

Communism Was Not the Social Theory of the Primitive Church

S.C.
From *The Baptist Magazine*, 1858

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There is a very general impression, one sanctioned by antiquity, that the early Christians renounced their personal property and established a perfect inter-community of goods—that social inequalities were unknown in the apostolic church—that, as a rule, its members sold their possessions, poured "the price of the things that were sold" into the treasury of the church, and became pensioners on a common fund. This, like all popular beliefs, has some ground on which to go.

One or two passages in the Acts of the Apostles, if taken by themselves, apart from the limitations which the context supplies, justify the belief. Those who do not habitually compare Scripture with Scripture, remembering that God has given us "here a little and there a little" in order that we may bring "the little here" and "the little there" together, are quite naturally led to a wrong conclusion.

If we would avoid their error, we must not be content with noting what a few disciples in one nook of it are doing, and inferring that the whole brotherhood are similarly engaged; nor what the whole assembly does on any one day, and argue that their mode of action, like the Medo-Persic law, changeth not. We must combine the scattered features of the scene, gather into one the separated portions of the apostolic plan, and when the whole is before us, we may hope to form a correct conception of what the church was and should be.

The proof passage advanced by the advocates of "Christian Socialism" or "Christian Communism," is Acts 4:32, 34, 35:

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common...Neither was there any among them that lacked:

for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

This, it must be confessed, seems to establish that absolute equality was established among the Christians, and that all private property was disposed of for the benefit of the community. Yet there are some considerations which might make us pause before accepting this as the true interpretation of the passage.

Let us glance at two of them before passing on to the Scripture argument.

1. Such a social arrangement, even if possible, would not have been desirable. For the infant church to start on the understanding that every rich man who entered its fellowship should renounce his wealth, and that every poor man should share it—to place all on one level, and to sustain all out of one common fund, would have been to create innumerable difficulties. It would have been to put another "stone of stumbling," another "rock of offence," in the path of the rich—a path which, as our Lord's mournful words indicate, are only too full of obstacles and impediments.

It would have been a virtual invitation to the selfish and indolent among the poor—like the loaves and garments and gratuitous education with which certain charitable vicars and priests win at least children to attend the services of their church. The broken trader, the lazy fisherman, the impoverished and unscrupulous of every class, would have seen no small attractions in a society whose members, however poor and unworthy, were placed on a level with the laborious and honourable.

So long as the apostles were present to "discern spirits," the worst effects of such a system might have been staved off; but when left in the hands of uninspired men, it must have become an open gateway for the most corrupting influences. Christianity would have suffered fearfully, had she committed herself to this unnatural and perilous communism. The honourable, the diligent, the rich, would have been deterred from her fellowship; the bankrupt, the indolent, the worthless, would have been won to it.

2. But again: such a social arrangement, even had it been desirable, was impossible. There never can be perfect equality among men. One flower, though all are beautiful, has a subtler beauty and diffuses a richer perfume than another. One star, though all are glorious, differs from another star in glory. And just as God's other works range themselves in almost infinite degrees of worth and glory, so with man, his noblest work. Quickness of spirit, force of will, must and will tell. The man who has most of these has a right—and, if any right be divine, has a divine right—to the highest place.

In the primitive church the same diversities of condition prevailed as in the world: there were men of every sort and class. There were soldiers and officers of the Roman army receiving very different rates of pay. There were fishermen and scribes, magistrates and husbandmen, merchants and landowners, even slave-owners and slaves. They were not enjoined, any of them, to leave their callings. They were to "abide" in them. Most of them did continue in the vocations in which they were called. Their ships had no special exemption from the perils of the deep, nor their crops from the contingencies which affect harvests, or the commercial laws which regulate their value.

No miracles were wrought to supply their lack of capital or skill, and both were as needful then as now. They lay open to the operation of the laws which now hold wealth in a perpetual flux, by means of which God enricheth and maketh poor. And therefore it must have been as impossible to establish equality and the "community of goods" among them as it would be among us—as impossible as it was undesirable.

All this, however, may be stigmatised as mere carnal reasoning. There is an instinct in pious hearts which pronounces that what the Bible says meet be true, whatever reason may seem to object; an instinct which thought and experience do but raise into a profound conviction. Impressed by this conviction, let us pass on to the Scripture argument, let us see what the Bible, honestly interpreted, really does say. Two conclusions, we take it, may be inferred from the inspired record: The first that the community of goods did not obtain in the general apostolic church; the second that it had no existence as a system, no extensive or permanent acceptance even in the church at Jerusalem.

As to the general apostolic church, little need be said. Men of wealth were not numerous, yet there were some who joined the Christian fellowship. In no single case were they enjoined to renounce their rank and lay their possessions or the price of them at the apostles' feet. We have no hint that Cornelius the centurion, a scion of one of the noblest Roman families, either sold his commission or renounced his ancestral honours. Sergius Paulus retained the government of Cyprus, albeit a disciple, receiving as governor honours and emoluments. Erastus remained quæstor of Corinth. Lydia did not give up her business as a trader in the Tyrian purple. Dionysius did not vacate his seat in the Areopagus. Simon Magus, after baptism, offered "money" for miraculous gifts, and must therefore have reserved some of his wealth to his private use. Yet all these were members of the primitive apostolic church; some of them among its brightest ornaments.

Moreover, if communism were the social system of the primitive church, how is it that it is nowhere explained and enforced in the letters of the apostles? How comes it that their epistles almost invariably contain exhortations addressed to the rich and to the poor? It is quite impossible to read these epistles without perceiving that degrees of wealth and distinctions of rank obtained among the early disciples, and were recognised and tacitly approved by the apostles. Take a graphic picture from James:

"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel; and there come in also a poor man, in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say to him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts?" (James 2:1-4)

Could James have written this description, with its minute graphic touches, or uttered the solemn warnings which follow it, if the community of goods had obtained in the churches to which he wrote. In his warnings against the dangers of wealth, and his instructions as to the relationship which ought to subsist between the rich and poor, he clearly implies that such diversities did exist and were acknowledged. In condemning the abuse of riches in the church, how much to his purpose it would have been to forbid their possession, if such had been the design of the gospel.

Again, the epistles of Paul and Peter constantly imply the possession of private property on the part of individual members. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." (I Cor. 16:2) The rich are charged to be humble, charitable and brotherly; the poor to be honest, contented and industrious. These and innumerable similar passages clearly imply the existence of rich and poor in the churches. Similar is the language of our Lord where he commands the rich to show kindness to their poor and needy brethren, clearly presupposing that "ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good." (Mark 14:7)

The graces of the Christian character, always and everywhere inculcated, demand for their exercise this diversity of rank and position in the household of faith. An absolute uniformity of condition and circumstances in the church would rob it of one of its greatest instrumentalities for promoting growth in grace. Looking at all these circumstances then, we conclude that communism, if it existed at all, was nothing more than a temporary and local expedient to meet an immediate want. Like Paul's counsel to abstain from marriage, it was "good for the present distress," (I Cor. 7:26) but was never designed to be perpetual and universal.

It was never organised into a system, never became matter of command, and from the whole tenor of the New Testament we may infer that it had no existence save in that special case. To deduce from that single isolated fact a general law for the government of the church universal, would be to fall into the same error with the Papal church which, from Paul's advice against marriage under existing circumstances, enjoins celibacy for all time.

But there is no evidence to prove that the community of goods had a general or perpetual existence even in the church at Jerusalem. In Acts 12:12, for instance, we read that Mary, the mother of Mark, had a house of her own. The solemn history of Ananias and Sapphira tends, too, in the same direction. Peter distinctly asserts that Ananias need not have sold his "land," and that even when sold the price of it was at his absolute disposal. "Whiles it remained was it not thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?" (Acts 5:4) His criminality consisted, not in clinging to his possession, but in making a desperate attempt to seem better than he was, and lying to the Holy Ghost.

If, then, Ananias were free, and Peter says he was, to sell or not to sell his land, to bring or not to bring the price of it to the apostles' feet, it is manifest that they did not enjoin a community of goods even at Jerusalem. Still more decisive is that minute of the Church in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 4:1-6, from which it appears that the poor widows of the Grecians were thought not to be equally favoured with the widows of the Hebrews in the distribution of the church's alms.

Not a word is said about a common stock, in which these poor women had as at a share as others. They are manifestly referred to as comparatively destitute, and seven men are appointed to administer the bounty of the church. One can hardly read this minute without receiving the impression that in the fellowship at Jerusalem there were rich believers who

gave, and poor believers who received, the alms of Christian love. The same idea is manifestly carried out by Paul's allusions to and efforts for "certain...poor saints which are at Jerusalem." (Rom. 15:26)

On the whole, therefore, we are justified in detaching all communistic theories from the social system of the primitive church. Taking the oft-quoted passage in Acts 4 as a fragment of the sacred history, interpreting it as we are bound to do within the limits suggested by other fragments of the same history, we may hope to arrive at its true meaning. When we read, "the multitude of believers were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common," (v. 32) we shall find in the record a description of that deep self-sacrificing love which constrained wealthy believers to regard themselves as stewards, to whom much had been given, and their poorer brethren as the friends and representatives of that Lord whose stewards they were. (the universals— "the multitude," "as many of them," "all," &c. —of this passage must not be too rigidly pressed. They are used throughout Scripture, as in our ordinary speech, in a loose general way; if strictly taken they would often produce a false impression, as for instance. Gen. 41: 57, "All countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn.")

When it is added, they sold their possessions, "and distribution was made to every man according as he had need," (v. 35) we understand that a common chest was provided, from which the wants of the poorer members of the church were supplied at a time when many had lost their all by professing Christ, and that under the constraints of Christian love many who had houses and lands sacrificed them for the good of their impoverished brethren; that these sacrifices were but a temporary expedient, suggested by an extraordinary crisis, were not made by all the members of the church at Jerusalem, were not binding on any of them; that this expedient was not adopted in the general apostolic church, and was never intended to become a law to the universal church of Christ.

It is, indeed, among the most striking and beautiful adaptations of the gospel, fitting it for universal empire that it fathered no scientific theory, no social system. It had far nobler work to do, and did it. It had to address itself to universal man and his profound spiritual needs. And hence it took men as it found them, striving by all means to quicken in them a new spiritual life, but leaving that life to manifest and unfold its powers through whatever social or political forms obtained among them. It lifted up its voice to all, and left all who listened to it to live out its life in their several callings and conditions. For, in truth, man, divested of his outward trappings, which are not him, nor any part of him, is much the same everywhere. Think of him as a creature with five senses and what pertains to these, and, judging according to the appearance, you may trace out endless diversities. But think of him as an immortal, incarnate spirit, and what pertains to that, and the diversities for the most part disappear.

Everywhere you find him sinful with some dim consciousness of his sin related to God, and with some distorted apprehension of his divine relationships, anticipating a future life, and not without terrors of what the future may bring. And it is to this universal man, this "hidden man" of every heart, as distinguished from the various "outward men of the flesh," that the gospel appeals. It brings in equality, not by reshaping the external conditions of men, but by quickening in each a new man after the image of Christ; not by enforcing new social codes, but by teaching us how, in our existent social conditions, however grievous and imperfect, we may glorify God; by teaching us, whatever and wherever we are, we may live a godly life, and "whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord." (Col. 3:23) This is the one only equality brought in by the gospel, that in our several vocations and under whatever social rules or forms, we may equally "serve the Lord Christ," (Col. 3:24) and win "the reward of the inheritance." (Col. 3:24)

It will be well for us, therefore, to put aside murmurings and complainings about the inequalities of our outward lot. Social distinctions will not affect our future "reward." Whatever time may bring us, immortality is open to us all; we may, with God's help, make of it what we will. Social position will not help us in that work, nor need it hinder us. Every position has its perils and its advantages.

The highest prizes are open to the lowliest, and are most likely, perhaps, to be won by them. The roughest road may lead—it often does—to the highest eminence. It is hard to say what station is in itself most favourable. If any have the advantage, it certainly is not that which men deem high, much less the highest. And God, the good Father, has given us each the station we hold. He is not unjust, nor unwise, nor unkind. He has no grudge against any one of us; He is not likely to have made a mistake. Shall we, then, even wish to take our destiny out of His hands, or say to Him, "What doest Thou?" (Ecc. 8:4)

We may, perhaps, prefer other stations, other social arrangements. We may think they would be more favourable to our spiritual growth and culture.

But how do we know? And God, does not he know? Ah! We may be very sure, for it is the simplest inference from His being and character, that our present condition is suited to our present capacity; that its hindrances and aids, its sorrows and joys, have been measured and ordained by His infinite wisdom and love. If we cannot grow in these, it is because we lack the principle and power of growth. If we cannot, with all our striving, outgrow them, it is because these are safer for us, and better than the conditions we desire.



Evidence of Messiah's Resurrection _____

R. B. Manly

From *The Baptist Pulpit*, 1850

The expression of Luke, that "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," (Acts 4:33) may refer to their earnestness. This was produced by a sense of the importance and certainty of the fact to which they testified. If the views comprehended in the New Testament scheme of truths connected with the resurrection of Jesus be correct, where, among all possible stimulants, can anything be found so suited to rouse and engage the slumbering energies of the mind?

Nothing more elevated, more sublime and important can ever be conceived of; and if energy depend on truth and certainty that which animated and sustained their testimony is of the highest degree. To be convinced of this, let us for a moment take a view of the circumstances in which they were placed with regard to this fact.

They had known the Saviour intimately for three years, and had had their attention particularly turned to the identity of his person by a thousand touching circumstances and wonderful events, so that it seems impossible they could mistake another for him. They saw him apprehended from among them, and never lost sight of him until his body was deposited in the sepulchre. They saw him expire, and observed the soldiers omit to break his legs under the conviction he was already dead. And if this had not been sufficient to convince them, yet when they saw the blood and water issue from his wounded side (an evidence that the pericardium had been pierced), no doubt could then have been harbored that he really was dead.

The sepulchre in which the body was laid, they knew had been closed and sealed, and guarded by a strong detachment of Roman soldiers, selected for the express purpose of preventing the disappearance of the body. After the third day it could not be produced.

They certainly knew that they had not taken it away, and with equal certainty almost, must they have known that neither the guard, nor the priests, nor any of his enemies would take it away; since this would have manifestly tended to prove that doctrine to be true which they were laboring to prove an imposture. They saw that the only account of the event, besides their own, carried in it its own refutation; and that within eight years it could be openly published and recorded as perjury, and the authors pointed out in the very place of their residence, no man contradicting.

Their own account, they must have felt, was not made up of romantic anticipations, and the welcome illusions of excited imaginations, but was forced upon them after the event by evidence which they could not resist. That they did not expect him to rise is evident from preparations made at great expense to embalm the body, and the unaffected astonishment and unbelief excited by the first reports of his resurrection.

Every motive of temporal interest combined to make them wish those reports untrue. They were, therefore, prepared to question all testimony and none but such as should be absolutely unquestionable would establish their faith. Accordingly, it is wonderful to observe from how many sources testimony came to their relief. The sense of sight furnished its aid. They saw he was not in the tomb—and he was afterwards seen by different individuals of their number on as many as ten several occasions, sometimes in Jerusalem or its neighborhood, and sometimes in Galilee; some of them saw him eat in their presence, wearing all the distinct marks of his identical body.

They heard him speak, knew his voice, and followed him from Jerusalem to Bethany, listening to his instructions just before his ascension. They touched him—putting their fingers into the nail-prints, holding his feet, and worshipping him. Their faith was also assisted by testimony. They saw a vision of angels who said that he was alive, and by memory, for they afterwards called to mind that he had often told them he would die and on the third day rise again. To these we may add their frequent intercourse and conversations with him, during forty days on various subjects which had mutually interested them before his death.

Under these circumstances how could they, how could we, avoid saying that it was by many infallible signs he showed himself alive after his passion? How could they have spoken otherwise than earnestly, and "with great power?"



Christ Crucified

A. D. Gillette, Philadelphia, A sermon preached at the ordination of Lewis Smith, at Hatborough, Pa., Nov., 1846.
From *The Baptist Preacher*, 1847

"We preach Christ crucified." I Cor. 1: 23

An aged, eminent minister, when dying, said, "Were I to live to preach again, I would preach nothing but Christ." If it be a question with any of you, my brethren, how this topic can be sufficiently expanded to fill all a preacher's duties, we answer by saying, the subject has glories of sufficient compass and variety to fill the anthems of eternity.

"Christ crucified" is a phrase combining all the sayings and doings of Jesus, as the author and finisher of man's faith and salvation. And hence, we preach Christ crucified—

I. In the glories of his person. "The brightness of his [Father's] glory, and the express image of his person." (Heb. 1:3) One with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit, in power and glory. This is to be taught and insisted upon, not in the metaphysical style of an iron age in theology, nor in the unyielding preciseness of the schools; but in the glowing and convincing language of revelation,—a revelation that speaks of Christ, the wisdom of God, and of itself as the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth. Christ as the first-born among many brethren,—God manifest in the flesh,—who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, and hence receives unforbidden, the honors which are due only to one who has in himself the attributes of the Almighty.

To preach Christ crucified, is to set him forth as the first to engage in the heavenly meditations, which resulted in the great scheme of man's rescue from eternal burnings; and as the last to be present in applying the means he appointed for man's temporal and eternal well-doing. It is to preach Christ as him who knew no sin, but who was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; who liveth and was dead, and is alive forevermore; who hath the keys of death and hell at his girdle; who openeth and no man shutteth, and who shutteth and no man openeth.

Concerning whom every admirer of his person, his government and grace, exclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." (Ps. 73:25) "Thou art all my salvation and all my desire." "My Lord and my God, who alone hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable." In short, it is giving such views of the Lamb of God as Peter had when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go?—thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)

The sun in the natural heavens is the centre around which all the lesser planets revolve. So Christ, the sun of righteousness with healing in his beams, is the centre of light and of attraction to all spiritual intelligences. His grace is the fountain of influence to the great kingdom of God. In him all the lines of the old and the new dispensation meet, and from him they all radiate. Jesus says, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad; and before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:56) The blood of the sacrificial victims shadowed his approach; prophetic vision spoke of his sufferings, and consequent glory; and in the fulness of time, an unknown star directed the votaries of science and religion to the manger where he lay.

II. To preach Christ crucified, is to preach him in the fulness of his vicarious merit. This is eminently according to his own teaching; and apostolic example never failed to assure those who confided in abolished rituals, that Jesus and the resurrection was their only hope.

Jesus the Saviour is a name that implies the infinite sufficiency of the atonement; and this was unquestionably meant, when inspired men knew nothing among Jews or Gentiles—confiding Moses or idols—but "Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Cor. 2:2) My brethren, it is the prime meaning of the Bible, that Christ Jesus, of the seed of David, was evidently set forth, crucified among men, and for men,—that all men through him might be saved. So, then, to preach Christ in the fulness of his vicarious merit, we have only to preach the truths conveyed by the Bible. To this only source should we be chained in the strong bonds of Christian fidelity,—speaking only as the oracles of God. "If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that in all things God may be glorified." (I Pet. 4:11)

O! My brethren, it was the masterly conception of Christ's merits that made his early and best apostle—abating various motives—say, I rejoice that Christ is preached." Present him in his real character, and the sinner will soon learn that there is no other medium of acceptableness with God—no other way of escape from the wrath to come. Show his merits; hold up the mirror, the reflective power of God, true to life; let infinite love and purity and greatness be seen as they truly consist in Christ crucified, and enquiring hearts will repent of sin—will shelter themselves in his cleft side—will adore him Lord of all.

To preach Christ's vicarious merits, you must preach him as dying that sinners might live; that any now live only by the grace of one who died on the cross; that we are blessed only through one who was cursed for our sakes—and justified by one whom multitudes pronounced not fit to live; that the only value of our hope is by reason of the shame, scorn and sorrow endured by one whom the world despised and rejected—yea, that our surest, sweetest, strongest joys, take their rise from the place of skulls—the rent rocks of Calvary, and those horrid scenes upon which the sun at midday frowned—and at whose transactions inanimate nature put on shuddering animation, and from whose dreadful reality Jehovah, the father of the innocent sufferer, turned his face away.

Says Andrew Fuller, in beginning to write his System of Theology, "I wish to begin with the centre of Christianity, the doctrine of the cross, and work round it; or with what may be called the heart of Christianity, and to trace it through its principal veins, or relations, both in doctrine and practice. The whole Christian system appears to be presupposed by it, included in it, or to arise from it." How true! Other foundation can no man lay than is laid,—Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone,—he is of revelation the glory and joy—of grace and truth the exhaustless fountain.

III. To preach Christ crucified, is to preach those doctrines which pertain to man, as a being amenable to God. Do we discover to the view of our hearers the doctrine of human depravity? Then we magnify Christ as its only cure. Do we examine our relations to the divine law? It unfolds the riches of Christ's merits, by whose death its claims were all met and cancelled. Do we look to the importance of maintaining good works for necessary uses? We see Christ glorified in his followers' well-ordered lives. Is repentance insisted upon and exercised? Christ is exalted as he alone who gives it. Is faith the theme? Christ is its author and finisher—cause and end. Are the works of creation, which set forth the eternal power and godhead of the Father, preached, as Paul on Mars Hill at Athens preached them? They lead us directly to the great fact of our necessity of applying to the blood of atonement; because "He [God] hath appointed a day in the which he will judge

the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, and hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

Surely, whoever fails to preach Christ as the only refuge to the guilty, is himself guilty of not preaching as those early ministers did, who "counted all things but loss," in comparison with "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. 3:8) My brethren, on Christ crucified we build—lay all our hopes for religion and bliss, for this world and the next. Who leans elsewhere, leans on a broken staff that will pierce him sorely through. "He builds too low, who builds beneath the skies."

We may differ in the use of terms by which we speak of the atonement; but all who know and teach the nature of sin and the necessity of forgiveness, must be agreed in preaching Christ's death, as making provision in infinite mercy suited to the sorrows and necessities of the guilty; and that no other name is given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus. When no helper was nigh, he saved poor, sinking Peter, who cried, "Lord save me!" (Matt 14:30) He spoke comfort and hope to the congealing heart of the thief on the cross, even when his own heart was being wrung with infinitely more than mortal anguish.

To do all this—so to preach as to shew Christ the dying sinner's only hope—only rescue from despair, and his safe convoy through nature's last dissolving struggle, man's final hour—is not only to repeat the ancient promises, or describe the bleeding victim—not merely to paint the dark crimson of that cloud that rose between Jesus on the cross and Jehovah on the throne—not to mimic the rumbling earthquake or thunder trumpet of Sinai.

No—it is to go even to Bethlehem and stop at the place over which the star stood still, and enter the stall, and behold there a virgin mother and her holy child Jesus—to be filled with faith in him as your Saviour, and so fired with zeal and love to him and the souls of men, as to go out into the world anointed with fresh courage, preaching Jesus "seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory," where he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, living to intercede for us, whence also he will come to judge the world at the last day.

IV. To preach Christ crucified, is to preach him as man's example in moral excellence, one whom man is bound to imitate in all his imitable perfections; to preach him as the embodiment and exemplifier of zeal for his Father's honor, and the honor of his Father's law; as the true model of devotion to others' good; hostile resistance to the flatteries, temptations and frowns of censurable pleasure; unwavering directness in duty, despite the terrors of persecution, or rigorous exactions of unrighteousness; in short, as at all times doing not his own will, but the will of him that sent him; and though fearful danger threaten, abating nothing—so that he might finish his work. O, his was an unwasting ardor, a self-denying consecration of his all, for the redemption and establishment of his church—the salvation of souls—the universal victories of a religion pure and undefiled.

It is when Christ is thus preached and believed on that he becomes the all in all of every doctrine, and of every duty—the trust entire, in every emergency. Are you "in poverty's vale or abounding in wealth?" suffering physical or mental infirmities, loss of property, friends, or blighted hopes? In all these straits Christ is yours, and among you, "as one that comforteth the mourner." On him cast all your care, for he careth for you. He is your high tower, your rock of defence. If temptation or persecutions rage, you may invoke the might and majesty of his name. If the whirl of earthly delusions threatens to engulf you, hope casts her anchor on his scarred bosom, and finds safe soundings.

To those whose hearts contain only the shreds of tattered, torn and bleeding affections, Christ is preached as courting your love. Yes, he bled from his very heart's sincerest central fountains that just such hearts as sorrowing sinners mourn, might be given to him. Are adversity's winds blowing fiercely upon the weak, trying their faith?

Does the grave open and threaten to enclose you? Or is it rapidly enclosing the forms of beauty and loveliness that have long and closely clung to your hearts? Christ crucified invests the dying with the immortality of the patriarchs; wraps them in the imperishable folds of his own righteousness, and they walk through the valley and shadow of death fearing no evil—his imitable example having moulded them into his moral image, they resign this mortal to the dust of the ground, in the triumphant assurance that he will raise it up again and fashion it like unto his own most glorious body.

V. To preach Christ crucified, we must preach his moral precepts. Apostolic example is equivalent to divine command: and both are given that men may repent of sin and believe on Christ, in order to be saved. Christ crucified must, then, be preached as the subject of faith; belief in whom must be insisted on in all gospel sermons.

Christ's requirements, from the least to the greatest, must be plainly taught and practiced, both by them who preach and them who hear. Believing in Christ crucified ourselves, and pointing to him in our ministry, others must with the heart believe on him unto righteousness, and with the mouth confess him unto salvation; must profess him by being buried with him in baptism, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; must imitate the lamb-like, peace-pursuing, peace-loving example of Christ, who will heal all your moral maladies, direct your purposes in their proper channels, and, as it is his prerogative, justly but mildly reprove your vagrancies; and when you come to stand before God in judgment, he will stand near you and say to justice, "Put up thy sword—I have found a ransom—I have redeemed this soul by my blood—he is mine to place among my jewels—to sparkle in my crown as a trophy of my war upon sin."

For the purposes of application, we remark:

1. Gospel example and experience shew us how and in what manner to preach "Christ crucified."

"Not with enticing words that man's wisdom teacheth, but in demonstration of the Spirit and with power." (I Cor. 2:4) Our hopes of success should not rest upon the form of words, or the style of speech—these are important in their places, and vastly more so than many suppose—yet we are to expect success, if we have the appliances, only because we use Christ's means—means which he has promised to accompany by his almighty Spirit, our only surety.

The apostles were taught personally by Jesus, the great teacher, three years, and hence were well taught. In preaching, Christ's apostles laid their inspired tongues on all creation, and it wheeled into line direct in the campaign of truth against error, for the sake of man's salvation and his Maker's glory

2. The characters and qualifications of the men first appointed to preach Christ crucified, shew that success in the world's conquest was based upon their theme—not themselves.

These had little worldly eminence, and it is well they had no more; for they were not sent to herald earthly, but heavenly greatness. O! It was a grand idea that preachers of a crucified Saviour should be men in whose condition and conduct was shadowed forth a participation in the lowliness and humbleness which the Divine author of this glorious scheme assumed.

How foolish appears the wisdom of this world's plans compared with redemption by the blood of Christ. God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty, in determining by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. And he has enforced and illustrated it, in his calling not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble, to be proclaimers of his mercy to the lost and dying, whom he came to seek and to save. In this how evident it is that he would have the excellence of the power to consist, not in man, but in God—so that he that glorieth should glory in the Lord alone.

My young brother—I may add, I trust, my son in the gospel—for I well remember, and this day pleasingly recalls that solemn hour, when you came to me enquiring, "Pastor, what shall I do?" and when having obtained instruction and precious faith, you said, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" And I think of that happy hour, when these hands led you down into the water and baptized you, and you gave yourself to Christ and his church by the will of God—whom I bless this day for having kept you, that your garments are unspotted from the world. He has preserved also your health, and prospered you thus far in your studies through college—called and directed your way into the ministry, in this great State and this inviting field. My brother, continue faithful, and my heart shall be as your heart, our Master being judge.

From what I have said, and from your own knowledge, you have learned, that you are not called into the ministry and this day ordained, to preach yourself—but Christ Jesus the Lord, and yourself the people's servant for Jesus' sake. Christ, I trust, is formed in your heart the hope of glory. He, as the hope of the hopeless, will be your theme of themes. Without him crucified, your best sermons will be soulless—lifeless. Egypt, Tyre, Greece and Rome, Caesar, Cromwell, Washington and Napoleon, may be used as the artist uses his brush, to illustrate, bring out to view your thoughts,—but never to become the

subject-matter of discourse. You will preach the advent, labors, death, resurrection, ascension, and final coming of Christ. You will dwell on him as a Prophet, Priest, King, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

At proper times, and always in a devout and reverent manner, you will dwell on the agonies of his soul in the garden and on the cross. In short, whatever the scroll of inspiration reveals, will be evolved in your ministry.

You will begin with in his pupilage, as a sinner against the nature of a holy, and the claims of a divine law. You will urge his obedience to authorities, his benevolence in giving for good purposes, from the little or much his Creator gives to him. You will preach, and enforce as a ruler in Christ's church, the discipline becoming the professed disciples of Jesus to maintain and observe.

You will teach the duty of prayer in the closet, the family and social circle. You will announce God's requirements of man, "to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with [his] God;" (Micah 6:8) urge them to the spirit and practice of the meekness and gentleness of Christ—to reason upon righteousness, temperance and a judgment to come, and whatever else becomes good living and sound doctrine, that you may now know or yet learn from the Holy Scriptures—and in so doing you may both save yourself and them that hear you.

All this you may do faithfully, and yet be censured,—for either preaching Christ crucified too much, or not enough,—but you will feel that it is a small thing to be judged with man's judgment.

Some would have you dwell on their skeleton ridden bobby, as the true embodiment of all necessary preaching. Imitate Leighton, in stormy political Scotland. His brethren asked him, "Why do you not preach up the times, all the clergy are doing so?" Leighton replied, "If all the clergy are preaching up the times, one poor brother may be excused for preaching Christ and him crucified."



The Angels

J. M. Pendleton

From *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology, 1878*

Angels are subjects of the divine government, and the part they act in the history of man renders it proper to make special reference to them. Their existence is everywhere taken for granted in the Scriptures; and while they are several times spoken of in the book of Genesis, they are more frequently mentioned in the book of Revelation. To attempt to prove, therefore, that angels exist, would be superfluous and uncalled for.

The term angel, in its literal import, suggests the idea of office—the office of a messenger, rather than the nature of the messenger. Hence we read in Luke 7:24, "And when the messengers of John [in the original Greek, the angels of John] were departed." It seems that when the Bible was written it was so common for some superior spiritual being to be divinely sent as messenger to man that such being was in process of time called angel, that is, messenger.

It is easy, too, to see that the order of beings to which the messenger belonged would likewise be called angels. The term angel, being used to designate a spirit bearing a message, would also be employed as descriptive of kindred spirits, even though they might not be appointed to bear messages. Thus the heavenly hosts are termed angels, though it may be that comparatively few of their vast numbers are engaged in the delivery of messages. But this is a point on which it is needless to dwell at length.

While the word angels is sometimes used in a specific sense to denote a part of the inhabitants of heaven, as in I Pet. 3:22, I assume that it is usually employed in a general sense as designating all the inhabitants of heaven, with the exception of the

redeemed from among men. It will therefore be unnecessary to refer specially to "cherubim," "seraphim," "principalities," "powers," "authorities." Doubtless these terms are significant, but I shall regard them as embraced in the general term angels. This view of the matter makes plain the meaning of Luke 15:10, "Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." No one can suppose that the joy in heaven over a repenting sinner is so confined to angels as to exclude cherubim, seraphim, and others of the heavenly host from participation in it.

Of angels the following observations may be made:

1. They are immortal spirits. The term spirit may be regarded in general contrast with matter. The two substances embrace all the objects to be found in the wide realm of knowledge. There is no substance of which it can be said that it is neither matter nor spirit. The world of matter is all around us. We see it in the earth and its productions, in the sea and its treasures, in the sun and the planets revolving round him.

Our senses bring us into contact with the universe of material nature, and we hear, and see, and smell, and touch, and taste. It is manifest, too, that matter is capable of great changes. It may be fashioned into many forms and taken through many processes of refinement. Gold may be purified seven times—that is, purified to perfection—till every particle of dross is taken from it; and the diamond by laborious and persevering effort may be fitted to sparkle in a monarch's crown; but no operation performed on matter, and no series of operations, can endow it with thought, and will, and reflection.

These are peculiarities of mind or spirit, and where they are found there is spirit. They are found in angels, and angels are spirits. They are in perfect contrast with matter, whether in its grosser or more refined forms. They are spiritual beings, and we, burdened with the encumbrances of matter, can very imperfectly imagine what they are.

While we regard spirit in general contrast with matter, we may consider it in particular contrast with body. The words of Jesus authorize us to do this: "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." (Luke 24:39) This language was addressed to the disciples when they were in great fear. To relieve their minds, excited and alarmed by the supposition that they were in the presence of a spirit, he said, "Handle me, and see." They were by personal examination to assure themselves that he had "flesh and bones," and this was to be decisive of the point that he was not a spirit. A body, we know, has "flesh and bones," for they are so essential to it that there can be no body without them. Here, then, the worth of Jesus place spirit and body in most positive contrast. It follows, therefore, that as angels are spirits, as we are taught in Heb. 1:7, they are without bodies.

Many suppose that they are capable of assuming bodies or something equivalent at pleasure, and that this is necessary to the performance of acts ascribed in the Bible to their agency. Such a supposition, however, may have no other basis than the fact that men are accustomed to exert their power through their bodily organs and by material mediums. It surely does not follow that the same limitations are placed on angelic power; or, if this is the case, may we not inquire as to the nature of supreme power in God?

Who will say that his power cannot be exerted unless a body furnishes the means by which it is done? Our knowledge of the two substances is confined to what can be known of their properties. Acquainted with the properties of matter, we can affirm or deny certain things concerning it; knowing the properties of spirit, we can also affirm or deny. This is all we can do.

Angels are immortal spirits. If asked why they are immortal, I can only say that their immortality is to be ascribed to the good pleasure of God. They are not necessarily immortal because they are spirits. Spirits would as certainly die as do bodies, if God should withdraw his sustaining arm. In the absolute and highest sense of the words God "only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." (I Tim. 6:16)

The immortality of angels and men is derived from him and dependent on his will. Angels are immortal, because God has made them so. They will never cease to be, because it is not the divine will that they return to their original nothingness. The words of Jesus shed important light on the immortality of angels. Speaking of the righteous dead at the resurrection, he says, "Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." (Luke 20:36)

It is clear that the equality specially referred to is the impossibility of dying: "Neither can they die any more." For this reason they are equal to the angels, and, like the angels, incapable of death. It is a pleasing thought that angelic spirits will live forever. They are engaged in the worship and service of God, and he deserves everlasting worship and service. They are students of the wonders of redemption (I Pet. 1:12), and these wonders invite endless exploration. Angelic research will be prosecuted for ever.

2. Angels possess great knowledge. All who believe in their existence accord to them intelligence and wisdom of a high order. The common belief among the Jews in the days of David can no doubt be learned from the fourteenth chapter of the second book of Samuel. Joab, anxious for Absalom's return to Jerusalem, sent "a wise woman of Tekoah" to David, hoping through her agency to accomplish the object.

The only thing, however, that has a bearing on the point now under consideration is the following language addressed to David: "For as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad." (II Sam. 14:17) "And my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth." (II Sam. 14:20) Here it is assumed that an angel of God is wise and endowed with superior knowledge. Nor is it strange that the history of God's favored people from the days of Abraham encouraged and confirmed this view.

There had been frequent angelic interpositions, the natural effect of which was to create the belief that angels excel in wisdom as well as in strength. Their superiority to men is conceded, and the point needs not to be argued. They were, no doubt, created intelligent spirits, their knowledge beginning with their existence. This being the case, we can understand why they, as "sons of God, shouted for joy" when the foundations of the earth were laid, as we are most probably taught in Job 38:7.

They, as intelligent creatures, appreciated the power and wisdom of God displayed in the formation of the globe knowing that it would serve as a theatre for the exhibition of the divine glory; hence their gladness and their shouts of joy. But if the knowledge of angels was coeval with their creation, we may safely conclude that it has been increasing ever since. Their opportunities of observation, and the many experiences they have had in connection, as we may suppose, with direct revelations from God, must have added greatly to the stock of their original intelligence.

They are finite beings, and their knowledge is therefore imperfect; and if imperfect, progressive. The knowledge of God cannot be augmented, because he is infinite; the knowledge of angelic spirits is susceptible of increase, because they are finite. If this one part of angelic history—namely, constant improvement in knowledge—could be written, how full of interest would it be!

We know full well that angels have never been unconcerned spectators of the works and ways of God; and what centuries of opportunity have they had to learn about divine things! Their knowledge was increased before the Flood, and received new accessions when the human race was, with the exception of one family, exterminated from the earth. They learned much more from Abrahamic and Jewish history, scanned the page of prophecy, and when in fulfilment of prophecy the Saviour was born in Bethlehem of Judea, while one of their number announced the fact to astonished shepherds, a multitude of the heavenly host shouted, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14) From the birth of Christ till now angels have watched and cherished the interests of his religion, learning more and more concerning the achievements of redemption, and looking forward with devout anxiety to the day when the earth shall be filled with truth, righteousness, and salvation. Truly, angels possess great knowledge.

3. They are very active and powerful. To give us some faint idea of the rapidity of their movements, the sacred writers represent them as having wings, and as flying on their errands to execute the commands of the Almighty. These forms of expression are not to be understood literally; for wings, and flight by means of wings, pertain to material beings, and we have seen that angels are pure spirits. Of all creatures coming within the range of our vision, those which have wings and fly, exemplify the highest speed.

Angelic activity is, therefore, very impressively taught by the figurative language referred to. There must, however, be a basis and a reason for the use of this figurative language, and they are to be found in the velocity of angelic movement. Here, again, our conceptions fail; for, as physical motion alone comes within the circle of our knowledge, we cannot

possibly say what is the nature of the movement by which a spirit goes from one place to another. There is transition from locality to locality, but who can explain it or conceive it? We only know that it must be inexpressibly rapid.

In proof of this I may refer to the words of Jesus on the night of his agony and arrest: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53) The words were addressed to Peter to show him that his feeble help was not needed in that hour, for more than twelve legions of angels would be sent to his rescue if the divine plans did not forbid their interference. But the thought to be emphasized in the passage is that so many angels, their supposed residence being in heaven, could instantly appear in defence of their Lord. How these legions of angels could pass with more than telegraphic rapidity from heaven to sad Gethsemane, we know not. We only know that the possibility of the thing indicates an activity truly wonderful.

There is also a passage in the book of Daniel to which reference may be made: "Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." (Dan. 9:21) Here there was such velocity of movement as defies conception. The movement of Gabriel was actual, real, whereas the movement of the "more than twelve legions of angels" was potential, possible. The two passages prove beyond doubt the amazing activity of angelic spirits.

Angels, too, are powerful. They are said to "excel in strength." (Ps. 53:20) We are not to suppose that they possess inherent strength. They do not. They have the power that God gives them, for power in the highest sense of the word belongs to him alone. It has been his pleasure to endow angelic spirits with such power as has often appeared wonderful to men. For example, it seems evident that an angel had control of the pestilence which in the days of David destroyed "seventy thousand men;" for we read, "And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand." (II Sam. 24:16)

Another striking display of angelic power is recorded in connection with the army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The impious monarch threatened the destruction of Jerusalem, but it is said, "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred four score and five thousand." (II Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36) This was a fearful exhibition of the power of an angelic spirit. He smote with an invisible weapon, and a hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors fell before him.

Having read these accounts from the Old Testament, we are prepared for the following in the New: "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory;" "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." (Rev. 18:1, 21) In view of such testimony as this we can readily believe that angels "excel in strength," and that on the last day "the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." (II Thess. 1:7)

4. Angelic spirits are sinless and obedient. If God, as we are told, made man upright, we may be sure that angels came from his hand pure, spotless, faultless. We are not left, however, to conjecture on this point; for the epithet holy is applied to angels. They are called "holy angels." (Matt. 25:31) Their holiness, like the holiness of God, is not only an exemption from all moral impurity, but an assemblage of all moral excellences. These excellences, infinite in the character of God, are of necessity finite in the character of angels, because they are creatures. They are objects of God's complacent love. They are just what he would have them to be. They shine in his moral image and reflect his glory. They ascribe to him all conceivable moral perfections, and these perfections they consider embraced in holiness. They therefore exclaim with reverential awe, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isa. 6:3)

They have an appreciative sense of the holiness of the divine character; they feel for it an interim admiration, for they are holy beings, and out of their holiness arises love to holiness as exemplified in God. In connection with the purity of angels, it is delightful to think of them as constituting "an innumerable company." (Heb. 12:22) There are countless myriads of them, and they retain their original rectitude. They are resplendent with the beauty of sinless excellence.

In short, they are "holy angels," and their obedience is inseparable from their holiness. David calls on them, saying, "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." (Ps.

53:20) It has ever been characteristic of them to hearken to the voice of the divine word. Thus to hearken is to obey. There is law in heaven, and the will of God is the supreme law. Every angel recognizes this fact, and is practically conformed to the will of God.

There is much meaning in the words of Jesus when he teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) It is taken for granted that the will of God is done in heaven. If so, it is done by angels. They are inhabitants of heaven, and it is their pleasure to do what God requires them to do. It would be a reflection on the completeness of their obedience to intimate that they ask the reason of any command. It is enough for them to know that a command comes from God. The source whence it comes is the reason why it should be obeyed.

Angels so understand the matter, and there is, therefore, an alacrity in their obedience highly pleasing to God. Their only question is, "What does the Lord Jehovah require?" Someone in expressing this thought has said, "If God should send two angels down from heaven, commanding the one to govern an empire, and the other to sweep the streets of a city, they would feel no disposition to exchange employments." Why? Because the will of every angel is perfectly absorbed in the will of God. In such conformity of the will of the creature to the will of the Creator, true happiness is to be found. Angels are therefore happy. Their joy is complete and their bliss unspeakable.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

Having attempted to show who and what angels are, it is now expedient to refer to what they do. They are doubtless employed, as we have incidentally seen, but what are their employments? How are they occupied? Much might be said of their agency in the administration of God's providential government, but I pass over this topic, or only touch it in its relation to the service they perform for the saints. That there is such a service is plain from these words: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14) To minister is to serve. Jesus therefore said, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28) Christ died for the heirs of salvation, and angels being in subjection to him, he has appointed them to serve the saints, and the service is most willingly rendered. It is unquestionable that angels take a deep interest in what I may call:

1. The beginning of saintship. The greatest of moral changes occurring in this world is that by which a sinner is transformed into a saint, an unbeliever into a believer, a child of the devil into a child of God. This change is inseparably connected with repentance, and repentance is indispensable to salvation. Jesus said in his teaching, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) And Peter under divine direction uttered these words: "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." (Acts 3:19)

These Scriptures show that repentance has an essential relation to the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul. There is so much involved in repentance, such important consequences result from it that angels rejoice over the event: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke 15:10) Such a sinner becomes an heir of salvation, and angels rejoice in anticipation of his ultimate equality with themselves. They at once assume a service which is to them unspeakably delightful, and they serve the Lord Jesus in serving those bought with his blood.

2. Angels watch and guard the steps of the saints. It is written, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Ps. 91:11, 12) The words of Jesus may also be properly quoted here: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 18:10)

Without entering into the controverted question whether every believer has a "guardian angel," it may surely be said that the meaning of this passage is plain: The little ones, according to verse 6, are those who believe in Christ, and the reason assigned why they should not be despised is, that in heaven their angels evermore behold the face of God. Jesus therefore teaches that it is a serious and a perilous thing to treat with contempt the weakest of his followers. To show the estimate he places on them and the honor they enjoy, he refers to "their angels." These words, "their angels," mean something. The little ones who believe in Christ can claim these angels as their own—in a sense it may be, which we cannot fully

understand, but still their own, "their angels." I see nothing incredible in the idea that angels are divinely appointed to watch and guard the steps of the saints.

3. Angels convey the disembodied spirits of the saints to heaven. If they invisibly accompany Christians through the pilgrimage of life, it is morally certain that they are with them when their pilgrimage ends. But what does Jesus say? Speaking of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar, he used these significant words: "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." (Luke 16:22) No one supposes that the emaciated body of Lazarus was conveyed to Abraham's bosom. It was the immortal spirit of which the angels took charge and which they carried to the heavenly mansions.

Nor is the case referred to as peculiar and exceptional, but we are rather led to regard it as a common occurrence; that is to say, the obvious inference is, that angels do for every dying saint what they did for Lazarus—convey his disembodied spirit to the paradise of God. How little we probably know of what takes place in the dying chamber! We see the cold sweat on the pale brow, we hear the death-rattle, we feel the tears as they roll down our cheeks, and we are obliged to listen to the lamentations of bereaved ones. If, however, our eyes could be opened as were those of the young man for whom Elisha prayed (II Kings 6:17), we might possibly see an angelic escort waiting to conduct the emancipated spirit to its home in the skies.

4. Angels will minister to "the heirs of salvation" when Christ comes again. It is the fundamental fact of the gospel, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and a kindred truth is that he will come "the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9:28) He will come to consummate the salvation of his followers. His coming will be grand and glorious, and he has told us that all the holy angels shall be with him. They will constitute his shining retinue. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. 24:31) The Saviour in his explanation of the parable of the "tares and wheat" said, "The reapers are the angels," and added, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity." (Matt. 13:41)

We may form some feeble conception of the interest angels will feel in gathering the saints together, for these saints will be the same persons over whose repentance as sinners they rejoiced. Having ministered to them through their earthly life, having been present with them in death, having conveyed their separate spirits to the realms of bliss, they continue their kind offices at the resurrection. How will they exult when they see the bodies of the saints, at the bidding of their Lord, come up out of the grave radiant with glory and clothed with immortality! When the redeemed hosts are invited to "inherit the kingdom" of God, they will doubtless take possession of their inheritance amid angelic congratulations. Through everlasting ages saints and angels will live in blessed companionship.

SINFUL ANGELS

Having referred to the character and ministry of holy angels, it is proper to direct our attention to sinful angels. I designate them thus, because Peter describes them as "the angels that sinned," and Jude denominates them "the angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation." (II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) It is plain that they had a "first estate," and a "habitation" peculiarly their own. Why they kept not "their first estate, but left their own habitation," we cannot tell, for the reason has not been given. True, one passage (I Tim. 3:6) contains an intimation that the sin of the devil was "pride," but as to the cause of his pride we know nothing; nor are we under obligation to adopt the theory of Milton or of any other great man.

The fact that some of the angels sinned is the thing which concerns us, and we are concerned in it, because their sin had a disastrous connection with the destiny of man. There is much less of mystery in the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden than in the origin of sin among the angels. Eve was influenced by an artful and plausible temptation presented by another being, but this could not be the case with the first angel that sinned. There was no external influence or temptation leading to sin. Sin must have been the result of internal thought and purpose, but how the thought arose and how the purpose was formed in a holy being we shall not know till the judgment of the Great Day discloses all the circumstances connected with the angelic revolt.

It is evident that no federal headship was recognized among angels, but that they acted in their individual capacity. On this account some, in the exercise of their free agency, sinned, and others maintained their allegiance to God. All the probabilities are that sin originated with Satan, and that he had some kind of superiority, which enabled him to propagate his influence successfully among his fellow-spirits. Unless we regard him in this light—namely, as the head and prime mover of the angelic insurrection—it will be difficult to say why Jesus speaks of “the devil and his angels.”

Sinful angels are not his by any creative tie, for he has no creative power, but they must be his because he is their leader and they act in subordination to him. He is, therefore everywhere referred to in the Scriptures as pre-eminent among apostate spirits, and is called "the prince of this world" and "the god of this world." In the common version of the Bible we have the term devil very frequently, both in the singular and in the plural number. It is not so in the original Greek. The term translated "devil," in its application to Satan, is always used in the singular number. There are two other terms sometimes translated "devil" in the singular, but more frequently "devils" in the plural, and in every instance the translation could be “demon” and “demons.” The teaching of Scripture, therefore, is that there are among fallen angels many demons, but only one devil, who presides over the demons.

This view seems to be sustained by Eph. 6:11, 12. There we have reference to "the wiles of the devil," and we are told that our contest is not against human foes alone, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." That the influence of the devil, which includes the influence of all the fallen angels, is very great, appears from the effects ascribed to his agency. He is said to "take away the word of God out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved (Luke 8:12); to "blind the minds of them which believe not (II Cor. 4:4); and sinners are said to be "taken captive by him at his will." (II Tim. 2:26) Christians, too, are the objects of his implacable hatred.

He has "devices" against them, and seeks their ruin. He is fertile in expedients to lead them astray, and even transforms himself "into an angel of light" to accomplish his evil purposes. He is the chief adversary of God, and with unwearied constancy attempts to defeat the divine purposes. His malignant depravity has shown itself in all ages, and the lapse of many centuries has not diminished its power. There is one fact which, perhaps above every other, indicates the greatness and the extent of Satan's influence. The most effectual restraints are to be placed on this influence before the day of millennial glory can come. When in the strong, figurative language of Scripture the devil is "bound...and cast into the bottomless pit," then, and not till then, will earth keep jubilee a thousand years.

While, however, we ascribe to Satan and his accomplices great influence for evil, we must not suppose that they possess compulsory power. They do not, and the fact of temptation proves it. Why should the devil tempt and allure men to sin? Why present inducements to sin, if he could coerce them to commit sin? The process of coercion, so far as we can see, would be much more simple than the process of temptation. As Satan possesses no power of compulsion, men are culpable and guilty when they yield to his temptations. Whenever assailed by temptation they should, in imitation of the example of Jesus, say, "Get thee hence, Satan."

Speculation with regard to the future of fallen angels would be unjustifiable, but something can be said that does not belong to the realm of speculation. They are evidently in custody now, reserved to the judgment of the great day. I quote again from Peter and Jude: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment," etc.; "And the angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." (II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6)

Other Scriptures prove abundantly that men will be judged on the Great Day, but these passages teach the same thing concerning the angels that sinned. They are "reserved unto judgment." All the facts having a bearing on their sin will be brought to light, their inexcusable guilt will be shown, and the divine procedure in their case will be fully vindicated. Truly, "the day of the Lord" will be a great day—great in publicly fixing the destinies of angels and men.

Wretched as are fallen spirits now, there is reason to believe that there will be decided increase of their wretchedness after sentence is pronounced on them at the judgment. In proof of the correctness of this view, I refer to Matt. 8:28, 29: "And when he was come to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with demons,

coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?"

The demons, having effectual control of the unfortunate men, spoke through them. There was no denial but rather a recognition of their future doom. They seem, however, to have regarded that doom as distant, and they were anxious to know whether Jesus was so anticipating it as to torment them before the time. We may regard these demons as representing the whole confederacy of fallen angels; and if so, it follows that there is a universal belief of a fixed period when their torment will be greatly augmented. The basis of that belief, we may reasonably suppose, is to be found in some intimation given them when they learned that they were to be "reserved to the judgment of the great day." (Jude 6)



Angels

From *The Pulpit Cyclopaedia*, 1851

"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Psalm 68:17

It does not appear that angels are included in the Mosaic account of the creation, for they were present on that occasion as adoring spectators. For then, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. The Scriptures do not furnish us with an extended regular history of these blessed intelligences, but a sufficiency of incidental reference is given to enable us to form a correct estimation of their holy and intellectual character, and the important position they occupy in the moral portion of God's universe.

The name itself is indicative rather of their office than their nature, signifying messenger or one sent. It is obvious from the Scripture revelation:

I. THAT THE ANGELS ARE SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCES. "Who maketh his angels spirits." (Ps. 104:4) It is not our present province to define what is meant by spirit. But, believing in the spirituality of the divine essence, and in the spiritual immateriality of the soul, we are not perplexed in conceiving of created beings, who are not formed of material substance, or clothed with corporeal bodies.

II. ANGELS ARE IMMORTAL, OR UNDYING INTELLIGENCES. This is clearly intimated in that passage, "Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels." Luke 20:36. This involves the idea, that by the very constitution of their nature they are immortal and not liable to decay or dissolution.

III. ANGELS ARE HOLY INTELLIGENCES. "Sons of God." Often described as the holy angels. Of necessity, such is their creation. The offspring of a holy Deity. Their obedience to the divine will is referred to by the psalmist, who speaks of them as "ministers of his, that do his pleasure." (Ps. 103:21) And the holy service of the angels is referred to by the Saviour who has taught us that the will of God should be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven. Their love of holiness is evident from their intense celebration of the divine purity. They rest not day nor night, but ever wait to know the divine pleasure; and, covering their faces with their wings, cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts," &c. Isa. 6:3. It is also clear, that the holy angels resisted the temptations of the leader of those who kept not their first estate, but by reason of their rebellion were cast down from their high habitations.

IV. ANGELS ARE BENEVOLENT INTELLIGENCES. It is clear that they delight in the benevolent works of God, especially in the great scheme of redemption. Benevolence is one of the essential attributes of holiness; for they cannot love and delight in God without also loving his creatures, especially those who resemble him in purity. How they exulted in the advent of the Saviour "Glory to God in the highest" &c. (Luke 2:14) How gladly they revealed his resurrection; how deeply they study the mysteries of the cross. (I Pet. 1:12)

V. THEY ARE ACTIVE AND POWERFUL INTELLIGENCES. Hence they fly to do God's bidding. See an extraordinary instance in the history of Daniel, 9:20. See also Matt. 13:21. They also "excel in strength" (Ps. 103:20) and are called the "mighty angels." (II Thess. 1:7) Hence some of their stupendous doings are related in the Scriptures, when employed as the agents of God, and the instruments of his providence.

VI. ANGELS ARE INTELLIGENCES HIGHLY ENDOWED WITH KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM. Their purely spiritual nature, their high rank, their exalted place of abode, their opportunities of observation, must all lead to their intellectual greatness. Doubtless they possess clearness of understanding, perfect soundness of judgment, and an expanded vigor of comprehension, belonging only to themselves.

VII. ANGELS ARE DISTINGUISHED INTO VARIOUS CLASSES, RANKS, AND ORDERS. Hence their diversity of appellations, as seraphim and cherubim, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, and in number they are thousands of thousands.

VIII. ANGELS ARE THE SERVANTS OF GOD TO EXECUTE HIS PLEASURE.

1. In ministering to the children of God. Hence they counselled and instructed:

- Hagar, Gen. 16:7
- Abraham, Gen. 18:2
- Joshua, Gideon, Elijah, II Kings 3:10-16
- David, Daniel, Zacharias, Luke 1:11
- Joseph, Matt. 120
- Philip, Acts 8:16
- Peter, Acts 10:3

2. They comforted—Jacob, Gen. 32:1; Daniel, 10:19; Paul, Acts 27:24. They delivered—Lot from Sodom; Daniel from the lion's den; and Peter and the apostles from prison.

3. They were the attendants of the Saviour at his birth—baptism—temptation—transfiguration—agony—death—resurrection—and ascension into heaven. They rejoice in the conversion of sinners, and bear the souls of the saints to the mansions of glory. They are destined also to attend Christ at his second coming, and witness the judgment of the world at the Great Day.

4. In being the instruments of the divine vengeance — as in the instances of the destruction of the Assyrian army, and in the death of the persecuting Herod, Acts 12.

APPLICATION

1. The pious have the distinguished privilege of angelic ministrations, Heb. 1:14.
2. They are worthy of our study and imitation.
3. They will be the companions of the redeemed in glory forever.



HERALD of mercy I go,
Thy Savior's love proclaim
To lands of death and woe,
Tell the Redeemer's name
Tell bow he came on earth to die
Tell bow he intercedes on high.

Let Every Christian Mother Look to the Christian Education of Her Own Child _____

Jabez Burns

From *Mothers of the Wise and Good*, 1860

The professed followers of Christ receive the Word of God as the only rule of life, and do, in some important cases, so modify their interpretations of it, by the customs and maxims of a world lying in wickedness, that they actually follow the dictates of a depraved heart. Their confidence is placed, partly in their own worldly wisdom, and partly in the power and faithfulness of God.

It is to be feared that the Bible system of education is strangely perverted by worldly wisdom. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6)

The family circle was appointed by Infinite Wisdom, as a nursery of all those principles which assimilate man to his Creator. How should we ever be able to form any adequate conception of our Father who is in heaven, or of the endearing relation in which we stand to Him, if we had never known the bond which unites the earthly parent and child?

Let a child be properly taught his duty to his earthly parent that he may comprehend the higher one which he owes to our Father in heaven.

The religious instruction of children, given by the parents in the family, enforced by a consistent example, and accompanied with fervent prayer, furnishes fathers and mothers with the only well-grounded hope that their children will be prepared to meet the temptations of the world.

How exalted the privilege, and how lofty the destiny of the rising generation! And how momentous the responsibilities resting upon Christian parents! Christian mothers, weigh well the truth that the most solemn obligations are pressing upon you to attend personally, faithfully, and prayerfully, to the religious education of your children. If you would save your child from infidelity, trust not the moulding of his young mind to unhallowed hands. A child acquires a perfect confidence in its mother - hence her influence is greater than any other.

Who can so well discover the unfolding intellect of a child as the mother? Who can so well apply seasonable instruction as the watchful mother?

The first impressions are fixed principles, and your example may make them either good or bad. Children are ever watching for something new from their mother, and, through the corrupt propensities of human nature, they will be far more ready to catch the evil than the good. How important, then, that your every act be consistent and correct, that the first impressions made upon the mind of your child be salutary!

Christian mother, consider how far your own conduct will tell upon the future weal or woe of your child's soul in eternity. By your apathy and negligence your child may be lost; by your prayerful, persevering watchfulness, care, and instruction, through Christ, your child may be saved.

Let your grand object be, to make your child, while yet a child, a believer in the Bible. Thoroughly explain to him its doctrines, precepts, and promises. Teach him the Gospel, prayerfully submitting the whole to God, believing the Holy Spirit will do his office-work upon the heart. But above all, beware how you encourage your child to hope his little heart is regenerated, merely because he has learned and knows it to be necessary. Close discrimination is necessary, that you do not deceive your child, and lead him to believe his heart is changed, when in fact it is not. Rest not satisfied until the fruits of the Spirit are manifested by the works of repentance and faith.

Even little children may be converted; and when you are satisfied, by Scriptural evidence, of the conversion of your child, be not satisfied with yourself, and think your work is done. It remains your duty, and your privilege, by the grace of God assisting you, to guide his young feet in the footsteps of our Saviour, the pathway to God, and eternal life. Mother, is it of small moment that you have in solemn charge the disposal of intelligence and immortality, on which hangs the issue of eternity? Does not your heart respond to this awful responsibility? Then ever be found with a prayerful spirit, which is a Mother's panoply.

"Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17)



A Mother's Privilege

Jabez Burns

From *Mothers of the Wise and Good*, 1860

What is a mother's privilege? It is your privilege, Christian mother, and you must not neglect it, to train up your child for heaven. It is your privilege, Oh, ever prize it, to plead for him the promises of a covenant-keeping God. He bids you come. He will not suffer any one to forbid you, when with yearning soul you bear your little one, warmed in your bosom, its heart beating with kindred life against your own, to Him who died for you and your child. This is a mother's privilege, to win a blessing for the babe you love that shall abide on its spirit through the eternity of its being. As it lies lapped in your guardianship, unconscious of the care that watches its slumbers, you can breathe over faith's heartfelt dedication of your love to your present God.

As in gentlest ministry of tenderness you open for it your bosom's fount, and give it as it were to drink from your own life, you can bear its name in all the urgency of a mother's love on your humble, holiest prayer! You can bind its soul around your own, inseparable from you, and never to be forgotten or neglected while life or hope is yours. To watch its infant passions, and check their promptings—to train its infant thoughts,—to twine around its infant heart a tie that Heaven will kindly own, and that shall wax stronger and stronger beneath a Saviour's smile—this, this is a mother's privilege.

Make it all your own. Think not it is enough to HOPE, but be sure to KNOW that your child is an heir of heaven. Promises bright with protection, and more precious still, with eternal life, beckon you on every page or God's revelation to labor for a world that needs salvation. Plead them—plead them mightily, and leave Him not till he bids you go in peace.

Motives break forth in voices from heaven, bidding you, "Come in with thy child, come!"

And in unearthly warnings from the pit, "Turn him from every path that may bring him here."

And as they pour their tide of influence on your heart, they proclaim that you have a work of faith and labor of love to perform, in which you must not linger, nor faint, nor grow weary. Strengthen, then, that faith by feeding on the Word of truth, and drink in, in communion with an all-sufficient Redeemer, the streams of life that may invigorate you to the noblest deed that your immortal spirit can accomplish.

You must win that soul, instinct with dying energies, to be a living gem in the Saviour's crown. Pride would teach you to ask for greatness, for honors to laurel the brow of your loved one, for what the earth-born delight in and call happiness, to be his portion here; but ask for Him a greater boon than any or all of these. You must beg, and passing this narrow bound of time, your prayer must reach out to grasp a prize of which he can only know the worth, as he learns it where eternal ages stamp it never to be forgotten or unenjoyed. As if but one sole request, which must never be let go till it is granted, is your errand there, so make your urgency be felt at the footstool of the throne. A mother's voice—a mother's heart shall not plead in vain.

