

The PRESBYTERIAN Journal

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S.S. LESSON AND YOUTH PROGRAM FOR NOVEMBER 27

THE *RIGHT* OR THE *GREAT*

There is a marked difference between moral, spiritual *righteousness* and material, temporal *greatness*.

In the latter, a man is counted important on account of the things he has. But in the former, a man's attainment depends on whom he belongs to, for righteousness characterizes only the redeemed child of God.

The human dilemma is grounded in our inability to distinguish between the right and the great. Only Christ, God's Incarnate Truth, places each in its proper perspective. And only His Holy Spirit can make us to love the right instead of the great.

To know Him as Saviour and Lord is to desire righteousness over greatness. Those who know only the sheer nakedness of greatness perish, but those who are robed and warmly clothed in His imputed righteousness have Life!

—Rev. Walter W. Brown

ACROSS the EDITOR'S DESK

We would encourage you to take the little test of your theological knowledge set up for you on p. 10. This test is designed to sharpen your awareness of the difference between what is fundamental in Christian **experience** and what is fundamental in Christian **communication**. A Christian is kind to others because he is a Christian. But being kind to others does not make **them** Christians. It's as simple as that.

According to an item in the Alexandria (La.) **Daily Town Talk**, workers began the job of stringing Christmas lights throughout the city during the last days in September. If they back up the season any more there will be no valid reason for taking the decorations down from one Christmas to the next. At this juncture we recall that the Ministerial Association of Raleigh, N. C. last year exacted from the Chamber of Commerce a promise that Christmas would not begin until after Thanksgiving.

Marching in a "Christian Witness" parade in Philadelphia recently, two teen-agers were observed carrying a sign which we, too, find eminently satisfying:

God said it
Jesus did it
I believe it
That settles it!

Miss Margaret Law and her mother, Mrs. R. W. Law, of the Mt. Zion church, St. Charles, S. C., (W. L. Newman, pastor) have recited the Shorter Catechism.

"I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." — Galatians 2:20. Henry Drummond spoke of the "expulsive power of a new affection". For the answer to life's problems, try loving Christ.

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CONTENTS

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE	5
Dr. Robert Strong	
GOD'S ENCOUNTER WITH MAN	7
Dr. William C. Robinson	
EDITORIALS	10
A LAYMAN AND HIS CHURCH	11
SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON, November 27	13
YOUTH PROGRAM, November 27	15
THE CHURCH AT HOME	16
CHILDREN'S BIBLE STUDIES	18
BOOK REVIEWS	19
THE MAILBAG	20

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THE SERMON

God's Encounter With Man

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON, Th.D.

Acts 7:2—"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." Gal. 1:15-16—"It pleased God who . . . called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me."

The Bible records a number of God's encounters with men. Perhaps the most dramatic of these are those with Abraham, with Moses, with Isaiah, and with Paul. It is our purpose to study these for light on how God deals with us and what is the nature of the faith with which we respond to His gracious intervention.

A. GOD'S GRACIOUS INTERVENTION

Looking at the account of these encounters, we are struck with the fact that in each case God takes the initiative. If you please God is the hero of each story. God, not man, is the author of every conversion. At the moment of encounter Abram is an idolater, a worshipper of Sin the Moon—God and Ningal his consort; Moses is the great excuser; Isaiah is the disappointed court politician; and Paul is the persecutor of the disciples of the Lord. The God of Glory appeared unto our Father Abraham when he was an uncircumcised pagan in Mesopotamia. When Moses was living in Midian as an embittered disillusionist the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush. When Isaiah was chagrined at the death of the great King Uzziah in whom all the hopes of the house of David were centered then he saw the real King, the LORD, high and lifted up. When Paul was breathing out slaughter and threatening in veritable Khrushchev fashion, then the Lord Jesus whom he was persecuting met him. Thus he became a "partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God who saved us and called us with an holy calling" (II Tim. 1:8-9).

In these meetings God is personally present in the power of His Holy Spirit. Paul urges the Galatians to stand before God as Abraham did: not by works but by faith. Thus will they receive the blessing of Abraham, the promise of the Spirit. In Isaiah 63:11 the prophet asks where is He that put His Holy Spirit within Moses. The same prophet speaks of the Spirit being given to the Messianic Servant 11:2; 42:1; and waits for the Spirit to be poured out from on high, 32:15, for in the covenant promise:

My Spirit which I have put upon thee and my Word which I have put in Thy mouth, shall not depart from thee nor from thy seed nor from thy seed's seed forever, 59:21.

Paul repeatedly testifies to the Spirit who bears witness with our spirits by which we call God, **Abba**, Father. Thus our faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, I Cor. 2:5.

"Let me no more my comfort draw,
From my frail hold on Thee;
In this alone rejoice with awe
Thy mighty hold on me."

The living God Who manifested Himself in the illuminating power of His Spirit was also present speaking His own Word. In each encounter, He was present as the Person of God speaking. God Almighty made to Abraham exceeding great and precious promises, even the assurance that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Jesus said that Abraham saw his day and was glad. As he offered his most precious possession, Isaac, the heir of the covenant, on the altar and as God stopped his hand, Abraham looked down the ages and saw the Heavenly Father doing in fact what the earthly father did, only

in figure. For the NT Gospel is phrased in terms of Abraham's great act: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" . . . God withheld not His own Son but freely offered Him up for us all.

God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of the covenant, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the Lord gracious and merciful, long-suffering and plenteous in loving-kindness and tender mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. To Isaiah, in the hour of human despair there is hope. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given and the government shall be upon His shoulders and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, Immanuel" 9:6; 7:14. And again "by His knowledge shall my Righteous servant justify many for He shall bear their iniquities" 53:11. The deepest note in the Lord's revelation of Himself to Paul is this: "He loved me and delivered Himself up for me." In Romans five the Apostle puts together the revelation of God's love in His Spirit and by His Word. The love of God for us is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit as He points us to Calvary and shows us God commending His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Is this word of God's love the word of our Calvinistic faith, or are we rather shut up to some kind of fatalistic determinism? Dean Doumergue cites Calvin as asking, "Wherein does our faith consist?" and answering, "In this: that God is our Father." This accords with the letter to Francis I:

"What is more consistent with faith, than to assure ourselves of God being a propitious Father,

where Christ is acknowledged as a brother and a Mediator? than securely to expect all prosperity and happiness from Him, whose unspeakable love towards us went so far that 'He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all?' than to rest in the certain expectation of salvation and eternal life, when we reflect upon the Father's gift in Christ, in whom such treasures are hidden?"

The same thoughts are found in the 12th, the 13th and the 111th answers to Calvin's Catechism. Everyone should be assured that he is beloved of God and that He will be both his Father and his Saviour. This assurance comes by His own Word wherein He utters His mercy in Christ and assures us of His love toward us. The right faith is a sure persuasion and steadfast knowledge of God's tender love toward us, as He has plainly uttered in His Gospel that He will be both a Father and a Saviour unto us through the means of Jesus Christ.

Only one who has been loved can love; only one who has been trusted can trust; only one who has experienced self-surrender in another can learn to surrender himself. We are set free to give ourselves to God through the fact that He has given Himself for us.

As we know ourselves loved by God we love Him. As we find Him opening His heart to us in Christ we open ourselves to Him. As we enter in the fellowship of His sufferings for us, we receive grace to give ourselves to Him. Who first gave Himself for and to us. It is as we find God trusting us with His only-begotten Son that we in turn trust Him. Who withheld not this unspeakable gift but freely offered Him up for us.

B. MAN'S RESPONSE IN FAITH

Now what is our response? What is the nature of that faith in which we reply in this God-wrought encounter?

While there is an intellectual response to God's revelation of Himself in the Gospel, faith is more than knowledge. It is trust, confidence of the heart, entrusting ourselves to and giving our trust to the faithfulness of God our Saviour. From acceptance of the promises of God, Abraham came to trust in the God of the promises. "He believed in the LORD and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness," Gen. 15:6.

Moses was faithful to Him that appointed him as a servant in all his house, Heb. 3:2,5, for "he endured as seeing Him that is invisible," Heb. 11:27. According to Isaiah 36:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in Thee." Paul reminds Peter, "We have put our trust in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ," Gal. 2:16. For "whosoever believeth on Him shall not be put to shame," Rom. 10:11.

For Luther, faith is unwavering trust of the heart in Him who has given Himself to us in Christ as our Saviour, steady assurance of faith because Christ with His work has undertaken our cause. For Calvin, faith is more of the heart than of the head. As the work of the Spirit, it is more heart certainty than intellectual comprehension, *Institutes* III.ii.8,14. Faith means to put one's entire confidence in, to rely on God in Christ.

In this whole record of Biblical men and reformers, the nature of faith is that it takes from the believer all glory and all self-confidence. It is a self-alienating principle. It does not make of my faith an idol. Abraham believed giving glory to God, Rom. 4:20; that is, faith is the unlimited willing-

ness to let God have all the glory of saving the sinners. It is to divest ourselves of all ground of glorying that God may be eminently glorious and that we may glory in Him. *Sola fide* as used by the Reformers meant that all the virtue, all the saving power of faith rests in its object, its content, none in the believer. The faith of Abraham is trust in the Almighty Power of God who despite the deadness of age gave Isaac to the patriarch, and who for our justification raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, Rom. 4:19,24; cf. Heb. 11:19.

Yet faith does involve a certain knowledge, or acknowledgement that God who knows us through and through has given us a partial knowledge, but a sure persuasion of His loving knowing of us. The older divines said that faith consisted of *notitia, essensus* and *fiducia*, that is knowledge, assent and confidence.

In our day many of the neo-orthodox object to propositional knowledge. It is interesting to note, however, that Karl Barth (whom Pauck calls the only neo-orthodox theologian) in his **DOGMATICS IN OUTLINE** recognizes that this knowledge may be logical as well as factual and in his **CHURCH**

(Cont. on p. 17, col. 1)

THE READERS ASK

(Address your questions to "The Readers Ask," c/o the JOURNAL)

Q. What are the advantages of the Rotary System for church officers?

A. The story is told (it was told us as true) that the Rotary System found its way to the General Assembly as a proposal because one congregation wished to rid itself of a highly disliked elder. It was primarily designed, not to give everyone in the congregation a chance to serve as an officer, but rather as a graceful way to prune the eldership and the diaconate in order to keep the spiritual leadership of a congregation at the highest and most effective level. (National elections of senators and congressmen are not designed to give everybody a chance to go to Washington, but rather to keep the best men in Washington).

Advantages of the system are related to the above remarks. The best possible men are brought into positions of spiritual leadership and those less able are retired.

Disadvantages of the system are more practical than theoretical. In practice, many congregations use the system to "give everybody a chance," and the spiritual level of the leadership is lowered. Instances have been noted in which a minister, faced with a non-cooperative session (for one reason or another), has managed to have things his way by "arranging" to have non-cooperative members replaced with men agreeable to his wishes. The possibility that decisions of Church Courts may be adversely affected by immature spiritual judgment has been proved a very real one. And the anomaly of an elder attending Presbytery and the General Assembly but without the privilege of a vote in his own Session has not been solved.

For these reasons, a large number of congregations have adopted the Rotary System for the Diaconate, but not for the Session.

DALLAS SPEAKER

DALLAS, Texas — (PN) — The Rev. William A. Benfield, pastor of the First Church in Shreveport, La., conducted a special series of nine meetings for various groups in First Presbyterian Church here, October 16-19. The "Spiritual Enrichment Week" was under the sponsorship of the Men of the Church. A feature of the program was luncheon meetings for the general public.

GOD'S ENCOUNTER—from p. 8

DOGMATICS, I.2:527, states the doctrine that the Bible is the Word of God in propositions, or as the German puts it, *thetisch klarzustellen*. On the other hand the leading classical Calvinist, C. G. Berkouwer, finds himself unable to put the relation between faith and justification into a neat proposition. In any case, there are more Biblical terms, such as, "my word" and "my words," promise and fulfillment, *kerygma* and *torah*, wisdom and understanding, revelation and acknowledgement of God's loving knowing of us.

Our faith, like the faith of an Abraham, a Moses, an Isaiah and a Paul

does have some intellectual content. Jesus commissioned the disciples to teach all things whatsoever He had commanded, Matt. 28:18, and they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ, Acts 5:42. The Apostle reminded the Galatian Christians that they had received the Spirit by the hearing that called for faith rather than by the works of the law. The Corinthian believers were put into Christ and He was made unto them wisdom, justification, sanctification and redemption under the preaching of the risen Christ as crucified. For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ, Rom. 10:17; or we are born again of incorruptible seed by the Word of God which is preached unto us in the Gospel, I Peter 1:23-25; cf. James 1:18.

Faith is not merely knowledge, yet God has been pleased to reason with us, not to treat us as sticks or stocks or cats or dogs. The more I know of my doctor, my lawyer, my fiancée, the better I am able to trust him and her. Let us, therefore, not seek the minimalist attitude in faith. May we grow in grace and in knowledge, increase in wisdom and understanding, that we may believe in and love the Lord our God with all our minds.

Finally, this encounter in which God converts man issues in decision and redirection of life. Faith is a conviction on which a man acts. God takes the man to whom He reveals Himself up into His plan and fits him into His own program for the Kingdom of God in the world. God called Abraham and he obeyed and went out, not knowing whither he went. Despite Moses' excuses, God sent him to deliver Israel from Egypt and make of them a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. To the challenge "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" Isaiah answers, "Here am I send me." And when the Lord appeared unto Saul of Tarsus to make of him a minister and a witness, Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. We are here be-

Books Wanted — THE PRESBYTERIAN DOCTRINE OF CHILDREN IN THE COVENANT, by Lewis Schenck, **THE HISTORY OF INFANT BAPTISM**, by William Wall, **THE LEOPARD HUNTS ALONE**, by Conway Wharton. If you have these three books and will donate or sell them please let us hear from you. Address: Rev. Howard Cameron, 1184 Conway Road, Decatur, Ga.

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cause God has met us and called us to leave the plow in the furrow, the business at the desk for other men, the law courts to our brethren, and go teach and preach the Gospel.

* * * *

Dr. Robinson is Professor of History at Columbia Seminary, Decatur, Ga.

LAYMAN—from p. 11
of the Word brings conviction, repentance and salvation through that same Spirit.

The writer is convinced that there is a direct connection between our attitude to the Scriptures and spiritual power in the use of the Scriptures. We may fool ourselves and some who hear us, but God is never fooled. Those great preachers of the Word, men who have been mightily used of God to win souls, have been men who **believed** the Word and the same Holy Spirit Who inspired the writers of the Book and Who empowers the preachers of this Book takes the message of the Word and uses it as the Sword of the Spirit — to the glory of God, the winning of souls and the strengthening of faith.

If the pulpits of the major denominations find their influence waning in contemporary life it is because of unbelief of the Bible and because of the substituting of ethical teachings for the spiritual truths of that Word, whereby men are regenerated and by which alone they can put into practical application true Christian ethics.

If the major denominations of America find themselves laid aside as the chief instrument of evangelical preaching and teaching it will be because they have tolerated in their midst a growing emphasis on worldly wisdom and concepts with a corresponding waning of emphasis on the spiritual and the eternal.

History shows that the critics, philosophers and scientists of this world have little to offer that is of **eternal** value, but we have permitted them to usurp the spot-light. The Apostle Paul warns of just this thing and affirms that such wisdom is "foolishness" in God's sight because it is **earth-bound**.

Without in any measure discounting the material advances to be seen on every hand we all need to see things in the right perspective. To do this we **must** exercise the faith of a little child.

Children's Bible Studies

Rev. and Mrs. Paul G. Settle
STORIES OF THE BEGINNINGS

8. God's Ark of Salvation

DO YOU KNOW—Why Noah built the ark?

LOOK UP in the Bible: Genesis 6:12, 13, 14, 17, 18; Hebrews 11:7.

WHAT DOES EACH VERSE SAY about why Noah built the ark?

THINGS TO REMEMBER: God provides for those who trust Him. Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:7.

MAN'S GREAT WICKEDNESS

(Cross out the wrong word.)

Genesis 6:5, 6, 7. God saw man's (goodness wickedness). God (sometimes always) sees our sin as well as our good deeds. Man's great wickedness (pleased grieved) God, and He said, "I will (scold destroy) man from off the face of the earth."

NOAH A JUST MAN

Genesis 6:8-16. (Noah Cain) found favor in the (eyes book) of the Lord, because he was a (dishonest just) man. God told Noah exactly how long, how wide, and how high to build the (house ark). It was to be covered inside and outside with (paint pitch). It was to have (two three) stories.

Genesis 6:19-21. Noah had to bring into the ark (ten two) of every sort of (fowl flowers cattle). He took food for (some all) of the people and animals. Noah had a wife and three sons. Each son had a wife. How many people went into the ark?

GOD PROVIDES A WAY OF SALVATION

(Draw a line from the action to the person who did it.)

God
Noah

provides salvation
did all that God said
spoke to Noah
believed God
tells us what to do

John 3:16. This verse tells us that we shall not perish if we, like Noah, believe and obey. If we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten — — —, our Ark of Safety, and obey His Word, we will not be destroyed by the flood of sin.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR BIBLE?

What is the first book in the New Testament written by Paul?

(Adapted from "Stories of the Beginnings," Copyright 1958 by the Sunday School House, Glendale, Calif.)