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"It Is Finished"

COME with me to Golgotha, the hill which is shaped like a skull outside the city of Jerusalem. It is the break of day and in our minds' eye we look back over the centuries and see the Son of God nailed upon the cross. On either side a thief is hanging. Our heads are bared and we stand in awe as the tremendous significance of this event becomes apparent to us. Such suffering and yet such resignation! Such dignity and yet withal such humiliation! The earth trembles, and it is dark!

Hear the words of the Man. "I thirst," He cries. They give Him vinegar to drink. They scoff—they rail—they deride. "If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself!"

How lonely He seems! The Roman soldiers, the high priests, the curious, milling, ignorant mob, all are arrayed against Him. Where is Peter who so gallantly had declared his loyalty by cutting off the ear of a soldier? He is far away! Where are all the other twelve? Frightened, disappointed, stunned and bewildered by the unexpected turn of events. They had hoped that Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom. Now what could this mean? In His loneliness the Lord cries out, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

He looks upon the angry mob in mercy. Out of a heart of love He prays, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

One thief rails at Him, while the other repents of his sins and cries out, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" Even at this agonizing

hour Jesus Christ's thoughts are for others and He assures the penitent thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

For a moment our attention is diverted from the crowd and Jesus seems to be speaking with some faithful friends. Among them is Mary His mother, and the beloved disciple. They are standing near the cross looking up at Jesus. He speaks to this small group and we hear Him say, "Woman, behold thy son!" and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!"

His strength slowly ebbs, but with one last effort He lifts His voice. "It is finished!" He cries, and gives up the ghost.

We wonder what He means by His "It is finished!" Obviously He refers to the accomplishment of the work which was given Him to do. He had done His Father's will, not His own. He had fulfilled the righteous demands of God's law. He had never erred. No man found iniquity in Him. Even Pilate said, "I find no fault in him." He had gone through the garden of Gethsemane. He had drunk the last drop of anguish. "I have glorified Thee on earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." The dark night had settled.

But that sentence means much more than a duty fulfilled or a task well done; it means that the satisfaction for our sin is complete, that because of His death our entrance into the Kingdom of God is assured. Once more we can know God through the Lord Jesus Christ not only as the creator of the world, but also as our heavenly Father. Our fellowship and spiritual com-

God's Will and God's Word

By the REV. PROFESSOR R. B. KUIPER



Mr. Kuiper

HOW am I to know the will of God concerning my life?" That question presents itself time and again to every Christian.

Its answer really is very simple and can be stated with utmost brevity. The Word of God, the Bible, is our one and only infallible rule of life as well as faith.

To be sure, it must not be forgotten that for a true understanding of God's Word the illumination of the Holy Spirit is indispensable. But it does not follow by any manner of means that God reveals His will to His children in two distinct and separate ways—by His Word *and* by His Spirit. He makes His will clear in just one way—by His Spirit *through* His Word.

The fact remains that we have but one infallible and objective statement of the will of God concerning our lives. It is the Bible.

Says the Westminster Confession of Faith (I:6): "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men."

That infidels and Modernists reject the Bible as the infallible rule of life is a matter of common knowledge. What is not so generally understood is that a great many erroneous views on this subject are prevalent among those who would be known as conservative Christians. Right within Christian circles there are those who would discover God's will for their lives by other methods than the study of His Word and who, in so doing, deny, perhaps unwittingly but nonetheless really, the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

A brief consideration of some instances of that sort of thing may prove helpful.

Human Tradition

When our Lord Jesus was on earth He rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees for placing the tradition of the elders on a par with, or even above, God's law. He charged them with making God's commandments of none effect by their tradition. Suppose a man had needy parents. God's law declared it his sacred duty to aid them to the utmost of his ability. But according to Jewish tradition he could escape this duty by simply declaring that what he might give them was *corban*, that is, a gift to God.

The Roman Catholic Church has a large body of traditions which find no support in the Word of God and yet are made binding on church members. That is as might be expected, for Rome frankly acknowledges not only the Bible as infallible, but the Church as well. Therefore ecclesiastical tradition is considered as authoritative as Scripture itself.

Protestantism from the beginning firmly rejected the authority of tradition and made the sole authority of the Bible its controlling principle. But what poor Protestants many of us are today! How difficult we find it to distinguish between human tradition and divine precept! How prone we are to make the traditions of men as binding as God's commandments—or a bit more so!

In the kind providence of God I had God-fearing parents. The home in which I was reared was pervaded with a pronounced Christian atmosphere. It was customary, for instance, not only to have prayers before and after meals, but also to read a chapter of God's Word at each meal. I consider the last named custom a most commendable one. Not only does it insure regularity in family worship, but it gives beautiful expression to the significant truth that man's need of spiritual food is at least as great as his need of food for the body. Therefore I have not the slightest inclination to depart from that custom. So dearly do I love it that I confidently expect to hold to it as long as I live. More than that, I strongly recommend it to all Chris-

tians. But have I the right to force this particular system of Bible reading on others? May I count those guilty of sinful neglect who have another system? In a word, may I elevate this most excellent tradition to the rank of divine law? Of course not. Emphatically not!

If even the best of human traditions are not to be compared with God's commandments, then surely less noble traditions do not deserve our respect.

May we ever be on our guard against those who in the name of religion would add to God's law. To be stricter than God is no evidence of piety but, contrariwise, of abominable presumption. To add to God's law is just as heinous a sin as to subtract from it. He who does either puts himself in God's place.

The Individual Conscience

It is very generally held, both in and outside Christian circles, that the conscience is an infallible guide for right living. Often the conscience has been defined as God's voice in man.

The fallacy of this belief is easily shown. The conscience is indeed a precious gift of God to man. But like everything else in man it was corrupted by sin. In consequence it has become extremely fallible.

It has been truly said that but one dictum of the conscience is thoroughly reliable, namely, that it is right to do the right and wrong to do the wrong. On that all consciences are agreed and rightly so. But when it comes to the question just what is right and just what is wrong, consciences give a wide variety of answers and not infrequently flatly contradict each other. It follows that, if we were to permit men's consciences to decide what may or may not be done, we should be compelled to admit that there is no such thing as objective good. The question, *What is good?* would become unanswerable.

Then too, the conscience is pliable. Everybody's conscience is strongly influenced by the traditions of childhood. As these traditions are left behind, the conscience frequently

changes. And will not the voice of conscience be stifled if one repeatedly does what it forbids?

It is altogether possible for a person to feel in sacred duty bound to do what is absolutely wrong. The Bible contains a striking instance of that. The apostle Paul tells us that before his conversion he verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. When the grace of God had opened his eyes, he saw that by doing these things he had become "a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious."

When one is born again, the new life which is his affects him all around. He now thinks differently, wills differently, feels differently. His conscience also is enlightened. But sin and its consequences will not vanish entirely until death. And so it comes about that the consciences, even of Christians, differ on details. I know a Christian whose conscience forbids him to walk even as little as a mile on Sundays except for going to church. Personally I can take a walk of more than three miles on the Lord's Day without compunction of conscience. In fact, my conscience sometimes troubles me a bit for not walking more than I do on each of the seven days of the week.

We conclude that the conscience is no substitute for the Word of God as a rule of life. Not even the Christian's conscience is that. And this means, among other things, that no one has a right to impose the dictates of his conscience on others.

Pious Soothsaying

Satan likes to ape God. Magic, for instance, is his imitation of the miracle, and soothsaying is his substitute for prophecy.

The heathen often take recourse to soothsaying in their efforts to discover the will of the gods. They may slaughter an animal. Some sacred person, as a priest, will examine the entrails. Presently he is ready to declare what the gods will have done.

It goes altogether without saying that no Christian will consciously resort to anything even remotely resembling such practices.

And yet, strange, very strange, to say, well-meaning Christians occasionally do seek to learn God's will by a method not wholly unrelated to pagan soothsaying. They are con-

vinced that the Bible is our only source of knowledge of the divine will. So, to discover that will, to the Bible they turn. But how? Do they study its content? No. They offer a brief prayer for divine guidance, open the Bible at random, and then seek the answer to their query in the first verse on which their eyes light.

That this practice is dishonoring to the Bible must be clear to every thinking person. Dr. Machen once likened it to the use of the ouija board. Thus to use the Bible is to abuse it. God's Word is not an instrument of magic. Pious soothsaying describes this practice with a fair degree of accuracy.

An Abbreviated Bible

Modernists tell us that not everything in the Bible is God's Word. Orthodox Christians insist that the whole Bible is God's Word. And yet there are those in the latter group who abbreviate Holy Scripture after a fashion. To be sure, it does not occur to them to say that any part of it is untrue, but they do teach that certain portions are not intended for us Christians of the New Dispensation.

Our Dispensationalist brethren hold that the Lord's Prayer, for instance, is not for us. And so sharp a line of demarcation do they draw between the Dispensation of Law, under which Israel lived, and the Dispensation of Grace, under which we live today, as to deny that the Ten Commandments are for us. A famous Dispensationalist preacher of New York City once said that the Lord's Prayer "has no more place in the Christian church than the thunders of Sinai." Not all Dispensationalists are equally radical, but at least one extremist has come to the conclusion that the only part of the Bible intended for us lies within the compass of the so-called Imprisonment Epistles.

When men deny that Christians are obligated to obey the Ten Commandments the implications for Christian ethics become extremely serious. This denial is the very essence of that old and devastating heresy known as Antinomianism. The history of the Christian Church tells us that Antinomianism has not been conducive to holy living. How could it be? It would deprive us of God's own summary of His will concerning our lives. It seeks to rob us of that revelation

of the divine will which is an expression of the very nature of God, and to which the apostle Paul could therefore ascribe the divine attributes of holiness, justice, and goodness (Rom. 7:12).

It is not strange that those who deny the eternal validity of the moral law should seek a substitute for it. And so at least a few of them have come to rely for the disclosure of God's will on a vague, mystical guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Presumptuous Mysticism

It is of the essence of Mysticism to separate the operation of the Holy Spirit from God's objective Word, to hold that the Spirit often reveals God's will without reference to the Bible, and thus by plain implication to deny that the Bible is God's once-for-all, finished, revelation of His will.

No student of Scripture will care to deny that before the Bible was completed God frequently revealed His will through such methods as visions, dreams, and the casting of lots. But to assert that God continues to do this after the completion of Holy Writ is to deny its sufficiency. That obviously is an extremely serious matter. And so we are not surprised to find the Westminster divines militating against it in the warning that nothing at any time is to be added to Scripture, not even "by new revelations of the Spirit."

And yet, how very prevalent is the notion that the will of God may be learned through special guidance of the Spirit apart from the Word!

There is the old story of the young man who imagined he saw the letters P. C. written in the sky, and interpreted them as a divine command for him to Preach Christ. However, soon after his arrival at the seminary, it became clear that he had no capacity whatever for study. So an elderly professor took him aside and in a kind way suggested that he might have misinterpreted his supposed vision. P. C. could stand for Plant Corn.

Then there is the story of the widow who informed a certain gentleman that it had been revealed to her in a vision that he and she should be married, to which he aptly replied that as soon as he received a like vision their wedding day would be set.

The Buchmanites put less stress on the study of Scripture than on their

quiet hour, when they sit still with paper and pencil in hand, ready to jot down whatever revelations God may vouchsafe them.

I once met a patient in a psychopathic hospital who had attempted to shoot his pastor because, as he claimed, God had revealed to him with unmistakable clarity that such was his duty. Likely there are men and women outside asylums who "feel led" to do things almost as bad.

To claim special revelations of God's will by the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture sounds pious but is in reality wicked presumption which lays him who makes the claim wide open to deception by Satan.

This type of Mysticism frequently expresses itself in prayers that in the sight of God must be abominations. Instead of praying that the Holy Spirit may make the divine will in a given matter clear from Scripture, one prays only to be led to know God's will and puts forth no effort to discover it from His Word. That amounts to tempting God as much as if a drunkard were to enter a saloon with the prayer on his lips: "Lead me not into temptation." And how dreadfully easy it becomes for such a one to convince himself that whatever he feels like doing after prayer for guidance cannot possibly be wrong.

Mysticism flings the door wide open to Pharisaism at its worst.

Providential Guidance

Few notions are held more widely by Christians than that God is wont to disclose His will by two means—His Word and His providence.

It is not difficult to show that he blunders seriously who coördinates providence with the Word as a source of knowledge of the divine will.

Theologians distinguish between God's secret will, embodied in His counsel of foreordination, and God's revealed will, embodied in His law. Of course, God does not have two wills, but for practical purposes this distinction between two phases of the divine will is helpful. God's revealed will is an infallible guide for the life of His children. But His secret will obviously is no guide at all. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas was included in God's counsel. Scripture tells us that it occurred "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." But that does not in the least lessen Judas's guilt. He sinned inexpressibly because he violated God's revealed

will most flagrantly. Here Deuteronomy 29:29 is applicable: "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Now providence is simply the gradual unfolding of God's secret will. How perfectly clear, then, that it cannot serve as a guide for our moral behavior. It has been said that destiny is duty, but that is pernicious heresy.

The danger is ever present that the human heart, deceitful as it is, will misinterpret the leadings of providence. A man has a strong desire to do something immoral. Down in his heart he knows that it is immoral, but he does not suppress his longing. He tries hard to convince himself that the contemplated thing is permissible. Now he prays a wicked prayer. He asks God to make it clear to him providentially whether or not he may yield to his inclination. One day he is confronted with an opportunity to satisfy his craving. Is there not great danger that he will interpret this opportunity as a divine hint to go ahead? If, on the other hand, he had held to the law of God as his perfect guide, he could have come to no such evil conclusion.

Sometimes providence will bring to our attention a moral issue which we had not seen. A young man works in an office, let us say. Near him works a young lady. He learns to love her and is thinking seriously of asking her to become his wife. Being a godly young man, he makes this affair a matter of prayer. He prays that God may make it clear to him whether or not he should marry her. Then one day he providentially makes the discovery that she is a divorcee and that she obtained her divorce on unbiblical grounds. His duty is clear. But what has made it clear? Providential guidance? Surely not! Providence simply brought the moral issue to the fore. But the moral issue was decided by the Word of God, and by it alone.

We conclude that questions of moral behavior are to be settled, never on the basis of providential leadings, but always and only in the light of God's will as revealed in His Word.

This article deals with moral issues. But let us for a moment consider an instance which apparently involves no choice between good and evil. A young

man feels called of God to become a foreign missionary but cannot decide whether to go to China or to Africa. He knows full well that God would have the gospel brought to both these places, and he has no personal preference, but he is anxious to do that which is best. So he prays that God may providentially guide him to make up his mind as is best. Presently a serious obstacle arises which renders it practically impossible for him to go to China. He decides that God would have him preach in Africa. The day of his departure comes. He sails. There is no trace of doubt in his mind but the Lord has called him to the dark continent. And well may he be reasonably certain. But, lo and behold, on his journey he is taken ill and dies. The history of Borden of Yale is repeated. What shall we say? In the first place, that what we are told of David when he desired to build a temple to the Lord is applicable to our friend. That he had it in his heart to become a missionary was good. In the second place, that the strongest feeling on our part that the Lord would have us do something is no conclusive proof that He really would. And in the third place, that we have no way of interpreting providential leadings infallibly. Providence often takes such unexpected turns that we can never be altogether sure where it will lead us. Nor do we need to know.

It may be added that when we stand before a choice of conduct we should be very slow to decide that no moral issue is at stake. Often moral questions lie hidden under the surface of things. But if after honest investigation we find no such issue, we may well pray for providential guidance to do that which is most expedient, but we must not neglect to use our God-given common sense, and in ordinary matters there can be no harm in following our natural inclinations. I sit down in a restaurant. The menu gives me a choice between lamb and ham. I dislike lamb. I like ham. There is no reason why I should afflict myself with lamb. Nor is there a good reason why I should not thoroughly enjoy my ham.

But after this digression I would repeat that providential guidance is not intended to solve our moral problems. God has given us His Word for that.

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The conclusion of the whole matter

is that God's Word is our one rule of life, our sole standard of morality. The Bible is an altogether sufficient

lamp unto our feet and the only light unto our path that we need. For the discovery of God's will for

our lives there is no substitute in all the world for painstaking and prayerful study of Holy Scripture.

Whither Christian Endeavor?

By the REV. JOHN H. SKILTON

Member of the Pastoral Council of the Maine State Christian Endeavor Union and
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MAINE Christian Endeavorers are witnessing an undeclared war. Unbelief, indifference, and compromise have been ill served by the evangelical Christianity of the state Christian Endeavor Union, and are striving to modify or oppose its testimony. They have enlisted the support of the International Society of Christian Endeavor which, without consulting the Maine Union, agreed to "assist" in a "state-wide C. E. conference" held in Portland, January 28th and 29th. This conference brought to Maine men unsympathetic toward the policies of the state Union, among them Dr. Daniel A. Poling, president of the International Society. It aimed to give the young people of Maine, who had been "dangerously" exposed to consistent Christianity by their own Union, "some of the help and some of the inspiration which millions of the world's youth have had." The place of meeting was the Williston Church, where Christian Endeavor happened to be born, and which, a few months ago, virtually ejected the Biblical Maine State Christian Endeavor convention. Again, without consulting the Maine State Union, the International Society invited the general secretary of the New York State Christian Endeavor Union to do some field work in Maine and has attempted to form an independent mailing list of Maine Christian Endeavor societies.

The Policy of the Maine Union

A source of annoyance to some persons in Maine and to the International Society of Christian Endeavor is that the Maine Union, at its last two annual conventions, has adopted a Biblical statement of "spiritual policy" and has attempted to make its witness conform to that policy. Without a dissenting vote the last conventions have declared that

"Because God is the Lord, and our God, and our Redeemer, therefore we are bound to obey His commandments. He commands: Come unto me . . . Preach the Word (the inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ to satisfy divine justice, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the miracles of Christ) . . . Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . Feed my sheep . . . Feed my lambs."

It may seem strange that so simple a statement as this of truths always believed by the Church of Christ regardless of denomination should cause any trouble, but unbelief and indifference are strong within the Church today. They are not pleased when consistent Christians, by affirming truths especially distasteful to infidelity, indicate that they are willing to stand definitely with Christ. The spiritual policy of the Maine State Union was designed to do what it has, in a measure, accomplished: clearly to inform men that in the conflict between Christianity and unbelief in the religious world the Maine Union is on the side of Christianity.

The Policy of the International Society

The International Society of Christian Endeavor, unlike the Maine Union, has refused to take a definite stand for the historic Christian religion. The trustees of that society, at a meeting in New York city in May, 1936, were invited to clarify their position, and to declare themselves on the side of Christianity by passing a resolution similar to the spiritual policy that Maine has adopted. To this end such a resolution as the following was offered to them by a representative from Maine: "We the trustees of the International Society of Christian Endeavor

affirm our belief in the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His miracles, His death on the cross as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile God to men, and His bodily resurrection: and we desire that the witness of the International Society of Christian Endeavor shall conform to these verities."

Not one of the trustees even seconded that simple affirmation and request! If this is hard to credit, one has only to consult the minutes of that meeting for verification: "The proposal . . . that the trustees of the International Society make a definite assertion as to theological beliefs was not seconded, and therefore was passed by without action."

The representative from Maine had a number of opportunities to learn the sentiment of individual leaders in the Christian Endeavor movement. One of the foremost field secretaries considered it unethical for a union to adopt a spiritual policy such as Maine has adopted. Another field secretary said that his state wanted conservative speakers but, when a man became involved in controversy, he was banned. Dr. William Hiram Foulkes, first vice president of the International Society and since elected moderator of the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., assailed the chief defender of the Christian faith then living, the Rev. Dr. J. Gresham Machen. Another officer of the International Society, Dr. Stanley B. Vandersall, said that Christian Endeavor had never been pinned down to doctrinal statements, and expressed his conviction that Maine policies had excluded or offended many in that state.

When the representative from Maine subsequently wrote to Dr. Daniel A. Poling, the president, informing him that some in Maine, because of difficulty with the policy