Articles by John S. Robertson

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Christian Liberty (September–October 1971)

From Ministry in Focus, September–October 1971.

Editor's note: John S. Robertson is a high-school teacher formerly of Toronto, Canada, now living in Vancouver. In other articles he has stimulated our thinking; he does so again in this one.

"Give me liberty or give me death." So cried Patrick Henry, that forensic orator who so fiercely espoused the cause of The American War of Independence. He was merely echoing a thought expressed by the Greek Tragedist, Aeschylus, some 500 years before Christ, when he wrote, "Death is better, a milder fate than tyranny." Since the dawn of civilization man has risen in rebellion against the forces of tyranny and oppression, and those in our society today who seek to tear apart the very fabric of our culture would have us believe that they are but following the natural and inevitable course of events.

But will this assertion bear the light of scrutiny?

Never, in the long history of human affairs, has revolt been more wide-spread than it is today. Like a giant octopus it has surreptitiously ferreted its way into every branch of human activity and its malevolent tentacles have fastened their sessile suckers upon the human mind at every level. In its more familiar form it is characterized by its slogan, "Doin' my thing [?]," and it has even developed a vocabulary of its own where "The Establishment" is the enemy. One finds it hard to believe that the adherents to this philosophy are revolting

against despotism. Are they not, rather, pursuing a plainly selfish course in defiance of the inalienable rights of others? It is certainly not the Christian way which teaches us the selfless life rather than the self-centred one. The most disturbing feature, as far as we Christians are concerned, is its influence [?] on the young people of our assemblies who are bombarded by liberal theology on every hand. One who has turned his back on some of the precious truths held among us for so long claims [?] to say, "We hope by rigorous discipline in the study of the Word in its original languages, and with the proper historical-grammatical principles of interpretation that we may come to a better common understanding of what God's Holy Word really does teach us." The truths which he finds need a better understanding have been handed down by men who learned them on their knees before God, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit "Who will guide you into all truth."

It is true that the desire to have one's own way is dateless. Indeed, this was the very origin of sin which originated in Heaven, not Eden. When Satan declared, "I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . ., I will be like the Most High (Isa. 14:13, 14b), the harmony of the Universe was broken. Restoration of this harmony was made possible when Christ surrendered His will to God, saying, "Not My will, but Thine be done," and [?] went to the cross. To thee [?], dear child of God, liberty that comes from this perfect harmony is yours through Christ Jesus.

One has but to read such passages as Romans 1:21-32 and 3:11-33 to realize the utter depravity of man and the fallacy of believing that anything he can do will ever free

him from the thraldom of Satan, sin, fear and death. The Psalmist says [?], "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5). Isaiah 53:6 succinctly suggests the result of following one's own way, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." How gloriously the prophet adds the remedy for this waywardness, "and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

No, man is not born free but, thank God, he can be set free and the Liberator is Christ Himself. "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). One day, in the full plan of God, even creation will be "brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

What, then, is this "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free?" (Gal. 5:1). In 1 Corinthians 7:22 it is given as a seeming paradox, an incomprehensible conundrum to the natural man, but plain [?] and lucid to the spirit-led saint of God: "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." The word translated servant is the Greek word "doulos" meaning a slave and in another [?] form is translated "bondage." How, then can we be free, yet a slave? The word translated free is "eleutheros," but the Apostle prefixes the preposition "apo," meaning "from," to this word to get the word [?]

Thus the emancipation of the believer from the bondage of Satan, sin, guilt and fear is what is BEk Tphi1ed hgi7 [?]. Read Acts 27:17, 18; Romans 7:24, 25; 8:15; and Hebrews 2:14, 15. Being delivered from those things which separated us from God, we are now brought into

that relationship with Him which had been destroyed by Satan. As the strings of the harp respond to the master touch to produce a sweet melliferous symphony, unmarred by any jarring discord, so the freed soul responds to the will of God to produce life [?] in perfect harmony with Him. There is no conflict for the will of the believer is one with that of God. This, beloved, is God's will for you. Will you bow with the hymn writer and join in the anthem:

"Sweet will of God,

Still draw me closer,

'Till I am wholly lost in Thee."

Christian Obedience (March–April 1972)

From Ministry in Focus, March–April 1972.

Editor's note: John S. Robertson, a high-school teacher and one of the original members of Food for the Flock, Inc., lives in Delta, British Columbia. We are always pleased when he contributes an article. His messages are always timely and forceful. In this one he challenges our obedience to the lordship of Christ.

"There is no more certain way of arriving at any particular notion than by undertaking to defend it, and among the most obstinate of our opinions may be classified those which are derived from discussions in which we affect to search for truth, while, in reality we are only fortifying prejudices." These words were spoken not by some great logician, but by a garrulous character in James Fenimore Cooper's novel "The Pathfinder." As might be expected, this said character was verily guilty of the very practice his words sought to disparage. Perhaps there is a lesson in this for us all. We, as Christians, do well to examine carefully the ideas we so vehemently espouse to see if they harmonize with the will of God. To this end let us examine the subject of Christian obedience from the Word. A thorough understanding of what God expects from us should rid us of any desire to engage in polemical persiflage (See I Tim. 6:20).

It is something more than mere coincidence that the words translated obedience most frequently in the Old and New Testaments have as their root meaning, "to

listen." An obedient Christian is a listening Christian. Ever since the birth of the Church Satan has waged a war of words for the minds of believers. It is against a background of gnosticism that the Epistles of John were written. Paul, too, found this a matter of deep concern and contention. Today the air is literally filled with voices shouting for attention and the presses are pouring out a veritable flood of printed material all advocating the pre-eminence of the ego. In some circles, even Christian ones, the opposite is the case. There the insistence is on obedience to some self-proclaimed leader or it may be to some set of prescribed rules not necessarily biblical. Setting one group of Christians against another is Satan's most potent weapon in our day.

"Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine" (Ex. 19:5). This was the promise of God to the people of Israel at Sinai. The people replied, "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do." Consequent events show how time and time again they failed and the results were disastrous. Isaiah 51 relates the blessings that follow from listening to God. "Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness" is the exhortation of verse one. The word here translated hearken is the same word translated obey in the verse from Exodus. To them who hearken, are promised comfort, joy, gladness and salvation. John enlarges on this in his Epistles where we read; "But whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected (I John 2:5). What a beautiful and blessed promise! How we should covet it!

The subject of the first two chapters of John's Epistles is fellowship, but verses three to six make it clear that the tests of fellowship are love and obedience. Even as our salvation came as a complete surrender of self to God, so does our fellowship with Him remain unbroken. Our fellowship is two-fold; first, with God and His Son, Jesus Christ; and second, with one another (Ibid 1:3, 7). Perfect obedience is the key to harmony with God and with one another. If this truth gripped our hearts as it should, there would be a fellowship one with the other that neither Satan nor the world could destroy. There can be no "Generation Gap," nor gap of any kind when we are listening to His voice and obeying His commands. Oh, that we might make whole-hearted obedience to Christ the aim of our lives!

The revised reading of II Corinthians 5:9 is, "So whether at home or away we make it our aim to please Him." This was the earnest desire of Paul and the unwavering practice of Christ on earth. It was his joy to "do always those things that pleased Him" (John 8:29). Peter, in dealing with the subject of Christ's suffering declared, He has left us "an example that ye should follow in His steps" (I Pet. 2:21). Can we deny that this same principal applies with equal force to His obedience? Our obedience will cost us something. Christ learned "obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8); so should we. Christ never sought to ingratiate Himself with the world by compromise; neither should we. One voice, and one only should claim our attention and our obedience. Is this not the teaching of John 10:27? "My Sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me." Let us be truthful. Whom are we following? Whose voice do we hear? His or our own?

Recently, in a report dealing with a conference attended by the Lord's people, these words appeared, "One thing was made crystal clear, that the young people in our Assemblies must be heard and accepted as an integral part of our fellowship in Christ." The second part of this statement can be accepted without reservation, but, not knowing the intent of the writer of the report, the first part of the statement is not scriptural. In the Church of God "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). Angry young men and irascible old men are alike repugnant to Christ and their voices have no place in His Church. The child Samuel heard the voice of God and replied, "Speak; for Thy servant heareth" (I Sam. 3:10). The mature Saul on the Damascus Road heard the voice of the risen Lord, and cried out, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The aged John on the island of Patmos heard the voice of his Lord saying, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (Rev. 1:19), and he wrote the Revelation of Jesus Christ. All these were listening: all obeyed.

"God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). He demands the same complete surrender to His will from all His children and He does not divide them according to race, colour or age. "Not My will, but Thine be done" was Christ's prayer in Luke 22:42. ivinijé [?] it ouÑ [?] and all differences will be od [?]. Only then will His prayer of John 17:21 become a living reality.

"Upon this rock I will build My Church," was Peter's confession in Matthew 16:18. The Church built upon Christ thus confessed has risen upon this rock according to the divine plan, and death and the last enemy will

never lay it low. Christ, being the foundation, determines the superstructure, consistent with His own nature. He determines the material which will go into it and the mode of integration. He maintains the prerogative of its direction and He will not relinquish it to another whether it be an organization or godly men. As chief corner-stone He is the head of the corner and crowns the whole. From first to last it is all by Him, of Him, and for Him and rightly so, for He purchased every single stone of it by His own precious blood. Divinely conceived and divinely consummated, it is secure for all eternity as a vehicle of divine glory. You, dear believer, cannot alter His purpose but you can mar and undermine the local testimony so that the Lord might remove the candlestick (Rev. 2:5). This is a very serious matter and each one of us should examine our hearts to see if the course we are pursuing is building up or destroying the local testimony. May each one of us consider this seriously, and by our willing obedience to His will so live and act that the lamp of His testimony will continue to shine brightly in this dark and dreary world, a world in which men have thrown off all restraint and rendered the word obedience archaic and extraneous. May our prayer be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23-24).

Christian Loyalty (May–June 1972)

From Ministry in Focus, May–June 1972.

Many years ago, in a small southern Ontario town, the centre of professional entertainment was the Opera House to which performers of the Thespian art brought their plays. On one occasion the writer was present when an Epic Motion Picture, entitled, "Intolerance," was shown. Its grim portrayal of war, massacre, carnage and death left vivid impression on my youthful mind and I came away thoroughly convinced that tolerance was the supreme need of humanity and the highest [?] of all virtues [?]. What was my astonishment to find that the word does not occur in the Bible.

Some Definitions

Like the words trinity and rapture, loyalty is another word not found in Scripture. Are we to assume, then, that these virtues play no part in Christian living? Surely not! Since the only basis for valid conclusions regarding the place and purpose of loyalty in Christian life and testimony is the Bible itself, let us examine the Word of God to see if it appears there in principle.

One definition of loyalty, given in Webster's dictionary, is "fidelity to duty or what one considers right." Unlike tolerance, which is defined as "allowing that which is not approved," loyalty does not run the risk of compromise. Two hundred years ago one severe critic of the political chicanery of his times, writing under the pseudonym of Junius, declared, "The subject that is truly loyal to the Chief Magistrate will neither advise nor submit to arbitrary measures." He was distinguishing between

loyalty and chauvinism, the latter being blind adherence to a cause without moral restraints. Peter and John put the subject in its right persepective when questioned on their conduct. They answered the religious authorities, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). Their consequent actions reveal that they knew where their loyalty lay and who the Judge of right was. May God give us grace to follow their example. In this day and age, with permissiveness as the reigning god, we need the Holy Spirit's guidance to show us where tolerance can lead us, but loyalty should not present such a problem.

Loyalty is derived from the Latin word legaBa [?], meaning law, but its meaning as legal is now obsolete. Modern tautology suggests loyalty operates in at least three areas - namely, obedience, honor, and truth, and from these come many synonyms. The most common synonym found in Scripture is faithful, but others include steadfast, continue (constant), and trust.

Some Examples

Both the Old and New Testament provide examples of loyalty in practice. Joseph, when tempted by Potiphar's wife, replied, "Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand . . . how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:8-9). He proved a loyal and trustworthy servant, and he knew the Judge of right. It is said of Moses, "My servant, Moses, is not so, who is faithful in all mine house" (Num. 12:7). We read further concerning Daniel, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's food, nor with the wine which he

drank" (Dan. 1:8). He remained true to his godly upbringing. Enoch was devoted and obedient. He was one of two in the Bible of whom it is said, "He walked with God" (Gen. 5:22, 24), and "He had this testimony that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). Indeed, Hebrews 11 is the "Honor Roll" of the loyal and true children of God. The saints of the early Church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The Lord Jesus, as in all things pertaining to godliness, is the perfect example of the loyal and obedient servant. He said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent me" (John 6:38), and again in John 8:28-29, "I do nothing of myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things . . . I do always those things that please Him." His was a consistent and loyal obedience.

Exhortations to Loyalty

Not only does loyalty appear in practice in God's Word, but it is a frequently repeated precept. The Ten Commandments begin with an unequivocal demand for a full and sublime mission of loyalty to the Lord God. Repeatedly the children of Israel were reminded that obedience to the covenant, law, and ordinances was the key to blessing. "Keep, therefore, the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do" (Deut. 29:9). A reading of verses 20-29 shows the judgment that followed failure to remain loyal to God's teaching. In writing to Timothy, his son in the faith, the Apostle Paul exhorted him to "take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee" (I

Tim. 4:16). Again, he urged him to "hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 1:13). He later repeats this exhortation saying, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (II Tim. 3:14). Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures "from a child" and he had every confidence in those who had taught him.

Summary Considerations

In the light of Scripture, it must be apparent to all that Christian loyalty is there in principle, practice, and precept, and that it demands complete and unreserved surrender to God, His ordinances, and His teaching. Few will disagree with the first of these conclusions, but some will get into a fruitless contention over the other two.

It must grieve the heart of our risen Lord to see the lack of regard some of His children have for the Lord's Supper. In Leviticus 23:1 (RSV), we read, "The Lord said unto Moses, Say to the people of Israel, The appointed feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, My appointed feasts are these." Thus the Lord introduced the "Feasts of Jehovah." The word, here translated "appointed," comes from the same root as the word translated "meet" in Exodus 25:22 (RSV). "There I will meet with you." The mercy seat is the place where the Lord by appointment meets with His people. These feasts were Jehovah's feasts, not Israel's. They were holy convocations, or callings, of His chosen ones. Every loyal Hebrew knew this and showed it by his presence. Today we do not have a number of feasts with different meanings, but the Lord has a special occasion - an

appointed season - when He calls His people together to remember Him. It is the Lord's Supper, and on the Lord's Day we present ourselves there, not by reason of any right we have, but because of His rightful claim upon us. Surely we owe Him nothing less.

We will not enlarge on the neglect of yet another ordinance, baptism. In many cases, failure to obey the Lord in baptism is due, not so much to lack of loyalty but to lack of teaching. The Psalmist cried out, "Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail" (Psa. 12:1). Have the leaders of our assemblies completely divorced themselves from their responsibilities because they are afraid to "feed the flock of God?" Is this the reason so many are seeking pasture elsewhere?

"A man without loyalty doesn't exist. Only by a man's willingness, in co-operation with others, to invest his intelligence and moral resources in something beyond his narrow circle has it been possible for communities of various kinds to emerge and continue to exist; among them family, church and nation." The prophet Amos epitomizes the above in these words, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). We are living in times when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12:4). The market is flooded with books on every subject, creed, and doctrine "under the sun." If we fail to provide the young people of our assemblies with "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus . . . the doctrine which is according to godliness" (I Tim. 6:3), we can hardly be surprised if they are carried away by plausible exegesis of the Word written by men who worship at the shrine of wisdom, not believing that "the world by wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21). They claim to follow a sequacious

study of the semasiology and give comprehensive consideration to the syntax of the original texts leading them to conclusions which make "those things which are most surely believed among us" both naive and irrelevant to our times. Our only defence against such is Spirit-taught ministry by men who are truly homo unius libri (i.e., man of the one Book), men whom, like Timothy, we can trust. Better this than to be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Tim. 3:7).

A Closing Note

Like the author of a recent article in "Ministry in Focus," entitled, "My Debt of Gratitude," the writer looks back to a long line of godly men who instructed us in the foundation truths of the faith. May the next generation be able to say the same, for "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psa. 11:3). It cheers our hearts to hear that the Young Men's Bible Class which we attended as a young man in Toronto, and which was revived there a few years ago, has spread to Hamilton. May this mark the beginning of a real revival in the teaching of God's Word. May we be encouraged to remain loyal to God, His ordinances, and His teaching. We close with the exhortation, "As ye have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding with thanksgiving" (Col. 2:6-7).

Three Cries from the Cross (Sep 1955)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 1 No. 9, Sep 1955.

John Robertson

“Sweet the moments, rich in blessing, Which before the cross we spend,

Life, and health, and peace possessing,

From the sinner’s dying Friend.”

A number of years ago a dear brother, now with the Lord, rose, frequently, at the end of the Hour of Worship, to give out this hymn. Invariably the hour had been one fraught with sweetness. The solemn contemplation of the pulsating pathos of Calvary had gripped each heart. It was only fitting that we should leave this very atmosphere of heaven with these words ringing in our ears:

“May we still, the cross discerning,

There for peace and comfort go;

There new wonders daily learning,

All the depths of mercy know.”

For our brother, sense has given place to sight; the shadow has become the substance. He basks in the eternal sunshine of the presence of Him Whom he loved. For us who remain, there is the constant remembrance of the cross, with all it means to us and all that it means to God.

Shall we turn aside for a moment, and with unshod feet, view afresh that scene. Let us listen while He speaks,

“Father forgive them; for they know not what they do,” (Lk. 23:24). Here is the very acme of grace; here the very heart-throb of God. A few moments before, the hands of those for whom He prayed had nailed Him to the cross. See, how they mill about its blessed precincts as they heap upon Him every insult the wicked heart can conceive. And yet He says, “Father forgive.” No wonder the poet could exclaim, “It passeth knowledge, that great love of Thine.”

What shall we say of this first cry from the cross? What shall we say of that One Who bore its pain and shame?

“True image of the Infinite

Whose essence is concealed,

Brightness of Uncreated Light,

The heart of God revealed.”

Yes, it took this One to reveal the heart of God. “For God so loved.” The little children, in their simple trust sing, “Jesus loves me; this I know,” and well might we join them singing, “The cross reveals Thy love below.” The history of man from Adam down proves his utter depravity. It reached the very pinnacle of human calumny at the cross. But there it was met, met by a simple word, “Forgive.” Over the trouble, wave-beaten shore of time came that word which whispered peace to the burdened soul. What joy to recall the sweet, sweet sense of repose that became ours when, as a penitent sinner, we bowed before the cross and received Divine forgiveness! How thrilling to remember again and again our blessed emancipation!

If the first cry from the cross was simple, the second was profound. The first revealed the love of God’s heart;

the second the trenchant anguish of the suffering Saviour. For the first time in His eternal existence, the Son of God made manifest in flesh, as the substitute for the sinner, was separated from His God. That poignant cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”. (Matt. 27:46), wrung from His heart engulfed in the blackness of Divine severence, told, only too well, the depth of His suffering. A deathly hush had fallen over the scene. The hour had come. The heavens were clothed in shades of night. Christ sank down, down, down under the judgment of the thrice holy God. No human mind can ever grasp the full meaning of this cry. Out of the Stygian gloom, there rose to the gates of heaven that awful, awful wail. And from its very echo we draw fresh hope. He was forsaken that we might never know the bleak desolation of eternal separation from God. His was the gall of bitterness; ours the transport of delight. He entered into death that we might enter into life. With heart filled to overflowing, we “Fall at His feet, and the story repeat, and the Lover of sinners adore.”

If the second cry was the cry of a soul seared by the flame of Divine judgment, the third cry was that of the Victory. “Finished,” (John 19:30). From the long night of darkness we turn toward the morning. Over the purple hills breaks the hue of a new day, the day of grace. One word turned the whole tide of human destiny. Here was the hinge upon which swung the whole purposes of God. With one clarion-voiced cry, the whole debt of sin was cancelled. What a glorious triumph, this! Here was the focal point round which centred God’s plan of salvation. The moment for which all eternity had waited was now come. The head that had found no resting place on earth pillowed itself on His own sweet breast. How grand to

know that we are among those millions who have found this perfect resting place in the calm of sins forgiven.

“I take the cross of Jesus

For my abiding place;

I ask no other sunshine than

The sunshine of His face;

Content to let the world go by,

To know no gain or loss;

My sinful self my only shame,

My glory all the cross.”

The Greatest of These (Feb 1957)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 3 No. 2, Feb 1957.

John Robertson

“Christians are the most hypercritical people on the face of the earth.” These were not the words of a worldling seeking to defame the people of God but the deliberate and studied language of a young man brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Word. Smarting under a sense of offended justice he fell into the same error of which he was accusing others. Since, however, there is some truth in what he said, we cannot dismiss the accusation with lofty disdain, nor can we treat, too lightly, the import of his charge.

Hypercritical means over critical or given to fault finding. Hypocritical, on the other hand, means assuming an unwarranted position or attitude. May it never be said of the saints of God that they are hypocrites. The Lord Jesus reserved that word for the Pharisees, those men of great religious pretensions. It was possibly the strongest word of denunciation He ever used. God deliver us from pretending to be something we are not. It is said of John Wesley that whenever he encountered an inebriate on the street he would exclaim, “There goes John Wesley, but for the grace of God.” He knew, full well, that he owed everything he was and had to the mercy of a loving Father.

Our young man was not the first to discover that those who claim to be Christ’s can be most bitter, the one to the other. In his first epistle to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul, sharply, rebuked them for their behaviour,

a behaviour that was dishonoring to God. In the Church at Corinth one brother not only did not trust another, but he had no confidence in the rest of his brethren to set matters right. After, roundly, berating the Corinthian Christians for their failure to see that if one member of the body suffer, the whole body must, likewise, suffer, he proceeds to show them “a more excellent way” to Christian unity; and in language unparalleled in English, he describes that supreme trait the possession of which should be the most earnest desire of every Christian heart, love.

The very reading of 1 Corinthians 13 has a salutary effect on the soul. Here, let us pause and read a while. The impact of the challenge reaches the ear in the booming reverberations of sounding brass or in the bell-like music of tinkling cymbals of that wonderful simile in verse one. The simple language of verses 4-8 extolling the virtues of love engulfs the mind with a deep sense of longing; the certain promise of verses 9, 10, and 12 bids the eye look up beyond the mundane things of life; the mild rebuke of verse 11 pricks the tender conscience and calls us to a sense of our responsibility. What a grand lesson for us all! How much more effective our testimony would be if we but exercised, in full measure, this greatest of all gifts!

Writing to his son in the faith, even Timothy, Paul spake in these words, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:2). A remarkable exhortation, and to such a young man! It is a well known fact, among those who study social behaviour and its problems, that young people are much more idealistic than older folk. Perhaps

for this reason we may find them less practical at times. As one who has spent his professional life among adolescents I would like to add, that I have heard more criticism of one's fellow travellers to eternity among "so-called grown-ups" in a single evening than would pass the lips of a group of "teen-agers" in a year. It is not surprising then that Paul writes such words to one so young in the faith. He was sure of a receptive heart, and confident that Timothy would seek to make good in his life the advice so lovingly given. How wonderful to know that this responsibility is entrusted to young believers! Beloved, count yourselves worthy to be called of God to be an example of the believers in charity, love.

Many of us will never be called to serve the Lord as evangelists, or pastors, or teachers, but we can be an "Epistle…. known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). In the chapter wherein Paul lists the ministry gifts of the risen Christ to His Church he introduces his subject with an exhortation to a Christian walk characterized by "lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). Only those who so walk are properly fitted to exercise the gifts. Our chapter in 1 Corinthians follows a chapter devoted to spiritual gifts which are for the building up of the whole body. There is no place for fault-finding and hypercriticism in God-given ministry but rather for the exhortation to a closer walk with Him.

Peter has the answer to dastardly pernicious sniping. When dealing with the question of unjust criticism he points us to Christ, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet. 2:23). Oh, to be more like Him! He knew what it was to be spitefully treated. Dear young believer, and older believer too, when things about you

appear dark and everything seems to go wrong, remember, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13). In that beautiful prayer of John 17 the Lord Jesus makes known that His loved ones could not hope to escape tribulation because they were His. He prayed, not that God would take them out of this world, but that He would preserve them through it. How precious to know that He never fails!

John in his First Epistle has a lot to say about love, the love of God, and the love God implants in our hearts. The remarkable feature about God’s love is that it is directed to us who are not worthy of the least of His mercies. When we get a real glimpse of what the love of God has done for us, it is not hard to understand that we should love Him in return. But John says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” and then he goes on to add, “‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11). This is not so easy to understand. The call is to prove our love to God by loving one another. Dear child of God, let that get a grip of your heart and the problem of fault-finding will disappear. John goes still further and points out that this is the real test of our faith. 1 John 3:14 reads, “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” There was nothing loveable in us, but Christ died for us. God established the principle; Jesus Christ fulfilled it. Let us follow His example.

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (I John 3:18). Words

can be powerful and the gift of speech has been used to sway multitudes. Many have coveted this gift. “Knowledge is power” is a saying in the world and many have sought this power. Many would like to understand all the mysteries that Scripture unfolds and much suffering has been assuaged because someone used the art of healing. All these gifts are great and are not to be despised. Nevertheless they become impotent without the greatest of these which is love.

Teacher's Relations (Feb 1958)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 4 No. 2, Feb 1958.

John Robertson

“And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

We Can be quite sure that when the Apostle Peter penned these words he did not have in mind the Sunday School Teacher; nevertheless, drawing from his wide experience in public life, he, herewith, sets down in chronological order definite practical principles which if followed, will aid the Christian in the field of Public Relations.

The Apostle begins with faith without which it is impossible to please God. Now faith is the link that binds us to God, but is unseen by the world. In our dealings with those about us it is the outward manifestation of this faith that is apparent.

The Apostle begins by declaring that the key-note of all Christian activity should be diligence. This word takes on a deeper and more significant meaning in the field of our study when we remember that it comes from a root word “deligo” which means “to love earnestly.” How appropriate! Surely, if this characterizes our motives we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to bring the

children out under the sound of the gospel. Lately we have been privileged to sit under the ministry of two of the Lord's servants on successive mid-week meetings. Both spoke on the subject of prayer; the one on its personal application, the other on its significance in assembly life. Neither knew of the other's talk; both emphasized the need for persistent prayer. In our understanding of the word diligence the idea of persistence is found.

The practical lesson to be found here is the need for regular and frequent contact with the parents. The subject of home visitation will be taken up by others, but we must not limit our meetings with the parents to these. The parents should be invited to the Hall. Normally, they come to the Sunday School Picnic. These are occasions that the teacher should seize upon to establish a closer relationship with fathers and mothers. At such times they are more susceptible to our suggestions and more responsive to our invitation to come again. In our assembly we have a Mothers' Meeting every Thursday at 2.00 p.m. The mothers of the neighbourhood come with their babies, and there are sisters who act as baby sitters while the mothers listen to a message given on many occasions by a sister of the meeting. In this connection use is made of any visiting missionaries or other servants of the Lord. This should be carried on by sisters not otherwise connected with the regular Sunday School work. A Parents' Night for parents and children alike, could serve as another occasion for meeting with and talking to the parents. This could take the form of a supper which need not be elaborate. (We have sandwiches, cakes, and cookies, with tea and ice cream for dessert.) This meeting should

be held early in September. We believe that the speaker on such an occasion ought to be, preferably, one of the teachers. The lesson should be at the Sunday School level. In this way the emphasis is placed on what we are doing for the children. In a word of welcome to the parents, the Superintendent should outline the programme for the year, including a contest among the pupils to see who can bring out their parents most frequently to the gospel services. It is an excellent idea to have the meetings for the month on printed pamphlets to give to the parents on such an occasion. A copy of God's Way of Salvation would be accepted at this time without demur. These and other means of making the parents feel welcome should be employed.

Now diligence is a most excellent thing, but our enthusiasm must be tempered with patience. In between these, Peter interjects virtue. It would hardly seem necessary to say much on this point. It is taken for granted that all our teachers are characterized by those moral traits that would make us respected in the community. It is needful that we keep in remembrance, however, that we are under constant surveillance and any act that might cast doubt on the high ideals we profess must be painstakingly avoided. Christian virtue is marked by faith, hope, and charity, but the world looks for prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. These must be practised with a consistency that will refute criticism. Since much of the parents' observation of us is through the eyes of the children it is before them we must display these qualities of character.

Up to this point we have been concerned with our actions and behaviour, but a comprehensive plan of action must be founded on a knowledge of the problem

involved. Each parent presents a different problem and a thorough knowledge of the individual is necessary if we are to win his or her confidence. The first contact is always the most important one for this either establishes a liaison or creates a gulf. It is our experience that a good listener is never dismissed curtly. It is at this point that patience plays an important role. It is wise, after introducing yourself, to let the parents do the talking, interjecting a word here and there to encourage them. Above all avoid getting into any theological discussion that will permanently close the door. We have had on numerous occasions children of Roman Catholics in our Sunday School. This has been possible by avoiding any possible discussion that could lead to conflict of opinion. As time goes on the parents are won by our honesty, sincerity, and good will. Even if the children of parents of widely diverging religious persuasion are encouraged to come to our Sunday School for a year or more the seed will have been sown, and God in His mercy may use it to the saving of a precious soul, in His own way and in His own time.

Having won the consent of the parent to allow the pupil to come to the Sunday School, the problem of keeping the child coming is often a trying one. The enthusiasm of the child can soon be dimmed by the total indifference of the parent. Every thing that we can do to arouse an interest in the parent is a step towards keeping the child a regular attender. There are available a number of pamphlets and brochures on child delinquency that might prove useful. One by Mr. Edgar Hoover of The Federal Bureau of Investigation reveals that children who attend Sunday School regularly are less likely to run afoul of the law in later years. Articles such as these

read by the parents may awaken in them a deeper appreciation of what we are trying to do. While these booklets do not contain anything of the gospel, they do contain good sound advice and if we can get the children to our Sunday School we will get the gospel into the homes through the Sunday School papers, and even the little choruses the children sing.

A knowledge of the parents' circumstances sometimes gives us the opportunity to display the brotherly kindness and charity that should be our letter of commendation to the world. A basket at Christmas time, or a half ton of coal in a basement in the coldness of the winter has opened more than one door to the gospel. Let us be "instant in season and out of season," ready always to preach the Word, "redeeming the time because the days are evil."

May God, in His grace, so exercise our hearts that we will be found willing to heed the message of 2 Pet. 1:5-8.

* * *

It is ever a fatal mistake when we measure the difficulties of service by what we are. The question is what God is; and the difficulties that appear as mountains, looming through the mists of unbelief, are nothing to Him, but the occasion for the display of His omnipotent power.

* * *

It takes very little effort to find fault with God's people, but it requires very much exercise to find food for God's people.

Not My Will but Thine (Mar 1958)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 4 No. 3, Mar 1958.

John Robertson

With tears I broke down and knelt trembling on the dusty floor … I wept my way afresh to Calvary. There God met me again." These are the words of Geoffrey T. Bull1 when, after three days of solitary confinement in a Tibetan prison, the weight of circumstances began to crush his spirit and rend his soul. For this young man, far from home and kindred, alone in a filthy, dark-drenched dungeon, prayer won the victory over doubt, dread, and despair. What a glorious triumph! How wonderful to know that this same resource is ours to employ!

This twentieth century scene recalls to mind a similar one enacted long ago. Luke records the most meaningful prayer in Holy Writ (Lk. 22:42). The Lord Jesus Christ, with Calvary looming menacingly before Him, lifted His eyes to heaven and cried, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." In the greatest test history has ever known, the Son of God prayed. Knowing full well the agony such a choice entailed, acutely aware of the poignant loneliness and utter desolation of soul that must follow in its train, our blessed Saviour bowed His will to that of God the Father. May we, by His grace, learn to yield and, by His power, so to live; for surely herein lies the secret of the truly God-directed life.

Thy will, O Lord, not mine,

Teach me to say.

Not my will, Lord, but Thine,

I would obey.

Then shall I know the joy,

And thy Name glorify,

When I, on earth, shall try

To follow thee.

The Apostle Paul began his Christian life with this prayer, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). A strict adherence to this path of obedience brought him much trial, suffering, and woe. Undaunted, he moved forward in the firm assurance that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28), and that nothing can “separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). In his epistle to the Philippians, in which he recounts many of the painful experiences through which he was called to pass, it is worth noting that the words “joy” and “rejoice” appear again and again. Paul would teach us that Christian experience is not something that is happening around us as much as it is something that is taking place within us. Such a conviction prompted Silas and Paul to sing at midnight despite the fevered backs laid raw by the Roman scourge and aggravated by the cold of the subterranean gaol (Acts 16:24-25).

Looking back over his life, fraught as it had been with constant danger and personal suffering, the Apostle could say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing” (2

Tim. 4:7-9). This aged servant of the Lord had nothing to offer the youthful Timothy but this same, painful, earthly path, but he could point him on to the same glorious future. May the Lord find us walking in the way the Saviour trod, perchance to feel something of the shadow in this vale of tears, that we might rejoice the more in the sunshine of His presence in the glory.

Romans 7:18-24 makes it all too clear that our lot is cast in a life of constant conflict. The arch-enemy of Christ, having failed in his bid to keep us from being saved, devotes all of his satanic power to the task of destroying our testimony. His prize product is an unhappy and unfruitful Christian. For this reason, Paul in writing to the Ephesians warns them to “put on the whole armour of God” for they wrestled “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:11-12). These “high places” are the “heavenlies” of Ephesians 1:3. It is in this realm that the evil one seeks to accomplish his purpose, which is to deprive us of the “spiritual blessings” God would have us enjoy. The deep-rooted Christian is not likely to succumb to the grosser lusts of the flesh; nor is he likely to be enticed by the allurements of a gaudy world. Yet he can be carried away by some strange teaching or fanciful interpretation of the Word of God. What a tragedy it is to find one of God’s dear children led into a path directly opposed to His will! So subtle is the enemy that the erring saint is all too often persuaded that he is obeying the Lord. Even the whole armour of God will prove unavailing if the warrior neglects his greatest resource — prayer (Eph. 6:18). The “calm and sure retreat” that is found

“beneath the mercy-seat” not only serves to carry us through the “stormy wind that blows” and over the “swelling tide of woes” but it can and does keep us on the only path the Lord will have us follow if the tenor of our prayer is the cry that rose from dark Gethsemane.

Prayer is the very air the Christian breathes. Without it we must perish as to our testimony. The disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk. 11:1), and His answer is probably the best known portion of Scripture in

Christendom. It is found on the lips of the careless throng at many official gatherings, and it is repeated perfunctorily in many school classrooms every day. May we who know the Lord as our own, claim the Saviour’s prayer, “Not my will, but Thine be done”. Can there be any question in our minds as to the results of such compliance to His will? God grant that this prayer may become not a mere “obiter dictum” but a living vital reality in our lives. If Christ Who loved us, even unto death, could make this His choice, shall we who profess to love Him attempt anything less?

Go labour on; spend and be spent, Thy joy to do the Father’s will: It is the way the Master went; Should not the servant tread it still?

1 When Iron Gates Yield, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1855, p. 140.

Christ Preeminent (Nov 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 11, Nov 1960.

John Robertson

‘Tis meet that Thy delight

Should centre in Thy Son;

That Thou shouldst place us in Thy sight,

In Him, Thy Holy One.

The arguments in favour of the first statement of this verse are quite apparent to the simplest Christian; the divine grace that makes the second possible leaves all lost in awesome wonder.

Faced with the error of Judaistic teaching that made salvation dependent upon external observance of law and a heresy of agnosticism that sought to relegate the Lord Jesus to a position of secondary importance, the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, had one devastating answer, “Christ is all and in all” (3:11). The first phrase, emphatically and unequivocally, declares the preeminence of the Christ of God, while the latter is a firm and forceful rebuttal of all esoteric doctrine.

The Preeminent One

In view of the subject before him, it is not surprising that the prayer of Paul for the saints at Colosse rises without a break into an enraptured confession of the glorious place of our Lord. Here, in terse but majestic language, he puts before the Colossian Christians the true position of Christ, in the universe and in the Church (1:15-18).

In three short verses, the Son of God is revealed as the finite cause of all existence, seen and unseen, and it is by His law and order that the universe operates as a "cosmos not a chaos." Such a transcendent glimpse of Him as, "True image of the Infinite," should cause our hearts to pause, to ponder and to praise.

Throughout the universe of bliss,

The centre Thou and Sun,

The eternal theme of praise is this,

To Heaven's beloved One.

It was the reverent consideration of all the worlds His hands had made that inspired the poet to pen that beautiful hymn, "How Great Thou Art." Even so with Paul, for as he unfolded the wondrous truth of the One in whom, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9), his own soul was caught up in a vortex of veneration.

In one short verse, he reiterates what he had so fully expounded to the Ephesian Christians, the Headship of Christ in the Church. He closes the whole on this triumphant note, "that in all things, He might have the pre-eminence" (vs. 18). How marvelous! How imponderable!

Apart from the dogmatic occasion preeminence" (vs. 18). How marvel-burst, the very reading of these words stirs the heart with a "joy in believing." This One, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3) fills our whole horizon and causes us to exclaim:

Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou,

That every knee to Thee should bow !

It is in just such a way that the divine Book, full of articulate and reasoned statements of the eternal verities, presents to our minds and souls the teaching of God. Ever and always, the unassailable assertions, penned by God's servants, as directed by the Holy Spirit, move us to worship. Never should the truth, as revealed in His Word, become a mere accumulation of facts, or a code of ethics, in the abstract. It must always be, "Christ, who is our life," activating the souls to the end that we might magnify and glorify Him.

The Privileged One

If the contemplation of what has gone before leaves us filled with ecstatic praise, what will be our response when we consider what it means to be placed in God's sight, in Him, who is the brightness of uncreated light and the full revelation of the Father's heart? Like one of old we will have to say, "How can these things be?" (John 3:8).

Were the Bible the work of man, himself, it would have presented a bowdlerized account of human thought and action. However, the Holy Spirit pictures man as he is, "alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works," but graciously continues, "yet now bath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight (21-22)." How astonishing! How unbelievable!

O Lamb of God! Thy bleeding wounds,

With cords of love divine,

Have drawn our willing hearts to Thee,

And linked our life with Thine!

As creatures of the dust, “born in sin and shapen in iniquity,” we could never hope ‘to stand before a righteous God. No act of reformation, no remodelling of the old man could ever fit us for His presence. It must be a new creation. The first requisite is a divine life, and this Christ, Himself, provided. Said He, “I give unto them eternal life” (John 10:28). and as our quotation from Colossians indicated, this was accomplished through His death. What infinite condescension! What unmeritted love!

Not only did Christ present us with a divine life, but He also made provision for us to have a divine nature. Among the exceeding great and precious promises reserved for us in Christ is this, “that... ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). How sad that we disregard what is rightfully ours! How often we fail to lay hold on that which is offered to us, in Him!

The Psalmist looked to the heavens and said. “When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?” (Psa. 8:3-4). As he looked out into Immeasurable space he was conscious of the magnitude and might of God the Creator. He could understand, in a measure, His greatness and power. But he was astonished that God should interest Himself in a tiny speck on an infinitesimal heavenly body. He was amazed that He would pick out from the myriads of sounds that filled the vast universe the heart beat of man.

This very God looked down from the pinnacle of distance, and out from the aeons of time selected you

and me to stand before Him in all the perfection of the eternal Son, to share with Him the glories of the Father and to enjoy the munificence of Heaven forever. “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ … that ye … may be able to comprehend… the breadth and length … and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ … that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19).

Yet Shall He Live (Mar 1961)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 7 No. 3, Mar 1961.

The place was Bethany. Two sisters sat grieved and disconsolate. Into that home, the enemy of life had entered and snatched away a brother, and now, four days had elapsed since his earthly remains had been committed to the grave. Disappointment bordering upon despair, had descended upon the the two mourners.

Down the ages, this scene has been re-enacted time and time again. Let us draw near and visit this home. Let us learn from their experience a lesson to comfort the sorrowing. Let us see, in the house of mourning, the sweetness of consolation. Let us find solace for bereavement and a revitalizing hope for the gloom-drenched soul.

On a number of occasions, the Lord Jesus had turned aside from the distractions and cares of His earthly journey to visit here. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus had learned to love the Saviour; His name had been ever on their lips. It is not surprising therefore that the two sisters should have turned to Him in their hour of trial and hurriedly dispatched the message, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick” (John 11:3). How anxiously they must have awaited his response! How they would have rejoiced to hear Him say, “This sickness is not unto death” (vs. 4)!

How often we too are driven to our knees when a loved one takes ill! How earnestly we plead his case before our sympathizing Lord! As hope for recovery grows dim, our prayers are oft-times mingled with tears. Then,

when God is pleased to call the ailing one home, our minds turn to that twice expressed declaration of faith, “Lord, if Thou hast been here my brother had not died” (vs. 21). Such is our confidence. Death can never prevail in His presence.

Into this dwelling saddened by bereavement, the Lord Jesus Christ entered. What did He say to those who mourned? Listen to His words, “I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die” (vs. 25-26). How startling! How profound!

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.” No one but an omnipotent God could have made such a declaration. Jesus stands revealed as the Author of life and the sustaining force of animate being. “He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” For the Christian there is no actual death. “The old order changeth, giving place to the new,” the place in which only life functions change. In one brief moment, the soul is transported from earth to Heaven, there to dwell for ever. This is the startling revelation Christ made to two sorrowing hearts. This is our hope. This is why we “sorrow not as others.”

“Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” The Lord rephrased His immutable proclamation and turning to the distraught inquired, “Believeth thou this?” Let us lay hold on this stupendous utterance. Our loved one lives! Far beyond the ken of human thought, mortal has put on immortality and has taken up residence in the land of “no more.”

God, in His grace, draws aside the vail for a moment and presents to our wondering eyes the land of “fadeless day,” where God Himself, “shall wipe away all tears.” In that land of tomorrow, “there shall be no more death, nether sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev. 21:14(. How wonderful that He should come to quieten the suffering disease-wracked body! How gracious that He should cool for aye the fevered brow! With what loving hands He carries the soul to its celestial home on high! There faith gives place to sight and the spirit takes up his eternal abode.

“Meet companion, then, for Jesus,

From Him, for Him, made.

Glory of God’s grace for ever,

There in me displayed.”

“Yet shall he live!” How this should cheer the bereaved! When called upon to look upon our loved one for the last time, how this unequivocal promise should still our fears! As we view the cold unresponsive clay that once housed a loved and inspiring spirit, these words should turn our thoughts above. Though time has run its course, it is not the end. “Because I live, ye shall live also,” were His own sweet words of comfort in John 14:19. “The sky, not the grave, is our goal.” A life has been lived, and a soul has entered into his eternal sphere.

For one, the desert journey is over and a new life has begun. Those words sung with nostalgic fervour on earth are now fully consummated.

“I lay in dust life’s glory dead,

And from the ground there blossoms red

Life that shall endless be.”

Home at last! Called into His own glad presence and presented “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Could we wish it otherwise?

“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou has given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.” What a prospect! “His forever, only His!” Loved and Lover one!

Christian Graces (Sept 1961)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 7 No. 9, Sept 1961.

John Robertson

How often have we heard the expression, “He is such a fine fellow, he must be a Christian!” How much better it would be to hear said, “What a fine fellow he is, for he is a Christian!” This should cause us to pause for thought. Why is it that so many of us, who claim Christ as Lord and Master, lack the graces that should characterize one who is His?

To be a Christian, one must have, by an act of faith, taken Christ as his own personal Saviour. Does the matter rest there? Surely not! Isn’t it true, however, that if we were pressed to give a reason for believing Mr. X to be a Christian, we would have to fall back on a profession of that because, outwardly, there is no other evidence. Perhaps we might have to resort to saying, “He must be a Christian because he goes to such and such an Assembly.” How pitiful!

Having dealt with Mr. X, let us turn our attention to Mr. Self. Let each of us, before God, inquire, “Do those about me know whose I am and whom I serve?”

Perhaps my neighbours and business associates know I am different, because I do not engage in the things in which they find so much enjoyment. They see me with my Bible going off to my place of worship each Sunday morning. They may even encounter me again as I am on my way to mid-week meeting. They may take note that I have no television set, or radio, or even car. They

recognize me as a “church-goer”; they know I talk on religion, but do they know that I am a “Christ-one”?

How easy it is to fall into a formal pattern of behaviour that marks us off from others. The Pharisees did, but the Lord Himself was most scathing in His denunciation of them in Matthew 23. They were careful to observe all the rules and regulations that their order imposed, that by the propriety of their talk and walk they might win praise for themselves. Their actions were not pleasing to God. It is quite true that we have a responsibility to so walk before men that they might see our good works, but the end result of such a walk is that God might receive the glory (Matt. 5:16). We do well to ask ourselves if we walk to please God, or man, or even our brethren.

The problem of personal behaviour is dealt with very fully in Holy Writ. In the Garden of Eden, man was tried in innocency and he failed. A period during which conscience operated followed with the same result. Law proved a burden greater than the people could bear, so, in grace and mercy, God sent forth His Son to settle forever the vexing question of sin. Through faith in Him, it is gloriously possible to live in newness of life. A carnal man could obey a law; it takes a spirit-led soul to enter into the full enjoyment of the liberty into which the grace of God has called all who believe on His name.

In this dispensation of grace, rules and regulations are not the order, but everywhere throughout the New Testament the marks of true Christian behaviour are emphasized. Even in Romans, so heavily weighted with doctrine, we have a comprehensive picture of what our conduct should be (Rom. 12:9-21).

A complete summary of all the passages bearing on this subject would be exhausting. Let us limit our attention to the seven graces presented in 2 Peter 1:5-7.

We have already pointed out that the Christian life begins with an act of faith. Here our passage urges us to add to our faith. Perhaps the word add, with its connotation of piling one thing upon another, is misleading. The teaching is better understood if we view it as an employing of the graces enumerated as an outward manifestation of an inward life.

In the original, the word here translated, “virtue,” simply means goodness, an attribute of God. It emphasizes the impression made upon another. In 1 Peter 2:9, it is translated “praises.” There, as a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,” we are exhorted to show forth His praises or excellencies. How better can we reveal to others that we are His than by displaying His goodness. As the hymn writer has put it, “Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.”

If, then, our lives are to be an outshining of Christ, it follows that we must have an intimate knowledge of Him. The First Epistle of Peter begins with linking all that pertains to life and godliness to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, and it ends with the exhortation, “Grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.” The Apostle Paul also emphasized this for he says, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my

Lord” (Phil. 8:8). Pursuing this same subject in Ephesians 4, he sets as the pinnacle of Christian attainment the coming “into the unity of faith, and

knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the stature of the fulness of Christ." The very contemplation of this goal must leave us lost with a sense of awe and shame, when we consider how far short we fall.

"Knowledge is power," is a well-known saying. On the one hand, knowledge without action is impotent, but on the other hand the unbridled use of the power entailed in knowledge is licentiousness. How fitting that "temperance" should follow "knowledge" in our passage for "temperance is power in restraint."

The history of Christendom reveals the tragic consequences of the lack of temperance. The enigma of the ages is the abuse of power by those who claim to be of the "Apostolic Succession." In speaking of the quality of mercy, Shakespeare said, "Tis mightiest in the mighty." So should it be with temperance. Those who know the most should show the greatest restraint. It is not only our responsibility, but it is our privilege to display this grace in a society that knows much less about the things of God than we. If temperance is so necessary among our unsaved acquaintances, how much more among the saints of God. Sad to relate, the greatest cause of discord and division among true believers is failure to observe this control.

If temperance is power in check, then patience is the soil in which it is nurtured. We recall a public Bible Reading in which a brother introduced the problem of smoking, and he went on at some length to describe its evils and effects on personal testimony. Since no one present smoked, it was suggested that a discussion of impatience and its twin, bad temper, might serve a more

practical purpose. The meeting floundered right there. If the reader's experience is anything like that of the writer, he will have to confess that this strikes a vulnerable spot. In every day life with its petty annoyances, vexing trials, and outright frustrations, it is very difficult to retain a calm, unruffled spirit. But that is what is demanded although it is very personal. Left to ourselves we must fail, but we have One who endured all that we must endure and more who is ready to aid us. Only the real sense of His living presence at our side can give us the forbearance to remain undisturbed by provocation and abuse.

We now come to "godliness," a much misunderstood word. As used here, it is that attitude Godward which results in a complete surrender to His will. The outward manifestation is a devout and pious life; the inward result is a serenity that accepts with composure the viscissitudes of day by day living. "In that mingled fear and love which, combined, constitute the piety of man toward God, the Old Testament places its emphasis on fear, the New Testament places it on love (though there was love in the fear of God's saints then, as there must be fear in their love now)." So wrote Trench. It is failure to understand this balance that produces extremes in Christian behaviour. Christ Himself set the pattern for us to follow, when, in that prayer of subjection, He said, "Not My will but Thine, be done." Oh, that we were able not only to repeat that cry, but, in full and complete surrender, place our lives in the hand of God! Then would those about us know of a surety that we are:

"Bought with a price, we're not our own;

We died, we lived to God alone!"

The last two graces have something in common; yet are different. In the original, “brotherly kindness” is the combination of a word meaning brother and another word meaning love. It is the word philadelphia from which the City of Brotherly Love, in Pennsylvania, gets its name. The emphasis is on natural affection. The word translated “charity” is a much stronger word for love and much harder to define. It is used in the New Testament to express the attitude of God toward His Son and to the world at large. It is the love of John 3:16. It is used almost exclusively in John’s epistles where so much is said about our love to one another, and it is characteristically dealt with in I Corinthians 13 where it is the greatest of the three graces, faith, hope and love.

The seven graces of 2 Peter are linked with a promise and a warning. We do well to consider them. The promise is fruitfulness. How much we long to see fruit in the Assemblies of God’s people! Is its lack due to our failure to apprehend and observe the pattern of behaviour God, not man, has placed before us? God give us grace to examine our walk before Him in the light of His word, and courage to make whatever change is necessary so that we “shall never fail.”

A Synopsis of Salvation (Jan 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 1, Jan 1962.

John Robertson

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Thus spake the Preacher many ages ago. Well might it be said, that which was written was upright, even words of truth! How important it is that we should pay earnest heed to his final summing up of life “under the sun”! “Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14).

This poetic gem encompasses the whole span of human existence. It is an epitome of life.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10); not the craven abject fear that would cause us to flee from His presence, but the wholesome awe and wonder that comes from a contemplation of His magnitude and might. Understanding follows knowledge of the Holy One and leads us into the path of true obedience. “Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3). Hear the final edict of the conclusion of the whole matter. God, in keeping with His holy character, must judge all things according to His righteous standard.

Our opening quotation reminds us that it is in our youth our thoughts should turn to God; the rest of that beautiful chapter reveals that God is vitally interested in us and that interest reaches beyond the grave into Eternity. This interest amazed the Psalmist who

exclaimed, “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy finger, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” (Psa. 8:3-4). How it should bow our hearts to sing His praise! In all of His wonderful creation, God’s primary concern is for man and his salvation.

Have you ever stopped to count the number of times the words save, saved, salvation, and Saviour are used in the Word of God? You would find the number runs into hundreds. In fact you would discover that they are the key words of the Bible. The whole story of Scripture from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22 is bound up with the salvation of man. The hinge upon which the history of this world swings is the Cross of Christ; the eternal destiny of the soul is inescapably linked with the death of the Saviour.

There are many aspects of our salvation, each of which would provide a study in itself. One might profitably trace through Holy Writ such words as forgiveness, atonement, reconciliation, justification etc. We will limit ourselves to the word salvation.

The root word translated salvation in the New Testament has a twofold meaning, deliverance and preservation. Let us not lose sight of this fact as we pursue this topic.

A young girl once remarked, “You people talk a lot about being saved. That word is never used in our church. Is it really a Bible word?” Our thoughts immediately turned to the verse in Scripture that means so much to us personally, the one through which we were led to claim Christ as Lord and Saviour: “Believe on the Lord Jesus

Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). This happened 40 years ago. I suspect that most of our readers can look back to a time in their experience when they too took Christ as Saviour. For us this is salvation in the past; it was our beginning of days. We are not hoping to be saved; neither are we waiting to see if we are truly saved. We know of a surety that our sins are all forgiven and our "title is clear to mansions in the sky" (Luke 1:77. Heb. 9:26; 10:17).

"The doctrine of salvation — Soteriology — is of first importance to every child of God, if he is to be clear in his apprehension of the Gospel." Salvation in the past tense is related to a work that was completed on the Cross, a work that need never be repeated. We who know Christ as Saviour possess this salvation and have been freed from the penalty of sin. This is so because God willed it, Christ purchased it, and the Holy Spirit revealed it to our troubled souls. Armed with this knowledge we are ready to meet every attack that modernism or rationalism can mount against us.

"Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). In a past Eternity it was conceived in the mind of God for we were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Because God is omniscient, He knew that Adam would fall. Aeons of ages before this took place, the plan whereby we might be brought back to God was formulated by Him. Because He is holy, this plan had to satisfy His righteous claims, for He cannot look upon sin. This necessitated the death of Christ who was without sin. "The Cross of Christ is the witness of God's justice as well as the expression of His love. Love gave the Son; righteousness demanded that He should die." How this should silence those who think that by their

own efforts they can fit themselves for the presence of God!

Salvation, however, does not stop with our deliverance from the penalty of sin. There is a present tense. Philippians 2:12b-13 speaks of this in these words; “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” When we trusted Christ, something more than a reprieve took place. “The life that comes through Christ is in no sense the polluted stream of Adam-life purified. It is entirely new.” We are told in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” In the true sense man cannot create. This is the prerogative of God. We are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Thus, our salvation is a day-to-day experience. We are not only delivered from the penalty of sin but we are preserved from its power. This is made possible by His abiding presence in our hearts, and by His constant advocacy at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Much of our failure to live a victorious life stems from the fact that we know so little in a practical way of this part of our salvation.

“While the believer is safe from judgment by virtue of the work of Christ, he needs to be daily preserved from the concerted efforts of the enemy to regain control of the reins.” This thought is considered in Romans 5:12, which reads, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Romans 6 continues with this, and draws a beautiful picture of what is symbolized for us in our baptism.

The doctrine of deliverance from the penalty of sin was being brought into jeopardy by a spirit of licentiousness that would have found an outlet in fleshly indulgence. “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” is the question raised. This is followed by an emphatic no. “God forbid. How shall we that are dead (have died) to sin live any longer therein?” Then comes a beautiful illustration from the first practice of Christianity. Those who had professed faith in Christ were baptized, not to His incarnation, which was the beginning of His holy life on earth, but to His death — by which He suffered the judgment that was ours. “We have been buried with Him by baptism unto death” (Rom. 6:4). The body submerged in water symbolizes the burial of Christ and is therefore, “planted together in the likeness of His death” (vs. 5). But this is not the end, even as Christ’s death was not the end. There follows a rising up “to walk in newness of life” (vs. 4). We are to reckon ourselves “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 11). Life in a risen Lord is our present portion.

In closing, let us speak briefly of the future tense of salvation. “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11). This can refer only to a coming day. Peter, in his first Epistle, speaks of our “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled,” and goes on to tell us that it is reserved for us “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Incorruptibility and likeness to our risen Lord is our future condition. Then we shall be free from the very presence of sin.

For us, this is the hope “That illumes with beams most cheering, the hours of night.” For the unsaved there is

no such prospect. The career of human greatness ends with the touch of the icy fingers of death. To the Christian, the grave throws open a gate presenting a heavenly vista, the like of which the human eye has never seen.

Where no shade nor stain can enter,

Nor the gold be dim;

In that holiness unsullied,

I shall walk with Him.

And if, perchance, it should please the Lord to come and take His waiting people home, we will be swept into His glorious presence in the twinkling of an eye.

Let Us Love One Another (Feb 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 2, Feb 1964.

John Robertson

The Pharisees, in their attempt to catch the Lord in His words, asked Him which was the greatest commandment in the law. He replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). Briefly and concisely, the Lord Jesus proclaimed the vital and exacting demands of an unchanging God. We have no reason to believe that these demands were ever abrogated. Even before time began it was the great passion of the Father’s heart to have a family to love and by whom He could be loved in return (Eph. 1:4-6, 2 Thess. 2:13). It remained for the Lord Jesus Christ to make possible the accomplishment of the eternal purpose of God.

True love cannot be legislated. It is the spontaneous outpouring of the affection and devotion of the heart. Neither the cause nor the consequence can be defined or predicated. There never has been any question about God’s love for us, for from time immemorial His “delights were with the sons of men” (Prov. 8:31). His love is like the blue sky above; it can be seen clearly, but its vastness is immeasurable. It has breadth without bound, length without end; its height is limitless, its depth fathomless. On the other hand, our love for God might often be called in question. As Creator of the

universe and Sustainer of worlds innumerable, He might evoke our ‘admiration and wonder. To win our love, it cost Him the darling of His bosom. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). As it ever has been with God, the first step was His. By an act of unexpressible love, He unlocked the bars that shut the human heart up unto self and unloosed the shackles that held captive our self-directed emotions.

In 1 Corinthians 13, human love at its highest is celebrated. Throughout the chapter, there is no reference to any divine person; all is charity in the abstract, without mention of any historic exhibition of love. There is nothing concrete, little emotion and neither the verb “to love” or the adjective “beloved” occur. All is as perfect as a Greek statue. Assent may be given to this beautiful praise poem without any feeling of personal involvement. Many who know nothing of the love of God as revealed by the Cross of Calvary have been moved by its reading. Indeed, its stainless virtue and exquisite language can be appreciated by a world that crucified and still rejects the Christ of God. But when we come to its counterpart in 1 John 4:7-21, the unbeliever must withdraw, for here is a bower reserved for the initiated alone. Here we are percipitated into an intimate and personal relationship that only the redeemed can enjoy.

“Beloved”! What a wealth of meaning that word enfolds! It was God’s own choice when from the opened heavens He affirmed the Diety of His Son and placed His stamp of approval upon His earthly ministry. It is the word John, the Apostle of Love, uses to encompass all whose hearts the Lord has claimed. It is a word of very nearness. It is for such that this passage has real import

and meaning. The word “love” as a noun of fact, as a verb of experience, and as an adjective of intimacy occurs no less the twenty-nine times, chiefly in connection with costly, burning exhibitions of love.

Under law, God demanded love to Himself and then love to our neighbour. The marvel of grace is that God moved in where man was impotent to act. In spite of our lack of love, God gave expression to His in the gift of His Son (v. 10). The Apostle Paul could say, “The love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14). This, as the context clearly shows, is His love for us, not ours for Him. As the natural sun in the heavens exercises a mighty and unceasing attractive energy on the planets that circle round it, so does the Son of Righteousness exercise on the mind of each child of God a continual and almighty energy constraining each to live henceforth no more unto self but unto God. It is this ever-present, ever-abiding, ever-moving power which forms the mainspring of our Christian activity. It is God working in us through the impelling power of His love that directs us into paths of love and righteousness. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). The revelation of God’s love to us compelled us to bow the knee in grateful acceptance; the revelation of God’s love IN US as the prime motivator of our Christian Life (Gal. 2:20) compells us to bow before Him in deep humility.

God is the very origin of love, “For love is of God” (v. 7); we are its outlet. God has implanted His love in our hearts that it might be “shed abroad.” Oh that, in place of the bickering and backbiting that occasionally disfigure our Christian behaviour and stulify our Christian testimony, the saints at large were to receive by the secret given in Roman 5:5 a new baptism of love,

as in the first days of power. The world would still be impressed by such a practical evidence of the reality and joy of our fellowship. This is the real proof that we know God and love Him (vv. 7,8). “We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” The appeal of verse seven becomes a duty in verse eleven. This in no way nullifies the aphorism of Matthew 22:37-40. It fulfils it. God still demands our love; where we failed, He makes success possible.

Lack of power in our Christian experience results from our failure to claim the “spiritual blessings” that are ours “in Christ.” Too many of us are content with His mercies, good health, and material prosperity. These are transient and we covet them. In the meantime our permanent and inalienable rights as sons of God elude us. Oh that we might be able to “escape the corruption that is in the world through lust” and become “partakers of the divine nature” which is one of the “great and precious promises” that is ours by right (2 Pet. 1:4). “If we love one another. God dwelleth in us and His love is perfected in us” (v. 12). The home of the heart is God, known and loved as Christ knew and loved. This is God’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes, God working in us “all things after the counsel of His will; That we should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:11).

Fear, with its handmaiden worry, is the bane of human existence, and the destoyer of all happiness. Where love reigns supreme, there is no room for fear, “For perfect love casteth out fear” (v. 18). Nowhere in Scripture are we promised freedom from adversity and trial. On the contrary, Christ Himself said, “In the world ye shall have

tribulation," but He hastened to add, "Be of good cheer (don't worry); I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The love of God operating in our hearts arms us for the conflict, cheers the drooping spirit in the face of disappointment and distress, and dispels all thought of terror and judgment with the assurance there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Our bark cannot be overthrown for it is borne over the troubled sea by the mighty hand of God and wafted to its haven by the breath of God's love. Romans 8:35-37 enumerates seven forms in which trouble comes but ends with this triumphant declaration, "Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." This river of love began before the worlds were made or Adam's clay was fashioned. Before creatures were, God loved us. This is a great deep. Who can fathom it? It is the key to all that has happened and all that ever will happen to mankind on this earth and in the worlds to come. The history of the Church in all ages has been a history of persecution, but in the fight with the world Christ has engaged to carry us through. Every wave for Christ's sake has served to lift the soul still higher upon the Rock of Ages. Every arrow of bitterness directed at the believer has driven him farther back into the cleft of the Rock.

Our passage ends with a commandment. John 13:34 gives it as a new commandment and yet it is not new but the message that we "have heard from the beginning" 1 John 3:11. It is the sign and seal of our union with Christ. The anchorite of old sought to please God by a life of pristine simplicity and purity, but we are not called to eke out our span of life in self-immolation and banishment from neighbour and brother. Sadly blinded

and mistaken as the zealot was, does not his unshrinking endeavour to earn what we have freely received rebuke our coldness and carelessness, our indifference, slothfulness, and self-pleasing and most of all our want of grateful love to Him Whose love alone saves and whose grace alone sanctifies. In view of our coldness to our brethren and in cases open animosity should not our prayer be, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me: And lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa. 139:32-24).

Beloved, let us love one another and so fulfil the command of God.

Our Christian Heritage (Mar 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 3, Mar 1964.

John Robertson

The traveller is not long in Britain before he realizes that every nook and cranny of the countryside breathes the very air of historical struggle and achievement. Not least of the impressionable sights are the cathedrals and abbeys. There can be no doubt that these buildings, whether restored and still in use or reduced by neglect, to a mere fragment of their former splendour are part of the national heritage of architecture, craftsmanship and history. The visiting tourist, however, might be at loss to explain the part they played in keeping the Christian faith alive on the Island.

Following Pentecost, the infant Church faced persecution after persecution and many were forced to flee Jerusalem. We read, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4). Thus the truths taught by the Apostles were carried to every part of Europe. But it was not long before the simplicity of Church government as given by the Holy Spirit, through the inspired writings of Paul, gave way to a rule of clergy under the domination of bishops. The cathedrals of England are mute evidence of this development in the motherland.

The Gospel was first introduced to Ireland by merchants and soldiers and from there it was carried to the shores of England and Scotland by monks. “Groups of twelve monks, under the leadership of an Abbot, would go to open fields for the Gospel… this work, in its origin and

progress, though it developed some features alien to New Testament teaching, was independent of Rome and different in important aspects from the Roman Catholic System" (The Pilgrim Church, Broadbent). These men relied upon Holy Scripture as the sole guide in matters of faith and life. They preached justification by faith and reserved baptism for those who had put their trust in Christ. These were the Celtic missionaries whose influence shaped the course of Christianity in Britain for more than 500 years.

"In 596 Augustine, with 40 Benedictine monks, sent by Pope Gregory I landed in Kent and began the missionary work among the heathen in England which was to bear such abundant fruit. The two forms of missionary activity in the country, the older British and the newer Roman, soon came into conflict" (The Pilgrim Church, Broadbent). In 601 Augustine, with papal authority, appointed twelve bishops. He himself was Archbishop of Canterbury. With State aid, which he was able to win, the design to compel the Celtic order to submit to Rome was vigorously carried out and gradually the earlier missionaries lost their influence and almost ceased to exist except in the northern regions.

Iona, Melrose and Glastonbury are sites of ancient Celtic Abbeys. The ruins still to be found there belong to the newer order. As visitors to these spots we found nothing but memories to remind us what Columba had accomplished. Standing on the shores of Iona, with the ruins of St. Oran's Chapel at our back, we could almost imagine we saw Columba and his courageous band approaching in an open boat over the mist-enshrouded sea. Here on the eastern shore of the island directly opposite Mull the small group set about building a

monastery, a church, a refectory of wood, a group of beehive huts and an encircling wall surrounding the whole enclosure.

For over thirty years Columba laboured in this area, directing his efforts towards the unconverted Northern Picts. His greatest triumph was winning King Brude for Christ. Everywhere he went he found the druids strongly entrenched but with his cry, “Christ is my Druid,” he hammered home the Word a God and slowly but surely this bastion of paganism gave way and the heathen tribes were brought into the fold of the Church.

Some of us hallow places through the natural habit of connecting events and places, the significance of one giving a certain sanctified and interpretative value to the other. At Glastonbury our thoughts turned to the story told by the monk of Glastonbury in Tennyson’s poem, “The Holy Grail.” Here we were in that Isle of Avalon made famous by the poems “The Idylls of the King.” How prophetic of this site and others his words from “The Passing of Arthur:”

“The old order changeth, giving place to the new

And God fulfils Himself in many ways…”

the prelude to his beautiful poem on prayer ending,

“For what are men better than sheep or goats,

If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,

Both for themselves and those who call them friends;

For so the whole round earth is every way

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

There is something of the mystic about the bard, but who are we to say he did not realize his hope expressed in still another poem, “I hope to see my Pilot face to face, when I have crossed the bar.”

Of the ecclesiastical buildings still standing, nearly all belong to the period following the Norman Conquest. But what shall we say of those who brought light to darkest England prior to 1066? In many instances the real issues of the Christian faith were lost sight of in the struggle for power, with a highly organized church hierarchy attempting to hold control over things spiritual and temporal. However, there were some who were moved by pure motives. St. Cuthbert, the saintly Bishop of Lindisfarne showed both by example and precept what it meant to be a child of God. Then too, if it had not been for Alfred the Great Christianity might have disappeared from England’s shores during the Danish Invasions. He wrote at that time, “It has often come to my remembrance what wise men there formerly were among the English race, both of the sacred order and the secular and how the kings who had the government of the folk in those days obeyed God and His ministers.” It was to this period also that the Venerable Bede belonged. He was the product of the monastery having received all his education from the Abbots. At the time of his death he was engaged in translating the Gospel of John. It is from his Historia Ecclesiastica that we learn much of the work of the Church in those early years. His translations were in latin and so were used by scholars, only.

The arrival of William the Conqueror marked a new era. He had no intention of relinquishing his rights as sovereign to the pope or any other dignitary. In the

years that followed this struggle between pope and Kings continued.

Under Lanfranc, whom William brought from Normandy to be Archbishop of Canterbury, there Was a revival of monasticism and a resurgence of building churches and cathedrals. Most of the great cathedrals of England bear marks of Norman structure. Lanfranc's successors may have been more interested in this work than in the salvation of souls, for the Abbey Churches were unusually rich in the Middle Ages. All the accumulated funds of the monastic orders were expended lavishly in the erection of edifices that would be a credit to the order responsible for them. Cathedrals, crystallizing, as they did, the power and wealth of a rich and ambitious Church surpassed in grandeur and architectural beauty all other buildings of the times. Strangely enough these vast structures were not parochial for most cathedral cities were well supplied with parish churches for the laity. Nor were they intended for large gatherings of diocesan clergy and laity. Rather, they were designed to provide dignified and impressive settings in which a small group of priests might offer daily worship to God and as a place where princes sacred and secular might be interred in magnificent vaults and tombs in keeping with the wealth and dignity they had enjoyed in life.

Perhaps this is nowhere better exemplified than in the most famous of all Abbeys, Westminster, erected in the time of Henry III and Edward I on the site of the old Benedictine Abbey. Famous as the scene of the coronation of English monarchs it has become the final resting place for kings, statesmen, writers, poets and churchmen.

“Amid the noblest of the Land,

They lay the sage to rest;

And give the bard an honoured place.

With costly marble dress.”

Our arrival there coincided with one of the many daily services and we stopped to listen while the speaker of the day intoned the service from the prayer book. There was a solemn dignity in the order followed and a reverent attention from the audience, but to us it seemed as cold and lifeless as the surrounding tombs and effigies. Certainly it lacked the warmth and spontaneity of a soul lost in contemplation of the Christ of Calvary. Yet who can say that from the hearts of those accustomed to such there did not arise a prayer that reached the ear of God.

Our Christian Heritage (Apr 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 4, Apr 1964.

John Robertson

If Westminster must be considered first among the Abbeys, then Canterbury must claim that distinction among the Cathedrals. The Archbishop of Canterbury is primate of the Church of England and has been since the time of Augustine, the first to hold this lofty position.

The visitor to Canterbury cannot but be impressed by its beautiful setting, lying in a saucer of green hills with its tall towers grouping unforgetable against their background of Kentish fields and woods. Inside two tombs are the objects of much interest, that of the Black Prince famous in war and that of Thomas Becket, churchman and martyr for his faith. His death more than any other single event points up the deep rift that existed between the Roman prelates and the king. Beckett had been a prime favourite of Henry II and had served him faithfully and well as Chancellor of the Realm but on his appointment to the primacy of the Church he forsook his wordly ways and became the pope’s man. In a fit of peevish anger Henry had expressed a wish to be rid of this troublesome fellow. The slaying of Becket in Canterbury Cathedral was the result. The fame of the martyr spread rapidly throughout Europe, and Becket’s tomb became a shrine to which a stream of pilgrims including kings, princes and cardinals flocked bringing offerings of jewels and gold. At the time of the Reformation Henry VIII removed the wealth of the shrine to his own royal treasury.

The very nature of its organization forced the Church into conflict with anyone who disputed its authority. Reformers within the Church were hampered by the arrogant intolerance of the scholars in the hierarchy on the one hand and the abysmal ignorance of the laity, most of whom could neither read nor write, on the other hand. A few raised their voices in protest. Stephen Langton, named a cardinal by the pope and appointed to the see of Canterbury challenged the extent of episcopal power and Grosseteste, Archbishop of York, refused to accept the nephew of the Pope to a vacancy in his see but theirs was but a faint cry in a powerful and intolerant Church. It was not until the time of John Wycliff that the rights of the individual and his responsibility to God became an issue that could not be overridden and silenced.

There had been rumbles of discontent with the power and demands of the monastic orders but mostly on economic grounds. Wat Tyler led an ill-fated revolt against the tyranny and oppression of the secular bodies who held the peasants in virtual slavery. In Wycliff, however, the Church found a more formidable opponent. Technically a parish priest, he was in reality an Oxford Don and it is as a scholar he ran a foul the papacy. He denounced the doctrine of transubstantiation and questioned the right of the pope to speak for the Church on earth. His two greatest contributions to our heritage were in translating the Bible into English and in the formation of a group of “poor preachers” whom he sent about the countryside preaching the Gospel with the Scriptures in their hands. Wycliff proved to be too popular a figure to be prosecuted for his rebellion to Church authority and he was still at his benefice at

Lutterworth at the time of his death. His followers who were called Lollards did not fare so well and many of them died for opposing the teaching of the Church, the most famous being Sir John Oldcastle, the first of noble blood to be martyred by popish cruelty.

Wycliff has been termed the “Morning Star of the Reformation” and no doubt his writing did influence John Huss and Martin Luther on the Continent. William Tyndale who was greatly influenced by Luther’s teaching followed Wycliff in translating the Bible but he was unable to do so in England. In addition to translating the Bible he wrote many pamphlets attacking the teachings of the Church. He not only repudiated the doctrine of transubstantiation but held that the sacrament was a commemorative act only. He incurred the displeasure of Henry VIII by opposing his divorce from Catherine of Aragon and was finally tried for heresy and put to death. Strangely enough his translation of the Bible, as far as it went, formed the basis of the Authorized Version, nearly a century later.

At the time of the Reformation, the power of Rome was very great. For a thousand years it had been uniting politically with the government of Europe and building itself into the life of the people with the pope in supreme command. No one questioned its divine authority on a national scale. Knowledge and books had been the exclussive privilege of the aristocracy and it was in their interest to protect vested rights. In Wycliff and Tyndale the nation had found men ready to champion the freedom of Worship and willing to take a lead in attacking intolerance. Repressive measures introduced to compel all to worship in the manner prescribed by the State Church had permanently divided the people into

Conformists and Nonconformists, of which latter body the Lollards had enjoyed considerable public support. This movement was outwardly suppressed but there always remained small groups who were determined to worship after the manner their conscience and the Scriptures, as they knew them, dictated.

The Reformation did nothing to ease the lot of the Nonconformists. Henry VIII, by a series of Acts of Parliament, cut England off from Rome and made himself supreme head of the Church. This simply led to a modification of the Constitution of the Church but all the old abuses remained. Tyndale's Bible was revived and edited by Miles Coverdale and placed in each church but the reading of it was reserved for, "judges, noblemen, captains and justices." Others were forbidden to read it under severe punishment from the law.

All forms of Dissent were relentlessly persecuted; Puritans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and independents. The first two favoured a State Church, but under a Presbyterian form of government rather than Episcopalian. The Puritans hoped to remain within the Church of England but with a purer form of worship. They took the lead in the struggle against the doctrine of the divine right of kings so strongly held by the Stewart Kings. This led to the beheading of Charles I and the establishment of Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. All the Dissenters had united in this struggle and under the Commonwealth freedom of worship was enforced by law. "Such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship or discipline publicly held forth shall not be restrained but shall be protected in the profession of

their faith and exercise of their religion," was the edict of the Council of State of 1653.

This liberty was short-lived under Charles II the old order was restored. It was this intolerance that caused many to leave England and seek freedom of worship first on the Continent and then in the New World. Many of the early settlers in United States were those seeking the right to worship as they pleased.

By the time of the Revolution and the disposition of James II, toleration was very much in the air. James I, in spite of his determined adherence to the principle of the divine right of kings, did have the Authorized Bible translated and made available to all who could read. This book has been the mainstay of our faith for more than 300 years. And even though Charles II attempted to stifle freedom of worship, a work had begun that could not be denied. Some persecution lingered as witnessed by the imprisonment of John Bunyan, author of that wonderful book the Pilgrim's Progress, that is second only to the Bible in popular reading in our tongue.

It must not be thought that this hard-won victory meant salvation for the masses. Most people remained indifferent to religion and there was little or no life in the Established Church to awaken man to his need. Immorality and drunkenness were a characteristic of the age and the clergy was in many cases little better than the people. Yet out of this "garden of weeds some goodly trees sprang up to bear good fruit." Men like John Newton, Rowland Hill and William Romaine were true Evangelicals but the most influential figure in the proclamation of the Gospel in the 18th century was John Wesley.

Our Christian Heritage (Part 3) (May 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 5, May 1964.

John Robertson

John Wesley was an ordained priest in the Church of England but it was not until he experienced personal conversion some years later that he became an evangelist and went up and down the country preaching the Gospel, having for his companion George Whitefield. Lack of clergy to preach forced Wesley to accept lay preachers and denied the use of many churches he built chapels. It was Wesley's hope that his work would remain a service within the Established Church but after his death the Methodist movement grew and a separate organization was formed outside the Church of England.

The Established Church was not unmoved by the Wesley Revival. Evangelicals within its fold were often ill-treated and persecuted. Charles Simon was one who hoped that the new movement would act "as leaven in the Church" but that it would conform to the Church principles and discipline. Others similarly moved were Isaac Milner, Dean of Carlisle and John Venn at Clapham. Here a group called the "Clapham Set" met to study the Word. William Wilberforce who worked to free the slaves, was of this set. Evangelism because it placed the emphasis on personal conversion with an appeal to the individual to repent and accept justification by faith was not primarily interested in ecclesiastical authority and so was viewed with suspicion. However, the consciousness of evil and sense of social responsibility

moved them to seek to help the poor and less fortunate. Out of this grew an interest in missionary work that carried the Gospel to the far ends of the earth, a vision shared by those of other denominations.

Many who sought to correct social evils were moved by purely humanitarian motives. Robert Raikes whose name is closely linked with the Sunday School movement made a national movement out of what had been attempted in several localities. Reports on the progress of this work give ample evidence that at the outset the problem of teaching the boys and girls to read and write was foremost in the minds of the organizers. Today the Sunday School plays an important role in instructing the young in things spiritual rather than temporal and must be considered a very important part of our Christian heritage.

For a time the English Puritans held on to the hope that reform within the State Church was possible but despairing of this they separated from it. These Separatists grew into two modern denominations, each of which had had similar bodies of Dissenters in the past. These were the Baptists and Congregationalists. There had been many fine men among the Puritans but perhaps the best known of them was John Milton whose great epic poems, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained so graphically picture God’s eternal purposes in His dealings with creation and man in language both majestic and profound.

Prior to Wesley the Baptists had shown little progress. John Bunyan was a Baptist preacher. Revival under Wesley started a flame that was not to be extinguished. William Carey who himself became a missionary to India

led the way to newer efforts by organizing the Baptists Missionary Society in 1792. This was the beginning of the modern missionary movement among English-speaking Christians. William Fox, another Baptist, gave great impetus to Sunday School work by organizing a school where he taught the children to read from the Bible. Out of this came a great demand for Bibles and Thomas Hughes became a leader and first Secretary of the British Foreign Missions and Bible Society whose contribution to Christianity, only eternity will reveal. Charles H. Spurgeon, the noted Evangelist, was a Baptist.

Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry were forerunners of the Congregationalists. Their church in London held as its foundation principle Matthew 18:20 “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” All three suffered death for their faith. Those who succeeded these men accepted the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice. They sought to find in it, not merely the authoritative source of Christian doctrine but also a complete and adequate pattern of church government. They rejected the idea of a National Church and went further than any other dissenting group. They held that the only proper form of the visible Church is the total congregation of a company of professed disciples of Christ who could claim a personal religious experience. These united to Christ and to one another by a voluntary covenant transform a company of Christians into a church. The right of each church to govern and discipline its own members was maintained. They believed that each church is completely self-governing and responsible only to Christ as its Head. This was certainly far removed

from what had been the practice down the centuries. It was this kind of thinking that brought about the movement begun by men like John Gifford Bellett, Edward Cronin and Anthony Norris Groves.

In Revelation 1:13, the Lord Jesus is seen in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks which we are told are the seven churches of Asia (v. 20), Thus in the time of the Apostle John each church is seen as a separate entity subject only to its Head, Jesus Christ. For centuries this was lost sight of and in its struggle for power under its bishops the Church suppressed everything that challenged its authority and right to instruct its members. It would almost seem that God stood aside and let man have his way. Yet through all these years of intolerance and bigotry, some dared to raise the lamp of truth and its flickering flame pierced the murky gloom of ignorance and superstition bringing hope and peace to those who turned their eyes upward. Rather than place a blanket condemnation over the whole sordid history of ambitious and conniving worldly men who sought to band the Church to their own selfish aims and purposes, let us thank God for whatsoever was true, whatsoever was honest, whatsoever was just, whatsoever was pure, whatsoever was lovely, whatsoever was of good report and think on these things. This is our Christian heritage.

As we look ahead to the future, let our doubts vanish as we pay tribute, not in lighted candles or incense, not in rich and glittering robes, not in silver and gold, but in love and faith and vows of allegiance to His Name, His Testimony, His Commission and His Service.

Christian Fellowship (Jan 1965)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 11 No. 1, Jan 1965.

John Robertson

There's nothing quite like Christian fellowship." This is the expression that found its way to our lips so often during our eight month visit to the British Isles and the Continent. The sterile hours during which we rubbed shoulders with the world seemed to sharpen our appetite for the companionship of those who loved the Lord and seemed to accentuate the joy we felt when privileged to meet with fellow-believers. Those happy moments spent sharing our common interest and our common faith more than compensated for the vexations and frustrations we encountered as we moved from one strange place to another.

The word fellowship has many connotations and applications to our place and practice as members of the family of God. In Acts 2:42, where it speaks of continuing "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayers," the New English Bible translates fellowship, "sharing in the common life." It is this thought that was paramount in our thinking. Our travelling experiences served to drive home the conviction that our fellowship transcended all barriers of customs, race and language and even time. It brought to our souls a satisfying sweetness that the world could not emulate or imitate.

In 1 John 1:17, we read, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." The measure of our fellowship is here determined by where

we walk not how we walk. It is not our comprehension of Scripture, nor yet our understanding of the deep truths of Church doctrine that is the governing factor, but rather our walk in relation to Him. As the prism before the beam of light breaks forth into a radient and many splendoured band of colour so our lives in sweet unbroken communion before Christ reflect the perfections of our risen Lord in divers ways and under various circumstances. This is the ultimate to which all Christian living is pointed — the outward manifestation of an indwelling Christ (Gal. 2:20). Missing this we are but purposeless puppets directed by the strings of chance. The key to harmony among the saints of God is the note piped from Heaven itself. What a joy it was to meet so many whose ears were turned to hear His voice!

Our plans for spending Christmas with His own in a Christian Hotel had been rudely shattered and we found ourselves motoring through southern France towards Spain. Weighed down by disappointment and wearied by much travel we longed to meet someone who knew our blessed Lord. Armed with the address of a brother in the town of Montpelier we sought him out and were ushered into his presence, only to find he spoke no English. My bookish French was scarcely adequate to meet the need of inquiring directions and ordering meals. Yet, in a matter of minutes we were right at home with our brother, Professor Vernet. True, our conversation was slow and halting as I groped to translate what he was saying into English so that I could understand what he was saying. Our spirits revived as we spoke to our brother of things concerning the King. Our oneness in Christ made it possible for us to share our mutual care

for the children of God through the universal language of love.

Travelling brings in its train a few trials and petty annoyances and because we had been forced to change our plans for Christmas we arrived in Spain ahead of schedule. A mutual friend had written brother Trenchard to say we would be in Barcelona in January, but we arrived December 19th when our brother was out of town. We were disappointed and lonesome, but a few days later we were able to get in touch with him and the warmth of Christian love that greeted us on meeting dispelled the gloom and filled our hearts with joy. In Barcelona, as in Paris, we were privileged to meet with the Lord's people in the "breaking of bread." In both centres, the meeting proceeded quietly and reverently. There was a sense of purpose and even urgency in the gathering as brother after brother rose to take part. There were no long awkward pauses and nearly every brother there took part. The prayers were short and fervent and to each the congregation, in chorus, added their audible amen. Our souls were enraptured, not by the words of the speakers, which were unintelligible to us, but by the presence of the Lord Himself in the midst of His gathered people. We shared with every worshipper there the same Lord and Saviour, and as they lifted their voices to Him in their language, we joined silently in ours and the same Lord heard both and understood. It was a fellowship that was felt and extended far beyond the spoken word.

We had come to sunny Spain to escape the cold of winter, but on Christmas eve it began to snow, a thing unheard of in this Mediterranean City. Within twenty-four hours, fifteen inches of snow blanketted Barcelona

and brought all transportation to a halt. We had written to our sister Mrs. Biffen in Madrid re our plans to go there, but with no trains running we had received no reply. In the midst of our perplexity our dear sister phoned and for three minutes we enjoyed a fellowship that was as unique as it was blessed. Our hearts sang:

“Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love.

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.”

It was our sister’s sad duty to pass on to me the news of the passing of my only sister in Canada. Following this I was forced to go to bed with a high fever. The kindly ministrations of our dear sister in our grief and illness was but another evidence of His care for us through the bond that binds us one to the other.

“We share our mutual woes,

Our mutual burdens bear:

And often for each other flows

The sympathizing tear.”

Our original intention had been to spend Christmas at the Beatenberg Bible School in Switzerland, but on our arrival in Paris we had discovered that the school was not open for visitors during Christmas. So it was not until February that we reached the Bibelheim. Here on a sunny slope fifteen hundred feet above Lac Thun and facing the mountain giants Eiger, Jungfrau and Monck, we spent two weeks of heavenly fellowship.

On our second day there we were approached by a young student who had heard we were from Canada. Although of German origin she had come to the school from Toronto. The only member of her family saved, she had been brought to the Lord through the invitation to meetings by the president of the Inter Varsity Fellowship group in the school where I taught. She was anxious to have me contact her parents on my return to give them a first hand account of her joy in preparing herself for the Lord's service. Thus it happened that our meeting, far from our native shores, had brought us into a happy fellowship that did not end in Switzerland for:

"There is a place where spirits blend,

Where friend holds fellowship with friend.

Tho' sundered far, by faith we meet,

Around one common mercy seat."

Here is a fellowship that transcends the bounds of space and time as she in far off Europe and I in Canada invoke the blessing of the Almighty on her unsaved parents.

Man, by nature, is gregarious and loves company, but the innate chattering of people with no common interest or goal is a poor substitute for the exchange of thoughts between saints of God, whether it be over a cup of tea in Cannes or on a stroll through the wooded countryside of Normandy. On such brief meetings with the servants of the Lord in their field of service we were able to enter, in a small measure, into their plans and pursuits for God.

The regular meetings for devotional study, which characterize the Christian Guest Houses of Great Britian, were another source of blessing to us and to the

hungry hearts we met there. They came for a rest and reaped a feast and we were able to join them in drinking in the good things of the Lord.

At Charterhouse, Teignmouth, South Devon, we sat around a cosy fire in the drawing room and listened to informal discussions led by our brother Mr. Ernest Barker and by our host Mr. A. J. Williams. As memory recalls these oasis of Christian fellowship we are reminded of a recent article by our brother Mr. Barker on the value of fellowship. He pointed to the parallel between our times and those in the days of Malachi. It was a time of spiritual depression and darkness, but in the midst of it all there were a few “that feared the Lord and spake often one to another” (Mal. 3:16). God took note and “a book of remembrance was written before Him.” Pursuing this line of thought our brother wrote, “We do well to follow this example of these godly Jews. In the midst of so much that is contrary to the clear teaching of the Word of God, even in the professing Church, we who name the name of Christ need to remember that we are a separate company and can therefore have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness…” The Christians’ best friends are those who seek to follow the Lord and love His Word.

The home-like atmosphere of these talks was new to us and made them most endearing. At Slavanka, Bournemouth, we met Miss Evelyn Booth - Clibborn, granddaughter of General Booth of Salvation Army fame. For a time the world with all its allurements captivated her mind and she trained to be a concert pianist. The story of how God called her from a promising career to go and serve Him in the drawing rooms of the English homes of the Gentry is a real

lesson in God’s dealings with His children and causes us to bow the knee in praise and thanksgiving. We thrilled as we listened to Miss Booth play and sing that beautiful hymn, “Down from the Glory,” written by her brother to the tune “O So Mio.”

The Foolishness of Preaching (Aug-Sept 1965)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 11 No. 7, Aug-Sept 1965.

The above title would seem to suggest that the art of public discourse on sacred subjects is worthless and devoid of reason and judgment, but an examination of the words in their context (1 Cor. 1:21) will show that exactly the opposite is intended. Indeed, the whole passage from verse 18 onward is a vigorous and thoughtful defence of this much despised and maligned practice.

Deeply grieved by reports of spreading division and increasing contention in the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote to the saints his inspired epistle in which he called upon the believers to “Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (v. 10). In the midst of his call for unity he turns to the subject of wisdom, the various conceptions of which lay at the root of the divisions and growth of parties within the local church. Reiterating his commission, “Christ sent me, not to baptize but to preach the gospel” (v. 17), Paul launched into a discussion of the relation between wisdom and the gospel.

In support of their stand each group at Corinth had linked its cause with a name which identified the particular doctrine or practice it admired. One of the more clamorous parties was swayed by rhetorical artistry as it was employed in the use of words and style that appealed to the ear at the expense of the heart, and

Paul realized that there was a real danger that the external and superficial “wisdom of words” would take over, and the deeper and more meaningful “words of the Cross would be “made void.” Exulting in human wisdom they were failing to fulfill the purpose of God in their individual lives and collective testimony. Paul had to show these misguided saints that the way to an understanding of God was not through the wisdom of man whose intellectual speculation could never bring him to a knowledge of God. The wisdom of God is found in the Cross, the preaching of which is the only way man can learn His mind and purpose for him.

The word translated foolishness (v. 18) is the word from which the English word “moron,” of low mental capacity, is derived. Hence, its use to mean something stupid, silly and worthless. It is in such terms that the warped and twisted mind of man views the preaching of the Cross. While this is the estimate of those who perish, to those who are saved or more correctly “being saved” (A. V.), it is the power of God. Since the death of Christ exceeds the limits of human credibility, to the natural mind it seems incapable of accomplishing the salvation of mankind. Hence, to such thinking it is foolishness.

Pursuing the theme, the wisdom of God as expressed in the Cross, the beloved Apostle selects from the history of the Children of Israel an incident where the wisdom of man failed and Judah was reduced to a condition of helplessness that they might learn to depend upon God alone (v. 19 Rf. Isa. 29: 14 et al). To the natural mind, an alliance with Egypt against Sennacherib seemed a wise and shrewd poltical move; to God it was an act of rebellion and a disavowal of faith in His promises. From the particular Paul carries his argument to the general

and discusses the futility of man's efforts to understand God through religion, the Jew; or, through speculative introspection, the Greek (v. 22).

The Jews were, and still are, a highly religious people. Their aspirations and hopes are earthly. They are a highly privileged people for unto them were committed the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2). But in all the writings of the prophets they could only see a Messiah who, as King, would deliver them from their bondage and establish them in His Kingdom. A crucified Christ was the very antithesis of what they had expected and so they rejected Him.

Those today who follow after the same error, religion, are taken up with signs and symbols translated into ritual and ceremony which they hope will be well-pleasing to God and merit His favour. They have a zeal, bordering on the fanatic in the more extreme sects and in their confused state of mind they cling to precepts and concerns which are the product of their own natural inclinations and years of teaching, but the "end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). While religion may serve to placate the yearnings of the human heart, only Christ can meet the need of fallen man.

The Greeks through philosophy sought to understand God but Paul's answer is "man by wisdom knew not God" (v. 21). Xenophanes was the first Greek philosopher to point out the moral defects of the popular

Greek gods who had as many vices as virtues. His followers replaced polytheism with pantheism which identified nature and God as one, a view held by many today, but God has revealed not only His nature but His character and purposes in His Son, the Lord Jesus

Christ. Plato's ideas of God seemed to undergo changes as he advanced in the realm of philosophy and Aristotle his most brilliant pupil saw God as the Prime Mover, the Uncaused Cause and Non Contingent One but neither man understood the great theme of redemption which culminated in the Cross of Christ. While both showed a deep appreciation of righteousness, wisdom, fortitude and temperance, they knew nothing of the actual possession of righteousness which is the inalienable treasure of the redeemed.

The mere observance of religious ritual failed the Jew and wisdom as the product of man's intellect left the Greek struggling in the mire of self-righteousness, but "Christ crucified" which was to the Jew a "stumbling block" and to the Greek "foolishness" is to them who are called both the "wisdom of God" and "the power of God" (v. 24). God's answer to the Human Quest was a Divine Plan, formulated in the mind and determined counsels of the Godhead before time was. Any attempt by man to attain righteousness was bound to fail because it was founded upon a false premise, the futile hope that he could by his own means merit salvation. Man is powerless to extricate himself from the bondage of sin, but Christ is God's power in the lives of those who respond to the gospel because of all that was accomplished by His Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. He Himself is the personal instrument of their salvation and the very sustenance of their life and activity. Failure of man to acknowledge his impotence in the face of sin has been the great barrier that has shut him out from God, and it has been the particular privilege of the saints down through the ages to breach this wall of unbelief through the simple presentation of

the gospel. It must result in a complete surrender to God's will with the consequent implanting of a new life in Christ Jesus to whom all praise, honour and glory rightly belong (v. 31).

Following His resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to the eleven in Galilee and gave to his chosen ones the great commission which was to change the whole course of history, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"(Mark 15:15). These were His final marching orders and they have never been withdrawn. For nearly two thousand years this commission has been carried out, and while many have rejected it as foolish, it remains the irrefutable proof of God's wisdom and grace. Thousands will attest to this in a day not too far future when with the redeemed throughout the ages they will join the heavenly chorus to sing; "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

Joy to the World (Dec 1965)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 11 No. 10, Dec 1965.

Nearly two thousand years ago, a group of startled shepherds, watching their flocks by night on the moon-bathed hills of Judea, heard a voice from the star-filled heavens saying, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10, 11). And yearly on the vigil of that day people the world over take up the strain, singing:

“Joy to the World, the Lord is come.

Let earth receive her King.”

Would that the words of the lip were a true echo of what is to be found in the hearts of the gay carollers. Alas! to many, they are but an empty phrase, a murmur of the wind in the grass, a soothing sound that finds no response in the soul. Such live for earth, never realizing that this brief life is only a brief interlude, the vestibule to worlds of mightier and more eternal moment. What do these words mean to you? Is the language of your heart

“Jesus Christ, Thou King of Glory,

Born a Saviour, Prince to be,

While the angel hosts adore Thee,

We joy in Thee;

Singing of Thy grace, the story,

Praise, praise to Thee.”

What is this joy, promised to a troubled earth so long, long ago? Surely it is not the hilarity of levity, nor yet the convivial pleasure occasioned by the frivolous festivity of the holiday season. At this time of year it is so easy to be caught up in the gaiety of the populace or to lend an ear to the appeal to a benevolent society for a spirit of charity in our relations one to another. One cannot find fault with the beautiful hymns that extol the virtues of the Babe of Bethlehem or call the faithful to worshipful adoration. There can be no doubt that participation in the holy exercise of singing Christ's praises can bring real joy to the Christian heart. But let us not mistake the stirring of our emotions or the elation of our spirits by things external for the deep soul-satisfying joy that is ours in Christ Jesus. It is more, much more than that.

Our joy is as eternal as God Himself for He is both the author and object of our joy. When the capstone of the great pyramid of creation was laid, the Almighty declared: "The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:4-7). It was ever the purpose of God that His own should be a happy people, "for God giveth to a man that is good in His sight wisdom, knowledge and joy; but to a sinner travail" (Eccl. 2:26). Moreover, it was to be a constant joy for Christ Himself declared, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may remain in you" (John 15:11), and again, "Asks, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (16:24). Ours is no fleeting exhilaration contingent upon immediate circumstances, but it is a full and complete serenity implanted in our heart by God, Himself, "the author and finisher of our gaith" (Heb. 12:2). Therefore let us lift up our hearts in thankfulness and praise and worship as we join the Psalmist to say,

“My soul shall be joyful in the Lord” (Psa. 35:9), and bow our heads as we repeat with Mary the magnificat, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:47-48).

It was given to the angels to herald the message of the Gospel but it remained for the Cross of Calvary to reveal the grim means of the Gospel. He, Who was ever, “the Father’s delight” and Whose daily occupation was “rejoicing always before Him” must needs become the “Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” While it is gloriously possible to understand the great joy that fills the heart at the knowledge of sins forgiven, it defies human reason to understand (Heb. 12:2), “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame.” Here, indeed, is one of the great imponderables and eternal verities of Holy Writ.

“Ours is the joy, and yet ‘tis Thine,

‘Tis ours as one with Thee.

My joy springs from that grief of Thine;

Thy death brings life to me.”

The stigma of sin must be once and forever removed. This, then, is the meaning and purpose of the Cross. The excrutiating pain and agonizing suffering of Calvary was the prelude to our joy. This must ever remain the enigma of the ages. How it should thrill our hearts, the realization that from mercy’s vast unfathomed sea springs our eternal joy! Its very mention should bow our hearts in grateful worship as we extol with exceeding joy, the Christ of God.

In all this God had a purpose of the Gospel. In His prayer to the Father, ‘ere He submitted to the death of

the Cross, the Lord Jesus prayed for His own. He prayed, not that they should be removed from this evil world, but that they might be preserved in it, “That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). The world hated Christ and crucified Him. Even so it hates those who claim Him as Lord and Saviour. It is a strange paradox that the world’s hatred should be our joy. On his way to prison in Rome, the Apostle Paul expressed one burning desire, “that I might finish my course with joy” (Acts 20:24). strange words under such circumstances. From his barred cell, in the midst of recounting the many things in which he might find satisfaction, he rejects them all as (offals, and voices) one passionate plea, “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering” (Phil. 3:10). Amazing desire in terms of human reasoning. The world finds its joy in personal achievement or monetary gain but the child of God confesses that Jesus is the joy of loving hearts and the One to whom he turns from the blest bliss the world imparts. The purpose of the Gospel is that we might have this complete and enthralling joy. In the measure that we submit unreservedly to His will, in that measure this joy will be ours.

“Go labour on, spend and be spent;

Thy joy to do the Father’s will;

This is the way the Master went.

Should not the servant follow still?”

Beyond all this there is the prospect of the Gospel. The Psalmist said, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5). While there is a sense in which this has an application to our life here on

earth, there is the prospect of a more glorious fulfilment in the ages to come. The same is true of the declaration of the Psalmist David; “Thou wilt show me the paths of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:11). We may find our pathway on earth strewn with thorns, and circumstances may at times dictate sorrow but when we hear His call and are swept into His glorious presence the final commital of Jude will be comsummated. “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). So while the bells of Christmas fade softly into the gathering night may we lift up our hearts to sing, “O Come, let us adore Him”, as we look forward to that day when

“He and I, in that bright glory,

One deep joy shall share;

Mine to be forever with Him;

His, that I am there.”

Peace on earth (Jan 1967)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 13 No. 1, Jan 1967.

John Robertson

We have entered another year and the grim spectre of war strides across the face of the earth. We look back on a year filled with conflict, strife and turmoil with its consequent misery and suffering and the prayer on many lips is, “Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.”

The beloved physician Luke, in his Gospel, describes the greatest panorama of all ages. With the heavens for a screen, filled with the heavenly hosts, and the Judean Hills peopled with flocks attended by affrighted shepherds as an arena, a glorious message was proclaimed and a fervent and comforting benediction pronounced. The message which was to change the whole course of human history reads, “For unto you is born, this day, in the City of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The benediction which follows declares, “Glory to God in the highest, and, on earth, peace, good will toward men” (v. 14).

For nearly twenty centuries the Gospel of Grace has been preached to an erring and sin-ridden people and we seem no nearer to that goal than when it was first promised. “Man’s inhumanity to man” continues to make “countless thousands mourn.” Never, in the affairs of human relationship has greed, avarice and unbridled ambition reached such abyssmal depths. Surely it behooves us to stop and consider our ways and seek out God’s answer to man’s perplexity.

Nearly 3000 years ago the prophet Isaiah made this startling revelation, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulders and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Here was Peace in Prophecy; God speaking through His prophet foretold the means whereby peace would be brought to a warring world.

To the ordered mind the question must be, “What has delayed the implementation of this promise?” May we suggest that the answer lies not in the failure of God to fulfil His promise but rather in man’s failure to comprehend the plan and purpose of God in the face of the creature’s intransigent opposition to God’s overtures of mercy. It ever has been and still is God’s eternal desire to gather together a people unto Himself where peace and joy shall reign from sea to sea and where He can dispense His bounty without stint or measure.

Some 750 years after the Old Testament Prophet made his declaration its fulfilment came to pass. God came in the person of Christ Jesus to reconcile the world unto Himself, a world that had been alienated from Him by wicked works. The Babe of Bethlehem who became the Stranger of Galilee trod this earthly scene and it was on the waters of this very lake Peace in Power was displayed. Mark records this event in the fourth chapter of his Gospel. Christ wearied by the strain and heat of the day lay asleep in the hinder part of a ship. When a storm arose whipping the waters into angry waves the disciples cried out in fear, and the One, in Whom all peace is invested, arose and stilled the troubled deep with the words, “Peace be still.” For a moment Christ’s Deity shone through the veil of humanity. Little did the

awe-struck disciples realize that those very waves that tossed the frail craft about, threatening to engulf its precious cargo, were spoken into existence by the very One Who stilled the tempest.

Jesus Christ came in direct obedience to the will of God and that obedience led Him to the Cross. On a lone gray hill, outside Jerusalem's walls the final chapter of man's redemption was written. Speaking of that momentous event, the Apostle Paul said, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell; And having made peace through the blood of His Cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself" (Col. 1:19-20). The Psalmist epitomized it in these words, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psa. 85:10). With an untimely darkness enshrouding Golgotha's Hill, the Lord of Light and Glory, raised His voice to Heaven in one triumphant utterance, "FINISHED" and the event toward which all of God's purpose pointed reached its culmination as Christ bowed His head and dismissed His spirit. Here indeed was Peace Perfected.

Thus was the story of peace unfolded. God has not failed. Man has. He has completely forgotten or deliberately ignored the opening words of the benediction. "Glory to God." Man's failure to give God the glory has left him mired in the slough of self-reformation which can never bring him peace. Until man returns to God and bows the knee and gives Him the glory there can be no universal peace.

'Ere He left this "vale of teams," the Lord speaking to His own had this to say, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto

you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). With these words ringing in their ears they went forth to witness the sad and seeming tragedy of Calvary. They endured persecution and affliction and some went home to Heaven to claim a martyr's crown. Down the long corridor of time saints of every age and nation have met death with a peace the world knows nothing about. They understood and knew God's peace.

To each and every one who know Christ as Saviour and Lord the gates of peace swing open upon a vista of "green pastures" and "Still waters." He has said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee" (Isa. 26:3). This is Peace Promised. Its author and guarantor is God. May it be ours to lay hold on Him and on His promise.

In closing let us remind our hearts of another benediction that the writer of Hebrews left with those scattered abroad. They were being persecuted from the world without and from those who had once been their leaders in the Jewish faith. This benediction was to encourage them to go forward in the new faith with the full revelation of God's purposes as fulfilled in Christ Jesus. "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Unchanged Amid Change (June-July 1967)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 13 No. 6, June-July 1967.

“We live in a changing world.” This phrase is found frequently on the lips of Christian and non-Christian alike. The fact of change is undeniable. It is an irrefutable phenomena that change moves inexorably forward from generation to generation and from age to age. Its presence as a positive force in the realm of natural science is borne out by every intelligent examination of the things around us and by our visual perception of things as they are. That it also works in the realm of economic, social and religious matters is quite obvious to even the unlearned.

There can be no argument with the fact of change but the conclusions reached and the inferences drawn there from are very much open to question. Not all change is good; nor is it synonymous with progress. The philosophy, “Without change we perish,” accepted without reservation is both misleading and dangerous. To justify a course of action on the sole ground that change is inevitable can have grave consequences. The unequivocal acceptance of this postulate lies at the root of much of the inordinate behaviour that plagues our modern society. In stressing the fallacy of such thinking, it is well to remember that the most apparent evidence of change in the natural realm is erosion and we cannot escape the conclusion that the same is true in the social and spiritual spheres as well.

Every generation has produced its own crop of rebels who chafe under restraint and look upon all social restrictions as a denial of their inalienable rights. They refuse in their own words, “to be shackled to the wheel of conformity.” The history of the human race is filled with stories of men and women who did not hesitate to break the bonds of established custom in order to please their own peculiar whims or satiate their own evil lust. Their justification for their actions, if indeed they sought to justify them, was that they were the vanguard of a change that must surely come to pass. In very truth, were they not blindly groping for something satisfying but never able to attain any real happiness? Only Christ can satisfy.

In view of the prophetic utterance of Scripture, “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13), it is not surprising to find all about us those who challenge moral order and flout every law that would seek to keep human behaviour within the bounds of decency. The advocates of so-called “free-thinking” have increased at an alarming rate, and thanks to the publicity they are given by the press, radio and television we are bombarded on every hand by iconoclasts, each trying to outdo the other in shocking the sensitivity and moral conscience of a tolerant society. Nothing is too intimate, nothing too sacred, to escape their soaring attack. Once the sole field of the self-styled intellectuals, the area of censure has been invaded by the clerics who vie with each other in their reprehensible obloquys. Even the simplest believer can see that their views, if universally accepted would result in a complete breakdown of our social structure and a reversion to unbridled lust and intemperate conduct.

Faced with this, the believer can turn to God's Word and find that though "change and decay" is the order of our time, there are certain things that never change. In Malachi 3:13, we read, "For I am the Lord, I change not." How comforting! How reassuring! He changeth not. The obituary announcing His demise has been written by one purporting to be a minister of the Gospel but this arrogant presumption leaves our God unmoved and unmovable. He remains steadfast, sure and immutable. Not all the winds of chance or change can alter the person of God nor make Him forego His purposes. Whatever the changes in our circumstances, in our hopes and aspirations or in our relationship, the one with the other, our God stands inviolate as to His being and undeviating as to His will. He lives in the eternal present ever ready to meet our every need and to carry us through the frustrations and vexations of life into "abundant pastures" and "beside still waters." Such is our God.

Since the dawn of history, poets, writers and philosophers have sought to know God and to explain Him in terms they can understand. Zophar, the Naamathite raised the question in his discourse with Job. Said he, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job. 11:7). Many and varied have been the answers proposed by theologians and sages, but the Apostle Paul dismisses all their speculation with the terse observation, "the world, by wisdom, knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:2).

"God is Eternity, the sky, the sea;

The consciousness of universal space;

The source of energy and living grace,

Of life, and light; of love and destiny.

God is that deep, ethereal ocean free

Whose billows keep their wide unharried place

Amid the stars that move before His face."

So wrote Albert Durrant Watson. Can human thought fathom the mystery of the essence of God or unravel the hidden secrets of His mind? Me thinks not! Alfred Lord Tennyson perhaps came nearest to the truth when he said:

"Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,

Whom we who have not seen Thy face,

By faith and faith alone embrace,

Believing where we cannot prove."

The inquiring Philip made a request to the Lord Jesus, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8). Christ replied, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (v. 18). To make the infinite comprehensible to the finite, God became man. "God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). All we know or ever will know of God is found in our Lord Jesus Christ Who like the Father changeth not. He is, "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

"I change, He changeth not.

The Christ can never die.

His love, not mine, the resting place;

His truth, not mine, the tie."

Our hope lies, not in the fleeting transient deductions of man or the illusory theories and ideologies he propounds, but in a thrice holy God, “with Whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). Why, then, should we be disturbed by what either the present or the future may bring? “Our times are in His hands.” We could not wish it otherwise, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Not only is God and His Christ stable and sure but His words are durable and ineradicable. Speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, Christ declared, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). “All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20). Rich and abundant are His promises and we need never fear but that every one of them will be fulfilled. There is no room for doubt or uncertainty, where He has spoken. As He has promised, so shall He perform.

The person and purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ has come under most virulent attack in the past few years, but strangely enough even His most ardent detractors have been forced to confess the wisdom of His words. When the pharisees sent officers to Jesus to bring Him to them, they returned empty-handed with this excuse, “Never man spake like this Man” (John 7:46). Here was One who spoke with an authority and finality that brooked no argument. Orators have, by their impassioned eloquence, won over audiences only to have another rhetorician by reasoned judgment refute their arguments and win over their devotees. When, however, Christ spoke, there was none to question. He spoke with a simplicity and directness that silenced His enemies. His response to every situation He

encountered leaves us lost in wonder and awe. Consider the profound wisdom of His words when confronted with the problem of dual allegiance. “Render unto Caesar, the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God, the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21). Did mortal tongue ever proffer such wise advice? Think, too, of the penetrating judgment in His words when faced with the woman taken in adultery. “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). How this silenced His tempters! Surely a greater than Solomon was here. One final word from the Cross, “Finished,” changed the whole course of human history. Even those who scoff at the Bible, and hold up to ridicule the precious truths therein, admit that the words of Jesus Christ are unsurpassed in knowledge, unparalled in wisdom and unequaled in judgment. They are authoritative, veracious and irrefutable. How it should anchor the soul! How it should rejoice our hearts to know that the words He spoke nearly two thousand years ago are eternal and imperishable, and carry the same comfort and consolation they carried when they were spoken. He said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful that promised)” (Heb. 10:23).

While it rejoices our hearts that our God is unchanged amid change, and His Word ever remaineth, Scripture warns us of something else that does not change and that is the human heart. While man has made vast strides forward in the fields of science, medicine and the arts, sad to relate, every attempt he has made to upgrade man, himself, has failed. No amount of education, culture or self-reformation has or can change

his sinful nature. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, about 2500 years ago, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). An honest appraisal of human behaviour over those years only confirms that conclusion. 2 Timothy gives a true, if odious picture of Christendom as it exists today and Revelation 17:1-18 shows us the downward course of man and the awful conditions that will exist just prior to God’s judgment upon a wicked and unrepentant mankind. Truly man’s heart remains unchanged. Sir Winston Churchill in describing the treachery of the Nazis during World War II said, “Never in the long catalogue of human crime has infamy so debased itself.” What an indictment! With the world in the condition it is today, can we say it has improved? In spite of international agencies created to alleviate human suffering and privation among the under-privileged, rapine and pillaging continues to be their constant lot, bringing in its wake disease, famine and death. All the charity and philanthrophy of well-intentioned humanitarians has failed to change the heart of man or solve the problem of evil.

Having failed in their self-chosen task of ministering to the spiritual need of their flocks, many occupying the pulpit today seek to change the rules of a game they cannot win. To them, sin is no longer sin; it is merely a deviation from the normal or a slight aberration. Tarpeian-like they would betray their sacred trust and throw open the gates of the citadel to every heresy and erroneous doctrine their minds can conceive, leaving their congregations floundering in the slough of doubt and despair. Shall we, who know the Lord, quail before such spurious teaching? Paul warns us that we will be

faced with, “spiritual wickedness in high places,” and he exhorts us to put on, “the whole armour of God” and to “stand fast with our loins girded about with truth” (Eph. 6:11-18). Let us respond to this call to faithfulness and go forward in the strength that God supplies, unmoved and undaunted by the evil forces about us, with a single eye, awaiting the coming of the Lord.

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Not only is God unchanged as is His word, but His love to fallen man is an everlasting love. The plan of our redemption was conceived in the heart of God in an Eternity past. Love gave it impulse. It culminated in the death of Christ on Calvary. Love executed it. It will bear its harvest in an Eternity yet to come. Love will reign for ever and ever. The love of God sent Christ to die for us; the righteousness of God demanded His death. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). Who can understand the length or breadth of God’s eternal love? Like shore-less seas His love can know no bounds. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end (uttermost)” (John 13:1). This is a deep that no mind can fathom. Only by an act of inexpressible love and ineffable grace could the righteousness of God be met and our salvation procured. Here is an unchanging love that transcends all human thought and reaches across the vast ocean of time and space to the vilest sinner and brings him unto God, cleansed and made whole. “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor

powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:38-39). Ours is an unchanging God, whose word endureth and whose love will carry us through the deepest tribulation to the “land of fadeless day” where we shall bask in the sunshine of His presence and drink of the fulness of His love for ever and ever, world without end. What assurance! What a prospect!

“He and I together entering

Those bright courts above.

He and I together sharing

All the Father’s love.”

God’s Grand Design (Apr 1968)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 14 No. 4, Apr 1968.

John Robertson

Recently, a colleague of mine gave me a translation of the Four Gospels. In his introduction, the author sets out his reason for undertaking this task, in these words, “The Four Gospels are spiritually supreme because they are great literature,” and continuing in this vein he adds, “If I am right in this conviction, it follows that any translations of the Gospels which neglect their artistic qualities is bound to fail.” Methinks the Apostle John refutes any such fatuous argument when he declares, “But 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” (John 20:31).

There is a view, held by many writers and literary critics, that ideas exist only in virtue of the language in which they are couched and that precision of epithet is essential to meaningful prose. However, it is our conviction that the greatness of the Four Gospels, and indeed of the entire Bible, lies in its purposeful message; and any reader who fails to grasp God’s Grand Design for the human race in this age and in the ages to come, as outlined in its sacred pages, fails completely to understand the Book.

Dr. Rieu is an erudite scholar and well qualified to judge the literary merits of any translation of the Bible and in all fairness to him it should be pointed out that in the same introduction he does say, “God makes a plan which Jesus volunteers to carry out.” Moreover, in a television

appearance with Mr. J. B. Phillips another well-known translator, he was questioned on his work in these words, “Did you not get the feeling the whole material is extraordinarily alive?” Dr. Rieu replied, “I got the deepest feeling I could possibly have expected… it changed me; my work changed me and I came to the conclusion that these words bear the seal of the Son of Man and God; they are the Magna Charta of the human spirit.”

When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, He promised, “I will make of thee a great nation and I will bless thee and make thy name great” (Gen. 12:1). Later, the angelic visitor to Abraham said, “All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” God has never abrogated that promise. Expanding on this theme, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh… aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope… were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:11-13). From eternity it was ever the purpose of God to have a people to honour, worship and obey Him, and for thousands of years it seemed that this purpose was to have its fulfilment in the Children of Israel for had He not said, “This people have I formed for Myself” (Isa. 43: 21). With the coming of Christ, it became clear that God was not so limited. Peter, when called to preach to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, was made aware of this for said he, “Of a truth I perceive God is no respecter of persons; But in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:34-35). Paul adds to this testimony declaring, “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and

of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6).

It was to these same Ephesian believers that Paul wrote expounding at length God's blueprint for the redemption of mankind and His plan for their present eternal good.

Between the time of the founding of the church at Ephesus (Acts 19) and the writing of the Epistle to Ephesians, the leaven of gnosticism had manifested itself in the infant church. This pernicious philosophy held that all matter was evil and therefore a holy and righteous God could not permit any contact between Himself and mankind. This reasoning ruled out the incarnation and redemption through God Emmanuel. Emancipation must come through knowledge, the possession of which could free the initiate from the clutch of matter. It was to combat this malicious teaching that Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus and "to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Paul launches into the task of revealing God's eternal purpose and plan for fallen humanity in bold and unequivocal language. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:3-6). What could be clearer than this forthright statement? What easier to understand?

Every verse of this beautiful letter is pregnant with meaning and rich in revelation. Let us look at God's Grand Design unfolded in five pertinent passages containing the phrase, "In whom."

The first follows immediately after the forceful didactic introduction quoted above. It reads, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace" (v.7). Here the basis on which all our relationship with God stands is pointedly put forward. In this sweeping statement Paul answers the challenge of gnosticism.

The truth of redemption, whereby the price is paid and we, sinners, are freed from the bondage of sin, Satan and death is more fully covered in Ephesians 2:1-10. Salvation is by grace, through faith, and without works. By an act of inexpressible love enacted on Calvary, God made it possible for us to enter His holy presence and stand before Him, cleansed and made righteous through the precious blood of Christ. This and this alone ensures our full acceptance into the family of God.

Antagonism of the human mind to the Cross and its implication is persistent and inveterate. Pursuing the trend of the mind, man seeks some refuge from the implication of guilt inherent in accepting a salvation provided in grace and available through faith alone. Either he removes some vital element from it, e.g. the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, or adds something to it, such as law-keeping or ordinances. This, affirms the Apostle Paul, is to make the Cross of Christ of none effect (1 Cor. 1:17).

Our second passage emphasizes the perfection of this salvation. The truth of the security of the believer is one

that escapes many sincere children of God. But we read, “In whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (1:13). God does not offer something imperfect; nor does its fulfilment depend upon anything we have done or ever can do. “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand,” are the words of Christ, Himself (John 10:28). Shall we give Him the lie?

The child of God is not left to his own resources for he has at his disposal all the power and might of God. “Ye have not because ye ask not,” says James in his Epistle (4:2) and no doubt he had in mind Christ’s parting words to His disciples in relation to prayer (John 16). Failure in our Christian life may be attributed to our lack of prayer. Here in Ephesians we read, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (3:12). The life wholly yielded to the direction of God through the Holy Spirit is one of triumph and victory. It is God’s purpose that it should be so. Galatians 2:20, aptly expresses this, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live, in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Christ’s historic declaration to Peter was, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church” (Matt. 16:18). Peter makes perfectly clear that the rock was Christ Jesus for says he, quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah, “Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded” (1 Pet. 2:6). For nearly two thousand years the Holy Spirit has been calling from this world redeemed souls to form the Church, a spiritual body,

comprising all who through faith in the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ are cleansed from all sin and made fit for the presence of God. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone… In whom also ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:1922). Is this not the fulfilment of God’s promise, “Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him”? (Gen. 18:18). Was this not succinctly expressed by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost? “For the promise is unto you (Jews) and to your children, and to all that are afar off (Gentiles), even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39).

“If in this world only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19). Our hopes and aspirations as children of God are not confined to this world for a greater and brighter prospect lies ahead. This is the promise of Ephesians 1:11, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” Mere words cannot describe the celestial glories that are to be found in the Father’s House; neither can the human intellect comprehend fully the meaning of the promise, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of time He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth, even in Him” (Eph. 1:10), together with His purpose, “That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace

in His kindness towards us through Jesus Christ” (2:7). But this has been God’s plan from the beginning. Only when we get home will the scales of human limitations be removed and we will stand in His glad persence where there is “fulness of joy” and find a place at His right hand where “there are pleasures for evermore.” Christ will be there: it is enough.