



FROM BONDAGE
...to Liberality

Andreas Dura

Source:

2006 International Seminar
Dickendorf, June 16-24, 2006

Cover:

Pixabay
Alexas_Fotos

Andrew Deen

Fonts:

High Tower Text
Liberation Sans Narrow
Linux Biolinum
Linux Libertine



September 2023
practicaprophetica.com
srac.info

Contents

1. Our Condition.....	1
<i>Double Bondage</i>	3
<i>We Cannot Deliver Ourselves</i>	5
<i>Let God Work</i>	7
<i>A Threefold Problem</i>	8
<i>Steps to the Solution</i>	12
<i>The Freedom</i>	14
<i>Allying with Heavenly Agencies</i>	17
2. Defining the Bondage.....	21
<i>What is Liberty?</i>	23
<i>What is Liberalism?</i>	24
<i>The Bondage of Legalism</i>	26
<i>Self-Sufficiency</i>	29
<i>Keeping the Law in a Selfish Way</i>	30
<i>Sitting in Judgment / Persecution</i>	30
<i>Summary</i>	33
3. Mary's Gift.....	34
<i>The Fragrance of Christ</i>	40
<i>Compared to Judas</i>	42
<i>Compared to the Disciples</i>	43
<i>Appreciation</i>	45
4. Judas and Simon.....	48
<i>Liberty Based on Faith</i>	48
<i>Judas' Desire to Control Christ</i>	50
<i>A Look at Simon</i>	60
<i>David's Liberty</i>	63
<i>The Answer of the Sheep</i>	64
5. Cain and Abel.....	67
<i>Receiving to Give</i>	67
<i>The Corinthian Church</i>	68
<i>Cain and Abel</i>	70
6. An Unstudied Act.....	84
<i>The Widow's Offering</i>	84
<i>Zacchaeus</i>	92
<i>John the Baptist</i>	98

7. The Spirit of Service.....	101
<i>The Rich Young Ruler.....</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>The Parable of the Laborers.....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>The Mystery of God.....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>The Currency of Heaven.....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>The Reward of Grace.....</i>	<i>116</i>
8. The Quality of the Work.....	118
<i>The Recompense of the Reward.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Labor Disputes.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>The Spirit of the Angels.....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>The Reward is Not of Works.....</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>Drudgery, or Joy?.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Not With Outward Show.....</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>The Pharisee and the Publican.....</i>	<i>134</i>
9. Bible Examples of Liberality.....	137
<i>The Centurion.....</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>Isaiah.....</i>	<i>144</i>
<i>Jeremiah.....</i>	<i>148</i>
<i>Jacob's Wrestling.....</i>	<i>150</i>
10. From Saul to Paul.....	153
<i>Saul the Persecutor.....</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>The Conversion of Saul.....</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>A Thorough Work.....</i>	<i>156</i>
<i>Ministry to the Gentiles.....</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ.....</i>	<i>165</i>
11. Liberality vs. Judaizing Teachers.....	170
<i>The Jewish Converts.....</i>	<i>170</i>
<i>The Jerusalem Council.....</i>	<i>171</i>
<i>The Authority of the Church.....</i>	<i>180</i>
<i>Paul Worked with the Church.....</i>	<i>186</i>
<i>Paul's Liberality.....</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>The Final Visit to Jerusalem.....</i>	<i>196</i>
12. Liberality in the Early Church.....	217
<i>Giving All.....</i>	<i>217</i>
<i>Ananias and Sapphira.....</i>	<i>222</i>
<i>The Corinthian Church.....</i>	<i>225</i>
13. Tithing in the New Testament.....	227
<i>Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.....</i>	<i>227</i>
<i>Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians.....</i>	<i>234</i>

<i>Greater Liberty Under the Gospel</i>	241
14. Encouragement to Liberty.....	248
<i>Paul's Encouragement of the Corinthians</i>	248
<i>A Transport of Joy</i>	250
<i>Removing the Hindrances</i>	253
<i>Letting God Take Control</i>	256
<i>The Easy Yoke of Christ</i>	261
<i>The Hindrance of Fear</i>	264
15. Resting in God.....	268
<i>The Burden of Human Barriers Against Sin</i>	268
<i>The Burden of Judging Others</i>	270
<i>The Burden of Controlling Others</i>	270
<i>The Burden of Trying to Control God</i>	275
<i>The Signs of Liberty</i>	279
<i>How Narrow-Mindedness Develops</i>	280
16. Who Is the Source?.....	284
<i>The Fall of Lucifer</i>	284
<i>No Praise Due to Man</i>	291
<i>The Spirit of Babylon</i>	293
<i>The Snare of Self-Sufficiency</i>	299
<i>Discerning the Truth</i>	304
17. Communion Service.....	307
<i>The Hypocrisy of Judas</i>	307
<i>Judas and the Other Disciples</i>	311
<i>Peter's Attempt to Control</i>	312
<i>Footwashing and Liberty</i>	317

1. Our Condition

FROM the beginning of this movement we have been very blessed with much light. It is important that we remember this light and live it out. Compared with past generations, our greatest problem is that we do not really appreciate and value the light we have been given, or we tend to forget it very quickly. For that reason it is important for us to repeat a little of our foundation messages, and the subject of those messages is obviously “From Bondage to Freedom.”

We will look at this from a slightly different angle: Liberty will be the subject. We will consider what it is, and how we can be delivered from the things that prevent liberty in our hearts. We learned in the beginning that our condition is bondage, or slavery. A slave cannot just say,

“I want to go here,”

—or,

“I want to live there,”

—or,

“I want to do this or that.”

His master determines what he does. We have to remind ourselves of this, because we tend to say,

“Well, we are born-again Christians. We left this bondage behind long ago. We don’t even need to think about it.”

But slavery is not just a matter of being in bondage to sin in the beginning. Slavery to sin is a situation which we can still find ourselves in. For that reason we must take another look at *Romans 7*.

Romans 7

⁷ I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet.

After Paul described how the law made him aware of sin, he said,

Romans 7

¹³ Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

That phrase, “sold under sin,” says quite a lot. What does it mean to be sold? It means that we are merely a piece of property that belongs to someone else. When we are sold, we can’t say,

“No, I don’t want to be sold,”

–or after being sold, say,

“No, I don’t want to do this or that.”

We are sold, period. We have no choice. The situation of slavery is very clearly described in the words “sold under sin.” Before we can even begin to study the subject of liberality we really have to understand the situation as it is. We are sold under sin.

¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

That clearly shows the kind of bondage the person is in. I want to do something, but I simply don’t do it. The things I hate, these are the things I do. This is the kind of slavery described here. Think about yourselves. Think about every situation in your life and be honest about these matters. Do you really do the things that you want to do?

¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

¹⁷ But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

He now describes the master that forces him to do what he doesn't want to do, and that is sin. Paul didn't write this in past tense; he wrote this in present tense. It means that every time we want to do something yet don't do it, every time we make a promise and don't keep it, every time we make a confession but fall again into sin, we are in the very situation that is described here.

Romans 7

¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

¹⁷ But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

Double Bondage

Here Paul describes this double bondage. It's not just the bondage of doing the things I don't want to do, but also I don't do the things I would like to do. So, the good things I would like to do I don't do, and the bad things I don't want to do, these things I do. That is a double bondage.

It would be one thing simply to do the evil things, but to do good things at the same time. That's what we all wish and hope for. When the Holy Spirit makes it clear that there is a sin in our life, we usually place a lot of good deeds alongside it in order to compensate for the evil deeds. But there is no such thing described here. In fact, the good things—the really good things—I don't do.

¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Again, this is a description of double bondage.

²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Described here is the typical situation of slavery. It is not an excuse when he says, “I don’t do it, but sin that dwells in me.” It is just an explanation of how serious this bondage is.

Romans 7

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

This is not meant as an excuse:

“You know, I can’t help it. That’s simply the way it is.”

No, it’s meant as a description of the situation. If it was meant as an excuse then I would say that this is the worst chapter in the Bible and we had better tear this page out. But that’s not the purpose of that chapter. The purpose is to show our situation to us very clearly.

So let us summarize:

1. We are sold under sin. That means we are slaves.
2. We cannot do what we like. It is sin, not I, which rules. I have the will, but I have no power to do what I want.
3. It is not only that I do the bad things which I don’t want to do, but I cannot do the good things either.

That is a double bondage. I am a slave to sin. Paul describes that as an inbuilt law. I find a law in my members. And he says that this law brings us into captivity to the law of sin. That is the clear situation described here. And finally he cries out,

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Many people would like to read this as,

“O poor man that I am. I really have such good intentions, but through no fault of my own I am somehow in bondage.”

That’s how many would like to read it, but that’s not what it says. It says,

Romans 7

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

We Cannot Deliver Ourselves

The next point is that we cannot deliver ourselves. This point cannot be overstressed because we tend to forget it again and again. We tend to think,

“Well, the situation can’t be that bad. One day I will accept the truth and then I will be delivered. Give me three days or a year or two years or three years and then I will accept the truth.”

We cannot, by our will, determine when we will accept the truth. We cannot play with God’s providence, and that is what Paul clearly explains:

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

I cannot do it myself. In verse 25 he says,

²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

He alone can do this. But a little further on he says,

²⁵ So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

He repeats this as though to make sure there is no question about the matter. I cannot do it myself. Forget about it. We have often stumbled over this last part of *Romans 7*. We thought,

“Well, doesn’t this negate everything that Paul said earlier in *Romans 7*?”

No, it confirms it. It puts a stamp on it, if we understand it rightly. He wants to say that:

“I am a total slave, and I cannot deliver myself.”

That is the message given in this chapter. And it is not only given in this part of the Bible. We read it in many other scriptures also. One very famous one is found in:

Jeremiah 13

²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?

Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

Can the leopard change its spots? No, it can't. Can our black brethren change their skin, or can we change ours to black? No we cannot; it's impossible. And so it is impossible to change ourselves. Four chapters later in *Jeremiah* we read that we do not even have a proper knowledge of our own evilness and wickedness. That's the reason Paul places such an emphasis on these things.

Jeremiah 17

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; who can know it?

Isaiah cries out,

Isaiah 1

⁵ Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints.

Here God expresses how seemingly hopeless the situation is:

“You know, I have really chastened you several times, and I've tried to help you with these things. I've tried to wake you up, but why should I try to do it again? You will only revolt more and more. The more I try, the more you will revolt. And for that reason, I won't try again. Your whole head is sick, and your whole heart faints.”

In *Job* we read,

Job 14

⁴ Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!

It's the same message as the one in *Jeremiah* 13:23. Let us read a Spirit of Prophecy statement about this:

The Desire of Ages, p. 172:

Jesus continued:

John 3

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

By nature the heart is evil, and...

Job 14

⁴ Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.

No human invention can find a remedy for the sinning soul.

Romans 8

⁷ The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Matthew 15

¹⁹ Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness. The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.

Let God Work

It is not possible for us to do this work, and this is the basic message of *Romans* 7.

Romans 7

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Then he says,

²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

That is the answer. Only God can deliver me. But he says not to forget that I myself am a slave. If I try to do it through my own efforts I will unquestionably fail. This change can be wrought only by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. This was made clear in our last quote:

The Desire of Ages, p. 172:

This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.

Paul emphasizes the same thought in the following words:

Philippians 2

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Why should we fear and tremble? What is the reason for this?

¹² ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

It doesn't say,

“Do it yourself because God won't help you,”

—nor,

“Help yourself and then God will help you.”

That's not the statement here. The statement is,

Philippians 2

¹² ...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

¹³ For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

What shall we fear then? We should fear that we will not allow God to work in us “to will and to do” because we are trying to do it ourselves.

A Threefold Problem

So let us look again at the problem. In *Romans 7* a three-fold problem is described:

1. DENY THE SIN

We deny even the existence of evil. When the truth comes home to our heart, when evil is shown to be in us, the first thing we do is to deny its existence.

“No, that’s not so.”

How many prayers are in vain? How many efforts of the Holy Spirit are in vain? How many talks are in vain because we simply deny the existence of evil, even though it is clearly there? Paul describes it in the words,

Romans 7

⁷ What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.

If the law hadn’t convinced me, I wouldn’t have known it.

⁷ For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.

So the first problem that God faces when He tries to help us is that we deny the existence of the evil in our heart.

“No, it’s not there. No, it’s not me. Let’s talk about someone else, not me.”

You can talk as long as you wish; you will not get to the root of the thing as long as you have this attitude of denying the existence of evil.

2. MAKE EXCUSES

The second problem is that we use another person’s sin as an excuse for our own. The first person to do this was Adam himself, in the Garden of Eden. This was after Adam and Eve sinned.

Genesis 3

⁹ Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, Where are you?

¹⁰ So he said, I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.

¹¹ And He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?

¹² Then the man said, The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.

That is a very typical reaction. How often it is that a sin which is rather obvious has to be pointed out even to the person himself. And what is the reaction?

“But you have done this and this and this.”

“But he has done this and that.”

It’s frustrating. It is labor lost to continue talking under those circumstances, because as long as there is a spirit of excusing and belittling my sin by pointing out the sins of another, then absolutely no advancement will be made.

Genesis 3

¹² Then the man said, The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.

¹³ And the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done?

God is very liberal. He did not say to Adam, as He could have,

“Stop trying to excuse yourself. Stop trying to blame the circumstances. We are talking about you now.”

He didn’t speak like this. He allowed it and said,

“Okay, then I will go to the next person.”

Why did he do this? It was for Eve’s sake first of all, but also for the Adam’s sake. Let’s see how Eve reacted.

¹³ The woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate.

We can see that Eve had exactly the same reaction. Adam could watch this in another person and see how this mechanism works. Instead of accepting her part, Eve had someone else to blame too. This must have opened Adam’s eyes. It must have shown him that

this would continue to go on. Talk to the serpent and what will it say?

“Well, the tree You put here in the garden has deceived me.”

And what will the tree say?

“Well, why did You put me here?”

That’s how it goes. The woman also had to see the problem. That is the second problem we have—using another person’s sin to excuse our own.

3. TRY TO DELIVER OURSELVES

The third problem is that we try to deliver ourselves, as we read:

Romans 7

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

So now I make an effort. I want to go forward. Paul doesn’t describe this in order to say,

“Look how good I am.”

No. He describes this to show how futile it is when he tries to do good.

²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

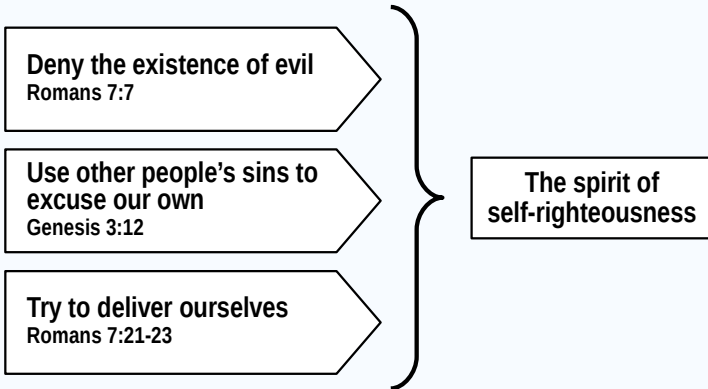
²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

So this is the three-fold problem:

1. Denying the existence of evil,
2. Using another’s sin to excuse our own, and
3. Trying to deliver ourselves.

That is the spirit of self-righteousness. That is the spirit which hinders and stifles all liberality, and that brings us into bondage.

The Problem



Steps to the Solution

Now that we have looked at this problem we would like to understand what the solution to it is. There is a three-fold answer.

1. ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM

What is the first step of the problem? It is denying the existence of evil. So what would then be the first step of the solution? It is to acknowledge the problem, as we read:

Romans 7

²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind.

2. STOP MAKING EXCUSES

Many are willing to go this so far, but then comes the next step. We must stop looking for excuses. Job had to learn this lesson, too. He finally cried out these words:

Job 40

³ Then Job answered the Lord and said,

⁴ Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth.

⁵ Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.

In other words,

“I will stop defending myself from now on.”

That is a very important step in deliverance from sin.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE OUR HELPLESSNESS

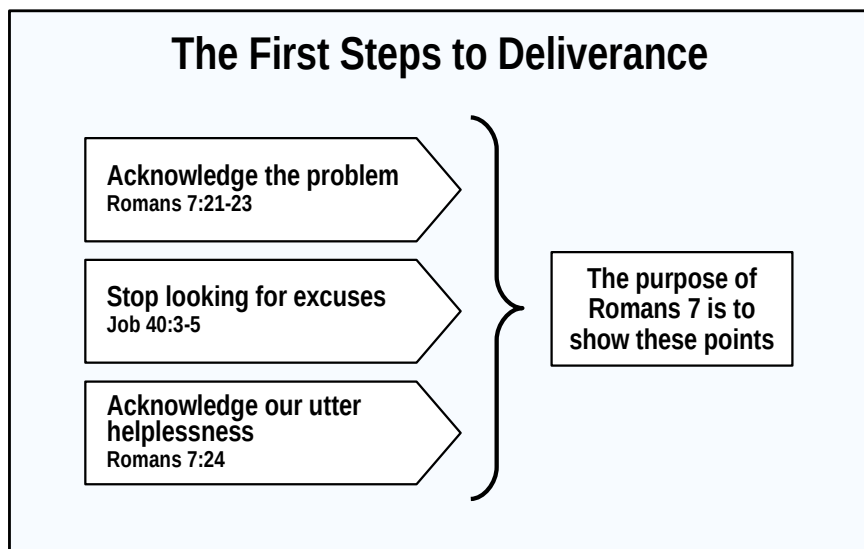
The third step is acknowledging our utter helplessness, as we read:

Romans 7

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

In short, the purpose of *Romans 7* is to show these steps.



And now we see why Paul didn't write this in the past tense, so that we won't say,

“Well, this is in the past and we don’t even need to think about it.”

No, we have to think. First we must acknowledge the problem. We must stop looking for excuses, and we must acknowledge our utter helplessness. This will enable God to continue working for us. This is not yet deliverance, but it’s the first step. It’s a step that we need to take.

The Freedom

Let us look at the freedom that God gives us when we take these steps:

1. Acknowledge the problem;
2. Cease to look for excuses;
3. Acknowledge our utter helplessness, and
4. Come to God with our problem.

What kind of freedom does He want to give us? As we study this freedom I want to emphasize very clearly that this is the aim, but it will not be reached without a struggle. We will go through a struggle before we acknowledge the problem, stop looking for excuses, and acknowledge our utter helplessness. But don’t say in your heart,

“Please Lord, give me the next year to struggle.”

It doesn’t work like this. Begin the struggle right here and now. Go forward, and press on with the determination that you cannot be stopped from getting the freedom that God wants to give you. Some people say,

“Well, I know what this freedom is like. I will simply wait until God gives me this freedom. Until then I will just do nothing.”

This is no less evil than the first situation I described, because it fastens people in their sin. It gives them an excuse. It almost puts the blame on God.

“Why does He not deliver me from that sin? Why does He leave me in that sin?”

In order to describe this freedom the first thing we want to look at is *Romans* 8. That is a life in harmony with God.

Romans 8

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

⁴ That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

This is a description of freedom. Many people have a wrong concept of freedom. They think,

“Freedom is being able to do what I want. Freedom is being able to do this or that. I can do good or evil. I can obey or disobey. That is my freedom. I can be friendly or unfriendly, or whatever I choose.”

That is a perversion of freedom, not real freedom. We are free to worship God or not to worship Him. If we choose not to worship Him, and follow our own perverse will, it becomes a perversion of freedom. Real freedom means to be in harmony with God, to be subject to Him, to be in harmony with His law.

⁴ ...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

I would like to take the next description of freedom from a statement in *The Desire of Ages*, in the chapter “Who Are My Brethren”:

The Desire of Ages, p. 324:

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan.

But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not cooperate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place.

The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.

This chapter describes both slavery and freedom. The freedom is described in the words,

The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own.

That is the description of true freedom.

Allying with Heavenly Agencies

The description of slavery is there, too. But it also tells us what makes it different from freedom. It is if we “neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light.” Let’s look at these three steps again because they are mentioned in that chapter. If we fail to acknowledge the problem fully, if we don’t stop looking for excuses, and if we fail to acknowledge our utter helplessness, we will not ally ourselves with these powers of light. Why is it that we don’t ally ourselves with these powers of light? It is because we say,

“They are nothing,”

or

“We can do it all ourselves.”

We don’t speak in such extremes because we think we are quite good. The reason is that we don’t fully acknowledge the problem. We don’t stop looking for excuses. Because of this we say,

“No thank you, I don’t need help. I can still manage myself.”

So if we refuse to get help from the divine agencies, then we are in a situation where we have neglected to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. Sometimes the divine agencies help us through our fellow believers. We must be aware of this. If we refuse help in our needy situation, then we neglect the agencies that God has given for our deliverance. Then we won’t have to choose the powers of darkness. We may say,

“I have nothing to do with spiritualism. I have nothing to do with all these things.”

But we will inevitably come under its power. That is certain. Some people make serious efforts to avoid coming under the power of evil. Yet they cannot help but come under it because they neglect to come under the power of God.

So freedom means to ally ourselves fully with divine agencies; with everything God has given for my deliverance:

- The Word,
- The Church,
- The Conscience,
- The Holy Spirit,
- The Angels;

—we cannot afford to neglect any one of these agencies. That means fully surrendering to Christ. There is another statement that makes this point very clear:

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself.

Here we have to stop for a moment.

The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself.

That is the highest sense of freedom. I want to emphasize again that many pervert this freedom by misapplying the statement. How can this statement be misapplied? Well, someone thinks,

“In the work of redemption there is no compulsion, so I am not to be forced to obey. If someone tries to use compulsion on me I won’t obey anyway. You can try this with children. It doesn’t work. It may work for a while but it won’t really work. Compulsion never brings true obedience.”

“So I will not be forced either. For that reason I will sit in my chair and wait until God performs a miracle to make me so free that I will really want it. Since I don’t want it, I won’t go forward. You know, I don’t want it. That’s simply how it is. And it is God’s fault because He hasn’t changed my heart. He hasn’t made me want it.”

That is a perversion of the freedom which was originally found in heaven. “The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself.” That

is true. But it doesn't come by itself. It doesn't come unless we take the three initial steps. That is:

1. Acknowledge our problem,
2. Stop excusing ourselves, and
3. Acknowledge our utter helplessness to change ourselves.

And it is a struggle to reach these points.

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.

That is when the soul is fully surrendered to Christ, and the expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. Both are found in this statement. Surrender to Christ is the full sense of freedom. Finally, we read that freedom means that we naturally turn to God like the flower turns to the sun.

Steps to Christ, p. 99:

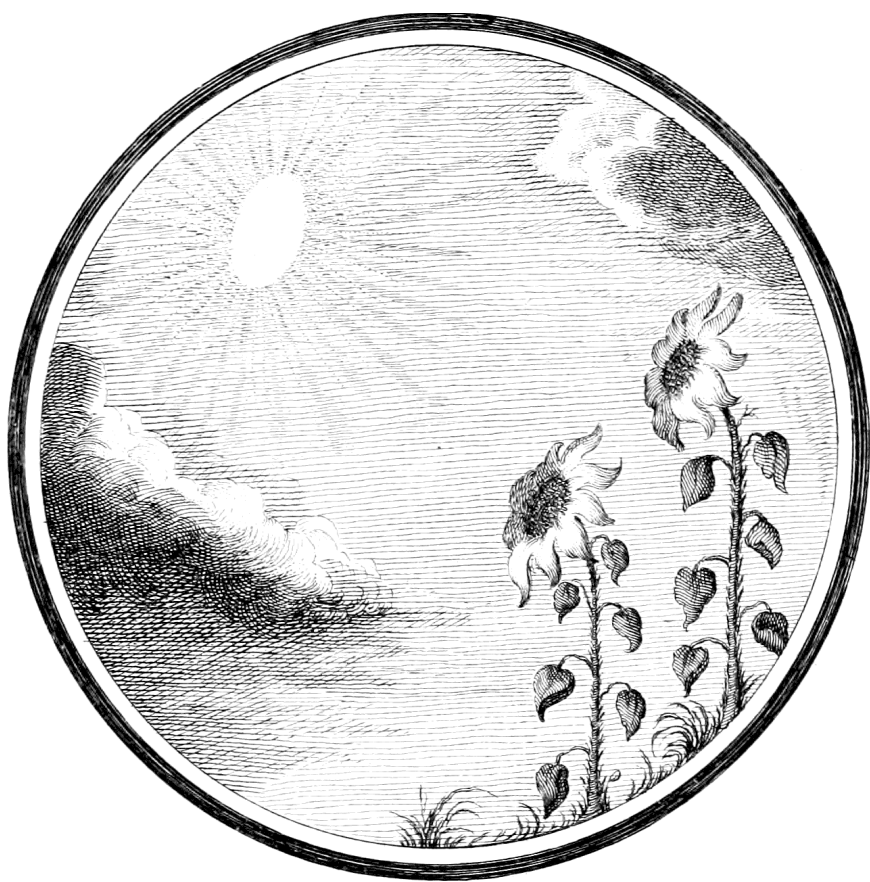
Let the soul be drawn out and upward, that God may grant us a breath of the heavenly atmosphere. We may keep so near to

What is Freedom?

- A life in harmony with the Law of God
Romans 8:1-4
- To be under the control of the power of Christ
The Desire of Ages, p. 324
- When the soul is fully surrendered to Christ
The Desire of Ages, p. 466
- Expulsion of sin is the work of the soul itself
The Desire of Ages, p. 466
- To turn to God as naturally as the flower turns to the sun
Steps to Christ, p. 99

God that in every unexpected trial our thoughts will turn to Him
as naturally as the flower turns to the sun.

That is the aim. And let us not rest until this aim is achieved.



2. Defining the Bondage

THE first step to obtain freedom is to acknowledge the sin as it is there, to stop making excuses, and finally to acknowledge our utter helplessness to deliver ourselves.

This is the freedom described in the statement we read at the end of our last study, from *Steps to Christ*. As naturally as the flower turns to the sun, so naturally will we turn to God when a question comes up. This must be our aim. When a sudden situation comes up, how do we react? What do we do? Do we naturally turn to God as a flower turns to the sun?

Let us look again at false freedom:

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

Every soul that refuses to give himself to God is under the control of another power. It is not his own. He may talk of freedom but he is in the most abject slavery.

This is why we said that many people have a wrong concept of freedom. They think freedom simply means to do what I like to do. But it means more than this. It means that I like to do the will of God. If that is the thing I like then I am free. Otherwise I'm in a position of slavery. Not many people realize this because they totally deny even the existence of evil in their heart, as I said. That is the first problem. That's the reason why they don't realize that they are slaves.

The Desire of Ages, p. 36:

They had chosen a ruler who chained them to his car as captives. Bewildered and deceived, they were moving on in gloomy procession toward eternal ruin,—to death in which is no hope of life, toward night to which comes no morning.

Many are like animals—they move on in a sad procession to their own ruin.

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

Every soul that refuses to give himself to God is under the control of another power. He is not his own. He may talk of freedom, but he is in the most abject slavery. He is not allowed to see the beauty of truth, for his mind is under the control of Satan. While he flatters himself that he is following the dictates of his own judgment, he obeys the will of the prince of darkness.

Christ came to break the shackles of sin-slavery from the soul.

John 8

³⁶ If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

Romans 8

² The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [sets us] free from the law of sin and death.

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve.

True, that is freedom—to be able to choose whom we want to serve. But the higher sense or the higher level of freedom is if we choose to serve God and abide in that service. That is the highest level of freedom.

In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.

So that is freedom. And again the fact that while this thing doesn't come automatically, while we have to fulfill the conditions for it to happen in our hearts, we cannot bring it about. Furthermore, it is important that we don't wait and say,

"I want to accept this freedom at another time."

Let us accept it now and fulfill the conditions now, right now.

What is Liberality?

What is meant by “liberality”? Liberality in the deepest sense of the word is selflessness. Everything else is not liberality. And now you understand why we need it so much—because we need selflessness. Let us read an expression of this:

Luke 6

³⁷ Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

And now comes this principle that is the leading text of our thought:

³⁸ Give and it will be given to you.

Give. That is liberality—giving.

³⁸ Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will He put in your bosom. For with the same measure you use it will be measured back to you.

Think about this for a moment. A “bosom”—maybe people don’t understand what this is. In earlier times, people would wear clothes that hung loosely over them, and they would have used a belt to hold them together. And then they used some of the cloth as a pocket. It hung from the belt, like a pocket hanging there. And in this they could carry all kinds of things. That is the bosom referred to, and in this people put grain and other things.

So it will be put in your bosom, Jesus said, in other words, in your pocket. Your bag will be filled. But there are other words which we should look at too. A “good measure”—what is this? All the statements He made are only used in the *Gospel of Luke*, interestingly. A good measure means a liberal measure, a full measure, not a stinted portion.

We can also use the word “measure” in a negative sense. It’s used in another Scripture where it says God does not give His gifts in a measure. He does not measure it with a rod or other measuring instrument, and then say, this much and not more. No,

God does give more. He gives not in a stinted way, but fully. And here it says, good measure, meaning full, plentiful, liberal, pressed.

In order to emphasize this point a few other terms are used, such as “pressed down.” When the grain is put into this pocket there it needs to be pressed down so as to fill every hole of that pocket, that no empty space is left there. Really press this grain down. Don’t be satisfied just to pour something into this pocket and then go away. No, make sure that it is pressed down. And not only this, but “shaken together.” Shake it, so as to decrease its volume that more will fit in, and even “running over.” Don’t be satisfied with it just being full, but let it run over. That is liberality, isn’t it?

If we sell something in the shop, how do we measure it? Do we give you just the exact amount, and make sure that you don’t get a bit more? Or do we fill your bag, press down the contents, shake it together, and let it even run over? Through this you can see liberality.

Luke 6

³⁸ Give and it will be given to you. For with the same measure that you use it will be measured back to you.

That is selflessness. That’s liberality. And you can’t separate these two things.

What is Liberalism?

I want to make a difference between liberality and liberalism. I will define this word as follows: the word “liberalism” stands in contrast to liberality; it’s a perversion of liberality. Liberalism and liberality are two different things. Liberalism is a perversion of liberality.

So what is liberalism? Liberalism means to make a compromise with sin. If we allow sin in our hearts, or if we allow sin in our church, if we say, “Oh, that’s not so bad,” if we are not really decisive against sin, then very often we appear to be very liberal. But

this is liberalism, it's not liberality. It's not what we need. This liberalism is the peace and safety cry that will be given in this world in abundant measure. Let us read this:

1 Thessalonians 5

³ For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman; and they shall not escape.

There are many people in the world today who are very liberally-minded. But that's liberalism. They are very tolerant, they allow everything, but very soon it will be found that the tolerance is only towards sin. It's not towards righteousness. It must be very clear that this peace and safety cry is not the liberality that we want to study here.

The Southern Watchman, June 23, 1908:

Those who transgress God's law will have much to say about charity...

Charity is an older word for love. They may quote *1 Corinthians* 13 in full, but that doesn't change the attitude.

Those who transgress God's law will have much to say about charity; and when the truth is spoken, they talk of the liberality of God's Word and the license given in it. But love for Christ and for the souls for whom He died, will lead the servant of God to make faithful warnings and appeals.

So if we neglect to give faithful warnings and appeals to the sinner and call this liberality, that is not liberality, that is liberalism. And that is a curse rather than a blessing. That's not what we want. That's not selflessness, it is selfishness. You see, very often truth and error lie very close beside each other and we have to distinguish between them.

Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, p. 235:

Sinners are continually crying, "You are narrow, so narrow." "Liberalism," cry the lawless; "Bring not your claims of law upon us." "The religion of Christ," says another, "is too hard. I cannot be a Christian; it involves too much."

That is not liberality. That is liberalism.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 13:

The carnal mind is enmity against God, and it rebels against His will. Let it once throw off the yoke of obedience and it slips unconsciously into the lawlessness of crime. Iniquity abounds among those who talk grandly of pure and perfect religious liberty. Their conduct is abhorrent to the Lord, and they are co-workers with the adversary of souls. The light of revealed truth is turned from their sight, and the beauties of holiness are but as shadows to them.

So when people throw off the yoke of obedience that is not liberality; that is liberalism. These are very obvious cases described here, but very often it appears that people are liberal, or tolerant, or nice and easy going, whereas in reality there's no selflessness behind it. Selflessness is more than this. Liberality is more than this. First of all there's liberality, which is selflessness. Then we have the perversion of liberality—that is liberalism which is not liberality, because liberality is obeying the law, it is true selflessness.

The Bondage of Legalism

But now what is bondage? Where is the bondage? We have titled the theme: "From Bondage to Liberality." I didn't describe what the bondage is, at the beginning. The bondage is legalism or narrow-mindedness. That is the thing from which we need to be delivered. Narrow-mindedness. Legalism, or narrow-mindedness, and liberalism, are two opposite sides of the same coin. They're both selfishness.

Why does a person cry "Liberalism"? Because they don't want to surrender to Christ. Because they don't want to submit to righteousness. Because they want to live their own lives. That is selfish. And, on the other hand, the narrow-minded person is also filled with self. They are both selfish. Narrow-mindedness is nothing but a perversion of wanting to obey the law. If a person wants to obey the law but doesn't fully get it, he will become very nar-

row-minded. That is the opposite of liberality. Selflessness is the key to true liberality and to true obedience of the law.

Let's look at the bondage of narrow-mindedness a little more closely. What is this bondage? What is narrow-mindedness? Another word for narrow-mindedness is bigotry. Maybe that seems a hard word but that's what it is.

The Desire of Ages, p. 271:

Physical disease, however malignant and deep-seated, was healed by the power of Christ; but the disease of the soul took a firmer hold upon those who closed their eyes against the light. Leprosy and palsy were not so terrible as bigotry and unbelief.

That should show us how dangerous and how deeply rooted that sin is. We look upon the Pharisees and we say we're not like them, but think about this more carefully. Leprosy and palsy are not so terrible as bigotry and unbelief, as narrow-mindedness. The first definition of narrow-mindedness is that it is an outward obedience only, an obedience that does not come from the heart, but is only an assent to doctrinal truths, to the logic of the truth.

The Desire of Ages, p. 309:

The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness. A jealous regard for what is termed theological truth often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life.

The darkest chapters of history are burdened with the record of crimes committed by bigoted religionists. The Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham, and boasted of their possession of the oracles of God; yet these advantages did not preserve them from selfishness, malignity, greed for gain, and the basest hypocrisy. They thought themselves the greatest religionists of the world, but their so-called orthodoxy led them to crucify the Lord of glory.

So here we have a very clear description and it says that there's an outward, or a jealous regard for what is termed theological truth, an outward assent to a message, without the inner life. That definitely means the person is narrow-minded or becomes narrow-minded.

The Desire of Ages, p. 500:

Job had said,

Job 31

³² The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveler.

And when the two angels in the guise of men came to Sodom, Lot bowed himself with his face toward the ground, and said,

Genesis 19

² Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night.

With all these lessons the priest and the Levite were familiar, but they had not brought them into practical life. Trained in the school of national bigotry, they had become selfish, narrow, and exclusive.

These three things are mentioned together: selfish, narrow, exclusive.

When they looked upon the wounded man, they could not tell whether he was of their nation or not. They thought he might be of the Samaritans, and they turned away.

In the Old Testament, God had given a lot of examples, and yet they asked the question,

“Who is my neighbor?”

But before you think too simply now, there are many who are narrow-minded and yet they are constantly going out and helping other people. I want to describe the following situation. A visitor comes to our house, and we invite him in. And immediately we have to tell him,

“Well, you know, the Third Angel’s Message, and the Image of the Beast go together, etc.”

He doesn’t even know what the Third Angel’s Message is; he doesn’t know what the Image of the Beast is. But we feel a heavy burden; we have to tell him this thing now. Why? Because maybe we want to get rid of our bad conscience.

Or the same situation can happen when we help others. We may indiscriminately help people who could really be helped much more if we would pray about them. But instead we just put some money in their pocket and we think that we have done a wonderful work. This is nothing but narrow-mindedness in the end. Because we don’t have it in our hearts to give. We have it only as a formal action.

Self-Sufficiency

Let us take another definition here. Narrow-mindedness means to be self-sufficient.

The Desire of Ages, p. 275:

But although the Pharisees thought so highly of themselves, they were really in a worse condition than the ones they despised. The publicans were less bigoted and self-sufficient, and thus were more open to the influence of truth. Jesus said to the rabbis,

Matthew 9

¹³ Go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.

Thus He showed that while they claimed to expound the word of God, they were wholly ignorant of its spirit.

The Pharisees could not receive what the publicans received from Jesus. And why not? Because they esteemed themselves too highly; because they were self-sufficient.

“No, not You, Jesus—we do not need your help at the moment. You can help the publicans, but not us.”

And Jesus could not overcome this self-sufficiency. That is narrow-mindedness. It means to look on just myself and not see the broader need; not to see that maybe another person sees more than I do. Could this be true? Have you ever tried to put yourself into the thoughts of another person and see what he sees? You can do this only with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Keeping the Law in a Selfish Way

The next definition is keeping strictly to the letter of the law without understanding its meaning. That's another definition of narrow-mindedness. In *Matthew 23* Jesus talks about the Pharisees and the Scribes as people who had such a narrow mind.

Matthew 23

²³ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

²⁴ You blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

So in other words,

“You are very particular about obeying the law.”

In theory, they were law-abiding people. But that was a perversion of law-obedience. It was really trying to fill out the law with a selfish heart, and that doesn't work. You can't do that. It's impossible. Narrow-mindedness means to be blind towards others; just to see myself, my own need, what I have to do, or maybe my own fears; just thinking of my own fears—maybe the other person will speak too bluntly to me, or too harshly. That is not really seeing what the work needs or what another person needs.

Sitting in Judgment / Persecution

In *Luke 10*, this question is asked:

Luke 10

²⁹ Who is my neighbor?

And that is a typical question for the narrow-minded person. He doesn't see who his neighbor is: he doesn't see it; he simply doesn't recognize it. And narrow-minded means to be judgmental:

Matthew 12

⁷ But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

This was said to the Pharisees who condemned the man whose blindness was healed by Christ, on the Sabbath. And they condemned Christ too. Jesus warned of this. He had said,

Luke 6

³⁷ Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 123:

The effort to earn salvation by one's own works inevitably leads men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin. For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey. All this turns the mind away from God to self. His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men.

A system of human invention, with its multitudinous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard. The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies.

The Pharisees were of this class. They came forth from their religious services, not humbled with a sense of their own weakness, not grateful for the great privileges that God had given them. They came forth filled with spiritual pride, and their theme was, "Myself, my feelings, my knowledge, my ways." Their own attainments became the standard by which they judged others. Putting on the robes of self-dignity, they mounted the judgment seat to criticize and condemn. The people partook largely of the same spirit, intruding upon the province of conscience and judging one another in matters that lay between the soul and God.

So this is a very clear description of narrow-mindedness: being judgmental. And finally, this leads to the desire to persecute:

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 126:

When men indulge this accusing spirit, they are not satisfied with pointing out what they suppose to be a defect in their brother. If milder means fail of making him do what they think ought to be done, they will resort to compulsion. Just as far as lies in their power they will force men to comply with their ideas of what is right.

This is what the Jews did in the days of Christ and what the church has done ever since whenever she has lost the grace of Christ. Finding herself destitute of the power of love, she has reached out for the strong arm of the state to enforce her dogmas and execute her decrees. Here is the secret of all religious laws that have ever been enacted, and the secret of all persecution from the days of Abel to our own time.

And the same thing we also read regarding the attitude of the apostles, when they came through Samaria, and the Samaritans didn't receive Jesus at that time:

The Desire of Ages, p. 487-488:

It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love.

There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas. Every human being, in body, soul, and spirit, is the property of God. Christ died to redeem all. Nothing can be more offensive to God than for men, through religious bigotry, to bring suffering upon those who are the purchase of the Saviour's blood.

So narrow-mindedness eventually leads to the desire to harm or even persecute those who do not agree with us. That is all bondage. It's the bondage of narrow-mindedness, the bondage of bigotry, or the bondage of legalism.

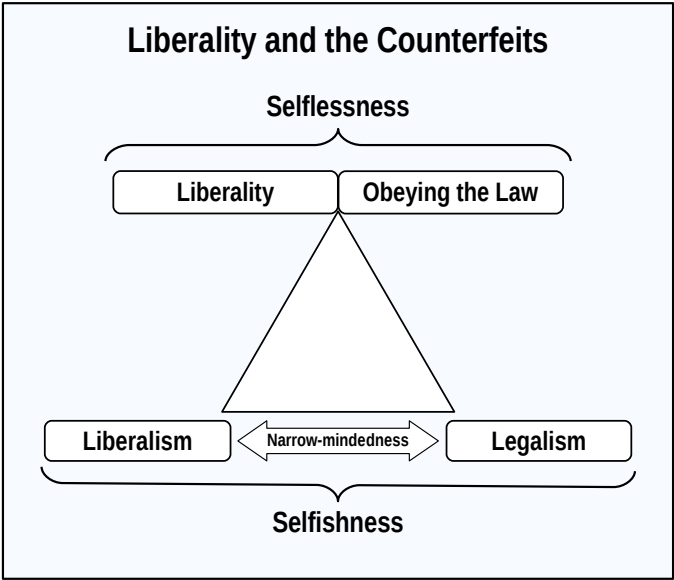
Summary

In summary, this study is about deliverance from the bondage of narrow-mindedness to the freedom of liberality. Legalism is the bondage, revealed in narrow-mindedness, which is selfishness. Legalism is fighting against liberalism, but yet has the same spirit behind it.

And true liberality is the deliverance from narrow-mindedness. Liberality does not mean lawlessness but it means obeying the law, which is true selflessness.

Luke 6

³⁸ Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again.



3. Mary's Gift

THE spirit of liberality can also be described as the spirit of selflessness, and the spirit of narrow-mindedness can be described as the spirit of selfishness. Narrow-mindedness and selfishness can be called liberalism which, in short, means lawlessness.

Luke 7

⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

This was said at the time when Mary anointed Jesus during the feast at Simon's house. Judas reacted by criticizing her and influenced the disciples to do likewise. Simon too felt critical of Mary even though he had been cured of leprosy by Jesus and had invited Him as a guest of honor to his house. Simon thought that it was inappropriate for such a sinful person to do such a thing for Jesus. The atmosphere of the whole place was charged with negativity against Mary.

Then Jesus intervened and brought this movement to a halt. He told them to leave her alone and not trouble her. Then he turned to Simon and gave him an object lesson. The crux of the lesson was that he who is forgiven much, loves much, and he who is forgiven little, loves little.

In this lesson Jesus was comparing Simon, the Pharisee, with Mary. Here we have the contrast between liberality and narrow-mindedness, especially as it pertains to Judas. Simon was converted, but Judas was hardened as a result of the whole incident. We really want to see how liberality is expressed in the act of Mary.

Simon was actually Mary's uncle, and he was the one who caused her to go into sin though we don't know the details of how he did this. But, as a result, she was looked upon as a sinner. That is why she is called Mary Magdalene even though she came

from Bethany. The town of Magdala is in northern Galilee. It is probable that she had to leave her place and live in Magdala, and the name Mary Magdalene became a synonym for Mary the sinner. But this Mary was one of Christ's most steadfast followers, and her act in washing Christ's feet is very significant and has been the subject of much thought since that time.

The Desire of Ages, p. 558:

While this plotting was going on at Jerusalem, Jesus and His friends were invited to Simon's feast. At the table the Saviour sat with Simon, whom He had cured of a loathsome disease, on one side, and Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, on the other. Martha served at the table, but Mary was earnestly listening to every word from the lips of Jesus.

In His mercy, Jesus had pardoned her sins, He had called forth her beloved brother from the grave, and Mary's heart was filled with gratitude. She had heard Jesus speak of His approaching death, and in her deep love and sorrow she had longed to show Him honor.

At great personal sacrifice she had purchased an alabaster box of "ointment of spikenard, very costly," with which to anoint His body. But now many were declaring that He was about to be crowned king. Her grief was turned to joy, and she was eager to be first in honoring her Lord. Breaking her box of ointment, she poured its contents upon the head and feet of Jesus; then, as she knelt weeping, moistening them with her tears, she wiped His feet with her long, flowing hair.

Why did she do this? What was her reason? What were her motives? She bought the ointment because she wanted to honor her Lord by anointing Him for His burial. She really believed Him when He said that He was going to die. This is significant because His disciples didn't believe Him. They wouldn't accept what He said. But Mary accepted it which shows a child-like faith.

On the other hand she did not fully understand everything, and when she heard that He was going to be crowned, she wanted to honor Him. So she anointed Him for that reason. Her act was not premeditated. It came from her more or less spontaneously. She

simply had the desire to honor her Master. But there was something more behind it.

The Desire of Ages, p. 559:

She had sought to avoid observation, and her movements might have passed unnoticed, but the ointment filled the room with its fragrance, and published her act to all present.

Next comes the reaction, but before we read about this, let's take a moment to learn something of her motives as revealed in this sentence,

“She sought to avoid observation.”

This is a very important sentence. It means that she did not do this in order that others might see it. Such a thing was not in her heart at all. Not for a moment. She did what she did for only one reason, and that was to honor her Lord. She even tried to do it in such a way that it would not be seen. This reminds us of a Bible text where Jesus said that when you give your offerings, don't do it to be seen of men, but do it for God:

Matthew 6

¹ Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

² Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

³ But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does:

⁴ That your alms may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret himself shall reward you openly.

Think about this. How often do we give gifts in order to be recognized by others? And then we talk about it as well. Such things never occurred to Mary. No such thoughts were in her mind. She sought to avoid observation.

This does not mean that she was secretive or that she had a bad conscience and tried to make sure that no one else would know. These were not her motives either. She really didn't even think of others. She simply did what she did for Jesus. If she had wanted to be secretive, she would have thought a little more and wouldn't have used this ointment because it had a very strong scent. But she didn't even think about this which shows what was in her heart. She simply wanted to bless her Lord.

The Desire of Ages, p. 560:

Mary heard the words of criticism. Her heart trembled within her. She feared that her sister would reproach her for extravagance.

It was at this point that she realized that her behavior was not appreciated by the others, and she wanted to withdraw.

The Master, too, might think her improvident. Without apology or excuse she was about to shrink away, when the voice of her Lord was heard, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her?" He saw that she was embarrassed and distressed. He knew that in this act of service she had expressed her gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins, and He brought relief to her mind.

Mary was totally surprised by Christ's response. This also reveals her motives to us. She did not expect Him to say anything like this, to give her any praise. She was surprised because she thought herself to be unworthy. Why did she think this?

First of all, she realized that she was a sinner, an adulteress. She had also been possessed by demons. And when she heard the others assess her act as wasteful, and when she heard her uncle's displeasure because he considered her to be a sinner, then she felt condemned. She felt totally unworthy. And even though worthiness was not her motive, at the same time she did not defend herself because she knew that she was not worthy. She felt unworthy and wanted to withdraw.

Then Jesus intervened and stopped everything. This surprised Mary, and her reaction reveals true liberality. I really want to

stress the point that when we calculate our goodness, when we seek recognition for our goodness either from people or from God, then we are narrow-minded. It is not the spirit of liberality. Only as we forget ourselves and are selfless can we be recommended to God. But we get this without calculating, without realizing it.

The Desire of Ages, p. 560:

He knew that in this act of service she had expressed her gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins, and He brought relief to her mind. Lifting His voice above the murmur of criticism, He said, "She has wrought a good work on me. For you have the poor with you always, and whensoever you will you may do them good: but me you have not always. She has done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying."

The fragrant gift which Mary had thought to lavish upon the dead body of the Saviour she poured upon His living form. At the burial its sweetness could only have pervaded the tomb; now it gladdened His heart with the assurance of her faith and love. Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus offered not their gift of love to Jesus in His life. With bitter tears they brought their costly spices for His cold, unconscious form. The women who bore spices to the tomb found their errand in vain, for He had risen.

But Mary, pouring out her love upon the Saviour while He was conscious of her devotion, was anointing Him for the burial. And as He went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.

Many there are who bring their precious gifts for the dead. As they stand about the cold, silent form, words of love are freely spoken. Tenderness, appreciation, devotion, all are lavished upon one who sees not nor hears. Had these words been spoken when the weary spirit needed them so much, when the ear could hear and the heart could feel, how precious would have been their fragrance!

She anointed Jesus for His burial while He was still alive. When we honor the dead, that is not wrong in itself, but if we despised

them while they were living, then our honor is not genuine. It is really hypocrisy. Her honor of the dead body of Jesus was genuine because she honored Him in life also.

The Desire of Ages, p. 560:

Mary knew not the full significance of her deed of love. She could not answer her accusers. She could not explain why she had chosen that occasion for anointing Jesus.

She could not explain why she did what she did. What does this fact mean? It means that she was not in control of the situation, but rather Another was. And who was that? Let's read on:

The Holy Spirit had planned for her, and she had obeyed His promptings. Inspiration stoops to give no reason. An unseen presence, it speaks to mind and soul, and moves the heart to action. It is its own justification.

Inspiration stoops to give no reason. How often do we want to have a reason for everything that someone else does! How often do we ask others why they did what they did! How often do we ask if they did it correctly! This was the attitude of Mary's critics. In effect that were asking her,

"Do you know that you are a sinner?"

They questioned whether or not Jesus had considered that she was a sinner. They questioned if she had considered the amount of money her purchase had cost. They questioned if she had considered the appearance of evil when a woman does something like this. This was the thinking of the others. But Mary was not thinking like this. She wanted only to honor her Lord. That was all.

The Desire of Ages, p. 560:

Inspiration stoops to give no reason. An unseen presence, it speaks to mind and soul, and moves the heart to action. It is its own justification.

Christ told Mary the meaning of her act, and in this He gave her more than He had received.

Matthew 26

¹² In that she has poured this ointment on my body, [He said,] she did it for my burial.

As the alabaster box was broken, and filled the whole house with its fragrance, so Christ was to die, His body was to be broken; but He was to rise from the tomb, and the fragrance of His life was to fill the earth.

Ephesians 5

² [Christ] has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.

Before we move on, I would like to go over the reasons for her act again. There are three reasons which need to be pointed out very clearly:

1. She wanted to honor her Master.
2. Her act was prompted by the Holy Spirit.
3. She had no reason; it was an unstudied act.

These are the three reasons.

The Fragrance of Christ

When the alabaster box was broken, it symbolized the breaking of the body of Christ. And when His body was broken, the fragrance of His sacrifice filled the whole earth in a short space of time. The sweet savor symbolized the gospel as we read in the next paragraph.

The Desire of Ages, p. 563:

Matthew 26

¹³ Verily I say unto you, [Christ declared,] Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

Looking into the future, the Saviour spoke with certainty concerning His gospel. It was to be preached throughout the world. And as far as the gospel extended, Mary's gift would shed its fragrance, and hearts would be blessed through her *unstudied act*.

Here we have the third reason: her unstudied act.

Kingdoms would rise and fall; the names of monarchs and conquerors would be forgotten; but this woman's deed would be immortalized upon the pages of sacred history. Until time should be no more, that broken alabaster box would tell the story of the abundant love of God for a fallen race.

Mary's box was full of ointment, the fragrance of which filled the room and everyone noticed it.

- The breaking of the box symbolized the breaking of the body of Jesus.
- The scent symbolized His character which was to be made known to the whole world.

We all give off a scent, and it is either good or bad. We have an influence. And the extent of this influence varies with each individual. The Bible talks about this fragrance in a spiritual context.

2 Corinthians 2

¹⁴ Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

¹⁶ To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

¹⁷ For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

So the idea is that we are to be a sweet aroma to the whole world. But it wouldn't be sweet if it was filled with selfishness. Only an unselfish spirit can have such an aroma, one of life unto life. It will not be a sweet aroma to those who reject it. That is made clear here. Many could not appreciate the selfless character of Jesus. Many could not appreciate the selfless character of the first disciples who went out to preach the message. But the honest seekers saw it.

What kind of aroma and what strength of aroma is in us? We need to ask ourselves this question. The answer depends upon our spirit of liberality. If we have the spirit of Mary, we are as sweet perfume. But the spirit of Mary means the desire to honor the Lord, to be moved by the Holy Spirit, to perform unstudied acts to honor Christ, and not to receive recognition from people.

But if we try to stand at the center, then it is not an unstudied act. It is not a sweet fragrance. It is not liberality.

Ephesians 5

¹ Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Maybe you remember that God called some of the sacrifices a sweet-smelling aroma. There was also sweet-smelling incense in the sanctuary, and this incense symbolized the merits of Christ. It showed His character which rises up to God and is pleasing to Him. But this aroma is also noticed by others.

Philippians 4

¹⁸ Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

Paul describes the gifts of others as a sweet-smelling aroma. Why does he say this? Because of the spirit with which these gifts were given. These people were happy to give these gifts. They did not give grudgingly. Nor did they question whether or not their gifts were being used correctly. They were simply happy to give, and this was a sweet-smelling aroma. This is the spirit of liberality.

Compared to Judas

Let's look more closely at the unstudied aspect of Mary's act. First, let's consider the contrast between her and Judas.

The Desire of Ages, p. 563:

Mary's act was in marked contrast with that which Judas was about to do. What a sharp lesson Christ might have given him who had dropped the seed of criticism and evil thinking into the minds of the disciples!

Judas was not necessarily fully debased at this point. He had some concerns. And if you had questioned Judas about his criticism and told him that he should not have done this, what would he have told you? He would have said,

“Why? I just pointed out that this money could have been used for something else. My comment was reasonable.”

But what he did was to plant doubts into the minds of the disciples. Judas' problem was not the money. His problem first of all was his distrust of Christ. He felt that Christ should not have accepted the gift. He felt that Christ was not worthy of the gift. He felt that it should have been used for something else. He would have spent it on himself.

He would have used the money to enhance his kind of kingdom, his world. He would have used it to make Christ king. But he would not have used it to show Christ the honor that Mary did. That was not in his heart.

Compared to the Disciples

The Desire of Ages, p. 564:

The disciples were not like Judas. They loved the Saviour. But they did not rightly appreciate His exalted character.

This was Judas' weakness too. They did not appreciate His exalted character.

Had they realized what He had done for them, they would have felt that nothing bestowed upon Him was wasted. The wise men from the East, who knew so little of Jesus, had shown a truer appreciation of the honor due Him. They brought precious gifts to the Saviour, and bowed in homage before Him when He was but a babe, and cradled in a manger.

Christ values acts of heartfelt courtesy. When anyone did Him a favor, with heavenly politeness He blessed the actor. He did not refuse the simplest flower plucked by the hand of a child, and offered to Him in love. He accepted the offerings of children, and blessed the givers, inscribing their names in the book of life. In the Scriptures, Mary's anointing of Jesus is mentioned as distinguishing her from the other Marys.

This is what we read in *John* 11 which is the chapter before the incident about the feast at Simon's house. *John* 11 is about the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus became sick, and his sisters sent a message to Jesus. The Bible describes this Mary as the one who anointed Jesus' feet.

There were several other Marys in the Bible. There was the mother of Jesus, and another was the mother of Mark. There was "the other Mary" as she is called who was at the tomb. And there is still another Mary mentioned. So there are several of them. And to make clear who she was in *John* 11, she is described as the one who anointed Jesus' feet.

John does not describe her as Mary Magdalene. This shows what a prominent role her act had and has for the preaching of the gospel.

The Desire of Ages, p. 564:

Acts of love and reverence for Jesus are an evidence of faith in Him as the Son of God. And the Holy Spirit mentions, as evidences of woman's loyalty to Christ:

1 Timothy 5

¹⁰ If she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

Christ delighted in the earnest desire of Mary to do the will of her Lord. He accepted the wealth of pure affection which His disciples did not, would not, understand.

The spirit of liberality is the spirit of pure, unselfish affection. And the disciples did not and would not understand this. Why not? They did not have this appreciation, and therefore they could

not have this liberality. It wasn't within them, so it couldn't come out.

Appreciation

The Desire of Ages, p. 564:

The desire that Mary had to do this service for her Lord was of more value to Christ than all the precious ointment in the world, because it expressed her appreciation of the world's Redeemer.

There are two kinds of people who give an offering. With one, Jesus sees a real savor in it. With the others, it doesn't smell very nice. One gift is given in unselfishness, and Jesus is really pleased with it. The other is given in selfishness. The gift the widow gave is an example of an unselfish gift.

The Desire of Ages, p. 564-565:

Christ delighted in the earnest desire of Mary to do the will of her Lord. He accepted the wealth of pure affection which His disciples did not, would not, understand. The desire that Mary had to do this service for her Lord was of more value to Christ than all the precious ointment in the world, because it expressed her appreciation of the world's Redeemer. It was the love of Christ that constrained her. The matchless excellence of the character of Christ filled her soul. That ointment was a symbol of the heart of the giver. It was the outward demonstration of a love fed by heavenly streams until it overflowed.

The work of Mary was just the lesson the disciples needed to show them that the expression of their love for Him would be pleasing to Christ. He had been everything to them, and they did not realize that soon they would be deprived of His presence, that soon they could offer Him no token of their gratitude for His great love.

The loneliness of Christ, separated from the heavenly courts, living the life of humanity, was never understood or appreciated by the disciples as it should have been. He was often grieved because His disciples did not give Him that which He should have received from them. He knew that if they were under the influence of the heavenly angels that accompanied Him, they too

would think no offering of sufficient value to declare the heart's spiritual affection.

How much do we appreciate the message? When we don't take advantage of everything that God gives us in the message, then do we really appreciate it? But there are some who take full advantage of it. They don't want to miss anything. That is an affection that Jesus honors and values.

The Desire of Ages, p. 565:

He knew that if they were under the influence of the heavenly angels that accompanied Him, they too would think no offering of sufficient value to declare the heart's spiritual affection.

It makes me think of the feeble excuses that some make in order to avoid listening to the truth because of some unpleasant situation. When one of God's ministers arrives to meet with a group, and someone complains that he was not informed in time or that he was not properly invited, you can't help but see the feebleness of these excuses. What narrow-mindedness! What selfishness!

On the other hand, would Mary have ever done that? Even if Jesus had sent an ambassador to her, wouldn't she have received him gladly?

Their afterknowledge gave them a true sense of the many things they might have done for Jesus expressive of the love and gratitude of their hearts, while they were near Him. When Jesus was no longer with them, and they felt indeed as sheep without a shepherd, they began to see how they might have shown Him attentions that would have brought gladness to His heart. They no longer cast blame upon Mary, but upon themselves. Oh, if they could have taken back their censuring, their presenting the poor as more worthy of the gift than was Christ! They felt the reproof keenly as they took from the cross the bruised body of their Lord.

There is no question that we do have a duty towards the poor. The problem is placing the poor before Christ. It shows a lack of appreciation of Christ.

The Desire of Ages, p. 565:

The same want is evident in our world today. But few appreciate all that Christ is to them.

What is the word used most in these paragraphs? Appreciation. From this we can see that appreciation is the key to liberality. If there is no true appreciation in our heart, it is as if there was a seal on our heart so that nothing can come out. There can be no liberality unless there is true appreciation.

But few appreciate all that Christ is to them. If they did, the great love of Mary would be expressed, the anointing would be freely bestowed. The expensive ointment would not be called a waste. Nothing would be thought too costly to give for Christ, no self-denial or self-sacrifice too great to be endured for His sake.

The next paragraph talks about the sacrifice of Jesus, the gift He gave so liberally and so freely, which is much more than Mary could have ever done. And when we understand this liberality of Jesus, it will spur us on to be more liberal ourselves.

4. Judas and Simon

LET us continue to look at the liberality of the act of Mary, or of the gift of Mary.

Liberality Based on Faith

The information that Mary had was not very clear. She did not know exactly whether Jesus would be buried or whether He would be alive and become king. She had no idea, no concept of this. But that didn't matter to her. She still wanted to honor Him in every possible way.

And how does this stand in contrast to so many people who do not want to give anything until they have 100% assurance of what use will be made of the things they give—what the purpose is? Let's suppose some of us would be Mary, and one day we would hear that Jesus will be buried, another day we will hear that He is crowned king. And we say,

“Well, we will hold back our offerings until we know what it is for, and then we will give it. But until this time we will keep it for ourselves.”

This is the narrow mind which Jesus must condemn. This is the mind which cannot finish the work. If we want to finish the work, our fragrance must fill the world. And that means that such considerations have no place. Our consideration must be,

“In what way can I honor the work of God? In what way can I honor God? How can I really press forward and be a blessing?”

The Desire of Ages, p. 565:

The words spoken in indignation,

Matthew 26

⁸ To what purpose is this waste?

—brought vividly before Christ the greatest sacrifice ever made,
—the gift of himself as the propitiation for a lost world.

You may say,

“Well God knew that some people would be saved on this earth.”

But, you do not fully understand how it could be a risk for God to give His Son. It cannot be fully understood. Even though God knows the future, there was a risk. He’s omniscient. But at the same time it was a risk. It could have happened that Jesus would be lost forever, or would have gone back into heaven and not finished His work on earth. There was a real chance of this.

And we do not begin to appreciate what risk God took in giving that tremendous Gift to mankind. We cannot really fully appreciate it. But we can try to grasp it, to lay hold on it. That is liberality. He did not hold back and say,

“First I want to see if people are really worthy of it, and then I will give my Son to the world.”

No, He gave His Son as a free gift. And it was wasted for many, many people. Think of the billions of people who are lost, because they do not accept that Gift. And yet He gave that Gift.

The Desire of Ages, p. 565:

Matthew 26

⁸ To what purpose is this waste?

—brought vividly before Christ the greatest sacrifice ever made, —the gift of himself as the propitiation for a lost world. The Lord would be so bountiful to His human family that it could not be said of Him that He could do more. In the gift of Jesus, God gave all heaven.

From a human point of view, such a sacrifice was a wanton waste. To human reasoning the whole plan of salvation is a waste of mercies and resources. Self-denial and wholehearted sacrifice meet us everywhere. Well may the heavenly host look with amazement upon the human family who refuse to be uplifted and enriched with the boundless love expressed in Christ. Well may they exclaim, Why this great waste?

But the atonement for a lost world was to be full, abundant, and complete. Christ’s offering was exceedingly abundant to reach every soul that God had created.

The Gift given would have saved every human being on this earth. It could have. But how few accept this Gift. What a waste, you would say, from a human point of view. But,

It could not be restricted so as not to exceed the number who would accept the great Gift.

God couldn't divide it into such small portions as to give it only to those who in the end would be saved. That's not possible for two reasons:

1. It wouldn't work.
2. That's not God's character.

Liberality is not just a good option, it's a necessity in the plan of God.

The Desire of Ages, p. 565:

All men are not saved; yet the plan of redemption is not a waste because it does not accomplish all that its liberality has provided for. There must be enough and to spare.

Judas' Desire to Control Christ

And then it talks about Simon in the next paragraph. I would like to turn to Judas for a moment. And to see this we turn back:

The Desire of Ages, p. 563-564:

But the look which Jesus cast upon Judas convinced him that the Saviour penetrated his hypocrisy, and read his base, contemptible character. And in commending Mary's action, which had been so severely condemned, Christ had rebuked Judas. Prior to this, the Saviour had never given him a direct rebuke. Now the reproof rankled in his heart. He determined to be re-venged. From the supper he went directly to the palace of the high priest, where he found the council assembled, and he offered to betray Jesus into their hands.

The priests were greatly rejoiced. These leaders of Israel had been given the privilege of receiving Christ as their Saviour, without money and without price. But they refused the precious gift offered them in the most tender spirit of constraining love.

They refused to accept that salvation which is of more value than gold, and bought their Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

So if they could have Him freely, why buy Him? Because they could have better control. When we buy something, when we give money for something, then it's ours, it belongs to us and we can do with it what we want. But when it's just lent to us, or given freely, it may be taken away again. You never know, if somebody gives it, he could take it away again. But if I buy it, then it's mine.

And their purpose was to destroy Jesus—not to accept the Gift in Jesus. And this really shows the narrow-mindedness of those who want to buy salvation in God's kingdom. In any way—to buy it either through money, which is simony, as you know, or to buy it through my good behavior, then God has to accept me.

The Desire of Ages, p. 564:

Judas had indulged avarice until it overpowered every good trait of his character. He grudged the offering made to Jesus. His heart burned with envy that the Saviour should be the recipient of a gift suitable for the monarchs of the earth. For a sum far less than the box of ointment cost, he betrayed his Lord.

And that shows how little he really appreciated and valued Him. How did Judas come to this point, where he determined to betray his Lord? He did not have this attitude at the beginning. But step by step he was led into it, through his own actions.

The reason Judas went there, was that he wanted to be in control, just like the priests. They really wanted to steer the thing according to their thinking. And this was Judas' problem right from the beginning.

The Desire of Ages, p. 716:

Judas had joined the disciples when multitudes were following Christ. The Saviour's teaching moved their hearts as they hung entranced upon His words, spoken in the synagogue, by the seashore, upon the mount. Judas saw the sick, the lame, the blind, flock to Jesus from the towns and cities.

So Judas admired Him, and you may say,

“Well okay, that is good. He appreciated Him.”

But he admired Him for His power rather than for His character. He admired Him for His abilities rather than as his Saviour. And when people admire our abilities as logical thinkers, as good speakers, as people who are able to present good sermons, then we should not be so happy about it. Because we must ask ourselves,

“Do they understand the content of what is preached? Is this really what they appreciate? Is the message that Holy Spirit speaks to them what they appreciate?”

That is the real question.

The Desire of Ages, p. 717:

He [Judas] saw the dying laid at His feet. He witnessed the Saviour’s mighty works in healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead. He felt in his own person the evidence of Christ’s power. He recognized the teaching of Christ as superior to all that he had ever heard.

And that’s often a reason why people also want to join the message, because they recognize there’s a message that is superior to everything they have heard before.

He loved the Great Teacher, and desired to be with Him. He felt a desire to be changed in character and life, and he hoped to experience this through connecting himself with Jesus. The Saviour did not repulse Judas. He gave him a place among the twelve. He trusted him to do the work of an evangelist.

Even though he was not one of the three disciples who went up with Christ on the mountain, he was still one of the twelve.

He endowed him with power to heal the sick and to cast out devils. But Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ. He did not give up his worldly ambition,

His worldly ambition? Did he have a business in the background? No, that's not what is meant here. His worldly ambition means his worldly way of thinking, in worldly lines.

The Desire of Ages, p. 717:

...or his love of money. While he accepted the position of a minister of Christ, he did not bring himself under the divine molding. He felt that he could retain his own judgment and opinions, and he cultivated a disposition to criticize and accuse.

So he did not always criticize, but occasionally he did, when things were not going exactly as he thought they should go. The main point is that he retained "his own judgment and opinions." These were holy to him. These were most important to him. He said,

"I must keep my own judgment and opinions. You know, if I don't have my own judgment and opinions, where's my personality then? I'm just a slave, I just do what others want."

If that is the case, well, then something is missing. What is missing? First of all a connection to Christ. That is missing. A connection to Christ where I hear His voice and recognize it also in the message and where I recognize it also in the believers, where I recognize this Voice also in the church that is assembled. If I don't recognize this, and I must reserve my own opinion and judgment in order to serve my personality, then I'm not really a disciple. That is the problem. He retained...

...his own judgment and opinions, and he cultivated a disposition to criticize and accuse.

If I'm in disharmony with the believers who are strong in the faith and who are really going forward and experiencing the message, then I should be most distrustful of myself, instead of thinking that I must now preserve my own judgment and opinion.

Judas was highly regarded by the disciples...

So what should Jesus say? Judas was highly regarded by the disciples, he had a great influence in that group, because of the things that he said, of the opinions that he expressed. And they all thought that he was one of the leading disciples.

The Desire of Ages, p. 717:

...and had great influence over them. He himself had a high opinion of his own qualifications, and looked upon his brethren as greatly inferior to him in judgment and ability.

When people talk about their own work, or when we talk about our own work, how do we talk about it? Do we say,

“Well, I’m really appreciated at my boss’ place, because he really sees how good the work is I do for him.”

If people say this, I used to think,

“Oh, if they’re appreciated in the world then maybe I should appreciate them too. And they would be good workers.”

But I found in many cases, even though not everybody was a bad worker, but if they were good workers in some respect there was always something missing. There was always this strife for worldly success, and a lack of spiritual perception when it came to spiritual things. And the reason is this—there was a high regard for their own abilities, which certainly were there, I’ve no question about this. And I appreciate these abilities. But at the same time there was another element missing and that was humility. That was a sense of our own inability to do any good work unless it’s done by God.

How would we talk if we really had this sense? We would rather be like Mary who would give the gift to the cause unselfishly and by this show where their heart is. They would give all their best to the work without making any claims of having done something great.

And sometimes these people are not even regarded much by the other believers. They are not seen as leading out and yet they

are leading out, because they have a good influence on others. So what kind of people do we want to be?

When we look for workers in the different areas of the world field, we do not look any more for workers who come with their own witness that they are very successful in the world. This is not a good background, because they are in the same danger as Judas. I don't say that everybody's a Judas, but they are in the same danger of going in the same way as Judas went.

Judas had a high regard of himself, and he was also highly regarded by the disciples. He had a high opinion of his own qualifications and he looked upon others as inferior.

"They can't do it as well as I can do it."

The Desire of Ages, p. 717-718:

They did not see their opportunities, he thought, and take advantage of circumstances. The church would never prosper with such shortsighted men...

Judas then judged all the other disciples, and then we read in the next paragraph:

Judas was blinded to his own weakness of character, and Christ placed him where he would have an opportunity to see and correct this. As treasurer for the disciples, he was called upon to provide for the needs of the little company, and to relieve the necessities of the poor. When in the Passover chamber Jesus said to him,

John 13

²⁷ That you do, do quickly,

—the disciples thought He had bidden him buy what was needed for the feast, or give something to the poor. In ministering to others, Judas might have developed an unselfish spirit. But while listening daily to the lessons of Christ and witnessing His unselfish life, Judas indulged his covetous disposition. The small sums that came into his hands were a continual temptation. Often when he did a little service for Christ, or devoted time to religious purposes, he paid himself out of this meager fund. In his

own eyes these pretexts served to excuse his action; but in God's sight he was a thief.

Christ's oft-repeated statement that His kingdom was not of this world offended Judas. He had marked out a line upon which he expected Christ to work. He had planned that John the Baptist should be delivered from prison. But lo, John was left to be beheaded.

Judas would have thought,

"Why don't you deliver him? Why do you allow this? I don't understand it. I don't accept what you are doing, and because I don't understand it, I can't really follow you completely. I have to reserve my own judgment, my own opinion."

The Desire of Ages, p. 718:

Judas wanted more aggressive warfare. He thought that if Jesus would not prevent the disciples from carrying out their schemes, the work would be more successful. He marked the increasing enmity of the Jewish leaders, and saw their challenge unheeded when they demanded from Christ a sign from heaven. His heart was open to unbelief, and the enemy supplied thoughts of questioning and rebellion.

Rebellion starts in a very small way. The enemy supplied thoughts and questions, and rebellion followed.

Why did Jesus dwell so much upon that which was discouraging? Why did He predict trial and persecution for himself and for His disciples? The prospect of having a high place in the new kingdom had led Judas to espouse the cause of Christ. Were his hopes to be disappointed? Judas had not decided that Jesus was not the Son of God; but he was questioning, and seeking to find some explanation of His mighty works.

Judas was sitting with one leg outside and with one leg inside. Inside, in case it would work out, and one leg outside in case it wouldn't work out. That is sitting on the wall.

Notwithstanding the Saviour's own teaching, Judas was continually advancing the idea that Christ would reign as king in

Jerusalem. At the feeding of the five thousand he tried to bring this about. On this occasion Judas assisted in distributing the food to the hungry multitude. He had an opportunity to see the benefit which it was in his power to impart to others. He felt the satisfaction that always comes in service to God. He helped to bring the sick and suffering from among the multitude to Christ.

So Judas was influenced to do good sometimes, and then he was more on the side of Christ. Then when he didn't understand something, he was outside again. So he was wavering. One moment he was in, one moment out. What really repelled him more seriously for the first time was Christ's discourse in the synagogue after He had fed the five thousand, where Jesus said,

John 6

⁵³ Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood...

That he could not understand.

"What is he talking about here? And how could He offend these people like this, so that most of them have left Him again? He has no support anymore. We cannot do any work without that. And we cannot all be supported by those few people, it's impossible. The work is going downhill."

He saw only blackness before him. So he thought,

"I really must do something to accelerate this, or else I must leave it."

But he never got an opportunity with Christ—He never allowed Judas to take over, He never allowed him to display his "true worth."

The Desire of Ages, p. 719:

From that time he expressed doubts that confused the disciples. He introduced controversies and misleading sentiments.

From now on Judas was more critical than ever. And that was the wrong time, in a way, because the work was really shrinking

—it was getting smaller, and now Satan even used Judas to tempt the few who remained faithful.

The Desire of Ages, p. 719-720:

When Jesus presented to the rich young ruler the condition of discipleship, Judas was displeased.

After all, finally, here was someone who would bring in some money to the cause and who would be a little influential, and Jesus puts him off like this. What is He doing? That can't be possible!

In all that Christ said to His disciples, there was something with which, in heart, Judas disagreed. Under his influence the leaven of disaffection was fast doing its work. The disciples did not see the real agency in all this; but Jesus saw that Satan was communicating his attributes to Judas, and thus opening up a channel through which to influence the other disciples. This, a year before the betrayal, Christ declared,

John 6

⁷⁰ Have not I chosen you twelve, [He said,] and one of you is a devil?

Yet Judas made no open opposition, nor seemed to question the Saviour's lessons. He made no outward murmur until the time of the feast in Simon's house. When Mary anointed the Saviour's feet, Judas manifested his covetous disposition. At the reproof from Jesus his very spirit seemed turned to gall. Wounded pride and desire for revenge broke down the barriers, and the greed so long indulged held him in control.

This will be the experience of everyone who persists in tampering with sin. The elements of depravity that are not resisted and overcome, respond to Satan's temptation, and the soul is led captive at his will.

When God is really going forward and He is using His workers, and we find ourselves constantly in disagreement with them, then we must ask ourselves if everything is in order. Furthermore, if we then find ourselves even criticizing and in bitterness in our hearts, then we must realize that there's wounded pride there. Be-

cause we are not listened to, because what we want doesn't go our way. And Satan uses these things—he wants to come in, to break down barriers and then to bring a lot of harm.

Criticism is like gossip, it goes from mouth to mouth to mouth. We may think that we have told only one person, but it goes to many people. Gossiping, when it goes on to criticize the leaders of God's church—that's a very different matter. Wounded pride and desire for revenge is the background of these things. And this breaks down barriers. And then Satan takes control of whatever weakness is there.

It says Judas was not “wholly hardened,” and very often before we are wholly hardened there are still many opportunities to come back.

The Desire of Ages, p. 720:

But Judas was not yet wholly hardened. Even after he had twice pledged himself to betray the Saviour, there was opportunity for repentance. At the Passover supper Jesus proved His divinity by revealing the traitor's purpose. He tenderly included Judas in the ministry to the disciples. But the last appeal of love was unheeded. Then the case of Judas was decided, and the feet that Jesus had washed went forth to the betrayer's work.

From here on Judas was now on a full campaign to betray Jesus, in order to force Him to deliver himself and finally to raise the kingdom. And if it wouldn't work out, which he also saw as a possibility, then he would take the other side. So he could only gain by what he did.

It seems contradictory, doesn't it? On the one hand he wanted to support Jesus, while on the other hand he undermined His work. But this is the result of a narrow mind. And what is a narrow mind? It is simply a mind that sees only its own world. Such a mind cannot meet the Mind of God. A narrow mind is simply one that lives in its own world; that cannot have access to the Mind of God; that doesn't hold communion with Him, and

doesn't understand Him, and doesn't understand how God is working in this last work.

A Look at Simon

After having looked at Judas, we also have to look very briefly at Simon. Simon who was healed from leprosy, was like Judas, attracted to Jesus, but at the same time he had his own thoughts. And he was thinking,

“Why did Jesus allow this?”

He was fully in sympathy with Judas, when Judas asked,

“For what purpose is this waste?”

Simon was even thinking further, he thought not only,

“For what is this waste of money?”

but also:

“Why is this bad appearance allowed? Why does Jesus allow a sinner to wash His feet?”

These doubts and prejudices of Simon are described as follows:

The Desire of Ages, p. 566:

But now Simon questioned whether the Saviour were a prophet. Because Christ allowed this woman to approach Him, because He did not indignantly spurn her as one whose sins were too great to be forgiven, because He did not show that He realized she had fallen, Simon was tempted to think that He was not a prophet. Jesus knows nothing of this woman who is so free in her demonstrations, he thought, or He would not allow her to touch Him.

But it was Simon's ignorance of God and of Christ that led him to think as he did. He did not realize that God's Son must act in God's way, with compassion, tenderness, and mercy. Simon's way was to take no notice of Mary's penitent service. Her act of kissing Christ's feet and anointing them with ointment was exasperating to his hardheartedness. He thought that if

Christ were a prophet, He would recognize sinners and rebuke them. To this unspoken thought the Saviour answered:

Luke 7

⁴⁰ Simon, I have somewhat to say unto you...

He addresses Simon directly. And that is a little differently from with Judas. Jesus did not address Judas directly because Judas was too sensitive. If He had spoken with Judas so directly, he would have exploded. He had exploded already, even though Jesus didn't talk directly to Judas. But with Simon it was different. You could talk with him. He was still open.

Luke 7

⁴⁰ Simon, I have somewhat to say unto you...

⁴¹ There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

⁴² And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

⁴³ Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, You have rightly judged.

That doesn't mean that the sin of Mary was greater than that of Simon. What Jesus wanted to explain with this parable is the reason why she shows such an appreciation, is because she has been delivered from a great sin. He could have said to Simon,

"Simon, your sin is greater than hers, because you have led her into sin."

He could have said this, but He didn't expose him in this way. Rather with this parable He tried to show why she expressed such an appreciation, such a love. And then He compared it with Simon's behavior and He said,

⁴⁴ And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet: but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet.

⁴⁶ My head with oil you did not anoint: but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment.

Simon was quiet, thoughtful and he accepted it. He saw himself as a sinner.

The Desire of Ages, p. 567:

Simon's coldness and neglect toward the Saviour showed how little he appreciated the mercy he had received. He had thought he honored Jesus by inviting Him to his house. But he now saw himself as he really was. While he thought himself reading his Guest, his Guest had been reading him. He saw how true Christ's judgment of him was. His religion had been a robe of Pharisaism. He had despised the compassion of Jesus. He had not recognized Him as the representative of God. While Mary was a sinner pardoned, he was a sinner unpardoned. The rigid rule of justice he had desired to enforce against her condemned him.

Simon was touched by the kindness of Jesus in not openly rebuking him before the guests. He had not been treated as he desired Mary to be treated. He saw that Jesus did not wish to expose his guilt to others, but sought by a true statement of the case to convince his mind, and by pitying kindness to subdue his heart. Stern denunciation would have hardened Simon against repentance, but patient admonition convinced him of his error. He saw the magnitude of the debt which he owed his Lord. His pride was humbled, he repented, and the proud Pharisee became a lowly, self-sacrificing disciple.

That is a wonderful miracle. And it gives us a lot of hope that we too can be delivered from narrow-mindedness. Narrow-mindedness cannot appreciate liberality. It cannot even see the spirit of liberality. It calls it only as waste, an unwanted waste.

When we see how Simon was finally converted, then we see that there's hope even for the narrow-minded people, provided they come to the point where they acknowledge their sin, where they don't defend themselves anymore, and finally where they see their utter helplessness to deliver themselves and seeing their

utter helplessness of being unable themselves, take hold of the power of God. And this is what Simon did.

My main point with Mary is that her act was an unstudied act. It was not done in order to show the others how good she was.

David's Liberality

Let us read where David expressed liberality. David was offering the gifts for the temple, which he himself couldn't build, but which task he had to pass on to his successor, to Solomon. But he thanked God:

1 Chronicles 29

¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise your glorious name.

¹⁴ But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? for all things come from You, and of your own have we given You.

There are many thoughts in this simple Bible text. The first thought is that everything comes from God. David recognizes that the gifts he gives do not earn credit with God, they simply come from God and are returned to Him. But there's another thought in this, and that is,

"Who am I, that I'm even able to do this?"

This shows a true appreciation of what Christ had done for him. David was a sinner and he saw himself as a sinner. He saw himself as totally unworthy even to give his gifts to the cause of God. That is something. He saw himself unworthy of doing this. And when he could do it, when he finally gave it, he said,

"What a privilege that I can do this."

That is the spirit of liberality. So we really want to understand now and learn this, because in all the examples we will see this again and again. We cannot have a spirit of liberality unless we first see our utter unworthiness and see the blessing of God.

Why did Mary want to shrink away? Because she saw her own unworthiness. She didn't accuse the others and say,

"Well, they talk badly about me, and they say this and this and this about me."

That was not in her thoughts. She saw only her own unworthiness. And she thought,

"Well, yes, I want to honor my Lord and if this is not an honor, I must withdraw quickly."

That was her only thought,

"How can I honor my Lord?"

And how surprised she was when she heard the voice of Jesus,

"Why do you trouble her?"

How surprised! As a rule, every time when we hear from the Lord that we have done well, and we are not surprised by it, but we think, "Yes, that's what I expected," then there's something wrong. There must be something wrong, because that is not an unstudied act. It is given as calculated goodness. And calculated goodness is not a sweet savor for the Lord. It's not a fragrance. It's filled full of selfishness. If we could only see this.

When we give something to the Lord, it's a matter of course—don't expect any reward, or any praise. See your unworthiness:

"Who am I, and who is my people that we should be able to offer as willingly as this?"

That must be our attitude and our language. And that is liberality.

The Answer of the Sheep

I would like now to turn to a Bible text about this:

Matthew 25

³¹ When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory:

³² All the nations will be gathered before Him: and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd divides His sheep and the goats:

³³ And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left.

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of this world:

³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in:

³⁶ I was naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came in to me.

And now comes the main point. The main point is this:

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer and say, Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you? or thirsty, and gave you drink?

³⁸ When did we see you a stranger, and take you in? or naked, and clothe you?

³⁹ Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?

⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, Assuredly I say to you, Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

As a result of seeing their own unworthiness, it is an appreciation even to give something. It flows over, it flows out, it naturally comes out, and it's a blessing to the world. And the whole world will be filled with this fragrance.

Unless that is our attitude as the people of God, we shall not be able to bring the message into all the world. The angel that lightens the whole world with his glory will have a fragrance around him. And that is the fragrance. The fragrance of Mary. Can you see that this would be her language?

“When have I done this Lord?”

She was surprised that the Lord should commend her. I wish that this would be our attitude, so that we as a people can really go forward. We can be delivered, just as Simon was delivered; or we can refuse to be delivered like Judas. And then we will also end like him. May this not be the case of any one of us, is my prayer. Amen.



5. Cain and Abel

IN OUR last studies we considered together the experience of Mary, and we saw that she had the spirit of liberality, and the key text for this was:

Luke 7

⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

There is very much in this text; more than we can see at one glance. Indeed every Bible text is like this, isn't it?

Receiving to Give

When we ask ourselves the question, "What is liberality?", would you think that is where we give something, or where we receive something? In what category would you place liberality? In the category of giving or in the category of receiving? Normally you would put it in a category of giving, wouldn't you?

But here Mary has received something: forgiveness. If we look at liberality only as a category of forgiving then we would look at this text as follows:

"Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, I have chosen to forgive, and I have chosen to forgive this because I prefer her above others. That is the reason why she loves, why she gives. Some have it and some don't have it. Those who have it can be liberal and those who don't can't be liberal."

That's how we would read it. But that is not the case. Mary had an open heart for forgiveness and that is an important part of liberality.

Liberality means that we receive in order to give.

Liberality means to lay hold upon everything that God has given to us for our advancement and for our service. When I say everything I really mean everything. That doesn't mean only to

come to Him in prayer. It also means to use the means that He has given on this earth, even the simplest means. And to despise and neglect them means to lack that spirit of liberality.

The other text which confirmed this to us was where we read about David when he gave his temple gifts:

1 Chronicles 29

¹⁴ But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of your own we have given You.

¹⁵ For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope.

“Without hope” means “without You”. Like Paul in *Romans 7* he makes it very clear that in ourselves we are nothing. In ourselves we have nothing to give. We receive from You everything we can give, and that is the spirit of liberality.

The spirit of liberality is not that I am generous because I can afford to give a lot. No. The spirit of liberality means to give everything which we have received, and to receive because we want to give. And this is expressed very well in this text. So, let us try to meditate about the text we just read. He says

“It is from your blessings that we bring our liberal offerings. You have prompted us to give it. It’s the Holy Spirit that has prompted us. We are unworthy even to give anything and we thank you that we can give.”

That is the standard for the spirit of liberality.

The Corinthian Church

Let’s read this now in another Bible text where we see the same spirit. Paul here writes to the Corinthians as a church that was liberal.

2 Corinthians 9

¹ Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;

² For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

They exerted quite an influence here.

³ Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready;

⁴ Lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

⁵ Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

⁶ But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

⁷ So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

The word “cheerful” is very meaningful. We could say God loves a “liberal” giver; a giver with the spirit of liberality. That is what God loves.

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

⁹ As it is written: He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.

¹⁰ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

¹¹ While you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

¹² For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,

¹³ While, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

¹⁴ And by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

How many times does the word “liberal” appear here? I would say twice if I have not counted wrongly.

¹¹ While you are enriched in everything for all *liberality*, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

So this church really was liberal.

¹³ ...they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your *liberal* sharing with them and all men.

So Paul speaks of the liberality of the Corinthians here in chapter 9. And he compares a cheerful giver to a liberal giver. He tells them that they are enriched in all liberality.

Cain and Abel

We want to illustrate this liberality with some examples again, so we will go back to the Old Testament and we turn now to *Genesis*. In the following story, liberality and narrow-mindedness met each other and created a tremendous hostility between the two parties, especially from the side of those who were narrow-minded.

Genesis 4

¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, I have acquired a man from the Lord.

² Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

³ And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.

⁴ Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering,

⁵ But He did not respect Cain and his offering. Now Cain was very angry. And his countenance fell.

What is the difference between the offering of Cain and the offering of Abel? Obviously the offering of Abel was in the spirit of *2 Corinthians* 9. It was a cheerful offering. God loves a cheerful giver. He gave his offering cheerfully and that is what God accepted. That is what He recognized as a gift.

Cain, on the other hand, was not a cheerful giver. He was narrow-minded as we shall see when we go on in our study, and because of this God could not accept his offering. When our offering is not given in the spirit of liberality it cannot be accepted by God. It's impossible; He can't accept it; He doesn't want it. Once He said about all the sacrifices,

Isaiah 1

¹¹ To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? says the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

In other words,

“I don't want your sacrifices anymore. They are an abomination to me. Don't bring them. Keep them for yourself, because your heart is not with me.”

But with Abel it was very different. So let's read now the spirit of these two brothers. First we want to see the spirit of Abel, and then we want to see the spirit of Cain.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71:

Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam, differed widely in character. Abel had a spirit of loyalty to God; he saw justice and mercy in the Creator's dealings with the fallen race, and gratefully accepted the hope of redemption.

What do you see in this sentence? Real appreciation. That means gratefulness and cheerfulness. For him to give something to God was not to give up anything. For him it was like,

“Oh, what a privilege I have, even to be able to give this.”

If God would say “Thank you” for this gift, Abel would say,

“Why do You thank me? You gave it to me.”

It’s as if I get a gift from God on my birthday and He says, “Thank you,” and I say,

“Pardon me? I should say thank You, not You.”

And that’s how it is. Abel really felt as though he gave nothing to God. God gave him something which he then committed to sacrifice. He really appreciated what God had done.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71:

The two brothers erected their altars alike, and each brought an offering. Abel presented a sacrifice from the flock, in accordance with the Lord’s directions.

Genesis 4

⁴ And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering.

Fire flashed from heaven and consumed the sacrifice.

God accepted it.

Hebrews 11

⁴ By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

In what way was it more excellent? This we read in the following sentence:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71:

Abel grasped the great principles of redemption. He saw himself a sinner, and he saw sin and its penalty, death, standing between his soul and communion with God. He brought the slain victim, the sacrificed life, thus acknowledging the claims of the law that had been transgressed. Through the shed blood he looked to the future sacrifice, Christ dying on the cross of Calvary; and trusting in the atonement that was there to be made, he had the witness that he was righteous, and his offering accepted.

So Abel grasped the great principles of redemption. He saw himself as a sinner. He expressed the same thing as Paul did in *Romans 7* when he said,

Romans 7

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

And when Christ then offered deliverance he said,

²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

He was full of gratitude for what God had done for him, and not for a moment did he think he had done anything for God. Not a moment. He saw himself only as falling short and God supplying his need.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 74:

In meekness, yet fearlessly and firmly, Abel defended the justice and goodness of God. He pointed out Cain's error, and tried to convince him that the wrong was in himself. He pointed to the compassion of God in sparing the life of their parents when He might have punished them with instant death, and urged that God loved them, or He would not have given His Son, innocent and holy, to suffer the penalty which they had incurred. All this caused Cain's anger to burn the hotter.

We come to Cain again. We can see that Abel expressed a real appreciation, and he expressed this also in the face of his godless brother. He was not ashamed to give a clear testimony. He said,

“God has been so gracious to us in sparing our parents. You know, they have transgressed His command; they should have died in the very moment that they ate of the fruit, but instead they were spared. What grace, what mercy! Shouldn't we be thankful for this? I am thankful for this.”

That was his witness even though Cain could not appreciate it. It was his witness, very clearly. And so we must give our witness, too. That is the spirit of liberality. Furthermore, the very fact that Abel defended the justice and goodness of God showed also that

he had an interest in his brother. He was not careless about him. He could have said,

“Well, if you think that is right, then you do what you want, but I will do what I want.”

But that was not his attitude. He rather said,

“Come on, Cain. This is the situation here. We must really see the mercy and goodness of God.”

There comes a point when you cannot speak to sinners like this anymore, but this was not the point here. It simply shows that the spirit of liberality is not so narrow that it just thinks of “my own salvation.” It thinks of the salvation of others also, and it appreciates what God has done; not only for me but for others as well—for my parents in this case here, and also for his brother.

In stark contrast to this spirit of liberality stands the spirit of narrow-mindedness of Cain, so it is no wonder his offering could not be accepted. After we read Abel had a spirit of loyalty, we read this:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71:

But Cain cherished feelings of rebellion, and murmured against God because of the curse pronounced upon the earth and upon the human race for Adam’s sin. He permitted his mind to run in the same channel that led to Satan’s fall—indulging the desire for self-exaltation and questioning the divine justice and authority.

He was dissatisfied with the situation as it is. Today people may not blame God directly like Cain did, but they do it indirectly by showing dissatisfaction with what God gives them through God’s servants. They make the same complaint, in fact, against God.

“He permitted his mind to run in the same channel that led to Satan’s fall.”

It is true that it was not easy for them to till the soil, even though it was much easier back then than it is today after the

flood. But still it was hard work—they had to sweat; it was warm, and they had thorns and thistles in the ground, and bad seed which destroyed the good seed.

But all this God had given for a blessing to humankind, and this is something that Cain overlooked. He thought that these things would hinder their progress, when in fact God allowed these things for their progress. It was necessary; it was essential that they had these things. But Cain was simply too narrow-minded to see it this way.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71:

These brothers were tested, as Adam had been tested before them, to prove whether they would believe and obey the word of God. They were acquainted with the provision made for the salvation of man, and understood the system of offerings which God had ordained. They knew that in these offerings they were to express faith in the Saviour whom the offerings typified, and at the same time to acknowledge their total dependence on Him for pardon; and they knew that by thus conforming to the divine plan for their redemption, they were giving proof of their obedience to the will of God. Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin; and they were to show their faith in the blood of Christ as the promised atonement by offering the firstlings of the flock in sacrifice. Besides this, the first fruits of the earth were to be presented before the Lord as a thank offering.

So it was not wrong as such that Cain brought fruits of the field because they were the first fruits or the thank offering, but what he lacked was the fact that this was only a part. The main part of the sacrifice was the shedding of blood, and this he refused to do.

It's like a person who says,

“Yes, I will worship God, but I don't want to go on my knees because that's too humiliating.”

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71-72:

The two brothers erected their altars alike, and each brought an offering. Abel presented a sacrifice from the flock, in accordance with the Lord's directions.

Genesis 4

⁴ And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering.

Fire flashed from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. But Cain, disregarding the Lord's direct and explicit command, presented only an offering of fruit. There was no token from heaven to show that it was accepted. Abel pleaded with his brother to approach God in the divinely prescribed way, but his entreaties only made Cain the more determined to follow his own will. As the eldest, he felt above being admonished by his brother, and despised his counsel.

First of all we see that Cain disregarded the Lord's direct and explicit command. He said,

"I can do it my way. I don't need to do it exactly as He says it. If I do it a little differently, the main thing is that I give Him something, isn't it? Exactly how I give it is not so important as that I give it to Him."

"And here, this is my fruit. This is what I harvested. I am a farmer. I am not a shepherd as my brother is, and I want to give something from my field and not from somebody else. Can't You recognize this, oh God, that I have to give something that comes from my very own labors?"

No, God could not.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 72:

Cain came before God with murmuring and infidelity in his heart in regard to the promised sacrifice and the necessity of the sacrificial offerings. His gift expressed no penitence for sin. He felt, as many now feel, that it would be an acknowledgment of weakness to follow the exact plan marked out by God, of trusting his salvation wholly to the atonement of the promised Saviour.

What kind of spirit does Cain have here? That's the spirit of liberalism, isn't it? That is the spirit of liberalism.

"Don't be so exact. Don't be so narrow-minded to do everything exactly as God has said. The main thing is it's given."

That is the spirit of liberalism. On the one hand this spirit is there. On the other hand, he was very narrow-minded because he could not rejoice in the fact that the offering was accepted from his brother. Another thing where he was very narrow-minded was that he could not accept any counsel from his brother who was younger than he was.

Sometimes we come to a situation where we do something wrong and others, whom we do not expect to, see it aright. And then we think,

"Well, what can they tell us? What do they have to tell us? They are just our children, and our children should be submissive to us. They should not tell us what we do wrong."

If we have this attitude we have a narrow mind because we exclude God's voice because it comes through an unexpected channel. And I really want to stress the fact that this is especially so in the relationship of parents and children, and older brothers and younger brothers.

Naturally, the older brother has a leading position. The parents have a leading position and there is no question about that. But if because of this we cannot receive any counsel from the younger ones then we are narrow-minded. And this narrow-mindedness is the very thing we need to be delivered from.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 72:

He chose the course of self-dependence. He would come in his own merits. He would not bring the lamb, and mingle its blood with his offering, but would present his fruits, the products of his labor. He presented his offering as a favor done to God, through which he expected to secure the divine approval.

Now I could count. How many years did I serve the Lord already? Good, I served Him so many years, so now I deserve also this and that, don't I? Or,

"I have been in prison for the Lord and now I deserve also a position in the church."

Or,

"I have done this and this. Now I deserve this and this."

When we think in these channels that is the narrow mind. That is as though we do God a favor. We must forget these things.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 72:

Cain obeyed in building an altar, obeyed in bringing a sacrifice; but he rendered only a partial obedience. The essential part, the recognition of the need of a Redeemer, was left out.

So far as birth and religious instruction were concerned, these brothers were equal. Both were sinners, and both acknowledged the claims of God to reverence and worship. To outward appearance their religion was the same up to a certain point, but beyond this the difference between the two was great.

Here we are told how equal the two brothers were, and we are told this so that we see very clearly that there is no arbitrary placing of the one to the right and the other to the left. God has given an equal chance to everyone just as he gave to these two brothers.

So today there may be people in the church who have had the same religious education, heard the same messages, so up to a point their religion is the same. But beyond this there is a huge difference, and the difference is between liberality and narrow-mindedness, or between wise and foolish virgins which we could also study in this context here.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 72:

Hebrews 11

⁴ By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

Abel grasped the great principles of redemption. He saw himself a sinner, and he saw sin and its penalty, death, standing between his soul and communion with God.

Cain had the same opportunity of learning and accepting these truths as had Abel. He was not the victim of an arbitrary purpose. One brother was not elected to be accepted of God, and the other to be rejected. Abel chose faith and obedience; Cain, unbelief and rebellion. Here the whole matter rested.

In the next paragraph, these two brothers are set forth as representatives of two classes of people in the world, and we could also say, “and also in the church.” And then we read about the murder of Abel:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 73-74:

When Cain saw that his offering was rejected, he was angry with the Lord and with Abel; he was angry that God did not accept man’s substitute in place of the sacrifice divinely ordained, and angry with his brother for choosing to obey God instead of joining in rebellion against Him.

That is something. If somebody is in rebellion he cannot be happy to be alone. He must always find somebody to join him.

Notwithstanding Cain’s disregard of the divine command, God did not leave him to himself; but He condescended to reason with the man who had shown himself so unreasonable. And the Lord said unto Cain,

Genesis 4

⁶ Why are you wroth? and why is your countenance fallen?

Through an angel messenger the divine warning was conveyed:

⁷ If you do well, shall you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin lies at the door.

The choice lay with Cain himself. If he would trust to the merits of the promised Saviour, and would obey God’s requirements, he would enjoy His favor. But should he persist in unbelief and transgression, he would have no ground for complaint because he was rejected by the Lord.

But instead of acknowledging his sin, Cain continued to complain of the injustice of God and to cherish jealousy and hatred

of Abel. He angrily reproached his brother, and attempted to draw him into controversy concerning God's dealings with them. In meekness, yet fearlessly and firmly, Abel defended the justice and goodness of God. He pointed out Cain's error, and tried to convince him that the wrong was in himself. He pointed to the compassion of God in sparing the life of their parents when He might have punished them with instant death, and urged that God loved them, or He would not have given His Son, innocent and holy, to suffer the penalty which they had incurred. All this caused Cain's anger to burn the hotter.

So we see here very clearly how Abel tried to help him, but Cain only closed himself even more.

Reason and conscience told him that Abel was in the right; but he was enraged that one who had been wont to heed his counsel should now presume to disagree with him, and that he could gain no sympathy in his rebellion. In the fury of his passion he slew his brother.

And that is the enmity that God had said from the beginning would be there between the righteous and the evil one. Cain killed Abel not because he had done something wrong, but simply because he was righteous. That was the very reason. And now we turn to *Genesis* and we see the answer that Cain gave.

Genesis 4

⁶ So the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?

⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.

⁸ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? He said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?

This statement is quite significant:

“Am I my brother's keeper?”

What does that mean? It means,

“I am responsible just for myself. I am not responsible for anybody else. I just look after myself and nobody else. I just live in my own world and have nothing to do with anybody else. If somebody intrudes into my world I will kill him and that’s all that matters. Otherwise I am not concerned with what happens outside of my world.”

And that is narrow-mindedness, a very great narrow-mindedness. It means the person is very restrictive, caring only about self. Am I my brother’s keeper? We *are* our brother’s keeper, and Abel very clearly recognized that he was his brother’s keeper by actually pleading with him, and trying to show him the error of his way, and reasoning with him. But Cain said,

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Am I my brother’s keeper? Of course we are our brother’s keeper. This statement really shows that the spirit of liberality is totally lacking in that person. Apart from this fact, the spirit of narrow-mindedness even led him to be a murderer, a murderer of his brother.

When we have this spirit of narrow-mindedness we are not satisfied with simply pointing out the wrong in our brother, but we want then to force him to do that what we think he should do, and this is the secret of all religious laws, of all religious persecution. And here we have the beginning of it.

So, when the image of the beast is erected, it will be done because of narrow-mindedness. It’s not because of the spirit of liberality, but because of narrow-mindedness.

Romans 9

³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;

³¹ But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

³² Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

³³ As it is written: Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.

Take a look at verse 30:

³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness.

Can you see Mary in this? Mary did not pursue righteousness. Her act was an unstudied act. What does this mean? It doesn't mean that she was careless about righteousness. It doesn't mean that she didn't want to serve Jesus. It simply meant that she did not intend to have her act published abroad. She did not intend to make a show of what she was doing. She did not intend to boast before others because she had nothing to boast of. She had only to express her gratefulness, nothing more.

And that was the situation of the Gentiles who came to the faith. They did not pursue after righteousness in that sense, did they? They did not seek to be righteous like the Jews tried to be righteous in front of all the people:

“Look how righteous we are. Look at us!”

The Gentiles did not do that. But they attained righteousness, even the righteousness of faith: faith in the Saviour who had delivered them from their sinfulness. They saw only their sinfulness, nothing more. And they sought deliverance from this, and that is righteousness by faith.

But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, trying to make themselves important, did not receive it. That reminds us again of those to the left and to the right. Those on the left will say,

“Lord, when have we done this, and this, and this? We have not done anything. We have only given what we have received.”¹

¹ *Matthew 25:37-39.*

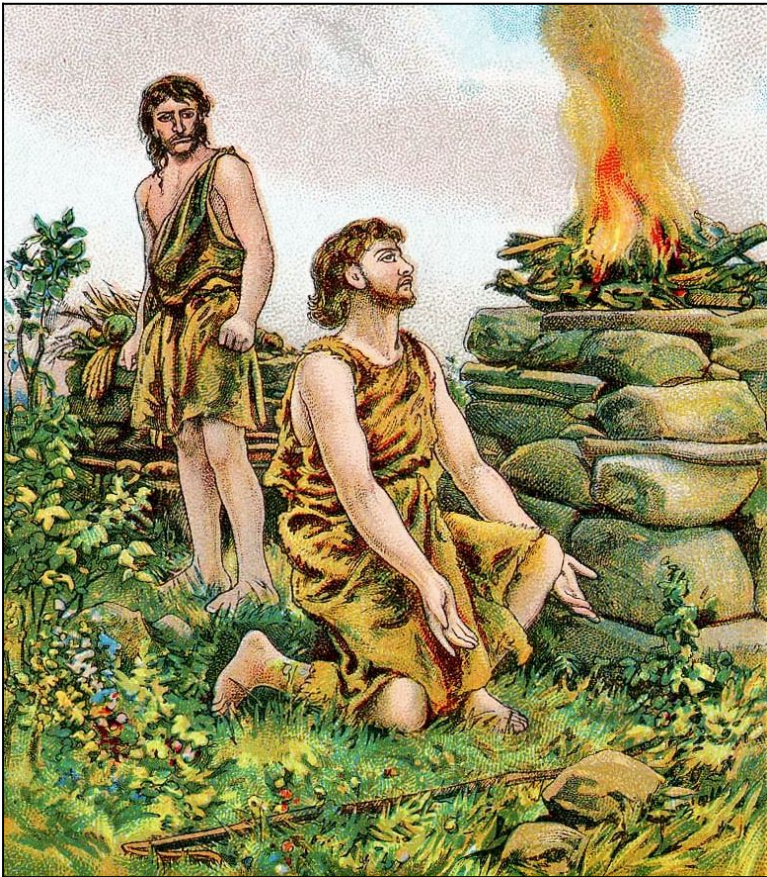
And those on the left will say,

“But, haven’t we done this and this and this?”²

And God must say,

“I am not pleased with this. I can’t accept it, because it was not given in the spirit of liberality.”

The question now is, with what spirit do we give our time, our labor, our gifts to the Lord? What is behind this? And this makes us either wise or foolish virgins.



² Matthew 7:22.

6. An Unstudied Act

NOW we want to come back to our study on Mary's unstudied act, and this morning we want to understand better what this really means: "an unstudied act." What does it really mean? What is included in this? Yesterday we wondered a little about this—whether that simply means an impulsive act, and what she did looks very impulsive—but I think the word "unstudied" is meant here in a different way.

During the last study we looked at *Romans* 9:30-33, and we saw that the righteousness which the Gentiles did not seek after, they found, and that is the righteousness by faith; whereas the righteousness the Jews sought after they did not find. The righteousness of the Gentiles was an unstudied act. That doesn't mean that it was impulsive. It simply means that it was not done in a calculated way so as to get recognition from God. It was not done in order to do Him a favor. It was simply done as an outflowing of a heart of appreciation.

And this is true of the unstudied act of Mary, too; unstudied in the sense of not calculated to get any approval from anyone. That was the unstudied part. Apart from this, she had prepared everything; she had bought the ointment beforehand.

The Widow's Offering

Let us turn to another story that makes this point very clear, and this story we find in two scriptures:

Mark 12

⁴¹ Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury.

⁴² And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites...

⁴³ So He called His disciples to himself and said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

⁴⁴ For they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.

When Jesus talked about this openly to His disciples the woman might have been quite surprised. Hers was an unstudied act—in what sense? Not in the sense that she did not intend to give that money. Not in the sense that she was impulsive.

“Now I am in a good mood so I will give my two mites.”

No, she knew very well that this was her livelihood. She knew very well she had set it apart, but she felt that she wanted to give her gratitude to the Lord. But it was unstudied in the sense that she did not think she would receive any commendation from Jesus, as she did. She was very surprised when she did, just as Mary was when Jesus said,

“Leave her alone.”

The widow stands in contrast to the rich people who gave their money, and here we have again a contrast between narrow-mindedness and the spirit of liberality.

The Desire of Ages, p. 614-615:

Jesus was in the court where were the treasure chests, and He watched those who came to deposit their gifts. Many of the rich brought large sums, which they presented with great ostentation.

With great ostentation—that is not the spirit of liberality.

Jesus looked upon them sadly, but made no comment on their liberal offerings.

You could put the word liberal in quotation marks: “liberal” offerings.

Presently His countenance lighted as He saw a poor widow approach hesitatingly, as though fearful of being observed. As the rich and haughty swept by, to deposit their offerings, she shrank

back as if hardly daring to venture farther. And yet she longed to do something, little though it might be, for the cause she loved.

She looked at the gift in her hand. It was very small in comparison with the gifts of those around her, yet it was her all. Watching her opportunity, she hurriedly threw in her two mites, and turned to hasten away. But in doing this she caught the eye of Jesus, which was fastened earnestly upon her.

So here we see what unstudied means. She did not try to say, “Look at me.” She did not try to explain, “This is all I have.” She made no excuses. She simply gave it from her heart and wanted to withdraw, not getting any attention for herself and her gift.

The Desire of Ages, p. 615:

The Saviour called His disciples to Him, and bade them mark the widow’s poverty. Then His words of commendation fell upon her ear:

Luke 21

³ Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow has cast in more than they all.

Tears of joy filled her eyes as she felt that her act was understood and appreciated. Many would have advised her to keep her pittance for her own use; given into the hands of the well-fed priests, it would be lost sight of among the many costly gifts brought to the treasury.

And think of the misuse of the gifts by these priests. Think of the stealing that was customary in those days. Wasn’t it a waste? No, it was not a waste, because she gave it from her heart, and what she gave we will see was much more than the others gave.

But Jesus understood her motive. She believed the service of the temple to be of God’s appointment, and she was anxious to do her utmost to sustain it. She did what she could, and her act was to be a monument to her memory through all time, and her joy in eternity. Her heart went with her gift; its value was estimated, not by the worth of the coin, but by the love to God and the interest in His work that had prompted the deed.

Jesus said of the poor widow,

Luke 21

³ [She] has cast in more than they all.

The rich had bestowed from their abundance, many of them to be seen and honored by men. Their large donations had deprived them of no comfort, or even luxury; they had required no sacrifice, and could not be compared in value with the widow's mite.

It is the motive that gives character to our acts, stamping them with ignominy [shame, dishonor] or with high moral worth.

So the gift of those who gave it out of their luxury was a dishonor, really. It was of no moral good. The question was asked in the break,

“Does that mean it would have been better if they had kept it for themselves?”

We have to look at it from various viewpoints. When I look at it from the side of the minister, or the side of God, God would say,

“Keep your money for yourself because it's not a blessing.”

But when I look at it from the side of the giver I would say,

“Well, I want to do everything to change. I don't want to leave it this way one more moment.”

Can you see this? It's absolutely essential that we understand what true liberality is, and when we realize that we have a narrow mind we need to change this.

The Desire of Ages, p. 615:

Not the great things which every eye sees and every tongue praises does God account most precious. The little duties cheerfully done, the little gifts which make no show, and which to human eyes may appear worthless, often stand highest in His sight. A heart of faith and love is dearer to God than the most costly gift.

That is really important to see. I really want to stress this again. If people have a lot of money and they give something without depriving themselves of any luxury or anything, that is not

wrong in itself, but think about this. How much more did this widow give when she gave everything, even though it was very very little?

The Desire of Ages, p. 615:

The poor widow gave her living to do the little that she did. She deprived herself of food in order to give those two mites to the cause she loved. And she did it in faith, believing that her heavenly Father would not overlook her great need. It was this unselfish spirit and childlike faith that won the Saviour's commendation.

How many are quite willing to give, but before they give they must first secure their own existence?

"First I must make sure that when I give I don't deprive myself of my existence. That is my priority."

When we give our gift in that spirit, then we don't really give it. We give it in the same way as the rich people gave it, out of abundance, and our gifts will not multiply. They will not be a sweet savor that fills the room with the fragrance of sweet ointment. It will not be like that.

The perfume of a sweet ointment is released when, regardless of our existence, we give. That means we give first, and that is what this widow did. Again, that doesn't mean God always requires us necessarily to deprive ourselves of everything, but the question is, are we willing? When the Holy Spirit prompts, are we willing to give all? Or do we just give as much as does not endanger us, or cause us any difficulty, so that we always have a safety net under us, a security, which we can fall back on in case God does not care for us anymore?

Do we have this attitude? If that is the case, then the work will not go forward because the spirit of liberality is missing. The work will not go forward through us at least. It may go forward through others, but not through us.

The Desire of Ages, p. 615-616:

Among the poor there are many who long to show their gratitude to God for His grace and truth. They greatly desire to share with their more prosperous brethren in sustaining His service. These souls should not be repulsed. Let them lay up their mites in the bank of heaven. If given from a heart filled with love for God, these seeming trifles become consecrated gifts, priceless offerings, which God smiles upon and blesses.

When Jesus said of the widow,

Luke 21

³ [She] has cast in more than they all,

–His words were true, not only of the motive, but of the results of her gift. The...

Mark 12

⁴² ...two mites which make a farthing

–have brought to God’s treasury an amount of money far greater than the contributions of those rich Jews. The influence of that little gift has been like a stream, small in its beginning, but widening and deepening as it flowed down through the ages. In a thousand ways it has contributed to the relief of the poor and the spread of the gospel.

I’ll ask you a question: didn’t the other people really show how much they gave? I could imagine there was a money box—so the rich people would come and show their \$100 dollar bill, maybe wave it about a little, and then drop it in. Then the next comes and gives two \$100 dollar bills and he waves them and shows them around a bit and then puts them in the box. And another comes and he is even more motivated because of this and he comes with four \$100 dollar bills, waves them a little and puts them in. And then somebody comes with a \$500 dollar bill. Is there such a thing? I don’t know. Let’s suppose there would be one, and he puts it in.

Aren’t they also producing more gifts from others? After all, they encourage the others, don’t they? They really encourage human pride. They encourage bigotry. They encourage narrow-mindedness. They encourage pride in my religion. This is what is

encouraged with this kind of spirit. But the widow did not come like this. It was Jesus who commended her gift. You may say,

“When I give my offering today, when I transfer this, or send a check to the treasury or whatever, how does Jesus commend this? In which corner is He standing and saying, ‘Well done,’ so that it can be an encouragement to others?”

Well, He does it differently today. He doesn’t do it as He did back then. Today my offerings, if I give them in the spirit of that widow, will multiply through the spirit that I have. My dedication to the work, my love of the work, will have an influence, which is far greater than the offering that I give. This we must always remember. It is not so much the money that I give, but the spirit with which I give it, which is of value for the cause of God.

In the case of the widow, Jesus personally, because He was on earth, commended it. He said,

“Look, this is what has been done.”

You know, in some churches today a list is handed out of how much individual people give.

“Brother so-and-so gave so much, Sister so-and-so so much,”

–and so forth. And when the list is given everybody can read it, so that it is an encouragement for everyone to give a little more. What does this foster? What kind of spirit? Not a very good spirit.

However, there is the possibility that people can give a testimony, for example, there are people who have in the past, when I think about this, who have openly dedicated something to the cause, like Annanias and Sapphira, and like others in the early church. They openly promised to give this and that, and this amount. However, they did this in the right spirit, not in order to show how much they would give, but in order to bind themselves. It’s like a contract. They publicly said,

“Here, this is what I will bind myself to.”

And that is a different spirit. We realize this. So we don’t want to look at the technicality of it and say,

“This is right, that is wrong.”

Again, it all depends on the spirit in which something is done. And the commendation of Jesus is what makes the gift of value, which multiplies it in the end, and Jesus gives His commendation when the spirit is right.

This commendation is not always given by Jesus personally standing in the corner and speaking. This commendation is very often given by the continuation of the life of the giver, and by the influence of their example on others, who see how he or she is living, and how they are dedicating themselves.

I can think of several examples of believers who gave everything to the cause because they loved it so much. Some of them have passed away meanwhile, and we think with gratitude of them because of what they gave. Their lives may not have been flawless, but their dedication to the Lord was full. Their heart was fully in it, and this is something that really speaks to the younger people. It’s a testimony that helps them to dedicate themselves too.

Let’s read a little further about this widow now.

The Desire of Ages, p. 616:

Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age. It has appealed to both the rich and the poor, and their offerings have swelled the value of her gift. God’s blessing upon the widow’s mite has made it the source of great results. So with every gift bestowed and every act performed with a sincere desire for God’s glory. It is linked with the purposes of Omnipotence. Its results for good no man can measure.

This stands in stark contrast to the spirit of the Pharisees, who also gave their gifts, but only so that they could be seen by men, not by God. So we have here again narrow-mindedness on the one hand, and the spirit of liberality on the other.

Zacchaeus

There are many other examples that we can study in this regard. I would like to point out just a few. One is Zacchaeus.

Luke 19

¹ Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

² Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

³ And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.

⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must stay at your house.

⁶ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

⁷ But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.

⁸ Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.

Let us consider what Zacchaeus spoke to the Lord, when he said,

“Look Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor.”

Wasn't he acting a bit differently from the widow? The widow quietly wanted to give her offerings and then she withdrew, and here we have a person who speaks very publicly and he says,

“Look, Lord, I am giving so much.”

But we must read the context. The context for this is in verse 7:

Luke 19

⁷ But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.

What kind of sinner was he? He was a tax collector. That's a job. Today you would say he's in the tax department. These were particular people, not like today where they are just collecting. Sometimes today they do this, but in most western countries the tax collectors don't come and try to get more money out of you.

If the country you live in is very poor and needs a lot of money then it may be that the tax collectors are a little more careful to get the last penny out of their clients, but people like Zacchaeus were at liberty to collect even more than they were required to collect and they made good use of that.

It was customary, even with priests, to take more from the people than they were required to give, so the tax collectors were especially a burden to the people because they seemed to impoverish the country. Furthermore they collected the taxes for the Romans. The Romans were hated anyway. And nobody likes to give money, does he? Especially not to the Romans who are just oppressing the people.

And not only was Zacchaeus a tax collector, he was the chief tax collector. That means he was the boss over them all. And not only this, a worse thing is true: he was a Jew. If he was a Roman it would have been more acceptable, but a Jew—he was a traitor. He was somebody who really betrayed the cause.

So he was looked upon as a great sinner who had exploited the people, who had robbed them, and who had really betrayed the cause. So when Zacchaeus heard the gospel for the first time from John the Baptist, he saw that he was a sinner. He saw that he had exploited the people, that he had enriched himself unjustly, and he felt very bad about it.

He then began to work against this. He gave back to everyone not only twenty percent more than he had taken, as the Word of

God requires³, but he gave fourfold—four times as much—to make sure that there was nothing left undone. And he gave half of what he had to the poor. But people still didn't recognize him as a good man. They still saw him as a sinner and they thought,

“Ha, why is he doing this now? Maybe he has a sinister purpose in this. Maybe he wants to lay a trap for us. Maybe he wants to exploit us even more. He is a very clever man, you know. When he does this, he is doing it for a purpose.”

That's how people always look at rich people, don't they?

“If a person is very rich he can give a lot of money for charitable purposes.”

Zacchaeus was still looked upon as a demon almost, by the ordinary people. That is so, because once you have this infamy as an exploiter you never get rid of it. So it was very hard for Zacchaeus. He tried to do everything to undo his wrongs but it was not recognized and he asked himself the question,

“How deep is my sin?”

He felt terrible. He had no righteousness of his own and when he heard of Jesus new hope sprang up in his life. He thought,

“That is my opportunity to see Jesus.”

And he had heard much about Him—how He had healed and forgiven sin. That was towards the end of His ministry—so much was known about the life of Christ at that time. And he hoped to get some assurance of forgiveness from Jesus. He did not boast in his righteousness or in what he had done at all. He felt that this

³ *Leviticus* 6:2-5 outlines “a fifth part” (20%) on top of the restitution of the amount of goods stolen. In *Exodus* 22:1 the penalty for stealing an ox or sheep, that was then sold or slaughtered, was 5 oxen (in the case of an Ox), or 4 sheep (in the case of a sheep). It was to this law that David referred, in *2 Samuel* 12:6. *Exodus* 22:4 stipulates that if the Ox, Ass, or Sheep is still alive and in the thieves possession, the penalty was “he shall restore double.”

was not even sufficient. That was his attitude. That was his spirit. And he only wanted to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Because Zacchaeus was a small man, he couldn't see Him when He was passing by, as there were too many people. So he climbed up a sycamore tree in order to get a better view. He did not expect Jesus to even see him. How surprised was he when, under the tree, Jesus halted and the whole crowd of people stopped. And Jesus looked up, and said,

“Come down for I am going to your house.”

What a surprise for this man. He did not expect this at all. What he did was absolutely unstudied, just like Mary's unstudied act. So he was more than happy to receive Jesus and he wanted to make Him a real Guest of Honor. But then came these whisperings which were not so quiet—they were rather loudly whispered so that everybody could hear,

Luke 19

⁷ He has gone to be guest of a man who is a sinner.

So the whole blame and shame lay now upon Jesus. And Zacchaeus felt that this shame must be taken from Jesus and for that reason he said,

“Lord, I gave half of my goods to the poor.”

So he did not do this in order to boast, in order to show how much he did, in order to receive a commendation from Jesus—not at all. He said this for only one reason, and that is to put away the shame from Jesus; to take the burden away from Him, because he wanted to show,

“What Jesus has done is not something wrong.”

He forgot himself when he said this. So when we give our testimony and our confession let us give this in the spirit of selflessness as Zacchaeus gave it, and then it is an expression of a spirit of liberality. These words of Zacchaeus were definitely in a spirit

of liberality. They were expressed in a spirit of liberality, as was also confirmed by Jesus:

Luke 19

⁹ And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Jesus confirmed,

“This is a man saved from sin. This is a man who loves much because he has been forgiven much.”

While those who criticized him loved little because they were forgiven little. But their sins were actually the same. The priests were also guilty of robbery:

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 304:

In the Jewish nation it was the priests and teachers who, by misleading the people, had robbed God of the service which He claimed. It was they who turned the nation away from Christ.

The Desire of Ages, p. 552:

On the way to Jerusalem,

Luke 19

¹ Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

And there was Zacchaeus.

“The chief among the publicans,”⁴ Zacchaeus, was a Jew, and detested by his countrymen. His rank and wealth were the reward of a calling they abhorred, and which was regarded as another name for injustice and extortion.

Yet the wealthy customs officer was not altogether the hardened man of the world that he seemed. Beneath the appearance of worldliness and pride was a heart susceptible to divine influences. Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus. The report of One who had borne himself with kindness and courtesy toward the proscribed

⁴ Luke 19:2.

classes had spread far and wide. In this chief of the publicans was awakened a longing for a better life.

Only a few miles from Jericho, John the Baptist had preached at the Jordan, and Zacchaeus had heard of the call to repentance. The instruction to the publicans,

Luke 3

¹³ Exact no more than that which is appointed you,
—though outwardly disregarded, had impressed his mind. He knew the Scriptures, and was convicted that his practice was wrong.

Now, hearing the words reported to have come from the Great Teacher, he felt that he was a sinner in the sight of God. Yet what he had heard of Jesus kindled hope in his heart. Repentance, reformation of life, was possible, even to him; was not one of the new Teacher's most trusted disciples a publican? Zacchaeus began at once to follow the conviction that had taken hold upon him, and to make restitution to those whom he had wronged.

This is the spirit of liberality—to follow conviction at once, to immediately do what we know is right to do. And so Jesus came to him. Zacchaeus was very surprised about this, and Sister White draws the following lesson out of this:

The Desire of Ages, p. 555:

Luke 19

⁹ And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

When the rich young ruler had turned away from Jesus, the disciples had marveled at their Master's saying,

Mark 10

²⁴ How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

They had exclaimed one to another,

²⁶ Who then can be saved?

Now they had a demonstration of the truth of Christ's words,

Luke 18

²⁷ The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

They saw how, through the grace of God, a rich man could enter into the kingdom.

Before Zacchaeus had looked upon the face of Christ, he had begun the work that made him manifest as a true penitent. Before being accused by man, he had confessed his sin. He had yielded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and had begun to carry out the teaching of the words written for ancient Israel as well as for ourselves. The Lord had said long before,

Leviticus 25

³⁵ If your brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with you; then you shall relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with you.

³⁶ Take you no usury of him, or increase: but fear your God; that your brother may live with you.

³⁷ You shall not give him your money upon usury, nor lend him your victuals for increase.

¹⁷ You shall not therefore oppress one another; but you shall fear your God.

These words had been spoken by Christ himself when He was enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, and the very first response of Zacchaeus to the love of Christ was in manifesting compassion toward the poor and suffering.

So it was a response to the love of Christ. Zacchaeus had received that love of Christ himself, and now he responded. That is similar to what Mary did. That was her act when she anointed the feet of Jesus. So we have here another experience that is basically the same.

John the Baptist

We want come to the next example, and that is John the Baptist. John the Baptist was also a person, like Mary, who gave everything to Jesus. He was a person who did not think that it was worthy of anything. Let's read about this. John said,

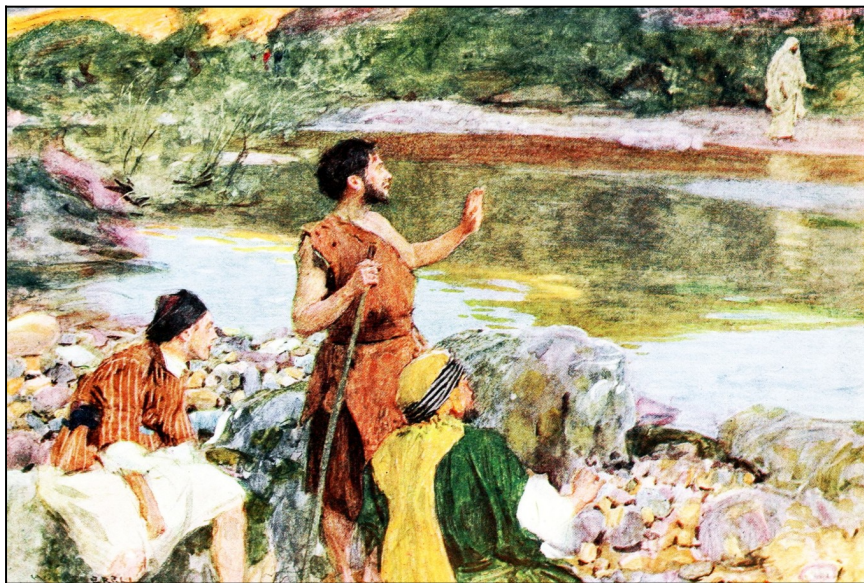
Matthew 3

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not

worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

He said,

“Who am I that I should be the one to prepare the way of the Lord? I am not worthy. I am not worthy even to carry His sandals. What a tremendous privilege the Lord has given me to preach of Him. What a tremendous privilege that I can say, ‘Behold, this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.’”



We read the same thing in *John*:

John 1

²⁷ It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.

Not everyone had this attitude, not even John’s own disciples, because when he was in prison and his own disciples came to him and questioned why this was permitted by Christ, what did John say?

John 3

³⁰ He must increase and I must decrease.

He clearly recognized, “I am not worthy.” This statement, “He must increase and I must decrease” really shows the spirit of liberality. It shows that he wanted nothing for himself but everything for Christ. That is liberality. Everything else is not liberality.

We can see how narrow-minded his own disciples were when they were jealous that Christ should baptize more than he did. When he was in prison John the Baptist had a lot of temptations to resist. And some of these temptations included the thought,

“Would Christ really be the Saviour of the world if He could not even save John from prison? Shouldn’t He do this? Didn’t He come to deliver the ones who were in prison? Wasn’t this a part of the prophecy of Isaiah?”

When John received the message of how Christ delivered those who were captives of Satan, he then began to understand that it was a privilege for him to be in prison. He began to understand that he was also only the forerunner of Jesus in suffering; that Christ would suffer the same—the same hatred, the same persecution, and finally death.

He began to understand more than anybody else understood at this time of the greatness of Christ, and he thought it a tremendous privilege to be there in prison. That is liberality. He gave everything he had and that was his life. And we must look at the martyrs of the past as people who had the spirit of liberality.

I really wish that we can grasp this and be a part of that spirit so that we can be that generation that finishes the work, because God is looking for such a generation, for people who have that spirit of John, who was alone in prison, yet he was not alone, but realized that the angels were with him.

So let us pray together that we understand this spirit and receive it. Amen.

7. The Spirit of Service

LET us come to back to the subject of Liberality and once again our key text is,

Luke 7

⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you her sins which are many are forgiven for she loved much, but to whom little is forgiven the same loves little.

We want to look again at Mary's unstudied act and this time we turn to another story to endeavor really to understand this.

The Rich Young Ruler

Let us turn to *Matthew 19*. This is the story of the rich young ruler who was so near to the kingdom of God and yet he did not enter.

Matthew 19

¹⁶ And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

¹⁷ And He said unto him, Why do you call me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments.

¹⁸ He said unto Him, Which? Jesus said, You shall do no murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,

¹⁹ Honor your father and your mother: and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

²⁰ The young man said unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what do I lack yet?

²¹ Jesus said unto him, If you will be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

²² But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

No doubt this young man thought that he was very liberal, because he wanted to become a disciple, which meant to stand against his colleagues who were also rulers, because at that time

Jesus was not popular among the rulers. Right from the beginning of His ministry Jesus was already rejected by the Sanhedrin. To be a disciple would involve several sacrifices. The young man would have also been willing to give quite a large sum to the cause. There is no question about that; he was rich. But Jesus demanded more. He said,

“Sell all that you have.”

And that, he thought, was a bit too much. He really revealed that he was not liberal after all. Even though he thought he was liberal. How often do we think that we are liberal when we give a certain amount, or a certain time, or whatever it may be to the Lord. If we make a confession, we think that we are very liberal.

But as soon as we think that we are liberal we must stop a moment to see if we are not mistaken. Because remember the widow did not even think that she was liberal, did she? Her act was an unstudied act. As soon as we boast in our own accomplishments, even in our thoughts, then there may be something wrong. It may not be as perfect as we think it is after all. And that was the problem with the rich young ruler. The demand was very exacting—it was simply too much.

But Jesus knew what He was asking. He showed by this what true liberality is. True liberality means to give everything. The disciples were a little shocked. Especially Judas, as we know. He could not understand what Jesus was doing here. To send away such an influential person! Actually, Jesus did not send him away, but in the mind of some it was like sending him away. Hanging the standard so high is like disfellowshipping these people. It is not in fact disfellowshipping, but:

“It is your fault because you set the standard so high.”

This is an accusation that is often made. The disciples who had these thoughts were then addressed by Jesus.

Matthew 19

²³ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

²⁴ And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

²⁵ When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

This great astonishment of the disciples and their question, “who then can be saved?” must be investigated a little. Because normally we wouldn’t ask that question. Just think about this for a moment. Do you consider yourself rich?

It is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Does somebody have so much money left that he can say he is rich? That he can be liberal? Or do we just have enough to feed ourselves and our family? Maybe we have a bit left over—a few dollars or euros to pay tithe and offerings—and that is it. We would not consider ourselves as belonging in the category of rich, when Jesus says “rich man” here.

This young ruler was rich, really rich. I don’t know if he was a millionaire, but today we have people who are even billionaires. Let us imagine if a millionaire or billionaire would come to us, who has much money that he can spend liberally. If Jesus would say this about him, and then say that it is difficult for such rich people to get into the kingdom, would we be astonished? No, we would say,

“Yes that is probably true.”

We would not fear and tremble if Jesus would say it’s hard for *them* to enter the kingdom of God. Then why were the disciples astonished? Why were they so fearful when they asked the question,

“Who can enter the kingdom of God?”

It’s like saying,

“Are we able to enter into the kingdom of God?”

How could they identify with that man? They could identify with him because of what Jesus said:

Matthew 19

²³ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

That part they would understand, but now He goes a step further:

²⁴ And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Suddenly the disciples saw themselves under scrutiny. Suddenly they understood that Jesus was talking about them and not about the rich young ruler anymore. And that prompted the question,

“Who then can be saved?”

How could they suddenly see that Jesus spoke about them and not about the rich young ruler anymore? How did they see it?

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 394:

Mark 10

²⁴ Jesus answered again, and said unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

²⁶ And they were astonished out of measure.

Now they realized that they themselves were included in the solemn warning. In the light of the Saviour’s words, their own secret longing for power and riches was revealed. With misgivings for themselves they exclaimed,

²⁶ ...Who then can be saved?

So they understood how people in the presence of Jesus so often had to realize that Jesus was talking about them and not about others. Jesus explained the law in a very deep way. The su-

perficial way of understanding the law is usually that it applies to other people, but a deeper understanding makes it clear that it applies to me.

And it touches not only the actions, but also the thoughts and the intents of the heart. So I may not be rich, as far as actual possessions are concerned, but I may have the same desires, the same longing for riches and for power as this rich young ruler. And that places me in the same category as him, even if I actually don't have riches.

Jesus would say the same about adultery. The person who acts out the adultery is a sinner and transgressor of the law. But Jesus made clear that this sin also touches the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 394:

Jesus looking upon them said,

Mark 10

²⁷ With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.

A rich man, as such, cannot enter heaven. His wealth gives him no title to the inheritance of the saints in light. It is only through the unmerited grace of Christ that any man can find entrance into the city of God.

What is the spirit of liberality? It means to deal with the currency of God's grace and not with the currency of this world. It does not mean to deal with the currency of money, power, and wealth, but with the currency of the purpose and grace of God.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 394-395:

To the rich no less than to the poor are the words of the Holy Spirit spoken,

1 Corinthians 6

¹⁹ You are not your own;

²⁰ For you are bought with a price.

When men believe this, their possessions will be held as a trust, to be used as God shall direct, for the saving of the lost, and the comfort of the suffering and the poor. With man this is

impossible, for the heart clings to its earthly treasure. The soul that is bound in service to mammon is deaf to the cry of human need. But with God all things are possible. By beholding the matchless love of Christ, the selfish heart will be melted and subdued. The rich man will be led, as was Saul the Pharisee, to say,

Philippians 3

⁷ What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

Then they will not count anything their own. They will joy to regard themselves as stewards of the manifold grace of God, and for His sake servants of all men.

What Jesus was really saying is that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a person who holds anything back from God to enter into the kingdom of heaven, regardless of whether he has a lot or a little. If he holds anything back—his power, strength, love, or his money—if he says I give only so much but not everything, then he falls into this category. And that is what the disciples saw at that moment:

“Sell everything that you have, and come and follow me.”

That is the background as to why they were so astonished. But the disciples recovered very soon from their astonishment, because they realized:

“Well, didn't we really give everything up? Didn't we do it? We are not so bad after all.”

Matthew 19

²⁷ Then answered Peter and said unto Him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed you.

They understood what Jesus meant. They didn't just give their offerings or their surplus, like the rich people in the temple, but like the widow they gave their two mites. They gave everything. They gave up their professions and their income to follow Jesus.

Wasn't that good? But in making this statement, they were revealed to be a little like the rich young ruler who asked,

“Lord what am I still lacking?”

The rich young ruler also thought that he had given everything. He was liberal, but he felt that something was lacking. And so the disciples also came to Jesus and said,

“But we are liberal after all. We have given all, haven't we?”

Matthew 19

²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That you which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

²⁹ And every one that has forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Good. They liked to hear that. So they felt confirmed. But now comes a little sentence which is not as confirming as they had thought:

³⁰ But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

What does that mean? Something is lacking. We have seen that the disciples were a little like the rich young ruler. The rich young ruler kept the law pretty well, up to a certain point. But beyond that he was not willing to keep it. So likewise, the disciples kept the law of Christ up to a certain point, but there was still something lacking. And now Jesus pointed this out by saying,

³⁰ But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

The Parable of the Laborers

Then He told the parable of the laborers. This parable is an endeavor of Jesus to explain what true liberality is. We will try to

understand it now, so that we will also understand what true liberality is.

Matthew 20

¹ For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

² And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

³ And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

⁴ And said unto them; Go also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

⁵ Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and said unto them, Why do you stand here all the day idle?

⁷ They said unto him, Because no man has hired us. He said unto them, Go also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall you receive.

⁸ So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

⁹ And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

¹⁰ But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

¹¹ And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house,

¹² Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and you have made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

¹³ But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do you no wrong: did you not agree with me for a penny?

¹⁴ Take what is yours, and go your way: I will give unto this last, even as unto you.

¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil, because I am good?

¹⁶ So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many are called, but few chosen.

This is an explanation of that statement “the first will be last, and the last will be first” in order to help them understand. In a way, the disciples were the first, because they were the first ones called, they were the pioneers of the movement of Jesus, of Christianity. But they were in danger of falling into the same trap as the Jews.

The Jews were also called before the Gentiles. They were also first in that sense, but they made this being first a reason to glory over the Gentiles, to stand above them, to think that they had gained more from God than the others. And the disciples were standing in the same danger:

“What shall we get? We have left all, we are disciples at the beginning, what shall we get?”

And Jesus makes it clear to them that it is not for them now to measure out their rewards. The rewards will be given to them according to the grace of God. And that is the currency of liberality.

Can you see liberality on the part of God? He is liberal. There is liberality on the part of God and He wishes us to partake of that liberality. He has mercy on the sinner and forgives him freely. Why should we be angry then? Why should we think that we ought to receive much more than another?

The Mystery of God

In the 3rd chapter of the letter to the *Ephesians*, Paul describes the mystery of God. And we understand what the mystery of God is. He describes it in *Colossians* and in other places also. What is it? It is:

Colossians 1

²⁷ Christ in you, the hope of glory.

That is the mystery of God. And this mystery really expresses a tremendous liberality on the part of God. In that context we want

to study the 3rd chapter of *Ephesians* now. It really is an evidence, or a testimony, of God's liberality. That God would plant the seed of Christ in His children is a mystery which is very difficult to understand fully. It expresses a liberality which we don't find anywhere among humans. It is a great test that really makes us marvel and this is what Paul expresses:

Ephesians 3

¹ For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

² If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

³ How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

⁴ Whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

⁵ Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

How does he describe the mystery? In what words? What is the mystery?

⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.

Because Paul stresses this point, the background should be understood. At that time the Jews thought that they were the chosen people. They thought that only a Jew could be a chosen person, but now the Gentiles were partakers of the same grace and that was a great mystery. Christ's life would not only be planted into Jews, but also into Gentiles. They would have the same chance to be transformed into the character of God as the Jews. That indeed was a mystery.

Once the Jews asked Christ to show them a miracle. They said,

John 6

³⁰ What sign do you show then, that we may see, and believe you? what do you work?

But Christ was working miracles all the time. What is the greatest miracle? When a person who has been stubborn and self-willed, who has been narrow-minded, becomes liberal. When a person who is stubborn and self-willed has become humble, teachable, and submissive to God. That is the greatest miracle. This is the evidence to the world that God has sent His Son to the world. That is the mystery of...

Colossians 1

²⁷ Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And that is what Paul describes here, this very thing. What does “Gentile” really mean? Gentile means “sinner.” It doesn’t mean only an atheist, but one who was ignorant of the real God. They worshiped other gods, they were spiritualistic, they were immoral people. That was a Gentile. They were outside Judaism, but they were also actual sinners. Do you know Gentile worship? It was spiritualism. So,

Ephesians 3

⁶ That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel,

—that is the mystery, that is the miracle.

⁷ Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power.

We must really begin to take hold of this wonderful liberality of God, and begin to understand that when He changes people that this is not a thing that is taken for granted. He doesn’t change people for His own sake, so that He can have better followers. No, He changes them because He loves them, because He wants to make them pure personalities again.

As long as they are Gentiles, as long as they are heathen, they are slaves to spiritualism, slaves to sin. But when He changes them, He makes them true persons again. Persons who stand in the true dignity of man. And this He doesn’t do for His own sake

—He does this because He loves us. This generosity we should really try to understand.

Ephesians 3

⁸ Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

⁹ And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Currency of Heaven

Let us come back to this parable of the vineyard for a moment. What is the penny here? The penny is the grace of God. It is the seed of Christ that is implanted. And the eternal purpose of God was to give each a penny. That is the eternal purpose. He gives us not according to what we have merited or have earned or worked out, but He gives us according to His eternal purpose. That is the currency of heaven.

¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹² In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him.

¹³ Wherefore I desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

¹⁴ For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

¹⁶ That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;

¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul invites us to behold that mystery—to make a real effort with all our mind and heart to understand as much as we possibly can about this mystery. We won’t grasp it fully, that is for sure. But we can grasp as much as possible in order to receive that spirit of liberality too.

That spirit of liberality was lacking, badly lacking, in the Jews at that time. It was also lacking in some of the Christians. And for that reason Paul emphasizes that point again and again.

Ephesians 3

¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.

He says,

“I am tremendously privileged that I can preach this subject. Who am I that I can do it? I know I bow on my knees before the Father. I worship Him. I am absolutely full of thankfulness that He has revealed this mystery to us today.”

²⁰ Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

Can you see liberality here?

“Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

That is liberality. It reminds us a little of the filling of this bag, or putting into the bosom a full measure. Shaken, pressed together and overflowing.⁵ That is the gift of God. That is His liberality.

⁵ Luke 6:38.

Ephesians 3

²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

²¹ Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

So that should have been the spirit of the disciples. For that reason He told them the parable of the workers in the vineyard. If you look at the last, who come into the kingdom at the end, with that admiration that is expressed here in *Ephesians 3*, then you have the right spirit of the kingdom of God.

But if you can't—if you think that you ought to have more than others, then there is something wrong. You still think in terms of position—you still think in terms of:

“Well I've earned this.”

I suppose a penny was just what was needed back then to feed a family for a day. So those who came at the eleventh hour would have earned less—they would have had to work several days in order to feed themselves. But they got the same pay, enough to feed them. Can we say “I bow on my knees” at this mystery? That is the mystery which Jesus describes.

Somebody might be very clever now and think that if I come at the eleventh hour that means I will get as much as those who came in the first hour.

“So I will stay at home for a while and come at the eleventh hour.”

Is this what Jesus wanted to say? Certainly not. Those who came and were hired at the eleventh hour were not there at the first hour. Otherwise they would have come. It is not because they refused, that they came only at the eleventh hour. If we have this kind of thinking, then we are like the rich young man. We want to give something to the Lord, but not everything. First we want to enjoy life, and then when it is over, we will give the rest of it to the Lord. That is not the spirit of a true servant of Christ—

the spirit of liberality. While others give it at first; they give right from the beginning.

“Yes, we give. We give everything, but not every every thing. There is still something we keep for ourselves. We must be ourselves. Here we are and here you are. We must be our own personality and we can’t be everything to you. We can’t give everything to you.”

“I want to give my service in the first year of my life after I’ve gained a profession. I will give my first year, but the rest—please let me live that for myself.”

Both are the same spirit. Whether I say,

“At first I will live my own life and in the end I will come to God,”

—or,

“I will give my life for the first years, and then in the end I will live it for myself”

—it is the same thing. It’s the spirit of one who serves the Lord only in order to get a reward—to get recognition. To get something for it. This thing is very subtle. And it is in human nature more than we think, more than we realize. When we give ourselves to the Lord, but not to the end, the work will not be finished through us.

It reminds me of a king in Israel who came to the prophet Elisha when he was lying on his sickbed. Even though this king was rather unworthy and godless he was still given a chance. He came to the prophet and the prophet accepted him. Elisha gave him counsel, he gave him encouragement.

And he told him clearly the conditions under which he could be an instrument in God’s hand—under which he himself could be a worthy laborer for the cause of God. Elisha commanded him,

2 Kings 13

¹⁸ Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed.

¹⁹ And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, You should have smitten five or six times; then had you smitten Syria till you had consumed it: whereas now you shall smite Syria but thrice.

What does this mean? It means that this king was a person like so many other people are. They come to the cause of God, they give their service for a time, and then they turn away because it gets too hot, too dangerous, too difficult. And they justify themselves:

“Well it is too difficult, isn’t it? I had to go away because it simply became too hard here.”

And then they are happy that they left it all behind them. When this is the case, then they don’t show the spirit of a true worker. A true worker will not leave his post of duty. He will not run away when he has “hit the ground only three times,” but he will cling to God until the victory is gained. That is the spirit of the true worker.

I really want us to see this very clearly. When we see what God has given us—He could have drawn back several times when things got very difficult, but He did not draw back—He stood there till the end. He bent not only three times to the ground, but He gave himself fully for us, so that He can live in us and that sinners can be converted. This spirit of God, and the spirit that is behind this whole thing, is the spirit of liberality.

The Reward of Grace

We want to think now in terms of reward, the reward of grace. That is the currency of heaven. That is the spirit of liberality. The reward of grace is also given to those who have this spirit of liberality. So what is the spirit of liberality? We can define it very briefly. It is receiving in order to give.

*We can do nothing in the work of God
until we receive first.*

Jesus taught this in several parables. For example, when your friend comes at midnight and you want to give him something to eat, but you have nothing. You must go to your neighbor and knock, and ask,

“Please give me something.”

Why? Because you don’t have it yourself. You must receive in order to give. But you don’t receive for yourself. Receive so that you can give.

What is the spirit of the narrow-mindedness in contrast with this? It’s just the other way around. The narrow-minded person wants to give so that he receives. He gives his service in the first hour of the day in order to receive a reward for it. And he will be last. That is why the first are the last.



8. The Quality of the Work

THE principle of liberality, which is expressed in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, brings its own reward. If we have the spirit of receiving in order to give, that is the spirit of liberality and this brings its reward. It frees the channel of communication between heaven and earth, so that light can come through, and this is freedom from selfishness.

On the other hand, there is the spirit of selfishness, which is giving in order to receive. We give in the hope that we will receive something for it.

We often act like this with one another, maybe even with our neighbors. We do them a favor because one day we hope to receive a favor back. We give something good because we hope to get something for it. Or we give something to them because we think we will get something from them. This is the spirit of a hireling. It is not the spirit of liberality.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 397:

Not the amount of labor performed or its visible results but the *spirit in which the work is done* [or, "the spirit of liberality"] makes it of value with God. Those who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour were thankful for an opportunity to work.

Their attitude was like David's:

"Who am I that I can give You something? Who am I and my people that we can give of Your own?"

They were thankful to work.

Their hearts were full of gratitude to the one who had accepted them;

"He who has been forgiven much loves much"⁶ was behind that...

⁶ Luke 7:47.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 397-398:

...and when at the close of the day the householder paid them for a full day's work, they were greatly surprised.

As Mary was greatly surprised when Jesus said, "Leave her alone. What she did was for My burial."⁷

They knew they had not earned such wages.

They did not even think that they had earned anything like this.

And the kindness expressed in the countenance of their employer filled them with joy. They never forgot the goodness of the householder or the generous compensation they had received.

Thus it is with the sinner who, knowing his unworthiness, has entered the Master's vineyard at the eleventh hour. His time of service seems so short, he feels that he is undeserving of reward; but he is filled with joy that God has accepted him at all. He works with a humble, trusting spirit, thankful for the privilege of being a co-worker with Christ. This spirit God delights to honor.

So this is the spirit of liberality which brings its reward.

The Lord desires us to rest in Him without a question as to our measure of reward. When Christ abides in the soul, the thought of reward is not uppermost. This is not the motive that actuates our service. It is true that in a subordinate sense we should have respect to the recompense of reward.

The Recompense of the Reward

I want to dwell on this secondary sentence a little:

It is true that in a subordinate sense we should have respect to the recompense of reward.

That statement comes from a Bible text of the *King James Version*:

⁷ Mark 14:6; Matthew 26:12.

Hebrews 11

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

²⁵ Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

²⁶ Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

²⁹ By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

The term "looking to the reward" is only here in the New Testament. It is a Greek expression. The *King James Version* says he had...

²⁶ ...respect unto the recompence of the reward.

Moses thought that the reproach of Christ was of higher value than all the things he saw in Egypt. There seems to be a contradiction between this fact that he had respect to the reward, or that he looked forward to the reward and because of this he did not choose Egypt, and the fact that the worker is not thinking along this line of reward, but he thinks along the line of,

"What service can I give?"

There is no real contradiction, so let us try to explain this. Liberty and receiving a reward—these two things are related to each other. First of all we have that spirit of liberty, and this means to serve not for the sake of reward, but to serve because we have the spirit of liberty, because we love to serve, because we think it's a privilege to serve. That is the spirit we are studying here which brings its reward. That is selflessness.

The perversion of this spirit is that we have no interest in the Lord's reward at all. And indeed there are people who value heaven very little. When they choose sin, and say,

“Well, I know that I am lost.”

It’s amazing, simply amazing. It shows that they have no respect for the reward, or, that they have no interest in what the Lord offers to them; no interest at all. That is the perversion of what we have here.

On the other hand, if we really look for an eternal reward, as we read in *Hebrews* 11:26, that is quite in harmony with serving not for the sake of the reward. It is not because we think we will get something that we serve, but because we enjoy service. We love to serve, and yet at that same time, we are looking forward to the reward, not in order simply to get something as a result of this, but as a further opportunity for service.

Heaven is not a place where we can then lie down and rest for all eternity as some have imagined; that you sit somewhere with an ice cream on a beach and do nothing throughout eternity. That is not what heaven is like, certainly not. Heaven is a working place, and only those who love work will want to be there. Those who don’t love work won’t want to be there. They will have no interest in it.

So, if you have the selfless desire to serve, then you will feel good in heaven, and then you will look forward to heaven. Those two are in harmony with one another. You look forward to the reward. The perversion of looking forward to the reward is working for a reward, and that is selfishness too. So whether we have no interest in the Lord’s reward, or whether we work for our reward, both result from a selfish spirit.

And you see now more clearly what this parable is about. It’s trying to deliver us from the spirit of working for a reward, to a spirit where we serve, but not for the sake of a reward. That is the intent of this object lesson, and there are extremes on every side.

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 398-399:

The Lord desires us to rest in Him without a question as to our measure of reward. When Christ abides in the soul, the thought

of reward is not uppermost. This is not the motive that actuates our service. It is true that in a subordinate sense we should have respect to the recompense of reward. God desires us to appreciate His promised blessings.

But He would not have us eager for rewards nor feel that for every duty we must receive compensation. We should not be so anxious to gain the reward as to do what is right, irrespective of all gain. Love to God and to our fellow men should be our motive.

We do right because it is right, not because we get something for it. Our motive is love for our fellow man, and we don't even expect that we should get something. We will be surprised when we hear what reward we get.

Labor Disputes

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 399:

This parable does not excuse those who hear the first call to labor but who neglect to enter the Lord's vineyard.

That answers the question that was asked,

"What is the problem with these eleventh hour workers? Did they neglect to hear the first call?"

No, they did not. They were not there to hear the first call.

When the householder went to the market place at the eleventh hour and found men unemployed he said,

Matthew 20

⁶ Why do you stand here all the day idle?

The answer was,

⁷ Because no man has hired us.

None of those called later in the day were there in the morning. They had not refused the call. Those who refuse and afterward repent, do well to repent; but it is not safe to trifle with the first call of mercy.

And that is not the spirit of liberality either when we think we will wait until the eleventh hour.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 399:

When the laborers in the vineyard received “every man a penny,” those who had begun work early in the day were offended. Had they not worked for twelve hours? they reasoned, and was it not right that they should receive more than those who had worked for only one hour in the cooler part of the day?

Matthew 20

¹² These last have wrought but one hour, [they said,] and you have made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

¹³ Friend, [the householder replied to one of them,] I do you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a penny?

¹⁴ Take that is yours, and go your way; I will give unto this last, even as unto you.

¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil, because I am good?

It reminds us a bit of Cain, doesn't it? He said, “I was evil because God was good to Abel.”

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 399-400:

The first laborers of the parable represent those who, because of their services, claim preference above others.

Here we can really see the narrow-mindedness of the first laborers. They claim preference above others.

They take up their work in a self-gratulatory spirit, and do not bring into it self-denial and sacrifice. They may have professed to serve God all their lives; they may have been foremost in enduring hardship, privation, and trial, and they therefore think themselves entitled to a large reward. They think more of the reward than of the privilege of being servants of Christ. In their view their labors and sacrifices entitle them to receive honor above others, and because this claim is not recognized, they are offended. Did they bring into their work a loving, trusting spirit, they would continue to be first; but their querulous, complaining disposition is un-Christlike, and proves them to be untrustworthy.

It really shows what spirit this is: “querulous, complaining disposition.” And it’s even said here, “un-Christlike, and proves them to be untrustworthy.”

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 400:

It reveals their desire for self-advancement, their distrust of God, and their jealous, grudging spirit toward their brethren. The Lord’s goodness and liberality is to them only an occasion of murmuring. Thus they show that there is no connection between their souls and God. They do not know the joy of cooperation with the Master Worker.

They are jealous of the liberality of God. They can’t handle that. They are in disharmony with it and so therefore they don’t have any joy in working together with God.

There is nothing more offensive to God than this narrow, self-caring spirit. He cannot work with any who manifest these attributes. They are insensible to the working of His Spirit.

So we may ask for the Holy Spirit for a long time, but we are absolutely insensible to Him as long as we have this narrow, self-caring spirit.

The Spirit of the Angels

That reminds me very much of another statement, so while we study this narrow-mindedness here we should also look briefly at another spirit, and that is the spirit of the angels.

The Desire of Ages, p. 21:

The angels of glory find their joy in giving,—giving love and tireless watch-care to souls that are fallen and unholy. Heavenly beings woo the hearts of men; they bring to this dark world light from the courts above; by gentle and patient ministry they move upon the human spirit, to bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know.

Are they jealous because of the mystery of Christ: “Christ in you, the hope of glory”? They don’t know this mystery for themselves. They have never been redeemed from sin and therefore

have never received the seed of Christ in the same way as the redeemed receive it. And yet they are not jealous. They rejoice in this liberality of God. They cooperate with Him. They find joy in that service. That is the spirit of liberality which we find in God and which we find in the Holy Angels.

The Desire of Ages, p. 21:

They...bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know.

And they find joy in doing this. Would you serve someone who is last so that he can rise above you? That is the question, and the person who has the true spirit of liberality, like the angels, will do so. Now it goes on to speak also of God:

But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give.

The spirit of liberality is the character of God.

John 8

²⁸ I do nothing of myself, [said Christ];

John 6

⁵⁷ The living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father;

John 8

⁵⁰ I seek not my own glory,

—but the glory of Him that sent me. *John 7:18*. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe.

And that is the spirit of liberality.

All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.

The Reward is Not of Works

The narrow, self-caring spirit is the opposite; it's the spirit of Satan. The Jews had been first who were called into the Lord's vineyard, and now Sister White applies this to the Jews; how they were narrow-minded, how they were jealous of the Gentiles who were coming in, and even the Jewish Christians were. They had difficulties with the fact that more Gentiles were coming into the church, and were outnumbering the Jewish Christians.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 400-401:

Christ warned the disciples who had been first called to follow Him, lest the same evil should be cherished among them.

And it was, even at that time. For that reason Jesus gave them the lesson,

Mark 9

³⁵ He who is first will be last, and the last will be first.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 401:

All boasting of merit in ourselves is out of place.

Jeremiah 9

²³ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches;

²⁴ But let him that glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord.

The reward is not of works, lest any man should boast; but it is all of grace.

So the spirit of liberality counts in the currency of grace, whereas the spirit of narrow-mindedness counts in the currency of money.

Romans 4

¹ What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, has found?

² For if Abraham were justified by works, he has whereof to glory; but not before God.

³ For what says the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

⁴ Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Therefore there is no occasion for one to glory over another or to grudge against another. No one is privileged above another, nor can anyone claim the reward as a right.

This again explains the spirit of narrow-mindedness—when we think we deserve it, or that we have earned it.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 402:

The first and the last are to be sharers in the great, eternal reward, and the first should gladly welcome the last. He who grudges the reward to another forgets that he himself is saved by grace alone. The parable of the laborers rebukes all jealousy and suspicion. Love rejoices in the truth and institutes no envious comparisons. He who possesses love compares only the loveliness of Christ and his own imperfect character.

This parable is a warning to all laborers, however long their service, however abundant their labors, that without love to their brethren, without humility before God, they are nothing. There is no religion in the enthronement of self. He who makes self-glorification his aim will find himself destitute of that grace which alone can make him efficient in Christ's service. Whenever pride and self-complacency are indulged, the work is marred.

It is not the length of time we labor but our willingness and fidelity in the work that makes it acceptable to God. In all our service a full surrender of self is demanded. The smallest duty done in sincerity and self-forgetfulness is more pleasing to God than the greatest work when marred with self-seeking. He looks to see how much of the spirit of Christ we cherish, and how much of the likeness of Christ our work reveals. He regards more the love and faithfulness with which we work than the amount we do.

So that is quite important. Many people think,

“Well, I am not in this position,”

or

“I don’t have these opportunities, therefore I can’t do so much.”

That doesn’t matter. It’s not the amount; it’s how you do it, which is important.

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 402-403:

Only when selfishness is dead, when strife for supremacy is banished, when gratitude fills the heart, and love makes fragrant the life—it is only then that Christ is abiding in the soul, and we are recognized as laborers together with God.

So when we do a certain job for the Lord, in what spirit do we do it? Do we think we are doing something for Him, or do we think it is a privilege that we can even do the job? Think about this yourself, very carefully. And that is the difference between a narrow mind and the spirit of liberality.

Drudgery, or Joy?

However trying their labor, the true workers do not regard it as drudgery.

Again, when you find yourself complaining about the work —“it’s so hard” and “this and this and this,” ask yourself, “Do I really have that spirit of liberality?”

They are ready to spend and to be spent; but it is a cheerful work, done with a glad heart.

What does Paul say?

2 Corinthians 9

⁷ God loves a cheerful giver.

That means a giver who gives with joy, not somebody who gives because he has to give, or because he now feels uuhhh—because he complains when he gives. Not at all. He loves those who

think it's a privilege to give. God loves "a cheerful work, done with a glad heart."

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 403:

Joy in God is expressed through Jesus Christ. Their joy is the joy set before Christ—

John 4

³⁴ To do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.

When the first Christians gave their life for Christ they were absolutely joyful in this. They thought it such a privilege. You know when John was put into a pot of boiling oil, he did not complain at all. He simply said,

"My Master suffered so much and what a privilege that I may share a little in the suffering."

And so did all the other Christians. That is joyfulness. Don't think that this is only expressed on a martyr's stake. Many will not come to the martyr's stake. But still they can express the same joy in the little things they do in everyday life—in the household, at work, and in blessing others.

They are in cooperation with the Lord of glory. This thought sweetens all toil, it braces the will, it nerves the spirit for whatever may befall. Working with unselfish heart, ennobled by being partakers of Christ's sufferings, sharing His sympathies, and co-operating with Him in His labor, they help to swell the tide of His joy and bring honor and praise to His exalted name.

Is this our style of working? Do we work this way, swelling the tide of joy? That means, are we really inspiring joy in others too because of the joyfulness with which we work? You know, when Christ as a child and as a young person worked in the carpentry shop, everybody around Him became joyful after a while:

The Desire of Ages, p. 73:

He [Jesus] was never so full of worldly care as to have no time or thought for heavenly things. Often He expressed the gladness of His heart by singing psalms and heavenly songs. Often the

dwellers in Nazareth heard His voice raised in praise and thanksgiving to God. He held communion with heaven in song; and as His companions complained of weariness from labor, they were cheered by the sweet melody from His lips. His praise seemed to banish the evil angels, and, like incense, fill the place with fragrance. The minds of His hearers were carried away from their earthly exile, to the heavenly home.

It is not always easy to bring religion into everyday life, because everyday life and labor want to crowd it out. But if we look back to what Christ did for us, if we look on Him constantly, then joy will come back. This joy is contagious. One catches it when the other has it. Some are quite immune against it, but not everyone.

Not With Outward Show

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 403:

This is the spirit of all true service for God. Through a lack of this spirit, many who appear to be first will become last, while those who possess it, though accounted last, will become first.

There are many who have given themselves to Christ, yet who see no opportunity of doing a large work or making great sacrifices in His service.

The thought in many minds is,

“Well I am not a minister after all, am I? So that’s not for me.”

But it is. Let us read on:

These may find comfort in the thought that it is not necessarily the martyr’s self-surrender which is most acceptable to God; it may not be the missionary who has daily faced danger and death that stands highest in heaven’s records. The Christian who is such in his private life, in the daily surrender of self, in sincerity of purpose and purity of thought, in meekness under provocation, in faith and piety, in fidelity in that which is least, the one who in the home life represents the character of Christ—such a one may in the sight of God be more precious than even the world-renowned missionary or martyr.

Oh, how different are the standards by which God and men measure character. God sees many temptations resisted of which the world and even near friends never know—temptations in the home, in the heart. He sees the soul's humility in view of its own weakness; the sincere repentance over even a thought that is evil. He sees the wholehearted devotion to His service. He has noted the hours of hard battle with self—battle that won the victory. All this God and angels know. A book of remembrance is written before Him for them that fear the Lord and that think upon His name.

Here is a reference to the book of remembrance. God knows what is written there, and we do not. It is not for us to speak out and proclaim that we have been faithful in little things. That is maybe what we want to do. We want to explain to everybody,

“Now look, I have been faithful, I have gained the victory, I have had a long and hard battle...”

Usually these battles happen secretly and they are written in the book. Most of these battles we don't know about, but one day we will, because they are written in the book of remembrance. If we make a big story out of it in this world, then we must be careful that we really understand this thing properly.

Let us remember that God looks into all secrets, and that Mary's act was an unstudied act. It was not studied so as to get any reward. In fact, when we get a victory over sin, we will think that is not to our merit at all. There is nothing we can boast of. Maybe we can encourage someone with that if he has similar struggles, but nothing where we can say,

“Well, I had a long, long hard difficult battle and it almost cost me my life, but now finally I got it...”

If that kind of language comes from our mouths then ours is not an unstudied act anymore. It would be better to be quiet and let God give a witness of our lives than to give it ourselves. But

the best thing is if we receive this deliverance in the right spirit; the spirit of liberality, and then can give a very simple testimony.

I would like to tell you a little experience in this regard. It was many, many years ago. I was a young person, I think not older than 12, 13 or 14. I cannot remember exactly. I was at that time in the Adventist church and there was youth evangelization. And one time the older people who organized this youth camp or evangelization (it was for the world) came to me and said:

“Can you give a little testimony there on the stage?”

I thought:

“Me—a testimony?”

I was totally surprised. I thought:

“How can I give a testimony?”

But they insisted on it, so I waited while the program ran on—music, the sermon, and so forth—and then finally came the time for testimonies and I was called to come up. Oh, did I sweat and shiver up there! And I can’t remember what I said. I said something about how I accepted Jesus, and I began to read the Bible for myself and then I was glad when it was over and I could sit down again.

The program went on and when it was finished there was an opportunity for the visitors to talk. There were not so many visitors, maybe a dozen or so and many more Adventist youth were there. And I remember I wanted to go out and suddenly all the visitors came to me and wanted to talk with me. And I thought:

“Why? What interest do they have in this?”

And in a way I was relieved when the older youth came and began to speak with these visitors and would talk more intelligently with them than I could because they had a better idea of the doctrines of Adventism than I had. But later I thought about it:

“Why did they come to me?”

And I came to the conclusion it was because I did not calculate anything. I did not even intend to speak to them in order to win them to our church. I simply gave a testimony. And in a way it was an unstudied act.

Later we had other youth evangelizations of the same style and this first experience somehow, I suppose, made me self-confident and I looked at it from a different point of view but it never was repeated like this. Never again did the visitors come to me afterwards. The cake was spoiled, you could say. There was no unstudied act anymore. Now it was almost a theater. You stood there, you gave a witness; it had to be the right words. It had to be said in the right way. It is only the unstudied act which really has effect on the world, the unstudied act of Mary, and the little things.

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 404:

Not in our learning, not in our position, not in our numbers or entrusted talents, not in the will of man, is to be found the secret of success. Feeling our inefficiency we are to contemplate Christ, and through Him who is the strength of all strength, the thought of all thought, the willing and obedient will gain victory after victory.

And however short our service or humble our work, if in simple faith we follow Christ, we shall not be disappointed of the reward. That which even the greatest and wisest cannot earn, the weakest and most humble may receive. Heaven’s golden gate opens not to the self-exalted. It is not lifted up to the proud in spirit. But the everlasting portals will open wide to the trembling touch of a little child. Blessed will be the recompense of grace to those who have wrought for God in the simplicity of faith and love.

So this is the story of the workers at the eleventh hour. The summary is here in the last two paragraphs.

The Pharisee and the Publican

I would like to turn to one more story to illustrate this point of true liberality, in the last minutes of this study, and that is in *Luke*. And this is very similar, really, to all the other stories that we have considered so far. And here again we see the difference between the spirit of liberality and the spirit of narrow-mindedness.

Luke 18

⁹ Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

¹⁰ Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.

¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner!

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Can you see here the spirit of liberality and the spirit of narrow-mindedness? The Pharisee boasted of his deeds, but more than this he compared himself with another man, he did not compare himself with God. This is the narrow mind. The narrow viewpoint of humanity and humans and of self, is very, very limited. God sees a much greater panorama. He invites us to come up to Him and view the things from His viewpoint. He says,

“Come and look at them from here and see how it looks.”

And then we won't feel like boasting anymore; we won't see ourselves as better than others, not for a moment. We will not say:

“I fast twice a week, I give my tithe, I do this, I do this, I do this.”

No such language will be found in our mouth. But when we compare ourselves to others, then we have much to say.

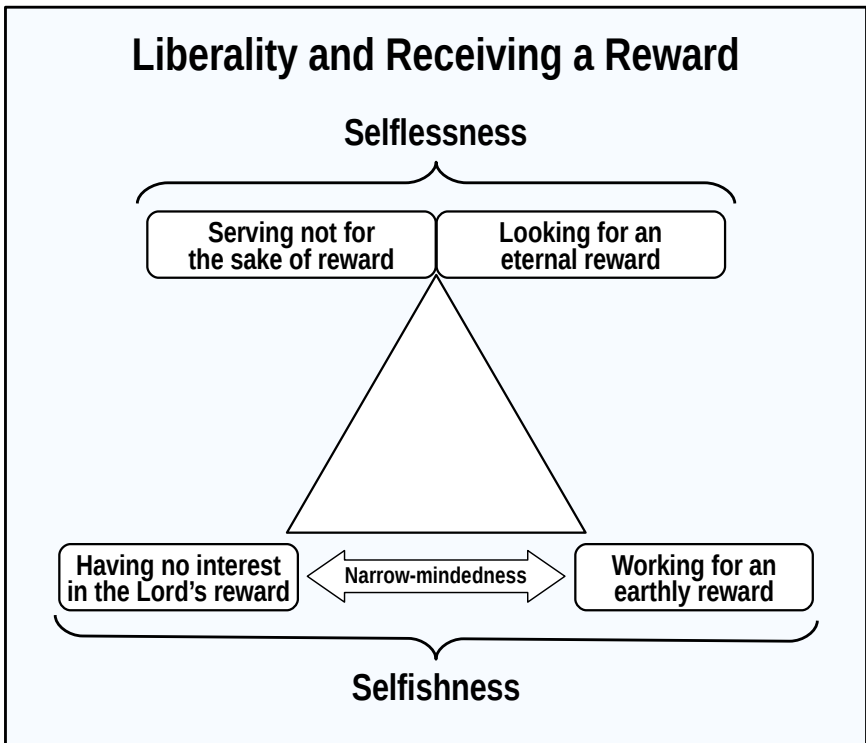
“They don’t do this, they don’t do this, they don’t do that.”

Such a spirit must stop if we want to be among the 144,000. The tax collector, he went away justified. He not only went there and beat his breast and said:

“I am a sinner.”

He also said:

“God be merciful to me. Forgive me. Cleanse me.”



And he was cleansed. He was healed. And that is the mystery of God. That is the mystery of which we read in *Ephesians* chapter 3.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 151:

The publican had gone to the temple with other worshipers, but he soon drew apart from them as unworthy to unite in their devotions.

Luke 18

¹³ Standing afar off, [he] would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast.

He saw things from God's view rather than from man's view, and because of this he had a much broader mind than the Pharisee.

¹³ Standing afar off, [he] would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast,

—in bitter anguish and self-aborrence. He felt that he had transgressed against God, that he was sinful and polluted. He could not expect even pity from those around him, for they looked upon him with contempt. He knew that he had no merit to commend him to God, and in utter self-despair he cried,

¹³ God be merciful to me, a sinner.

He did not compare himself with others. Overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, he stood as if alone in God's presence. His only desire was for pardon and peace, his only plea was for the mercy of God. And he was blessed.

¹⁴ I tell you, [Christ said,] this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Oh, how different is God's evaluation than man's, isn't it? Why does the work go forward in the one instance and not in another instance? It's simply because there is the spirit of liberality in one, and there is the spirit of narrow-mindedness in the other. God's ability to use a person as a vessel of His grace is dependent upon the spirit that is in that person. Let us truly understand this and embrace the spirit of true liberality.

9. Bible Examples of Liberality

LET us come back to the two spirits: of liberality on the one hand and the spirit of narrow-mindedness on the other hand. For this purpose we will come back for just a few moments to the publican and the Pharisee; or the tax-collector as it says in the *New King James Version*.

As we have seen the tax collector went away healed whereas the Pharisee went away without being healed. And the reason for this is that the Pharisee did not have the humility to submit to God; he brought God something of his own; something that he could offer to the Lord. He actually has that spirit of the Pharisee. His spirit was described by the phrase:

“Lord, I thank You that I am better than he is.”

He might not always say it in these very words.

Christ Object Lessons, p. 159:

No man can of himself understand his errors. His heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it. The lips may express a poverty of soul that the heart does not acknowledge. While speaking to God of poverty of spirit, the heart may be swelling with the conceit of its own superior humility and exalted righteousness.

There is apparently no bad intent in the person who is swelling because he obviously wants to be humble. But he also wants to understand himself, by himself. That is the problem. No man can of himself understand himself, or his errors.

Psalm 19

¹² Who can understand his errors? cleanse me from secret faults.

1 Corinthians 8

² And if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

Jeremiah 17

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Let's take Laodicea for example. What shall Laodicea do when God comes and says that you are blind and wretched? Accept it. If I go away and say,

"I must find it out myself,"

—then I am beginning to reject the faithful witness. The first thing we have to acknowledge is:

Jeremiah 17

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things.

"How can we know, then?"

The answer is given in the second part of this paragraph:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 159:

In one way only can a true knowledge of self be obtained. We must behold Christ. It is ignorance of Him that makes man so uplifted in their own righteousness. When we contemplate His purity and excellence, we shall see our own weakness and poverty and defects as they really are. We shall see ourselves lost and hopeless, clad in garments of self-righteousness, like every other sinner. We shall see that if we are ever saved, it will not be through our own goodness, but through God's infinite grace.

Unless we come to this point we can never have the spirit of liberality, that is impossible. Because we will always tend to think in terms of our own works and our own works are always narrow. They never can meet the need of the world. They can never be liberal, it's impossible. Even if we think we are liberal, we can't meet it.

Can you still remember our main text for this study?

Luke 7

⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

The Centurion

Let's look at another example. We have a person who was normally considered a sinner. A person who was born as a heathen, that is, as a Roman. He was educated in idolatry, and even trained as a soldier. And he belonged to the occupying force of that hated people—the Jews—who were so unreasonable. In fact, the Jews were a by-word among the people of that time because they were so unreasonable, so bigoted, so hateful of everything else. They thought that they alone had everything.

And the Romans who were far superior in technology and in military might only smiled at the narrow-mindedness of the Jews, who thought that they had it, whereas they didn't have it, in the minds of the Romans at least. So they were really looked upon with contempt. This man, this Roman, he actually came to Jesus.

Luke 7

¹ Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum.

² And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die.

³ So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant.

⁴ And when they came to Jesus they begged Him earnestly saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving for he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue.

⁵ Then Jesus went with them.

The disciples did not know exactly who this centurion was, even though he was quite well known among the Jews. After all he had built a synagogue. But why did this man want to come to Jesus? Why would these haughty, self-righteous Jews recommend him to Jesus? And the disciples wondered that Jesus immediately went with them. How could they make such a request? Can this be true?

Let's suppose that one of our enemies should suggest to us that we should go to somebody and talk with them about the gospel. Would we readily go? Or would we think,

“What is this apple that he wants to put in my basket here?
What’s the trap?”

Wouldn’t you think like this? This is a bit how the disciples thought. They thought,

“Who is this person? Why does Jesus immediately go with these haughty rabbis?”

But He went. Another question that should also make us wonder a little is,

“Why did the centurion use the Jews to make this request to Jesus?”

Why didn’t he come directly to Jesus himself? Why would he work in this way? The Jews were not the best friends of Jesus. The Roman centurion was trying to follow what he thought was the right order. He believed that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi and for that reason he asked those who were nearest and whom he imagined would have access to Him.

He didn’t know Jesus personally, he had only heard about Him and he had heard about His teachings and he was quite affected by them. So Jesus went with these haughty rabbis who, when the centurion was healed, would probably take all the credit to themselves and would say,

“Look, we have brought the right man to you.”

It’s a bit like the captain of the King’s guard who came to Nebuchadnezzar; and said to him,

Daniel 2

²⁵ I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.

“I have found him!” How good am I? But Jesus went with them, in spite of this.

Luke 7

⁶ And when He was already not far from the house the centurion sent friends to him, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof.

⁷ Therefore, I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word and my servant will be healed.

⁸ For I also am a man placed under authority having soldiers under me, and I say to one go and he goes and to another come and he comes and to my servant do this and he does it.

What do you think about this man? First, he sends a message to the Lord that He does not need to come, and when Jesus still wants to come, he even goes personally and says “don’t come.” Was this the spirit of Mary? Jesus confirms that it was. When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him,

⁹ I say to you, I have not found such great faith; not even in Israel.

So the reason why the centurion said to Jesus that He should not trouble himself to come was in no way directed by any spirit of independence. In no way did he mean to say,

“I don’t need You.”

Quite the opposite. He wanted to make very clear that he implicitly believed in Jesus, whether He would come or not. Compare this with many others, the Jewish nobleman for example. He also requested the healing of his son from Jesus. But he insisted that Jesus would come and Jesus insisted,

“No, you go home.”

The one needs this and the other needs that. It was actually faith that led the Roman to act like this. That he requested the healing, not for himself, but for his servant is also significant. And a servant! What did a servant count for in those days? Nothing. The Roman was the owner. It was not because of the money he would lose when he would lose his servant, that he asked Jesus

to heal him. He had enough money. He could buy ten others servants if he wanted. No, he had a personal interest in this man. He did not hold him just as his property. He had a higher and nobler spirit.

The Desire of Ages, p. 315:

The centurion's servant had been stricken with palsy, and lay at the point of death. Among the Romans the servants were slaves, bought and sold in the market places, and treated with abuse and cruelty; but the centurion was tenderly attached to his servant, and greatly desired his recovery. He believed that Jesus could heal him. He had not seen the Saviour, but the reports he heard had inspired him with faith.

Notwithstanding the formalism of the Jews, this Roman was convinced that their religion was superior to his own. Already he had broken through the barriers of national prejudice and hatred that separated the conquerors from the conquered people. He had manifested respect for the service of God, and had shown kindness to the Jews as His worshipers.

In the teaching of Christ, as it had been reported to him, he found that which met the need of the soul. All that was spiritual within him responded to the Saviour's words. But he felt unworthy to come into the presence of Jesus, and he appealed to the Jewish elders to make request for the healing of his servant. They were acquainted with the Great Teacher, and would, he thought, know how to approach Him so as to win His favor.

So the fact that the centurion approached Him through the Jews was showing honor to Jesus. He considered Him as a great teacher and he thought the elders would also respect Him as a great teacher. He thought that they were standing nearer to Him than he was, so they could make the request. What hindrances were there? Can you count them up again? The hindrances were:

1. He was born in heathenism,
2. He was educated in idolatry,
3. He was educated as a soldier.

This was all his life long, and he was a man now. And yet, he had an interest in spiritual things. More than this, the only people through whom the light could reach him were bigoted. They considered him as an outsider, as someone who was hated. Not only this, his own countrymen looked upon the Jews as bigoted, too. So, how could all these barriers be overcome?

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 995:

Faith is the living power that presses through every barrier, overrides all obstacles, and plants its banner in the heart of the enemy's camp.

The centurion did not desire to gain any honor for himself for this thing. Like Mary, he did not want to come into the focus of attention. That was the real reason why he was acting so humbly. It had nothing to do with not wanting to be in the presence of Jesus.

The Desire of Ages, p. 316:

Luke 7

⁶ Lord, trouble not yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof.

But the Saviour kept on His way, and then he came personally and completed the message,

⁷ Neither thought I myself worthy to come unto You. But speak the word only and my servant shall be healed.

⁸ For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it.

As I represent the power of Rome, and my soldiers recognize my authority as supreme, so do You represent the power of the Infinite God, and all created things obey Your word. You can command the disease to depart, and it shall obey You. You can summon your heavenly messengers, and they shall impart healing virtue. Speak but the word, and my servant shall be healed.

Isn't this the spirit of Mary? She sat at the feet of Jesus, and implicitly trusted Him, taking in every word that He spoke. She didn't need big evidences, as others did—she just appreciated

Him. And this man without even personally knowing Jesus, trusted Him; without even once having experienced the healing of himself or somebody else; except the spiritual healing, which he would not immediately be able to connect to Jesus. But just hearing of Him, just hearing the spiritual message, impressed him so much.

We can be sure that there are people in this world who have the same attitude. We can't see them yet, but they have it. When they hear the spiritual message; when they hear this truth, they are impressed. Last night I was speaking with an elderly sister from Canada and she recounted to me how she came to the message. She said,

"You know, I got a list of books from somewhere. One hundred and twenty books. And out of this list I ordered only one book. Do you know which book it was?"

I said, "Behold Your God?" She replied, "Yes!" She ordered that book. She got it and she immediately saw the light in it. It was the spirit she saw in there which now prompted her to seek for more of that same truth, and this was the spirit of the centurion. He saw the thing from afar and as he saw it, he immediately responded to it, and that was the quick obedience of Mary also. As she saw the light she immediately responded to it, and that is what Jesus appreciated. That is the spirit of liberality.

Isaiah

Let us now turn to a few others in order to study the spirit of liberality. The next one I want to come to is the prophet Isaiah. We could study a lot about him but we only want to look, very briefly, at his experience.

Isaiah 6

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple.

² Above it stood seraphim. Each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

³ And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.

⁴ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

⁵ So I said, Woe is me! For I am undone. Because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar.

⁷ And he touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips, your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged.

⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, Here am I, send me.

Then Isaiah is instructed to:

“Go and tell these people and they won’t hear. Preach to them and they won’t listen. Their hearts are dull and make them even duller with your words, shut their eyes...”

But Isaiah did not refuse to go. His words, “I will go,” were offered in the face of his full knowledge of the hard-heartedness of the people. This is liberality. This liberality was not possible until he saw his own unworthiness.

Romans 7

²⁴ Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from the body of this death?

This was his language too. He said,

Isaiah 6

⁵ Woe is me! For I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips!

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1138-1139:

As the prophet Isaiah beheld the glory of the Lord, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his own weakness and unworthiness, he cried,

Isaiah 6

⁵ Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.

Isaiah had denounced the sins of others; but now he sees himself exposed to the same condemnation he had pronounced upon them.

So should he not have denounced the sins of others? Sometimes people use this as an excuse, when their sins are denounced,

“You know, you are like Isaiah who had denounced the sins of others, but you first need to see your own sins.”

When we denounce the sins of others and we do this in our own authority and our own strength, then certainly this is wrong. This is being judgmental, and using our own standard, which is even worse. But Isaiah didn't do that. When Isaiah was preaching to the people, he preached in the name of the Lord. He preached what the Lord gave him and denouncing their sins was quite correct.

The liberals say,

“Don't name my sins; don't name them.”

But that is not liberality, that is liberalism, isn't it? It is this wrong kind of liberty that the sinner would like to have. But no, sins must be denounced and God really charges His church to name sin by its right name.

But now Isaiah sees himself exposed. Does that mean that he should now stop preaching about the sins of the people? Certainly not. But now he sees things much more deeply. His preaching could be much more effective. It now had much more depth in it, when he denounced the sins of others. Why? Because he saw

the same thing in himself. One thing we need to remember is that our own experience is really our most effective tool in preaching —when we can really see that we are delivered from sin. When we can see what dwells in us, then we can really help the sinner; and we must help him. Many people, who have this sense of their unworthiness, then say,

“Well, then I will be quiet, I won’t speak anymore.”

That is not the spirit of liberality. The spirit of liberality obeys God’s command and goes where He sends us. Regardless of where it is. Even if it means to preach the sins of others when I see the same weaknesses in my own heart. I cannot then look down upon them. I cannot say,

“You down there, what have you done?”

I have to see that I have the same problem, but I can nevertheless denounce the sin. That is what I need to do. I also need an experience of deliverance like Isaiah experienced. His lips were touched by the live coal, that is, by the love of God. This love drove him to go on preaching even though his work, during his lifetime, was not very successful. It drove him to carry on until the last. This is the spirit of liberality. It is also the spirit of endurance, of not giving up when the difficulties come.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1139:

He had been satisfied with a cold, lifeless ceremony in his worship of God. He had not known this until the vision was given him of the Lord. How little now appeared his wisdom and talents as he looked upon the sacredness and majesty of the sanctuary. How unworthy he was! How unfitted for sacred service! His view of himself might be expressed in the language of the apostle Paul,

Romans 7

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

But relief was sent to Isaiah in his distress. [*Isaiah* 6:6-7 quoted.]

The vision given to Isaiah represents the condition of God's people in the last days.

This experience of Isaiah is a special pattern for us that we need to study more closely. But we want to go on and look at one or two more examples.

Jeremiah

The next example would be Jeremiah. How was Jeremiah called? Or when was he called? At a very early age. He was already chosen when he was in his mother's womb. But, the audible call to him came when he was a young man.

Jeremiah 1

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

⁵ Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you. I ordained you a prophet to the nations.

⁶ Then I said, Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak for I am a youth.

⁷ But the Lord said to me, do not say, I am a youth: for you shall go to all whom I send you and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

In other words Jeremiah said,

“Look, I cannot really be respected by the people because I am so young. Because of my age, they cannot respect me.”

And God said,

“That doesn't matter. It's not that you shall only go where you are respected. You shall go because I send you. The only thing that is important for you is obedience. That is the only honor you shall look for, the honor of having obeyed. But look for no other honor, please.”

That is a message to us. It means that when we preach, we must not expect any other honor than at the end, when we hear the words of Jesus, “Well done my servant.” Is this the spirit of Mary? She did not desire any honor for her act, nor any attention. All

that she wanted to do was exalt the Lord, and this is the same attitude that God instructed Jeremiah to have. When Jeremiah said,

“I am a youth, I am too young,”

–he saw that he would not be appreciated. But there was also another motive in saying this, and the motive was,

“I am not really able to do it. I am not capable. Aren’t there more capable people around here that can do this?”

Do you think like this sometimes? Well, when God calls you, you must accept it. We must also be ready to sit down at any moment when God calls us to. But when He calls us to go forward, we must go forward. If we then give the work to somebody else, then that would be really perilous for the cause. We really have to be faithful.

Moses had the same attitude. He was not too young when he was called at the burning bush. He was at that time about eighty: forty years in Egypt and forty years in the wilderness. So he was not young, but he felt too young; he felt incapable of doing the work and he said,

“Lord, send somebody who is more capable.”

But once he accepted the work, he did it with his whole heart. The fact that Moses was hesitant at the beginning showed that he understood the magnitude of the work, and he understood his own inability. This understanding always kept him close to the Lord.

Mary also did not think that she was capable of doing a great work for the master, but she desired to do it, and that always kept her close to the Lord. It is when we begin to think that we can do a great work, then we are in danger of going our own way and losing the true spirit of liberality.

Paul had the same attitude, do you remember? In all his life-work he always said,

“I was the one who persecuted the saints. I was the one who was so zealous for the wrong cause. I am not worthy to be considered somebody. I am simply doing the work that God gave me and I praise the Lord for this mystery which He has revealed through me, but, I am not worthy. Definitely not.”⁸

This sense of unworthiness kept him very close to the Lord and that is the spirit of liberality.

Jacob's Wrestling

In the last example, I want to turn to a very famous person, and that is Jacob in his struggle—when he wrestled with the angel. First of all, when Jacob began marching home, he did this at the express command of God. He did not do this because he wanted to do something wonderful. No, he went at the command of God and all he had in front of him was destruction for himself and his family.

That he himself might suffer was not his great concern. He felt that he deserved suffering because he had lied to his father, he had betrayed his brother, and he thought to himself,

“No wonder my brother is like this; that is to be expected.”

He didn't even blame his brother for being as he was. He said,

“It was I who caused him to be like this.”

He always thought of his weakness and his failure. But he also recognized that if the consequences would fall upon him it would hit his family too. And that would destroy the possibility for God to bring the Heir which He had promised to Adam and to Abraham; the Heir who would eventually bring the gospel message to the world. Remember, Jacob always cherished that hope which he had received from his father. He always cherished it—that was dearest to him. And now, to have all of this ended through his mistake; it was just unbearable. So, not thinking of himself, but of the cause, he went alone to pray.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:9-10.

Then this Man came and placed his hand on Jacob and he began to fight and struggle. This fight and struggle was at first not exactly the spirit of liberality. He was fighting in his own strength for quite some time. But then, when he realized that in his own strength, he could not do it; he fell at the feet of this Man whom he now recognized to be divine, he clung to Him and said,

Genesis 32

²⁶ I won't let You go, except You bless me.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 196:

It was in a lonely, mountainous region, the haunt of wild beasts and the lurking place of robbers and murderers. Solitary and unprotected, Jacob bowed in deep distress upon the earth. It was midnight. All that made life dear to him were at a distance, exposed to danger and death. Bitterest of all was the thought that it was his own sin which had brought this peril upon the innocent. With earnest cries and tears he made his prayer before God.

Suddenly a strong hand was laid upon him. He thought that an enemy was seeking his life, and he endeavored to wrest himself from the grasp of his assailant. In the darkness the two struggled for the mastery. Not a word was spoken, but Jacob put forth all his strength, and did not relax his efforts for a moment. While he was thus battling for his life, the sense of his guilt pressed upon his soul; his sins rose up before him, to shut him out from God.

But in his terrible extremity he remembered God's promises, and his whole heart went out in entreaty for His mercy. The struggle continued until near the break of day, when the stranger placed his finger upon Jacob's thigh, and he was crippled instantly. The patriarch now discerned the character of his antagonist. He knew that he had been in conflict with a heavenly messenger, and this was why his almost superhuman effort had not gained the victory.

It was Christ, "the Angel of the covenant," who had revealed himself to Jacob. The patriarch was now disabled and suffering the keenest pain, but he would not loosen his hold. All penitent and broken, he clung to the Angel; "he wept, and made supplication" (*Hosea* 12:4), pleading for a blessing. He must have the as-

surance that his sin was pardoned. Physical pain was not sufficient to divert his mind from this object. His determination grew stronger, his faith more earnest and persevering, until the very last.

The Angel tried to release himself; He urged, "Let me go, for the day breaks;" but Jacob answered, "I will not let You go, except You bless me." Had this been a boastful, presumptuous confidence, Jacob would have been instantly destroyed; but his was the assurance of one who confesses his own unworthiness, yet trusts the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God.

There are two elements to the spirit of liberality:

1. Understanding our unworthiness;
2. Really laying hold on Christ.

If one element is missing it won't work. Leave away the feeling of our own unworthiness and we probably wouldn't even lay hold on Christ to start with. On the other hand, if we would feel our own unworthiness, but we do not lay hold on the power of Christ, we would simply sink into despair and accomplish nothing. So, both of these elements are really necessary, and this we see very clearly in Jacob. To be successful, both elements together make the true spirit of liberality, which Christ is looking for so much in His people.

Think of Mary. Mary had a true and keen sense of her sinfulness, and at the same time she had a determination so that she could not be deterred from listening to every word that came from the mouth of Jesus. That is the spirit of liberality.

10. From Saul to Paul

Matthew 23

²⁴ Blind guides, which strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!

WHAT is a gnat? A tiny little insect, which you need a very fine sieve to sift out. This is certainly not what God would require. They sifted these things out in order not to eat them—that would be an unclean animal, and to eat an unclean animal would be a real problem. On the other hand they would swallow the camel, which was also an unclean animal.

Jesus wanted to show the relationship between the two—they feared that they might eat a little thing, whereas instead they ate a very big thing. And this is always the case with narrow-minded people—they see the little things and try to correct them, but they don't realize that with their spirit of narrow-mindedness they are swallowing camels. This was the situation of the Pharisees; that is narrow-mindedness; that is a lack of spirituality.

Saul the Persecutor

Let us come to the apostle Paul and look at him step by step. Paul himself describes his past experiences as a fierce persecutor in the following words:

Philippians 3

² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh.

⁴ Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I moreso:

⁵ Circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

⁶ Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

So he really describes his experience, before his conversion, as a being a persecutor, very clearly, without making an excuse or making it look nicer, or saying,

“I didn’t mean it so badly.”

No!

“I was a persecutor.”

Very clear and to the point. And even though he was according to the law blameless, according to the righteousness of Christ he was not blameless at all, and he knew this. He was instrumental in the condemnation of Stephen, as we read in *The Acts of the Apostles*. But even while Stephen was being stoned Paul had a secret conviction.

Maybe I should tell you a little how he was instrumental in the execution of Stephen. Stephen was a very able man who could preach the gospel very well, and the leaders of Jerusalem—that is the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders—could not withstand him. His arguments were too clear, like those of the blind man. They were so clear that the Pharisees were embarrassed.

And then Paul came up—a very able scholar, like Dr. Eck in the time of Luther—who could really argue with him. And this finally brought about the stoning of Stephen. Even though he argued with Stephen, he could not overcome him, and this made the Jews so angry that they determined to stone him. So he was then stoned—this man who had withstood him, the able Pharisee—and Paul was very pleased.

But because he saw the bearing of Stephen, he had his doubts about the whole issue. However, he put away those doubts for a moment because he thought,

“Well, I must listen to the other brothers, to the leaders.”

But he did not consider the fact that this act was wholly against righteousness and against the law, even of the Bible—which he

also believed in. So these doubts still lived on in his heart, but were further put into the background by the fact that at the very moment when Stephen was stoned, Paul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council. The reason for this was that he had such a prominent role.

And then he really began persecuting the saints, also in an effort to deny his secret conviction. And he asked for letters, so that he could go to Damascus and there take them by force.

The Conversion of Saul

So he went to Damascus, and as we know, at the gate of Damascus the Saviour appeared to him. And there Jesus asked him,

Acts 9

⁴ Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

He also told him at that time that he should be His instrument, and that he should even go to the Gentiles. Paul later recounts this whole thing and says that this is what the Lord told him at the gates of Damascus.

But there is another point too, and that is that Paul was brought into connection with the church at that time. Immediately, he was brought to Ananias. Ananias at first couldn't believe that this fierce persecutor could now be a disciple. Saul (as Paul was called at that time) was obviously blind, but Ananias thought maybe he was playing a trick, maybe he is only pretending, so he can get all of us. The Christians at that time had to be very careful, so fierce was the persecution.

But an angel spoke to Ananias, and then under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he laid his hands on him. Saul received his sight again, and also confirmed what Jesus had told him, that he should be an instrument of His. And immediately Saul stood up, and he wanted to preach Christ. But this was not very pleasant for the Jews.



When somebody has just left the ranks of the enemy, or if a soldier falls, that is one thing. But if that person joins the other force, then this is a real loss. And this departure of Saul the Jews really considered as a great loss. Their hatred now was hotter for him than for anybody else.

A Thorough Work

So he had to leave Damascus—he couldn't stay there for long, and he fled to Arabia, where he stayed for two years. In Arabia, he experienced a very thorough conversion. And we would like to read about this conversion a little to understand where Paul got this spirit of liberality. Where did he get it, and why didn't all the others get it?

Another question we want to deal with this morning is, how did Paul deal with people who did not have this spirit of liberality? It's one thing to strive to have the spirit of liberality in ourselves, but it's another thing to deal with people who don't have it, who are narrow-minded. I often wonder about this, and I hope God gives us some answers here.

So let's first turn to Paul himself. How did he get this spirit? In *The Acts of the Apostles* we read a little about his experiences—his being blind, how he repeated his knowledge of the scriptures, and how at a marvelous speed he saw things that he didn't see before. Further it says,

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 120:

The conversion of Saul is a striking evidence of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin. He had verily believed that Jesus of Nazareth had disregarded the law of God and had taught His disciples that it was of no effect. But after his conversion, Saul recognized Jesus as the one who had come into the world for the express purpose of vindicating His Father's law. He was convinced that Jesus was the originator of the entire Jewish system of sacrifices. He saw that at the crucifixion type had met antitype, that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Redeemer of Israel.

Let's go a bit further now, to page 125, to the chapter "Days of Preparation."

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 125:

The opposition grew so fierce that Paul was not allowed to continue his labors at Damascus. A messenger from heaven bade him leave for a time, and he went into Arabia, where he found a safe retreat. Here, in the solitude of the desert, Paul had ample opportunity for quiet study and meditation. He calmly reviewed his past experience and made sure work of repentance.

What does this tell you and me—"he made sure work of repentance"? It tells us that he was not satisfied with the first glance at his own weakness. He was not satisfied with roughly seeing that "yes, I was a persecutor, I was a sinner." He definitely wasted no

time whatsoever in self-pity. He did not waste time with such thoughts as:

“Oh, how poor I am, that I am here in the wilderness now. I have lost my position, I have lost my proper eyesight [he had weak eyesight after Jesus appeared to him], I can’t even read properly...”

There were many reasons why he could have complained and felt self-pity, but no thought was wasted on this whatsoever. He was not satisfied with a superficial understanding of his weakness, but made a sure work. That means he dug deeper. He wanted to understand,

“Why was I like this? Why did I persecute them? Why couldn’t Stephen convince me right at the beginning? I felt the power of God then, but why didn’t I go after it? What was the problem?”

And he took time for meditation. It reminds us a little of Moses doesn’t it? Moses also learned narrow-mindedness in Egypt. He was very narrow-minded, when he left Egypt, and had a very limited view. But when he was in the wilderness, his view broadened more and more, until he became the liberal person he was. And Paul had the same experience.

With Moses we know it was because of the change of surroundings, time, and communion with God, and all three elements you will find in Paul’s case too. Change of surroundings—he had to be alone in the wilderness—time, and communion with God. These three elements together really helped him to make a sure work of repentance. It says,

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 125:

He calmly reviewed his past experience.

What does the word “calmly” indicate? That he took his time, but he also did not do this in a spirit of nervousness and anxiety. He said,

“I need to understand, but the Lord is with me, I know. The Lord will reveal these things to me.”

He trusted the Lord to lead him to a deeper understanding. It reminds me of a situation once when I was pacing the floor all the time because I couldn’t understand something. But Paul calmly said,

“No, I must get to the bottom of this thing.”

And he studied the Word, he prayed, he studied the Word, and he prayed, and waited for God’s answer. And the answers came, more and more. He would also remember what he had learned from the Christians, because he was instructed by them in Damascus for some time, and that was very helpful and very important. God placed Paul together with the church right from the beginning.

He sought God with all his heart, resting not until he knew for a certainty that his repentance was accepted and his sin pardoned.

This could be understood two ways. It could be taken to mean that he was very interested in getting recognition for his repentance; that he did not rest until God recognized his honesty, and the depth of his repentance. But that is not how it is meant. He did not rest until he knew that a change had taken place. He did not seek God’s approval of his repentance, but he sought to be changed. He wanted to know that the work within him was thoroughly done. He did not want to depend just on his own judgment, on his own opinion, that his repentance was now deep enough.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 125:

He longed for the assurance that Jesus would be with him in his coming ministry.

He knew he had a ministry before him. Then it says,

He emptied his soul of prejudices and traditions that had hitherto shaped his life.

How do you empty your soul of prejudice and traditions? First of all, you must really put everything into question. You must ask yourself,

“What kind of prejudices did I have?”

Probably he would have made a list of these things on a piece of paper, or parchment that they had in those days, and he would with big letters write down: this, this, and this. And then he would meditate about it, would compare it with scripture, would try to see parallels:

- In what way was I like Moses when he was in Egypt?
- In what way was I like Jacob when he betrayed his brother?
- In what way was I like Adam when he sinned?

He would meditate about these things and God would be with him, and would help him, giving him inspiration, just as He had given to Moses.

He longed for the assurance that Jesus would be with him in his coming ministry. He emptied his soul of the prejudices and traditions that had hitherto shaped his life. He received instructions from the source of truth. Jesus communed with him, and established him in the faith, bestowing upon him a rich measure of wisdom and grace.

When he had a good experience one day, he would not finish with that and say,

“That’s over. Now I have it.”

Instead, he would think,

“I am not satisfied, I want more.”

We also must not be satisfied. We want more—we want to receive the latter rain. And we can’t be satisfied until we are really

mature Christians and have the true spirit of liberality, and also know how to deal with those who don't have it.

While Paul was there in the wilderness, he must have realized that if he went back to his brethren, they would not understand what he had learned there, and would not accept it. Moses knew very well that his own people would hardly be able to understand what he had seen out there in the wilderness. Paul must have realized the same thing. He did not know so much about the Christian church at that time, but he knew that his former Jewish brethren would be absolutely hateful of whatever he told them of his new experience.

Acts of the Apostles, p. 126:

Jesus communed with him and established him in the faith, bestowing upon him a rich measure of wisdom and grace. When the mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite...

Or we could say, "the narrow mind with the broad mind." Our mind is always narrow because it's finite, it's always limited. But God's mind is always broad because it's infinite. Paul brought his finite mind together with the infinite Mind.

...the effect on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate. In such communion is found the highest education. It is God's own method of development. "Acquaint now yourself with Him" (*Job* 22:21), is His message to mankind.

How much time do we spend in prayer, in communion with the mind of God? Do we say, "I want more"? Paul spent more than two years in intensive communion with God—in which he really needed to make a thorough work of repentance, and to receive wisdom. And he got it.

Ministry to the Gentiles

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 126:

The solemn charge that had been given Paul on the occasion of his interview with Ananias, rested with increasing weight upon

his heart. When, in response to the word, “Brother Saul, receive your sight,” Paul had for the first time looked upon the face of this devout man, Ananias under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said to him:

Acts 22

¹⁴ The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will, and see that Just One, and should hear the voice of His mouth.

¹⁵ For you shall be His witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard.

¹⁶ And now why do you tarry? arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

These words were in harmony with the words of Jesus himself, who, when He arrested Saul on the journey to Damascus, declared:

Acts 26

¹⁶ I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto you;

¹⁷ Delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send you,

¹⁸ To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

So Paul was here called to be a minister to the Jews and to the Gentiles—to both. This is where God called him: at Damascus, and also through Ananias. This now weighed heavily on his heart—he knew that task would be tremendous. He knew also the Gentiles’ prejudice against Judaism and everything that came from Judaism. And Christ came from the Jews, didn’t He?

So he wondered, how could he deal with all those narrow minds? It reminds me of when he was in Athens, and he saw all these proud men—philosophers—who were talking in these high spheres, not really knowing anything about real life, but just in intellectual air-castles. And he saw all these gods. And then, in his

heart, he got angry about this deception that Satan had practiced upon them, and really wondered,

“How can I help them?”

He then went and made his speech, in which Paul met them as far as he could. He was studying how he could reach the prejudiced minds, how he could change the narrow minds and give them the spirit of liberality. He first had to get this spirit himself, and he got it there in the wilderness. But then this task rested heavily on his heart.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 127:

As he pondered these things in his heart, Paul understood more and more clearly the meaning of his call...

1 Corinthians 1

¹ ...to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.

His call had come,

Galatians 1

¹ ...not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.

The greatness of the work before him led him to give much study to the Holy Scriptures, in order that he might preach the gospel...

1 Corinthians 1

¹⁷ ...not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect,

1 Corinthians 2

⁴ ...but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
—that the faith of all who heard...

⁵ ...should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

So he said to himself,

“I have nothing to say. It’s the Word that must speak. It’s Christ that must speak in the word.”

And now it was really his burden to understand this. So he studied it. And as he studied it his mind got broader and broader.

He understood the tremendous liberality of God in giving His Son, and gained an appreciation of it. This is what made him so liberal.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 127:

As Paul searched the Scriptures, he learned that throughout the ages...

1 Corinthians 1

²⁶ ...not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

Can you see how his mind broadened now? In his time there was a great veneration of those who were highly educated. The Romans had this, and the Jews had it as well. The Jews had to learn in the Pharisaical schools, and they learned quite a lot there, humanly speaking. And the Romans—they had their philosophers, their universities in Alexandria and other places, where all the learned people would go.

Paul himself was such a learned person as well. He knew all the philosophers, the gods of the Greeks, and everything that Pharisaism knew. He was an intellectual giant. So he could depend very much on these things. But he now saw that all this is narrow-minded! Why was it narrow-minded? Because the truth is revealed by revelation (God's power) and not by searching out (man's power). It comes not by human wisdom. So God could choose anyone to reveal His truth. He doesn't need a philosopher, or a person that has gone to school for so many years. That seems to be a simple truth, but it is very important here.

Today in this society in which we live, we have the same thing. If someone has not had so many years in school and then an examination and a certificate, he is simply not able to teach. Or if someone has not gone to a theological college and had so many years of theological study, and then received a certificate, he can-

not be a preacher. Isn't this the common understanding of man? But Paul began to see that this is narrow-minded.

1 Corinthians 1

²⁶ Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

We do not say by this that no one should go and learn anything anymore. I think you understand this. But these things are not the key for success in the gospel work. We must get away from this, we must have a broader understanding. "Not *many* wise men" does not mean "not *any* wise men." God also chose wise men. The people who came to worship Christ in the manger were called "the wise men," so they must have been very educated people. But they were not too educated to bow down before a child in a manger. That is liberality.

1 Corinthians 1

²⁶ Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

²⁹ That no flesh should glory in His presence.

When we think that before we can say anything we first must make so many searches on the internet, then we have missed the point. We need to recognize our own weakness, and then pray for divine strength and wisdom, if we really want to tell somebody something which is of any value.

The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 127:

And so, viewing the wisdom of the world in the light of the cross, Paul...

1 Corinthians 2

² ...determined not to know anything,...save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Can you see how his mind broadened? He was a wise man, but his mind was now much broader than his wisdom. That is where he got the spirit of liberality.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 128:

Throughout his later ministry, Paul never lost sight of the Source of his wisdom and strength. Hear him, years afterward, still declaring,

Philippians 1

²¹ For to me to live is Christ.

And again:

Philippians 3

⁸ I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

In short, he said:

“All my knowledge, I count loss.”

When he came from Athens he was not proud that he had given a very intellectual speech which even the people in Athens admired. He didn't think much of that. He thought it was not so successful. And when he came to the Corinthians he said,

1 Corinthians 2

² I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus and Him crucified.

So he was laying aside all the things which men esteem. And he was ready to be counted as nothing, as simply a preacher of the cross—nothing more.

Philippians 3

⁸ I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,...that I may win Christ,

⁹ And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

¹⁰ That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.

Question: Do you know all the feasts of *Leviticus* 23? Could you repeat them to me, one by one? What is the first feast? The Passover is the first one, and then comes Unleavened Bread, the First fruits, then the Feast of Weeks, etc. Some would have difficulties in doing this.

Well, do you know all the laws in *Leviticus*, beginning with chapter one? It gets a little difficult. Yet, all these Paul knew by heart. He knew every little detail. And not only this—the Jews had added a lot of particulars to this because the Bible doesn't explain everything. It explains how the priests should be dressed, but when exactly should he be dressed? And in what order? There were many extra regulations that helped them to keep all these other regulations, and Paul knew everything, every detail. He was an expert on the Mosaic law—an absolute expert.

But now he saw Christ. He began to see the meaning. He did not pride himself on his detailed knowledge, but began to see the meaning of the whole thing. He really began to appreciate it, and he saw that his knowledge from before counted for nothing.

It would be good for us to understand *Leviticus*. I don't want to say it's good that we are not able to recite all this, but do we really understand its *meaning*? Do we really understand what it means for us personally? Do we see the liberality of God in these things? That is the key. If we don't have the key for the scriptures, we have nothing. We can have the best knowledge in the world, but we still have nothing. And we know people who have a lot of knowledge.

I once met a person who seemed to know the Bible almost by heart. He could instantly quote scripture on anything. And yet he didn't see the truth. He couldn't see it. When we discussed about

the conditional nature of promises, he simply couldn't see it. He knew everything literally, but he didn't see the spirit behind it. I wish I had this knowledge of his, and it's good to have it, but it is nothing if you don't have the key. And this is what Paul here received. He says,

Philippians 3

⁸ I count all things loss,

—even this knowledge I count loss...

⁸ ...for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

Just by the way, the person whom I said had this great knowledge was also a bit proud of it. He showed it off a little, and wanted to have an influence through it. But that was not Paul's spirit anymore. He said,

⁸ I count it loss...that I may win Christ,

⁹ And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

¹⁰ That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.

The same we could say about history, for example. It is good to have a thorough knowledge of history, but do we understand the meaning of history? Do we see Christ in it? Do we see the liberality of God in dealing with mankind? Or do we think it's good to have this knowledge without understanding it? We must come away from human pride and understand the divine value of things. And we must count even human knowledge as loss compared with that.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 128:

From Arabia Paul...

Galatians 1

¹⁷ ...returned again unto Damascus,

Acts 9

²⁷ ...and...preached boldly...in the name of Jesus.

Unable to withstand the wisdom of his arguments,

²³ ...the Jews took counsel to kill him.

They were unable to withstand the wisdom of his arguments. When I was a young person, and a part of the Adventist youth, we often had situations in which some of our older youth would start a discussion with Evangelicals or Protestants. And they could discuss wonderfully—they spoke like a machine gun, and gunned them down to nothing. And I always admired them.

But today I really must say, what is this? It's nothing; absolutely nothing. I once had a discussion with somebody about the character of God, point by point, and at the end the other person had to say, "You are right," and I had the victory, but then I noticed I had the victory for nothing because the person didn't accept the truth. What is it? We can have the best knowledge, but we must have the Holy Spirit. We must have divine wisdom for all these things. And this is what Paul got. He had a deeper understanding than anyone else of the sacrifices and of everything because of his thorough work of repentance.

I really wish that we all have such an experience. We need it! Because we have to face the same legalism, the same narrow-mindedness in this world, especially when the image of the beast is set up, when it comes to the last struggle between light and darkness. We need to understand the liberality of God and the spiritual meaning of his Word. A narrow-minded view of the word of God leads to very rough and incorrect ideas. We have to understand how to meet these things. And for this we have to have a knowledge of God's liberality. Paul had this, and so they could not withstand the wisdom of his arguments. But he was not proud of this. He did not think,

"Oh, I have the best arguments!"

Paul really received that spirit of liberality.

11. Liberty vs. Judaizing Teachers

WE NOW want to see the narrow-mindedness of the Jews on the other hand, and investigate a little to see what happened when the two spirits met soon afterwards.

The Jewish Converts

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 189:

The Jewish converts generally were not inclined to move as rapidly as the providence of God opened the way. From the result of the apostles' labors among the Gentiles it was evident that the converts among the latter people would far exceed the Jewish converts in number. The Jews feared that if the restrictions and ceremonies of their law were not made obligatory upon the Gentiles as a condition of church fellowship, the national peculiarities of the Jews, which had hitherto kept them distinct from all other people, would finally disappear from among those who received the gospel message.

This was the kind of mind that Paul had to meet. It was Christians who confessed Christ, but who still had the Jewish way of thinking. They still thought in terms of the Jews being the chosen people, and of their finishing the work, of their nation being converted. Paul also desired the Jews' conversion, but they thought in terms of keeping everything that the Jews had—the ceremonies and regulations, like circumcision.

Circumcision was the real controversy here, but you could name other things too. It was a long list, all the laws that Paul also knew, but which he now counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But the Jews felt that they were superior to the other people. In some respects they were, because they had:

- Health laws,
- The Old Testament, and
- A knowledge of God.

All of these things others didn't have. They feared to lose all this if the ceremonial laws would be watered down, so they felt they needed to defend them. They had this narrow mind—the Jewish nation. Everything must fit into this box first, and then we can go on.

The Jerusalem Council

But Paul said no, this box is not the right box, it is too narrow, far too narrow. So he withstood them. And there was a big dispute, and finally this whole matter was carried to the leaders in Jerusalem for a discussion. It is described in *1 Corinthians* 15.

There was a warm discussion going on for some time, and there were complicated questions concerning this, and from my own experience, I can say, once you go into detail with these things, you lose yourself. You don't see the forest because of all the trees. You don't see the aim anymore. You are lost in the details.

I feel like this sometimes too, when I have to discuss with people. I am lost in the details and don't even know why we started the talk.

“Wait a moment,” I have to say, “what is the real object here? Where do we need to go?”

What is the aim, the spiritual aim? Satan will always find little arguments here and there, and if I may say so, lawyers are specialized in this—finding little points here and there, and very often because of this the real picture is lost sight of. And sometimes somebody wins the case who shouldn't win the case, simply because the whole picture is lost sight of and it's only judged by little details.

And it is the same in the spiritual line. When we don't see “Christ in you, the hope of glory,”⁹ the mystery of God, the liberality of God, we get very narrow-minded. And this was the case even with some Christians. That was the cause for this contro-

⁹ *Colossians* 1:27.

versy, until Peter stood up and related his experience of how God really helped him out of his narrow-mindedness through the dream he had about the sheet of unclean animals, and how he was led to Cornelius; how Cornelius was then converted, how he received the Holy Spirit, and then was baptized—but was not circumcised.

There was no rule about this in the church—the Holy Spirit was given without circumcision being needed first. And Paul made this point so clear that everybody saw it and exclaimed,

“That’s it! Really, that’s it!”

They saw the big picture again—they had gotten it back in their view. Not everybody though; some still clung to their old Jewish traditions.

We have to study this controversy now, and we want to understand how we are to deal with similar issues. First of all, we have to be liberated ourselves, like Paul was. We can’t deal with these kinds of matters by losing ourselves in discussions about narrow little points.

In Arabia, Paul’s understanding broadened. He actually came to a totally new understanding, but a broader understanding too, because he had a thorough conversion at the gates of Damascus during those three days when he was blind, and in the time afterwards when he was instructed by the church.

There was definitely a thorough conversion with him, but now his mind needed to be broadened. He received the spirit of liberality. He then saw things in a different light from the way he had seen them before. We want to see how this worked out in his life, and how he dealt with his former brethren and also with the brethren in the Christian church who did not have such a broad mind.

As we have seen already, in Antioch there was a struggle about this matter. Let us turn to it again in the chapter “Jew and Gen-

tile.”

Acts of the Apostles, p. 188:

On reaching Antioch in Syria, from which place they had been sent forth on their mission, Paul and Barnabas took advantage of an early opportunity to assemble the believers and rehearse...

Acts 14

²⁷ ...all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

The church at Antioch was a large and growing one. A center of missionary activity, it was one of the most important of the groups of Christian believers. Its membership was made up of many classes of people from among both Jews and Gentiles. While the apostles united with the ministers and lay members at Antioch in an earnest effort to win many souls to Christ, certain Jewish believers from Judea “of the sect of the Pharisees”...

Did the Christians include Pharisees? There was no sect of Pharisees within the Christian church. There were Nicolaitans as we know from the book of *Revelation*. And there were agnostics; we know that from history. But were there Pharisees? Well, there were converted Pharisees, we could say, and that’s what it means here.

...certain Jewish believers from Judea “of the sect of the Pharisees” succeeded in introducing a question that soon led to widespread controversy in the church and brought consternation to the believing Gentiles. With great assurance these Judaizing teachers asserted that in order to be saved, one must be circumcised and must keep the entire ceremonial law.

So here we have some narrow-minded people. And they now met with Paul who was liberal. How did they deal with one another? How did Paul deal with them? Paul and Barnabas, it says here, met this false doctrine with promptness, and opposed the introduction of the subject to the Gentiles.

So the spirit of liberality is not liberalism. The spirit of liberality does not mean that they now tolerated this different teaching within the church. They recognized its danger, and they acted

promptly and with decision. That brought quite a stir in the church and you can be sure that they were accused of causing that stir even though it was brought about by the Judaizing teachers.

But I could imagine very easily how these Judaizing teachers would talk very nicely, very softly, very gently; how they would also work a little subversively, and win some of the people over. Then suddenly Paul and Barnabas stood up very promptly and very strictly and you can imagine what the people thought:

“They are the trouble-makers.”

Satan always works in a subtle way that is not always discerned at first, whereas God’s servants very often have to work with promptness and decision.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 189:

Paul and Barnabas met this false doctrine with promptness and opposed the introduction of the subject to the Gentiles. On the other hand, many of the believing Jews of Antioch favored the position of the brethren recently come from Judea. The Jewish converts generally were not inclined to move as rapidly as the providence of God opened the way...

This paragraph shows why the people were narrow-minded. They had national pride, they also had religious pride; it was simply a case of what usually makes a person narrow-minded. They had some good arguments too, which we will see later, that were difficult to answer.

The Jews had always prided themselves upon their divinely appointed services, and many of those who had been converted to the faith of Christ still felt that since God had once clearly outlined the Hebrew manner of worship, it was improbable that He would ever authorize a change in any of its specifications. They insisted that the Jewish laws and ceremonies should be incorporated into the rites of the Christian religion. They were slow to discern that all the sacrificial offerings had but prefigured the death of the Son of God, in which type met antitype, and after

which the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation were no longer binding.

So the Jewish converts did not have this broad mind—the spiritual understanding of these issues. For them, they just saw that all the laws, one after the other, had to be obeyed if they wanted to remain a body distinct from the world. That's what they thought. For us it seems to be so clear, but it was not so clear for them since they were so familiar with the Old Testament and also with the instructions of God where at times He even said,

Leviticus 16

³⁴ And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you.

And they would say,

“Well, if it's an everlasting order, you can't just change it like that.”

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 190:

Before his conversion Paul had regarded himself as blameless “touching the righteousness which is in the law.” *Philippians* 3:6. But since his change of heart he had gained a clear conception of the mission of the Saviour as the Redeemer of the entire race.

This little sentence shows us the real reason for the difference of understanding—a change of heart. Does this mean that the others were not born-again Christians? I would not go as far as that. Their conversion simply wasn't very deep. They still carried with them all the old thinking as they now began to preach in the Christian church.

In the church at Antioch the consideration of the question of circumcision resulted in much discussion and contention. Finally, the members of the church, fearing that a division among them would be the outcome of continued discussion, decided to send Paul and Barnabas, with some responsible men from the church, to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the apostles and elders.

There was such disunity on this matter that they needed to do something urgently and that was to lay this before the others. It's

good that they didn't try to solve the issue themselves first and then tell somebody else about it. They were really open enough to present it as a problem to the leaders of the Christian church. Many do not have this freedom. They think that first they have to solve the matter themselves and then they can present the results, but this again is a narrow mind.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 190:

There they were to meet delegates from the different churches and those who had come to Jerusalem to attend the approaching festivals. Meanwhile all controversy was to cease until a final decision should be given in general council. This decision was then to be universally accepted by the different churches throughout the country.

Now we will skip a few paragraphs.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 191:

This question was warmly discussed in the assembly.

So this was the question of circumcision: yes or no. And the ceremonial law: yes or no.

Intimately connected with the question of circumcision were several others demanding careful study. One was the problem as to what attitude should be taken toward the use of meats offered to idols. Many of the Gentile converts were living among ignorant and superstitious people who made frequent sacrifices and offerings to idols. The priests of this heathen worship carried on an extensive merchandise with the offerings brought to them, and the Jews feared that the Gentile converts would bring Christianity into disrepute by purchasing that which had been offered to idols, thereby sanctioning, in some measure, idolatrous customs.

That was one issue that Paul had to deal with often. What position did Paul take? He said,

1 Corinthians 8

⁴ As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

But Paul did not sanction eating that food in the temple with the idol worshipers. That was a different matter. But if the food, as such, was in the marketplace and you didn't know where it came from, it was not a matter needing to be carefully investigated. But if they ate the food because it came from the priests, that would be a different matter.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 191-192:

Again, the Gentiles were accustomed to eat the flesh of animals that had been strangled, while the Jews had been divinely instructed that when beasts were killed for food, particular care was to be taken that the blood should flow from the body; otherwise the meat would not be regarded as wholesome.

And that is true, isn't it? That is true, very true.

God had given these injunctions to the Jews for the purpose of preserving their health. The Jews regarded it as sinful to use blood as an article of diet. They held that the blood was the life, and that the shedding of blood was in consequence of sin.

The Gentiles, on the contrary, practiced catching the blood that flowed from the sacrificial victim and using it in the preparation of food. The Jews could not believe that they ought to change the customs they had adopted under the special direction of God. Therefore, as things then stood, if Jew and Gentile should attempt to eat at the same table, the former would be shocked and outraged by the latter.

Difficult question, isn't it? Not so easy to answer.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 192:

The Gentiles, and especially the Greeks, were extremely licentious, and there was danger that some, unconverted in heart, would make a profession of faith without renouncing their evil practices. The Jewish Christians could not tolerate the immorality that was not even regarded as criminal by the heathen. The

Jews therefore held it as highly proper that circumcision and the observance of the ceremonial law should be enjoined on the Gentile converts as a test of their sincerity and devotion. This, they believed, would prevent the addition to the church of those who, adopting the faith without true conversion of heart, might afterward bring reproach upon the cause by immorality and excess.

Can you see that these were difficult questions? What was the issue here in this battle? What was the problem of the Judaizing Christians? Legalism, or narrow-mindedness. Paul was delivered from this narrow-mindedness into the liberality of God. But now these Judaizing teachers put forth the argument that Paul was caught in liberalism.

“Oh, if you start to do what Paul says then you will begin to eat blood, you’ll begin to eat flesh that is from animals that are strangled, you’ll begin to be as licentious as the heathen are. You have to put a stop to these things, you know.”

And they tried to do this with their narrow mind. And so that was the argument. And what should Paul say? He could hardly say anything because they wouldn’t let him speak. There was too much excitement, too warm a discussion, until finally Peter spoke.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 192:

The various points involved in the settlement of the main question at issue seemed to present before the council insurmountable difficulties.

“What shall we decide for? Liberalism or legalism?” That was the question, basically. And the detailed questions were so complicated they lost sight of what the real issue was.

But the Holy Spirit had, in reality, already settled this question, upon the decision of which seemed to depend the prosperity, if not the very existence, of the Christian church.

The issue was clear already; they just couldn't see it. Paul saw it; Barnabas saw it. But the others didn't see it, and they wouldn't listen.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 192:

When there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren...

Then he rehearsed his previous experience when he brought the gospel to Cornelius. This brought peace to the minds of the people. They realized that God had really answered this question. But before they fully saw it, they listened to Paul and Barnabas.

Peter's address brought the assembly to a point where they could listen with patience...

Which means that before they couldn't listen with patience.

...to Paul and Barnabas, who related their experience in working for the Gentiles.

What does it mean to listen with patience to the minister? It means to let him speak. But very often people come and ask a question, and before the answer is even finished, the next question is asked. That is impatience, and in this way an answer is never received. Or, they demand an answer to a certain question and you answer this, but they only use this as an occasion to discuss more and to bring up other charges and accusations. And so the thing goes on and on and on. That is impatience.

But now the people here were brought to the point where they listened. They realized something was wrong with them. They realized that the Holy Spirit had spoken and for the first time they began to have some self-distrust, which was necessary for them to be liberal enough to listen to Paul and Barnabas. They had been so narrow-minded that they hadn't even listened to them. So now they listened.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 194:

All the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

So they related their experiences, adding to that of Peter, of the wonderful miracles and conversions of heart.

James also bore his testimony with decision, declaring that it was God's purpose to bestow upon the Gentiles the same privileges and blessings that had been granted to the Jews. This ended the discussion.

The Authority of the Church

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 195:

Paul and Barnabas were recommended to them [that is to the churches] as men who had hazarded their lives for the Lord.

Their views had really broadened. They began to see the value of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. They saw that they had been narrow-minded in the past, and they really began to appreciate the work of God. Can you see how, in a short time they had had a similar experience as Paul did in the wilderness? But their experience, even though it was the same, was not as thorough as that of Paul. They now saw the work of God as it really is, looked at from God's side.

Paul and Barnabas were recommended to them as men who had hazarded their lives for the Lord.

This was not a sentimental recommendation:

"Oh, these poor men—they have all given their lives to you, so because of that please receive them,"

—or,

"These people have been in prison; therefore please receive them as leaders."

No, there was no such thing. They were recommended because they were the servants of God, and because they had the spirit of liberality. They “had hazarded their lives” means they had given themselves completely and unreservedly to the cause and they would continue to do so. Judas and Silas were sent with these apostles to declare to the Gentiles by word of mouth the decision of the council:

Acts 15

²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

²⁹ That you abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well.

So no liberalism, but liberality.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 195:

The four servants of God were sent to Antioch with the epistle and message that was to put an end to all controversy; for it was the voice of the highest authority upon the earth.

It was clear. There was no liberalism, but there was liberality instead of narrow-mindedness.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 196:

The council which decided this case was composed of apostles and teachers who had been prominent in raising up the Jewish and Gentile Christian churches, with chosen delegates from various places. Elders from Jerusalem and deputies from Antioch were present, and the most influential churches were represented. The council moved in accordance with the dictates of enlightened judgment, and with the dignity of a church established by the divine will. As a result of their deliberations they all saw that God himself had answered the question at issue by bestowing upon the Gentiles the Holy Ghost; and they realized that it was their part to follow the guidance of the Spirit.

It has been said before, “It was the highest authority on earth,” and this is what Jesus said.

Matthew 18

¹⁸ What you bind shall be bound in heaven; what you loose shall be loosed in heaven.

He gave a tremendous authority to the church, and this authority is based on the Word of God. It is not the authority of human beings. This authority is when the church speaks the Word of God: then it is the highest authority on earth; then they can bind, and then they can loose.

When a group of people, whatever they may call themselves—presidents, directors, bosses, etc.—when they sit together in a small circle and determine something for the rest of the body, which is not based upon the Word of God, do we then have to say this is the highest authority? Certainly not. That is not the authority God speaks of. I want to remind us again: it must be based on the Word of God.

I say this because in the time of Sister White there was a general conference assembly which met from time to time, which Sister White always considered to be the voice of God. And there were also some people who led the church, or who administered the business of the church over the year. They were called the General Conference Committee. And usually, Sister White showed great respect for them. But at times she had to say that these people are not the voice of God, because they had rejected the message of 1888, because they were distrusting of the messengers of God, and she had to say clearly,

“They are not the voice of God.”

It was not the highest authority on earth. And why not? Because it was not based on the Word of God. The highest authority is always where the Word of God is. Where the Word of God is not, we have no authority, regardless of what people claim.

So, why was this the voice of the highest authority on earth? Because they were unified on the Word of God. The speech of Peter made it clear, then Paul and Barnabas spoke which made it

clear, and then James spoke which made it clear, and they all saw the light in it and they unified and they said “Amen” to this. They united with it. They were an authority, not simply because they were united. That in itself is an authority already, because this unity was based on the Word of God.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 196-197:

The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The “apostles and elders,” men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches. Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message. From the first the church has had such obstacles to meet and ever will have till the close of time.

What do we see here in these people who went away in disharmony with that decision of the council? First of all we read that they were not willing to accept what the other men had decided. They would live only by what they themselves decided. They were saying,

“We accept no man’s say-so. We accept no human authority over us except our own.”

This made them the most terrible slaves because they are slaves of their self-will, slaves of the spirit of non-cooperative independence, slaves of their narrow-mindedness. They could not see the prison they were in. They couldn’t see the work of God as it really was. That was their problem.

There was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren.

That was their problem, their narrow-mindedness:

...ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it.

To disagree with the church that has such a witness of the Word of God—and of the spirit that worked in that meeting to change the hearts and minds of the people—to disagree with that, that is quite daring. I feel sorry for those believers who stand up and disagree with the power of God that He is revealing. But some do. They are ambitious and self-confident. They think they can do it, and they go on their own mission, on their own responsibility.

But they did more than this. If that was all they did, then God would have been able to solve this problem. That wouldn't have been such a great problem after all. But it goes on:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 196:

They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding.

We will always find this spirit of extreme independence coupled with murmuring and fault-finding of the leaders, of those whom God uses to carry forward the work.

They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message.

The arguments that they use are sometimes difficult to meet because they use rumors. When the worker is out in the battlefield it is difficult to understand what he is doing all the time. You don't always see everything. And then when rumors come back from the battlefield, "Oh he is doing this and this," then it's hard to meet these things. You don't always know what is really going on. And furthermore, it will be presented by Satan in such a light as to appear that there is really something wrong.

Only if we have the spirit of liberality can we escape that trap. When we tend to have a narrow mind we will be very easily caught up in these things, in this indulgence of murmuring and faultfinding.

...proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message.

These elements are not limited to the time of the early church. We have to deal with them constantly. The next paragraph explains why they were so narrow-minded:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 197:

Jerusalem was the metropolis of the Jews, and it was there that the greatest exclusiveness and bigotry were found.

Today it can be everywhere. It doesn't need to be Jerusalem. It can be the Western civilization. It may even be in Africa—a culture or custom, whatever is the problem.

The Jewish Christians living within sight of the temple naturally allowed their minds to revert to the peculiar privileges of the Jews as a nation. When they saw the Christian church departing from the ceremonies and traditions of Judaism, and perceived that the peculiar sacredness with which the Jewish customs had been invested would soon be lost sight of in the light of the new faith, many grew indignant with Paul as the one who had, in a large measure, caused this change. Even the disciples were not all prepared to accept willingly the decision of the council. Some were zealous for the ceremonial law, and they regarded Paul with disfavor because they thought that his principles in regard to the obligations of the Jewish law were lax.

So they charged Paul with liberalism, not seeing the true freedom that he was bringing.

The broad and far-reaching decisions of the general council...

Broad and far-reaching—what is another word for that? The liberal decisions of the general council—not liberalism, but liberality...

...brought confidence into the ranks of the Gentile believers, and the cause of God prospered. In Antioch the church was favored with the presence of Judas and Silas, the special messengers who had returned with the apostles from the meeting in Jerusalem.

Acts 15

³² Being prophets also themselves, Judas and Silas exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

These godly men tarried in Antioch for a time.

³⁵ Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

The following paragraphs talk about Peter and how he had a struggle with his narrow-mindedness, but was corrected. We can say that the other disciples were also willing to be corrected—that is, as far as the twelve disciples were concerned—but there were yet others who were not so willing to be corrected and who really acted independently.

Paul Worked with the Church

I would like now to come to the last paragraph of this chapter to see a little more about the liberality of Paul.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 200:

Notwithstanding the fact that Paul was personally taught by God, he had no strained ideas of individual responsibility. While looking to God for direct guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship. He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose...

So he did not have that spirit of independence of others; he had the spirit of liberality. The spirit of liberality is opposed to the spirit of independence, whereas the spirit of narrow-mindedness is the spirit of independence.

He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose, he was glad to lay these before the church and to unite with his brethren in seeking God for wisdom to make right decisions.

1 Corinthians 14

³² [Even] the spirits of the prophets, [he declared,] are subject to the prophets.

³³ For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

With Peter, he taught that all united in church capacity should be “subject one to another.” *1 Peter* 5:5.

That is the spirit of liberality. In what way is it the spirit of liberality? It almost seems like the opposite of freedom. Was he free, if he was subject to others? If he could not live out his own mind? No, he was liberal enough to open himself up to a church that was also based on the word of God, and he had no fears.

The narrow mind is constantly fearing he will lose his personality. He must always withdraw. He must always be independent. But the liberal mind has no fear, because his surety is on the word of God. And he will let others test it; let them also deliberate about it.

I will gladly submit to a church that is based on the Word of God. What a privilege we have with such a body that God has given on this earth. I would like to read a little statement with you from the *1888 Materials*. In 1888 there was not a very good spirit in the church. It was similar to what was in the early church—this narrow-mindedness, this criticizing and faultfinding with the messengers of God, including Sister White. And she writes a little about this:

1888 Materials, p. 1369:

Dear Brother, To answer your letter will require of me some very plain statements. The matters you refer to have been presented before me for years. Long before the meeting at Minneapolis the leaven that is now working was at work. The spirit of disaffection was gathering strength up to that time. Since that time some have confessed their wrongs and have decidedly changed their attitude, and have not manifested the same spirit. For years previous they withstood the pleadings of the Spirit of God, and were aided in their rebellion by the great adversary of souls.

But there are some in influential positions who are still seeking to leaven the minds of canvassers, and to influence those who assemble in conference meetings. They work contrary to truth and righteousness, making use of any and every expedient to carry forward their own ideas. Many think that because these

men are in responsible positions, because they have an appearance of being calm and rational, they must be reliable men. But God has no use for men who are disloyal in heart.

These people were disloyal. They wondered what words of Sister White's were really inspired and what were not. That was their question, and they said,

"Well then, Sister White had a vision and a dream; those are inspired. But if she just writes an answer to a letter, that is not inspired. We don't have to take it seriously."

In this way, they tried to dissect the writings of Sister White. Sometimes they asked her,

"Did you have a dream about it? Did you have a vision about it?"

And Sister White calls them "disloyal in heart."

1888 Materials, p. 1369:

He has not given his people into the hands of any man or set of men to make use of as their impulses dictate. In the name of the Lord God of Israel, I protest against this work.

This is the same work as of the Christian Judaizers.

Paul's Liberality

After Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, there were a lot of rumors going around about his work. The very same people who some time before had made such a wonderful decision, and had such a wonderful unity, were not so sure anymore about that, because Paul's work seemed to bring a lot of problems to the church:

1. There were many who criticized the work.
2. It caused a lot of persecution.
3. It brought such a change and that was not pleasant.

Let's start with the first paragraph because we see here something of the liberality of Paul.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 399:

When we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

So outwardly there was no change.

On this occasion, Paul and his companions formally presented to the leaders of the work at Jerusalem the contributions forwarded by the Gentile churches for the support of the poor among their Jewish brethren. The gathering of these contributions had cost the apostle and his fellow workers much time, anxious thought, and wearisome labor. The sum, which far exceeded the expectations of the elders at Jerusalem, represented many sacrifices and even severe privations on the part of the Gentile believers. "These freewill offerings betokened the loyalty of the Gentile converts to the organized work of God throughout the world and should have been received by all with grateful acknowledgment, yet it was apparent to Paul and his companions that even among those before whom they now stood were some who were unable to appreciate the spirit of brotherly love that had prompted the gifts.

Did Paul repent that he had brought these gifts? Did he repent of his work? Not at all. He found comfort even after he was so badly treated. He was so little appreciated, but he found comfort in the fact that he had brought the gifts. That is a testimony of liberality. He held no grudges, no regrets whatsoever. That was his liberality.

In the earlier years of the gospel work among the Gentiles some of the leading brethren at Jerusalem, clinging to former prejudices and habits of thought, had not cooperated heartily with Paul and his associates. In their anxiety to preserve a few meaningless forms and ceremonies, they had lost sight of the blessing that would come to them and to the cause they loved, through an effort to unite in one all parts of the Lord's work.

They had lost sight of the gospel. They had lost sight of the message. When people begin to criticize and pick on this and

that, they have lost sight of the gospel. We have so many reasons to be thankful, so many reasons to unite and to press forward, instead of picking on this or that difficulty or problem which looms so big in our own mind as it loomed so big in their minds there—but this is narrow-mindedness.

Although desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church, they had failed to keep step with the advancing providences of God, and in their human wisdom attempted to throw about workers many unnecessary restrictions.

So they now said,

“Well you have to do this, you have to do this, and you have to do this, in order to make sure that you do the right thing.”

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 400:

Thus there arose a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor. They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions.

Their attitude would be:

“You know, if you don’t do everything right according to our definition of what right is, then we won’t support you anymore. Then we can’t allow you to go on anymore. We have to stop you.”

I feel sorry for people who in this way bring about a lot of burdens to the work and cut themselves off from the work of the Gospel. I very much hope that everybody who has this narrow mind will be delivered from it, and see the light of the gospel again.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 200:

Notwithstanding the fact that Paul was personally taught by God, he had no strained ideas of individual responsibility. While looking to God for direct guidance, he was ever ready to recog-

nize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship. He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose, he was glad to lay these before the church and to unite with his brethren in seeking God for wisdom to make right decisions...

Paul did this from his whole heart. He was really in harmony with the brethren. When it talks here of the brethren it means the brethren who were responsible for the leadership of the work. Very often people turn the statement around and instead of seeing their own duty in that statement they prescribe the duties of others. But it is not given for that purpose. In other words, instead of them looking for counsel, like Paul did, they say,

“Look, you must counsel with us.”

The minister is not really a person with a spirit of independence. He is a person who loves to counsel, to lay the matters before people of responsibility, and who seeks also the mind of God, which is revealed through His church. On the other hand, those who are independent, who have the spirit of independence, will not want to do this. For them their own opinion is the most important thing in the world, and they want to press this opinion upon others. Then if others don't accept their opinion, they go their own way. This is narrow-mindedness because it is limited to my understanding of my own way, whereas the spirit of liberality is a spirit that is always really seeking out the mind of God, including as it is found in fellow believers.

There are other instances where we see how liberal Paul was, especially in his dealing with the narrow-minded. To see this, I want to read two Bible texts.

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁹ For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more.

He made himself a servant that he might win more.

1 Corinthians 9

²⁰ And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;

²¹ To those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;

²² To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

²³ Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

What did Paul say here? He said,

“I am free. I’m really free to be myself. And what am I? I am a Jew, but not really anymore; I am a Christian. I am also a Roman citizen and I can be everything. I am free.”

That is liberality.

“I can be anything in order to help them. I can adapt myself to these people, to those people, and to those people in order to come close to them.”

This is the liberality of Christ, Who came not as an angel to this world, not as God, not as an inhabitant of the other worlds, but He came in our human flesh to this world. He became one of us, and this He did because He had the spirit of liberality. Christ could have said,

“Well, they must adapt to me. I will come as an angel just as I am to the other angels and they can get used to my brightness and my glory.”

No, He said,

“I want to be like them in order to reach them.”

The spirit of liberality—let me repeat this again—is the spirit of service. It is the spirit of selflessness. It is the spirit of giving and

to give, and this we find in Paul in the deepest sense, as we find it in Christ most of all.

This attitude is shown in the life of Paul, in *Acts* 16. This event concerns Timothy, who was one of his closest helpers, whom he won in Lystra. Remember when Paul was stoned? He was stoned at Lystra, and Timothy was there. Timothy had a Jewish mother and grandmother who taught him the Bible, but his father was a heathen, a Greek. Because of this he was not circumcised as a child.

Acts 16

¹ Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.

Greek meaning basically non-Jewish, because the culture in those days was the Greek culture. The language was Greek even though the Romans ruled. But even the Romans allowed the Greek Language to continue. It still continued from the time of the Greek empire, which existed just prior to the Roman empire. And so the non-Jews were simply called Greeks.

² He [Timothy] was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

³ Paul wanted to have him as a helper. And he took him and circumcised him...

What! Paul circumcised Timothy? Didn't he teach, as we read yesterday, that circumcision was not necessary? Didn't Peter make this clear in the assembly that circumcision is no longer necessary? It was just one chapter earlier, in *Acts* 15, that they came to the conclusion that:

"We don't want to lay this burden upon the Gentiles to be circumcised."

And Timothy was the son of a Gentile so why should he be circumcised? Well, Paul circumcised him...

Acts 16

³ ...because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

So why did he do it? He did it for the Jews' sake. He knew that they had prejudices in their minds, although for Paul circumcision was nothing, and to be uncircumcised was nothing either. So he did this for their sake in order to help them, in order to meet them as far as he could.

This morning we had a little thought here about dress, and this is the idea. In what way can I serve? Which is the best vessel for serving? That is really the most important question, which is the question of liberality. Everything else is narrow-minded; it's selfish. It's looking upon myself.

³ He [Paul] circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

They were now preaching, "keep the decrees, according to what we have determined," and yet Paul circumcised Timothy.

⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

This was done purely out of a spirit of service, out of a spirit of liberality. Paul dealt with the narrow-minded in this way—that he met them as much as he could without compromising the faith, without deviating from the commandments of God. And circumcision as a health measure, would not be harmful, would it? Some people actually do it as a health measure. So if we do it, it's okay. If we don't do it, it's also okay.

And Paul saw no problem in doing this. He did not give a wrong testimony by doing this. But he gave the testimony of going the second mile as Jesus had required of His disciples. He became a Jew to the Jews in that sense.

We read previously that Paul laid all the gifts and offerings before the elders and that they did not really appreciate these gifts; that they had their misgivings about Paul and his labors. Let's read on:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 402:

Throughout his ministry, Paul had looked to God for direct guidance. At the same time, he had been very careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem, and as a result the churches were "established in the faith, and increased in number daily." *Acts 16:5*.

So Paul had a personal connection with God. That is very clear. He got his message from God, not from man. But at the same time he did not have a spirit of independence, but he worked in harmony with the counsel of the brethren. This was not an arbitrary counsel based on human wisdom. It was a counsel based on the Word of God.

And now, notwithstanding the lack of sympathy shown him by some, he found comfort in the consciousness that he had done his duty in encouraging in his converts a spirit of loyalty, generosity, and brotherly love, as revealed on this occasion in the liberal contributions which he was enabled to place before the Jewish elders.

So did Paul regret that he gave the money? Not at all. He felt comfort after having given it. Why did he find comfort? Because he appeared better in the sight of the people? No. Because he felt that through giving this, God's name was honored. He felt that this was the spirit of God; this was generosity.

And he felt that eventually that spirit would prevail and it did prevail, even though not with the leaders in Jerusalem. It did prevail because the lessons are written here in *The Acts of the Apostles*. We read it and it encourages us to be liberal even if our offerings are not appreciated; to bless others even if we are not blessed; to let our sun shine on the good and on the evil, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5

⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

⁴⁵ That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

That is liberality and that is what Paul had in the innermost depths of his heart. That also tells us a little of how to deal with those who are narrow-minded.

The Final Visit to Jerusalem

However we have to understand more about it. So now let's go back to the beginning of this chapter "Paul a Prisoner" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, and take up the story again. We want to see how Paul related to these people who were narrow-minded. We also want to see again why they were narrow-minded.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 399:

Acts 21

⁷ When we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

⁸ And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

On this occasion, Paul and his companions formally presented to the leaders of the work at Jerusalem the contributions forwarded by the Gentile churches for the support of the poor among their Jewish brethren.

Paul had a high respect for the organized church and he definitely respected the leadership of that church of the people who were in Jerusalem. He formally presented the gifts before them.

It was the leaders who still supervised here, and Paul recognized this. He laid the gifts before them formally, even though they themselves might not now distribute the gifts. They would do this through the deacons and through other helpers which existed at that time, no doubt. But they still had responsibility.

Some people, who do not want to submit to this order, demand that others should have responsibility instead of the leaders and they quote the statement that deacons were also chosen in the New Testament, and for that reason deacons must be chosen now, and then the leaders will have nothing to do with that work anymore. This problem is caused by a distrust of the leaders that God has chosen, and a desire to bypass them. Choosing deacons instead does not solve the problem.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 399-400:

The gathering of these contributions had cost the apostle and his fellow workers much time, anxious thought, and wearisome labor. The sum, which far exceeded the expectations of the elders at Jerusalem, represented many sacrifices and even severe privations on the part of the Gentile believers. These freewill offerings betokened the loyalty of the Gentile converts to the organized work of God throughout the world and should have been received by all with grateful acknowledgment, yet it was apparent to Paul and his companions that even among those before whom they now stood were some who were unable to appreciate the spirit of brotherly love that had prompted the gifts.

In the earlier years of the gospel work among the Gentiles some of the leading brethren at Jerusalem, clinging to former prejudices and habits of thought, had not cooperated heartily with Paul and his associates. In their anxiety to preserve a few meaningless forms and ceremonies, they had lost sight of the blessing that would come to them and to the cause they loved, through an effort to unite in one all parts of the Lord's work.

Although desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church, they had failed to keep step with the advancing providences of God, and in their human wisdom attempted to throw about workers many unnecessary restrictions.

They were desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church. Their motives were not bad, and they had a real interest in protecting the interests of the church. They felt that they were capable of protecting these interests of the church and they felt that these interests of the church were not properly pro-

tected by the ministration of Paul. So for the sake of the church they felt they had to criticize. For the protection of the church they had to do something with him. But they had also...

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 400:

...failed to keep step with the advancing providences of God, and in their *human wisdom* attempted to throw about workers many unnecessary restrictions.

Whenever human wisdom comes into the work, even though it's with good intentions, then we find a lot of regulations and complicated requirements which in the end restricts the work rather than furthers it. It's a testimony of a narrow mind, a mind that lacks true liberality.

Thus there arose a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor.

Here is a group who wants to protect the cause and there are laborers in distant fields, and rumors come back from the field and they think that they must do something about that. They are not acquainted with these workers personally but still they feel that they must control them.

They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions.

These brethren who came to this opinion had also been at the Jerusalem Council, as we studied yesterday in *Acts* 15. And Sister White now turns back to this event and describes what happened there.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 400-401:

Several years had passed since the brethren in Jerusalem, with representatives from other leading churches, gave careful consideration to the perplexing questions that had arisen over methods followed by those who were laboring for the Gentiles. As a result

of this council, the brethren had united in making definite recommendations to the churches concerning certain rites and customs, including circumcision. It was at this general council that the brethren had also united in commending to the Christian churches Barnabas and Paul as laborers worthy of the full confidence of every believer.

Among those present at this meeting, were some who had severely criticized the methods of labor followed by the apostles upon whom rested the chief burden of carrying the gospel to the Gentile world. But during the council their views of God's purpose had broadened, and they had united with their brethren in making wise decisions which made possible the unification of the entire body of believers.

So their view had broadened. What is another phrase for that? They had become liberal. Their liberality was now aroused. They were not so narrow-minded anymore. They were beginning to realize God speaks through these people and God also works for the Gentiles. Their view now was much broader.

Afterward, when it became apparent that the converts among the Gentiles were increasing rapidly, there were a few of the leading brethren at Jerusalem who began to cherish anew their former prejudices against the methods of Paul and his associates. These prejudices strengthened with the passing of the years, until some of the leaders determined that the work of preaching the gospel must henceforth be conducted in accordance with their own ideas.

When it says here, "their own ideas," they would not say,

"It's my own idea."

They would hide this behind some legal requirement or some law that God had given in the Old Testament. Maybe they would use the excuse that they were only trying to protect the cause from the Romans, who would otherwise become violent. They wouldn't say,

"It's my own idea."

They would always quote another authority for their own idea, but in a sense it would be their own idea. Very seldom does a person stand up and say,

“This is my own idea.”

Usually he uses an authority to back him up and this authority, if it is not the Word of God, must be rejected as human. And these people here would say they are only interested in the welfare of the work.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 401:

These prejudices strengthened with the passing of the years, until some of the leaders determined that the work of preaching the gospel must henceforth be conducted in accordance with their own ideas.

You remember how yesterday we looked at some of the leaders and how they were not so sure. Initially, they had accepted the decisions of the council, and were unified. But soon afterward some became shaky again. Others who were not present at the meeting did not accept the results of this meeting anyway, and they went on under their own responsibility.

And both of these groups now had strong prejudices against the work of Paul especially, because he was the main champion of the work among the Gentiles.

If Paul would conform his methods to certain policies which they advocated they would acknowledge and sustain his work; otherwise they could no longer look upon it with favor or grant it their support.

On the surface, this might seem logical. If they cannot see light in what Paul is doing then they can't grant him their support. But we should think about this a little more deeply. We have only two powers in this world. There is the power of good and the power of evil. We really have two armies in this spiritual warfare. That is, the army of God, and the army of Satan. And either we are on the side of the army of God or we are on the side of the army of

Satan. We can't be in between. God's army is not divided. It's not organized so that one worker goes there and another worker goes here and everybody goes according to his own mind. God's army must be united.

So if I no longer give my support to a worker, I am actually harming him. It's like trying to limit his influence. It's like destroying him. That is the point because we have only two powers. And God placed the obligation on the church of supporting the minister of God, so if they don't support him then they harm him.

On the other hand, if the worker is really a self-sent worker, or a worker who does not appreciate the Gospel, then it's our duty not to support him. Then we must not support him. Otherwise we will be supporting the kingdom of darkness. So the decision is clear-cut. I must either fully support him or I must declare why I cannot support him. But to say simply,

"I won't support you anymore if you don't do what I tell you,"

—this is the spirit that Christ does not want to have in His church; absolutely not. Some people say,

"Well, I support some of the activities but others I don't support."

This is not possible. Either we support the worker or we don't support him. There can't be a half-way position, because either we are in God's army or in Satan's army. So,

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 401:

...they could no longer look upon it with favor or grant it their support.

In fact, that means they declared themselves enemies of the ministry of Paul. Or, they declared the ministry of Paul an enemy to the church of God—you can take it from whatever angle you see it.

These men had lost sight of the fact that God is the teacher of His people; that every worker in His cause is to obtain an indi-

vidual experience in following the divine Leader, not looking to man for direct guidance; that His workers are to be molded and fashioned, not after man's ideas, but after the similitude of the divine.

So these men had lost sight of the fact that gospel order means that God is working through His workers and that there is no human institution between God and His minister. That is what they lost sight of. They thought they must now stand between God and His minister. And you know what that is? That is man in the place of God, the papacy.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 402:

In his ministry the apostle Paul had taught the people...

1 Corinthians 2

⁴ ...not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

The truths that he proclaimed had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit,

¹⁰ For the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God.

¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God.

¹³ Which things, [declared Paul,] we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Paul explains here that the worker receives the message directly from God. He also works under God's direction, and under God's responsibility. And this is confirmed in the next sentence:

Throughout his ministry, Paul had looked to God for direct guidance.

But now some people may say,

"That's exactly what we want. We want to be independent."

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 402:

At the same time, he had been very careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem...

Not in harmony with the decisions of some brethren who proposed new plans and who wanted to tear down the work that God had erected; not in harmony with the decisions of a self-appointed committee of men who now determined that the work should go forward in harmony with their ideas. Not in harmony with this, no, but in harmony with the decisions of the general council of Jerusalem. Can you see that there is a difference between these two?

...and as a result the churches were “established in the faith, and increased in number daily.” *Acts 16:5*.

I really want to stress this point, so try to envision it: on the one hand we have the general council in Jerusalem, which was based on the word of God, and the Spirit spoke in that council. And on the other hand we have the leading brethren in Jerusalem who proposed to safeguard the work by directing other workers according to their ideas, their own ideas, not based on the word of God. These are the two pictures here. Paul was...

...careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council in Jerusalem.

There always have to be believers who lead out, and that's not wrong. If these people who are leading out, even in an organized church of God, determine that the work has to go forward in harmony with their own ideas, if they place themselves between the minister of God and God, that is a problem. So, the minister must look directly to God, but at the same time he worked...

...in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem, and as a result the churches were “established in the faith, and increased in number daily.” *Acts 16:5*. And now, notwithstanding the lack of sympathy shown him by some...

That means by some of those that had been present even in that meeting in Jerusalem. But there were only some.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 402:

...he found comfort in the consciousness that he had done his duty in encouraging in his converts a spirit of loyalty, generosity, and brotherly love, as revealed on this occasion in the liberal contributions which he was enabled to place before the Jewish elders.

After the presentation of the gifts,

Acts 21

¹⁹ [Paul] declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

This recital of facts brought to the hearts of all, even of those who had been doubting, the conviction that the blessing of heaven had accompanied his labors.

²⁰ When they heard it, they glorified the Lord.

Can you see how the spirit of liberality was really coming over them again? This narrow-mindedness must flee from where the spirit of God is powerfully working. It can't abide there.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 402-403:

Acts 21

²⁰ When they heard it, they glorified the Lord.

They felt that the methods of labor pursued by the apostle bore the signet of Heaven. The liberal contributions lying before them added weight to the testimony of the apostle concerning the faithfulness of the new churches established among the Gentiles.

The men who, while numbered among those who were in charge of the work at Jerusalem, had urged that arbitrary measures of control be adopted, saw Paul's ministry in a new light and were convinced that their own course had been wrong, that they had been held in bondage by Jewish customs and traditions,...

In bondage to what? "Jewish customs and traditions," which is narrow-mindedness.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 403:

...and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their failure to recognize that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by the death of Christ.

They now saw their narrow-mindedness clearly before them. There is no question about that. And what would have been the appropriate action? Right away? Without any hesitation? Immediately confess this.

“I was narrow-minded.”

Especially in that situation. To speak with Paul and say,

“We are sorry that we allowed the prejudices to fill our mind against your ministry. We see now that your work bears the signet of heaven. The Holy Spirit has spoken.”

And there could have been a similar victory as in the Jerusalem council.

This was the golden opportunity for all the leading brethren to confess frankly that God had wrought through Paul, and that at times they had erred in permitting the reports of his enemies to arouse their jealousy and prejudice. But instead of uniting in an effort to do justice to the one who had been injured, they gave him counsel which showed that they still cherished a feeling that Paul should be held largely responsible for the existing prejudice.

In other words now something else has kicked in which will always kick in in that situation, and that is,

“Well, we haven’t been so wrong, have we? You know, there must be something right in our thoughts that we had previously cherished all the time. It can’t be all wrong, so what was right in our thoughts?”

This tendency is to defend our own ways. Have you noticed this? Whenever new light comes it is almost a reflex. When you

fall you immediately have a reflex. Whenever the Holy Spirit convinces it is like a reflex.

“I want to defend my old ways. I want to defend at least some of them.”

This is a tremendous danger and they now wanted to say,

“Well, Paul was also responsible. Well, we were prejudiced. Yes, yes. And we now see again that Paul is a real minister of God. We see this. We acknowledge this, but [and this *but* was the problem] he is also at fault.”

It was not a confession at all. A confession that contains a “but” is not a confession. A confession that places part of the guilt onto another person is not a confession. A confession bears, or deals with it’s own guilt and nothing else. But if you even mention the fault of another as an excuse of your own failure, then you have lost it. That is a hypocritical confession. It is not a real confession.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 403:

They did not stand nobly in his defense, endeavoring to show the disaffected ones where they were wrong...

When evil reports came in about Paul, what would have been the duty of the leaders in Jerusalem, even before Paul arrived? Immediately to stand in his defense. To take a stand. To say,

“I will have nothing to do with those rumors. I don’t accept them.”

This was their duty, but this duty they did not understand. That was their duty especially then. Now that the Holy Spirit had made the situation clear again:

They did not stand up nobly in his defense, endeavoring to show the disaffected ones where they were wrong, but sought to effect a compromise by counseling him to pursue a course which in their opinion would remove all cause for misapprehension.

Sad to say, that was the victory of narrow-mindedness over liberality. They now tried to effect a compromise in order to satisfy one party, and also to make an outward confession at least, that they would also support Paul, but they did not really support him.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 403-404:

Acts 21

²⁰ You see, brother, [they said, in response to his testimony,] how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

²¹ And they are informed of you, that you teach all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

²² What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that you are come.

²³ Do therefore this that we say to you...

That is the narrow mind. It always leads to a spirit of control, but now they really tried to control Paul. They placed themselves between the minister of God and God. They took it into their own hands to work to safeguard the cause of God.

Acts 21

²³ Do therefore this that we say to you.

Then they counseled him that he should obey some ceremonial laws:

“Go into the temple, take four Nazarenes with you, and dedicate yourselves; carry out the vows,...”

—all these kinds of things. In the next paragraph we are told why the brethren gave this counsel. They gave this counsel not only because they were narrow-minded, and had prejudices; they gave the counsel for another reason, and that is fear. And fear is always something that limits our view and makes us narrow-minded. Fear makes us narrow-minded. Fear prevents us from seeing things as God sees them, and prevents true liberality.

We now need to understand the motives of these brethren in order to see what produces narrow-mindedness.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 404:

The brethren hoped that Paul, by following the course suggested, might give a decisive contradiction to the false reports concerning him. They assured him that the decision of the former council concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law, still held good.

So, seemingly, they accepted the same basis as Paul. Seemingly they were also in harmony.

“Yes, we agree with that council.”

How often does this happen that people confess one thing with their mouth, but with their actions they do another thing? So they said,

“Yes, yes, we still hold the truth that the Gentiles don’t need to be circumcised and the Gentiles don’t need to keep the ceremonial law. But you know, Paul, with you it’s different. You’re not a Gentile.”

So you can see how they now had a different interpretation of the Jerusalem Council, didn’t they?

But the advice now given was not consistent with that decision. The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction...

It is referring to the instruction that the elders gave to Paul, “Do what we tell you.” The Holy Spirit had not prompted that instruction. It was not in harmony with the council of Jerusalem. It was the opinion of these people. It was an outgrowth of the spirit of independence because they were not in harmony with that council.

...it was the fruit of cowardice.

What is another word for cowardice? Fear. It was the fruit of fear. What fear? Why should they fear? Where did the fear come from?

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem knew that by non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the Jews and expose themselves to persecution. The Sanhedrin was doing its utmost to hinder the progress of the gospel. Men were chosen by this body to follow up the apostles, especially Paul, and in every possible way to oppose their work. Should the believers in Christ be condemned before the Sanhedrin as breakers of the law, they would suffer swift and severe punishment as apostates from the Jewish faith.

Can you understand why they were afraid? They saw the hatred of the Jews. They saw their persecution. More particularly, they saw that it was the ministry of Paul that was bringing this persecution upon them. And they wanted to relieve themselves of that. That was their fear. And fear always creates narrow-mindedness. What they argued was,

“Look there are still many thousands of Jews who would nonetheless believe in Christ if we would just move a little closer towards them.”

And this sounds very much like what Paul said.

“I’m a Jew to the Jews, a Gentile to the Gentiles.”

So in effect they now seemed to be saying to Paul,

“Be a Jew to the Jews.”

That’s almost what they said. But behind it was not the deep desire to save these people. There was something else behind it. There was fear—fear of persecution. They didn’t tell Paul they feared persecution. Instead they said,

“We think that there are thousands of Jews who will be converted if you do this.”

But what was in their heart was fear. And fear leads to narrow-mindedness, because it can't see things as God sees them. Fear always presupposes that we are standing alone without the protection of God, as though at any moment anything can happen to us. And then we fail to see the real picture. When we go through experiences where Satan shows his power, where he "flexes his muscles" and nearly gets the victory, then there is a tendency to say,

"Oh, I don't want this to happen again."

And we tend to say,

"I must protect myself."

The result is living in a state of constant fear. But we must see things from God's angle and not from the angle of human fear. This will always limit us. Let's look at it from the angle of God and see how different it is. Satan is a conquered foe after all, isn't he?

The Desire of Ages, p. 490:

Henceforward Christ's followers were to look upon Satan as a conquered foe. Upon the cross, Jesus was to gain the victory for them; that victory He desired them to accept as their own.

Luke 10

¹⁹ Behold, [He said,] I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper.

Let us read the next paragraph, which explains the decision that these leaders made in saying to Paul, "Do what we tell you."

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 405:

Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.

So now we have two directives:

1. The words of the elders in Jerusalem, who said, "Do what we tell you."
2. The Word of God as spoken through the Jerusalem council, which made it very clear that there was no obligation to follow the ceremonial law anymore.

These were the two directives, and Paul had to decide which word to follow. Paul made the wrong decision here. What is the difference between the liberality of Paul, when he wanted to be everything to everyone, and his liberalism, when he made an unwise compromise, as in this case? What is the difference between these two attitudes?

The next paragraph gives us an understanding of why Paul acted like this.

When we think of Paul's great desire to be in harmony with his brethren, his tenderness toward the weak in the faith, his reverence for the apostles who had been with Christ, and for James, the brother of the Lord, and his purpose to become all things to all men so far as he could without sacrificing principle—when we think of all this, it is less surprising that he was constrained to deviate from the firm, decided course that he had hitherto followed.

Can you understand that? But was it right? Why wasn't it right? Where did he go too far?

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 405-406:

But instead of accomplishing the desired object, his efforts for conciliation only precipitated the crisis, hastened his predicted sufferings, and resulted in separating him from his brethren, depriving the church of one of its strongest pillars, and bringing sorrow to Christian hearts in every land.

You know, it requires quite a degree of spiritual discernment to understand where Paul made a mistake. Why didn't he make a mistake when he circumcised Timothy? Why didn't he make a mistake when he was a Jew to the Jews, a Gentile to the Gentiles, and a Greek to the Greeks? Why did he make a mistake here? There is a difference between these actions.

Let's take, for example, the situation when Paul circumcised Timothy. He circumcised Timothy before they went out and preached the gospel. But he went out to new fields—he did not preach to those who had heard the gospel already. Paul was a missionary to new fields. And when we come to people in the world, then we must meet them as far as we can in order to come very close to them, without sacrificing principle. We won't begin to smoke now in order to reach the smokers. We won't begin to drink in order to reach the drinkers. We wouldn't do this. We have to meet them without sacrificing principles, without committing any sin.

But there are other things we can do. We can to a certain extent adopt their dress for example, if it's not immoral or indecent. We can learn their language, if it's Spanish or another language. We can do many things in order to meet them where they are, to come as close as we can without sacrificing principle. But it's different when it comes to believers who have known the message for a long time.

Let me give an example. If I were to visit people who had invited me to bring the message to them for the first time and I saw

that they had a meal of fish or of lamb, on their lunch table, I would not feel authorized to criticize them at all. I would support them. I would wish them *bon appetite* and I would pray for them quite naturally. But let's suppose I were to come to a believer who understands more deeply and who has some experience in the truth. If I saw such things on his table unexpectedly, could I still pray with a good conscience, and wish him a good appetite? There's a difference between these two cases, isn't there?

The people who were so prejudiced against Paul had the opportunity already. They had seen the light, but had rejected the gospel. To unite with them in carrying out the ceremonial law was giving the wrong signal. If we meet people who have had the opportunity to hear the gospel but who have rejected it, we can't go their way; we can't meet them on their ground. We would have to make it very clear that their "ceremonial law" has ended for us.

When Paul went into the temple and took these vows, he did not help these people who had rejected the gospel, at all. In fact his actions had quite the opposite effect. He incited their rebellion even more. That was the result.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 406:

Those who advised Paul to take this step had not fully considered the great peril to which he would thus be exposed.

And he was exposed to great peril. At first they did not seem to recognize him, but then when they did recognize him they jumped upon him like wild beasts and held onto him not letting him go. They would have actually killed him were it not for the Romans who delivered him.

Never put pearls before swine. These people had rejected the gospel. So for their sakes to go and carry out some of the ceremonial law was not appropriate. That was totally against the plan of God. Why didn't Paul see this? He hoped that through doing this he could help the brethren, the leading brethren in Jerusalem who had told him,

“Go and do what we tell you.”

But he couldn't help them either. It was not something they should have counseled him to do. It was not the Spirit of God. It strengthened them in a wrong way, in the way of putting an institution between God and the minister, which never should have happened.

I really want to stress this fact very clearly—that was narrow-mindedness. And even on the part of Paul. That was not true liberality, even though it looked very much like liberality. It was going one step too far. It was an unwise compromise. We would say it was liberalism, which is the counterfeit of liberality.

Let us turn to this again. The Spirit of God had not prompted this. It was the fruit of cowardice and Paul should have discerned this. And when we act as a result of the fear of others instead of acting according to principle we will not accomplish any good result. We must act on principle and never because of our fears or the fears of others.

I pray to God that we really understand this and act accordingly. What I see here when I read this, is that a tremendous amount of discernment is needed, a tremendous amount of spiritual wisdom to see these things. If I would have been Paul, I don't think that I would have made a better decision, under those circumstances. I hope that because of this history of Paul's life we will make right decisions today when we come into similar situations.

But there is actually more to it this story.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 417:

The Saviour's words of reproof to the men of Nazareth applied, in the case of Paul, not only to the unbelieving Jews,...

The reproof to the people in Nazareth was that He said that the minister of God is safer among the Gentiles than among His own people. He told them a fearful truth when He said this. He showed how serious it is when the minister of God is not really

supported, but when he is rejected in the heart instead. But these words of reproof were applied, in the case of Paul, not only to the unbelieving Jews,...

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 417:

...but to his own brethren in the faith. Had the leaders in the church fully surrendered their feeling of bitterness toward the apostle, and accepted him as one specially called of God to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, the Lord would have spared him to them. God had not ordained that Paul's labors should so soon end, but He did not work a miracle to counteract the train of circumstances to which the course of the leaders in the church at Jerusalem had given rise.

We could conclude from this, that if Paul hadn't made this mistake, his labors wouldn't have ended so soon. But that's not is said here. If Paul had not followed that demand of the elders—"Do what we tell you,"—what would have happened? Would his labors have been cut short or not? Maybe his labors wouldn't have been cut short. Nevertheless, the elders wouldn't have been satisfied. They would have continued to hinder his work and tried to stop it. We don't know for sure how this would have happened but the main burden lay with them; they were the ones who were constantly hindering the work of the minister.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 417-418:

The same spirit is still leading to the same results. A neglect to appreciate and improve the provisions of divine grace has deprived the church of many a blessing. How often would the Lord have prolonged the work of some faithful minister, had his labors been appreciated! But if the church permits the enemy of souls to pervert the understanding, so that they misrepresent and misinterpret the words and acts of the servant of Christ; if they allow themselves to stand in his way and hinder his usefulness, the Lord sometimes removes from them the blessing which He gave.

Satan is constantly working through his agents to dishearten and destroy those whom God has chosen to accomplish a great

and good work. They may be ready to sacrifice even life itself for the advancement of the cause of Christ,...

So in other words, they may show real liberality.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 418:

...yet the great deceiver will suggest to their brethren doubts concerning them which, if entertained, would undermine confidence in their integrity of character, and thus cripple their usefulness. Too often he succeeds in bringing upon them, through their own brethren, such sorrow of heart that God graciously interposes to give His persecuted servants rest. After the hands are folded upon the pulseless breast, when the voice of warning and encouragement is silent, then the obdurate may be aroused to see and prize the blessings they have cast from them. Their death may accomplish that which their life has failed to do.

It “may accomplish that which their life has failed to do,” but not in all cases. In some cases many people are happy when the minister is dead, which was really true in Paul’s case. The spirit of narrow-mindedness is shown very clearly here. On the other hand we see in Paul the spirit of liberality, even though he made one mistake on the side of liberalism, when he compromised unwisely. These things are written for our understanding.¹⁰

¹⁰ 1 *Corinthians* 10:11.

12. Liberty in the Early Church

WE NOW want to see how Paul encouraged liberty in the believers, and we want to see how liberty was in the early church.

Giving All

Turn to *Acts* chapter 2, which covers the preaching of Peter in the early church:

Acts 2

⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, be saved from this perverse generation. Then those who gladly received his word were baptized: in that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

On that day three thousand souls were added to them. You know that is even a lot today, but back then that was huge, because there were less inhabitants on the earth and the people were more spread out. Three thousand people were baptized on one day. They must have had more than one person to baptize them and I wonder where they found the water to do this? They probably went into the Jordan.

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

⁴⁴ All who believed were together, and had all things common;

⁴⁵ And sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all as any one had need.

So they really sold all their possessions. They divided everything among them all. And they lived off the common income of that. That was total self-sacrifice in the early church. They had all things in common. They lived together. They really acted as one body.

Acts 2

⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

⁴⁷ Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

And of this number who were saved, they all had the same spirit when they came in. There was none who said,

“No, no, that’s mine.”

When he was baptized he immediately felt that he wanted to give everything. It was not required from them. You know God requires only one tenth, doesn’t He? But they gave all. When the preacher says,

“Well, it’s our duty to pay one tenth,”

–he is telling the church what to do. But when he has to encourage them to pay one tenth, I think that’s very small-minded. When nobody preached to the early church saying,

“Give one tenth,”

–they gave more than one tenth. They gave everything to the cause. And nobody said,

“What will you do with my money?”

There was definitely no such question in their mind. That is the spirit of liberality that existed in those believers. If we need to be exhorted to pay our tithe faithfully, and if we need to be exhorted to give offerings in addition to this, then something is wrong. The church is not liberal under those circumstances. The standard of liberality is the standard of the early church, where everyone really gave everything.

Acts 4

³² Now the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

Nobody said that anything was his own. You know, when we give a tithe we say,

“But the rest is my own.”

No, they didn’t say this. They said nothing was their own.

³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked: for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

³⁵ And laid them at the apostles’ feet: and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

So there must have been several thousand believers by then. That’s in chapter four and by chapter two we have already read that three thousand were converted in one day, and thousands were added daily. So how many would there be by chapter four? Fifty thousand maybe, I don’t know, maybe a hundred thousand. And they all had the same mind. Nobody said that the things he had were his own, but they freely gave everything.

Do you feel a little fearful when you read this? Does God really demand so much from us? Isn’t it a bit too much? Shouldn’t we reserve something for our children, or for ourselves? That was not what they thought. Or maybe we should reserve something for our future pension? But they did not think like this. They had said,

“Nothing that belongs to us is our own.”

If the believers had such liberality, there would be no question about the need of any part of the work. There would be no question about if the tithe is properly used. There would be no ques-

tion about it, because there would always be enough there for what is needed for the work.

A question that is often raised is:

“Was the tithing system observed in the New Testament church?”

That’s a question that is often raised because we observe the tithing system. It’s also called systematic benevolence—a systematic way of giving offerings. Was it observed in the New Testament? We read not one word about tithe, because it was more than the tithe that they gave. They were not concerned how it was used; they were only concerned to give it. That was their spirit, and that is liberality.

Acts 4

³⁵ And they laid them at the apostles’ feet: and they distributed to each as any one had need.

³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles, (which is, translated, Son of Encouragement) a Levite, of the country of Cyprus,

³⁷ Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

So that was the early church practice—to lay this money at the apostles’ feet. Let us see how this went forward:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 70:

As the disciples proclaimed the truths of the gospel in Jerusalem, God bore witness to their word, and a multitude believed. Many of these early believers were immediately cut off from family and friends by the zealous bigotry of the Jews, and it was necessary to provide them with food and shelter.

The record declares, “Neither was there any among them that lacked,” and it tells how the need was filled. Those among the believers who had money and possessions cheerfully sacrificed them to meet the emergency.

They didn’t sacrifice them saying,

“Oh, what a sacrifice we have to give!”

They gave cheerfully and happily. They didn’t sacrifice their possessions in order to show the other believers how much they gave. No, they wanted to give. It was a joy for them. They...

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 70:

....cheerfully sacrificed them to meet the emergency. Selling their houses or their lands, they brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet, “and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” This liberality on the part of the believers was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Now we know why they were so liberal. And now we know what the real cause of liberality is. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. When the church is not liberal, when the tithe is not honestly paid, or just the tithe is paid and nothing more, then it shows a lack of the Holy Spirit. If we want to see the fruits of the Spirit, liberality is one of the spirit’s important fruits. Liberality is the result of the outpouring of the Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 70-71:

The converts to the gospel were “of one heart and of one soul.” One common interest controlled them—the success of the mission entrusted to them; and covetousness had no place in their lives. Their love for their brethren and the cause they had espoused, was greater than their love of money and possessions. Their works testified that they accounted the souls of men of higher value than earthly wealth.

That is the result of the Holy Spirit. We pray for the Holy Spirit often, but do we allow Him to give us the spirit of liberality? If we don’t allow Him to give us the spirit of liberality, then we can’t receive anything more of the Holy Spirit.

I feel sorry that we as a church in these last days, especially in the richer countries, are so narrow-minded. We have so little of the Holy Spirit. The works of the early church testified that they accounted the souls of men of higher value than earthly wealth.

Our actions clearly show where our values lie. What do we count as a higher value: souls, or our earthly comfort and wealth?

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 71:

Thus it will ever be when the Spirit of God takes possession of the life. Those whose hearts are filled with the love of Christ, will follow the example of Him who for our sake became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Money, time, influence—all the gifts they have received from God's hand, they will value only as a means of advancing the work of the gospel. Thus it was in the early church; and when in the church of today it is seen that by the power of the Spirit the members have taken their affections from the things of the world, and that they are willing to make sacrifices in order that their fellow men may hear the gospel, the truths proclaimed will have a powerful influence upon the hearers.

That is the promise. That is the result of the Holy Spirit. I really pray that we will be gripped by that liberality.

Ananias and Sapphira

Very soon after this we find the spirit of narrow-mindedness creeping in again.

Acts 5

¹ But a certain man named Ananias, and Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 71-72:

In sharp contrast to the example of benevolence shown by the believers, was the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, whose experience, traced by the pen of Inspiration, has left a dark stain upon the history of the early church. With others, these professed disciples had shared the privilege of hearing the gospel preached by the apostles. They had been present with other believers when, after the apostles had prayed,

Acts 4

³¹ ...the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

Deep conviction had rested upon all present, and under the direct influence of the Spirit of God, Ananias and Sapphira had made a pledge to give to the Lord the proceeds from the sale of certain property.

Afterward, Ananias and Sapphira grieved the Holy Spirit by yielding to feelings of covetousness. They began to regret their promise and soon lost the sweet influence of the blessing that had warmed their hearts with a desire to do large things in behalf of the cause of Christ. They thought they had been too hasty, that they ought to reconsider their decision. They talked the matter over, and decided not to fulfill their pledge.

They saw, however, that those who parted with their possessions to supply the needs of their poorer brethren, were held in high esteem among the believers; and ashamed to have their brethren know that their selfish souls grudged that which they had solemnly dedicated to God, they deliberately decided to sell their property and pretend to give all the proceeds into the general fund, but really to keep a large share for themselves. Thus they would secure their living from the common store and at the same time gain the high esteem of their brethren.

That is the problem of narrow-mindedness—we want to have the esteem of the brethren. That's like people who have a lot of money and put it in the collection box publicly, compared to the widow who gave her two mites. The widow gave everything, but rich people have to show what they give.

“Look how much money we are giving!”

They want to be held in high esteem in the sight of other people. If we give our money in this way, the Holy Spirit is grieved because the only way God can accept our sacrifice is if we do it as David did when he said,

1 Chronicles 29

¹⁴ But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of You, and of your own have we given You.

It's not my possession. From the beginning it's not mine, it's Yours. Which of us can say this? So this was the spirit of the early church. And as we have seen, Ananias and Sapphira had a different spirit. And the marked judgment that fell upon them is warning to all who cherish narrow-mindedness, especially when coupled with deceit and hypocrisy.



The Corinthian Church

When Paul went into new places he had to educate the people into liberality; they were not immediately like this. The Holy Spirit was also with him, and when the Holy Spirit came upon the people they received this disposition to liberality. But they also had to be educated in these lines. So Paul taught the believers what to do.

1 Corinthians 9

¹ Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

² And if I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you: for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

He was quite bold to say this, but it's clear that it was not for his personal merit. By saying this he was showing what the gospel had done for them. And whenever people receive the gospel and are changed by it, then the minister is happy. He says, "that is the seal of my apostleship." That is the confirmation of the work, that God is in it, when people are really converted.

³ My defense to those who examine me is this,

⁴ Do we have no right to eat and drink?

⁵ Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

⁷ Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock, and does not drink the milk of the flock?

Paul does not refer here to the Old Testament in order to describe the support of the ministry. He refers to logic. The Corinthians obviously came from a Gentile background. If they had come from a Jewish background I suppose he would have quoted Old Testament scripture. Although he does quote one Scripture from the Old Testament next:

1 Corinthians 9

⁸ Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?

⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, You shall not muzzle an ox while he treads the grain. Is it oxen God is concerned about?

¹⁰ Or does he say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he who plows should plow in hope; and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.

What kind of laws did God give in the Old Testament to teach the same thing? The law of tithes and offerings. And we have another Scripture in the New Testament as well:

Hebrews 7

⁵ And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law.

So Paul speaks about the same thing here in his letter to the Corinthians. Only he doesn't mention the word tithe. He says,

“That is the support of the ministry.”

And he talks about not just their eating and drinking, he talks about their traveling also, and taking their wives with them.

1 Corinthians 9

⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

⁷ Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock, and does not drink the milk of the flock?

Those who preach the gospel must live off the gospel. That is the principle of tithing, as expressed in the New Testament, which we will delve more deeply into, in the next chapter.

13. Tithing in the New Testament

IN OUR last study we looked at the early church and we considered their liberality. And that example clearly shows that liberality means selflessness. They said that nothing they had was their own. But they realized that everything they had, they had in order to give. And that is the principle—receiving in order to give.

We want to continue to look at how Paul encouraged the other believers, who were new to the message, into this liberality. That was not always easy because Satan was also doing his work as we previously, in the struggle between the Judaizing teachers and the liberality of Paul and the gospel.

And we also saw how very early in the church Satan tried to put down or to kill that spirit of liberality. He definitely tried to do this not only in Antioch, but also in other places as well, for example, in Corinth. In Corinth, Paul was not undividedly recognized as the apostle of God. There was competition in the minds of the people between several teachers—Cephas, and some even said, “I am of Christ,” others said, “I am of Apollos,” and some said, “I am of Paul.” The real reason was that they were narrow-minded. They had a very limited view and they did not support Paul as heartily as they should have. This is the same problem that appeared in the leaders at Jerusalem, as we saw in [Chapter 11](#).

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

For that reason Paul wrote a letter to them, which we now know as *1 Corinthians*, in order to try to help them to become liberal again. And this is one of the most beautiful letters, which shows:

- his concern for the people,
- the loving appeals he made to them, and
- the humility that he had.

Paul showed very clearly in *1 Corinthians* 8, for example, that he is willing to submit his rights in order to save others. He says this also in:

1 Corinthians 9

²⁰ And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

²¹ To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

²² To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

²³ And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Or in other words,

“I am a Jew to the Jews, a Gentile to the Gentiles.”

This showed his liberality. And in the first part of chapter 9, he continues with this thought by saying,

¹¹ If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

¹² If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

¹³ Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

¹⁴ Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

¹⁵ But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

¹⁶ For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

Or, to summarize:

“Well, I am free. I am also free to receive your bountiful gifts, but I have not done this at this point because I am also free not to do so. You see, whatever I do, I do for your sake.”

He shows his total selflessness in the whole thing. But, he shows the duty of the Corinthian believers to support the ministry. He says,

1 Corinthians 9

¹ Am I not an apostle?

It's a rhetorical question and the answer is, “of course,” but not everybody saw this so clearly.

¹ ...Am I not free?”

Of course.

¹ ...Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?

That was a known fact.

¹ ...Are you not my work in the Lord?

He now appeals to the fact that through the gospel that God commissioned him to preach they were changed people, and isn't this an evidence?

² If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

And now he says:

³ My defense to those who examine me is this:

⁴ Do we have no right to eat and drink?

⁵ Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

Or, in other words:

“You know how much I have to travel everywhere in order to take the gospel there, so do you want to say that I have no right to do this?”

1 Corinthians 9

⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

⁷ Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

He really explains very clearly that the gospel worker must live from the gospel, and he speaks here of the same system that was given in the Old Testament, namely the tithing system. He doesn't mention the tithe because he doesn't need to. He simply appeals to the liberality that is a result of the gospel message.

And when we can appeal to this liberality there is no need to say,

“Well, you have to give the tithe,”

—because the believer will gladly give more than this, and he will not ask the minister,

“Well, can't I save a little here or save a little there?”

He will say,

“I want to give more please.”

He is more concerned with what he gives rather than looking to the minister and what he shall say or not say, or what he shall use or not use.

⁸ Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?

⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

And then he points out that when God so cares for the oxen does He not care much more for His ministers?

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁵ But I have used none of these things...

He didn't do this in order to make himself look better or to exalt himself. He did this simply to help them in that situation. He did this because of their weaknesses and for nothing else.

When we constantly work so that others will not misunderstand us, what does this indicate? If we constantly work like this: if I always explain myself three or four times, wouldn't you get tired after a while? Certainly.

What does this indicate if I would do this? It indicates that I can't fully trust you, that you are a little hard in your heart. That maybe you are even narrow-minded and I constantly have to make sure of everything. Whereas when we have a good relationship, when I can trust you, when I know that you have the spirit of liberality in your mind, nothing of this sort is necessary.

I don't know if this is so with horses, but I think that with a good horse you don't need to do much with it. You give it a little hint and it goes in the direction you want. A horse that is not so good, you have to give it a real strong signal to make it go. Is this so? With humans it's so.

You don't need to say much to a person who has the spirit of liberality in his heart. He immediately knows what the matter is. But you constantly have to say something to a person who does not have it. If we would constantly speak like this to our friends, because we fear that they don't love us or whatever, it burdens the relationship.

When a person comes to my house and he doesn't feel at home and he must ask for everything, then after a while I am sad, because I say to myself, why doesn't he feel at home? Why doesn't he act as somebody who is part of my household? However, if somebody comes and he has the tendency to take things for himself all the time, then I must discipline him a little. I must say,

"My friend, please ask first before you take things."

If he has a good mind then he will not mind my saying this. He will be happy. And our relationship must be like this: that we don't defend ourselves all the time, and that we don't have to constantly make absolutely sure that others don't misunderstand us.

When Paul was not working, but was laboring for himself, he did not do this in order to protect himself from the gossiping of others; he didn't do it for his own sake. He did it because he knew the people, and he knew it would help them.

Whatever we do, let us do it because we want to help the others, not because we want to protect ourselves. Whenever we do something, do it because we want to help others, but not to protect ourselves. Paul was talking very openly with the Corinthians here. He said to them,

"I have a right not to work. I don't do it for my sake. I do it for your sake, because I want to be everything to you."

And this placed the matter on a whole different foundation.

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁵ But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

That sounds a bit as though he was boasting, but the context of Paul is "giving." He is not boasting of himself, or his fame. His boasting is in the happiness that he could help others; that is his only boasting.

¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

He makes it very clear:

"There is nothing that I can boast of. I cannot say that I have preached so many hours in your presence; I have done this and this and this; I have undergone a lot of trials and difficulties; I had a long struggle until I came and preached to you, etc. I can't

boast of anything of these things. Why not? Because I was constrained to go. Woe is upon me. If I hadn't gone there would have been a terrible woe."

This is the criteria for every minister, and even for every worker. When a person wants to be a worker and we have to test him, one thing we really have to test is:

- Does he have this woe upon him?
- Does he realize that if he didn't do it he would be under condemnation?
- Does he really feel that he must do it, and if he doesn't do it he will displease God?
- Does he have this burden?

If he doesn't have it, then he is not the worker, especially in the case of a minister. If he wants to run away when things get difficult, if he says,

"Well, I did this with great sacrifice, it took all my effort;"

if he talks a lot about himself, then I would say, no that's not the one. The one who is called by God will feel the woe; he will feel a terrible burden and he will not take his hands from the plow until the work is finished and God releases him. And that is what Paul says:

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁷ For if I do this willingly...

That is, if I do it from my own choice, my own planning, on my own initiative.

¹⁷ ...I have a reward; but if against my will...

That means, if somebody else places this burden upon me.

¹⁷ ...I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

Let us question ourselves,

"Why am I a minister?"

“Why am I a worker?”

“What would happen if I would leave my job?”

And I cannot say that the temptation hasn't been there quite a few times to let go and to say,

“I will step back and then all my troubles are over.”

But if I really would do that, then there would be a terrible curse upon me. Woe is upon him who is given this job and he doesn't do it. It reminds me a little of the story of Hazen Foss, the man who was chosen to give a message to the early Advent believers. When he received the Spirit of Prophecy and then refused to deliver the message, it was terrible for him.

Once God gives us this job then there is a woe upon us if we refuse it. And if we do not feel that woe, then we are not the ones for the job. Paul makes this very clear:

“I have it because God gave it to me, regardless of whether I take your gifts for myself or if I don't. That makes no difference.”

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁸ What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

So in other words,

“It doesn't matter whether I take it or not. The woe is upon me. That is all that matters.”

But to the Corinthians he says,

“It is your duty to support the ministry. My willingness to labor without support does not relieve you of your duty.”

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

After the Corinthians had received the first letter, they really saw their own narrow-mindedness. They received a very deep conversion. And Paul was praying very much that they would receive

his letter like this, and how happy he was when they did. The Corinthians became a very liberal church, and we have a chapter in *The Acts of the Apostles* headed, “A Liberal Church,” which talks about the Corinthians. Let us now read from there:

2 Corinthians 8

¹ Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

Macedonia was the area, Corinth was the city. So, in short, Macedonia is the area we call Greece today. And Corinth was one important city in Macedonia.

² That in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

These churches were not rich churches, even though the people in these cities were not usually poor people, but the believers who came to the truth were poor. That is usually so. It’s seldom that rich people come to the truth; it’s more the poor people who come. So in this case here, it was the poor people who were the members of the church. Most of them were poor in this world’s goods. Paul says, “in deep poverty,” but he also says,

² ...their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Of what story does this remind you? Of the widow who gave her two mites.

³ For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing.

Like the widow who gave everything, they gave everything for the cause.

⁴ Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

The first letter had borne its fruits. Liberality was there in the church. They had freely given to the saints.

⁵ And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

And here it shows the order:

1. They gave themselves;
2. Then they gave of their goods.

This must always be the order. It cannot be the other way around—never. It's impossible. One day a minister spoke to his congregation and usually there was a money appeal, but he said,

“Today I don't want to have any money from you. I want to have your hearts.”

Was he saying the right thing? Yes, but he didn't want their hearts for himself, but for Jesus. Before we can give any money to God or any of our goods, we must give our hearts. It can't be the other way around. These two things are always connected—to give myself first and then to give my means.

And that is what the Corinthian believers did. They gave their hearts. And then they gave their monies to the apostle Paul, not that he needed it for himself—he wanted it to pass on to others; he wanted to receive in order to give. So when they gave their money to Paul, and he brought it to Jerusalem, they had first given themselves. They first saw that he indeed was an apostle of Christ. They had received his first letter very well.

2 Corinthians 8

⁶ So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.

⁷ But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

So Paul was not saying,

“You have everything and now it's enough, so go on.”

2 Corinthians 8

⁸ I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

¹⁰ And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago;

¹¹ But now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.

He doesn't say,

“Now you can rest.”

He says,

“Press on. Continue to give yourself.”

¹² For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened;

¹⁴ But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.

¹⁵ As it is written, He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.

That reminds us also of what Jesus said, that he who gives shall receive. How much shall he receive? A full measure, packed, shaken down, and overflowing.

¹⁵ He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who had gathered little had no lack.

Which is to say:

“God is always supplying; so continue to give.”



2 Corinthians 8

¹⁶ But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.

¹⁷ For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.

¹⁸ And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches,

A superficial reader might say,

“Titus went willingly, but Paul was not willingly an apostle.”

Paul was not saying,

“I am unwillingly an apostle.”

What he was saying is,

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁶ ...woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

He was like Isaiah, who said, “Lord, send me,” when the call came. Every minister and worker will be like this. There is a willingness, and there is also a sense of urgency, a sense of,

“I can’t run away from this call.”

That is the point that Paul wanted to make.

2 Corinthians 8

¹⁹ And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord himself and to show your ready mind,

²⁰ Avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us—

²¹ Providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

²² And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you.

²³ If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you...

It’s almost as if Paul wanted to say,

“Don’t make the same mistake with him that you made with me a year ago. Accept him. He is my partner.”

2 Corinthians 8

²³ Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

²⁴ Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

And then he continues to talk about the gifts:

2 Corinthians 9

¹ Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;

² For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

The Corinthian believers were now so liberal that they encouraged others to be liberal too. It stirred up the majority of the others.

³ Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready;

In other words,

“I am coming again now. I expect that you will be liberal again.”

⁴ Lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

⁵ Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

⁶ But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

⁹ As it is written: He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.

¹⁰ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

¹¹ While you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

¹² For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,

That reminds us of the circle of life. They receive in order to give. The Corinthian believers said nothing was their own, but they would continue to give. And he says,

“Don’t stop this. Otherwise what I said about you may be in vain. I told everybody that you had this spirit of liberality. Continue in that spirit.”

Paul was not ashamed to encourage the believers like this, because he knew what blessings came out of it, and we need to let this word speak to us as well.

Greater Liberality Under the Gospel

I would like to turn to *The Acts of the Apostles* now.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 336-337:

The payment of the tithe was but a part of God’s plan for the support of His service.

What does this say? It was only a part of God’s plan for the support of the service. It was not everything; only a part. If we think that we have done our duty when we have given God a tenth, then we have not understood the liberality of God.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 337:

Numerous gifts and offerings were divinely specified. Under the Jewish system the people were taught to cherish a spirit of liberality both in sustaining the cause of God and in supplying the wants of the needy. For special occasions there were freewill offerings. At the harvest and the vintage, the first fruits of the field—corn, wine, and oil—were consecrated as an offering to the

Lord. The gleanings and the corners of the field were reserved for the poor. The first fruits of the wool when the sheep were shorn, of the grain when the wheat was threshed, were set apart for God. So also were the first-born of all animals, and a redemption price was paid for the first-born son. The first fruits were to be presented before the Lord at the sanctuary and were then devoted to the use of the priests.

The first fruits had to be given first. Before anything was used it had to be given in order to make clear that everything belongs to God; the same with the tithe. It is an indication that everything belongs to God. And Paul also wrote to the Corinthians to say,

1 Corinthians 16

² Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

This was to be done at the beginning of the week. Some people wait until the end and then they calculate and give. No, at the beginning they should do this in order to cherish that spirit of liberality.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 337:

By this system of benevolence the Lord sought to teach Israel that in everything He must be first. Thus they were reminded that God was the proprietor of their fields, their flocks, and their herds;

That reminds me of Mary. When did she break the alabaster box? She didn't wait till the last moment. She wanted to do it at the first occasion, and as soon as she could, she did it. And that is the spirit of liberality. The spirit of narrow-mindedness waits until the end.

"I must make sure that if I give my gifts then I can afford it,"

or

"I must make sure if I give my gift it's not misused, so I will wait till the end."

But if I give it at the beginning, then by that I show my full support for the cause of God. In the next paragraph a comparison is made between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Whereas in the Old Testament gifts were essential, in the New Testament we have even a greater obligation.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 337:

Surely our obligations are much greater than were those of ancient Israel.

That seems to be difficult to fulfill in view of the fact that the state or government already requires so much. And yet our obligation is greater. How great is it? Think of the New Testament church. There was nothing that they said was their own.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 338:

As God's work extends, calls for help will come more and more frequently. That these calls may be answered, Christians should heed the command,

Malachi 3

¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house.

If professing Christians would faithfully bring to God their tithes and offerings, His treasury would be full. There would then be no occasion to resort to fairs, lotteries, or parties of pleasure to secure funds for the support of the gospel.

Men are tempted to use their means in self-indulgence, in the gratification of appetite, in personal adornment, or in the embellishment of their homes. For these objects many church members do not hesitate to spend freely and even extravagantly. But when asked to give to the Lord's treasury, to carry forward His work in the earth, they demur. Perhaps, feeling that they cannot well do otherwise, they dole out a sum far smaller than they often spend for needless indulgence. They manifest no real love for Christ's service, no earnest interest in the salvation of souls. What marvel that the Christian life of such ones is but a dwarfed, sickly existence!

The lack of the spirit of liberality means a lack of spirituality in the person.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 338-339:

He whose heart is aglow with the love of Christ will regard it as not only a duty, but a pleasure, to aid in the advancement of the highest, holiest work committed to man—the work of presenting to the world the riches of goodness, mercy, and truth.

On the next page we have a key sentence of this whole subject:

The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven.

And if we do not have this spirit in our hearts, then we don't have the spirit of heaven in our hearts. And that can only mean that we have no connection with heaven.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 339:

This spirit finds its highest manifestation in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In our behalf the Father gave His only-begotten Son; and Christ, having given up all that He had, then gave himself, that man might be saved. The cross of Calvary should appeal to the benevolence of every follower of the Saviour. The principle there illustrated is to give, give.

1 John 2

⁶ He that says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.

On the other hand, the spirit of selfishness is the spirit of Satan. The principle illustrated in the lives of worldlings is to get, get. Thus they hope to secure happiness and ease, but the fruit of their sowing is misery and death.

We have to skip a little and go on:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 340:

God's chosen messengers, who are engaged in aggressive labor, should never be compelled to go a warfare at their own charges, unaided by the sympathetic and hearty support of their brethren.

"Sympathetic and hearty support" is not only giving money. I can give my money and then I can say,

"Now I have nothing to do with you anymore."

Or I might say,

“I don’t trust you fully, but I will still give my money.”

No, it means more. It means sympathetic, hearty support. And this the leaders in Jerusalem failed to give to Paul. Can you see this? Even though they received him gladly when he came to Jerusalem with all the gifts of the Macedonian believers who were poor. He brought all these gifts formally before them and they saw the liberality of these people, but it did not instigate any liberality in them. They failed to give Paul their sympathetic and hearty support, and that was their sin.

It is the part of church members to deal liberally with those who lay aside their secular employment that they may give themselves to the ministry. When God’s ministers are encouraged, His cause is greatly advanced. But when, through the selfishness of men, their rightful support is withheld...

And again that’s not only money. That also includes prayers, encouragement, loyalty, and such things. When “their rightful support is withheld,” and it is withheld, for example, if we allow the enemies of truth to install seeds of doubt in our hearts and if because of this we have the spirit of disloyalty,

...their hands are weakened, and often their usefulness is seriously crippled.

“Often.” That doesn’t mean “always” because the minister of God must not look at this and say,

“Well, because they don’t support me, I can’t do my work.”

From the minister’s side, he looks to Christ and he sees Him and because he sees Him, he goes forward, and he is not influenced by the lack of support from his brethren. But the brethren must realize that much depends on them. In the end they harm themselves if they don’t give the minister their whole-hearted support. They don’t harm the cause of God, because the cause of God goes on. They harm themselves.

And when it says “their usefulness is seriously crippled” maybe we should read it in another context. When men through their selfishness withhold their rightful support, the hands are weakened. In what sense? The hand is weakened to serve them, and the usefulness of the minister for them is weakened.

That doesn’t mean that their usefulness altogether is weakened. They may serve others very well, but they cannot serve the unwilling because their heart is closed. It’s like a channel that doesn’t work because nothing goes through it.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 340-341:

The displeasure of God is kindled against those who claim to be His followers, yet allow consecrated workers to suffer for the necessities of life while engaged in active ministry. These selfish ones will be called to render an account, not only for the misuse of their Lord’s money, but for the depression and heartache which their course has brought upon His faithful servants.

Those who are called to the work of the ministry, and at the call of duty give up all to engage in God’s service, should receive for their self-sacrificing efforts wages sufficient to support themselves and their families.

In the various departments of secular labor, mental and physical, faithful workmen can earn good wages. Is not the work of disseminating truth, and leading souls to Christ, of more importance than any ordinary business? And are not those who faithfully engage in this work justly entitled to ample remuneration? By our estimate of the relative value of labor for moral and for physical good, we show our appreciation of the heavenly in contrast with the earthly.

If our heart does not burn when we have an opportunity to give something for the cause, and we really don’t want to give it, then whatever we give is an abomination in the sight of God. He doesn’t want that gift because it’s not a sweet smelling savor.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 341:

That there may be funds in the treasury for the support of the ministry, and to meet the calls for assistance in missionary en-

terprises, it is necessary that the people of God give cheerfully and liberally. A solemn responsibility rests upon ministers to keep before the churches the needs of the cause of God and to educate them to be liberal. When this is neglected, and the churches fail to give for the necessities of others, not only does the work of the Lord suffer, but the blessing that should come to believers is withheld.

Even the very poor should bring their offerings to God.

And then is given the example of the widow who gave everything that she had. It's not that we can say,

"Because we are poor we cannot give."

No, we can give. And the poor widow gave her heart and that is what mattered. When we give our heart to the cause of God that is what God wants to see. The Corinthians gave themselves first.

2 Corinthians 8

⁵ And this they did, not as we hoped, but *first gave their own selves to the Lord*, and unto us by the will of God.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 342:

The apostle Paul in his ministry among the churches was untiring in his efforts to inspire in the hearts of the new converts a desire to do large things [to be liberal] for the cause of God.

Paul constantly encouraged the believers to be liberal. He was very daring in this, but he knew it was for their sake.

2 Corinthians 9

⁶ He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Where the spirit of narrow-mindedness is, it needs to be rebuked so as to heal the people who have that spirit.

14. Encouragement to Liberty

WE WANT to continue now to see how Paul encouraged the believers in the spirit of liberty and what value that had for the churches, and what value the same spirit has today.

Paul's Encouragement of the Corinthians

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 342:

The apostle Paul in his ministry among the churches was untiring in his efforts to inspire in the hearts of the new converts a desire to do large things for the cause of God.

He was untiring. It reminds me a little of his letter to the *Philippians*. What did he say there?

Philippians 4

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

“And I am not tired of telling you the same thing over and over again. Again, I say rejoice.”

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 342:

Often he exhorted them to the exercise of liberty. In speaking to the elders of Ephesus of his former labors among them, he said,

Acts 20

³⁵ I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

2 Corinthians 9

⁶ He which sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

⁷ Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver.

Nearly all the Macedonian believers were poor in this world's goods, but their hearts were overflowing with love for God and His truth, and they gladly gave for the support of the gospel. When general collections were taken up in the Gentile churches for the relief of the Jewish believers, the liberty of the converts

in Macedonia was held up as an example to other churches. Writing to the Corinthian believers, the apostle called their attention to...

2 Corinthians 8

¹ ...the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

² How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

³ For to their power,...yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;

⁴ Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

The willingness to sacrifice on the part of the Macedonian believers came as a result of wholehearted consecration. Moved by the Spirit of God, they...

⁵ ...first gave their own selves to the Lord,

—then they were willing to give freely of their means for the support of the gospel. It was not necessary to urge them to give; rather, they rejoiced in the privilege of denying themselves even of necessary things in order to supply the needs of others. When the apostle would have restrained them, they importuned him to accept their offering. In their simplicity and integrity, and in their love for the brethren, they gladly denied self, and thus abounded in the fruit of benevolence.

That was the spirit of liberality. They were only too happy to give. They could not be stopped and when Paul said,

“Don’t give too much”

—if he had tried to caution them by saying something like this, they would say,

“Oh please let us give this.”

I have had this experience too when going into poor countries. I sometimes saw people in great need, and I sometimes wanted to help them, but do you know what they sometimes answered? They said,

“Andreas, we want to have nothing except the gospel. We don’t want your money.”

I was really impressed by this because I saw very clearly that the people who were so needy were not looking for anything but the spiritual truth, and that was the spirit that is described here: to give. That is the liberality of heaven. To take for ourselves is the spirit of Satan.

A Transport of Joy

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 344:

When Paul sent Titus to Corinth to strengthen the believers there, he instructed him to build up that church in the grace of giving, and in a personal letter to the believers he also added his own appeal.

2 Corinthians 8

⁷ As you abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that you abound in this grace also.

¹¹ Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which you have.

¹² For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not.

2 Corinthians 9

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

¹¹ Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causes through us thanksgiving to God.

Unselfish liberality threw the early church into a transport of joy.

Liberality and joy are two things that go together. Where there is the spirit of liberality there is always the spirit of joy; whereas when there is a spirit of sadness there is a lack of the spirit of liberality. There can be sadness when others are lost, obviously, but I am referring to the general attitude of a person. When a person is

always depressed, always begrudging, then the spirit of liberality is lacking, which is the Holy Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 344:

Unselfish liberality threw the early church into a transport of joy...

Well, did they have an easier life than we have? Certainly not. They had to work as hard for their bread as we do, maybe even harder. In fact it was most certainly harder for them. And more than this; they were persecuted during that time. They had a lot of opposition from Satan. The serpent was really angry with the woman at that time; really angry. And yet their liberality threw them into a transport of joy.

Philippians 4

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

Or to put it in the words of our study,

“Be liberal. I am not tired of telling you, to be liberal.”

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 344:

Unselfish liberality threw the early church into a transport of joy for the believers knew that their efforts were helping to send the gospel message to those in darkness. Their benevolence testified that they had not received the grace of God in vain. What could produce such liberality but the sanctification of the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the cause of that liberality.

In the eyes of believers and unbelievers it was a miracle of grace.

What was the miracle? That spirit of liberality. As I said before, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul had to testify to them that they did not have that spirit of liberality, but in the second letter he could testify,

“You have it now.”

What a difference! What a miracle had taken place! And now we come to an important principle which we always need to remember:

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 344-345:

Spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality.

What does this mean? It means that when we refuse to let the spirit of liberality fill our hearts, then our spiritual prosperity will decrease. Similarly, when our spiritual status is not very high, then our liberality is not very great either.

Spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality. The more liberal a church is, the more spiritually strong she is. The less liberal she is, the less spiritually strong she is. And also, the more there are spiritual problems in a church, the less liberality there is in the church. The more she has problems, the more she will depend on the letter of the law instead of the spirit of the law.

The followers of Christ should rejoice in the privilege of revealing in their lives the beneficence of their Redeemer. As they give to the Lord they have the assurance that their treasure is going before them to the heavenly courts.

Would men make their property secure? Let them place it in the hands that bear the marks of the crucifixion. Would they enjoy their substance? Let them use it to bless the needy and suffering. Would they increase their possessions? Let them heed the divine injunction,

Proverbs 3

⁹ Honor the Lord with your substance, and with the first fruits of all your increase:

¹⁰ So shall your barns be filled with plenty, and your presses shall burst out with new wine.

So joyfulness and liberality go together. But there is another element which goes with liberality, and that is thankfulness. Thankfulness, liberality, joy: these three things are inseparable.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 345:

Let them seek to retain their possessions for selfish purposes, and it will be to their eternal loss. But let their treasure be given to God, and from that moment it bears His inscription. It is sealed with His immutability.

God declares,

Isaiah 32

²⁰ Blessed are you that sow beside all waters.

A continual imparting of God's gifts wherever the cause of God or the needs of humanity demand our aid, does not tend to poverty.

Proverbs 11

²⁴ There is that scatters, and yet increases; and there is that withholds more than is meet, but it tends to poverty.

The sower multiplies his seed by casting it away. So it is with those who are faithful in distributing God's gifts. By imparting they increase their blessings.

Luke 6

³⁸ Give, and it shall be given unto you,

—God has promised;

³⁸ ...good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.

I earnestly pray that liberality will be our experience so that the stream of healing can come.

Removing the Hindrances

You know, there are many promises in the Word. I am thinking of the statement:

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 420:

God does not bid us strive to shine, but He says,

Matthew 5

¹⁶ Let your light shine.

Remove the hindrances and the light will shine.

Remove the hindrances; and the hindrances are selfishness. That must be removed.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 116:

If human beings would open the windows of the soul heavenward, in appreciation of the divine gifts, a flood of healing virtue would pour in [for the world].

These are the promises. When we have spiritual liberality, when we really accept the Holy Spirit, then this selfishness will go. What are the hindrances? We need to understand them a little better, and for that reason we now want to look at some of the causes. Again I want to remind us of the text:

Luke 7

⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

There is a spirit of liberality with him whose sins are forgiven. Why is it that we cannot be liberal? Why is it that we have so much fear of giving things away, that we hold on and cling to them?

Just a simple object lesson comes to my mind. I once trained as a telephone technician. As a telephone technician you sometimes have to climb up a wooden pole. Have you ever seen these people climb up these poles? They have metal clips on special shoes so that they can easily climb them.

When I tried to do this for the first time, or the first few times, I was never very successful. I was very insecure and several times I slipped down, one meter, two meters, three meters. I just couldn't do it as easily as the others could. And do you know why? I found out after a while the reason was because I was fearful. I always clung to the pole with my hands and my whole body, and then the metal clips on my shoes couldn't grip the wood, and my hands couldn't hold my weight, so I slipped.

I hurt myself quite a bit in this way, until I realized I had to tell myself,

“Let yourself just hang in the belt and climb up like this.”

It's easy; very easy. You know, what you want to hold, you lose, but when you let go, then it holds. My problem was that I tried to be in control. And because I tried to be in control I couldn't be, so I lost control. I had to give the control to the clips that were on my feet, by letting myself totally hang in the belt. I had to trust these metal clips to hold me. I really had to depend on them, and that was what gave me safety in the end.

So that is our problem. We want to manage ourselves. We want to be in control ourselves. Let us read a statement here. It talks about the Holy Spirit giving the spirit of liberality.

The Desire of Ages, p. 672:

Christ has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to His church, and the promise belongs to us as much as to the first disciples. But like every other promise, it is given on conditions. There are many who believe and profess to claim the Lord's promise; they talk about Christ and about the Holy Spirit, yet receive no benefit. They do not surrender the soul to be guided and controlled by the divine agencies.

We cannot use the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to use us. Through the Spirit God works in His people...

Philippians 2

¹³ ...to will and to do of His good pleasure.

But many will not submit to this. They want to manage themselves. This is why they do not receive the heavenly gift. Only to those who wait humbly upon God, who watch for His guidance and grace, is the Spirit given. The power of God awaits their demand and reception. This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train. It is given according to the riches of the grace of Christ, and He is ready to supply every soul according to the capacity to receive.

Why do many not receive the Holy Spirit? What is the reason given here? In five words:

They want to manage themselves.

That is the reason, and in other words, they want to keep control. It reminds me of my pole climbing experience again. I want

to control myself. I don't trust these clips to hold me, or that they really have a strong enough grip. And as long as I feel like this I can't have that spirit of liberality; it's impossible.

They want to manage themselves.

They want to exercise their own control over themselves. This is the narrow-mindedness which really hinders us from having the spirit of liberality. Trying to be in control over ourselves, or to have our own control over ourselves—that is the narrow-mindedness of the Pharisees.

Letting God Take Control

Jesus was standing before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, and they charged Him with having healed a person on the Sabbath. You know this story about the man at the pool of Bethesda where they asked,

“Why did you do this on the Sabbath?”

And He justified himself by saying that He did the works of God. He showed that this is the real meaning of the Sabbath. Here liberality and narrow-mindedness met together and they argued with each other.

The Desire of Ages, p. 208:

Jesus repelled the charge of blasphemy. My authority, He said, for doing the work of which you accuse me, is that I am the Son of God, one with Him in nature, in will, and in purpose. In all His works of creation and providence, I co-operate with God.

John 5

¹⁹ The Son can do nothing of himself, but what He sees the Father do.

The priests and rabbis were taking the Son of God to task for the very work He had been sent into the world to do. By their sins they had separated themselves from God, and in their pride were moving independently of Him. They felt sufficient in themselves for all things, and realized no need of a higher wisdom to direct their acts.

Can you see that this is the spirit of trying to be in control?

“I want to be in control of myself. I won’t give myself into another’s hands.”

When people work a lot and pray but little, when they argue a lot and have little communication with God, then they are in that situation. They are trying to be in control. They are trying to get the upper hand in arguments, they are trying to get the upper hand in work or whatever, but they never get what they are after, because they can’t. We cannot really control ourselves. There will always be a feeling of dissatisfaction in the end.

The Desire of Ages, p. 208:

But the Son of God was surrendered to the Father’s will...

That is liberality. What a contrast! He was surrendered to the Father’s will.

...and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for himself. He accepted God’s plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans.

We are then told that we shouldn’t think that it was only Christ who could be like this:

So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.

At first glance that might not seem like liberality:

“Now I can’t do what I want anymore. I have to do everything that the Father wants me to do.”

We tend to think that this seems narrow-minded, and that we should have some freedom to do what we would like to do.

“I have a right now for some holidays. I deserve some free time, don’t I? After so much service for the Lord, this is my time now.”

If we think in these terms then we show by this that we are still trying to take control of ourselves. But there is no question that the human instrument needs some rest. Jesus himself said,

Mark 6

³¹ Come...and rest awhile.

There is no question about that. But we don't need to control when this happens. It will be given to us. We don't need to desperately cut ourselves off from service because we think we have given too much. We only have to follow in the steps of our heavenly Father, that our life may simply be an outworking of His will. And then we shall be liberal in many respects. We will have the spirit of liberality, which we see very clearly in Jesus.

People today who do not keep the Sabbath think that Jesus had a spirit of liberalism and rejected the Sabbath, which He did not. In fact quite the opposite was the case—He showed what the true meaning of the Sabbath is, and the true meaning of the Sabbath was to heal.

Many questions come up from time to time, such as,

“What are we allowed to do on the Sabbath and what are we not allowed to do?”

The question comes up,

“Is it okay to work as a nurse on the Sabbath or not? Is it okay to work in a hospital on the Sabbath or not?”

These questions really cannot be answered unless we receive the true spirit of liberality. When we have this we will know what the purpose of the Sabbath is and we will do God's work on the Sabbath.

Simply to earn money on the Sabbath, even if it's as a nurse or doctor, is not God's work. But we really should not refuse to heal a person whom God puts in our way on that day. We will do it with the whole heart, with a good conscience and a happy heart.

Then at the end of the day we can say we are so happy about this Sabbath because it was a very good Sabbath. And when we can serve the needy under God's instruction on the Sabbath day, then we will be very glad. It will be a very good Sabbath. That is the spirit of liberality; whereas the narrow-minded would always doubt whether a person should be healed on a Sabbath, especially if they are judgmental.

These are the principles that we can see in contrast with those of Jesus. Why do we want to control ourselves? Why is it? Let's read another statement about this:

The Desire of Ages, p. 330:

In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage.

That was joy, wasn't it? "Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice."

But many who profess to be His followers have an anxious, troubled heart, because they are afraid to trust themselves with God. They do not make a complete surrender to Him; for they shrink from the consequences that such a surrender may involve. Unless they do make this surrender, they cannot find peace.

Why don't we have peace? What is the reason we don't have this liberality in our hearts? Because we don't make a full surrender. That is the reason. What was the reason I didn't feel secure on that pole? Why did I constantly fear I would slip down? Because I did not make a full surrender to the clips on my feet. I had to hold myself and that didn't work.

They do not make a complete surrender to Him; for they shrink from the consequences that such a surrender may involve. Unless they do make this surrender, they cannot find peace.

So the spirit of narrow-mindedness is really the spirit of self-righteousness. It is when I am righteous in myself. This morning in the Sabbath school lesson we read a Bible text and maybe we should read it again together because this text tells us the secret of this rejoicing in the Lord. It says here:

Ecclesiastes 3

¹ To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:

² A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;

³ A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;

⁴ A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;

⁵ A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;

⁷ A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;

⁸ A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.

And then in verse 11 it says,

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time.

That reminds me of Paul saying,

Philippians 4

¹¹ Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

¹² I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

So whatever would happen to Paul, he would look upon it as an opportunity. He would see the hand of God in it for the advancement of the cause and for his best interest too. That is not always

easy. We know that John the Baptist did not understand why he was in prison. But once he understood, he accepted it. Likewise with Paul, at the end of his life when he said:

“I would like to do both. I would like to die, and I would like to live for your sake. I would like to do both.”¹¹

And he would be happy with either. He didn’t say,

“I would like to do neither.”

Some people have several options and they like none of the options. They don’t want to live and they don’t want to die. They are the most miserable men in the world. But Paul was happy with either, because he saw that God had made a right time for everything. And he fully accepted everything from the hand of God. He had fully surrendered himself to God.

The Easy Yoke of Christ

And Jesus invites us to surrender too. He actually tells us that we should come and rest with Him.

Matthew 11

²⁸ Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Again, who is in control here? Who is controlling? The one who wears the yoke or the one who gives the yoke? Obviously the one who gives the yoke is in control. But Jesus says,

³⁰ My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

It’s not a heavy thing which presses you down. It is something which helps you serve. It helps you to be happy, to be joyful, to rejoice in the Lord, and to be liberal. A person who wears that yoke is a person who is liberal, even though it may not look like

¹¹ *Philippians* 1:22-24.

it. Normally we think a person who wears a yoke is not very liberal because he doesn't move much. No, he is liberal because he rejoices in service.

Matthew 11

³⁰ My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

On the other hand, there is a yoke of the world. And whoever bears this yoke is very narrow-minded. Or the yoke of selfishness—that is the yoke that really makes us narrow-minded. But the yoke of Christ is easy, and is light, and gives us true liberality of soul and heart. This lightness and this easiness I want to study with you in a minute.

But first let me read another statement that makes it clear how Christ himself was really free and why He was free. You know in the wilderness when there was nothing to eat and nothing to drink for forty days, how Jesus depended fully on the word of God. Satan came to Him after forty days and said,

“Here, come and eat something.”

Jesus said,

“I shall live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Jesus was so fully surrendered to the Father's will that He had no problem with living for even forty days without food. This freedom is the freedom that we also need—the freedom to obey God, which is the true freedom. But now, why is this yoke light, why is this burden easy? Because when we take Christ's yoke He helps us to carry it. We have access to His comfort in all situations. He says,

Matthew 5

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

When He leads us through it, He leads us through it with the purpose of giving us this comfort, which we wouldn't get otherwise, in order to give us a deeper experience.

But there is also another reason why the yoke is easy and the burden is light. It is because it's not forced upon us. It's a yoke that we wear gladly, happily, because we rejoice in it.

The Desire of Ages, p. 668:

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.

Can you see how this burden is light? Normally when we carry a yoke, we don't like carrying it. It's a restriction. We think it's a limitation of our possibilities. But when...

...we consent, He will so identify himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.

Can you now see why the yoke is light and easy? Because we want to carry it with our whole heart. It's the very thing that we want.

The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.

So this is the lightness of that yoke. We are reminded of the statement we read at the beginning of the week from the same book:

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed.

There is one force that is employed and that is the restraint of love. It's the "woe" that a person himself can feel. It's the urging of the Holy Spirit. But that is no external force. It's something that is in agreement and harmony with the individual.

The Desire of Ages, p. 466:

Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself.

God is liberal. That is the spirit of liberality on the side of God. He would never force this yoke upon us, never. It's the act of the soul itself to surrender to Christ. Delighting in it is the highest sense of freedom we can have.

True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.

The Hindrance of Fear

After seeing how light and easy the yoke is, and how happily we can bear it, with what joy and with what a liberal spirit, we will now look at what is hindering us. Why are we not so joyful all the time? What is the reason?

Let's look at the object lesson that I used at the beginning again: hanging on the telephone pole. Why could I not hang joyfully up there while I did the repair work? Usually it was a joy for everyone to climb up there. Everybody liked to do this, but I didn't like it so much. Then after I knew how to do it, I liked it too. It was nice to be up there and to repair the wires.

Why didn't I like it at the start? What was the reason? Fear. Fear is what hinders us from really accepting the yoke of Christ. It's the fear of coming into bondage; it's a fear of slipping down, a fear of losing something. Fear—that is our greatest enemy.

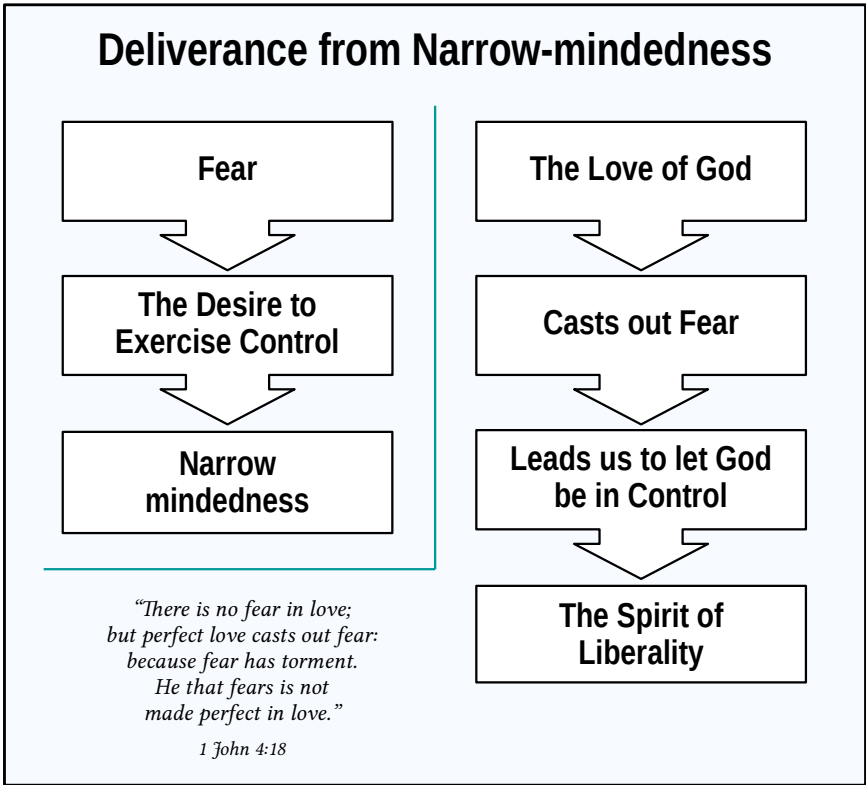
When we look at deliverance from narrow-mindedness, we see that fear is the cause. And this fear causes us to desire to exercise control. We want to control ourselves. We do not want to let go. And in turn this naturally leads to narrow-mindedness. So fear leads to the desire to exercise control and to attempt to exercise control over ourselves. And this in turn leads to being narrow-minded.

What solution does the word of God provide for that problem?

1 John 4

¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.

¹⁹ But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.



So what casts out this terrible fear? It is the love of God. This initiates another chain of events. The love of God casts out fear. What comes next? When fear is cast out then we don't try to control ourselves anymore, but we allow God to be in control, completely. And when God is in control, then we have the spirit of liberality.

So everything starts with observing the love of God, which casts out fear; to see His tremendous care for us; to see that He has no shortage of love towards us. We love Him because He first loved us. We behold His tremendous love and that leads us to surrender fully to Him, to trust ourselves fully to Him, to let Him completely control our lives like Jesus did. Then we will have the same spirit of liberality that He had.

There is nothing that we need to defend for ourselves anymore. It is now God who works in and through us. That this is our experience is really my prayer.

Capo 3

Refrain

Perfect Love

Perfect love casts out fear, fear brings on - ly torment;

Perfect love casts out fear,

Fine

Perfect love makes us bold in the day of judg - ment.

Perfect love makes us bold

1. Tri - als, loss - es, pains and death: these are fears that steal mens breath.
 2. Fear holds men as slaves with - in, slaves to fash - ion, slaves to sin;
 3. Love makes bold a - gainst all foes, per - se - cu - tions, threats and blows;

But with Christ all fears re - move, swept a - way by the pow'r of love.
 True re - li - gion breaks these bands, puts our lives in - to saf - er Hands.
 Hosts of de - mons fill the land - fear - less still, on God's word we stand.

D.C. al Fine

Text: 1 John 4:17,18 (Refrain)

15. Resting in God

WE CLOSED our last chapter with the thought that the spirit of narrow-mindedness comes about because, or is in harmony with, trying to manage ourselves—trying to be in control of ourselves instead of giving ourselves over to Christ and being managed by the Holy Spirit.

The Burden of Human Barriers Against Sin

If we try to hold fast to these things in our own power, we will very soon realize that we are slipping, that we cannot control ourselves. This is the main point we studied yesterday, and for this reason Jesus invites us,

Matthew 11

²⁸ Come unto me you who are heavy laden and burdened, and find rest.

Rest can be found only when we give over the control to God. One thing that prevents us from giving this control over to God is fear, and for that reason we have learned that fear must be driven out by love—by beholding the love of God, and by drinking it in.

The desire to control ourselves will lead to the attempt to control others, which is the next step. We become very narrow-minded when we do this. Let's read from *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, the first paragraph of the chapter, "Not Judging but Doing."

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 123:

The effort to earn salvation by one's own works inevitably leads one to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin.

When it says here "inevitably" it means that people do not necessarily intend to do this. It means that it's automatic—you can't prevent it—it will unavoidably lead to it. When? When we try to earn salvation by our own works, when we try to control our salvation, to make sure that we are saved. If we try to do this, then it will...

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 123:

...inevitably lead men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin.

Well, to have a barrier against sin is not so bad, is it? The problem here lies in the words “human exactions.” Let’s read on a little to see what the problem with these human exactions is.

For seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own, to force themselves to obey.

If I want to obey, I don’t mind how obedience comes about in the end, do I? Whether it’s by force, or whether it’s by pushing it a bit, the main thing is that I obey. But do you think it’s right if we are forced to obey? Some people wish that they were pushed all the time. They are quite happy if they get a push:

“Come on, go forward!”

They actually want this. They say,

“I need it!”

But they are also dependent on it. They can’t be independent, to stand alone. They always need somebody to push them. So there is something not right here. Furthermore, it talks about “human” regulations and rules, or the rules and regulations of their own. So, these things are not given by God. “Of their own” means they try to control it themselves. They try to have a controlled environment that brings them to salvation. What is the result of this?

All this turns the mind away from God to self.

It gives us a very narrow view. When the mind is turned away from God to self, the view becomes very narrow-minded. Then you see only self, and that’s the problem, why so many struggle with their sins and never gain the victory, because the view is very narrow-minded, it’s revolving around self all the time.

His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men. A system of human inventions, with its multitudi-

nous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard.

The Burden of Judging Others

Now comes a new element into this train of thought, and that is “all” others. Not only will I force myself to obey, now I begin to look upon others and see that they do not obey these human exactions; they are not within that controlled environment which I created for myself for my own salvation.

“They are not within that, so how can they be saved? If I cannot be saved outside of this controlled environment, how can they be saved outside of this controlled environment? How is this possible? It is not. It cannot be. According to my opinion now, they cannot be saved.”

So I begin to be very concerned for them, to say the least. And since I myself want to be forced to obey, I see the need for others as well; they need to be forced too, they need to get an external impulse from time to time to make them obedient.

The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies.

What does “petty” mean? Small, exactly; spies about small things. Petty spies are those who see every little mistake that somebody makes, and immediately see something big in it. Or they hear a rumor, and immediately believe there is a problem here. Or in their imagination something arises because of jealousy and immediately it’s a big problem. That is a petty spy, and a self-centered judge. Can you see that this is narrow-mindedness?

The Burden of Controlling Others

The desire to control myself or manage myself, which in the end I will fail to do, automatically leads to the next step, which is the desire to manage others. Regardless of my profession or confession. I may say,

“Well, I have nothing to do with the others.”

But there is always this desire there to control the other person as well. Let us use an example to illustrate this. You remember Mary and Martha? We studied Mary as an example of a person with liberality. How once Jesus came to their home, and Mary sat at His feet and Martha served at the table. And Mary meant well and Martha meant well. Martha really wanted to show her guest everything that she could—she wanted to feed Him, she wanted to wash His clothes, everything. She was really concerned for Him. And then she saw Mary sitting at His feet, and what was her feeling? She must come under my control.

“Jesus, help me to get her under my control, because she is doing something that is not right.”

Martha, in this instance, did not have this devoted spirit, and so she made up for it with her activity. Her activity was her saviour. And this she felt must be the saviour of Mary as well. And for that reason she had this problem—she wanted to get Mary under her control. When Mary was at the feast of Simon, and she broke the alabaster box, what did Judas think?

“She shouldn’t have done it, she should have listened to me.”

And Simon?

“She shouldn’t have done it, she is a sinner.”

So both Judas and Simon tried to control Mary. Can you see this? They themselves couldn’t control themselves. Judas was a thief and Simon was a sinner. They had no control, they had to force themselves to obey—both of them. And for this reason, they tried to exercise this control over Mary.

In the last few days we have studied the elders in Jerusalem; we have seen how they desired to control Paul. And why? Because they couldn’t control themselves. They feared persecution. That was their problem.

Peter explains this matter very well when he says that when we suffer, we shall suffer as Christians—that means as those who live out the life of Christ. There is a natural enmity between the world and the Christian. And whenever we exercise the character of Christ, whenever we reveal the character of Christ, it will make the evil one angry. And he will use his instruments to persecute the people of God.

But there is a danger also that we are persecuted for other reasons, and one of the reasons is described by Peter:

1 Peter 4

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer,...

When he says a murderer he does not mean just a physical murderer, because Jesus said that even if you say to your brother, “You fool!” then you are guilty already of judgment. So we must see the deeper meaning in this text. Actual physical murder is just the final step in a program of attempted control of another.

¹⁵ ...a thief, an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters.

What is a busybody? A meddler. It’s somebody who meddles in other people’s affairs; somebody who wants to control other people’s affairs. It is true that in the world you find many problems, but there are some people who constantly try to correct everything around them. They cannot leave it and wait for God to do something. They have to take it in hand. And those are the people who meddle with others. They have to jump immediately in. Now Peter says,

“As such you shall not suffer. Be careful of this.”

So Peter warns us here of this danger of trying to be in control. The more we try to be in control, the more difficulties we will create for ourselves. When the message is preached, and we hear it, and we apply it to others instead of ourselves, then we have this problem of trying to be in control. That is where we can see it.

Think about it. When we hear the message, to whom do we apply it? Some people say,

“If he would only listen to this truth...”

—or,

“If he would only apply it to himself...”

...when they hear it, instead of asking,

“Where does it apply in my life?”

If that is the case then there is this spirit of desiring to be in control. The problem of desiring to be in control is a very deep one, and we should not underestimate the danger of it. Because when we try to be in control of others, then Satan takes advantage of it—then he wants to use us. At that moment, we ourselves become weak, and open ourselves to Satan.

I want to read a statement from *The Ministry of Healing* with you that explains this mechanism.

The Ministry of Healing, p. 243:

The theory of mind controlling mind was originated by Satan, to introduce himself as the chief worker, to put human philosophy where divine philosophy should be. Of all the errors that are finding acceptance among professedly Christian people, none is a more dangerous deception, none more certain to separate man from God than is this.

Innocent though it may appear, if exercised upon patients, it will tend to their destruction, not to their restoration. It opens a door through which Satan will enter to take possession [Of whom? Of the one who is controlled?] both of the mind that is given up to be controlled by another, and of the mind that controls.

And I think first the mind that wants to control is used by Satan, and then the mind that is given up to the control of the person whom Satan controls, will be controlled as well. So, the desire to exercise control over others brings us into very great danger. It

brings us into the danger that Satan can use this mechanism to deceive both the controller and the controlled. Jesus says the same thing.

Matthew 20

²⁵ But Jesus called them to himself and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

So, in these words Jesus spoke a very deep truth. So, who are the Gentiles? What is a Gentile? A Gentile is somebody who is not connected with God; somebody who is controlled by the evil one, somebody who is on the side of the enemy. You can use the word Gentile in a double sense. You can use it in the sense that they are those who are not Jews. It's not used in this sense here. It's used in the sense of "enemies of God." In that sense the word Gentile is used here. So,

"You know that the rulers of the enemies of God lord it over them."

Those who rule over the Gentiles are Gentiles themselves. They are controlled by the evil one as much as the Gentiles themselves. Christians would never rule over Gentiles. Neither will Gentiles ever rule over Christians. A person who is a true Christian will never allow himself to be controlled by a Gentile. He cannot, because he is controlled by God. God will be his controlling agent. The Holy Spirit is controlling him—he has submitted to Him. And therefore there is no room, no place, for any other control anymore.

That is the truth which makes us free. On the other hand, when we allow ourselves to be controlled, and desire to control, then we become very narrow-minded. Liberality will go out of the heart. I would like to read a statement which describes this effort of managing others:

1888 Materials, p. 1528:

The plans to obtain control of human minds and abilities are a strange fire which is an offense to God. And who are those who dare engage in this work? Men who have revealed that they do not have self control, that they are not divested of selfishness. Unless these men shall themselves turn unto the Lord, they will die in their own sins.

These people desire to exercise control, but they don't have control over themselves—that's the problem.

There is scarcely a vestige of genuine truth remaining in them. The effort to manage others, which is made by those who cannot manage themselves, is one of the greatest fallacies that could exist.

Let those who love to rule begin the work where it should have begun years ago. Let them rule themselves and show that they are in subordination to God's rule, that they have been converted at heart. Then they will at least not make their fellow men groan under the galling yoke of their restrictive policy. Then there will be fewer prayers sent up to heaven in anguish of heart because of their selfish oppression.

This is found in the *1888 Materials*. That means it is connected with the resistance of the message of 1888. At that time the resistance was so strong that people wanted to control their environment. They couldn't allow the new thoughts to arise. They wanted to keep these matters under control, and Sister White said,

“This is a bad thing. First manage yourselves. That is the first step.”

The Burden of Trying to Control God

But then, when we try to be in control in this way, it doesn't stop even with trying to control others. It goes one step further. And the ultimate desire to control is wanting to control God himself. You may think that is too blasphemous, that nobody would really dare to do such a thing. But think about this carefully—first of all

think about Jesus. What did His brothers and even His mother try to do about Jesus who was God? Didn't they try to control Him? They meant well; there is no question about that. They didn't want to hurt Him. But for His own sake they wanted to control Him a little.

The Desire of Ages, p. 321:

The sons of Joseph were far from being in sympathy with Jesus in his work. The reports that reached them in regard to his life and labors filled them with astonishment and dismay. They heard that he devoted entire nights to prayer. That through the day he was thronged by great companies of people, and did not give himself time so much as to eat. His friends felt that he was wearing himself out by his incessant labor. They were unable to account for his attitude towards the Pharisees, and there were some who feared that his reason was becoming unsettled.

So they had great fear. And what does fear always lead to? It always leads to the desire to control.

His brothers heard of this, and also of the charge brought by the Pharisees that he cast out devils through the power of Satan. They felt keenly the reproach that came upon them through their relation to Jesus. They knew what a tumult his words and works created, and were not only alarmed at his bold statements, but indignant at his denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. They decided that he must be persuaded or constrained to cease his manner of labor, and they induced Mary to unite with them, thinking that through his love for her they might prevail upon him to be more prudent.

So can you see here the desire to control? Which words betray the brothers' character? Sister White describes it very clearly:

"He must be persuaded or constrained."

He must be forced. Can you remember how we read something similar:

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 123:

For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey.

And when they force themselves, what do they try to do with others? They try to force them too, they try to constrain them. So we will read now how this actually happened.

The Desire of Ages, p. 326:

The enmity kindled in the human heart against the gospel was keenly felt by the Son of God, and it was most painful to Him in His home; for His own heart was full of kindness and love, and He appreciated tender regard in the family relation. His brothers desired that He should concede to their ideas, when such a course would have been utterly out of harmony with His divine mission. They looked upon Him as in need of their counsel. They judged Him from their human point of view, and thought that if He would speak only such things as would be acceptable to the scribes and Pharisees, He would avoid the disagreeable controversy that His words aroused. They thought that He was beside himself in claiming divine authority, and in placing himself before the rabbis as a reprover of their sins.

His brothers desired that He should concede to their ideas. But what would such a course have meant for Jesus? It would have meant to be out of harmony with His divine mission. The brothers of Jesus wanted to control Him, which plainly shows the desire that man has to control. Likewise the disciples, for they wanted to control Jesus, too. When He was feeding the five thousand they wanted to make Him king. And when they saw that He was not so enthusiastic about this they thought,

“It’s only His humility. We must push Him a little.”

And then the whole multitude wanted to force Him to become king. At that moment, they wanted to control what took place. Think about yourself for a moment. It may be difficult to place yourself in that position. You may think,

“I would not have tried to control Jesus.”

But when you find a word in the Bible that is difficult to understand, have you never felt a sort of anger in your heart that it is not expressed more clearly? Think about this. Haven't you said,

"If I had written the Bible I would have written this more clearly so that everybody could understand."

But do you know how far out such an attitude is? Do you realize that in feeling like this we are criticizing the Word of God? Or when God does something or other, and we want to say,

"It should be done in a different way."

Maybe you know the following story. It's an object lesson for us here. Once there was a farmer who argued with God one day about the weather, because he always thought the weather was never right for the harvest. So then God told him,

"Okay, you control the weather this year."

And the farmer said,

"Oh, that's good! I will show You how it should be done."

And then he made the weather just ideal, according to the way he thought it should be. He put the rain there; he put the sunshine there; he put the temperature there: everything in its right time, in its right season. And he was very pleased when he saw how the grain was growing up and it was growing very well, and then the harvest time came.

But when he went out with his sickle to bring in the harvest, he realized that all the ears were empty. There was no grain in them. What had happened? And then God told him,

"You forgot the wind my brother. You thought of everything except the wind."

This little story illustrates how when we try to be in control we are absolutely unable to do so. That's a simple story, but you know how real life is much more complex. The great controversy

between good and evil is very complex. So when I think of how we have it in our hearts to charge God,

“Why don’t You do this? Why do You do that?”

Then I am ashamed of my rebellion. I am absolutely ashamed, because I often wondered,

“Why doesn’t God do this now? Why does He do that?”

And such thinking is totally out of place. It shows that we would even control God if we could. That is what it reveals. It shows the desire to be in control, and this makes us narrow-minded, very narrow-minded. Mary was different, wasn’t she? She was absolutely satisfied with everything that God gave her, and more than satisfied. She was grateful for it, and Jesus testified of her:

Luke 7

⁴⁷ Because she is forgiven much, she loves much.

The Signs of Liberality

What are the signs of the spirit of liberality, of the spirit of selflessness? I have written down five points—maybe you can agree with them.

1. The first point I see is thankfulness and appreciation. These two, I think, are the same thing. When we really appreciate the love of God and are thankful for it, this is a sign of liberality. The mouth will constantly have thanks and praise on its lips when the heart is liberal. The mouth will always speak it out.
2. The next sign of true liberality is love—the love of God in the heart.
3. The third sign of liberality is submitting to God’s control. This is when I really submit to God’s control instead of trying to be in control myself, either of myself or of others, and of God’s dealing with me.

4. And the next sign of liberality is giving—when I have the spirit of giving, liberal giving.
5. And finally, not least important but almost more important, a sign of liberality is joy. The Corinthian believers were transported into joy when they were able to give. It was a joy for them. And when Paul tried to stop them, they pleaded with him, “Please, don’t take away this joy from us. We want this joy of giving.”

So these are at least some of the signs that a spirit is liberal—that liberality is living in him.

How Narrow-Mindedness Develops

We now want to look at the process of how this narrow-mindedness comes about, by considering the original sin of Lucifer, to see how he became narrow-minded. This will really serve to give us another warning to place safeguards against narrow-mindedness right from the beginning.

The Desire of Ages, p. 464:

John 1

⁹ That was the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world.

The world has had its great teachers, men of giant intellect and wonderful research, men whose utterances have stimulated thought, and opened to view vast fields of knowledge; and these men have been honored as guides and benefactors of their race. But there is One who stands higher than they.

John 1

¹² As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.

¹⁸ No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

We can trace the line of the world’s great teachers as far back as human records extend; but the Light was before them. As the moon and the stars of the solar system shine by the reflected light of the sun, so, as far as their teaching is true, do the world’s great thinkers reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Every

gem of thought, every flash of the intellect, is from the Light of the world.

In these days we hear much about “higher education.” The true “higher education” is that imparted by Him...

Colossians 2

³ ...in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

John 1

⁴ In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.

John 8

¹² He that follows me, [said Jesus,] shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

That turns all human pride into dust. How much do humans want to praise themselves and want to have the praise of others because they have invented this or that? We should move away from this narrow-mindedness. We should realize that these things belong to God, not us. He is the real Source. It is true that we are stewards of His goods. It is also worthwhile at times to mention the stewards of His goods in order to understand how God is working and also how He will continue to work.

For example, if people are led to the church of God, then they are led to His stewards as the channel of light. But the stewards are not the light: God is the light. He was before them, and the truth we have is not our truth. It's the truth of God. And it's not what we give to men; it's what God gives to men, through us.

There must be a marked contrast between the pride of men which we find in the scientific world today, and the church of God. There must be a marked contrast between these two. And this contrast is between narrow-mindedness and liberality. When we realize that God is the Source of all light, then there is another thing that we realize, and this is that we can never have all the light; never. We will never claim to have all the light. Quite the opposite. We will always say,

“Whatever we preach needs to be improved. And it needs to be improved by further revelations.”

We never will settle down and say,

“Now we are satisfied. Now we have it. Now we can put a box around it and protect it.”

If we try to do this we will lose it. That is the spirit of control. Paul expressed this very well:

1 Corinthians 13

¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

What is Paul saying here? “We see in a mirror.” Do you know what a mirror was like back then? Today a mirror is very clear. You can see almost everything in a mirror. But you know, back there they didn’t have the kind of mirrors we have today. When you look at your reflection on a car for example, then you see yourself a little, but usually in a distorted way, don’t you? That’s similar to the kind of mirrors they had back then, but they were often not even as good as that. They might have had a polished metal plate; but nothing more than that. That was their kind of mirror. So you saw very little in those days when you looked in a mirror. And that is the context here.

¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly...

We don’t see everything. We see things very dimly.

¹² ...but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

And this was said by Paul, who had the privilege of preaching the mystery of God to the Gentiles, for which he bowed on his knees before God and worshiped Him, with gratitude for the revelation that God gave unto him for the Gentiles. But he still said,

“I have but a very limited knowledge. Look, God is the Source; from Him all light comes. He is to be acknowledged, as what I give you is just a faint reflection of that.”

The planets all reflect the sun, which we can see. So, likewise, the stars reflect the true Son, Jesus. And so we reflect Jesus. The reformers understood this. I would like to turn to *The Great Controversy* and read a statement that Robinson made as he said farewell to the pilgrim fathers who went to America.

The Great Controversy, p. 292:

“Remember your church covenant, in which you have agreed to walk in all the ways of the Lord, made or to be made known unto you. Remember your promise and covenant with God and with one another, to receive whatever light and truth shall be made known to you from His written word; but withal, take heed, I beseech you, what you receive for truth, and compare it and weigh it with other scriptures of truth before you accept it; for it is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick antichristian darkness, and that full perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.”--Martyn, vol. 5, pp. 70-71.

What did Robinson recognize? He recognized that he was only a faint reflection of the true Son. And he said,

“Don’t take me as a source.”

He directed everyone back to the original Source, to God. He said,

“Listen to Him. Now we part asunder. Now don’t take my writings as the Lutherans take the writings of Luther, or the Calvinists take the writings of Calvin. They turn them into their bible. Don’t you do this. Go to God and get more light from Him.”

And this is the attitude that is the spirit of liberality.

16. Who Is the Source?

A PERSON with the spirit of liberality will always be conscious that he is not the source of anything, but that he has received everything from the Source that is from God, or from Christ. God was there before him.

Think of all the inventions, all the wise things that man has ever said in this world—everything that is the truth only reflects Christ, nothing more. Let us now turn to a statement by Paul who really emphasizes this point:

1 Corinthians 4

⁷ For who makes you differ from another and what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

That is the question: What do you have that you did not receive? First of all what makes you different from another? What makes you special? Are you a special person? Do you have anything that others do not have? Everything that you have, you first of all received. If you received it, why do you boast as if you have not received it?

That is the problem—people boast as if they are the inventors, and for that reason they try to control their rights, through copyright, patent, etc. They must be asked for permission first. This is the spirit of Lucifer, which we shall now look at.

The Fall of Lucifer

Lucifer in heaven was also a receiver—he received everything from God through Jesus Christ. And there was a time when he thought that he ought not to receive anymore because he was different from the other angels. He felt that he deserved more honor.

But how did he go so far from the truth? What was his problem? Why did he boast as though he had not received all the gifts

that he had? Why did he boast as though he had not received all the messages that he had to give? How did it come to this point?

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35:

Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation. The Scripture says,

Ezekiel 28

¹⁷ Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness...

Isaiah 14

¹³ You have said in your heart,...I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...

¹⁴ ...I will be like the Most High.

Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself.

Can you see here, “Why do you boast as though you have not received it?” That is exactly the spirit of Lucifer.

Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself.

He was now the originator of these things, he was now the copyright holder of the truth which he was preaching, instead of giving that glory to God.

Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself. And coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone.

He became narrow-minded now because everything was concentrated on self—my achievements, my inventions, my productions, what I have, what I have given. And as soon as a person begins to think in these lines he becomes narrow-minded. He actually blocks the further flow of light which God wants to give him. The perfect harmony of heaven was broken now.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35-36:

Lucifer's disposition to serve himself instead of his Creator aroused a feeling of apprehension when observed by those who considered that the glory of God should be supreme.

What we see here is the spirit of independence—to serve himself rather than to serve the cause. This spirit of independence in Lucifer is the archetype of every other spirit of independence. “My own” is most important—self is most important.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 36:

The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him...

That is when the King summoned the heavenly hosts before Him and explained the position of Jesus, and even Lucifer acknowledged this at first. And then we read:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 37:

Leaving his place in the immediate presence...

Even though Lucifer acknowledged the supremacy of Jesus at first, after awhile again his old feeling came up.

Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels.

A person who does not have this spirit of independence, a person who has liberality of spirit, tries to avail himself of every ray of light that he can get. But a person who is narrow-minded, who has the spirit of independence, wants to go his own way, and he cannot stand being exposed to light all the time.

Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. He worked with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealed his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God. He began to insinuate doubts concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that though laws might be necessary for the inhabitants of the worlds, angels, being more

exalted, needed no such restraint, for their own wisdom was a sufficient guide.

What we see here is the spirit of liberalism, don't we? The spirit of narrow-mindedness and the spirit of liberalism somehow go together. Very often a person fluctuates between these two extremes, even though they contradict each other. But they don't really, because both are based on selfishness. You can imagine Lucifer very well, can't you? How he was stating,

"Well we are free, we don't need such restrictions as laws."

But then he would make himself laws and regulations that every angel was to obey strictly. Can you see Lucifer doing that? We are not told all the details here, but this is how we know that this spirit develops.

The communists, for example, wanted to liberate all people, didn't they? But no regime was more oppressive than the communistic regime—why? Because although they want to be free from all restrictions, suppose somebody is against their laws? Then he must be put down. This is always the case, and this had its beginnings with Lucifer.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 37:

They were not beings that could bring dishonor to God; all their thoughts were holy; it was no more possible for them than for God himself to err. The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor. If this prince of angels could but attain to his true, exalted position, great good would accrue to the entire host of heaven; for it was his object to secure freedom for all. But now even the liberty which they had hitherto enjoyed was at an end; for an absolute Ruler had been appointed them, and to His authority all must pay homage. Such were the subtle deceptions that through the wiles of Lucifer were fast obtaining in the heavenly courts.

Why did Lucifer leave his place in the immediate presence of the Father?

1. His spirit was constantly rebuked by the light of God. Darkness cannot stay where light is.
2. He now felt that he was no longer in need of receiving anything, as he was an originator himself. He was a god himself in his own eyes. He now thought that he had no need to receive anything anymore.
3. To make sure that others understood that he was not a receiver anymore but an originator now. In order to prove the fact that he had an original mind he had to separate from God.

And that is what an independent spirit will always do. To prove that he has an original mind he will emphasize the fact that he has not received this message through the minister, but that he has invented it himself. That is always the case.

Why did he leave His presence? To prove to the universe that the messages were coming from him now—that the wise sayings were coming from him. But did they really come from him? If they were wise sayings, they certainly didn't because he still had received them and he still had knowledge from God. God was above him, and Christ was above him. If ever he said something true, even though mixed with error, the truth was from God, through Christ.

But he tried to deny this now by putting himself in the position where he was the inventor of novel and interesting things and new ideas. What was the novel and new idea? That they didn't need a law? That Christ was restrictive? It was a summary of a lot of negatives, wasn't it?

There was nothing really interesting in his message, it was more or less an attack on the government of God—that was the new thing that he had to bring. And to those angels who were loyal to God it was clear that he had no new light, that all that he had was criticism of the old. Or if he said something true, then it was not new because God was the Originator of it. This is the way Lucifer tried to steal the honor that really belonged to God.

The next step is that Lucifer openly claimed this honor for himself. At first he did this by insinuations—by indirect remarks—but the time came when he declared it openly.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 40:

Rejecting with disdain the arguments and entreaties of the loyal angels, he denounced them as deluded slaves. The preference shown to Christ he declared an act of injustice both to himself, and to the entire heavenly host, and announced that he would no longer submit to this invasion of his rights and theirs. He would never again acknowledge the supremacy of Christ. He had determined to claim the honor which should have been given him, and take command of all who would become his followers.

He now claimed honor for himself that did not belong to him. And the next point is that Lucifer promoted himself as the guardian of this honor for everybody else too. He said,

“I am here to protect your honor which God wants to take away from you because He says you’re only receivers, you’re dependent receivers. But no, you are not! You have an intelligent mind, you deserve honor, you deserve praise! And here I will give it to you, and I am the guarantee that you will get it. For that reason I will erect a righteous and just government.”

That’s how he would put it. Isn’t it interesting how the truth can be so perverted? So Lucifer became the spiritual father of all those who leave the path of spiritual liberality, and go on the path of narrow-mindedness. Lucifer really fostered the spirit of independence, and the spirit of independence is the spirit of narrow-mindedness.

The next point is that Lucifer was covetous. And the spirit of covetousness is the spirit of narrow-mindedness. So his view was of himself only, and this view was very limited. Let us review the steps. First of all he had a secret desire for honor. This was the first step—it was already there at that point of time when God tried to help him, when Jesus tried to help him. It expressed itself

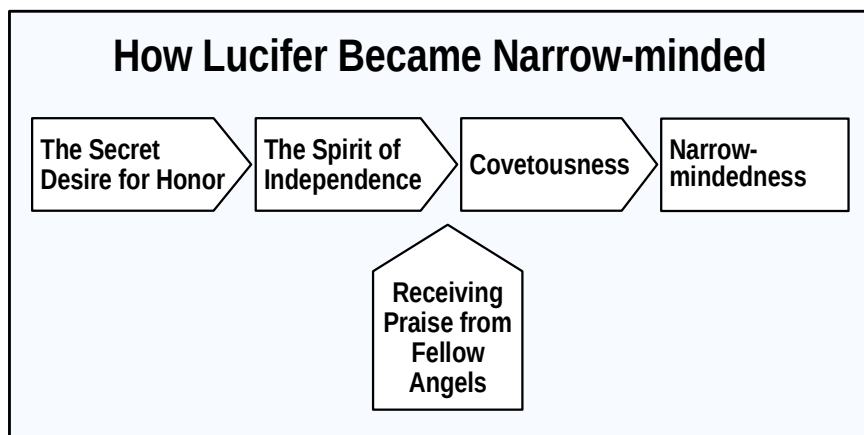
in little things. But then he left the immediate presence of his Father, and that meant he began to have the spirit of independence.

“Look, now I don’t need to be a receiver anymore, I don’t need to listen to Christ anymore. I can show you myself, so you yourself can also see everything.”

And next he became very covetous of Christ because God would not give him his rights that he supposed were his, and this all led to a very narrow view of the Kingdom as it really is.

But there is another element which really strengthened Lucifer in his wrong way. He actually received support; he received the praise of his fellow angels. If he had never received any support from any of the angels I wonder how his course would have gone? I don’t know, but this was a real problem.

That is why the other angels who are loyal to him are not guiltless. They played their role. Satan was the originator of evil, there is no question about that, but their giving support to Lucifer was an added problem.



Even though we may not be the originators of any problems that exist in the church, when we give support to those who are, if we give them praise in any form directly or indirectly, if we excuse them and by this say, “Well they have a point,” then we are

also guilty of their peril. For this reason, the Word of God gives a very clear warning.

No Praise Due to Man

And the warning that the word of God gives us is that we should not give praise to a person because that will make him narrow-minded. I would not say this is always so, because there are some people who can handle this, but there are very few people who can safely handle praise when it is given to them.

And for that reason praise is a great danger when we give it to people, especially if they are on the wrong track. Nothing can be more pleasing to a person who is on the wrong track than getting praise. But it is the worst thing he can get.

Patriarch and Prophets, p. 717:

The Bible has little to say in praise of men. Little space is given to recounting the virtues of even the best men who have ever lived. This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God...

Can you remember in what other context this is written? Of the childhood of Christ. Very little is said of His childhood in the Bible:

Youth's Instructor, February 1, 1873:

There is an important lesson for parents and children to learn in the silence of the Scriptures in reference to the childhood and youth of Christ. He was our example in all things. In the little notice given of his childhood and youthful life is an example for parents as well as children, that the more quiet and unnoticed the period of childhood and youth is passed, and the more natural and free from artificial excitement, the more safe will it be for the children, and the more favorable for the formation of a character of purity, natural simplicity, and true moral worth.

What is the purpose and lesson there? The more quietly and unobtrusively a child grows up, the more free from artificial excitement and attention of all the others that are around, the better it is for its development. So all the excitement and attention that

people give to pregnancy, and also to birth, and to the little children is not so good for their education.

We must realize this, because it's giving a sort of praise, praise first to the mother and then to the child, or to the child through the mother, and that's not good for its development. Very few people can handle such a thing. Let's read this again:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 717:

This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ. Since they owe all to God the glory of whatever they are or do belongs to Him alone; they are but instruments in His hands.

More than this—as all the lessons of Bible history teach—it is a perilous thing to praise or exalt men; for if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall. Man is contending with foes who are stronger than he.

Ephesians 6 [margin]

¹² We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places.

It is impossible for us in our own strength to maintain the conflict; and whatever diverts the mind from God, whatever leads to self-exaltation or to self-dependence, is surely preparing the way for our overthrow. The tenor of the Bible is to inculcate distrust of human power and to encourage trust in divine power.

A very clear statement! Think about this. There is a problem on both sides—there is a problem on the side of the one who gives praise, and there's also a problem on the side of the one who receives praise. The problem on the side of the one who receives praise is that he wants to receive praise. Lucifer was quite pleased to receive praise and he worked for it so that he would receive praise. And that is a desire that most humans have in their hearts.

Let's ask ourselves very honestly is there some desire to receive praise from man? If that is there, then consciously work against

it, make sure that you don't get praise. On the other hand you can also overcome it by looking to God as the source of all your wisdom and everything else.

When people come to me and say this was a good sermon, then I consciously turn them to Christ who is the Source of this. I am grateful that the Holy Spirit spoke to their heart and that they acknowledge this; every minister would be. But I must make sure that they understand that it's not because of my speech, it's not because of my talents, it's because of the Holy Spirit, it's because of God who gave the light to me. I'm nothing but the channel—I'm not the inventor of the truth.

That must be very, very clear to all of us. So the Bible has nothing much to say in praise of man, but it shows their sins very clearly.

The Spirit of Babylon

I now want to show you the contrast of the spirit that we find in the Bible to the spirit of Babylon. The spirit of Babylon was found in ancient Babylon, first of all, and I want to turn together with you to *Daniel 2* for a moment to see what kind of spirit the Babylonians have.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and nobody could explain this to him and he got very upset. When his wise men could not explain the dream or tell him the dream he wanted to kill them all, Daniel included, even though Daniel was never asked. Then when Daniel heard about it he asked for some time to pray, and then he went to God and prayed, and God gave him an answer. God explained the dream to Daniel, He told him what the dream was about, and also what the explanation of the dream was.

Daniel 2

²⁴ Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation.

Arioch was a servant who now brought this matter before the King.

Daniel 2

²⁵ Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, I have found a man...

In other words,

“Look at me, I have found a man.”

Was Arioch the one who had found the man Daniel? No. Daniel had gone to Arioch. If he had the spirit of Christ, if he had the spirit of liberality, he would have said,

“God has given us a man.”

But it is the narrow-minded way that claims everything to itself,

“I have found something, I have found a new message, I have found a new idea, I have found something.”

²⁵ I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation.

Okay, copyright. “I found him.” So Daniel was copyrighted now by Arioch wasn’t he? Well the King now received Daniel, but he did not quite acknowledge that.

²⁶ The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?

The king was implying,

“Are you the source now?”

Can you see again we have the same spirit here?

“Are you the one?”

Daniel now shows that he clearly understood, and he also clearly testified to this that he was not the Source of that truth, of that light.

Daniel 2

²⁷ Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king.

So all the intellect combined in the world could not find this out. And Daniel said,

“It’s impossible and I cannot either.”

²⁸ But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these...

Now Daniel explains the dream. Isn’t that wonderful? He gives a very clear testimony as to the Source of that revelation.

When you look at Paul he made the same point. He said,

Ephesians 3

³ *By revelation* he made known unto me the mystery.

He never says,

“I found this out,”

—or,

“I thought this out,”

—or,

“I invented this,”

—or,

“I am the originator of this.”

He always points to God,

Galatians 1

¹¹ But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I'm not sure if Nebuchadnezzar fully understood these points, even though he listened. Even though it was a testimony to him of the Source, he still thought as all Babylonians thought, in human terms. You know we can often tell the people in the world,

“This truth that we have is not ours it is from God. It is given to us from God for you.”

They still say,

“But what is your teaching? What do you believe? What do you think?”

It's hard for them to understand that truth is by revelation, that God is the Source. And so it was hard for Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 2

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him.

That is something, an offering and incense *to Daniel!* John, who received the revelation of Jesus Christ to pass on to the churches, was so amazed by the revelations that he wanted to fall down before the angel and worship him. What did the angel say?

“Don't do this, don't do this. Honor belongs to God alone. I'm not God.”

Revelation 19

¹⁰ And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See you do it not: I am your fellowservant, and of your brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Revelation 22

⁸ And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things.

⁹ Then he said unto me, See you do it not: for I am your fellowservant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

But the Babylonians didn't understand that. We are not told here what Daniel exactly did when they presented offerings and incense to him. I could imagine that Daniel would say,

"No, the honor doesn't belong to me."

He would repeat that again, even though we are not told so here. But even though it was a wrong act, as such, the Bible doesn't say much about it. It simply assumes Nebuchadnezzar was still a heathen, so he could hardly know better, could he? He was so blinded, so captive to that human honor, human praise, it was the best he could do at that moment.

Daniel 2

⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel, and said, Truly your God is the God of gods...

What should he have said? "Our God." It was not just Daniel's God was it? It was Nebuchadnezzar's God too.

⁴⁷ ...a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.

How do you feel when people come to us and say, "Your God"? It's strange isn't it? We have a book that is entitled, *Behold Your God*. We could have entitled it "Behold Our God." That would have been a wrong title, wouldn't it? *Behold Your God*—we have to preach this to the people,

"It's your God, He loves you."

Daniel 2

⁴⁸ Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon.

⁴⁹ Daniel petitioned the king and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

It seems a little as though Daniel would go along with what Nebuchadnezzar did here, and I think that is due to the fact that Daniel would have the patience of a true Christian believer. He would not immediately criticize everything that the world does. He would not meddle in the affairs of others, but would patiently wait for a further opportunity to reveal the Source of light. That is all that Nebuchadnezzar could bear for the moment. There came other opportunities when he would see more of the fact that God is the real Source of light.

Let us draw a distinction here. And the difference we must make is between respect and praise. It's easy to confuse the two things. It is important to respect other people even though we don't praise them. Some people think when we cannot give praise to people then we cannot respect them either. But the Bible is very clear about the fact that we should also respect those who in the world have honor. So Daniel respected Darius. He said to him,

Daniel 6

²¹ O king, live forever.

He could say this with a free heart, which is a liberal spirit, or liberality. *Romans 13* talks about our relationship to the government or to the state, or to the authorities that are, that they bear not the sword in vain.

Romans 13

⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

When it says here, “honor to whom honor,” it does not mean that we are to praise, but we are to honor them to whom honor is due. That means if we would meet today a person of high standing in government, if he would come to us, we would we honor him. That doesn’t mean that we would flatter him or give him praise, it simply means that we would honor him, because honor is due to him, because God has placed him in this position.

Is this clear, the difference between honor and praise? In a sense you can say it is also giving praise, but it’s not the kind of praise which is bad—it’s praise that is due to be given.

The Snare of Self-Sufficiency

Let us now come to some statements which talk about giving praise to man and how bad this is.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 1035:

Elijah humbled himself until he was in a condition where he would not take the glory to himself. This is the condition upon which the Lord hears prayer, for then we shall give the praise to Him. The custom of offering praise to men is one that results in great evil. One praises another, and thus men are led to feel that glory and honor belong to them. When you exalt man, you lay a snare for his soul, and do just as Satan would have you. You should praise God with all your heart, soul, might, mind, and strength; for God alone is worthy to be glorified.

Humble yourself before Him. The custom of offering praise to man results in great evil. It’s a custom, isn’t it? When somebody makes a nice piece of art, it’s a custom to give him praise. If somebody gives a speech, it’s a custom to give applause, to give him praise. Just imagine if you would applaud everything you agree with in the sermon. It would be terrible. But in some churches this is customary. The pastor preaches, and then the people applaud what he says. That results in great evil. Why? Be-

cause the praise belongs to God! That is the path that Lucifer trod, and the path which we must not go on at all.

When we come into the world they tend to give praise because it is their custom. So what shall we do about that? How can we best handle that? The best way we can handle it, is as Daniel handled it. He said,

“All the might of man cannot do this, but there is a God in heaven who can do that. And I have just a little glimpse of an insight into what He has revealed. There’s much more that He can give.”

“And what makes me differ from another? Why do I behave as though I have not received it and boast as though I have not received it? I cannot. I am not different from others.”

If that is my attitude and in an appropriate way I can express this, then I can help those people who are accustomed to giving praise to man. There is much more that we can read now in this context.

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 161:

We need to shun everything that would encourage pride and self-sufficiency; therefore we should beware of giving or receiving flattery or praise. It is Satan’s work to flatter. He deals in flattery as well as in accusing and condemnation. Thus he seeks to work the ruin of the soul. Those who give praise to men are used by Satan as his agents.

And Satan used Nebuchadnezzar to flatter Daniel, did you know? It was via an agent. Nebuchadnezzar was an agent of Satan really to bring about the downfall of Daniel. But he was not so successful in this. It is Satan’s work to flatter—he often does this.

Let the workers for Christ direct every word of praise away from themselves. Let self be put out of sight. Christ alone is to be exalted.

Revelation 1

⁵ Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

—let every eye be directed, and praise from every heart ascend.

John 3

³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.

That must be our continuous message, in every word, and every act, and in everything that we do. Christ never gave praise to men for their clever inventions, never, in His sermons, or whatever He said. Can you find one sermon where He gave praise to men for their clever inventions? Never!

When you look at the Bible itself, which is the revelation of the thought of God, do you find that the writers of the Bible claimed any honor to themselves, any copyright or anything? Nothing! In fact in many of the books of the Bible you do not even know who the author is. We know them through many other circumstances and through the Spirit of Prophecy, but without that we wouldn't know.

For example, who was the writer of *Hebrews*? Paul? How do you know that? Show me one part in the book of *Hebrews* that shows Paul as the author. There's nothing, absolutely nothing. That is why theologians have a big discussion about who the author of *Hebrews* is. But Sister White tells us it was Paul. So we know this by God's revelation, but not by Paul's revelation.

Genesis—who wrote *Genesis*? Moses? Where do we read about this in *Genesis*?

“This is the book of Moses; this is the idea of Moses about the origin of mankind.”

Is this how *Genesis* starts? Certainly not, it starts,

Genesis 1

¹ In the beginning God created heaven and earth.

And so it goes through the whole book. *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*, are all the same. You can go on and name book after book and you do not find in any book that an author receives any special praise. When you come to *Job*, who wrote *Job*? Moses? How do you know? You don't know it from the book of *Job*. You could say,

"An interesting story written by Moses."

But there is nothing like this. The *Psalms*—in some of the *Psalms* we have the author given, but some we don't. Some of them we know from where they come, and the reasons why the authors are given is because they want to say,

"This is my testimony, I want to praise the Lord, I want to stand to this praise myself."

It is NOT:

"Now listen to the good Psalm I can write."

The names are only given merely because they wanted to give their testimonies or an authentic testimony. In other cases we don't know who the psalm writer is, because it doesn't say.

When we come to the New Testament, who wrote *Matthew*? Don't know? Yes we do—Matthew wrote it. But how do you know? It's church tradition first of all, and the Spirit of Prophecy confirms this. But it does not say in the book,

"Matthew wrote this here."

In the *Gospel of John* he even studiously avoids mentioning himself by name. He just says,

John 21

²⁰ ...the disciple whom Jesus loved.

John 13

²³ Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

John 19

²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and *the disciple standing by, whom He loved...*

John 20

² Then she ran, and came to Simon Peter, and to *the other disciple, whom Jesus loved...*

John 21

⁷ Therefore *that disciple whom Jesus loved* said unto Peter, It is the Lord.

That's how he identifies himself in that book, which means:

"I'm not important. The Gospel is important, but I'm not important at all. My only value is that Jesus loved me."

The letters of Paul bear his name, but there is a good reason for that. There were already several spurious epistles going around during this time, and there were also spurious gospels after the first gospels were written. Many claimed that they had knowledge of Christ, but this was not real knowledge.

There was a Thomas gospel, and there were false letters of James, and of other apostles. These were not from the apostles, but they were written using their names. People took the honor which did not belong to them. Because of this Paul wanted to say,

"Look, this letter is from me,"

—not to get any honor for it, but only to make clear the difference between those who claim authorship and those that are the true letters.

But the most interesting is the book of *Revelation*. The book of *Revelation* was one of the last books written. Not the very last,—the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd letters of *John* were written afterwards,—but it was almost the last book. It was written a century after Christ was born. Let us see now how *Revelation* is entitled. A question:

"Is this a revelation of John?"

What does it say in your Bible? And is the heading in your Bible, *The Revelation of St. John*? That is the wrong title, it's a title that John would never intend to have been given, a title that he would be very sad for you to read. The true title is rather different:

Revelation 1

¹ The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show His servants things which must shortly take place.

² And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

First of all it doesn't matter to whom God gave that. The main thing is that it is *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. The reason why John is mentioned here as a servant, as a channel, is again to distinguish between this revelation and other revelations that other people would also write in the name of John, which would not be from God but of their own invention. So this is *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. And I really wish that through this we give our praise and honor to God, and that is the truest spirit of liberality.

Let us, in closing, draw another distinction. This difference is between wanting to receive praise from man or receiving praise from man, and looking forward to the fruit of our labor. Christ never tried to look to man—He never tried to exalt himself—He was always looking for the fruit of His labor, to the reward. He did this not for His own praise, but because He loved us so much. And for that reason it is His reward when we accept the gospel.

Discerning the Truth

When we listen to a person today, who claims that he has a message, how can we understand whether he is seeking his own exultation or whether he is really bringing the message of God? How do we know the difference? How can we discern that spirit of narrow-mindedness, of self-exultation? How do we discern the spirit of liberality on the other hand? Jesus said:

John 7

¹⁷ If anyone wants to do the will of God, he will know if my teaching is from God or not.

When we ourselves have the spirit of liberality, then we can appreciate the spirit of liberality, because like appreciates like. If we are narrow-minded, we can never appreciate this spirit of liberality—that's impossible. God can give everything to us and we can't appreciate it—we can't see it—because we ourselves do not have that mind.

The Desire of Ages, p. 455:

John 7 [RV]

¹⁶ My teaching is not mine, [said Jesus,] but His that sent me.

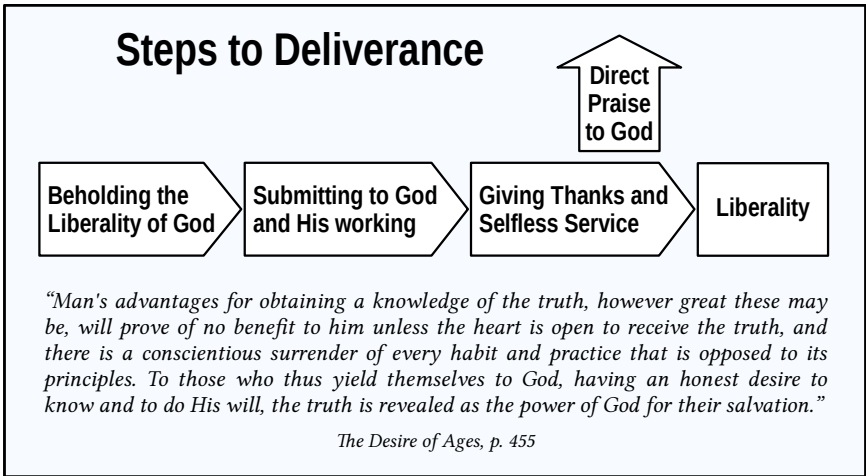
¹⁷ If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself.

The question of these cavilers Jesus met, not by answering the cavil, but by opening up truth vital to the salvation of the soul. The perception and appreciation of truth, He said, depends less upon the mind than upon the heart. Truth must be received into the soul; it claims the homage of the will. If truth could be submitted to the reason alone, pride would be no hindrance in the way of its reception. But it is to be received through the work of grace in the heart; and its reception depends upon the renunciation of every sin that the Spirit of God reveals.

Man's advantages for obtaining a knowledge of the truth, however great these may be, will prove of no benefit to him unless the heart is open to receive the truth, and there is a conscientious surrender of every habit and practice that is opposed to its principles. To those who thus yield themselves to God, having an honest desire to know and to do His will, the truth is revealed as the power of God for their salvation. These will be able to distinguish between him who speaks for God, and him who speaks merely from himself.

The Pharisees had not put their will on the side of God's will. They were not seeking to know the truth, but to find some excuse for evading it; Christ showed that this was why they did not understand His teaching.

This really shows us that everybody who wants to do the will of God, earnestly and sincerely, will see this spirit of liberality in others and will appreciate it. He will submit to God and His working, he will give thanks in selfless service, and direct any praise to God.



I really pray that we will all be a liberal church, as it was said of the Corinthian church, that they were a liberal church. Not only as far as tithes and offerings are concerned, but much more in our whole conduct, so that people in the world realize this, see the selfless service of His people, and are attracted to the character of God.

17. Communion Service

WELCOME this Sabbath evening to our Communion service. We have studied together the whole week about the subject of liberality, and in contrast to this, narrow-mindedness. We have seen that narrow-mindedness is a slavery from which we need to be delivered, and that we need to take this matter very seriously.

We see the same truth revealed in the foot washing. We turn now to *John* 13, and we want to meditate on this chapter for a moment. We also then want to meditate about the institution of the Lord's supper itself.

John 13

¹ Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

² And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him,

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God,

⁴ Rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded himself.

⁵ After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

The Hypocrisy of Judas

In these few verses we have a witness of the liberality of God. What comes to our notice, first of all, is the statement that the devil had...

...already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him.

In fact, he had already betrayed him and received money for his betrayal. He had not yet kissed Him and said,

“This is the One whom you shall take,”

—but this was only a matter of time. The determination was clear—He would be betrayed. Judas had received the money for it already. The deal was made. This he had determined immediately after the feast at Simon’s house where Mary had washed the feet of Jesus. Judas was so upset that Jesus defended Mary and rebuked him, even though it was indirectly, that he went and betrayed Jesus.

His narrow-mindedness now led him to all kinds of strange actions. The most strange action was that he would betray Jesus and thereby even think that he would honor Him, or exalt Him. That is, he wanted to force Him to make himself king. He had this in his heart and Jesus knew it very well. He knew it, but the other disciples didn’t know it. If Jesus at that moment would have exposed Judas, or if He had asked him to please leave the room and leave them alone, no one would have understood it. If Judas at that moment had hung himself, everyone would have thought,

“Poor guy! Why was he so desperate? There was something wrong. Maybe it was Jesus’ fault. Maybe He did not really encourage him enough.”

Everyone would have thought that. Jesus had the patience to wait until Judas would betray himself. Even though He exposed him in a way, the disciples didn’t fully understand it. At the Lord’s supper He said,

“One of you will betray me.”

Then everyone asked,

“Is it I?”

And finally, Judas asked too in order to not be embarrassed, and Christ said,

“Yes.”

But the other disciples seemed not to understand fully. When Jesus said,

John 13

²⁷ What you do, do quickly,

—they thought that Jesus had given him a task—to do something for the disciples. So blind they were! They did not understand the true character of Judas. It was problematic that the church had so little discernment. On the other hand, Jesus had the patience to wait, wait, wait, wait, until Judas would expose himself. And this speaks to me of liberality of mind and heart.

Everybody knows that Jesus had the liberality even to wash the feet of Judas and give him the Communion service. But some people interpret this as liberalism rather than liberality. Liberalism would mean that it doesn't matter what character you have—it doesn't matter what sins are in your life—you can always partake of the Lord's supper. That is not so. Open sin excludes from the Lord's supper. If there is an open disagreement with fellow believers, a person should be honest and say,

“No. This is not the time for the Lord's supper.”

There is a duty to make peace with everyone before we partake. That is the reason for the foot washing. It's not just a form. We really must make sure that there is no enmity, no bad feelings, no envy, between us and our brethren. And if we know that brethren have a problem, we must settle these things. That's absolutely our duty. It's not only between us and the brethren, it's also between us and God. We really must make sure that there is nothing between us and God.

There are situations where it will not be possible to remove all the hindrances. Let's say, there's someone who is not accessible at the moment, some person with whom there are some difficulties, and we had no opportunity for a whole year to speak with him because maybe he lives in a remote area, or has passed away and we could not settle a matter with him. In this case, we have to de-

pend on the mercy of God. But wherever we can, it is our duty to remove the hindrances.

So, Jesus did not here condone that you can partake of the Lord's supper regardless of what sin you have. That is not the message. The message is that Jesus could wait patiently until the church had the discernment to discern the betrayer, that He had this liberality to be friendly even to His greatest enemies.

When you know that someone is betraying you, what is your attitude towards him? I had the experience of people actually wanting to harm the work. They wanted to harm me, but they wanted to harm the work more. I had this experience, and I know how difficult it is to put away feelings of bitterness and still be kind and friendly to them, shake their hands, and treat them as though they were the best of brothers.

We need the spirit of liberality for that. It is not easy. Satan suggests thoughts like,

"They are not worthy. You shouldn't do this."

This is especially when these people have not exposed themselves. But you know their sin. Sister White was in this situation often. She said,

"I know the character of these people. God has shown it to me. I know that they are hypocrites."

But at that time she could do nothing, because it was not her role to expose them. So she simply had to accept them for the moment until they exposed themselves. To be able to do this is liberality. But if I think that I can partake of the Lord's supper, regardless of how wicked I am, that is liberalism. Can you see the difference? So, Jesus practiced liberality, but He did not condone liberalism by this.

There is a clear condition for partaking in the Lord's supper. For that reason we also have the foot-washing service. But, when it comes to being tolerant towards others—especially those whose

sins are not exposed, or when we are not sure whether they have repented or not—it is better to err on the side of mercy. That means to let them partake. In cases of real doubt, you can also try to clarify the matter beforehand.

Jesus couldn't clarify this with Judas. He would have exploded if He had even touched upon such a subject with him. You know this. Judas was not teachable at all. And if He had done this in front of the other disciples, they would have been terribly disappointed with Jesus. They wouldn't have understood it. So, for their sake, Jesus had to endure that situation.

John 13

⁴ He rose up from supper...and girded himself.

Judas and the Other Disciples

I want to make a brief comparison between Judas and the other disciples. Judas was very narrow-minded, no question about it. But the other disciples were also under the influence of Judas, and they were also rather narrow-minded. Do you remember how at Simon's feast they sided with Judas when he said, "Why is this waste?" They thought like him. Do you remember that they also wanted to force Him to become king? It was not only Judas.

There was a difference between Judas and the other disciples. Judas was really reserved, you could say, towards the cause of Christ. He was not really sure if Jesus was the Christ. He clearly had his doubts about this. And he kept himself aloof from closer contact, or a closer influence of Jesus. He wanted to keep his independence. And he was also a betrayer. He was obviously placing his own interests above those of Christ and His cause. Still, he was a follower of Christ, and still he had an opportunity to change his attitude.

The other disciples were not in a situation that led to their being betrayers. Their situation was not that they kept themselves aloof, rather, they wanted to come nearer to Jesus. But they had other problems. Their problems were not less serious than that of

Judas, had Jesus not corrected them. We tend to think that the other disciples were good and Judas was bad. But we must realize that the other disciples were in a very similar situation and in the same danger of falling into the same peril as Judas.

Peter's Attempt to Control

John 13

⁴ Jesus rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded himself.

⁵ After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

⁶ Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, Lord, are You washing my feet?

Why this question?

1. He was embarrassed. He felt that one of the disciples should have done this job.
2. He could not bear for Jesus, who was king, to do the job of a servant. That was not his idea of the kingdom.
3. He felt that Jesus should not wash his feet, but rather that he should wash them himself.

When you think about this, what does it mean? It means he wanted to manage himself. He wanted to keep the control in his own hands. When Jesus came and washed his feet, someone else had control. He couldn't bear that. To accept that service meant to give away his control. This he clearly did not want to do. Jesus warned him. He said,

John 13

⁷ What I am doing, you don't understand. But you will know after this.

Or, in other words:

"Don't try to control. Don't try to understand everything now. Don't keep the control in your hands. Let it go. Let me control

your life. Let me tell your future. Let it happen right now, even if you don't understand."

In certain situations, we all tend to be impatient at times. We want an answer, and we want it now. And it's very difficult for us to endure uncertainty for a while. Job knew enough from God that He could trust God in the things he didn't know. We must trust that God has the stars in His hand, that in due time these things will be answered. It's a matter of trusting God. Trust Him—that He will answer difficult problems in due time.

Peter was in the same situation. He did not understand what was going on. For him, Jesus was not the Messiah if He did that job. For him, that was like Him confessing,

"I am not the Messiah."

His idea of a Messiah was that He would never do this. For that reason Jesus said,

"Let it be now. Don't try to think it out. Don't try to have it under control right now. Let it happen. Leave it. Let go and trust me. Trust God. You will understand thereafter."

But Peter could not. He had this strong tendency to control things.

John 13

⁸ Peter said to Him, You shall never wash my feet!

He was very determined. What a statement,

⁸ You shall never wash my feet!

"I need to keep the control in my hands. You know, Jesus, it's quite nice that You want to do this. But I must first be convinced myself, and then I will go forward. You don't expect me to trust You blindly, do You? You shall never wash my feet. I must first understand, and then I will act."

John 13

⁸ Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.

That was as determined as Peter's statement.

"If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me, if you don't let go now."

That seems to be quite a small matter, doesn't it? To wash the feet or not wash the feet. Isn't it a bit much to disfellowship someone because you can't wash their feet?

"You make a little thing very large here, Jesus, don't You?"

Do you feel this way? But in this little thing there is a lot of meaning. Not to wash the feet of Peter, to allow him to have his way here, meant that he would have gone the same way as Judas. Can you now understand that Peter was not too far away from Judas? It is true that he didn't go the same way. He didn't have the same attitude. He was not a hypocrite in that sense. But, he would have gone the same way had Jesus not insisted on that little point.

⁸ If I don't wash your feet, you have no part with me.

Jesus was speaking more than of just this symbolic act of washing the feet. But this symbolic act would have shown everything.

This reminds me of some other experiences we've had in the past. Sometimes you can boil down the rebellion of a person to one little act in the end. One time there was a person who was leaning very much towards the world. And there was one little thing he cherished very much—a little piece of jewelry. We asked him,

"Give us this as a token. Give it to us, and we will sell it."

But he couldn't. We had to tell him,

"If you don't give us this thing, you won't be a disciple."

For a moment I thought, can we really do this? Can we really make it dependent on that thing? After all, it was not such a precious thing. But we realized that if he cannot separate from this thing he will not be serious; he will not go forward. Sometimes the eternal destiny hinges on one little decision.

That doesn't mean that we are always lost when we make a wrong decision. In the case of the rich young ruler, his decision not to sell all and follow Jesus was fatal to his spiritual life. Likewise, in the case of Peter, it would have been very serious. Otherwise, Jesus wouldn't have said,

John 13

⁸ If I don't wash your feet, you have no part with me.

That was a yes or no, a black or white, a saving or loss situation. How do we know when our time comes? How do we know, when we cling to our little trinkets and don't want to give them away, whether this is not our last chance? We cannot know. Jesus knows. Let us not trifle with eternity. Let us not play with the thought that maybe later we can repent. As I said, it is usually not too late with an individual when he makes a wrong decision at one time. But sometimes it is. And here it definitely was.

I want to encourage all of us, if we have such things in our lives, which still bind us to the world, not to act like Judas—to be angry with God because He demands these things from us—but rather to be grateful. How did Peter react?

⁹ Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!

Even though that was now overdoing it, it shows the honesty of Peter. It shows that in his heart he was not against Jesus and he really would not want to be separated from Jesus. He made the right decision at that moment, and gave up control. He said,

“Take me completely. Take everything. Not just my feet, take my whole body please. I don't want to have it anymore. I don't want to be separated from You.”

That was showing signs of true repentance and a clear, right decision. Jesus had to tell him,

John 13

¹⁰ He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.

Jesus can say this. But sometimes we want to say this. For Peter, it was quite right to say,

“Take everything. Take my head and my hands also. Please take my whole body.”

It was right for Jesus to tell him,

“No, you are baptized already. You don’t need to be baptized again. What you need now is foot washing.”

But very often the sinner doesn’t want to give everything. He says,

“Please, take only a part,”

—whereas maybe he needs to give himself completely again. Let’s really understand that a true repentance gives away control completely, not just half. To give away only half the control to Jesus means to not give it at all. There is no half-dedication. There can be no such thing. Either we give ourselves completely to Jesus or we don’t. Peter made the right decision; he had the spirit of liberality. He said,

“I am ready for everything, to be completely washed or to have my feet washed. I’m ready Lord. Here am I. Take me as wholly yours.”

This is the spirit of true liberality.

Footwashing and Liberality

John 13

¹² So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you?

¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

¹⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.

¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

With this, Jesus instituted the foot washing not only as a ceremony, but as something we should often repeat in our hearts. When we are together here, Jesus is present, not as a human being, but through the Holy Spirit. He said,

“I will send you the Comforter.”

The Holy Spirit is doing basically the same thing as Jesus did when He was among the disciples. He convicted them of their sin. He it was who caused Peter to say,

“Not my feet only, but my head and my whole body.”

As Jesus did this work for the disciples, He does the same for us. Let us also be as open as Peter. Let us also understand the seriousness that if we do not give up the control, it may be very dangerous for us. We will have no part with Jesus. Partaking of the Lord's supper without really giving away this control means to take it for our judgment. We will be hardened. And next time it will be more difficult for the Holy Spirit to speak to us.

So, let us give up this control. Let us make proper confessions. And even if we do not fully understand everything, let us open ourselves to our fellow believers. Maybe they can help us. We may not understand everything. But we can at least say,

“Lord, I need this cleansing. If you have anything to show me, please let me know.”

If that is our attitude we will certainly see many things. I believe that this experience was very necessary for Peter, just as other experiences are. He saw that Jesus loved him. He also saw later that Jesus foretold the betrayal of Judas. He was a witness of this whole thing.

And when Peter betrayed his Lord, he remembered the love of Jesus, and it helped him at that moment not to despair, but to rise again in faith of the forgiving love of Jesus and to cling to Him. He understood something of the liberality of God. He understood that He is not tolerant towards sin, but He loves the sinner. This made him one of the most steadfast disciples.

We are a bit like the disciples in many respects, aren't we? We have not gone through the final crisis yet, as the disciples had when their master was crucified. This certainly will come. But there are smaller tests for us, as there were smaller tests for the disciples too. For them they seemed rather big and for us they seem rather big. But they are smaller tests.

Worse things will come. It's always a comfort, isn't it? It's not the worst yet. The worst will come. But we need to pass these smaller tests in order that we are prepared for the bigger test. So when that situation comes we can remember the liberality of God and can then stand firm. You remember how some of God's people will say,

The Great Controversy, p. 609:

Had we foreseen the consequences of our words, we would have held our peace.

So great will be the despair in the end. But then we need to remember the liberality of Jesus and of others—the Reformers, who really pressed the battle to the gate. This will give us the courage to carry the work on until it is finished.

This Communion service, and first the foot washing, is such an opportunity. We will go to the foot washing now, quietly and thoughtfully. And as we wash one another's feet, let us prayerfully believe that the Holy Spirit is present, speaking to our hearts. Let us really give up control over ourselves so that we do not try to manage ourselves—so that we are really ready for the Holy Spirit to use us.



