
The Abiding Word

The
**ABIDING
WORD**

AN ANTHOLOGY OF DOCTRINAL
ESSAYS FOR THE YEARS
1954–1955

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Publisher's Preface

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THE PUBLISHER

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The Abiding Word

Our Divine Adoption

PAUL prays that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.” (Eph. 1:17-19)

With these words Paul prays that we may know the efficient cause of our divine adoption, that we may become fully conscious and appreciative of our high calling as sons of God. May a restudy of our exalted position, under the heading

OUR DIVINE ADOPTION

speed the fulfillment of Paul’s prayer also in us, who are even now the sons of God by adoption.

The word “adoption” in itself implies that we were originally not children of Him who is now our Father.

WHAT, THEN, WERE WE BY NATURE?

“Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?” (Mal. 2:10). Indeed we are the offspring of God (Acts 17:29). Originally man was created for God and for a life in communion with God. But by the Fall, God’s children have become estranged children, so that Christ must bluntly say: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” (John 8:44)

Instead of loving God as our Father, we by nature hate Him; we do not seek Him, but try our natural best to avoid Him, and have as little to do with Him as we can possibly get by with. We who are now called the sons of God, once were dead through

trespasses and sins, we once walked according to the present evil tendency of the ungodly world, and we walked according to the prince of this world, that evil spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience. (See Eph. 2:2, 3)

Far, then, from being the children of God by natural birth, we were the children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). By nature we were subject to the rule of Satan. Having the devil's nature in our hearts, we had no choice but to live the devil's life of rebellion against the heavenly Father.

Since we originally and by nature were not God's children in truth and spirit but are now again called sons of God, the Bible rightly speaks of our special reborn relationship to God as *adoption to sonship*. Sonship does not embrace all men, but only those who are sanctified. We did *not* make God to be our Father, *but He made us to be His children*. (1 John 3:1)

I. WHAT MOVED GOD TO MAKE US HIS CHILDREN?

It all starts with the eternal plan of *predestination* to sonship. "He predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph. 1:5). The heavenly Father has not been wondering all these years how many sons and daughters He would finally have in heaven, or who they would be. He had the whole family of God made up beforehand, from all eternity.

By Christ – in Christ – through Christ. God bestows the sonship on us because Christ earned it for us by the work of redemption. He came into this world, picked us off the streets of the world, washed us in His blood, cleansed us, dressed us in His own holy righteousness, and so presented us to His own Father for adoption.

This adoption is not merely a fortunate but undesigned coincidence, for God chose and adopted us *individually* to be His sons before the creation of the universe, *because He foresaw Jesus' work of redemption*. It alone is the meritorious cause of our adoption.

It is obvious, then, that God elected us to sonship *not* because He foresaw any goodness in us, *not* because He saw that we were somewhat disposed to accept His offer, *not* because He foresaw or foreknew that we would remain faithful to the end, and *not* because of any special feature that made us different from those not elected.

From eternity He decreed for us the special privilege of being adopted for Christ's sake, just because He wanted it so to be. The parable of the Son's Wedding shows us that God will not let Jesus' work of redemption go fruitless. God will have children in heaven with Him. He will provide them. Therefore He chose us to be His children. He knew the only way to get us obstreperous, satanic children to become His own would be that if He Himself would make the arrangement through the redemptive work of His own Son. His Son first pays for our sin-debt, and then, in order that the work would not be in vain, God follows through with His plans, devising ways and means through which He would make our unwilling hearts willing to accept the earned forgiveness. The Gospel is the power unto salvation. *Our election, then, is through Christ, for the sake of Christ, and in Christ.*

Again, if you ask: What moved God to adopt us? John answers: "Behold what manner of *love* the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 John 3:1. Study also Eph. 2:4-6.)

Nothing but love could move God to take a mass of sinners, who continually rebelled against His authority, or to take criminals under the sentence of the Law — nothing but love could move God to take us who by nature would much rather continue in a condition estranged and separated from Him forever than consent to return to be reconciled to Him in peace — I say, nothing but love could move God to take people who were determined to remain the devil's children and make them over into His loving children. *That is what you call love.* But remember, God's love for us is abundant, free, but it is not cheap. It cost God the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son.

God Himself in His own Son, making common cause with us, becoming and being made sin for us, suffering all the agony in hell that payment for sin required — that is love.

A Danish missionary appointed a Hindu convert to help him translate Luther's Catechism. When it came to saying in Hindu that the Christians are children of God, the convert objected, "This is too much. Let me rather say that the Christians are permitted to kiss His feet." No wonder that John says, "Behold what

manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" To quote from an old Jewish ode by Rabbi Ben Isaac and sung during the Feast of Pentecost:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the heavens of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade:
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Another answer: *His desire to have others outside Himself to make known the riches of His glory.* "God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and hath given to *us* the ministry of reconciliation . . . and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. Now, then, *we* are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

A fourth answer: His desire to have us as the very objects on whom He might make known and display the riches of His glory. "What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has [on the contrary] endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy which He has prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He has called?" (Rom. 9:22-24 RSV)

II. HOW DOES GOD CARRY OUT HIS ETERNAL PLAN OF OUR ADOPTION?

It is quite possible for a person to adopt someone as a son and yet be disappointed to find that the adopted one will *not* respond as a son, will never become integrated into the family life, and in general will spurn the love and high position of sonship. There was the case of a state prison warden a few years ago. He adopted a son whom all the reform schools in the state had described as "hopelessly incorrigible." With the consent of the court the boy was finally sent to the state prison. It seemed that the warden had a great deal of healthy influence over the youngster. He sort of adopted him as one of the family. In this new home-surrounding the warden treated the boy as his own son.

Soon the warden noticed that inwardly the boy had really never appreciated this love, care, and attention. The warden could not change the heart and the thinking of this boy. There was nothing he could do to make him a true member of the family. One day a riot broke out in the prison, and this boy used that occasion to turn against the warden and tried to kill the warden's wife. He would have done so had it not been for one faithful trusty.

Here we have a case in hand just as it would be if God had merely, by some legal proclamation, dubbed us His sons. Without a complete change in our nature, heart, desire, and will, and without a new birth from God, we would never have become one with God, in heart, mind, and soul; we would never have become children of God in reality, but at heart would have remained Satan's offspring and enemies of God.

Since God does not desire children in name only, but since He wants obedient children of the same heart and mind with Himself; since God desires thankful children who will respond to His love, He had to create a brand-new nature in us. This change of heart He works in us by giving us a second birth. "Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of God" (1 John 2:29). Our divine adoption goes far beyond His simply passing a law to make us His children, because our heavenly Father aims at a more thorough filiation, a more intensely real sonship. Therefore we are born again of *Him*. We have become as little children by conversion so that we can enter into the kingdom of heaven. In conversion the Spirit of God removes from us the proud, cold heart of natural manhood and creates in us the meek heart of a child. The fleshly heart in man, full of envy, suspicion, and selfishness, recoils from being a child of God. It resents the idea of dependence and indebtedness to our Father.

Man in his natural condition declares his self-reliance and independence. He often appeals to the idea of evolution (long outmoded) to explain how he is practically a self-made creature. He assigns to God as unimportant a part in the universe as he possibly can get away with. Natural man, who tries to refuse to bow to God, makes much of the idea of superman as the goal for human progress and world salvation. Of course, those who

prate of being supermen really demonstrate only the frustration of their actual smallness.

In England at the turn of the century there lived such a naturalistic philosopher of this type, William Ernest Henley by name. In his most famous poem, "Invictus," Henley throws back his shoulders, pushes out his chest, challenges God, men, and devils, in these words:-

Out of the night that covers me
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Loom but the horrors of the shade;
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, ,unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll;
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Reading this robust announcement of independence before knowing much about the life of this whining braggart, you might think the author had been a broad-shouldered, two-fisted, hard-hitting, powerful man of muscle and frame, brilliant of mind, able to push his way through the world, asking odds from nobody. Actually Henley was an English newspaperman of frail health and limited physical resources. He admired physical prowess, and he himself would have liked to be an athlete, but he never realized his ambitions. This poem is a whining complaint under the guise of mouthy defiance. He complains of being bludgeoned by chance, wounded by the buffeting of unreasonable circumstances. His future is filled only with great, frightening, unknown forms. He is afraid but too dishonest to admit it. Deep in his conscience he realizes that someday he must meet a punishment-laden scroll. Yet whining, afraid, fearful of the future, he makes quite a point of his independence.

This poem, typical of natural man's thinking, betrays not a big man, not a mature, Christian man, not a child dependent on a dependable Father or an almighty God, but shows up the small man trying to compensate for his frustrations and feelings of inferiority. The pride in man is only then thoroughly subdued when the Father gives him a new heart.

"He begets us to Himself" (James 1:18). We are born of God in such a manner that He places His nature into us. He would have us be real and actual children, children of a new creation, of one heart and mind with Him. (See 2 Peter 1:3, 4 RSV.)

Lest we forget the reason for all this, John invites with these words: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 John 3:1)

If we would fully estimate this love of God, we must again and again turn to the cross. There we see a love that shrinks from no sacrifice, for God gives His own Son into death to make us His children. We turn to the cross and there see a love which is evoked by no loveliness on our part. There we see a love that will not be put off by sinfulness, a love which pours its treasures on us unworthy ones like sunshine on a dunghill.

"To all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God." (John 1:12 RSV)

The fact that we are born of God, regenerated or converted, or whatever you will call it with the Bible, is the direct result and outflow of God having adopted us unto sonship. There would be no conversion today had these not been chosen from eternity as sons of God.

And this birth came about by the Word. "We are born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." (1 Peter 1:23)

YOU ARE CHILDREN OF GOD BY FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS

As soon as we believe, in that very moment, the eternal plan of our divine adoption materializes in the individual. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." The light bulbs in your home are dead and dark unless the electric current comes down along the copper wire, along the power-conveyor, to light them up.

So God sends His Spirit into our hearts, spiritually dead of themselves, through the power-conveyor, the means of grace, the living Word of God. *And as by the Gospel we were made children of God, so by the Gospel we grow.* (1 Peter 2:1, 2)

To summarize: adoption, sonship, election is therefore entirely rooted in the sovereign will of the gracious God. The ultimate end of our adoption is this, that God's glory may be admired and adored, that grace with which He accepted us in His beloved Son, who procured the redemption by the shedding of His blood.

We see, then, that God has taken our childhood into His own almighty hands and into His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown. Moreover, you are not to forget that even now, in the present time, God is carrying into fulfillment His eternal counsel on us. According to Ephesians 1 He is employing the present time, your and my lifetime, and in general the New Testament era, to complete the gathering-in of His elect children. Even now He is sending out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gentiles hear it, believe it, and thus become children of God. The entire work of the church and everything that is connected with the preaching of the Gospel serves this purpose and has this effect, that the children of God from all ends of the world are being brought to their heavenly Father. God's entire direction of our life is divine pedagogy, intended to produce, strengthen, and preserve in us the adoption.

In other words: The decree of predestination unto adoption of children ordains not merely the final salvation of the elect, but it includes the entire way that leads to heaven. We are adopted via justification, conversion, faith, sanctification, and preservation, as Paul says: "He hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ . . . in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:4, 5, 7); and again: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). The entire work of the Holy Spirit by which He calls, converts, justifies, sanctifies, keeps, and finally saves sinners is part and parcel of the execution and realization of our divine adoption.

III. CERTAINTY OF OUR DIVINE ADOPTION

We now turn to a question which sometimes proves very disturbing even to Christians: "How can we know with certainty that we are the children of God?" The unbeliever lives in a constant state of uncertainty about his salvation. He has the law written indelibly in his heart, bearing testimony of his evil and the sure punishment for sin. This knowledge of a final accounting makes the unregenerate hate God and fear death and creates uncertainty for him in everything he does. To escape this conviction of conscience, some turn to a careless certainty which solves nothing. These harden their conscience with an attitude of worldly concern, thinking that if they smother the accusing voice with worldly pleasure, they will find peace and security.

E. g., they find that their conscience does not bother them nearly as much if it must first penetrate a haze of alcohol. Or they keep themselves in a mad race of pleasure, trying to refuse to face the realities of life. They think that if they wrap themselves up in a scramble for money, concentrate hard on getting ahead in the world and enjoying themselves, there will be little opportunity to worry about death and what comes thereafter. Their philosophy is, "Find certainty by running away from the realities of life, death, and eternity."

Others who can't swallow this medicine for deadening their conscience invent a milder anaesthetic equally as bad. They dope their conscience with the marijuana of their own goodness and the morphine of a perverted doctrine about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. In essence they say, "We are not perfect, but we're not so bad either. After all, everybody has his faults, and as long as we try to be good neighbors and good citizens and lead a pretty good, outwardly moral life, we'll make it; and does not God say that He is a God of *love*? Why, then, should He want to punish us at all?" That is the certain uncertainty of the natural man.

We who are even now the sons of God must avoid two extremes: overconfidence and underconfidence. Many an athletic contest is lost because of overconfidence. Nowhere is overconfidence more damaging than in the spiritual realm. Let no man abuse this teaching about our divine adoption, so as to reach a state of

complacency and feel that the devil cannot reach him, that the world cannot tempt him, that his own flesh cannot betray him, or that he has made so much progress in Christian life that he could never be diverted to worldly ways. The Bible frequently warns against overconfidence.

At the same time the pendulum dare not swing to the other extreme—the lack of confidence in our divine adoption. We are not to go through life uncertain of our place in the heavenly Father's family. With Paul we are to say: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12). 1 John 3:18-24 calls this a confidence toward God and tells us three ways in which this confidence in our divine adoption can be maintained and strengthened. *There is first the testimony of a Christian life; secondly, the evidence of Christian prayer; thirdly, the assurance of Christian faith,* and from Romans we add: *there is the assurance of the indwelling Holy Spirit, or the witness of the Spirit.*

John says that sometimes our hearts condemn us. How true! Every mature Christian knows the truth of this. Sometimes the contemplation of our spiritual shallowness and our moral degradation has made us wonder whether we have the right to bear the name child of God. Every Sunday morning we sing, "Cast me not away from Thy presence," and yet there are times when our faith is at such low ebb that we feel cut off from God altogether. We think of the shameful hour when we acted like cowards instead of brave, confessing Christians; of that moment of moral crisis when we should have been heroes and instead turned out to be weaklings. We recall the days of trial and sickness when we yielded to bitterness and self-pity. And then there are those countless hours when we were in the grip of spiritual lethargy, when our lives were marked by spiritual futility and sterility. And so our hearts condemn us. It therefore seems rather strange to learn from John that one source of confidence toward God is the testimony of a Christian life. Says he, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him if we do not love in word neither in tongue [only] but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18, 19)

Now the opposite seems to be the case. It is when we have examined our life and behold how we have failed that our heart

condemns us. Knowing this condition, John adds: "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." (1 John 3:20)

This is truly one of the most profoundly comforting passages in the Bible. God knows the truth about us, and yet He cares for us and wants us to be His children. He sees our moral failures and frailties, but He also sees beyond these surface disclosures (manifestations) of our natural sinfulness, into the deeper recesses of our heart, and there discovers the penitent and regenerate spirit which the Holy Spirit has created there.

Usually we think of God's searching omniscience only in reference to His ability to detect our hidden faults and secret sins. But to us, His children, the omniscience of God is also a source of comfort. The searching scrutiny of our heavenly Father penetrates into the deep places of our souls and there observes our willingness to live a Christian life. While our fellow men for the most part see only our surface behavior and our miserable failures, God looks deeper. He knows all things, including the fact that you and I desire to be better Christians. God looks beyond our capacities to our intentions, beyond our achievements to our motives. He not only sees how we live but how we want to live. So that, when our heart condemns us, we can rejoice that God is greater than our heart, for He knoweth *all* things.

We see, then, that the testimony of our Christian life, weak though it is much of the time, serves as proof that we are the children of God. "As many as are led [or directed to do good works] by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:14)

A *second* assurance that God is our dear heavenly Father and we His dear children mentioned by John is: "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him." Here again let us look away from the long list of unanswered prayers — prayers which in the main perhaps were very selfish, and if God had answered them as we asked, we would have ruined ourselves with the things for which we asked — let us turn away from these unanswered prayers to the long list of answered prayers and find therein a second proof that God is our loving Father and we His dear children. Since we are children of God, it follows that we freely talk to our Father. Do you pray? If so, you are an adopted son. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent

forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts [the Spirit of prayer], crying Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6)

John has a *third* assurance that we are children of God, *the assurance which our faith in Christ gives us.* "This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." It is the will of the Father that we believe in His Son, trust Him as our Savior, and worship Him as Lord. If, then, we are believers in Christ, our lives are in harmony with the highest will of God, and we can be assured that we are His own. "How?" you ask. You see it is Christ who removed the one barrier that existed between the holy God and unholly man. So Christ becomes the principal Source of our confidence toward God. Through His redemptive work He has broken the paralyzing power of sin. He broke down the wall of separation. *Through our faith in the Savior* we have gained the conviction that we are now at one with God and have been restored as members of His family. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and everyone who loves the Parent loves the child." (1 John 5:1 RSV)

Sometimes we are slow to understand what a rock foundation for life is given us in our Christian faith. In most affairs of earthly life there is always some degree of uncertainty and insecurity, but in regard to our adoption, we need never doubt that our sins are forgiven, that we are saved and destined for life eternal. Do not be afraid of being too confident, if your confidence is based and built on God and His Son Jesus and on the promises sealed by the Holy Spirit. You see our salvation does not depend upon ourselves and our moral success. It is precisely because our divine adoption does *not* depend on us but on the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world, that we can confidently rely on our redemption and look forward *without* anxiety to the day of our entrance into the Father's house.

And so John brings one more assurance that we are God's children: *You dwell in God and God in you, and He has given you His indwelling Spirit* (cf. 1 John 3:24). Paul is very emphatic on this point in Rom. 8:14-16: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. . . . The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

What is the meaning of *witness of the Spirit*? Paul uses a similar expression, though expanded (Eph. 1:13 ff.). *After you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation, and after you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. This Holy Spirit is the earnest [the down payment, the initial investment that God has in us], which makes it sure that He will also redeem the purchased inheritance.* Because God has made such a huge investment in us through the death of His Son and through the Holy Spirit now dwelling in our hearts through the Gospel, we are positive that He will make also the final payment and actually take us home to the land of inheritance. *As proof that you are children, God has sent into your hearts the Spirit of His Son.* (Gal. 4:6)

With regard to the words *the witness of the Spirit* in Rom. 8:16, let us free ourselves of the false notion that this involves some spectacular emotional upheaval. There are many religious fanatics who in their brain-sick fancies think of the *witness of the Spirit* in terms of an ecstatic experience which results in convulsive psychological and physiological reactions. If such experiences are necessary to prove that we are children of God, hardly anyone here would qualify for membership in God's family. But certainly this is not what the Scripture means by *witness of the Spirit*. Rather this: The Holy Ghost works through the means of grace. Through the Gospel He testifies to the love of God in Christ; He speaks to us of God's forgiving grace through Jesus. Paul asks in Gal. 3:5: "Does He who supplies the Spirit to you do so by works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?" The *witness of the Spirit* is not something that should be thought of in terms of our feelings toward God, but in terms of God's feelings toward us. He directs our thought not inward upon ourselves, but outward and upward toward our God. Through the Word the Spirit bears witness to the love of God in Christ. The Spirit of God makes the Word live in our heart. Through endless repetition of the love the Father has for us He removes the spirit of bondage and fear and convinces us that we are truly His own sons and daughters. "Perfect love casteth out fear."

Also clearly to be understood is this: If the love of Christ leaves you cold and unmoved, and if you feel no need for redemption, no longing for Christ's grace, then indeed you are not a child of

God. But if in your own spirit you respond to the *witness of God's Spirit*, if you long for God's mercy and pardon, there need be no doubt: you are a child of God.

As such a child you are made capable of believing the incredible, for the Gospel of redemption which is foolishness to natural man is to you the power of God and the wisdom of God. You are made capable of doing the impossible, for you can rise above the instincts of your natural self and serve God and man in devotion to Christ. You are made capable of comprehending the incomprehensible. Yes, because you have this soul- and heart-changing, faith-creating, and understanding-enlightening Holy Spirit dwelling in you, you are one of the elect, predestined, adopted children of God.

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). There are, then, as many children of God as there are Christians, no more and no less.

Since our adoption unto sonship is equivalent to election thereto, let us yet add this: *no man on earth* has direct information as to his election. But if a person in this life experiences these spiritual blessings we have described, which are the result of the election and adoption, then he may and should infer that he also is one of the elect children of God.

Even as we infer from the faith we now have that we shall be saved (John 3:16), so we should infer from the same faith (Acts 13:48) that we are elected unto sonship. Faith in Christ is a matter of personal experience, based on the assured knowledge gained from the firm and infallible Word of God. "I know whom I have believed," says Paul in 2 Tim. 1:12. And by this faith which I now have I know of my election in the past and of my sure salvation in the future.

Thus the knowledge of my election to the sonship — not election itself — is contingent on faith. Faith in Christ does not explain *why* we are elected, but it does show *that* we are elected. "Der Glaube ist nicht Erklaerungsgrund, wohl aber Erkenntnisgrund der Wahl."

He who would know whether he be a child of God should not begin to speculate concerning the secret and inscrutable fore-knowledge of God, but let him repent of his sins, hear the Gospel of grace, by which God calls His elect, and let him "examine himself

whether he be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). Then by this faith he will also know of his election.

We are also admonished "to give diligence to make our calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). Let no one think that because he is in the faith today and thereby assured of his adoption to sonship, that he may now discard the Gospel, lose faith, and live in sin — and still regard himself as a child of God who will unfailingly be saved. We find comfort in our divine adoption only while we are in faith.

IV. ADOPTED SONS NOW

The question immediately arises: Do we realize that now at this very moment in our life and throughout our whole life in faith we are God's children? Do we rejoice in our present dignity? Do we draw from this truth the comforting assurance in the hours of affliction and cross-bearing? Does our position as a child of God have a sobering effect upon us when life seems to be one success after another?

You see we don't have to wait until we cross the River Jordan to enjoy the benefits of our divine adoption. In Ephesians Paul, with characteristic, impetuous fervor and exuberant joy, plunges into that great theme which constitutes that letter, because he for one personally experiences the fact that he has been and even now is adopted to sonship. Put a pen into Paul's hand, and it is like tapping a blast furnace out of which rushes a fiery stream of joy. He is at once buoyant, emphatic, cheering, thanking for this exalted theme: I am a child of God now because God *has* given. Blessed be the God who *has* given us all spiritual blessings, etc.

Notice the tense, not "will give" but "has given." Completed action. The limiting of the gifts from God lies only within ourselves. God has given all spiritual blessings. The question arises, "How much do we with our faith take hold on these gifts?"

A poor beggar came to a rich man, asking for a handout. The rich man said, "Return tomorrow, bring along your bag so that I can make you a large present." The beggar returned, but with only a small coin purse. The rich man, insulted because the beggar thought of him in only such small terms, said, "I told you to expect big gifts from me, and here you bring only a small purse. According to your conception of me, so be it unto you."

Is our conception of God that which is made evident by the few spiritual blessings we have laid hold on? Is our God perhaps too small? There is no doubt that we could possess greater spiritual powers in this life in order to perform greater things for our Father and the expansion of His family, if only we, with a larger measure of faith and a firmer trust in His promises, would take more from Him.

A St. Louis man had business dealings with John D. Rockefeller. At one point in these business dealings John D. wrote out a check for a million dollars in favor of this man. Mr. St. Louis carried it on his person until the day of his own death. All this while his own family was in dire straits. Only when he died did this check come to the attention of the family. He would have enjoyed comfortable living. He could have supplied all the needs and wants of his family; but no! He had refused to cash the check given him by the multimillionaire. By the time this folly was discovered, the Rockefeller estate had been divided. The check was no longer of value.

Something similar happens in the lives of a host of professing Christians who have not in any real sense laid hold on the possessions which God is even now ready to give unto them. There are so many spiritually starved and anemic Christians who have never risen to the full stature of what God intended them to be, who grow so little in the knowledge of the Father's Word, who have only a flickering faith, if it be faith at all; who know so little about the religion they claim to profess, people who give so little, love so little, and do so little, all because they do not "cash in," to use a common expression, on the huge blessings and the heaven-backed promises that God so eagerly puts at their disposal. What God says in Malachi 3 with reference to tithing may well be used in this connection too: If we would only with a larger measure of faith try out God's promises, then He would also in this respect fulfill His pledge: "I will open up unto you the windows of heaven, I will pour out upon you a blessing so bountiful that you shall not have room enough to receive it."

Many of the problems in the church today are due to the fact that vast numbers of its members are without the vital experience of God's eternal promises as the motivating power in their own life.

Our people may be familiar with what Christ says, in some cases they are even attracted, hungry and wistful, but unless they are surrendered to Christ, unless they have committed their life to Him, they are not wholly won to the religion they claim to profess. In such weak lives the promises of God are not fulfilled, and the fruits are not as obvious as they could be.

God does not wish His adopted children to be "fakes." He does not wish them to use their attendance at divine service or their membership on a church committee or their vehement discussion of some Bible doctrine as a substitute for the real thing. God would have His children to vibrate, effervesce with joy and action in love, because they are *now* already His children. In the lives of many people Christ is only a catechism to be memorized, a creed to be confessed, or a list of pious customs to be practiced. In themselves these are beautiful things. But Christ and the riches of heaven which our Father would bestow on us do not exist in externals.

And how about us who have been specially called to proclaim the message of our divine adoption? Paul could never get over what God had done to Saul on the road to Damascus. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:4-6)

When did Paul say this? When in heaven? No. He thought of himself as sitting in heavenly places *now*, whether in the thick of battle or in imprisonment or in the more pleasant days of his life.

How can any preacher, conscious of the exalted position of a child of God *now*, ever deliver a dull or dry sermon? Be his shortcomings what they may, he will not be a parrot, but a witness of bounties, material and spiritual, that God has showered upon him. He will be a man acquainted with Jesus and the heavenly Father. This acquaintance will be a firsthand knowledge and experience.

Too many are still like the man who had a great estate in another land bequeathed to him. He knew practically nothing about this estate, because he had never tried to find out about it and had actually never taken possession of it. Instead he lived in grimy poverty on a back alley and side street, in no man's land of Foggenville. The potentiality of wealth that is ours at our beck and

call is beyond the dreams of avarice, and yet we only too often poorly and weakly realize our possible riches.

How often do we think or preach about heaven? Oh, yes, we may speak about it in a casual way, but there is great danger that it will not have the attraction for us and our hearers that it is meant to have, unless we really search the Scriptures on this particular teaching. Often we are living in swamps while we could actually live in the exhilarating mountain air of God's grace and knowledge. In this respect the word also applies: "According to thy faith, so be it unto thee."

Now are we the children of God. This is John's trumpet call to action. It should arouse us from the stupor of indifference and urge us to defend and extend the family of God. Jeremiah says: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently" (48:10). And Amos 6:1: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!" You say: "The times in which we now live are out of joint." So what? For this very time God has made us members of His family to do our share to set them aright. "Thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). The world is in darkness, therefore *now* are we to let our light shine.

As a child of God *now*, I consider this *my* hour of grace to let the influence of a godly character and a stainless life be felt in my neighborhood.

As a member of the Father's family you will send your gifted sons to our colleges to prepare for the ministry so that they may in turn proclaim the message of our divine adoption. If you have no sons, you will help the poorer neighbor's bright sons prepare for the ministry. Our *divine adoption now* means that more and more of our young men will bid farewell to the prospects of industrial or commercial triumphs to enlist in the bands of His heralds, proclaiming the Gospel tidings to a ruined world. If young men cannot do that, *divine adoption* will bid them work faithfully, live economically, and give liberally so that they can help send other young men and women into the Father's field to bring in the sheaves.

Divine adoption applies equally to Christian women, young and old; encourage them first to become a Mary to sit at Jesus' feet to learn, and then also to become a Martha to go out to serve.

Concluding this section then, let us say that with the exception of Rom. 8:23 (where our relation as children is thought of in terms of the hereafter) every passage that deals with the subject of *our divine adoption* refers to our present status as children of God.

V. OUR FATHER'S DISCIPLINE

As God's children we, like human children, need correction, disciplining, instruction, and education. The most comprehensive passages on this phase of *our divine adoption* are Hebrews 12 and 1 Peter 4:12, 16.

How often have not our children asked us and we before them: "Why do I have to? Why can't I? etc." We, as parents, were often vexed with these persistent questions. Strangely enough, we ask the same questions of God. "Why this way? Why that way, O Lord?" It is almost as though we expected our children to accept our wisdom as infallible and our judgment beyond dispute, while in turn we often act as though we were privileged to argue and question the ways and wisdom of the almighty, all-wise, and all-knowing God.

And yet it is not always wrong to ask "Why?" It all depends on the spirit in which we ask. If our question is asked in the spirit of resentment, it is sinful, but if we ask from a submissive, trusting heart that seeks to know the divine purpose, then, knowing what God has in mind for us, we may the better co-operate, and our question will result in great blessings for us and others. Heb. 12:7: "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

This answers the question "Why?" Here the Revised Standard Version is better: "It is for discipline that you endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" The preparation of God's chosen vessels involves discipline as a must. It is so even in the case of our divine, sinless Savior. Heb. 2:10: "For it was fitting that He for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory, should make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." If it is so for the perfect Son, how much more shall we expect discipline in the process of being brought to glory by Him?

Perhaps we ought to *define discipline*. Peter calls it *partaking or sharing in Christ's suffering*. By way of example let us say what it is not. When a man is punished for murder, theft, or for any other crime, he is suffering as an evildoer and not as a partaker of Christ's suffering. When a glutton eats himself into apoplexy or when juvenile delinquents work their way into reform school or prison, they are not partakers of Christ's suffering. When our biting tongue and hot temper and vaulting ambitions and selfish nature get us into trouble, we are not suffering as Christians.

What, then, is God's discipline? When Christ, who did no wrong and in whom there was no guile, was persecuted and scourged and crucified for preaching the Word of God and for doing good, He suffered because of Christian principles.

When John the Baptist was thrown into prison, he suffered for Christian principles. When missionaries and native Christians are persecuted, they suffer discipline and are partakers of Christ's suffering. When a bookkeeper refuses to cheat for his employer and loses his position and suffers want, he suffers as a Christian and for Christ's sake. When a woman goes to church and leads a godly life and for this reason is abused by her godless husband, she is indeed undergoing our heavenly Father's discipline.

What will be our attitude as God disciplines us? Will it be resentment, indifference, discouragement? It will be none of these if we remember the exhortation from Hebrews: "My son, do not regard lightly the Lord's discipline nor faint when you are rebuked by Him, for whom the Lord loves, He disciplines." (Heb. 12:5, 6)

When these things come upon us, are we to be surprised, dazed, or stunned? Are we to grieve, fret, wail, and lament, or even curse God? "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." (1 Peter 4:12)

It isn't strange at all — on the contrary, it is quite natural. The sailor looks for storms and rough seas. The soldier expects long marches, fighting, wounds. So the Christian expects these fiery trials. They belong to his Christian progress and warfare, for the servant is not above his Master. We have been forewarned and thus forearmed. "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Matthew 10 and Luke 23:31). The Christian

expects the fiery trial, but he does not await it as his doom, as a dreadful calamity.

The *discipline* which our Father exercises on us is nothing less than part of His eternal love for us. Our heavenly Father knows what things we have need of. When an earthly parent tells you that he loves his son or daughter far too much to discipline him or her, the child usually shows it in disrespect, disobedience, selfishness, and in all those immaturities which will cause him so much trouble later in life. A parent who refuses to discipline his child is not a loving parent but a fond parent, in the original meaning, a silly, foolish, doting parent. Romans 8 repeatedly assures us on the basis of our divine adoption that there is no mistake when we are asked to bear the cross and affliction.

Love does not spare the rod. This principle of discipline is also operative in the family of God. God scourges every son whom He receives and thus deals with us as a father should. Our heavenly Father's love not only imposes no more discipline than is required, but it imposes also all the discipline required to assure our fitness in the family of sons and daughters which He has appointed for us individually. If God's discipline is conspicuously absent from your life, then examine yourselves "whether you be in faith. For if you are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." (Heb. 12:8)

God deals differently with sinners than with sons. Both may experience the same affliction, yet in the case of the sinner it is a matter of heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, while in the case of sons and daughters it is designed to make us purer, stronger, and more Christlike. In the case of God's forgiven children the cross and affliction can't be punishment for sin because these, being children through faith in Christ, are forgiven. "There is now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1, 31, 39). "It is true, Christians are still sinners after the flesh, and in so far they deserve not only their temporal suffering but also eternal damnation. But since they repent of their sins and by faith in Christ daily appropriate the forgiveness of sins, their suffering is no longer a punishment in the proper sense, because the true punishment of sin is not this or that temporal misfortune but eternal damnation." (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 69)

There is a *difference between the discipline practiced among men and that which God imposes upon us.* "They [the fathers] verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure." This A. V. rendering, "after their own pleasure," sounds as a bit of slander on our good fathers. Therefore we prefer the revised: "*They verily for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them.*" Our fathers had a fairly clear picture in mind as they chastened us. They had a clear picture of what they wanted us to become. So they imposed the sort and amount of discipline they thought would produce the desired effect. Most of us can vouch for the truth of that.

Now we thank God for fathers who set before themselves the goal of godly character and useful lives for their sons, and who diligently corrected us toward that end. True, many fathers lacked the proper vision for their children, and their correctings were often impulsive, explosive, rather than studied and effective. Even the best of them had but a few days in which to do their work, for children are not in the parental home for long.

Not so the chastening of the heavenly Father. His authority rests upon us all our days. He knows exactly what He would make of us, and His wisdom and resources are infinite, *so that He is able to perfect that which concerns us.* He knows the exact kind and measure of discipline to impose, not too little or too lenient to spoil us, not too much or too severe to wound us.

We did respect our human father's discipline, even though we did not always fall in love with it. If, then, we honored and respected the defective discipline of our father according to the flesh, what trustful and loving submission shall we not give to the heavenly Father, whose ways are perfect and whose aim is to perfect us! We know He can make no mistakes. If He takes from us health, wealth, home, or little empire, or if He allows us to suffer in a long struggle with temptation before release comes, or if He adds calumny and misunderstanding and disappointment to our lot, it must be good. Submission is the way to blessing. Submission, not with the growl of a helpless captive who cannot do otherwise, but with the loving trust of a child which knows that the Father's love cannot fail nor His wisdom err. Submission to God's will does not mean confinement, slavery, bondage, or reduction. Submission

to the discipline of our loving Father means only enlargement, release, liberty, and increase. Let us, then, be done putting limits to God's control of our lives. Let us stop resisting His disciplining hand, which has a high goal in sight for each of us, His children.

In the history of music we read the story of a great Italian master of the 18th century, Porpora by name. One day Porpora saw great possibilities in a voice pupil. He challenged the pupil to entrust himself into master-teacher Porpora's training. The pupil consented. Porpora wrote out on a single sheet of ruled paper the diatonic and the chromatic scales, the various intervals, with trills, groups, appoggiaturas, and various sorts of vocal passages. A whole year was devoted to this single sheet. Then a second, a third, and a fourth year devoted to the same sheet. The pupil grew somewhat impatient by the end of the fourth year, but the master-teacher, Porpora, reminded him of his pledge to go through with this program to make himself a great singer, and so it went on into the sixth year. Finally a few lessons in articulation and pronunciation were added. Then only, at the end of the sixth year, Porpora said to the amazed pupil, "Go, my son. You have nothing more to learn. You are the first and best singer in all Italy and in the world." This was Caffarelli, one of Italy's greatest singers.

This was discipline; but it worked.

THE ULTIMATE RESULTS GOD DESIRES TO BRING ABOUT BY HIS DISCIPLINE

Heb. 12:10, 11: "But He disciplines us for our good that we might be partakers of His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. Later it yields the fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." God's discipline program may at times appear rigorous, but anything less would fail of the ultimate purpose: that we may be partakers of His holiness. God is out to produce character like His own. If we are satisfied with less than that, rest assured God is not. "Be ye holy, for I the Lord am holy." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Though strenuous, yet later it yields the fruit of righteousness.

Here again we call to mind that God uses Scripture as His textbook through which He instructs and educates us in righteousness: "So that the child of God may be perfect and thoroughly

furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16). In this book of instruction, the Bible, our Father explains not only the nature, length, and duration of the course, but also the purpose of discipline.

The purpose of God's instruction, discipline and education, is to make man perfect. We must distinguish here between the perfected righteousness which is ours through faith in Christ (commonly called justification), and the righteousness of life. The righteousness of faith, or the imputed righteousness, is perfect and complete. The righteousness of life, or our inherent righteousness, is imperfect and incomplete (Baier). It is this righteousness of life toward which God disciplines us so that we reach perfection, even though it will never be attained in this life.

The education and instruction in righteousness of life *is a continuous process*. Even though the children of God are heirs in every sense of the word, yet because of the evil nature still clinging to us, we must strive to grow. To illustrate the relation between our perfected adoption, on the one hand, and our need for further discipline and instruction in righteousness, on the other hand, let us think of an alien who receives American citizenship. The very moment the final papers are granted him, naturalization takes place. Although born in a foreign land, the alien has been adopted into the family of the United States. American citizenship, full citizenship, with all its rights and privileges is now his political standing. Before the government his position is that of a member of this nation. But now there follows a process of education and disciplining in American citizenship. To be sure, the new member of our nation is not enrolled in some formal school on civic affairs. It is sufficient for his standing that he has enrolled in this country. Having been admitted to citizenship, he has entered upon a life-long course of education in the rights and privileges of an American. However, as year succeeds year and as he lives the rest of his life among us, he daily learns more and more what it means to be an American. He grows in the knowledge of our American ways and customs, and as he grows, he becomes more thoroughly American.

So it is with us who are now called the children of God. Paul in Ephesians, after telling us in chapters 1 and 2 how we became children of God, in chapter 4 says in effect: Because of all that

I have told you previously, I therefore now beg you to lead a life worthy of the high calling to which you have been called.

Earlier in this part we said that the Bible is God's textbook through which He trains and teaches us. The Teacher, of course, is the Holy Spirit. As instructional aids, the divine Teacher uses all the countless varied experiences of life. They are interpreted by the Word of God, and as they are understood in its light, help in the education in righteousness.

With respect to the chastisements with which God visits His saints on earth, poverty, sickness, sorrow, etc., we may say that, while these do not in themselves sanctify the believer, yet they are the means by which God induces His children to meditate on His Word. Through the study of the Law we learn that we indeed deserve nothing but the chastening trials of God, and through the study of the Gospel we again comfort ourselves with the abiding love of our heavenly Father. Let us not overlook that also the blessings with which God endows His saints on earth should lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). How? By these He moves us to search the Scriptures, in which the glory of divine grace shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ, and from these we constantly draw strength for greater faith and holier service. (Read Ps. 119:9-16, 105-112. See J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis, 1934, pp. 90-142)

Let me call your attention to one more very interesting and instructive passage, 1 Peter 1:3-8. The outline of this passage is: (1) We are born again to a living hope, v. 3; (2) We are born again to an inheritance, v. 4; (3) We are guarded through faith for salvation, v. 5; (4) In the meantime, "Rejoice, even though for a little while you have had to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of your faith [a far more precious genuineness than that of gold, which is only a perishable substance, though a trial or testing by fire is employed even for its testing] — so that the genuineness of your faith may be found unto praise and glory and honor at Jesus' revelation."

Peter is showing us the nature and purpose of God's dealings with us, His children, in the hour of trial. Therefore he has in mind the picture of the goldsmith. He sees him watching the crude gold ore as it liquefies in the crucible, subject to intense heat, and the impurities rising to the surface. The metalworker skims

off the dross and continues to regulate the heat most carefully. When he sees his face reflected in the liquid gold, he cuts off the heat. It is now pure gold. Since gold is a very precious metal, the refiner takes the utmost pains with it, but subjects it to the hottest fires.

So our divine Father, the heavenly Refiner, often takes His choicest children and places them into the crucibles of suffering. Since chaff looks like wheat, the threshing floor is necessary. Gilt looks like gold, hence the crucible. Through the refining process of trials, He hopes eventually to see the likeness of Christ reflected in our lives. We need not know all the reasons for the events in our lives which are strange and hard to understand. What we need while in the fiery furnace is implicitly to believe that God is our loving Father and that He would not put us to a test if He thought He could not sustain us or we could not come through stronger and better children. The fact that God trusts us under such stern times is further proof that we are His children.

If we really believe in the love and wisdom of our heavenly Father, as He orders our discipline, we shall be better satisfied to endure the training course than if a hundred explanations were put forth by man. Job sounded the triumphant note when he gave expression to his faith in these words: "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I perceive Him not; on the left hand where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him, BUT He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:8-10)

The child of God which retains its firm hold on the heavenly Father through one trial finds it somewhat easier to face the next trial and thus learns through the sustaining grace of God to exploit each succeeding trial for his eternal good. These lessons of discipline enrich our usefulness in the world, strengthen our hold on God, and increase our understanding of the needs of our brethren. Ps. 66:10-13: "Thou, O God, hast proved us. Thou hast tried us as silver is tried. Thou hast laid affliction upon our loins. We went through fire and water, but Thou hast brought us into a wealthy place. Therefore will I go into Thy house to pay my vows."

The Father teaches, tests, and tries us, as Peter says: "In order that we be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation

of Jesus Christ." These trials are not for God's benefit. He knows everything, our weakness and strength. These are in one instance for our praise, glory, and honor. There is a reward of grace awaiting the children of God. At Christ's revelation the Father will bestow upon His children: PRAISE, namely, His commendation; and GLORY, like the glory of Christ; and HONOR, high distinction. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

At the battle of Cressy, where Edward, the Black Prince, then a youth of eighteen, was called on by his father to lead in the battle, the king, his father, drew up a strong party of soldiers on a rising piece of ground. From that height the loving father of Edward observed the course of the battle in which his son was engaged. The father was ready at any moment to send relief when it should be necessary. However, the young prince was being fiercely attacked. At times he was in great danger. He sent for help from his father. But the king delayed sending help. The son sent another request for help. And then another and another. Finally the father sent this message. "My son, I am not so inexperienced a commander as not to know when help is really needed, nor so careless a father as not to send it. I intend the honor of the day to be yours, my son. Therefore I have permitted you with courage to stand up under the pressure. I will send help only when it will bring real honor to you, my son."

So our wise and heavenly Father draws forth His children into battle. Sometimes the charge is very sharp and the battle thick, and we cry in desperation. But God is too watchful to overlook our crucial needs, and too much of a Father to neglect our supply. If help seems denied for the present, or delayed for a while, it has this purpose, that we be enlarged in life and its service and that the victory may be more glorious in the end.

HE leadeth me.
Beside still water? No, not always so.
Ofttimes the heavy tempests around me blow,
And o'er my soul the waves and billows go.
But when the storm beats wildest, and I cry
Aloud for help, the Master standeth by
And whispers to my soul: Lo, it is I.
Above the tempest wild I hear Him say:
"Beyond the darkness lies the perfect day,
In every path of thine, I lead the way."

GROWTH*Our Father's Discipline Is Designed for Our Growth*

As our Father, God has a right to expect growth. Having given us spiritual birth, He expects spiritual growth.

When a child is born into the world, the parents watch for signs of growth. They look for that first smile. They await eagerly the day when it begins to play with its toes and utters its first "coo." They watch to see whether it will recognize different objects. Then comes the day when it will sit up by itself, begin to crawl, and take its first step.

Try to imagine the heart-breaking disappointment of those parents who begin to realize that theirs is not a healthy, growing, developing child, but rather mentally deficient, feeble-minded, a child that will never be a source of joy and happiness, perhaps even headed for an early death!

As God's true children we ought all to be healthy, growing, progressive children. To that end Peter closes his letter with "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

This spiritual growth in knowledge and grace implies more than a head knowledge of some creed or book. Of course, creed creates conduct. But unless we proceed from intellectual apprehensions about Jesus to a most intimate, close, trusting, telling, and asking relationship, we remain stunted Christians. Our churches are full of spiritual monsters, specimens of arrested growth, dwarfs who have scarcely grown since they were first babes in Christ, people who remain spiritual infants all their lives.

"Be no more children, but grow up into Him who is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). "Strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, i. e., those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:14)

And so in self-examination we ask ourselves, "Is there more of Christ's beauty in our characters, more grace and love, more kindness and consideration for our fellow man in our hearts today than when we first believed?" Or must the apostle also complain of us: "When at present you ought to be teachers, you still have need that someone teach you the first principles and oracles of God?" Would that it could be said of all of us what Paul says in Eph. 4:14:

"Be no longer children, tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine"; "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men. Be strong." (1 Cor. 16:13)

Two Essentials for Growth Are Food and Exercise

He who has given us new birth also furnishes the nourishment for growth and increase in that new life. True to the earthly origin of their bodies, "Most men labor for meat that perishes, trailing their lives like low vines along the ground to the dreary tune of 'What shall we eat, What shall we drink, Wherewith shall we be clothed?'"

Man cannot of his own power satisfy his soul's hunger for the bread of life. No Christian is a self-made man. Therefore, hearing the people's wail of hunger and seeing them vainly groping in darkness for satisfying food, Jesus takes pity on us and generously offers Himself as the Bread of Life. John 6:48: "I am the Bread of Life."

"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man shall give unto you. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven that a man eat thereof and die not. I am the Bread of Life. I am the living Bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever. The bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life. [This does not refer to the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper.] He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him. The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. This is the bread which came down from heaven. He that eateth this bread shall live forever."

Since Christ offers Himself as the Bread of Life in the Bible, we ought to "study [it] to show [ourselves] approved unto God." "As newborn babes, [we should] desire the sincere milk of the Word, that [we] may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2)

To whom does Christ offer Himself as the Bread of Life? "The bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world" (John 6:51). This means you! "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." This again means you!

The purpose for which Christ offers Himself as Bread of Life is that it be used. Like daily bread for earthly life, so Christ is not a luxury, but an absolute necessity. "Except ye eat this flesh of the Son of God, ye have no life in you." (John 6)

*Feeding on Christ the Bread of Life as Revealed
in His Holy Word Implies that:*

1. I read what the Bible has to say about Jesus and all He has done for me.
2. Not only must I read, but I must think about what it says, think long and hard with the sincere desire to know what it means to me.
3. I must further pray and await the Holy Spirit's revelation and explanation. He will show me the need for this Savior, and show me how well Jesus alone fits that need.
4. The Holy Spirit creates faith and trust in my heart so that I lay hold on Christ as my personal Savior. All that Jesus did, becomes my own by faith, to have and to hold, to use and to enjoy, to live by and to die by.
5. I must aspire to be like my Savior. Having received the Spirit of Adoption, I also cry Abba, dear Father. To that end I ask God to make me more and more into the likeness of His perfect Son. "In prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known unto God." (Phil. 4:6)
6. When in doubt as to my action, I ask, "What would Jesus do?" When I know from the Bible what Jesus would do, I strive to do that thing and none other.
7. If we imitate Christ, we will become like Christ, no longer conforming to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind. Faith having transformed the heart, love will transform the life.

So, then, having fed on Christ for our spiritual growth, it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. "And the life which we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us" (Gal. 2:20). Surely we are still the same person, but we have a new life, new aim, new motive. A man reduced to a skeleton by starvation will be

transformed by proper food into a man of strength, action, hope, and courage.

Finally we have Jesus' assurance: "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the Last Day." (John 6:54)

Let us, then, learn to know Christ as the Bread of Life, feed on Christ by faith and through the Scriptures, and imitate Christ, and so be changed into the same image from glory to glory. (2 Cor. 3:18)

You might as well expect a plant wrenched from the soil and shut out from the light and sunshine to grow as to expect Christian progress in the hearts which are disjoined from Christ. But, rooted in that soil, smiled upon by that sun, watered by the perpetual dew from His heaven, we shall grow like a tree planted by the rivers of water and bring forth fruit in due season. Our leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever we do shall prosper. (We might at this point profitably discuss this question: "How effectively does the Lord's Supper in our sermons and in our life act as a source of strength and growth?")

God Expects Us as His Children to Grow Through Exercise

Live the Word. "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." "Love one another." "Pray for the brethren." "Exercise yourselves in godliness." "Run the race." "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh." "As Christ forgave, so also do ye." "Go, teach."

These and thousands of other passages indicate God's directive as to how we are to exercise ourselves in holiness so that from day to day we become more Christlike. The athlete's muscles are strengthened by exercise. Unused muscles waste away. As soon as a stream stands, it stagnates. The very manna from God which was not eaten bred worms and stank. So also Christian truth unpracticed by those who hold it produces stinking dead orthodoxy and hypocrisy.

Decay in Christians may be real and yet unsuspected. There are many professing Christians like Samson of old, ignorant that their strength has gone from them because the Spirit of God has departed

from them. The sure way to reduce knowledge of Christ to an inert condition is to neglect applying it to daily life. The only way to grow by exercise is to teach it and to live it.

"Every branch that beareth fruit should bring forth more fruit" (John 15). The need for continued encouragement to become strong children of God is quite evident. None of us has escaped the contamination of the secularism, materialism, and irreligiousness of our age. All around us sons of God are people who regard piety as a virtue reserved for old women who live in sanctified seclusion, untouched by the stream of life. These same people regard their own lack of piety as excusable or even commendable, amusing, and interesting. Others believe that a profane and worldly attitude suggests a higher degree of sophistication and intelligence. These think that pious people are usually a little simple-minded and naive. Since the children of God frequently mingle with people of the previously described thinking, there is grave danger that their own growth in piety will be retarded.

Our childhood in Christ and the new life in us is not a weed that will grow unintended and uncared for. It is rather a delicate and beautiful flower that needs careful nurture and painstaking cultivation. We must therefore exercise ourselves spiritually in order to grow. If religion is to be a vital and pervasive force in our lives, we must engage in religious exercises. We must practice self-discipline, employ the techniques of Christian living, develop habits of piety, discipline ourselves to think, feel, and hope in a God-centered and Christ-centered life. A Christian must be in training every day if he wishes to remain in trim.

One of the important Christian exercises is prayer, personal prayer. Emergency prayers, occasional prayers, anxiety prayers are not sufficient to keep in spiritual trim. Such a prayer life which builds for a stronger Christian includes the following:

Prayer for the members of God's family under the same roof with us;

Prayers for the members of God's family in the locality (fellow members);

Prayers for those who are not yet united with the family, and for those who for one reason or another have fallen from the family (unchurched in community);

Prayers for those who have gone out to enlarge the family (home and foreign mission work);

Prayers for those who protect the family of God in this world (government);

Prayers for a willing heart to share our time, talents, and treasures in the expansion of the family of God (stewardship).

So we see that our growth is dependent on two major factors:

1. Intelligent, prayerful, faith-strengthening Bible reading and study.

2. Putting into living practice the truth and principles and heavenly philosophy proclaimed in the Word, the Bible.

VI. IF CHILDREN, THEN BRETHREN

"Those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the First-born among many brethren." (Rom. 8:29)

The Bible is full of passages which speak of Jesus as our Brother and of the passages which speak of us Christians as brothers and sisters one to another.

Heb. 2:11: "He [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren." Why? Because He and we are from one Father. Therefore He says after His resurrection: "Go to My brethren and say unto them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and to your God," as though He would say, What God is to Me, He is also to you — Our Father. Therefore we are brothers. The common bond of brotherhood does not embrace all men, but only those who are justified and sanctified through faith in Christ Jesus. Nothing in the whole Scriptures warrants the teaching of the universal Fatherhood of God or the universal brotherhood of man, to the exclusion of the redemptive work of Christ and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. Only the believers have a common parentage with the Sanctifier.

Brotherhood is a word which men mouth readily and glibly. Men glow as they use this word. But what it means and what it entails and how it is born is of small moment to most of them. The cry is simply for more brotherhood. That's all! That in itself, men think, will heal the world. But brotherhood, without the

Fatherhood of God through a ransoming Savior, comes close to asinity. It is a meaningless word, because it can mean everything or nothing. To some it can mean the Golden Rule, but even the cleverest rogue finds it convenient to live by the Golden Rule, simply because it pays in business. To others brotherhood means handing the poor beggar a cast-off overcoat and feeling mighty warm and virtuous about it. It is also the word used for the tight exclusiveness of the college fraternity and the lodge. More often it is just another word for selfishness.

However, let men see the brotherhood as a relationship that arises because men are God's children through the redemptive work and the grace of the Savior, and the word becomes pregnant with the deepest significance. Men are God's sons and Jesus' brothers and so brothers one to another because we've been redeemed and purchased by His love.

The taproot of Christian brotherhood is in the grace of our Lord. When man comes to feel this in his life, then he knows the full compulsion of helping every other child of God in need. Not, to be sure, because it will make him a better son of God, not because he expects preferred treatment from the Father, not for any reason except his abiding gratitude that the Father has been good and merciful to him.

We are brothers not because science has suddenly discovered that blood of the Chinese or African or Hindu is not different from the blood of the American, but we are brothers because the blood of Jesus Christ was shed just as much for Chinese as for the American.

In order that the Savior could make us His brethren, He first had to reach down to where we really were. He had to be greater than we, and yet one of us. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise had to partake of the same" — from the form of God to the fashion of man — "therefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." He made Himself as one of us to make us His brethren.

Whatever we in this country may think of royalty, we should appreciate the manner in which the king and queen of England shared the privations of their subjects in World War II. When

the windows of the king's private apartments in Buckingham Palace were shattered by the air raids, he waited his turn like any private citizen to have them repaired. The royal family received the same ration coupons as any other, and the queen like many other housewives saved her coupons for her Sunday roast. The blue line around the bathtubs marked the five-inch limit of water for the inhabitants of London. This line was strictly adhered to by the royalty. The great park of Windsor Castle did not escape the plow for growing wheat, and the king's horses were sent to do farmwork. The queen herself drove around in station wagons to gather up paper, bones, and metal for the national drive. The poor in London saw the king and queen walk about the rubble of the bombed homes of the Londoners. One Londoner said to an American, "They share the same trouble, danger, and privation that I suffer. Their home is bombed just like mine."

Wonderful as this touching devotion to their people was, it all pales into insignificance before the divine condescension of our Lord, who took upon Himself our flesh, the flesh of His enemies, all with but one holy purpose: to become our Brother so that we became children and sons of God. By accepting Him as our Brother, all we, believers in Christ, become brothers in Christ.

What, then, is our work and our obligation as brethren in Christ? "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God, and everyone that loveth Him that begat us, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? Therefore love the brotherhood. Seeing that you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit by an unfeigned love for the brethren, see to it that you love one another with a pure heart, fervently" [burningly]. (1 John 5:1; 4:20; 1 Peter 2:17; 1:22)

How Do WE PROVE OUR LOVE AS BRETHREN?

1. *Brethren help the needy. This love is not idle emotion, asleep in the heart, but a propelling power producing practical proofs.* "Whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Let us love in deed and in truth, distribut-

ing to the necessity of the saints and be given to hospitality." (1 John 3; Romans 12)

Brotherhood in Christ causes us to value persons above riches and possessions. Even in an earthly family, the *person* comes first. "Our Billie is a little shaver, but we wouldn't take a million dollars for him." And yet, how inhumane and unbrotherly the world can be at times we gather from every page of the news. For example, an old yellowing piece of paper, dated 1855, Lexington, Ky., shows that one man made his brother a slave by paying a third party \$800.00. In the same town, shortly thereafter, a French stallion sold for \$400,000.00. We have here not only inhumane inversion of values but also the unbrotherly worldly attitude that one man's life is as nothing to his fellow man, except for the selfish personal gain one can obtain from him. Not so with the children of God. We love the brethren because God first loved us.

2. How do we prove that we love the brethren? *As children of the same Father and as brothers one to another, we work for one another.* This means that we are not puffed up one against the other, nor think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. "But think soberly, even as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another. Mind not high things, but stoop to men of low estate." (1 Cor. 4:6; Romans 12)

3. Brethren are not self-righteous faultfinders. "Why beholdest thou the mote in thy brother's eye but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . First take out the beam from thine own eye and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote in thy brother's eye." (Matthew 7)

4. Brethren do not slander one another. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." (James 4:11)

5. Brethren generally give full credit. Paul sets the pace in 2 Thess. 1:3: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you abounds toward each other."

6. Brethren are sympathetic and considerate. Again Paul: "Brethren, you have been called unto liberty, but do not use liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." "Take heed lest by any means this liberty become a stumbling block to the

weak. When you sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if meat makes my brother to offend, I eat no flesh." (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 8:9, 12, 13)

7. Brethren are not partial. "My brethren, do not imagine that the faith of our Lord Jesus can agree with showing partiality in respect to persons, for, if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a man in vile raiment and you have respect to him that weareth gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit you here in this good place, and say to the poor, Stand you there or sit here under my footstool, are you not then partial in yourselves?" (James 2:1-4)

This does not mean that we must all be alike. Every parent remarks, "How different my children are one from another!" Natural differences enrich the family; so also in the family of God. Not all are gifted or talented alike. Paul brings this out very forcefully in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians 4, where he points out that the one body has different members, each with its characteristic special talent, yet all working in the same direction for that one body. As the solidarity of an earthly home is not a level uniformity of sameness, but a living harmony of differences, so the diversity of gifts among the brethren in Christ are designed for the perfection of the saints. (Eph. 4:12)

The Christian Church from its very beginning has worked at this task of bringing human differences into harmony. Look at the early Roman world, and you see it divided into slaves and masters. Some wanted to create unity by converting the masters into slaves and the slaves into masters, but Christianity came along with this alternative: it took slaves and masters and made brothers of them.

The same acid of brotherhood was eating away at the barriers of human discrimination and prejudice. Paul and the Bible's philosophy of brotherhood through the redemptive work of Jesus took enmity between Jews and Gentiles and transmuted it in peace, by transforming both into Christians.

Brotherhood is not partial but blends all the different gifts of the individual Christians into a harmoniously working force, to build the kingdom of God.

8. Brethren are not resentful. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor. They that

have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren" (1 Tim. 6:1, 2). If this philosophy were carried out between capital and labor, what a revolution we would have!

9. Brethren are ready to apologize. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave thy gift, go and first be reconciled to thy brother." (Matt. 5:23-26)

10. Brethren are ready to forgive, not only seven times but seventy times seven. (Matt. 18:21-35)

11. *Brethren are forbearing.* "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another. Love as brethren. Be pitiful. Be courteous. Do not render evil for evil, but contrariwise blessing, knowing that you were thereunto called that you should inherit a blessing." "My beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." "Grudge not one against another, brethren. My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." (1 Peter 3:8, 9; James 1:19, 20; 5:9; 3:1)

Paul pleads for this in Eph. 4:1 ff.: "I beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all."

Brotherly love does not mean that we overlook one another's faults. If we see individuals lost in error, if we see them living lives which will destroy their souls, we are not showing love if we let them deliberately go over the precipice. If they're going wrong in their lives, if they are being taken in by drunkenness or pride or the lust of the flesh, or whatever their particular difficulty may be, then it is our job to bring them back into the pathways of God. If they lose themselves in error, and if they accept things which are not the truths of God, then it isn't for us indifferently to ignore them, leave them to their own fate, or let error lead them where it may. No, our job is to use every opportunity to counsel with them so that they can also come into the fuller light of the truths of God. We don't do this in the spirit of the soap-box reformers. We ask

God for tact for the appropriate moment to open the door to help the erring.

However, this should be done in a spirit of lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance. We're not very long on patience. If we talk to them and they don't understand us or subscribe to our way of thinking, we're inclined to be finished with them.

As we bear our testimony to divine truth before Christians who are not in accord with us in matters of doctrine, we are not to do so in the spirit of being holier than they are or of being wiser. The "wiser than thou" attitude is just as offensive as the "holier than thou" attitude. It isn't for us to sit on a pedestal and talk *down* to other people. If ours is the proper spirit of love, we will meet them on our knees and by the guidance of God's Holy Spirit endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

12. Brethren are peaceable. Rom. 12:18: "If possible and as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men." If this is not possible, you will at least not go to law with your brethren, but arbitrate your differences among other brothers (1 Cor. 6:1-10). The way to do it is outlined in Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

13. Love for the brethren has no limits. Hereby we perceive the "*love of God, in that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*" Old Kaiser Franz of Austria once begged, threatened, and even promised large rewards, to anyone who would bring bread to the starving people of Leopoldstadt, but no one would risk his life amidst the large ice floes jamming the river. Suddenly Franz jumped into the boat and took the oars himself, saying, "Never shall it be said that those who would sacrifice their all for me were left to starve without my having made an attempt to rescue them." His example inspired others, the river was crossed, and bread was brought to the starving.

VII. THE FATHER'S BUSINESS

Since we are the heavenly Father's children, it ought to be natural for us to be about our heavenly Father's business. As Jesus, so we must say, "Know ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" Since the Father's Spirit and will has been planted into us, it is our newborn desire that all men be saved and come to the knowledge

of the true God through faith in our only Savior. That is our Father's business.

The adventurous children of early Americans were for the most part concerned to help their fathers clear the ground for new fields and pastures. In like manner the children of God should say with Joshua, "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."

In 1450 Spain inscribed on her coins the pictures of the Pillars of Hercules, which stood on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, then the extreme boundary of her empire, and on the scroll above them was written, NE PLUS ULTRA — nothing beyond. Afterward, when Columbus discovered the New World, Spain struck out the negative and left the inscription PLUS ULTRA — more beyond. The picture of that "more land yet to be possessed" brought renewed life and vitality to Europe. There is much land to be possessed even for us in the spiritual realm, and the new land and the open doors are a gift from God to us Christian brethren, God's sons, to forge ahead.

As true children of God we will not be like the Children of Israel, who, once having entered the Promised Land, occupied a little section of it and then settled down and began to take it easy. When this happened, Joshua lifted before them the picture of unpossessed territory as a challenge.

A character in Louis Bromfield's book *Possession*, a young man of the Middle West, makes the complaint, "My grandfather set out into the wilderness to conquer and subdue it. It was a land filled with savages and adventure. I, too, must have my chance. I am of a race of pioneers, but I no longer have any frontier." We children of God have no cause for such complaint. In every respect we, and especially we of the Southeastern District, are on the frontiers. In all areas of Christian knowledge, Christian living, and in the expansion of the Father's kingdom, there remaineth much land to be possessed.

As we are about our Father's business, we ought to keep in mind this fact: Not all who claim nominal membership in some Christian church are at heart God's children. "Not everyone who saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). There is much work to be done among the nom-

inal Christians. "Only he that doeth the will of My Father, he is My brother and sister" (Matt. 12:50). "And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on Him hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the Last Day" (John 6:40). But how shall they see the Son, or "how shall they call on the name of the Lord in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14, 15)

We, the children of God, have *been sent*, one and all, by Christ Himself. "Go ye into all the world, preach the Gospel, make disciples. . . ."

What if we can't go into all the world? Who said we can't go? If we can't go to a foreign land or can't leave our business, there is no excuse for not going to the immediate neighborhood or among our own relationship.

Anyway, to preach the Gospel is the main business of every Christian. The Christian is simply preoccupied with the Father's business. To make a living is only a side line. *The child of God makes money as a means to preach the Gospel as the end.* Of course, there will always be those who try to delegate their work to others. There are always those who think that mission work belongs exclusively to the pastor or to the called missionary or the paid parish worker. *When our people in our congregations will learn that the church members are not primarily the pastor's field which he works, but his force with which he works the field, the world, then a revolution will take place in Kingdom work too.*

In carrying out our Father's business, we must always remember that we are faced by savage, tenacious, dynamic *opposition*. There is first the opposition of the ungodly world, the children of Satan. The world has little use for us except insofar as we may be able to help them in their material problems. Because they are Satan's children, they do not know our Father, and therefore they also do not know us, His children. In fact, they hate us!

One reason for the hatred on the part of Satan's children is our Father's *high standard of holiness*. They hate us because we refuse to conform to their ungodly principles. The worldling feels uncomfortable in the presence of the children of God. Therefore he

fights back or tries to rationalize away our heavenly philosophy of life, of the here and hereafter, and even attacks the Christian wherever possible, thus indirectly attacking Christ.

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own children; but because you do not belong to the world and I have chosen you out of it, the world will hate you. . . . Where they have persecuted Me they will persecute you as well. . . . They will do all these things to you as My disciples, because they do not know the One who sent Me. . . . The man who hates Me hates My Father as well." (John 15:18-22, Phillips)

Not only are the children of Satan tenacious in their unbelief and dynamic in their rejection of our Father's way to heaven, but they are also very complacent and self-satisfied with themselves. Our heavenly Father simply does not count in their way of life and thinking. They say they are happy when their conscience does not remind them of God. Those who seek satisfaction on the animal level seem to find sufficient resources within easy reach. Hence these feel no need for God. Then there are those who claim to live on a more intellectual plane. They maintain that they find satisfaction in art, music, or the cultural fields. All these, whether intellectual, sophisticated, or not, feel that whatever good and rewarding things come their way do so because they deserve them. All this adds up to trying to outlaw God and His grace and mercy from their mind. As long as all goes well, there is no need for God. And when life is unpleasant, these same people denounce God as their enemy.

In the same spirit they also hate our Elder Brother, Jesus. In speaking to such people of His own times, Jesus says (John 8: 43-45): "Why do you not understand My speech? It is because you cannot hear My Word. You are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, you believe Me not."

Thus it is that they also *hate* our Father's message. The Law is written in their heart. It is part of them. But the Gospel they hate

because it is not written in their heart, is not part of them, but is revealed. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." *These words indicate the special problem we as children of God face as we are about our Father's business.* However, that very message which is foolish unto them, and which the natural man so stubbornly resists, *is the only message we have to give.*

Now God planned it so: "God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise so that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Cor.1:27-29)

Yet, in spite of the tenacious and often dynamic resistance and rejection of our Father's message and way to salvation, the very word and preaching of the Cross, which is foolishness to their natural mind, is dynamic to the *n*th degree and successful in changing the resistance into acceptance. "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation."

"For while walking in this weak and bodily flesh we are not campaigning after the manner of our weak and bodily flesh; for the equipment for our campaign is not weak bodily and sinful flesh but the power of God fit for wrecking Satan's fortifications — we are wrecking the foolish human reasonings and every height raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are capturing every device of human thought for the obedience to Christ." (2 Cor. 10:3, 5, Lenski's translation)

The world's dynamic opposition to the message of the Cross fades into impotence when this powerful weapon of God, the message of the Cross, is properly applied. To quote only a few incidents:

1. The very printing press from which Voltaire's infidel works were issued was later dedicated exclusively to the printing of the Bible in France.
2. Lord Chesterfield was a follower and avid reader of Voltaire's trash. The very clubroom in which Chesterfield and his infidels in England met is now a vestry where Christians meet for prayer and praise.
3. Hume, the English historian, also an outright infidel, predicted the death of Christianity in twenty years, yet the first meeting of the Scottish Bible Society in Edinburgh was held in the very room in which Hume died.

4. The Englishman Edward Gibbon wrote his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in the hope of undermining Christianity. However, over the very room in which he wrote much of his history, we read this sign: "THIS IS A BIBLE DEPOT." For years the income of the Gibbon estate was used to circulate the very Bible he so much tried to discredit.

5. A group of skeptics led by John Thien settled in a Wisconsin village, later called Thiensville. Their unbelief demanded that no church tower should ever be built within their bounds. They baptized, not as Scripture commands, but mockingly in the name of the United States. Blasphemously they ridiculed the Gospel. They sought to maintain a community which would have no contact with God's Son. . . . But today a Lutheran theological seminary trains and graduates ministers in this place where infidels cursed the Savior's name, and church spires rise high over Thiensville.

6. Young America, Minnesota, was similarly founded by agnostics, who swore they would not be bothered by churches; yet our pastor there, some years ago, baptized the last of those who held out against the Word of God.

7. New Ulm, Minnesota, likewise was established by those who resolved that their town should not be disgraced by religious edifices. Yet today a Lutheran college and Christian congregations have succeeded where infidelity failed.

Yes, the weapon and tool God has given us to carry on the Father's business is "quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). "Is not My Word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29)

In carrying out the Father's business, we are confronted not only by a hostile world but also by an inherent old Adam. It is, of course, extremely unpleasant for us to admit that we ourselves are often a hindrance to progress in our Father's business. To point out only a few facets of our obstructive practices:

a. Often we are inclined to think that we are doing or have done the Father's business when we have erected "big stone or brick buildings with towering spires and sounding chimes and stained-

glass windows, and carpeted floors, cushioned pews, paid choirs, grand organs, ornamental pulpits, carved altars, marble fonts, and bronze lecterns, and elaborate liturgy, and imposing rites, magnificent ceremonies, and feast days and fast days, and fairs and bazaars, and theatricals and concerts and kitchens, and committees, and societies, and guilds, and sons of this and daughters of that." To look at the doings of many of the twentieth-century churches, the conviction is impressed upon us that the foregoing is their conception of the kingdom of God and the Father's business, and when that has been accomplished, many complacently fold their hands in their laps and go to sleep. Oh, yes, our old Adam is easily influenced by today's spirit of materialism and is quite active in us children of God too.

b. Often we also find the curse of practical modernism and atheism running through our veins. If you are shocked to hear this, let me explain. An atheist is one who says there is no God; but very similar to an atheist is a person who admits there is a God but who lives and acts as though no God existed. If we really believe that there is a just and holy God who is rightly angered because of sin, why is it that we are often so slow and lethargic in bringing the religiously illiterate to know Him and especially His Son?

Again, the modernist is a person who, among other things, does not believe that there is a hell. But do we always act, in our relationship with our fellow man, as though we really believed what the Bible says about never-ending damnation? Do we use every talent to save from hell those whom the Father would adopt as His children? Or can it be that these doomed souls do not concern us? If we are the Father's children, there ought to be in us the same concern for souls as there is in His heart, who loved us and gave His Son into death for us while we were yet His enemies. Would, then, that there were in us that kind of missionary madness found in Paul when he said, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren." (Rom. 9:3)

Another obstacle in the Father's business is empty ritualism, the error which substitutes ceremonies for the sin-destroying Gospel. When form takes precedence over faith and the cut of the preacher's robe is of more concern than the soul-searching appeal for repent-

ance; when pageantry and procession overshadow trust and obedience, the night of religious decay has fallen. Rituals certainly have a place in the service. There are those who ought to become more appreciative of good Christian forms and practices and customs of the early church, but the ritual must never supersede the recognition of Jesus Christ as the center of our religion. We invite unchurched to our services not because of our beautiful Lutheran customs, but because we preach the Gospel of salvation through the only Savior.

c. Another obstacle in us that often keeps us from being efficient at the Father's business is a refined form of self-righteousness. As children of God we rejoice in our Savior and humbly accept His forgiveness. But there is danger as we move into the years of more meager instruction, that we develop an attitude of only listening to the teachings and preaching and fail to respond to the call for a change of heart within ourselves. We so easily assume the conviction that all is well between us and God simply because we do what the church demands: we go to divine service, attend Communion, and even give to the Lord's work. But how easy is it not, having done these things, to put aside the business of personal witness-bearing? Instead we hide our light under a bushel.

If there is any doubt about the truth of this, we challenge you to inquire of many of the average middle-aged and older church members as to what their understanding of a life in Christ, this side of heaven, really consists of. Ask them what they think of their obligations as children of God over against those who are yet children of Satan.

When we rejoice in our knowledge of the truth and at the same time neglect to give it to those who still sit in darkness, we are, perhaps somewhat unwittingly, betraying a spirit of self-righteousness.

d. Since our business ought to be our Father's business, it ought to be Christ-centered and not self-centered. No element of selfishness should play a part in our work. We're not building only Holy Cross Congregation, or Immanuel Congregation, or Redeemer Congregation, or the Southeastern District, or the Missouri Synod. We're building Christ's kingdom, and we're building for eternity. Self-centeredness is another enemy to the progress in the Father's business. It is nothing else than spiritual sabotage. This kind of

spirit is evident when there is jealousy and strife among members or groups of members, and pastors among pastors, within a congregation, or within the District or Synod.

Our work is to be Christ-centered. We say that our *preaching* is Christ-centered. Would that that were always true too! But is our life, behavior, and the practical aspect of our religion Christ-centered? Are we so closely attached to Him that we are always directed and guided by Him in everything we do?

We have all seen the little gasoline-motored model airplanes take off in flight, dip and glide, do a loop-the-loop in mid-air and then land smoothly. The most important factor in this smooth performance is the fact that this model airplane is connected by a string to a steady hand which directs its movements. If it were not attached and guided by that pivotal hand, it would take off into the air with direction unknown and eventually crash somewhere when it ran out of fuel. Only when it remains connected with that steady hand is it able to perform its function perfectly. So also are we Christians able to function properly only when we are directly controlled by Christ. When we are closely related to Him and when our work remains Christ-centered, we are able to do those tasks which our Father has set before us, but when our work becomes self-centered, we run into trouble and face destruction.

As sons of God about our Father's business we ought to remember daily that we are on the threshold of great opportunities.

God has well trained, equipped and prepared us children who go under the mundane name Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. There is in our midst a great variety of wonderful spiritual gifts and powers — the pure Gospel, genuine Christian faith, rich and varied Christian experiences, a large and well-articulated organization, equipped with all the necessary facilities, unusual manpower, vast material resources, and last but not least, innumerable proofs of His guidance, blessing, and protection.

Aside from this, our Father gives us His assurance that we shall succeed in His business. "We are in the unique position of knowing beforehand that our work and business in the Kingdom will be successful." No business failures in the Father's business.

Yet there are many of His children who actually refuse to go forward. Some see only the difficulties that lie ahead, entirely

forgetful that our Father is an almighty God, able to remove or overcome these difficulties for us. There are still too many of God's children who pray for tasks equal to their powers. We should rather ask God to give us powers equal to our task.

Then there are some of God's children who are inclined to exaggerate the difficulties and to multiply the problems and dangers besetting us. Such persons may still be God's children, but with the mental attitude of fear and their own exaggeration of the difficulties in the Father's business these become a real menace to progress. Stoeckhardt said: "Things have come to a sorry pass in the church when the men whom God has called as leaders of His congregation become timid, lose courage, and try to evade combat."

When the spirit of conquest and aggressiveness in us children about our Father's business is slowing down, or when there is a decided evidence of a spiritual decline, or when we, like the Children of Israel, are satisfied to sit "at ease," each under his own vine while there is much work to be done in the Father's vineyard, we ought not only to recognize our sinful lethargy, but we ought to seek and search deeply within each of us for the real source of trouble. If the Father's business has slowed down, it is not due to a lack of training or educational facilities, it is not due to a lack of leadership, or inefficiency in the organization, or lack of well-planned publications and campaigns.

The fundamental requirement at this stage in our Father's business is an honest confession couched in the words of Jeremiah (Lam. 3:40-42; and I put it in the singular rather than in Jeremiah's plural): "Let me search and try my ways and turn again to the Lord. Let me lift up my heart unto God and say, I have transgressed and rebelled."

Let each son of God re-examine his Father's plan. Let us ask: For which special phase in the business has He prepared me? To which job has He assigned me? What talents have I for this job? Am I now living up to expectations? Or am I advancing old Satan's business by being indifferent about my Father's business? I must search the secret chambers of my heart, scrutinize every thought and desire in the light of my Father's order of business for the day. This order of business, of course, is outlined in His Word.

In this process of self-examination it will not be long before my conscience will convict me of self-complacency, halfhearted support, and of periodic indifference in my Father's business. If we truly search our ways, the Spirit of God will also produce the desired results. Not only will He create in us a strong conviction of our own sinfulness, but He will also grant us a complete change of attitude toward our Father's business.

A father and a mother are sending their son out into the world away from the parental home for the first time in his life. They are standing at the railroad station bidding him farewell. The one parent gives him much last-minute advice as to what he must do in certain situations. The other parent merely pats him on the shoulder and says, "My boy, remember whose son you are." Fellow redeemed, let us always be conscious of our high calling as the adopted sons and daughters of God, through Christ Jesus, our Savior. Remember, then, whose son you are!

The Spirit of God will also reactivate in us the strong desire to return again with renewed energy to our work. Faith without works is dead. And by faith we here mean that living, active, aggressive, powerful closeness and trust in our Savior's promise, "I am with you always even unto the end of the world," trust in the assurance that He will bless every inch of our way if we keep hard at the only business He has assigned to us: go teach; go preach; go make disciples.

Our Father's business is a growing business which must never rest on its laurels but must continually reach out for further and greater conquests. The healthy child of God is mission-minded. His chief concern is progress in the Father's business. This is not a carnal ambition, for the children of God are not interested merely in building earthly organizations. We ought to be interested with the heaven-born desire to fill our Father's house.

VIII. INHERITANCE

Because we are adopted sons of God, we are also heirs of heaven. This is the divine logic of the Bible. "If children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). We have the "inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:18). "Therefore thou art no more a servant but

a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Gal. 4:7)

As stated earlier in the essay, we now already have the earnest, or down payment, of our inheritance through the Holy Spirit that dwells in our heart. "But it does not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). That this inheritance shall be ours for certain is assured by God through Peter: "We have been begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, and even now we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:4, 5)

In this powerful passage Peter tells us that the price of our inheritance is the blood of Jesus Christ, the positive proof of our inheritance is His resurrection, and the final possession of our inheritance is the appearing of Jesus Christ. Jesus speaks of this inheritance: "In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2, 3)

As our adoption, so also the full possession of our inheritance is through Christ by grace. In the very nature of the case we do not work for an inheritance. We do not earn it or pay for it. An inheritance is something somebody else has already worked out for us, gathered and earned and now bequeathed to us. Time does not permit us to enter upon all the points and descriptions the Bible offers with reference to heaven and our eternal inheritance. We shall summarize only briefly.

Before we were the children of God, there was nothing to look forward to, for the future was only dark, the present meaningless, and the past so laden with sin that even our consciences assured us nothing but eternal damnation. But now we have a *living hope*.

All men have some sort of hope, but while so many deceive themselves with a dead, empty, false, deceptive, and evasive hope of their own making, we as God's children have a living hope which rests upon God's promises and power. When the hopes of others go to pieces in the last flood, our hope will sail triumphantly into the harbor of eternal fulfillment.

Said Bridget at Pat's death, "I hope to meet him in heaven, but I sure don't expect to." This saying not only reveals her opinion

about Pat but also indicates the true nature of natural hope. Natural hope is a quivering, nervous creature trying hard enough to be bright and cheerful, but alas, mostly sick abed with nervous prostration and heart failure. Natural hope is next-door neighbor to despair. Christian hope is poles apart and has no fellowship with natural hope. Those who are not children of God feed on dreams, insubstantial airy things, things of which they can never be sure, on bubbles which burst with the catching. Natural hope of this kind does not make for robust, healthy, positive living. Christian hope is virile, strong, because it is nourished by the life-giving Word and by the irrefutable resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

A child of God with the hope of everlasting inheritance assured has no right to look on the dark side of things and always to expect the worst to happen. A child of God is aggressively optimistic. We have no right to be gloomy but on the contrary have right to look on tomorrow only with absolute quiet and confidence. Ours is a living hope. Our future is just as bright as the Father, just as certain as the resurrection of His Son ("Because I live, you shall live also"), and just as positive as the present indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

In this world, however, whatever knowledge we do have of our inheritance is ours only through God's revelation in His Word. Natural theology and heathen philosophy go to great length to prove the immortality of the soul, but this pagan teaching of the immortality of the soul must not be mistaken for the Christian teaching of eternal life.

While the believers in this life know God only through His Word, and while at present we see only darkly as in a mirror, when we are in full possession of our inheritance, God will reveal Himself to His blessed ones without the mirror, without image or veil, face to face, immediately. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." "For now we see through a mirror darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part but then shall I know even as also I am known." (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:12)

The point of comparison with reference to a mirror is this: In this world we see the person of our heavenly Father only in reflection. We see the divine realities only as they are reflected in the mirror

of God's Word and not directly as they are. *Actually the Bible tells us only so much about God and about our inheritance as we need know to possess it.* There is so much left to be known about God and heaven, but all this is for future solution. The Bible, speaking to earth-bound creatures who are hemmed in by space, time, and material things, must of necessity employ earthly terms in speaking to us about divine and supernatural realities. Here we think of the many parables and types, hundreds of comparisons, and Paul's endless use of human illustrations, to give us even a smattering taste of heaven. The Bible pictures heaven to us in terms of this life, wedding (Matt. 25:10), feast (Matt. 8:11), sitting on thrones (Luke 22:30), etc.

Scripture describes our inheritance negatively and positively. Negatively it speaks of the absence of all sin, the flesh no longer inciting us to sin; the devil no longer making evil suggestions; the world not seducing us; no calamities; no punishment; no temporal or eternal death; no hunger; no thirst; no burning sun; no use of marriage, etc.

Positively the Bible describes our inheritance as the perfect enlightenment of the intellect (1 Cor. 13:12); complete rectitude of the will and appetite (Ps. 17:15; Eph. 5:27); the highest security concerning perpetual duration of this blessedness (John 16:22); our bodies shall be spiritual (1 Cor. 15:44); not hampered by time and space, they shall be agile (1 Thess. 4:17); incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15); strong and sound (1 Cor. 15:43); brilliant (Dan. 12:3); beautiful (Phil. 3:21). In heaven we shall enjoy perfect and delightful communion and fellowship with God, with the angels, and with all the blessed.

Even though the Bible gives us many descriptions of heaven, it would be actually impossible to describe it as it is. In this life we have no adequate conception of the nature of things that lie beyond space and time.

However, not only the soul but also the body will share in the eternal bliss of heaven, for our body shall be like the glorified body of Christ. That our body shall actually be raised to enjoy the glories of heaven needs to be stressed. Although we confess it in the Creed every Sunday, one often finds people in the Christian Church who conceive of the life to come as a kind of weird, disembodied

existence in some unreal and shadowy ghost-land. Perhaps they do not go as far as some of the religious cults who conceive of existence after death as absorption into the Oneness or Allness of God. Yet you find with discouraging frequency that also church members cling to a conception of the life beyond the grave which is entirely un-Biblical, uninviting, and unattractive. The prospect of spending eternity in some ethereal regions, amid ghostly creatures, in an unearthly and dreamlike existence, is certainly not heart-warming but rather frightening and repulsive. Therefore we thank God that He has told us that heaven is a substantial place, tangible, sensible, wonderfully real, although indescribably glorious, in which our resurrected and glorified body shall have all its desires fulfilled.

IN CONCLUSION

Since the children of God are hated and troubled in this world and since they must endure much tribulation before they enter into the full possession of the eternal inheritance, it is necessary that we constantly direct our attention to this inheritance so that we may overcome all evil and finally gain full possession of heaven.