

Rationalism

1 Cor. 2: 6-16.

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It is not my business at this or any time to weaken the place of reason as given of God to man. It is an instrument fine, active, admirable, in its own sphere. Rationalism is the abuse of reason, by no means necessarily its result. Rationalism is reason intruding into the sphere of God and His revelation, so as in effect, if not openly, to deny both. It is this that I shall seek to combat, and this above all, not so much by exposing, as might be easily done, the folly of its course, and the danger of its issues, but as much as possible by the presentation of the truth. Now Rationalism does not pretend to the truth; on the contrary its constant aim is to render the acquisition of truth an uncertain thing. It would thus plunge man back again into that very darkness from which the revelation of God was given to bring him out.

The apostle, in the passage just now read, touches on the root of this snare for the spirit of man; and the same principle, it is needless to say, is found almost everywhere in Scripture. The very fact of there being a Bible is of itself the witness against man's self-assertion, for the Bible throughout assumes that it is the word of God, — not merely that there is an element of God in its pages, which reason has to discover and separate from the human elements that surround it. It is not so that God teaches or intimates or allows in any part of His word.

Happily too we stand at such an epoch in the revelation of God to man that we can bring in what all but an open infidel must acknowledge to be a most decisive authority. I am not now alluding to the assumptions of men, whoever they may be. I allude to the holiest and humblest of those born of woman, — to One who was man as truly as ever there was one, but to One who counted it not robbery to be equal with God. The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ ought at least to be definitive; and He, the Lord, has spoken not once only, for whenever He employs the word of God at all He makes it the ultimate authority from which there is no appeal. He guards it so fully as to exclude the notion that there might be that in the word of God which betrayed the infirmity of the earthen vessels His grace employed. Though man wrote, it is never styled the word of man, but God's word: yet He used human instruments; but these, the instruments, were so inspired of God as to display and to preserve their own distinctive features, whilst they perfectly furnished God's truth and only this. Such was in part the wisdom of God in inspiration. It did not set aside man, but it brought in God, and this with invariable perfectness: to bring Him in partially would have been to introduce the old element of difficulty and uncertainty.

That such is the fact cannot be denied by any soul that receives the words of the Lord Jesus as they are given by His disciples; and it is quite certain that He always speaks as one who gives us the words of God, and that He promised His followers the power of the Holy Ghost in order that they should communicate the word of God, one of these chief followers, no doubt ignorant of Jesus in the days of His flesh, nevertheless as to labours not only in word but in deed not a whit behind the chiefest, being the great apostle Paul. (John 3: 34, John 7: 16, John 14: 26; 1 Cor. 2: 13; 2 Tim. 3; 2 Peter 3: 15, 16.)

Let us for a moment consider the gravity of this fact. I cannot allow you to take the ground of owning how good, how lowly, how perfect was Jesus, and then to cavil at His words. I know that Rationalism does so. May I be permitted to say that it exposes its folly in so doing? There is nothing more offensive than to talk in a patronizing way of the Lord Jesus, — to own the unsullied integrity of the Saviour, and at the same time to deny the inevitable conclusion which follows from His words and

from His ways. I am aware that it is the fashion of some to insinuate that the Lord Jesus was not above the prejudices of His day — that He shared in the notions of the Jews. Can those who say so believe that He was and is God? Has God prejudices? Does He not move above the thoughts of the day of man on the earth? Now the Lord Jesus has committed Himself throughout the whole course of His ministry to the most simple, distinct, reiterated utterances on a subject which yields to no other in vital moment, — which concerns you, — which concerns each child of man, — which does not concern the believer only but the unbeliever, — for which every soul must give account to God. Impossible therefore to find anything that touches one more practically, more immediately, or more solemnly.

All through we have the Lord Jesus, first in a general way, next also in the smallest detail, in joy, in sorrow, in what concerned others, in what concerned Himself, in life, in death itself, at all times and under all circumstances, showing us His estimate — God's estimate — of the Scripture, the written word of God. And this came out in a remarkable way, and at a time when even those who freely handle Scripture, and in anything but a becoming spirit, must acknowledge it to be decisive; for there are those who would insinuate that our Lord Jesus "in the days of His flesh" was not above the possibility of being affected by the passing opinions of the age.

But will they say so of Him risen from the dead? Is it come to this, that resurrection itself does not deliver — nay, not even Jesus — from that which belongs to a world where sense and the workings of mind, and tradition may no doubt cast their chequering influences on man's mind and expression? I again ask, Is it so in the resurrection state for any? Assuredly we have the Lord risen from the dead; we have His words; we have one of the sweetest and most deeply interesting scenes of converse between the Lord and those who loved Him, when tried immensely by His death. Why? They understood not the Scriptures. And the Lord meets them where they were. What is the weapon that He uses? He, if any one, might surely have spoken out of His own unfathomable depths of mind, — might have opened those rich and mighty streams of divine truth that could and would have burst from His heart to roll away the difficulties of those that clung to Him, cast down by the very cross wherein He was accomplishing their redemption. But no, our Lord takes up the Scriptures — the plain written word of God.

He begins with Moses; He quotes the Psalms; He points to the prophets — the well known threefold division of the Old Testament. I refer to this, because it proves in the most decisive way that the difficulties of speculation, on which so many have stranded are in fact their prejudices — that they are the passing clouds of this day, not the truth of God. It is false, yea blasphemous, that the Lord, the eternal Creator, yielded to the prejudices of *His* day, but true that the men who thus object are carried away by the irreverent thoughts of *their* day. He does indeed stamp with His own divine authority the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. He gives it to us just as it was then known among the Jews.

Undoubtedly too the Jews had passed through deep trials and great changes at that time. Then, if ever, the Old Testament Scriptures must have suffered somewhat from transmission. Impossible, save by the most immediate care of God, that the transcription of the Hebrew Scriptures should have quite escaped damage during such a fearful crisis as Israel had experienced. Up to this date, you must remember, they had been as a whole translated into but one language besides the original Hebrew. For although obviously the diffusion of God's word into a number of different tongues may act in each to admit of the mixture of man's infirmity in the translation, nevertheless the comparison of these different tongues tells just in a contrary way. The result is that, where these various versions made at different times by so many distinct parties agree, his must be a singularly constituted mind which can get rid of the force derived from such united testimony. Now, at this very time, when our Lord employed Moses

and the Psalms and the prophets as witnesses, there was not nor could be that wide-spread testimony which is derived from the Scriptures being diffused all over the world; it was after much had occurred calculated to ruffle the surface of the word of God, but before there was the counteracting power of one translation checking another in detail, yet in the mass conspiring to guard the revealed truth of God.

Neither is this subject to be considered simply in a broad point of view, but in practical application. For example, take our Lord in either His ordinary ways or the most extraordinary passages of His life. It is always the same weapon He uses. Regarded with Satan, in the scene of the temptation in the wilderness, the word of God is the one means of repelling him; and even Satan did not venture at that day on the expedient of the present — the insinuation that the divine authority of the Scripture is compromised by errors in copying, by the difficulties of preserving it intact, or the like. There was a plain issue between the enemy and the Saviour; but all depended on obedience, on meeting him by constant faith in the word of God. Then again, in the course of His ministry as of His daily walk, the continual reference is to the Scripture as the arbiter of every doubt or controversy that could be raised — the true, the divine, and the only solution of every enigma in this dark world.

I have referred to these applications of a practical kind, in the first instance, but we may take the general principle into consideration for a few moments, in order to show how admirably revelation meets the wants of man and the glory of God.

God did not make man in the condition in which he is now; He did not throw the world into its moral confusion, not to speak of its physical misery. He that can conceive a divine being to have made man as he is, and the world as it is, must have the notion of a demon, an Ahriman, instead of the true God. That infinite power should create man to be the victim of such sorrow, to have his heart distracted with varied, intense, and ceaseless misery — to have, according to the word of God itself, evil inbred in his very nature (a doctrine enforced by the facts of every day), he that could conceive God to have so made man in such a world has the least worthy notion of God that even Rationalism could conceive. The word of God alone supplies the key, and explains this otherwise inscrutable riddle. According to that word He made man upright; the world and every creature in it He formed good; but man departed from God, and lost Him morally. No wonder, if foundations are out of course — God left and man fallen through self-exalting rebellion, that there should be misery; for the only possible spring of happiness is in the communion of God with His creatures. Sin necessarily destroys it; and man having lost Him becomes a prey to all the evil that the enemy of God can bring into the world, more deeply and if possible irreparably, to sever man from God. This is the account of the Scriptures, and there is none other that can compete with it or explain all, so as either to justify God or to clear up the state of man. To make God Himself the author of man's moral evil is heinous wickedness, and man's conscience knows it, even when he might wish it to excuse himself. Here then at the outset the immense and singular value of God's word comes in; and upon this too a remark of general import may be seasonable.

I say "God's word," — not at first "Scripture," but God's *word*; for His word was spoken before it was written. Then as ever the word of God became the sole link with God of man departed from Him. Sin had broken the relationship between the Creator and the creature. The word of God meets man even so through the revelation of another; for man had no sooner fallen into sin than God appeared upon the scene, and pledged, not Himself as such, but in the most tender way the Seed of the woman as the conqueror of him that had brought in the evil — the bruiser of the serpent's head. That word of God became the resource, if not yet the resting-place, of faith. It might have other words added in due time; but that first pledge of grace was enough for faith to receive, and find in it the spring of a new nature by looking to the Seed of the woman — the Lord Jesus Christ. The word of God is revealed before

there can and in order that there may be a blessing for man — a blessing for man fallen from God.

At that time the circumstances wherewith to prove divine wisdom and goodness were unlike what we know as our own. The length of man's life on the earth was enormous. It did not reach, it is true, that space to which man is yet destined even on earth. Man will never arrive at his proper and full measure here below, till the Second Man comes to take the world under His government. Complete blessing for man in the world is reserved for the woman's Seed — for Jesus. Still, the life of man was only short of the due period of its ultimate display (though even then dissolution may not be). It never reached a thousand years, — all but a thousand years, we may say in general terms, but never so much. This will be the common term for man ere long; but it is reserved not for his witty inventions — for no panacea that he will discover; it will be the honour of God for Jesus, and for Him even with man here below. At that day we can well understand therefore how fitly the word of God was not yet committed to writing; but in due time, when man's age was shortened, and it was no longer individuals with whom God had suited dealings in grace, but when a people was called out, we see the perfect wisdom of God in then committing His word to writing.

This as a whole was called the law, contained in its great foundation in the Old Testament, — of course generally, but more particularly in the five books of Moses — not without a most remarkable companion, the book of Job, the witness of what God is to a man, to one outside, and not merely to a Jew. And, wonderful to say, the Jew, ignorant of this priceless and peculiar treasure, is nevertheless the very channel to which we are indebted for its transmission to us. He does not see that his narrowness is rebuked by it; he does not perceive how God's mercy to the stranger is assumed and indeed asserted in it; he does not conclude that He who was the God of Israel is the God who had compassion for man in his need and wretchedness, the sport of Satan's power, but always under the mighty hand of God, who accomplishes His own sifting and gracious purpose — a purpose decided on before Satan tempts — a purpose which Satan only consummates in attempting to hinder, corrupt, and destroy.

Moses is followed by a multitude of other testimonies in due time. It is of this collection of writings called the Scripture that our Lord speaks, and it was from this that He borrowed from time to time as occasion called for it. But, when or for whatsoever end cited, even He constantly used it as decisive authority. Thus we have the principle laid down in the question with the Jew which the fifth chapter of John's gospel presents to us. There Christ justifies the judgment which is coming by the weight and variety of the evidence addressed to their conscience. There was first the Baptist whom the Jews acknowledged for a prophet. There was next a greater witness in the works that Jesus did — His miracles — never before approached in magnitude or in character; for the works of Jesus had a speciality in their import, and not merely in their grandeur. Then again the Father Himself bore witness of Jesus up to that time. But the Lord reserves for the last place, and therefore the greatest of all morally — what? His words? Nay, but the writings — of whom? Of the very man who, if this century is to be listened to, has written none of these books called by his name — at most but scanty legends made up many centuries after into that which is styled the law of Moses. Not such is the language of the Lord of glory. HE has commended, used, and reasoned on the books of Moses as in point of authority possessed of a character superior to any words that could be spoken. This is a point of capital importance. He censures the Jews for slighting rather than believing Moses, and decides that, if they did not believe the writings of Moses, it was in vain to expect their believing His words. This does not at all imply that the writings of Moses in themselves were more simply, or thoroughly, or characteristically divine than the words of Jesus: God forbid such a thought! But it is Jesus Himself who sets the writings of Moses, as a medium of authority, in a place which no spoken words could have. Who can deny that this is the doctrine of John 5? Can any man bring any other conclusion in

fairness from it ?

The words are plain: and here is another point to which I may address myself for a moment. Men talk about the "obscurity" of Scripture. It is not for me to doubt that Scripture must be profound; it cannot be that that which is the revelation of God should not be incomparably above man. But is it therefore obscure? Certainly not in the sense of that vague and dark uncertainty from which men suffer who are conscious of their own weakness. I can understand a person with a dense cloud of words, just because he has little matter. I can understand one that, perhaps without even intending it, thus involves himself, just because his thought is anything but clear; but the reverse is true as to Scripture. Not only did God see all things as they really are, but He would convey the truth (for this was the object of revelation) in the manner most suited to man, and nevertheless by the instruments whom it best suited His glory to use at one time, whether in the Old Testament or in the New. This He has done. He has not in any way shut out the style, the manner, the heart, the character of each man inspired to write. All these things are impressed upon the Scriptures. Particular authors have their own way and tone. This is one of the great beauties of revelation — the vast variety of those that were employed. But then the main distinguishing feature which Rationalism denies is, that it is the word of God — the chosen, the appropriate, the specific name of Scripture.

On the other hand I grant you that there are those who would apply the term "Word of God" exclusively to Jesus. It is true that Jesus is the Word of God. Thus the link between Jesus and the Scripture is immensely close and characteristic. I make this remark because, as is so often found, these oppositions will be proved to have a link which reconciles them. It is true on its own warrant that Scripture is called the word of God; it is true that Jesus is called the Word of God; but it is true that Scripture is the word of God emphatically, because God has continually before Him Jesus as the object of that written word. He is the personal Word of God from all eternity; Scripture is the written word of God in time, but then having its link of connection in this — that the thread, so to speak, which unites all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is the reference of the Holy Ghost directly or indirectly to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Now why is this? For a reason of the deepest import; and, as being of a general character, we may glance at it for a moment. Jesus is THE TRUTH. The truth is to be found nowhere else. You may find other things, but *the truth* is in Him, and severed from Him it is nowhere else. It is remarkable that Scripture never calls the Father the truth, nor ever uses an expression of which Rationalism is exceedingly fond — that God is the truth. I grant that not a few divines say so too. They are not aware that they are rationalizing when they thus speak. No doubt they mean nothing wrong; but very surely they *are* wrong. Scripture is right, and nothing but Scripture is divinely authoritative. How comes it then that Scripture calls Jesus the truth ? and why is it that neither God nor the Father is ever said to be the truth? The reason is this: God could not be said to be the truth because "the truth" means the expression of what a person or thing, is — the revelation of what it really is. The statement which reveals another fully and truly is the truth. Consequently God, being the self-subsisting One who alone can say I AM, has been pleased to reveal Himself, not in the written word only, but in and by One who is God and became man, and thus alone could be the expression of Himself to man. The truth means the *expression* of what God is, not merely the being of God. Hence the blessedness of revelation by the personal Word, the Son who when none saw God at any time declared Him the Father. Christ is called therefore in Scripture "the image of the invisible God."

Do you know why it is that rationalists lean to and employ the expression that God is the truth, while they shrink back from the declaration of Scripture that Christ is the truth? Because they assume the ability to know God directly and immediately themselves, — because they instinctively if not

formally exclude a mediator. The system maintains that man is competent to search out God without another, without a revelation, without a personal expression of Him. Such is its fatal vice. It may not be carried out to the same extent in all: piety, reverence, tradition may arrest its full conclusions. But if Rationalism be regarded in its principle, and consistently carried out to its last logical results, there is the absolute exclusion of the truth as revealed in the person of Christ. It is the assertion either of man's ability to know God without any means except his own mind, or it sinks into sheer despair. Thus when carried out it always tends either towards the Pantheistic idea of man being a part of God, or to the atheism that denies the God he cannot thus know. Such is the philosophy of the day in various forms.

But the truth cuts up the principle by the roots. Christ is the only One who objectively presents the truth — that truth which was revealed in the words of Scripture; for here was just the difficulty. The creature, as such, cannot of himself know God. It is impossible for one that has merely a relative being to know the absolute. There is necessarily an infinite distance between God the Creator as such and the creature as such; still more, when the opposition of sin enters the account, and makes it not merely a difference in nature, but a moral gulf which separates. And how then is this immeasurable gap between God and the creature, severed withal by sin, to be met? How is the vast distance to be filled up? By One who can come down from God to man, — by One who, deigning to humble Himself in love, does not merely bring Godhead into contact with humanity, but comes down to be a man in the midst of men. In this is seen what orthodoxy most justly insists on (and it cannot be too much insisted on), — the grand fundamental truth which lies at the bottom of all truth from God and of all hope for man, — that the same blessed person is as truly God as man, as truly man as God. For on one side we have One who is in Himself absolute (He is God); on the other side none the less does He come down into relationship with man (He is man), — One who, if He were not man, could not make God known to man, but One who, if He had only remained God, could not have bridged the space between God and man. But becoming man without ceasing to be God, and uniting God and man in the same person, He is just the one to give us the truth as it could not be otherwise known. The Father remains in His own unapproachable Godhead; He does not become relative. It is the Son, the man Christ Jesus, who becomes the Mediator between God and man.

But then this is not the only want of man; because the heart of man still rebels, and no matter what the love, the goodness, and the truth which God reveals in Christ, no matter what the need, the misery, the sense of guilt in man; neither the grace that is on the one side, nor the abject evil and wretchedness on the other, of themselves can bring men to God; — in truth, if this were all, they fail to overcome the resistance that the carnal mind makes to God. And how then is this difficulty vanquished? By another great fact in the divine nature, clearly set forth in the word of God. Not only is there One who is the truth objectively, even Jesus, but there is One who has the power of bringing the truth in grace into the heart of man, in virtue of God's counsels, and of Christ's redemption, communicating a wholly new nature. Who, what, is He? The Spirit. Hence it is said in 1 John 5: 6, that the Spirit is the truth. It is said of the Holy Ghost no less than of the Son — of the Son because He brings the truth in His own person; of the Spirit because He makes that truth my own. The Spirit is the immediate link by bringing the written word and mixing it with faith in those who hear it. Such is the way in which God settles the matter, and there is nothing that shows divine wisdom and grace in a manner more blessedly distinct. Let me ask too, who can complain of lack of clearness even when we listen to the most abstract truth? It would be hard to find any communications made with greater simplicity throughout the compass of the revealed word of God. Yet here we are touching on the highest truth — the very nature of God Himself; here we are touching on the deepest wants of man: nevertheless what can be plainer?

It is well to state another fact. The reason why the word of God is not understood by man is not from any obscurity in the word, but from the *will* — the alienated condition of man's own nature as departed from God. The truth is that the word of God is too plain for him. There is the real fault, if man only realized what the true difficulty is, — and you will find it true continually. I grant you this: there are cases where an honest doubt exhibits more working of conscience than a mere traditional faith. A man who merely accepts things generally received because they are so believes man, not God, and under pressure will give all up. He got what he calls his faith easily, and the day hastens when he will part with it easily: it has never sunk down — never been planted of God in his soul. When you are in earnest about a thing, you do not so readily believe what is said. If you don't care the least about it, you may believe anything, and you may deny anything. Easy going and otiose faith is mere indifference.

A person tells you a story: well, you feel no particular interest in it, and you answer, "I suppose so;" you are not in a position to confront the informant with a counterproof, even if it seem suspicious. You let it pass. It may be so. What does this prove? Simply that your heart is not concerned in the matter. But a person tells you that a large fortune was left you a month ago in France, and at once you turn round. Why so? Because you are interested in the thing. You say, No, you cannot believe it is so; you have no relatives there; and you demand full proof. In this you are interested, though the effect of the interest is that you seem obliged to doubt the tale. You would like it to be true, but still you have serious difficulties. It is just so when persons are interested in the testimony of the word of God. Indeed it is so when the Spirit of God has so far met the heart's indisposition to receive the blessing of God that it really desires what scripture says to be true. Then men enquire, believe with the heart, and are saved.

But the real ground why man fights against the word of God is because it slights and judges man as he is, laying bare all his faults. There is nothing that man likes so little as his own exposure; there is nothing he will fight more keenly for than to show he is not in the wrong. I grant you that when a man is abandoned to all that is evil, — when utterly unjust, he knows not even shame, and may allow anything to be said without feeling about it; but I am now supposing men in their ordinary state, when the last thing a man will honestly allow is that he is quite wrong.

As a whole Scripture necessarily directs itself to this, — yea, the word of God before it was written, — for there never was a word of God bearing on man's estate, since the fall, without that effect. There was a word given of old meant to be the rule of conduct in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; they might eat anything else; but this was forbidden. They eat, and fell; but there never was any word revealed to be the resting-place of faith except what prostrates the first man and exalts the Second, thus laying bare man as he is fallen from God, but bringing in the Second Man, the Lord Jesus, as the only deliverer.

This then is the great difficulty for man in Scripture. Every part of it tends to a moral end. It is not merely a book that contains truth, but it has this moral character, dealing with the nature of man, and letting in the will of God. All Scripture speaks thus. There is not a single portion of Scripture which has not moral elements in it. If God were only giving a genealogy, He does not separate the truth even from what looks to be a list of dry names. Take, for instance, the first chapter of Matthew. You know, I dare say, that rationalists will have it that Matthew could not even count fourteen right; and as for Scripture facts, according to their sage conclusion, the apostolic writer did not know as much as a Sunday scholar. So much for the discernment and wisdom of men. Do you think they believe it? Perhaps so; I will not dispute that matter; but at any rate, whether they are satisfied with their own statements or not, I must affirm that this chapter — and I am speaking now of its list of names, which is the driest part of it, as men would say — bears the stamp of God upon it as truly, though not so evidently, as John 17. It is clothed with a deep divine purpose in every particular. Who but God would have thought if it were

only of his beginning with David and Abraham, and bringing these two capital points together from the very first? Why not trace up to Adam, like Luke? No; David and Abraham alone were right in Matthew. If Luke had either begun with Abraham and David or ended with them, there would have been no such perfection in the Spirit's design by him as there is now.

For what am I using these facts? To show that all Scripture is instinct with a purpose of the deepest wisdom, and moral power, and divine grace. Whose purpose was it? Am I contending that Matthew knew all this? Perhaps he did not. It is nothing at all to our present question whether he did or did not. The great thing for you and for me is this, that it was *God's* purpose, — that it was a wisdom above Matthew's; and yet it is such that, though extant from the first in the word of God, how many of us have passed it over, how few have even noticed it! Why? Because we so little enter into His hidden wisdom. But there it is; and it is just the fact as to Scripture, that not the most enlightened teacher or glowing preacher who ever spoke put a single beauty into it; he only helps you to see the beauty that is there. This serves to show by the way that true ministry is in no way weakened by the assertion of the divine authority of Scripture. Neither again is the authority of the church weakened by it.

On the contrary, it is Scripture which gives the church authority; as it is Scripture which furnishes the great store of materials for ministry. At the same time here is the essential difference: ministry is not an ultimate authority in itself. In fact it is not properly authority: the idea of ministry is serving, even if it were the exercise of the gift of rule. For I grant that there are among those that minister such as rule. My advice to those that rule, if I may be allowed to offer any, is to do that work with firmness, however lowly, as much as anything else. Rule is no less divine a gift for ministry than preaching and teaching. It is well, no doubt, to take care that they are rulers of the Lord's giving before they enter on that grave task. But, however -this may be, what I want to show is, that Scripture, so far from interfering with or weakening whatever is good and of God, not only furnishes the finest and most abundant material for the use of those who are serving the Lord, but has another use yet more distinctive — indeed unique. Scripture is not merely a source of truth, an infinitely richer source than all other mines of spiritual lore in the world put together, but it gives you pure truth without error on every subject of which it treats. Not that it talks the science of the nineteenth century: and there is just the wisdom of God. Neither does it talk the science of the first century, or of any other. It stands alone with a wholly different origin, nature, character, and aim. Confessedly the language of science has often changed; it has often had to mend, just because it is imperfect, as it is human. But there is the word of God, which, while it condescends to the humblest, never changes for the highest. It is the expression of the unchangeable One; it is the permanent communication of truth, and for all souls, places, and times. There is nothing similar nor even second to it.

But I wish also to show that, while the church, as already referred to, is not and could not be the truth, any more than ministry, Scripture is the truth, as being not only its best source, but its only standard. Such is the blessedness of the Scripture God has given. It is the standard by which we can test every statement that is made by man. There, above all, it writes its own divine character. The written word is the truth even as Christ is. If Christ were not the truth, scripture would not be so in the same way in which it is. Christ personally — the written word as the standard of truth — is the test for everything that can be said or written now, in the hands of all that fear the Lord, whether it be those that minister or those that are ministered to. What an invaluable prize to have the perfect standard of truth, and not only a means of knowledge! This means we may have from one another. A man, woman, child, a tract even, it has been remarked, might be the medium of communicating the truth; but none of these is the standard: only the word of God is. Scripture has this character, and this because throughout Christ is its constant object, directly or indirectly, — Christ who is the truth.

Thus it does not matter what you are looking at, test it at once by Christ. Supposing, for instance, I want to know who and what God is, — how is it to be learned? I might search out and weigh all the works that point to a divine mind and hand; but where is the man to gather thence a full, clear, adequate conception of what God is? I answer, look at Christ. What Christ said was the word of God; what Christ showed was the way of God; what Christ wrought was the work of God. I cannot know God Himself except so far as I behold Him in Christ. As the Lord Himself said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It was not that the Son was in any personal sense the Father, but assuredly He was the only one competent to reveal the Father. No angel would suffice. An angel could only show me a creature. A divine person, the Son, the image of the invisible God, — He lets me know what God is.

Again, supposing I make a totally different inquiry — one which might seem so opposed as to be incompatible with the display of what God is in the same person of Christ — I want to get a true conception of man: where am I to look for it? At you, or myself, or any other? No; I grant you that we are men. But oh! it were sorrowful to think that there was no brighter ideal of humanity, sorrowful to think there had never been any exemplar better than ourselves. But there was, there is. Where? Adam? No; he was man, the first man, it is true; but what I see in Adam is a man that fell, a man that gave up God for an apple. Ah! it is a poor picture of man. I see God acting there for the trial of man's responsibility; but there is nothing that gives me the true elevation of man in Adam. Let me look at Christ. Ah! there is man. There I find that which my heart loves; there is that which gives me the true nobility and perfection of man; there I can rest.

We might go through all other objects; for it does not matter what is chosen. Thus, suppose I want to know the wickedness of man — surely we cannot find this in Christ! No; but I must bring in Christ none the less to find its full manifestation in others. Looking at man at any time, no doubt we find evil in abundance. I see man wicked when he fell in Paradise, and no less wicked when he killed his brother outside it; I see man in all corruption and violence till the Lord swept him away; I see man setting up demons and idols before the law, and I see him basely rebellious under the law; but where shall I find man as he is, where at his worst? Not till I see perfect goodness come into the world in the person of Christ. It is always Christ who is the test of every object. He is the truth. Never do we get the truth of anything until we compare it with Christ; and, on the other hand, if we honestly apply Christ, there we have the truth as it never can be found otherwise. All else is but piecemeal. A partial view of man is given at this time, and a partial view at that; but bring in Christ and then man appears as he really is. Christ goes not merely among poor men, but among the rich; not only before the profane, but before religious people, — Pharisees, Sadducees, Pilate, Herod, or anybody. Thus every soul is put to the test, for Christ is the truth, and Christ only.

Just in the same way must I seek, supposing I want to gain a just idea of what heaven will be. What then is it? A place of gold and precious stones? Nothing of the sort. I know that these are employed as figures of the Bride or the glorified church in the Apocalypse; but it is to me certain that a man who has merely this as his conception of heaven is more a Mahometan than a Christian. All believers ought to know very well that such is not the meaning of the word of God; and God Himself, therefore, gives us divine landmarks that we may not be ignorant when He is using Scripture figuratively, and when He is using it symbolically. There is no such difficulty as unbelief affects to find. Men do the same thing in principle almost every day, as we meet with in the language of Scripture. Supposing you tell me that you "flew" down the street, we do not suppose that you borrowed wings, yet we know very well what you mean; you are only using a very intelligible and expressive figure. Supposing you tell me that another "crept" down the street, are we to suppose that he went on all fours? Thus, no matter what the figure that is used, there are landmarks by which one may learn

whether the thing, is intended in its literal import, or whether it is a strikingly figurative method of stating what is meant. This makes no difficulty at all. It is only uncommonly stupid or uncommonly wilful people who are stumbled by such expressions. If the Bible be accepted as God's word, He must look for docility, not wilfulness, in those who profess to believe in Him; but He takes account of everybody — the poorest and the lowest; and there is nothing that delights one more in Scripture than the manner in which God has respect even to the child or the feeblest soul imaginable. And Christ is the One who brings it all out. Thus I know what heaven is, because it is the place where God is displaying His own excellence by crowning the man that was rejected from and by the world. It is the place where Christ is glorified, where He is accepted in love, light, and glory, where God Himself puts honour on His Son.

But further, as we learn from Christ what are the elements of heaven, by the very same application of Him, one may know why and how it is that the simplest soul who receives the gospel will be in the nearest circle round the Son of God in the heavens. And another thing is discovered which otherwise might perplex some — how it is that the amiable, the moral, the benevolent, might nevertheless be lost, instead of going to heaven. How many do not understand this!*

* I am certainly not disposed to defend the system laid down by Sir W. Hamilton and defended by the present Dean of St. Paul's, believing that they have laid themselves open to the not unsuccessful attacks even of men hostile to revealed truth. Yet who that fears God can but shudder at the language of the critic, bolder than man should be in talking of God as set forth in the very imperfect words of those he censures? "If (says Mr. J. S. Mill, in his Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy, 2nd edition, pp. 102, 103) instead of the 'glad tidings,' that there exists a being in whom all the excellencies which the highest human mind can conceive, exist in a degree inconceivable to us, I am informed that the world is ruled by a being whose attributes are infinite, but what they are we cannot learn, nor what are the principles of his government, except that 'the highest human morality which we are capable of conceiving' does not sanction them: convince me of it, and I will bear my fate as I may. But when I am told that I must believe this, and at the same time call this being by the names which express and affirm the highest human morality, I say in plain terms that I will not. Whatever power such a being may have over me, there is one thing which he shall not do: he shall not compel me to worship him. I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go." Now it is plain that the principle on which Mr. M., like all other unbelievers, goes, is that of judging the word which will judge him at the last day, when the lost, no less than the saved, when those under the earth, as well as all on it and above it, shall bow every knee, and with every mouth confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Mr. H. must bow: may it not be in perdition!

Is not God just? Certainly. How then is it that God should cast into hell a conscientious, benevolent, and kindly person, amiable, refined, all that is delightful in human society? For this simple reason: the test of every soul is Christ; and if the most correct, the most elegant, the most intelligent in every other pursuit, were to turn all those qualities, and make them the reason, as is constantly done, for rejecting Jesus and refusing to be saved as poor sinners, I affirm it to be most righteous with God to condemn them. For they despise His grace.

I press this truth on every soul here: salvation flows from grace; salvation is for the lost; salvation is for those that want it. It is not help merely; salvation is far more than help. When God owned the Jews as His people, He gave them helps, ordinances, priesthood, every moral test, and ritual aid. What was the result? The crucifixion of His Son Jesus Christ. The use of every help in the hands of weak and guilty man ends in the rejection of the Lord of glory; and when man has done his very worst, God, if I

may so say, does His very best; for blessed as it was to give Jesus, to send Him on an errand of love into the world, it was still more blessed to give Him to die for His enemies, and to turn that death which was their worst sin into the only door, not of hope only, but of salvation for the poorest of sinners. This is what He has done. This is the truth; and there if not purblind we may see the highest kind of justice too — God's justice now revealed in the gospel. For it is no longer a question of claiming righteousness from man, as the law did, but on God's part of revealing it; and this is the precise meaning of the expression that we have all read in Romans 1, 3, 10, to which I would briefly draw your attention, so that you may learn it from God himself in His own word for your soul, — "the righteousness of God."

This is a new kind of righteousness — God's justifying justice, through the redemption that is in Christ our Lord, because of His blood and death. It is the justice of God, who now justifies the unjust by faith of Jesus; it is for lost ones who believe in Jesus, by whom God can afford to reconcile to Himself His enemies. And how? By Jesus Christ. It is *His* righteousness by Christ's work. This is the truth. Therefore, plainly, it does not matter what you look at, whether salvation or perdition, whether the ground of the rejection of the most moral or the reception of the most depraved, all finds its explanation in this — that God measures everything by Christ. If He is refused, all is lost; if He is accepted, all is changed — old things pass away, all things become new.

How different is God's standard from that of the philosophers, who said that man was the measure of all things! They could not have uttered a greater lie; for I use plain words about a very serious thing, and refuse pleasant compliments where the deepest interests are at stake. I say that the grand standing maxim of the Greek philosophy was a falsehood. Not man but Christ is the measure of all things. He of whom we have been speaking — the Truth — alone truly measures all things. Accordingly this is just the reason why I press it so strongly this day. The word of God is the written form of it — the fully-expressed manner of giving it to us in Scripture. But do you not see one that runs through all the book — a person that we can and do love above all?* I can understand valuing, prizing, honouring a book; but we can love a person as even a book cannot be loved. Hence it is that you cannot have real faith in Jesus without love to His person, as He is Himself the full expression of God's love, found nowhere else in perfection. For although there are manifestations of divine bounty and goodness everywhere around us, there is always a sad falling short, and how often moral perplexity and contradiction even for the thoughtful, in this world! There is, no doubt, a beautiful exuberance of life in the spring; but as surely as possible there is the extinction of its leaves and fruits before the winter closes. And so if there be the bloom of man's life, there is more palpably the inroad of decrepitude and death at last. Everything in this world is thus tarnished and spoiled; the reason of which is simply that man is departed from God. But then another Man is gone up to God, and is glorified straightway — not in heaven alone, but in God Himself. And there is the true place to behold man now — in Christ's person. It is not only that we see the true man now, the perfect image of what man is in Christ; but we learn the God-given place of man in heaven at the right hand of God. And Christ is gone to prepare a place for us.

* See Appendix.

More than this; it is only by looking at Christ that I know the future according to God any: more than the present place of the Christian. The nations are wearying themselves in the very fire for vanity, trying this expedient and that to improve the world. I do not wonder that statesmen have weary heads; I do not wonder that there is constant change and disappointment; for in point of fact it is only man trying to patch up a thing that cannot be mended. But then here is what God will do. With Him is no patching up, but the bringing in what He calls a new creation. This is what God has in hand. He does not mean alone to bring glory to Himself by taking men up to heaven to be with Christ there, and reign

with Him, but also to bless men under Christ's reign on earth. And how does one know this? By bringing Christ into the consideration of man here below. God has promised Christ the earth, and all things; for He did not merely reconcile those that believed, but all things. Consequently it is there we see the triumph of the truth as against all the rationalizing of men. Rationalism merely allows of man's experience whereby to judge all else. According to it man cannot work miracles, and *therefore* there were none! man cannot prophesy, and *therefore* there could not be prophecy! Everything in this school is founded on man's little circle of power, knowledge, and experience; but man is far from being the measure of everything, — is, in fact, the measure of nothing. Christ is the measure of all things. Christ is the truth, and that is what I have wished to press on you.

I desire not to protract this lecture beyond a reasonable length. I have tried to bring forward, as opposed to Rationalism, the great distinctive features of the truth in Christ. Men will say as to the word of God, that there is fine poetry in it, wonderful biography, admirable maxims of prudence such as are found nowhere else, and the most profound morality. All most true, but all in vain; for what is the good of grand poetry and true history and the soundest maxims of human life and the deepest insight into the heart, if after all one perishes, as assuredly they must who have not received the truth? Further, there are none who fall into such perdition as those who go out from the bosom of Christendom. It was bad enough for the Jews to reject Christ; but Christendom is guilty of a worse apostasy from far greater privileges and from the most certain truth. Depend upon it that Rationalism is one of the most powerful currents that is flowing on and carrying down in its stream all who trust it. The Lord deliver from that which can only lure to destruction — deliver from that system which exalts man and lowers the Christ whom it professes to honour, but really rejects as the Truth.

The Lord give all who hear faith to receive Jesus Christ the Son of God, and then to read the word of God as the divine expression of Jesus — the personal Word brought before us in the written word. This will be our safeguard, and we shall need all: it is the divinely given one, specially for the last days. It is not faithful ministers (although I am sure God will have them as long as He is gathering the church from the earth); it is not the church (for itself requires to be secured, and therefore is not the security): the word of God is. It is not even the Spirit Himself, although there cannot be the power of the word without the Spirit: you cannot know the value of Christ the truth unless you have the Spirit the truth. Nevertheless the test of having the Spirit the truth, and of not being a prey to fanaticism, is that the soul is attracted and subject to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God; and this cannot be without faith produced and nourished by the word of God.

APPENDIX.

The following extract from Mr. J. S. Mill on Liberty, chapter 2, will illustrate the utter blindness of the natural man where Christ is not seen and applied by faith as the embodiment of God's mind and will. Hence the absurdity of concluding that the ideal of Christian morality is negative rather than positive; that in its precepts 'thou shalt not' predominates unduly over 'thou shalt;' that a body of ethical doctrine is only possible by eking it out from the Old Testament (that St. Paul, hostile to this, assumes a pre-existing morality; namely, that of the Greeks and Romans); and that it is a great error to persist in attempting to find in the Christian doctrine that complete rule for our guidance which its author intended it to sanction and enforce, but only partially to provide. How solemn too to see that superstition and infidelity alike bring in law, heathen philosophy, and ecclesiastical development, because they both ignore Christ, who alone gives the written word its fulness of meaning and power of adaptation, as they both set aside practically and even in principle, though not in name, the free action of the Holy Spirit, in order to claim church authority on one side and human liberty on the other.

Development is manifestly common to both; for Christ is not seen by either as the Second Man any more than as the last Adam. (1 Cor. 15) The Christian knows Him as setting aside Adam and all the race included in that first man — knows Him as magnifying the law, but withal bringing in perfection which the law did in nothing. Thus He is not only the Second Man, but He is the *last* Adam. Perfection is in Him only. Progress after Him is a lie; and no lie is of the truth, says St. John. Pretension to a fuller or higher morality is in part that spirit of antichrist which was to come; "and even now already is it in the world."

Mr. M. thus writes: "Before pronouncing what Christian morality is or is not, it would be desirable to decide what is meant by Christian morality. If it means the morality of the New Testament, I wonder that any one who derives his knowledge of this from the book itself can suppose that it was announced or intended as a complete doctrine of morals. The Gospel always refers to a pre-existing morality, and confines its precepts to the particulars in which that morality was to be corrected, or superseded by a wider and higher; expressing itself, moreover, in terms most general, often impossible to be interpreted literally, and possessing rather the impressiveness of poetry or eloquence than the precision of legislation. To extract from it a body of ethical doctrine has never been possible without eking it out from the Old Testament, that is, from a system elaborate indeed, but in many respects barbarous, and intended only for a barbarous people. St. Paul, a declared enemy to this Judaical mode of interpreting the doctrine and filling up the scheme of his Master, equally assumes a pre-existing morality; namely, that of the Greeks and Romans (!); and his advice to Christians is in a great measure a system of accommodation to that; even to the extent of giving an apparent sanction to slavery. What is called Christian, but should rather be termed theological morality, was not the work of Christ or the apostles, but is of much later origin, having been gradually built up by the Catholic church of the first five centuries, and though not implicitly adopted by moderns and Protestants, has been much less modified by them than might have been expected. For the most part indeed they have contented themselves with cutting off the additions which had been made to it in the Middle Ages, each sect supplying the place by fresh additions, adapted to its own character and tendencies. That mankind owe a great debt to this morality, and to its early teachers, I should be the last person to deny; but I do not scruple to say of it that it is, in many important points, incomplete and one-sided, and that unless ideas and feelings, not sanctioned by it, had contributed to the formation of European life and character, human affairs would have been in a worse condition than they are. [This means, that to the free-thinker's mind mediaeval Christendom has been better for man than the pure and simple Christianity of Christ and His apostles!] Christian morality (so called) has all the characters of a reaction; it is in great part a protest against Paganism. [Quite true; but how does this consist with Paul's assuming the pre-existing morality of the Greeks and Romans? This I should have thought to be in great part an adoption of Paganism, not a protest against it.] Its ideal is negative rather than positive; [Is not Christ its ideal? Is He negative rather than positive? or can blindness be more absolute?] passive rather than active; [What! He who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil? Undoubtedly He was also the Sufferer beyond all, but this seems a small matter to the man who feels not his ruin nor the need of redemption;] innocence rather than nobility; abstinence from evil rather than energetic pursuit of good; in its precepts (as has been well said) 'thou shalt not' predominates unduly over 'thou shalt.' [It is clear that the allegation here is based on the traditions of a guilty judaizing Christendom, not on the teaching of Christ and the apostles, which is and is meant to be the exercise of a new spiritual nature in obedience, righteousness, and love, instead of the mere prohibitions of the law addressed to Israel.] In its horror of sensuality it made an idol of asceticism, which has been gradually compromised away into one of legality. It holds out the hope of heaven and the threat of hell as the appointed and appropriate motives to a virtuous life, in this falling far below the hope of the ancients,

and doing what lies in it to give to human morality an essentially selfish character by disconnecting each man's feeling of duty from the interests of his fellow creatures, except so far as a self-interested inducement is offered to him for *consulting* them. [The truth is that the gospel alone is right; for it deals with man as a sinner and lost, needing therefore to be saved: this done, it acts on him by the highest motives of known divine grace in Christ to obedience, righteousness, and love. In both its parts how incomparably beyond heathenism, which denies the depths of human need and the heights of God's favour! It does condescend to the real necessities of the sinner, but it lifts him out of his abject wretchedness into fellowship with the Father and the Son: if this be to meet selfishness, it assuredly is to slay it, and replace it with the enjoyment and active power of divine love.] It is essentially a doctrine of passive obedience; it inculcates submission to all authorities found established; who indeed are not to be actively obeyed when they command what religion forbids, but who are not to be resisted, far less rebelled against, for any amount of wrong in themselves. kind while, in the morality of the best Pagan nations, duty to the State holds even a disproportionate place, infringing on the just liberty of the individual; in purely Christian ethics that grand department of duty is scarcely noticed or acknowledged. It is in the Koran, not the New Testament, that we read the maxim, 'A ruler who appoints any man to an office, when there is in his dominions another man better qualified for it, sins against God and against the State.' What little recognition there is of obligation of laws in modern morality is derived from Greek and Roman sources, not from Christian; as even in the morality of private life, whatever exists of magnanimity, high-mindedness, personal dignity, even the sense of honour, is derived from the purely human, not the religious part of our education, and never could have grown out of a standard of ethics in which the only worth, professedly recognised, is that of obedience. [This last is of God; the "purely human" is Satan's cheat for man far from Him. "My kingdom," answered Jesus to another freethinker, "is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." Soon the kingdom of the world will be His. The Christian follows Him in both respects.]

"I am as far as any one from pretending that these defects are necessarily inherent in the Christian ethics, in every manner in which it can be conceived, or that the many requisites of a complete moral doctrine which it does not contain, do not admit of being reconciled with it. Far less would I insinuate this of the doctrines and precepts of Christ Himself. I believe that the sayings of Christ are all that I can see any evidence of their having been intended to be; that they are irreconcilable with nothing which a comprehensive morality requires; that everything which is excellent in ethics may be brought within them, with no greater violence to their language than has been done to it by all who have attempted to deduce from them any practical system of conduct whatever. But it is quite consistent with this to believe that they contain, and were meant to contain, only a part of the truth, that many essential elements of the highest morality are among the things which are not provided for, nor intended to be provided for, in the recorded deliverances of the founder of Christianity, and which have been entirely thrown aside in the system of ethics erected on the basis of those deliverances by the Christian church."

It is vain to speak patronisingly of Christ or Christianity. Either He was the Word (and the Word was God) made flesh, or an impostor. If He is God over all blessed for ever, though He became man to die for man in infinite love, it is folly to argue that His sayings, supplemented by the subsequent teaching of the Spirit, when the disciples could bear all the truth, leave any part either wanting or superfluous. Mr. U. utters only the presumptuous language of unbelief, for which he must surely give account. There is grace with God through that very Christ now: there will be judgment then. May he and my reader be wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus!

"And this being so, I think it a great error to persist in attempting to find in the Christian doctrine

that complete rule for our guidance, which its author intended it to sanction and enforce, but only partially to provide. I believe, too, that this narrow theory is becoming a grave practical evil, detracting greatly from the moral training and instruction, which so many well-meaning persons are now at length exerting themselves to promote. I much fear that by attempting to form the mind and feelings on an exclusively religious type, and discarding those secular standards (as for want of a better name they may be called) which heretofore co-existed with, and supplemented the Christian ethics, receiving some of its spirit, and infusing into it some of theirs, there will result, and is even now resulting, a low, abject, servile type of character, [What! Mr. Mill was CHRIST'S character "low, abject, servile"? This is the Christian's "type of character;" and who can pretend that He derived His morality from Greek and Roman sources — that love, purity, lowliness, and devotedness, at cost of all to God's will and glory which shone in their fulness in Jesus of Nazareth? But no; he that admires the morality of the "secular standards," if he spoke out the truth of his mind and heart, must own his hatred and contempt of Christ's life who came solely to do God's will,] which, submit itself as it may to what it deems the Supreme Will, is incapable of rising to, or sympathizing in, the conception of Supreme Goodness. [Was not Christ the ever obedient one? Was *He* incapable of rising to, or sympathizing in, the conception of Supreme Goodness? Are we *not* to walk as He walked?] I believe that other ethics than any which can be evolved from exclusively Christian sources must exist side by side with Christian ethics, to produce the moral regeneration of mankind; and that the Christian system is no exception to the rule, that in an imperfect state of the human mind the interests of truth require a diversity of opinions. [It is clear that a revelation of God, of His truth, is ignored and denied.] It is not necessary that in ceasing to ignore the moral truths not contained in Christianity [such as "honour" *i.e.* personal pride !] men do ignore any of those which it does contain. Such prejudices, or oversight, when it occurs, is altogether an evil; but it is one from which we cannot hope to be always exempt, and must be regarded as the price paid for an inestimable good. The exclusive pretensions made by a part of the truth to be the whole [which is inevitable to every man save the instructed Christian, who has learnt to use the fulness we have received in Christ] must and ought to be protested against; and if a reactionary impulse should make the protesters unjust in their turn, this onesidedness, like the other, may be lamented, but must be tolerated. If Christians would teach infidels to be just to Christians, they should themselves be just to infidelity. [This is precisely what the Apostle shows himself, and what every Christian can afford to be; for even the infidel is not without a conscience, and must own that which is amply sufficient to expose the sin and folly of his own infidelity.] It can do truth no service to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teaching has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected, the Christian faith."

Thus lawlessly writes a man, who, not having seen and believed in the Son of God, has not life and is in darkness, hating the true God whom he knows not, and misrepresenting the Christian morality, which cannot be understood apart from Christ, who is its living model and the sole spring of conformity to it as now made known to the Christian by the Spirit in the power of His own resurrection. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, not to the mere works of innocence which befitted an unfallen Adam, nor to the legal position of a people in the flesh like Israel under Sinai, but unto *good works* [does this mean honestly "'thou shalt not' predominating unduly over 'thou shalt'"?] which God before prepared that we should walk in them. Undoubtedly in those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, the righteous demand (δικαίωμα) of the law is fulfilled, yet the result is produced by being under grace, and not under the law. For the law works wrath not love, and is the strength of sin, not of holiness. The law is lawful if one use it lawfully; and even Mr. M. ought to be aware of this, still more any one who truly names the name of the Lord, that the law is not

made for a righteous man (and surely the Christian should be this and more), but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, etc. Be ought to be aware that the apostle Paul affirms that this is according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, who will judge men ere long by Jesus Christ the Lord. If He will be "just to infidelity," where and how must the infidel be?