

Christianity & Liberalism

by

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Chapter 6

“Salvation”

It has been observed thus far that liberalism differs from Christianity with regard to the presuppositions of the gospel (the view of God and the view of man), with regard to the Book in which the gospel is contained, and with regard to the Person whose work the gospel sets forth. It is not surprising then that it differs from Christianity in its account of the gospel itself; it is not surprising that it presents an entirely different account of the way of salvation. Liberalism finds salvation (so far as it is willing to speak at all of “salvation”) in man; Christianity finds it in an act of God.

The difference with regard to the way of salvation concerns, in the first place, the basis of salvation in the redeeming work of Christ. According to Christian belief, Jesus is our Savior, not by virtue of what He said, not even by virtue of what He was, but by what He did. He is our Savior, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross. Such is the Christian conception of the Cross of Christ. It is ridiculed as being a “subtle theory of the atonement.” In reality, it is the plain teaching of the word of God; we know absolutely nothing about an atonement that is not a vicarious atonement, for that is the only atonement of which the New Testament speaks. And this Bible doctrine is not intricate or subtle.

On the contrary, though it involves mysteries, it is itself so simple that a child can understand it. “We deserved eternal death, but the Lord Jesus, because He loved us, died instead of us on the cross”—surely there is nothing so very intricate about that. It is not the Bible doctrine of the atonement which is difficult to understand—what are really incomprehensible are the elaborate modern efforts to get rid of the Bible doctrine in the interests of human pride.¹

Modern liberal preachers do indeed sometimes speak of the “atonement.” But they speak of it just as seldom as they possibly can, and one can see plainly that their hearts are elsewhere than at the foot of the Cross. Indeed, at this point, as at many others, one has the feeling that traditional language is being strained to become the expression of totally alien ideas. And when the tradi-

¹ See “*The Second Declaration of the Council on Organic Union*,” *The Presbyterian*, for March 17, 1921, p. 8.

tional phraseology has been stripped away, the essence of the modern conception of the death of Christ, though that conception appears in many forms, is fairly plain. The essence of it is that the death of Christ had an effect not upon God but only upon man. Sometimes the effect upon man is conceived of in a very simple way, Christ's death being regarded merely as an example of self-sacrifice for us to emulate. The uniqueness of this particular example, then, can be found only in the fact that Christian sentiment, gathering around it, has made it a convenient symbol for all self-sacrifice; it puts in concrete form what would otherwise have to be expressed in colder general terms. Sometimes, again, the effect of Christ's death upon us is conceived of in subtler ways; the death of Christ, it is said, shows how much God hates sin—since sin brought even the Holy One to the dreadful Cross—and we too, therefore, ought to hate sin, as God hates it, and repent. Sometimes, still again, the death of Christ is thought of as displaying the love of God; it exhibits God's own Son as given up for us all. These modern "theories of the atonement" are not all to be placed upon the same plane; the last of them, in particular, may be joined with a high view of Jesus' Person. But they err in that they ignore the dreadful reality of guilt, and make a mere persuasion of the human will all that is needed for salvation. They do indeed all contain an element of truth: it is true that the death of Christ is an example of self-sacrifice which may inspire self-sacrifice in others; it is true that the death of Christ shows how much God hates sin; it is true that the death of Christ displays the love of God. All of these truths are found plainly in the New Testament. But they are swallowed up in a far greater truth—that Christ died instead of us to present us faultless before the throne of God. Without that central truth, all the rest is devoid of real meaning: an example of self-sacrifice is useless to those who are under both the guilt and thralldom of sin; the knowledge of God's hatred of sin can in itself bring only despair; an exhibition of the love of God is a mere display unless there was some underlying reason for the sacrifice. If the Cross is to be restored to its rightful place in Christian life, we shall have to penetrate far beneath the modern theories to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Upon the Christian doctrine of the Cross, modern liberals are never weary of pouring out the vials of their hatred and their scorn. Even at this point, it is true, the hope of avoiding offence is not always abandoned; the words "vicarious atonement" and the like—of course in a sense totally at variance from their Christian meaning—are still sometimes used. But despite such occasional employment of traditional language the liberal preachers reveal only too clearly what is in their minds. They speak with disgust of those who believe "that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner."² Against the doctrine of the Cross they use every weapon of caricature and vilification. Thus

² Fosdick, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?*, stenographically reported by Margaret Renton, 1922, p. 5.

they pour out their scorn upon a thing so holy and so precious that in the presence of it the Christian heart melts in gratitude too deep for words. It never seems to occur to modern liberals that in deriding the Christian doctrine of the Cross, they are trampling upon human hearts. But the modern liberal attacks upon the Christian doctrine of the Cross may at least serve the purpose of showing what that doctrine is, and from this point of view they may be examined briefly now.

In the first place, then, the Christian way of salvation through the Cross of Christ is criticized because it is dependent upon history. This criticism is sometimes evaded; it is sometimes said that as Christians we may attend to what Christ does now for every Christian rather than to what He did long ago in Palestine. But the evasion involves a total abandonment of the Christian faith. If the saving work of Christ were confined to what He does now for every Christian, there would be no such thing as a Christian gospel—an account of an event which put a new face on life. What we should have left would be simply mysticism, and mysticism is quite different from Christianity. It is the connection of the present experience of the believer with an actual historic appearance of Jesus in the world which prevents our religion from being mysticism and causes it to be Christianity.

It must certainly be admitted, then, that Christianity does depend upon something that happened; our religion must be abandoned altogether unless at a definite point in history Jesus died as a propitiation for the sins of men. Christianity is certainly dependent upon history.

But if so, the objection lies very near. Must we really depend for the welfare of our souls upon what happened long ago? Must we really wait until historians have finished disputing about the value of sources and the like before we can have peace with God? Would it not be better to have a salvation which is with us here and now, and which depends only upon what we can see or feel?

With regard to this objection it should be observed that if religion be made independent of history there is no such thing as a gospel. For “gospel” means “good news,” tidings, information about something that has happened. A gospel independent of history is a contradiction in terms. The Christian gospel means, not a presentation of what always has been true, but a report of something new—something that imparts a totally different aspect to the situation of mankind. The situation of mankind was desperate because of sin; but God has changed the situation by the atoning death of Christ—that is no mere reflection upon the old, but an account of something new. We are shut up in this world as in a beleaguered camp. To maintain our courage, the liberal preacher offers us exhortation. Make the best of the situation, he says, look on the bright side of life. But unfortunately, such exhortation cannot change the facts. In particular it cannot remove the dreadful fact of sin. Very different is the

message of the Christian evangelist. He offers not reflection on the old but tidings of something new, not exhortation but a gospel.³

It is true that the Christian gospel is an account, not of something that happened yesterday, but of something that happened long ago; but the important thing is that it really happened. If it really happened, then it makes little difference when it happened. No matter when it happened, whether yesterday or in the first century, it remains a real gospel, a real piece of news.

The happening of long ago, moreover, is in this case confirmed by present experience. The Christian man receives first the account which the New Testament gives of the atoning death of Christ. That account is history. But if true it has effects in the present, and it can be tested by its effects. The Christian man makes trial of the Christian message, and making trial of it he finds it to be true. Experience does not provide a substitute for the documentary evidence, but it does confirm that evidence. The word of the Cross no longer seems to the Christian to be merely a far-off thing, merely a matter to be disputed about by trained theologians. On the contrary, it is received into the Christian's inmost soul, and every day and hour of the Christian's life brings new confirmation of its truth.

In the second place, the Christian doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ is criticized on the ground that it is narrow. It binds salvation to the name of Jesus, and there are many men in the world who have never in any effective way heard of the name of Jesus. What is really needed, we are told, is a salvation which will save all men everywhere, whether they have heard of Jesus or not, and whatever may be the type of life to which they have been reared. Not a new creed, it is said, will meet the universal need of the world, but some means of making effective in right living whatever creed men may chance to have.

This second objection, as well as the first, is sometimes evaded. It is sometimes said that although one way of salvation is by means of acceptance of the gospel there may be other ways. But this method of meeting the objection relinquishes one of the things that are most obviously characteristic of the Christian message—namely, its exclusiveness. What struck the early observers of Christianity most forcibly was not merely that salvation was offered by means of the Christian gospel, but that all other means were resolutely rejected. The early Christian missionaries demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion to Christ. Such exclusiveness ran directly counter to the prevailing syncretism of the Hellenistic age. In that day, many saviors were offered by many religions to the attention of men, but the various pagan religions could live together in perfect harmony. When a man became a devotee of one god, he did not have to give up the others. But Christianity would have nothing to do with these

³ Compare *History and Faith* 1915, pp. 1-3.

“courtly polygamies of the soul”;⁴ it demanded an absolutely exclusive devotion; all other Saviors, it insisted, must be deserted for the one Lord. Salvation, in other words, was not merely through Christ, but it was only through Christ. In that little word “only” lay all the offence. Without that word there would have been no persecutions; the cultured men of the day would probably have been willing to give Jesus a place, and an honorable place, among the saviors of mankind. Without its exclusiveness, the Christian message would have seemed perfectly inoffensive to the men of that day. So modern liberalism, placing Jesus alongside other benefactors of mankind, is perfectly inoffensive in the modern world. All men speak well of it. It is entirely inoffensive.

But it is also entirely futile. The offence of the Cross is done away, but so is the glory and the power.

Thus it must fairly be admitted that Christianity does bind salvation to the name of Christ. The question need not here be discussed whether the benefits of Christ’s death are ever applied to those who, though they have come to years of discretion, have not heard or accepted the gospel message. Certainly the New Testament holds out with regard to this matter no clear hope. At the very basis of the work of the apostolic Church is the consciousness of a terrible responsibility. The sole message of life and salvation had been committed to men; that message was at all hazards to be proclaimed while yet there was time. The objection as to the exclusiveness of the Christian way of salvation, therefore, cannot be evaded, but must be met.

In answer to the objection, it may be said simply that the Christian way of salvation is narrow only so long as the Church chooses to let it remain narrow. The name of Jesus is discovered to be strangely adapted to men of every race and of every kind of previous education. And the Church has ample means, with promise of God’s Spirit to bring the name of Jesus to all. If, therefore, this way of salvation is not offered to man is not the fault of the way of salvation itself, but the fault of those who fail to use the means that God has placed in their hands.

But, it may be said, is that not a stupendous responsibility to be placed in the hands weak and sinful men; it is it not more natural that God should offer salvation to all without requiring them to accept a new message and thus to be dependent upon the faithfulness of the messengers? The answer to this objection is plain. It is certainly true that the Christian way of salvation places a stupendous responsibility upon men. But that responsibility is like the responsibility which, as ordinary observation shows, God does, as a matter of fact, commit to men. It is like the responsibility, for example, of the parent for the child. The parent has full power to mar the soul as well as the body of the child. The responsibility is terrible; but it is a responsibility which unquestionably exists. Similar is the responsibility of the Church for making the name of

⁴ Phillimore, in the introduction to his translation of Philostratus, *In Honour of Apollonius of Tyana*, 1912, vol. i, p. iii.

Jesus known to all mankind. It is a terrible responsibility; but it exists, and it is just like the other known dealings of God.

But modern liberalism has still more specific objections to the Christian doctrine of the Cross. How can one person, it is asked, suffer for the sins of another? The thing we are told is absurd. Guilt, it is said, is personal; if I allow another man to suffer for my fault, my guilt is not thereby one whit diminished.

An answer to this objection is sometimes found in the plain instances in ordinary human life where one person does suffer for another person's sin. In the war, for example, many men died freely for the welfare of others. Here, it is said, we have something analogous to the sacrifice of Christ.

It must be confessed, however, that the analogy is very faint; for it does not touch the specific point at issue. The death of a volunteer soldier in the war was like the death of Christ in that it was a supreme example of self-sacrifice. But the thing to be accomplished by the self-sacrifice was entirely different from the thing which was accomplished on Calvary. The death of those who sacrificed themselves in the war brought peace and protection to the loved ones at home, but it could never avail to wipe out the guilt of sin.

The real answer to the objection is to be found not in the similarity between the death of Christ and other examples of self-sacrifice, but in the profound difference.⁵ Why is it that men are no longer willing to trust for their own salvation and for the hope of the world to one act that was done by one Man of long ago? Why is it that they prefer to trust to millions of acts of self-sacrifice wrought by millions of men all through the centuries and in our own day? The answer is plain. It is because men have lost sight of the majesty of Jesus' Person. They think of Him as a man like themselves; and if He was a man like themselves, His death becomes simply an example of self-sacrifice. But there have been millions of examples of self-sacrifice. Why then should we pay such exclusive attention to this one Palestinian example of long ago? Men used to say with reference to Jesus, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin." They say so now no longer. On the contrary, every man is now regarded as plenty good enough to pay the price of sin if, whether in peace or in war, he will only go bravely over the top in some noble cause.

It is perfectly true that no mere man can pay the penalty of another man's sin. But it does not follow that Jesus could not do it; for Jesus was no mere man but the eternal Son of God. Jesus is master of the innermost secrets of the moral world. He has done what none other could possibly do; He has borne our sin.

The Christian doctrine of the atonement, therefore, is altogether rooted in the Christian doctrine of the deity of Christ. The reality of an atonement for sin depends altogether upon the New Testament presentation of the Person of

⁵ For what follows, compare "The Church in the War," in *The Presbyterian*, for May 29 1919, pp. 10f.

Christ. And even the hymns dealing with the Cross which we sing in Church can be placed in an ascending scale according as they are based upon a lower or a higher view of Jesus' Person. At the very bottom of the scale is that familiar hymn:

Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me.

That is a perfectly good hymn. It means that our trials may be a discipline to bring us nearer to God. The thought is not opposed to Christianity; it is found in the New Testament. But many persons have the impression, because the word "cross" is found in the hymn, that there is something specifically Christian about it, and that it has something to do with the gospel. This impression is entirely false. In reality, the cross that is spoken of is not the Cross of Christ, but our own cross; the verse simply means that our own crosses or trials may be a means to bring us nearer to God. It is a perfectly good thought, but certainly it is not the gospel. One can only be sorry that the people on the Titanic could not find a better hymn to use in the last solemn hour of their lives. But there is another hymn in the hymn-book:

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

That is certainly better. It is here not our own crosses but the Cross of Christ, the actual event that took place on Calvary, that is spoken of, and that event is celebrated as the center of all history. Certainly the Christian man can sing that hymn. But one misses even there the full Christian sense of the meaning of the Cross; the Cross is celebrated, but it is not understood.

It is well, therefore, that there is another hymn in our hymn-book:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

There at length are heard the accents of true Christian feeling—"the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died." When we come to see that it was no mere man who suffered on Calvary but the Lord of Glory, then we shall be willing to say that one drop of the precious blood of Jesus is of more value, for our own salvation and for the hope of society, than all the rivers of blood that have flowed upon the battlefields of history.

Thus the objection to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ disappears altogether before the tremendous Christian sense of the majesty of Jesus' Person. It is perfectly true that the Christ of modern naturalistic reconstruction never could have suffered for the sins of others; but it is very different in the case of the Lord of Glory. And if the notion of vicarious atonement be so absurd as modern opposition would lead us to believe, what shall be said of the Christian experience that has been based upon it? The modern liberal Church is fond of appealing to experience. But where shall true Christian experience be found if not in the blessed peace which comes from Calvary? That peace comes only when a man recognizes that all his striving to be right with God, all his feverish endeavor to keep the Law before he can be saved, is unnecessary, and that the Lord Jesus has wiped out the handwriting that was against him by dying instead of him on the Cross. Who can measure the depth of the peace and joy that comes from this blessed knowledge? Is it a "theory of the atonement," a delusion of man's fancy? Or is it the very truth of God?

But still another objection remains against the Christian doctrine of the Cross. The objection concerns the character of God. What a degraded view of God it is, the modern liberal exclaims, when God is represented as being "alienated" from man, and as waiting coldly until a price be paid before He grants salvation! In reality, we are told, God is more willing to forgive sin than we are willing to be forgiven; reconciliation, therefore, can have to do only with man; it all depends upon us; God will receive us any time we choose.

The objection depends of course upon the liberal view of sin. If sin is so trifling a matter as the liberal Church supposes, then indeed the curse of God's law can be taken very lightly, and God can easily let by-gones be by-gones.

This business of letting by-gones be by-gones has a pleasant sound. But in reality it is the most heartless thing in the world. It will not do at all even in the case of sins committed against our fellow-men. To say nothing of sin against God, what shall be done about the harm that we have wrought to our neighbor? Sometimes, no doubt, the harm can be repaired. If we have defrauded our neighbor of a sum of money, we can pay the sum back with interest. But in the case of the more serious wrongs such repayment is usually quite impossible. The more serious wrongs are those that are done, not to the bodies, but to the souls of men. And who can think with complacency of wrongs of that kind which he has committed? Who can bear to think, for example, of the harm that he has done to those younger than himself by a bad example? And what of those sad words, spoken to those we love, that have left scars never to be obliterated by the hand of time? In the presence of such memories, we are told by the modern preacher simply to repent and to let by-gones be by-gones. But what a heartless thing is such repentance! We escape into some higher, happier, respectable life. But what of those whom we, by our example and by our words, have helped to drag down to the brink of hell? We forget them and let by-gones be by-gones!

Such repentance will never wipe out the guilt of sin—not even sin committed against our fellow-men, to say nothing of sin against our God. The truly penitent man longs to wipe out the effects of sin, not merely to forget sin. But who can wipe out the effects of sin? Others are suffering because of our past sins; and we can attain no real peace until we suffer in their stead. We long to go back into the tangle of our life, and make right the things that are wrong—at least to suffer where we have caused others to suffer. And something like that Christ did for us when He died instead of us on the cross; He atoned for all our sins.

The sorrow for sins committed against one's fellowmen does indeed remain in the Christian's heart. And he will seek by every means that is within his power to repair the damage that he has done. But atonement at least has been made—made as truly as if the sinner himself had suffered with and for those whom he has wronged. And the sinner himself, by a mystery of grace, becomes right with God. All sin at bottom is a sin against God. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned" is the cry of a true penitent. How terrible is the sin against God! Who can recall the wasted moments and years? Gone they are, never to return; gone the little allotted span of life; gone the little day in which a man must work. Who can measure the irrevocable guilt of a wasted life? Yet even for such guilt God has provided a fountain of cleansing in the precious blood of Christ. God has clothed us with Christ's righteousness as with a garment; in Christ we stand spotless before the judgment throne.

Thus to deny the necessity of atonement is to deny the existence of a real moral order. And it is strange how those who venture upon such denial can regard themselves as disciples of Jesus; for if one thing is clear in the record of Jesus' life it is that Jesus recognized the justice as distinguished from the love of God. God is love, according to Jesus, but He is not only love. Jesus spoke, in terrible words, of the sin that shall never be forgiven either in this world or in that which is to come. Clearly Jesus recognized the existence of retributive justice; Jesus was far from accepting the light modern view of sin.

But what, then, it will be objected, becomes of God's love? Even if it be admitted that justice demands punishment for sin, the modern liberal theologian will say, what becomes of the Christian doctrine that justice is swallowed up by grace? If God is represented as waiting for a price to be paid before sin shall be forgiven, perhaps His justice may be rescued, but what becomes of His love?

Modern liberal teachers are never tired of ringing the changes upon this objection. They speak with horror of the doctrine of an "alienated" or an "angry" God. In answer, of course it would be easy to point to the New Testament. The New Testament clearly speaks of the wrath of God and the wrath of Jesus Himself; and all the teaching of Jesus presupposes a divine indignation against sin. With what possible right, then, can those who reject this vital element in Jesus' teaching and example regard themselves as true disciples of His? The truth is that the modern rejection of the doctrine of God's wrath pro-

ceeds from a light view of sin which is totally at variance with the teaching of the whole New Testament and of Jesus Himself. If a man has once come under a true conviction of sin, he will have little difficulty with the doctrine of the Cross.

But as a matter of fact the modern objection to the doctrine of the atonement on the ground that that doctrine is contrary to the love of God, is based upon the most abysmal misunderstanding of the doctrine itself. The modern liberal teachers persist in speaking of the sacrifice of Christ as though it were a sacrifice made by some one other than God. They speak of it as though it meant that God waits coldly until a price is paid to Him before He forgives sin. As a matter of fact, it means nothing of the kind; the objection ignores that which is absolutely fundamental in the Christian doctrine of the Cross. The fundamental thing is that God Himself, and not another, makes the sacrifice for sin—God Himself in the person of the Son who assumed our nature and died for us, God Himself in the Person of the Father who spared not His own Son but offered Him up for us all. Salvation is as free for us as the air we breathe; God's the dreadful cost, ours the gain. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Such love is very different from the complacency found in the God of modern preaching; this love is love that did not count the cost; it is love that is love indeed.

This love and this love alone brings true joy to men. Joy is indeed being sought by the modern liberal Church. But it is being sought in ways that are false. How may communion with God be made joyful? Obviously, we are told, by emphasizing the comforting attributes of God—His long-suffering. His love. Let us, it is urged, regard Him not as a moody Despot, not as a sternly righteous Judge, but simply as a loving Father. Away with the horrors of the old theology! Let us worship a God in whom we can rejoice.

Two questions arise with regard to this method of making religion joyful—in the first place. Does it work? and in the second place, Is it true?

Does it work? It certainly ought to work. How can anyone be unhappy when the ruler of the universe is declared to be the loving Father of all men who will never permanently inflict pain upon His children? Where is the sting of remorse if all sin will necessarily be forgiven? Yet men are strangely ungrateful. After the modern preacher has done his part with all diligence—after everything unpleasant has carefully been eliminated from the conception of God, after His unlimited love has been celebrated with the eloquence that it deserves—the congregation somehow persistently refuses to burst into the old ecstasies of joy. The truth is, the God of modern preaching, though He may perhaps be very good, is rather uninteresting. Nothing is so insipid as indiscriminate good humor. Is that really love that costs so little? If God will necessarily forgive, no matter what we do, why trouble ourselves about Him at all? Such a God may deliver us from the fear of hell. But His heaven, if He has any, is full of sin.

The other objection to the modern encouraging idea of God is that it is not true. How do you know that God is all love and kindness? Surely not through nature, for it is full of horrors. Human suffering may be unpleasant, but it is real, and God must have something to do with it. Just as surely not through the Bible. For it was from the Bible that the old theologians derived that conception of God which you would reject as gloomy. "The Lord thy God," the Bible says, "is a consuming fire." Or is Jesus alone your authority? You are no better off. For it was Jesus who spoke of the outer darkness and the everlasting fire, of the sin that shall not be forgiven either in this age or in that which is to come. Or do you appeal, for your comforting idea of God, to a twentieth-century revelation granted immediately to you? It is to be feared that you will convince no one but yourself.

Religion cannot be made joyful simply by looking on the bright side of God. For a one-sided God is not a real God, and it is the real God alone who can satisfy the longing of our soul. God is love, but is He only love? God is love, but is love God? Seek joy alone, then, seek joy at any cost, and you will not find it. How then may it be attained?

The search for joy in religion seems to have ended in disaster. God is found to be enveloped in impenetrable mystery, and in awful righteousness; man is confined in the prison of the world, trying to make the best of his condition, beautifying the prison with tinsel, yet secretly dissatisfied with his bondage, dissatisfied with a merely relative goodness which is no goodness at all, dissatisfied with the companionship of his sinful fellows, unable to forget his heavenly destiny and his heavenly duty, longing for communion with the Holy One. There seems to be no hope; God is separate from sinners; there is no room for joy, but only a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.

Yet such a God has at least one advantage over the comforting God of modern preaching—He is alive. He is sovereign, He is not bound by His creation or by His creatures. He can perform wonders. Could He even save us if He would? He has saved us—in that message the gospel consists. It could not have been foretold; still less could the manner of it have been foretold. That Birth, that Life, that Death—why was it done just thus and then and there? It all seems so very local, so very particular, so very unphilosophical, so very unlike what might have been expected. Are not our own methods of salvation, men say, better than that? "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" Yet what if it were true? "So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too"—God's own Son delivered up for us all, freedom from the world, sought by philosophers of all the ages, offered now freely to every simple soul, things hidden from the wise and prudent revealed unto babes, the long striving over, the impossible accomplished, sin conquered by mysterious grace, communion at length with the holy God, our Father which art in heaven!

Surely this and this alone is joy. But it is a joy that is akin to fear. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Were we not safer with a God of our own devising—love and only love, a Father and nothing else, one before whom we could stand in our own merit without fear? He who will may be satisfied with such a God. But we, God help us—sinful as we are, we would see Jehovah. Despairing, hoping, trembling, half-doubting and half-believing, trusting all to Jesus, we venture into the presence of the very God. And in His presence we live.

The atoning death of Christ, and that alone, has presented sinners as righteous in God's sight; the Lord Jesus has paid the full penalty of their sins, and clothed them with His perfect righteousness before the judgment seat of God. But Christ has done for Christians even far more than that. He has given to them not only a new and right relation to God, but a new life in God's presence for evermore. He has saved them from the power as well as from the guilt of sin. The New Testament does not end with the death of Christ; it does not end with the triumphant words of Jesus on the Cross, "It is finished." The death was followed by the resurrection, and the resurrection like the death was for our sakes. Jesus rose from the dead into a new life of glory and power, and into that life He brings those for whom He died. The Christian, on the basis of Christ's redeeming work, not only has died unto sin, but also lives unto God.

Thus was completed the redeeming work of Christ—the work for which He entered into the world. The account of that work is the "gospel," the "good news." It never could have been predicted, for sin deserves naught but eternal death. But God triumphed over sin through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But how is the redeeming work of Christ applied to the individual Christian man? The answer of the New Testament is plain. According to the New Testament the work of Christ is applied to the individual Christian man by the Holy Spirit. And this work of the Holy Spirit is part of the creative work of God. It is not accomplished by the ordinary use of means; it is not accomplished merely by using the good that is already in man. On the contrary, it is something new. It is not an influence upon the life, but the beginning of a new life; it is not development of what we had already, but a new birth. At the very center of Christianity are the words, "Ye must be born again."

These words are despised today. They involve supernaturalism, and the modern man is opposed to supernaturalism in the experience of the individual as much as in the realm of history. A cardinal doctrine of modern liberalism is that the world's evil may be overcome by the world's good; no help is thought to be needed from outside the world.

This doctrine is propagated in various ways. It runs all through the popular literature of our time. It dominates religious literature, and it appears even upon the stage. Some years ago great popularity was attained by a play which taught the doctrine in powerful fashion. The play began with a scene in a London boarding-house. And it was a very discouraging scene. The persons in that boarding-house were not by any means desperate criminals, but one could al-

most have wished that they had been—they would have been so much more interesting. As it was, they were simply sordid, selfish persons, snapping and snarling about things to eat and about creature comforts—the sort of persons about whom one is tempted to say that they have no souls. The scene was a powerful picture of the hideousness of the commonplace. But presently the mysterious stranger of “the third floor back” entered upon the scene, and all was changed. He had no creed to offer, and no religion. But he simply engaged in conversation with everyone in that boarding-house, and discovered the one good point in every individual life. Somewhere in every life there was some one good thing—some one true human affection, some one noble ambition. It had long been hidden by a thick coating of sordidness and selfishness; its very existence had been forgotten. But it was there, and when it was brought to the light the whole life was transformed. Thus the evil that was in man was overcome by the good that was already there.

The same thing is taught in more immediately practical ways. For example, there are those who would apply it to the prisoners in our jails. The inmates of jails and penitentiaries constitute no doubt unpromising material. But it is a great mistake, it is said, to tell them that they are bad, to discourage them by insisting upon their sin. On the contrary, we are told, what ought to be done is to find the good that is already in them and build upon that; we ought to appeal to some latent sense of honor which shows that even criminals possess the remnants of our common human nature. Thus again the evil that is in man is to be overcome not by a foreign good but by a good which man himself possesses.

Certainly there is a large element of truth in this modern principle. That element of truth is found in the Bible. The Bible does certainly teach that the good that is already in man ought to be fostered in order to check the evil. Whatsoever things are true and pure and of good report—we ought to think on those things. Certainly the principle of overcoming the world’s evil by the good already in the world is a great principle. The old theologians recognized it to the full in their doctrine of “common grace.” There is something in the world even apart from Christianity which restrains the worst manifestations of evil. And that something ought to be used. Without the use of it, this world could not be lived in for a day. The use of it is certainly a great principle; it will certainly accomplish many, useful things.

But there is one thing which it will not accomplish. It will not remove the disease of sin. It will indeed palliate the symptoms of the disease; it will change the form of the disease. Sometimes the disease is hidden, and there are those who think that it is cured. But then it bursts forth in some new way, as in 1914, and startles the world. What is really needed is not a salve to palliate the symptoms of sin, but a remedy that attacks the root of the disease.

In reality, however, the figure of disease is misleading. The only true figure—if indeed it can be called merely a figure—is the one which is used in the Bible. Man is not merely ill, but he is dead, in trespasses and sins, and what is

really needed is a new life. That life is given by the Holy Spirit in “regeneration” or the new birth.

Many are the passages and many are the ways in which the central doctrine of the new birth is taught in the Word of God. One of the most stupendous passages is Gal. ii. 20: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me.” That passage was called by Bengel the marrow of Christianity. And it was rightly so called. It refers to the objective basis of Christianity in the redeeming work of Christ, and it contains also the supernaturalism of Christian experience. “It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me”—these are extraordinary words. “If you look upon Christians,” Paul says in effect, “you see so many manifestations of the life of Christ.” Undoubtedly if the words of Gal. ii. 20 stood alone they might be taken in a mystical or pantheistic sense; they might be taken to involve the merging of the personality of the Christian in the personality of Christ. But Paul had no reason to fear such a misinterpretation, for he had fortified himself against it by the whole of his teaching. The new relation of the Christian to Christ, according to Paul, involves no loss of the separate personality of the Christian; on the contrary, it is everywhere intensely personal; it is not a merely mystical relationship to the All or the Absolute, but a relationship of love existing between one person and another. Just because Paul had fortified himself against misunderstanding, he was not afraid of an extreme boldness of language. “It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me”—these words involve a tremendous conception of the break that comes in a man’s life when he becomes a Christian. It is almost as though he became a new person—so stupendous is the change. These words were not written by a man who believed that Christianity means merely the entrance of a new motive into the life; Paul believed with all his mind and heart in the doctrine of the new creation or the new birth.

That doctrine represents one aspect of the salvation which was wrought by Christ and is applied by His Spirit. But there is another aspect of the same salvation. Regeneration means a new life; but there is also a new relation in which the believer stands toward God. That new relation is instituted by “justification”—the act of God by which a sinner is pronounced righteous in His sight because of the atoning death of Christ. It is not necessary to ask whether justification comes before regeneration or vice versa; in reality they are two aspects of one salvation. And they both stand at the very beginning of the Christian life. The Christian has not merely the promise of a new life, but he has already a new life. And he has not merely the promise of being pronounced righteous in God’s sight (though the blessed pronouncement will be confirmed on the judgment day), but he is already pronounced righteous here and now. At the beginning of every Christian life there stands, not a process, but a definite act of God.

That does not mean that every Christian can tell exactly at what moment he was justified and born again. Some Christians, indeed, are really able to

give day and hour of their conversion. It is a grievous sin to ridicule the experience of such men. Sometimes, indeed, they are inclined to ignore the steps in the providence of God which prepared for the great change. But they are right on the main point. They know that when on such and such a day they kneeled in prayer they were still in their sins, and when they rose from their knees they were children of God never to be separated from Him. Such experience is a very holy thing. But on the other hand it is a mistake to demand that it should be universal. There are Christians who can give day and hour of their conversion, but the great majority do not know exactly at what moment they were saved. The effects of the act are plain, but the act itself was done in the quietness of God. Such, very often, is the experience of children brought up by Christian parents. It is not necessary that all should pass through agonies of soul before being saved; there are those to whom faith comes peacefully and easily through the nurture of Christian homes.

But however it be manifested, the beginning of the Christian life is an act of God. It is an act of God and not an act of man.

That does not mean, however, that in the beginning of the Christian life God deals with us as with sticks or stones, unable to understand what is being done. On the contrary He deals with us as with persons; salvation has a place in the conscious life of man; God uses in our salvation a conscious act of the human soul—an act which though it is itself the work of God's Spirit, is at the same time an act of man. That act of man which God produces and employs in salvation is faith. At the center of Christianity is the doctrine of "justification by faith."

In exalting faith, we are not immediately putting ourselves in contradiction to modern thought. Indeed faith is being exalted very high by men of the most modern type. But what kind of faith? There emerges the difference of opinion.

Faith is being exalted so high today that men are being satisfied with any kind of faith, just so it is faith. It makes no difference what is believed, we are told, just so the blessed attitude of faith is there. The undogmatic faith, it is said, is better than the dogmatic, because it is purer faith—faith less weakened by the alloy of knowledge.

Now it is perfectly clear that such employment of faith merely as a beneficent state of the soul is bringing some results. Faith in the most absurd things sometimes produces the most beneficent and far-reaching results. But the disturbing thing is that all faith has an object. The scientific observer may not think that it is the object that does the work; from his vantage point he may see clearly that it is really the faith, considered simply as a psychological phenomenon, that is the important thing, and that any other object would have answered as well. But the one who does the believing is always convinced just exactly that it is not the faith, but the object of the faith, which is helping him. The moment he becomes convinced that it is merely the faith that is helping him, the faith disappears; for faith always involves a conviction of the objective truth or trustworthiness of the object. If the object is not really trustworthy

then the faith is a false faith. It is perfectly true that such a false faith will often help a man. Things that are false will accomplish a great many useful things in the world. If I take a counterfeit coin and buy a dinner with it, the dinner is every bit as good as if the coin were a product of the mint. And what a very useful thing a dinner is! But just as I am on my way downtown to buy a dinner for a poor man, an expert tells me that my coin is a counterfeit. The miserable, heartless theorizer! While he is going into uninteresting, learned details about the primitive history of that coin, a poor man is dying for want of bread. So it is with faith. Faith is so very useful, they tell us, that we must not scrutinize its basis in truth. But, the great trouble is, such an avoidance of scrutiny itself involves the destruction of faith. For faith is essentially dogmatic. Despite all you can do, you cannot remove the element of intellectual assent from it. Faith is the opinion that some person will do something for you. If that person really will do that thing for you, then the faith is true. If he will not do it, then the faith is false. In the latter case, not all the benefits in the world will make the faith true. Though it has transformed the world from darkness to light, though it has produced thousands of glorious healthy lives, it remains a pathological phenomenon. It is false, and sooner or later it is sure to be found out.

Such counterfeits should be removed, not out of a love of destruction, but in order to leave room for the pure gold, the existence of which is implied in the presence of the counterfeits. Faith is often based upon error, but there would be no faith at all unless it were sometimes based upon truth. But if Christian faith is based upon truth, then it is not the faith which saves the Christian but the object of the faith. And the object of the faith is Christ. Faith, then, according to the Christian view means simply receiving a gift. To have faith in Christ means to cease trying to win God's favour by one's own character; the man who believes in Christ simply accepts the sacrifice which Christ offered on Calvary. The result of such faith is a new life and all good works; but the salvation itself is an absolutely free gift of God.

Very different is the conception of faith which prevails in the liberal Church. According to modern liberalism, faith is essentially the same as "making Christ Master" in one's life; at least it is by making Christ Master in the life that the welfare of men is sought. But that simply means that salvation is thought to be obtained by our own obedience to the commands of Christ. Such teaching is just a sublimated form of legalism. Not the sacrifice of Christ, on this view, but our own obedience to God's law, is the ground of hope.

In this way the whole achievement of the Reformation has been given up, and there has been a return to the religion of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, God raised up a man who began to read the Epistle to the Galatians with his own eyes. The result was the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith. Upon that rediscovery has been based the whole of our evangelical freedom. As expounded by Luther and Calvin the Epistle to the Galatians became the "Magna Charta of Christian liberty." But modern liberalism has returned to the old interpretation of Galatians which

was urged against the Reformers. Thus Professor Burton's elaborate commentary on the Epistle, despite all its extremely valuable modern scholarship, is in one respect a medieval book; it has returned to an anti-Reformation exegesis, by which Paul is thought to be attacking in the Epistle only the piecemeal morality of the Pharisees. In reality, of course, the object of Paul's attack is the thought that in any way man can earn his acceptance with God. What Paul is primarily interested in is not spiritual religion over against ceremonialism, but the free grace of God over against human merit.

The grace of God is rejected by modern liberalism. And the result is slavery—the slavery of the law, the wretched bondage by which man undertakes the impossible task of establishing his own righteousness as a ground of acceptance with God. It may seem strange at first sight that “liberalism,” of which the very name means freedom, should in reality be wretched slavery. But the phenomenon is not really so strange. Emancipation from the blessed will of God always involves bondage to some worse taskmaster.

Thus it may be said of the modern liberal Church, as of the Jerusalem of Paul's day, that “she is in bondage with her children.” God grant that she may turn again to the liberty of the gospel of Christ!

The liberty of the gospel depends upon the gift of God by which the Christian life is begun—a gift which involves justification, or the removal of the guilt of sin and the establishment of a right relation between the believer and God, and regeneration or the new birth, which makes of the Christian man a new creature.

But there is one obvious objection to this high doctrine, and the objection leads on to a fuller account of the Christian way of salvation. The obvious objection to the doctrine of the new creation is that it does not seem to be in accord with the observed fact. Are Christians really new creatures? It certainly does not seem so. They are subject to the same old conditions of life to which they were subject before; if you look upon them you cannot notice any very obvious change. They have the same weaknesses, and, unfortunately, they have sometimes the same sins. The new creation, if it be really new, does not seem to be very perfect; God can hardly look upon it and say, as of the first creation, that it is all very good.

This is a very real objection. But Paul meets it gloriously in the very same verse, already considered, in which the doctrine of the new creation is so boldly proclaimed. “It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me”—that is the doctrine of the new creation. But immediately the objection is taken up; “The life which I now live in the flesh,” Paul continues, “I live by the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” “The life which I now live in the flesh”—there is the admission. Paul admits that the Christian does live a life in the flesh, subject to the same old earthly conditions and with a continued battle against sin. “But,” says Paul (and here the objection is answered), “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The Christian life is

lived by faith and not by sight; the great change has not yet come to full fruition; sin has not yet been fully conquered; the beginning of the Christian life is a new birth, not an immediate creation of the full grown man. But although the new life has not yet come to full fruition, the Christian knows that the fruition will not fail; he is confident that the God who has begun a good work in him will complete it unto the day of Christ; he knows that the Christ who has loved him and given Himself for him will not fail him now, but through the Holy Spirit will build him up unto the perfect man. That is what Paul means by living the Christian life by faith.

Thus the Christian life, though it begins by a momentary act of God, is continued by a process. In other words—to use theological language—justification and regeneration are followed by sanctification. In principle the Christian is already free from the present evil world, but in practice freedom must still be attained. Thus the Christian life is not a life of idleness, but a battle.

That is what Paul means when he speaks of faith working through love (Gal. v. 6). The faith that he makes the means of salvation is not an idle faith, like the faith which is condemned in the Epistle of James, but a faith that works. The work that it performs is love, and what love is Paul explains in the last section of the Epistle to the Galatians. Love, in the Christian sense, is not a mere emotion, but a very practical and a very comprehensive thing. It involves nothing less than the keeping of the whole law of God. “The whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Yet the practical results of faith do not mean that faith itself is a work. It is a significant thing that in that last “practical” section of Galatians Paul does not say that I faith produces the life of love; he says that the Spirit of God produces it. The Spirit, then, in that section is represented as doing exactly what in the pregnant words, “faith working through love,” is attributed to faith. The apparent contradiction simply leads to the true conception of faith. True faith does not do anything. When it is said to do something (for example, when we say that it can remove mountains), that is only by a very natural shortness of expression. Faith is the exact opposite of works; faith does not give, it receives. So when Paul says that we do something by faith, that is just another way of saying that of ourselves we do nothing; when it is said that faith works through love that means that through faith the necessary basis of all Christian work has been obtained in the removal of guilt and the birth of the new man, and that the Spirit of God has been received—the Spirit who works with and through the Christian man for holy living. The force which enters the Christian life through faith and works itself out through love is the power of the Spirit of God.

But the Christian life is lived not only by faith; it is also lived in hope. The Christian is in the midst of a sore battle. And as for the condition of the world at large, nothing but the coldest heartlessness could be satisfied with that. It is certainly true that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together

until now. Even in the Christian life there are things that we should like to see removed; there are fears within as well as fightings without; even within the Christian life there are sad evidences of sin. But according to the hope which Christ has given us, there will be final victory, and the struggle of this world will be followed by the glories of heaven. That hope runs all through the Christian life; Christianity is not engrossed by this transitory world, but measures all things by the thought of eternity.

But at this point an objection is frequently raised. The “otherworldliness” of Christianity is objected to as a form of selfishness. The Christian, it is said, does what is right because of the hope of heaven, but how much nobler is the man who because of duty walks boldly into the darkness of annihilation!

The objection would have some weight if heaven according to Christian belief were mere enjoyment. But as a matter of fact heaven is communion with God and with His Christ. It can be said reverently that the Christian longs for heaven not only for his own sake, but also for the sake of God. Our present love is so cold, our present service so weak; and we would one day love and serve Him as His love deserves. It is perfectly true that the Christian is dissatisfied with the present world, but it is a holy dissatisfaction; it is that hunger and thirst after righteousness which our Savior blessed. We are separated from the Savior now by the veil of sense and by the effects of sin, and it is not selfish to long to see Him face to face. To relinquish such longing is not unselfishness, but is like the cold heartlessness of a man who could part from father or mother or wife or child without a pang. It is not selfish to long for the One whom not having seen we love.

Such is the Christian life—it is a life of conflict but it is also a life of hope. It views this world under the aspect of eternity; the fashion of this world passeth away, and all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Very different is the “program” of the modern liberal Church. In that program, heaven has little place, and this world is really all in all. The rejection of the Christian hope is not always definite or conscious; sometimes the liberal preacher tries to maintain a belief in the immortality of the soul. But the real basis of the belief in immortality has been given up by the rejection of the New Testament account of the resurrection of Christ.

And, practically, the liberal preacher has very little to say about the other world. This world is really the center of all his thoughts; religion itself, and even God, are made merely a means for the betterment of conditions upon this earth.

Thus religion has become a mere function of the community or of the state. So it is looked upon by the men of the present day. Even hard-headed business men and politicians have become convinced that religion is needed. But it is thought to be needed merely as a means to an end. We have tried to get along without religion, it is said, but the experiment was a failure, and now religion must be called in to help.

For example, there is the problem of the immigrants; great populations have found a place in our country; they do not speak our language or know our customs; and we do not know what to do with them. We have attacked them by oppressive legislation or proposals of legislation, but such measures have not been altogether effective. Somehow these people display a perverse attachment to the language that they learned at their mother's knee. It may be strange that a man should love the language that he learned at his mother's knee, but these people do love it, and we are perplexed in our efforts to produce a unified American people. So religion is called in to help; we are inclined to proceed against the immigrants now with a Bible in one hand and a club in the other offering them the blessings of liberty. That is what is sometimes meant by "Christian Americanization."

Another puzzling problem is the problem of industrial relations. Self-interest has here been appealed to; employers and employees have had pointed out to them the plain commercial advantages of conciliation. But all to no purpose. Class clashes still against class in the destructiveness of industrial warfare. And sometimes false doctrine provides a basis for false practice; the danger of Bolshevism is ever in the air. Here again repressive measures have been tried without avail; the freedom of speech and of the press has been radically curtailed. But repressive legislation seems unable to check the march of ideas. Perhaps, therefore, in these matters also, religion must be invoked.

Still another problem faces the modern world—the problem of international peace. This problem also seemed at one time nearly solved; self-interest seemed likely to be sufficient; there were many who supposed that the bankers would prevent another European war. But all such hopes were cruelly shattered in 1914, and there is not a whit of evidence that they are better founded now than they were then. Here again, therefore, self-interest is insufficient; and religion must be called in to help.

Such considerations have led to a renewed public interest in the subject of religion; religion is discovered after all to be a useful thing. But the trouble is that in being utilized religion is also being degraded and destroyed. Religion is being regarded more and more as a mere means to a higher end. The change can be detected with especial clearness in the way in which missionaries commend their cause. Fifty years ago, missionaries made their appeal in the light of eternity. "Millions of men," they were accustomed to say, "are going down to eternal destruction; Jesus is a Savior sufficient for all; send us out therefore with the message of salvation while yet there is time." Some missionaries, thank God, still speak in that way. But very many missionaries make quite a different appeal. "We are missionaries to India," they say. "Now India is in ferment; Bolshevism is creeping in; send us out to India that the menace may be checked." Or else they say: "We are missionaries to Japan; Japan will be dominated by militarism unless the principles of Jesus have sway; send us out therefore to prevent the calamity of war."

The same great change appears in community life. A new community, let us say, has been formed. It possesses many things that naturally belong to a well-ordered community; it has a drug-store, and a country club, and school. "But there is one thing," its inhabitants say to themselves, "that is still lacking; we have no church. But a church is a recognized and necessary part of every healthy community. We must therefore have a church." And so an expert in community church-building is summoned to take the necessary steps. The persons who speak in this way usually have little interest in religion for its own sake; it has never occurred to them to enter into the secret place of communion with the holy God. But religion is thought to be necessary for a healthy community; and therefore for the sake of the community they are willing to have a church.

Whatever may be thought of this attitude toward religion, it is perfectly plain that the Christian religion cannot be treated in any such way. The moment it is so treated it ceases to be Christian. For if one thing is plain it is that Christianity refuses to be regarded as a mere means to a higher end.⁶ Our Lord made that perfectly clear when He said: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). Whatever else those stupendous words may mean, they certainly mean that the relationship to Christ takes precedence of all other relationships, even the holiest of relationships like those that exist between husband and wife and parent and child. Those other relationships exist for the sake of Christianity and not Christianity for the sake of them. Christianity will indeed accomplish many useful things in this world, but if it is accepted in order to accomplish those useful things it is not Christianity. Christianity will combat Bolshevism; but if it is accepted in order to combat Bolshevism, it is not Christianity: Christianity will produce a unified nation, in a slow but satisfactory way; but if it is accepted in order to produce a unified nation, it is not Christianity: Christianity will produce a healthy community; but if it is accepted in order to produce a healthy community, it is not Christianity: Christianity will promote international peace; but if it is accepted in order to promote international peace, it is not Christianity. Our Lord said: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." But if you seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in order that all those other things may be added unto you, you will miss both those other things and the Kingdom of God as well.

But if Christianity be directed toward another world; if it be a way by which individuals can escape from the present evil age to some better country, what becomes of "the social gospel"? At this point is detected one of the most obvious lines of cleavage between Christianity and the liberal Church. The

⁶ For a penetrating criticism of this tendency, especially as it would result in the control of religious education by the community, and for an eloquent advocacy of the opposite view, which makes Christianity an end in itself, see Harold McA. Robinson, "*Democracy and Christianity*," in *The Christian Educator* Vol. No. 1, for October, 1920, pp. 3-5.

older evangelism, says the modern liberal preacher, sought to rescue individuals, while the newer evangelism seeks to transform the whole organism of society: the older evangelism was individual; the newer evangelism is social.

This formulation of the issue is not entirely correct, but it contains an element of truth. It is true that historic Christianity is in conflict at many points with the collectivism of the present day; it does emphasize, against the claims of society, the worth of the individual soul. It provides for the individual a refuge from all the fluctuating currents of human opinion, a secret place of meditation where a man can come alone into the presence of God. It does give a man courage to stand, if need be, against the world; it resolutely refuses to make of the individual a mere means to an end, a mere element in the composition of society. It rejects altogether any means of salvation which deals with men in a mass; it brings the individual face to face with his God. In that sense, it is true that Christianity is individualistic and not social.

But though Christianity is individualistic, it is not only individualistic. It provides fully for the social needs of man.

In the first place, even the communion of the individual man with God is not really individualistic, but social. A man is not isolated when he is in communion with God; he can be regarded as isolated only by one who has forgotten the real existence of the supreme Person. Here again, as at many other places, the line of cleavage between liberalism and Christianity really reduces to a profound difference in the conception of God. Christianity is earnestly theistic; liberalism is at best but half-heartedly so. If a man once comes to believe in a personal God, then the worship of Him will not be regarded as selfish isolation, but as the chief end of man. That does not mean that on the Christian view the worship of God is ever to be carried on to the neglect of service rendered to one's fellow-men—"he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, is not able to love God whom he hath not seen"—but it does mean that the worship of God has a value of its own. Very different is the prevailing doctrine of modern liberalism. According to Christian belief, man exists for the sake of God; according to the liberal Church, in practice if not in theory, God exists for the sake of man.

But the social element in Christianity is found not only in communion between man and God, but also in communion between man and man. Such communion appears even in institutions which are not specifically Christian.

The most important of such institutions, according to Christian teaching, is the family. And that institution is being pushed more and more into the background. It is being pushed into the background by undue encroachments of the community and of the state. Modern life is tending more and more toward the contraction of the sphere of parental control and parental influence. The choice of schools is being placed under the power of the state; the "community" is seizing hold of recreation and of social activities. It may be a question how far these community activities are responsible for the modern breakdown of the home; very possibly they are only trying to fill a void which even apart from

them had already appeared. But the result at any rate is plain—the lives of children are no longer surrounded by the loving atmosphere of the Christian home, but by the utilitarianism of the state. A revival of the Christian religion would unquestionably bring a reversal of the process; the family, as over against all other social institutions, would come to its rights again.

But the state, even when reduced to its proper limits, has a large place in human life, and in the possession of that place it is supported by Christianity. The support, moreover, is independent of the Christian or non-Christian character of the state; it was in the Roman Empire under Nero that Paul said, “The powers that be are ordained of God.” Christianity assumes no negative attitude, therefore, toward the state, but recognizes, under existing conditions, the necessity of government.

The case is similar with respect to those broad aspects of human life which are associated with industrialism. The “otherworldliness” of Christianity involves no withdrawal from the battle of this world; our Lord Himself, with His stupendous mission, lived in the midst of life’s throng and press. Plainly, then, the Christian man may not simplify his problem by withdrawing from the business of the world, but must learn to apply the principles of Jesus even to the complex problems of modern industrial life. At this point Christian teaching is in full accord with the modern liberal Church; the evangelical Christian is not true to his profession if he leaves his Christianity behind him on Monday morning. On the contrary, the whole of life, including business and all of social relations, must be made obedient to the law of love. The Christian man certainly should display no lack of interest in “applied Christianity.”

Only—and here emerges the enormous difference of opinion—the Christian man believes that there can be no applied Christianity unless there be “a Christianity to apply.”⁷ That is where the Christian man differs from the modern liberal. The liberal believes that applied Christianity is all there is of Christianity, Christianity being merely a way of life; the Christian man believes that applied Christianity is the result of an initial act of God. Thus there is an enormous difference between the modern liberal and the Christian man with reference to human institutions like the community and the state, and with reference to human efforts at applying the Golden Rule in industrial relationships. The modern liberal is optimistic with reference to these institutions; the Christian man is pessimistic unless the institutions be manned by Christian men. The modern liberal believes that human nature as at present constituted can be molded by the principles of Jesus; the Christian man believes that evil can only be held in check and not destroyed by human institutions, and that there must be a transformation of the human materials before any new building can be produced. This difference is not a mere difference in theory, but makes itself felt everywhere in the practical realm. It is particularly evident on

⁷ Francis S. Downs, “*Christianity and Today*,” in *Princeton Theological Review*, xx, 1922 p. 287. See also the whole article, *ibid*.

the mission field. The missionary of liberalism seeks to spread the blessings of Christian civilization (whatever that may be), and is not particularly interested in leading individuals to relinquish their pagan beliefs. The Christian missionary, on the other hand, regards satisfaction with a mere influence of Christian civilization as a hindrance rather than a help; his chief business, he believes, is the saving of souls, and souls are saved not by the mere ethical principles of Jesus but by His redemptive work. The Christian missionary, in other words, and the Christian worker at home as well as abroad, unlike the apostle of liberalism, says to all men everywhere: "Human goodness will avail nothing for lost souls; ye must be born again."