

Fatherhood and Sonship

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One serious effect of sin entering the world was that mankind lost the true knowledge of God. Once lost, that highest and best of all knowledge could not be regained by any effort of man's will or intellect. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11: 7), was the question of Zophar, whilst in a previous chapter Job confessed his inability in that direction, saying, "Lo, He goeth by me, and I see Him not: He passeth on also, but I perceive Him not" (Job 9: 11). Since, therefore, we cannot discover God, it is needful that He should make Himself known to us. Revelation becomes a necessity; and the crowning point of that revelation of Himself was touched when in Christ He made Himself known as Father.

It is quite clear that sin having entered, mankind did not lose the knowledge of God all at once. For evidence of this Romans 1: 18-32 may be read. The Apostle Paul here draws a lurid picture of the state of the heathen world. Incidentally it reveals three things:-

(1) That *all*, even the most degraded heathen peoples, once had the knowledge of God. It speaks of "when they knew God" (v. 21).

(2) That not glorifying Him as God they gradually lost all true knowledge of Him. They "became vain in their imaginations," "their foolish heart was darkened," and so they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (v. 23).

(3) That all this process took place because "they did not LIKE to retain God in their knowledge" (v. 28). They were *glad* to forget Him.

This indictment shows that man's departure from God was in the first instance *deliberate*. It then became *debasing* and issued in gross sins that were *disgusting*.

Just when this darkness reached a climax subsequent to the tower of Babel, God commenced to work in the way of revealing Himself. We do not forget, of course, that some knowledge of Himself remained with chosen individuals all through, both before and after the flood, but with the call of Abram the epoch of revelation began. To him at the start the God of glory appeared, and later "when Abram was ninety years old and nine the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17: 1).

The Almighty power of God came out in the birth of Isaac, which was a humanly **impossible** thing; When at the announcement of his birth Sarah laughed incredulously the Lord said, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18: 14). Can a living child be produced from parents as good as dead? Here clearly was involved the supreme test. Can life be brought out of death? It was brought out. Isaac was born. God is the ALMIGHTY.

Four hundred years later God called the nation that sprang from Isaac out of Egypt. In so doing He revealed Himself in a fresh light. To Moses He said, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (Ex. 6: 3). Notice the exact wording here. He did not say, "They did not know My name Jehovah." Abraham knew the name Jehovah, for in Genesis we find him using it. He did not, however, know God by that name; that is, the real meaning and import of the name Jehovah never dawned upon him, inasmuch as the circumstances which demanded such a revelation had not arisen. But now the moment had come for it to be unfolded, and the Almighty One stood forth, pledged in connection with Israel, as the I AM — the self-existent and therefore unchanging One, always true and faithful to His word. This was abundantly verified in Israel's history. At the end of the Old Testament God said, "I am the LORD [i.e. Jehovah]. I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3: 6).

The full revelation of God, however, awaited the coming of the Lord Jesus. The utmost that was possible even for so great a man as Moses was to see "the back parts" of Jehovah (Ex. 33: 23). Certain of the divine attributes were emphasized such as His mercy and long-suffering; the full-orbed revelation of Himself was only possible in the only-begotten Son who was God and became Man. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1: 18).

To Moses it was said, "Thou canst not see *my face*: for there shall no man see Me, and live" (Ex. 33: 20). Yet is it possible for the Christian to say, "God . . . 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). Man can much less look upon God in His essence and uncreated glory than he can calmly fix his gaze upon the sun in noontday splendour, yet the believer today can contemplate all that God is as revealed in Jesus. Not one ray is absent, yet they all shine with a peculiar softness which brings them within the range of creatures such as ourselves. Redemption, of course, was necessary in order that we might stand unabashed before such a revelation. But then, He who was the Revealer was also the Redeemer.

Now the great name which characterizes the revelation of God in Christ is FATHER. When near, or in, the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and uttered the wonderful prayer recorded in John 17, He said, "*Father . . . I have manifested Thy name* unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world" (v. 6). We do well then reverently to enquire: What does the name of Father mean?

To begin with, it clearly means *relationship*. The knowledge of God as Almighty or as Jehovah

did not involve this, which doubtless accounts for the way in which unconverted people use, such a term as "Almighty God" in speaking of Him and instinctively avoid "Father." In their case the relationship does not exist.

Further, it means relationship of *the closest* kind. The correlative terms to Father are "children" and "sons," and both these are used in the New Testament of Christians. The closeness of the relationship is further emphasized by the fact that it is real and vital and not something merely assumed. We are children of God inasmuch as we are *born of God* (John 1: 12, 13; 1 John 3: 9, 10).

But the crowning point in the revelation of God as Father lies in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as incarnate is the *Son*. He was ever "the Son" in the unity of the Godhead, but we refer to the place He took in Manhood here (see Luke 1: 35; Gal. 4: 4). Hence in His advent there was the full setting forth of all that God is as Father in connection with all that He Himself is as Son; and the light in which we know God is as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1: 3).

Much depends upon this, and we urge the reader to ponder it prayerfully until he makes it his own. Our tendency is to connect God's Fatherhood merely with *ourselves*, with the result that we lower it until it becomes to our minds just a matter of the fatherly care that gives us food and raiment and the mercies of this life. All these things are indeed ours from our Father's hand, but the Father's thoughts and the Father's love soar infinitely beyond them.

Connect God's Fatherhood with *Christ the Son* — who is the worthy Object of His love, and in whom a perfect response is given — and at once you have the key that opens the subject in its fulness. That is the standard! There you see the revelation in its perfection!

We are indeed sons of God with "the Spirit of His Son" in our hearts "crying Abba, Father;" but sonship is only ours as the fruit of God's Son being revealed and redemption accomplished (see Gal. 4: 4-6). Only thus was that wonderful message made possible. "I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20: 17).

"Sonship," then, is the word which most fully expresses the nearness and dignity of the place of blessing which is occupied by the saint of today. The word does not actually occur in the Authorized version since the translators preferred to paraphrase it as "the adoption of sons" in Galatians 4: 5, and similarly in other places. The whole passage, Galatians 3: 21 to 4: 7, should be read, when the Apostle's argument will be seen to be that the coming of Christ has inaugurated a new epoch. Before He came the law, with its partial revelation of God, held sway, and believers then were like minors in a family, under a schoolmaster. Having come, and consequently redemption having been accomplished, we are like children come of age, emancipated from the nursery regime and in the full liberty of the Father's house. "Wherefore," says the Apostle, "thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4: 7).

Our place with God is in exact correspondence with the light in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself to us. But both the brightness of the revelation and the standard and pattern of the place, are found in CHRIST.

No teaching is more popular to-day than that of "the universal Fatherhood of God." What truth is there in it?

None at all, as the doctrine is popularly presented. The Scriptures clearly reveal "the universal Creatorship of God," and if this were what is meant when God's Fatherhood is spoken of there would be little to take exception to. But this is not the case, for the theory is that Christ, by assuming

Manhood, has lifted up mankind into this relationship with God, or at least that He brought to light the relationship that existed between God and the human race. In any case it means that Christ is but the finest specimen of the race of Adam and that the race as such is acknowledged and owned of God; whereas the truth is that Christ is the second Man and also the last Adam — the Head of a new race which is of His order or kind — and that those of His race are in relationship with God, and no others.

God is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1: 3) and consequently the Father of those who are in Him.

Again John 1: 12 tells us that "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God;" and those who received Him are described, not as everybody, but as those who "believe on His name" and who are "born of God."

Further, the Jews claimed a kind of "universal Fatherhood of God" in the presence of our Lord, saying, "We have one Father, even God." His answer was, "If God were your Father . . ." A big IF that! He even went further and said, "Ye are of your father the devil . . . When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8: 41-44), thus branding their true origin upon them and the doctrine they represented.

Clear, cutting language this! The universal-Fatherhood-of-God idea is, in fact, a lie fathered by Satan.

What, then, about the universal brotherhood of men?

This idea springs out of the one we have just dealt with, and is a corollary to it. It also has some truth in a creatorial sense inasmuch as God has "made of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17: 20). It is not true in any other sense. The Scriptures draw the most distinct line imaginable between the believer and the man of the world. In his first epistle, 1 John 3 and 1 John 4, the Apostle John has much to say to the Christian as to his brother. And who is the brother in question? Any other child of Adam? No, any other child of God; any one who is "born of God." John, indeed, wields his pen in the clear and cutting style of his great Master and speaks of "the children of the devil" in contrast to "the children of God" (1 John 3: 10).

A universal cousinship, in very attenuated degree, exists amongst men. The only true Christian brotherhood is that which exists amongst Christians as born of God.

We are sometimes said to be the adopted children of God. Is this correct?

It is, thank God, *not* correct. If we were just adopted into God's family there would lie no more vital connection between God and ourselves than exists between the Director and some homeless child when the latter is happily sheltered in the benevolent institutions founded by the late Dr. Barnardo. The believer is born of God and thus there is a most vital connection.

The believer is not only a *child* of God by being born of God, but is also a *son*. This speaks of position and dignity, and therefore in Romans 8: 23 we are said to be "waiting for the adoption [literally — *sonship*], to wit, the redemption of our body," inasmuch as our full entrance upon the dignity which that glorious position entails is yet future, and will take place when our bodies are redeemed at the coming of the Lord.

The word "adoption" occurs in our English Bible, but in every case it is a translation of the Greek word meaning "sonship" or "placing as a son."

Also our excellent Authorized Version does not clearly distinguish between the two terms "son" and "child." A good concordance will show that in John's writings he always speaks of us as *children* of God and not sons; and he it is who so frequently alludes to the fact that we are *born of God*; whilst in Galatians we are always spoken of as "sons."

If God was not fully revealed until Christ came, would that not involve a certain inferiority in Old Testament believers?

In one way it would. Galatians 3: 21 - 4: 7, as we have already remarked, contrasts the position of the Old Testament believer with the New Testament saint. The former — a child under age, "shut up" with no real liberty or access to the Father, but kept under the law as a schoolmaster, and this condition persisted "unto Christ"; that is, till Christ came and accomplished redemption. The latter — a son of full age in the liberty of the Father's home.

It did not, however, mean any inferiority in these Old Testament saints as to what one may call their spiritual calibre. The fact that they could know but a little of God in their day makes the clearness and strength of their faith in what they did know only the more remarkable. They had *great* faith in a *partial* revelation; we, alas! often have *little* faith in a *full* revelation.

Is the revelation of God in Christ something which has taken place once for all?

It is. The revelation is complete and absolute. The Lord Jesus could say, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father" (John 14: 9). He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1: 15). God spoke in time past by the prophets, but now He has spoken to us, not by or *through* anyone, but "*in His Son*" (Heb. 1: 2, R.V.) He Himself without intermediary spoke to us in that character, for the Son was and is God equally with the Father. Hence there is nothing more to be said. God is fully "in the light" (1 John 1: 7) and finality is reached.

This does not mean that there was no further unfolding of God's mind and purpose subsequent to the Lord's own ministry, for He Himself promised that there should be when the Holy Ghost was come (see John 16: 12-15; and this promised ministry was carried out through the apostles and preserved for us in the epistles.

Nor does it mean that the Lord Himself revealed everything as to the Father at once. The way He spoke of the Father to His disciples just before leaving them as recorded in John, John 13 to 16, and in His prayer of John 17, is manifestly far in advance of anything He said in such a discourse as that recorded in Matthew 5 to 7. In the sermon on the mount it was the making known of the Father in heaven who has a loving interest in His people on earth, whereas in John it is the Father in His own love and purposes that is presented to us and the lifting of His disciples' hearts into communion with the Father in His own circumstances. In the sermon on the mount the Father stoops to our humble little cottage on earth. In the sermon in the upper chamber we are lifted to the Father's palace above.

THE BELIEVER'S PRESENT POSITION ON EARTH, AND CHRIST'S PRESENT SERVICE IN HEAVEN

As believers, we are redeemed to God, and a day is coming when redemption in its full power will be applied to our bodies, which will mean our full entrance into the glorious estate which is ours in Christ. Meanwhile for a longer or shorter time we live on in the world. Externally nothing was changed

in the hour of our conversion. That great revolution was internal, yet profoundly effective. It has put us in altogether new relations with God. How has it altered our position here?

Mankind is dominated by a triple alliance of evil — the world, the flesh, and the devil. The first is that organized system of things produced as the fruit of human thought and activity, without God and in opposition to Him.

The second is that corrupt nature, inherent in man as a fallen creature, which finds expression in the world, and is quite at home there.

The last is the mighty personage, the very source and originator of evil itself. The world as an elaborate system has been built up by men, but unknown to them the inspiring genius of its developments has been the devil, and he controls the machine thus created. He is the god and prince of this world (see 2 Cor. 4: 4; John 12: 31).

From all three the death of Christ is our deliverance — a deliverance to be experimentally enjoyed even now in the power of the Spirit of God. As delivered we are set up here in witness *for* our absent Lord, and *against* these evil powers which formerly held us in bondage.

Let us consider a few scriptures that deal with this important part of the truth; and first of all as to the devil.

As the god of this world he has "blinded the minds of them which believe not lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ . . . should shine unto them," but the apostle immediately adds, "God . . . 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: 4-6). The believer is, therefore, one who is no longer kept under the blinding influence of Satan. God has, in his case, broken through the devil's line of dark defence and let the light in.

Consequently ours is the happy privilege of "giving thanks to the Father . . . who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear son" (Col. 1: 12, 13). Notice that this deliverance is stated as *an act of God* and not something realized progressively in our experience. It is as much an act of God as was that great deliverance wrought when God overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea, bringing Israel into the light of the Pillar of His presence, and the further light of the triumphant morning on the eastern banks, when Moses and all Israel sang their thanks to Jehovah out of full hearts. Indeed this latter is the type in the material realm. The former is the far greater reality in the spiritual realm. We have been called "out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2: 9).

We English-speaking Christians but feebly realize the triumphant ring of these words. What must it have been to the Eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8), or the Jailer of Philippi (Acts 16), or Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17), to step out of the dark unfathomed caves of pagan superstition and vice, whether rough and barbaric or polished and intellectual, into the clear sunlight of the Gospel!

Next the world. Here too the line of demarcation is clearly and sharply drawn. The Lord Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. 1: 4). Hence anticipating the cross He prayed for His disciples, saying, "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world" (John 17: 16), and consequently we are enjoined, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2: 15). By the Cross the world is crucified to the believer, and the believer to the world (see Gal. 6: 14).

Lastly, as to the flesh. This too is a condemned thing. It is utterly worthless, inasmuch as no good is found in it (see Rom. 7: 18). "Sin in the flesh" is "condemned" (Rom. 8: 3), and consequently "they

that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5: 24). This last scripture shows that it is not contemplated that any are brought into allegiance to Christ, and so belong to Him, without their having themselves solemnly endorsed and verified the sentence executed against it at the Cross. For the believer, as well as for God, the flesh is a worthless thing and he condemns and repudiates it in its practical workings. This is possible, of course, by reason of the fact that we have a new nature and possess the Spirit of God.

The bare recital of these great facts will prepare us for that which Scripture indicates as our present position on earth. The flesh being held as a crucified thing we are set in sharpest conflict with the powers of darkness (see Eph. 6), and we are severed from the world; so totally are we severed that if we do practically' come into alliance with it we are addressed as "adulterers and adulteresses" and told that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4: 4)

In the light of this scripture we are safe in saying that no true Christian deliberately and of set purpose stands forth as an enemy of God and a friend of the world; but, on the other hand, there is grave danger for every Christian, even the most devoted, lest they should be allured by the world in one of its many fairer forms, and thus, deceived and decoyed, fall under its power. The man of God from Judah, you may remember, had not much difficulty in declining the proffered hand of friendship, extended by Jeroboam, for that hand was stained by idolatry and open rebellion against God. He fell an easy victim though to the wily old prophet of Bethel. His words were smooth and religious. His proffered hand was professedly pious and guided by an angel of Jehovah — "but *he lied* unto *him*." The man of God struck up an alliance and fell (see 1 Kings 13). That is our danger.

What, then, is our business in the world? Why are we here? In order that we may be for Christ just as once He was here for God. His place and position in the world is just he pattern of ours. His own words were: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17: 18). Here He clearly views us as taken out of the world and sent back into it to be for Him.

Did he appear as a great Social Reformer? He did not. On the one occasion when He was appealed to, and urged to interfere because of social and pecuniary inequality, He flatly refused to have anything to do with it (see Luke 12: 13-15). Neither are we left here to be social reformers.

Did He bear witness for God? Indeed He did. He came and spoke to men; He did "among them the works which none other man did;" He bore "witness unto the truth" (John 15: 22, 24, and John 18: 37). We, too, should be witnesses to truth by word and by work.

Was He sharply antagonized and hated? He was: and that to such an extent that the scripture was fulfilled which said, "They hated Me without a cause" (John 15: 25). We too are warned by His lips, "Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15: 19).

Again we say — His position here is ours. We stand out, severed from the world system, and delivered from satanic authority. The powers of darkness are against us. We need the whole armour of God to stand in the defensive attitude against these unseen forces of evil. And if grace is ours to take the offensive in the service of the Lord, we must still remember that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor. 10: 4 and 5). The "strongholds" may be in human hearts; the "imagination" or "reasonings" may be in human heads; but the pride that exalts itself against the knowledge of God is satanic in its origin and we are confronted with that.

If here our subject ended we should be left in a panic-stricken frame of mind, similar to that of the

ten spies who felt themselves but grasshoppers in the presence of the giants. It does not end here, however. Just as Israel, fighting Amalek under Joshua in the valleys below, had Moses interceding effectually on the top of the hill (see Ex. 17: 8-13) so we are left in the conflict with not only the Spirit of God to indwell us but with Christ's continuous present service in heaven to sustain us. The Spirit of God does indeed help our infirmities and make intercession for us according to Romans 8: 26, but verse 34 tells us that the Christ who died and rose again "is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." In the succeeding verses all the adverse forces are surveyed. Not only those which proceed from men, such as persecution and the sword, but also the far more terrible principalities and powers of darkness. Yet in the face of them all the Apostle triumphantly asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" We may sum up his answer by replying, No one! Nothing! Never!

When we come to examine more closely this present service of Christ we find that it falls into two main divisions.

The first is that of His priesthood, which is so largely developed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in keeping with its great theme of approach to God. Our approach is *based on the blood*, but it is by *the Priest* (see Heb. 10: 19-22). In order, however, that He may thus serve, much priestly work of another kind is His. He concerns Himself with the "*infirmities*" of His saints (Heb. 4: 15), and in view of these infirmities He proves Himself "able to succour" (Heb. 2: 18), able to sympathize (see Heb. 4: 15), and "able . . . to save . . . to the uttermost" (Heb. 7: 25).

The second is that of His advocacy. Scripture says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2: 1). As is well-known, the word here translated "Advocate" is translated "Comforter" in John 14, 15, and 16; the fact being that we have the Spirit of God here below as Comforter (or Advocate), and Christ above with the Father as Advocate (or Comforter).

As Advocate He charges Himself with our concerns, and especially acts in relation to our *sins*. He leads us to repentance concerning them, so that we confess them to God according to 1 John 1: 9; He also is there before the Father on our behalf as the One who has accomplished propitiation, and thus, repentance and confession having taken place, the communion that had been disturbed by the sin is re-established.

Bear in mind, then, the following distinctions: —

As Priest He deals with and counteracts the infirmities of His saints that He may lead them in their approach to God: as Advocate, He deals with the sins of His saints.

As Priest, He acts that we may not fall in spite of our infirmities: as Advocate, He lifts us up when fallen.

His Priesthood, in a word, has as its first object, *prevention*. His advocacy has as its object, *cure*.

In Christ's present ministry on high we have thus a perfect provision for our sojourn in weakness below. We are truly in the enemy's land and in the presence of his power; yet we may be maintained in the conflict against our foes, because sustained in our approach and nearness to God by the priestly action of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Should the Christian be silent in the presence of earth's great wrongs? Ought he not to strive to put the world right?

It is hardly conceivable that the Christian should be silent and thus condone the wrongs. The

point, however, is this: — when he opens his mouth against them, what is his object in doing so?

Have Christians been commissioned by God to set the world right? Are they set as kings upon God's holy hill of Zion to dispense judgment and justice in the earth? They are NOT. But a day is coming in which CHRIST will be, according to Psalms 2 and 72, and other scriptures. The putting of the world right will be quickly accomplished by Him at His second coming.

The prophets of old and the apostles of the New Testament were not silent as to the enormity of men's sins. But they made more of men's sins *against God* than of a man's sins against his neighbour, and they charged home those sins on men's consciences with the object of bringing them to repentance and thus into right relations with God.

If as the result of men getting right with God they altered their ways and so abuses were reformed it was indeed well. This, however, is a secondary consequence, and not the primary object of the Christian's witness.

**There can be no harm in the believer doing all he can to improve things, can there?
Many useful societies exist, and he can help on their good work.**

If a believer allows himself to be side-tracked from the main line of God's purpose for us, *there is very GREAT harm indeed.*

Here is an earnest child of God most zealously labouring at work God never allotted to him, a work indeed so utterly beyond his powers that it has been reserved for accomplishment by the mighty Son of God when He comes in glory with ten thousands of His saints. Is there no harm? There is in fact a double harm. First, the waste of energy in the pursuit of what is *not* God's present programme. Secondly, the neglect of what is.

The Church, composed of all God's saints, is on earth as a fortress in the enemy's land, or, to change the figure, is like an embassy in a foreign country. Are the officials of the British Embassy in Paris — from the ambassador downwards — in that city in order to improve French life? Do they conduct an agitation, or join clubs for political reform? They do not. They are there to look after the interests of their own King and country, and to rightly represent those interests in the eyes of the French people. To interfere with French affairs would be really an insult to the French people.

We Christians, being heaven's embassy, are concerned with Christ's interests. We represent Him. We do not meddle with world interests as though we were natives in the world-system, and not foreigners.

**You would surely advocate that as we go through the world we should do all the good
we can?**

Certainly. The crux of the matter lies, however, in the question — and *what good can we do?*

A ship, let us suppose, is grounded on the Goodwin Sands in a gale and the seas are breaking her up. The sailors are already on the masts. The lifeboat draws near. The coxswain skilfully brings it alongside the doomed vessel. See! instead of removing the sailors by rope from the battered ship into the security of the lifeboat, the majority of the lifeboat men spring on to the wreck, hammer in hand, and with a bag full of heavy nails slung on their backs. They attempt with feverish energy to undo the sea's ravages and nail up her shattered planks. The coxswain protests, but they have an answer ready. Are they not doing all the good they can to the imperilled ship?

Possibly they are. But they have forsaken their true calling. They are lifeboat men and not ship's carpenters. Moreover, their puny efforts fail. Their nails are no match for the raging sea. Their work is destroyed, and the sailors, who might have been saved, are drowned.

Need we apply our parable? Do all the good you can: but what GOOD can you do?

What, then is the object of the service and activities of the Christian?

To save people out of the world, as the parable just used would indicate.

We cannot too earnestly press this point. Thousands of dear Christians are busy tinkering with the growing defects of the world-system. The oncoming tide of lawlessness and apostasy will submerge all their efforts, and meanwhile they are diverted from what they could accomplish, under God, viz. *the saving of souls out of the world-system*.

The mischief, however, does not end here. By these well-meant efforts they are themselves entangled to a considerable extent in the world-system; instead of taking their stand with Paul and saying, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6: 14).

When Lot "sat in the gate of Sodom" (Gen. 19: 1), which means that he acted as a magistrate, he, being a righteous man, must have earnestly desired to assist in improving its fearful state of unrighteousness and immorality. He accomplished nothing save the wrecking of his own power to witness against it and the destruction of his family. "He seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law" (v. 14). He himself barely escaped at the last moment, without any power to deliver others. His very wife was lost, and though the angels did extricate his two unmarried daughters, they promptly involved their backslidden father in drunkenness and immorality — the very sins of Sodom itself.

What a story! How great the warning for us! Let us take heed to it.

We naturally shrink from conflict. If we take up our true position is it inevitable?

Quite inevitable. We must make up our minds for it. Having unfolded to His disciples their true place on earth as His witnesses in John 15 and 16, the Lord closed with these words: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33).

Tribulation, then, in one way or another, *we shall have*. We shall also have the mighty power of the risen Lord on our side. "All power," said He, "is given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore . . . and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28: 18-20).

If we deviate from His path, if we change His programme and ally ourselves with the world, can we expect to realize His power? No. The more truly we are obedient to His word and way the more that power will be at our disposal. He wields "ALL power," and that in both spheres: *heaven*, the seat of those evil powers which are against us; and *earth*, where they operate and where we are.

In Ephesians 6: 12 the devil and his hosts are called "the rulers of the darkness of this world" — the Greek word for ruler being *kosmokrator*, or literally, "world-ruler"; i.e. they are the rulers of this *kosmos* — this ordered world system. But in 2 Corinthians 6: 18 God speaks of Himself as "the Almighty," the Greek word being *Pantokrator*, i.e. the ruler of the "*all-things*" — the "universe" — and not merely this little "*kosmos*" in which we move and suffer.

Do we tremble in the presence of the mighty invisible rulers of the *kosmos*? Above them towers the Almighty — the Ruler of the *universe*. He is for us. The keys of His power are in the hands of

Jesus. We may well be of good cheer.

How best may a Christian keep himself unspotted from the world?

By keeping much in touch with the Lord in heaven. The negative is secured in the strength of the positive. The greater includes the less.

The Christian is like a diver. He finds himself in an element utterly foreign to him. Why does a man don a diving dress if he wishes to spend half an hour at the bottom of the sea? Because he knows two things are necessary. Negatively the water must be kept out. Positively the air must be let in. Therefore he encases himself in an air-tight garment and sees to it that he has uninterrupted communication with the boundless expanse of air above. But if air-tight then necessarily watertight. In securing the positive air supply the water is necessarily excluded.

If some one points out that after all the diver cannot keep up his own air supplies but is absolutely dependent upon a helper faithfully pumping down the air from above, we reply by affirming that this but increases the applicability of the illustration. There is, thank God, the ONE at the top, both Advocate and Priest, and His faithful services never fail.

But, then, like a diver, we are in the death-element of this world but for a time, and our business is not the cleaning up of the sea or its bottom but the extrication from its depths of the pearls that our Master values.