, only to rise in all the glory of accomplished redemption, when the promised Spirit of truth should come, guide them into all truth, and skew them things to come.

Scripture Truth: Volume 1, Communion, Worship, and Service (12:1-18)

Charles Hickman

John 12

John 12:1-8.

"Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead.

"There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him.

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.

"Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him,

"Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

"This He said, not that He cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

"Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this.

"For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always."

=====

The home at Bethany was always a place of rest and comfort for the Lord, and in this chapter we see the whole family that He loved so well contributing to His joy; Lazarus sat at the table with Him — a figure of communion, Mary anointed His feet with ointment — a figure of worship, while Martha served. These three things — communion, worship and service, go to make up the present privileges of every Christian.

Communion stands first, and is the spring from whence worship and service flow; moreover it is this that the Lord particularly desires. He is not satisfied with the hope of having us with Him in heaven presently; He wants our company now. This is strikingly proved by His tender appeal to the Laodicean church, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). Do we desire His company as He desires ours?

It is impossible for us to have communion with Christ, if we are walking in a way that grieves the Holy Spirit. We need to judge ourselves in what may seem little things. In the Song of Solomon we read: "Take us the foxes," but it does not stop there, "the little foxes that spoil the vines." I will call your attention to one or two little foxes that spoil the vine of communion. The first shall be — spiritual sloth. Diligence has a large place in the Word of God. It is the diligent soul that shall be made fat, and apart from spiritual diligence you cannot know very much about communion with the Lord.

Another little fox is neglect of prayer. It would be a very interesting thing for each of us to see how much time we spend in prayer. There is no such thing as maintaining communion apart from a prayerful spirit. It is good to live in the spirit of prayer. You can pray while walking down the street — you can pray while at your business, but never neglect to spend time alone with the Lord.

Another little fox that spoils the vine of communion is anxiety. It is impossible to have communion if weighed down by a load of care. Hence it is written "Cast [or roll] thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Psa. 55:22). The Lord wants us to roll every care upon Him, so that our hearts shall be free for communion with Himself.

There is another fox, and it is very little, for it creeps in so easily. It is worldliness. You cannot walk with Christ and the world at the same time. Remember the prayer of the Lord Jesus in reference to His disciples: — "I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth" (John 17:15-17).

The world has rejected and murdered the Lord Jesus, and if our hearts are true to Him we shall not desire its favors.

If you go on in the spirit, and with the pursuits, of the world that murdered your Savior, you will not know the joy of communion with Him.

Now let us consider the case of Mary. We read:

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment."

Elsewhere we read that "Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word" (Luke 10:39). At the feet of the Lord Jesus she had learned something of His perfections, and her soul was filled with adoration. In the intelligence gained in His company of what was suitable, she took the box of ointment at that hour preceding the Lord's death and anointed the feet of Jesus.

I do not think that, Mary was a rich person; if she had been rich, the Holy Spirit would not, I judge, have spoken of the ointment in the way He did. I am under the impression it took all the money she possessed to purchase it. She would say "Christ is worthy of everything," and she expended her all upon Him. Judas said the ointment was worth three hundred pence. But I would rather have the statement of the Holy Spirit: He said it was "very costly." Her appreciation of Christ was precious to God. We are told that the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. This is a true figure of worship flowing out from a heart filled with love to Christ, and it is very fragrant to God, and precious to Christ, and no higher privilege could we have than this; but there must be communion if there is to be worship. Do not try to reverse the order. First communion: you walk in His company; then as the heart is filled with His beauty, there is the outflow of worship to Him.

In Martha we see intelligent and loving service. If you look at the narrative in Luke 10 you find failure there: she was cumbered with her service. But in John 12 There is no failure. Lazarus was right, Mary was right, and Martha was right: each was right because Christ had His rightful position — He was the supreme object of each. I make bold to say, that Martha was as right in her service, as Lazarus in his communion, or Mary in her worship. Love always wishes to serve its object. If I saw a person who did not wish to serve one whom he professed to love, I should say the love was not real. And how great is the privilege of serving Christ in the scene of His rejection! In heaven everyone owns the Lord Jesus; mightiest spirits fly upon lightning wings to carry out His commands. But in the world, where He is despised and rejected, we have now the honor of owning Him as Lord, and of doing His pleasure. You may feel that your service is poor and feeble, but if it springs from love to and communion with Him He greatly appreciates it.

=====

The Sphere of Service

The true homeland of the Church is "in Christ Jesus," and all who know Him not, whether at home or abroad, are the one great outland, which is the field of gospel work. We must preach Christ to all, for to their need of Him there is no exception, and to His power to save there is no limit.

The presentation of Christ to all is our supreme business. This was placed beyond question by His parting charge, to go into all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature. Through all these centuries the charge has come down to the present generation, telling of a purpose and desire still existent in the heart of our ascended Lord.