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THE NEW THEOLOGY.

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PART III.

ONE of the constant cries of the New Theologians is, "Back to Christ"; "back to Christ." "Back," say they, "behind the views of the Old Theologians of the present day"; "back behind the dogmas and creeds of the churches"; "back behind the mediaeval church"; "back behind the fathers"; "back behind everybody and everything to Christ himself, the supreme authority in religion." They make the startling charge that the true Christ has been lost; that the church, as it has come down through the centuries, has left him behind; that the Christ now found in the creeds and theology of the present day is very different from the Christ whom the apostles knew and whom they describe in the gospels; very different in his character, teachings, works, and ultimate purposes in regard to the human race. Of course this cry, at first view, is very plausible, very pious; a cry to which, in itself considered, nobody can object; a cry expressive of what every Christian must approve—supreme devotion to Christ, and complete submission to his authority as the great Prophet of the church, and the only trustworthy source of religious knowledge. It presents the New Theologians in the attractive and conciliatory aspect of religious teachers who wish to discard all human opinions and speculations, and to go back behind them all afresh

THAT CHRIST MAY HAVE THE PRE-EMINENCE.¹

BY ROBERT E. SPEER.

IF Christ has the right to pre-eminence in any life, he has that right in ours. In common with all Christians we bear his name and call ourselves his men. Beyond that we have set ourselves, nay, we believe that he has set us aside, for special service over which he is to have complete dominance, and in all the ways of which we are to grant him pre-eminence.

What is covered by this claim of Christ's to perfect sovereignty over us, and by our recognition of his right to the first place in our lives and wills? I think it will help us if we take a little time to think of some of those terms by which the first Christians avowed their recognition of Christ's right to this pre-eminence, especially two sets of the titles by which they addressed our Lord in the first years of the Christian Church. First of all, the title of Master and those other names that are associated with that. There are five different Greek words in the New Testament that are translated master in our English Bibles. The first of them means simply teacher. It is the word that was used by the two disciples of John when they left their master and turned to follow Jesus and said to him, "Rabbi (which is by interpretation Master), where dwellest thou?" It was the word that Mary used, in our translation of the New Testament, that morning of the resurrection when she stood in front of Jesus' grave and Jesus stood behind her, and she did not know who he was, thinking he was the gardener, until at last he spoke her name, and she said, "Rabboni," which is by interpretation Master. That is the simplest of all those titles by which the

¹ This address, delivered at the Alleghany Conference of Theological Students in November last, is published by the courtesy of Mr. Speer and the editors of the *Conference Report*, from the advance "copy" of which it is taken. This valuable "Report" will be issued at an early date.—ED.

early Christians recognized the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. They acknowledged that he was their Master in the sense that they had now entered his school, and that whatever education they were receiving was an education in which he held the place of pre-eminent teacher. Now our Lord teaches still in many ways men who call him Master. There is a powerful educational influence just in his presence. I think many times we forget the power of education that there is in personal companionship and the influence, not of speech, but of presence upon the thought and judgment. There are thousands of men who cannot think in their mother's presence what they can think when out of her presence. We all have cherished thoughts often in our lives that we could not have borne into the presence of Jesus Christ. I think that is the lesson of the story that opens the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John. Things looked differently to those scribes when they beheld that woman in Jesus' presence from the way in which they looked to them when they thought the matter over alone, and there before his blushing face and his downcast eyes, with the vision of the offender lying upon the ground, those men formed judgments of themselves, of their behavior, of the sinful woman, that were quite diverse from the judgments they had formed outside of Jesus' presence. There is a wrath against sin born in the presence of Christ that cannot be maintained outside his presence. There is a love of tenderness, there is a fondness for the likeness of his Father's countenance in the presence of Christ that is not begotten where Jesus Christ's presence is not exercising the mastery of education over life.

We see just that thing in the life of our Lord, in the declaration, in the prologue of the gospel of John, that the face of the Word was ever directed towards the face of the Father, *Πρὸς τὸν θεόν*. Not that he was with God only, but that he never looked at anything in itself, but only in the face of God; that he saw this world not in itself, but reflected in the face of God; that he judged life and all its values not as they appeared in themselves, but as he saw them in the face of God. Our Lord thought his thoughts and formed his judgments in the educating presence of God. And if he is my Master, he begins in my life this process of education by personal influence; he makes me loathe those things that I would not loathe if I did not make him

my pre-eminent teacher in this regard. The apostles were appealing to this truth when they held up before the eyes of the early Christians the prospect of Christ's second coming and exhorted them by the hope of his coming to great purity and strength of life. Why? They appealed to them to cherish certain judgments because, if Christ were there, they would have cherished those judgments; they appealed to them to lead certain lives because in Christ's presence they would not be satisfied with any other kind of life. "And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

But if Christ is my Master in any real and sincere sense, he will be teaching me in other ways than this general educational influence of his presence. Think of his masterful teaching in the matter of prayer, in the matter of service, in the matter of humility. Who ever entered his school who was not taught lessons in service and humility and prayer that no hands and lips but the Master's would have been able to teach? Or think how he sets himself to be the lesson that we are to learn. I like the way in which, after putting things so constantly indirectly, the New Testament rises with perfectly dauntless directness and says we are not to feed only upon the influence of Jesus, but that Jesus said that we are to feed upon him. We are not alone to live by the words of God that come out of his mouth; we are to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ. And we are not only to sit in our Master's school and have his influence work upon our judgments in its mighty transforming power, not alone to sit in his school and be taught lessons of prayer and humility and service; we are to set himself before us and learn him. "Ye have not so learned Christ," said Paul in one of his choice expressions. And Simon Peter conveys the same idea by the phrase in which he describes Jesus by the very term that was used to describe the copy that a school-master wrote at the head of the wax tablet for his pupils, an *ἐπεγράμμη* that they should reproduce, "To follow in his steps." If Jesus Christ is our Master, not, I mean, in the ordinary empty sense, not in the sense in which we speak of other masters—if he is our Master really and sincerely and vitally, then you and I are pupils in his school, and all our judgments take form from his influence. We ourselves are the little

children learning the lessons that he sets for us. Yes, we are the little children who learn the lesson that he himself is.

The second word for "Master" occurs only once, and then in the gospel of Matthew in the chapter towards the close of the gospel where Jesus says to his disciples, "Have ye not many masters, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." *Καθηγήτης* is the Greek word, and it means literally "leader," the man who goes before, after whom the disciples go. It was a more pertinent word perhaps in those early days when schools moved about and walked after their teachers, but it is a pertinent word even still. If Jesus Christ is my Master, I set him before my eyes and give him pre-eminence as the leader of my life, and all that I am and do must take shape from the path in which he leads me. The very natures that he has given us demand such a Master as Jesus Christ in just this regard. No human life can get along without some kind of a master of this sort. We make them for ourselves out of our friends; we make them for ourselves out of dead heroes, or we find them in Jesus Christ, our Master leader. He sets for us the example of our life so that many things sink beneath our contempt when we walk in his discipleship, and we deem those things despicable which he deemed despicable, those things loathsome which he despised, and only those things beautiful and holy which lay close and warm upon his heart.

The third word for master occurs only in the gospel of Luke, and there half a dozen times. It is the word that Simon Peter used that night of their fruitless fishing on the Galilean Sea when Jesus bade them to cast the net on the other side and they would find fish. "Master, we have toiled all night and taken nothing; notwithstanding, at thy word, I will let down the net for a draught." It is the word the disciples used when Jesus was asleep in the boat among the troubled waves of the sea. "Master," they said, "carest thou not that we perish?" It is the word that the sons of Zebedee used when they came to him and said, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followed not with us." *Επιστάτης* is the Greek word. "Overseer" it means, or "superintendent." The one who has complete control over our methods of service, the one who has a right to direct us in our toil, to tell us the

things to be done and not to be done; the one to whom we look for counsel and direction and advice, and under whose rule we reverently lay all our schemes and plans for his direction and control. Is Jesus Christ our Master in any such sense? Have we given him the pre-eminence honestly in our lives in this regard, so that he has become the true overseer of our lives, so that he directs us in our work? Think of the immense amount of fruitless, flippant, frivolous, shallow and squalid work done in this world that would be undone at once by men who took their directions from him! Think of all the tenderness of heart that would come into the toil of men who were working under the direction of him and following his methods in their toil! I met a gentleman a couple of years ago who told me of a visit that he paid to the city of Dundee, in Scotland, not many years after the death of Robert Murray MacCheyne, for whom the whole of Scotland was weeping, although he died only at the age of twenty-nine. He said that when he got off in Dundee he asked a man on the street if he could tell him where MacCheyne's home was. "Oh! yes," said the man with a smile, pointing him down the street to where MacCheyne's church and manse were standing. Then he knocked at the door where MacCheyne had lived, and his old sexton let him in and took him into the study where MacCheyne's books were still upon the table, and he said, "Sit down here," taking him up to the chair in which MacCheyne worked, and my friend sat down. "Now," he said, "put your elbows down on the table," and he put his elbows down. "Now," he said, "put your face down in your hands," and he put his face in his hands. "Now," he said, "let the tears fall. That was the way my pastor used to do." And he took him into the old church of Dundee and stood him up in the pulpit where MacCheyne had preached, and he said, "Put your elbows down on the Bible," and he put his elbows down on the Bible. "Now," he said, "put your face in your hands," and he put his face in his hands. "Now," he said, "let the tears fall. That was the way my pastor used to do." And that was the way my Master used to do. As he drew near the city we read that he wept over it, and he cried, "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! if thou hadst but known in this thy day the things that belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." I think one reason why so much

of our service is dead and fruitless is because it has no vision of the overseeing, weeping Christ whose eye-lids knew the touch of tears, and who would direct those who would follow him as their loving and pre-eminent Master in ways of service that would find access to the hearts of men as his ways found access to their hearts, and hold their hearts in absolute sovereignty still.

It is this mastery of Jesus Christ that will do in the realm of our work what the teaching of Jesus Christ will do in the realm of our thinking and our judgment. There is a power in the presence of Christ to quicken the sluggish life. Who has not seen the torpid life touched by Christ? I have a friend who is a puddler in some iron and steel mills. Some years ago he was not able even to read. When he was converted he could not read a chapter in the Bible, but after his conversion he made up his mind he must learn to read in order to be able to study the Bible. He has had no education except what he has found in the mastery of Christ and in the study of his word. And it is a treat to hear that man pray—the rich, fluent dignity, the deep, reverent spirit—and to sit down and talk with him is like talking with a man who had been at school at the Master's feet, who had all his sluggish instincts touched by Christ and raised into vitality, whose torpid life had been quickened and awakened by him. The dullest can be touched by the power of Christ's mastery when once his pre-eminence as overseer of life is honestly and candidly recognized and the whole life yielded up to his rule.

The fourth word that is translated master is the word *κύριος*, which most of the time is translated Lord. It is the word that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount, when he says that "No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or cleave to the one and despise the other." It is the term constantly used in the New Testament in addressing Jesus, and also with reference to Jesus' power over life, and over and over, instead of being translated Lord, it is translated by our word "Master." Jesus Christ, the Lord of life. I think there is scarcely any title of Christ's that is quite so familiar to us as this or that we use so often in our prayers and perhaps in our speech about Christ to one another, nor any that we take upon our lips more often in vain. Lord! What does it mean that Jesus Christ should

be my Lord? I heard Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston, say once not long before he died that there was nothing that gave him such a thrill of pleasure as to hear a young man call Jesus Christ Lord if he had any knowledge at all of the meaning of what he was saying. Jesus Christ, Lord, the owner of life, the utter King of life, everything yielded up to his dominating control. If Jesus Christ is my Master in the sense of being my Lord, then all the plans of my life must be laid down for his supervision and judgment and authority. I go where he sends me; I do what he tells me; I stay where he bids me. We worry ourselves so many times about our difficulty in finding the will of God. Fellow students, the will of God is seeking every man of us with more eagerness to discover us than we feel to find that will. We cannot get away from the will of God if we have the least desire that the will of God should discover us and set us in the Father's place. And the man who has once called Jesus Christ Lord honestly—and no man can say that honestly except by the Spirit of God—has at once guaranteed to himself that his Lord will put him in the place where he wants him to be. It is of infinitely more consequence to my Lord that I should be where he wants me than it is to me that I should be there, and I may be sure that he will see that that which he owns is where it can be of greatest service to him, and that he will guard alike all its hours and its place and vocation in life if once it has yielded itself to him as King and Lord.

If Jesus Christ is my Lord, he is Lord of all my thoughts. I know my own heart well enough, and yours, too, to know that Jesus Christ is not Lord of our thoughts. Read over again this evening before you lie down to sleep what Jesus Christ had to say about thinking—of the guilt of evil thinking—in the Sermon on the Mount; what he had to say with reference to certain standards of judgment that had prevailed with reference to sin, and his own views of sin as a thing not alone in the outer act but in the inner imagination and desire. And I challenge one man here this evening to say to himself, "I am a man of an untarnished heart and unsoiled mind." Who of us has brought every one of his thoughts into captivity and obedience to Christ? Who of us has honestly yielded up his thinking to Jesus Christ, his Lord? I went in last

summer at Northfield to say good-bye to Major Whipple, not expecting ever to see him again. He was so weak that they were watching with him day and night, not knowing when he might die. Only a fortnight before, when trying to lift one of his arms from the coverlet, the weight of the arm had broken the bones and it dropped helplessly on the bed. He lay there almost unable to move, with the red sunlight coming in and falling across the pale, wan face. The doctor and the nurse were there at the time, and he asked them to step out of the room for a few moments. He said the days were very long, that he could not sleep more than a few hours, and he waked up every night just a little after midnight, and then he had to lie alone until the sun came and the friends began to come in. I asked him what he did during all those hours. Well, he said he gave all his time to thinking upon Christ. He thought upon Christ in the Old Testament types and prophecies; he thought about his lovely life, the sweet things he had said when he was here, all his ways with the little children and with the poor and bereaved, and all the mighty things he had done; he thought of him now, and he thought of him as some sweet day when the eastern sky grows all ruddy with the hope of his return he will come back again. And he asked me what was the best thought I had had that day, apologizing by adding that that was the only thing he could do now to freshen up his own thinking, inasmuch as he could not read, and had only to recall what was already stored in his memory, and to live upon what friends said to him. I told him I had been thinking that day of what an immense blessing it would be if every time a man's mind was released from the pressure of any objective duty and free to go to its own place, if every time it was at liberty from every external strain and could do just the thing that was natural to it, it would fall back inevitably on Christ. Yes, he said, he had often thought of that, and he quoted a quatrain from a little Scotch hymn:

"As a wee bairn to its mither,
As a little bird to its nest,
I fain would lie down
On my dear Saviour's breast."

And then he opened up his heart and spoke to me of him. And I had a fresh revelation that summer evening as the light of

the setting sun streamed in over that face that was so near the vision of the great land that, after all, is not so very far away from any one of us, of the beauty, of the transforming power, the sweetness, the ineffable glory of the life that has made Jesus Christ Lord of its thought. Have you thought one single moment to-day only of Jesus? Have you recalled to-day, spontaneously, I mean, and not when it was forced upon you by some one speaking to you, a single thing that Jesus said? Has your imagination brought back to-day a single incident or event out of the life of our Lord? What else was the imagination given to us for except to play upon Christ, except to make Christ live again, except to bring back to us every recorded event in his earthly life, and to make us even still his willing subjects as he abides Lord over all our thoughts. I cannot speak of will, of passion, of emotion, of taste, of use of time, of standards of judgment. Over all these things too Jesus Christ is to be Lord if, with true honesty of heart, I call him my Master.

The last word used in the New Testament and translated master occurs only three times there, and twice with reference to those who deny Christ. Once it is found in one of Paul's Epistles to Timothy where he speaks of vessels meet for the Master's use. Once it appears in the Second Epistle of Peter where he speaks of certain men who deny the Master that bought them. Once it appears in the Epistle of Jude where he speaks of those who deny their only Master and Lord. *Δεσπότης* is the Greek word, Emperor. The one to whom we yield everything, the absolute Ruler, Emperor and King whom we joyfully recognize as possessing us, all that we are and have, and ever may be; possessing the thoughts with which we awake in the morning and the thoughts with which we lie down to sleep in the evening, and possessing our affections, all our human relationships and friendships; possessing all our tastes, possessing every activity and power of our lives, Jesus Christ enthroned as absolute Emperor of life. There is a sweet old story of one of the Napoleonic wars that relates how one of Napoleon's men was wounded on the battle-field and the bullet lodged in the cardiac region. It was before the days of anæsthetics, and they laid the soldier out on the battle-field and began to operate in the hope of finding the bullet. He lay with his eyes looking up into

the surgeon's face while he cut closer and closer to his heart, until at last the heart itself was almost laid bare, and he could almost feel the wind blow in upon it while the surgeon still probed for the bullet; and he looked up quietly in his face and said, haltingly, "Surgeon, I think if you cut much further, you will touch the emperor." He had him there more truly than he sat upon any throne, more truly than he sat in any judgment hall; there on the throne of that soldier's life and affection and will was the emperor. Is Jesus Christ our Master in these senses? If he is not, is he our Master at all? If he is our Master at all, he must be Master, teacher of us, overseer of us, leader of us, Lord of us, emperor of our lives.

I must add a few words in closing about that other set of titles in which the early Church recognized the pre-eminence of Christ in men's lives—the name Saviour, and those other names of our Lord that are analogous to that one—Jesus Christ the Saviour. We think sometimes as men who are entering the ministry, or men who are giving all their lives to Christian work, that that is a term for men who have not yet come into the Christian life. Do you honestly think so? I feel myself this moment more in need of Jesus Christ as my Saviour than I felt before I confessed him as Lord and friend.

Professor Davis pointed out in his memorial address regarding Professor William Henry Green at Princeton that his life began as a boy of sixteen, his Christian life, in a deep sense of sin and of Christ's power to save, and that after sixty years had passed of busy, useful toil in Christ's Church, instead of removing that sense they had only sharpened it and made it more keen and acute. The further on we go in the Christian life the more sensible we become of the necessity of Christ as pre-eminent Saviour in life. The unclean thought, the selfish ambition, the harsh judgment, the unkind word, the low ideal, the thousand and one things that are sin in our lives, Jesus Christ alone can save us from. We need him to save us not alone from the coarse vice which, let us hope, we laid aside from us with all temptations to it years ago; we need him now to save us from the infinitely more subtle temptations that come with every day of growth in the Christian life. As men go on in the Christian life temptations do not drop from them. Temptations assail them more.

Temptations, after all, are God's form of human compliment. There is so much evil in this world to be slain; and he apportions it out to men as he sees them able to bear it. If he gives one man more temptation than another, he gives him no more than he is able to bear, and only as much as he sees that he is capable of slaying; and as year by year we go on and feel the spirit of Christ nerving us for fresh strife and struggle, Christ answers that sense of growth by giving us fresh temptation and more sin to overcome, and more of battle with the evil one as our share of the conflict with the sin and wickedness in the world. And when we take up our first charge in the ministry we shall have, more so than now, to lay ourselves down at the feet of him who alone can pre-eminently save men. I suppose Isaiah was about the holiest man of his time, but it was he who, in the year that King Uzziah died, fell down in the temple while the house was filled with smoke when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." I suppose Paul was about as clean a man as there was in his time. But it was he who pronounced himself the chiefest of sinners. I suppose there was no man among the apostles more earnestly sincere in his desire to follow Christ than Simon Peter, and it was he who fell down on the shores of the Tiberian Sea crying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" And that man is the worst hypocrite who, as he grows in his spiritual life, thinks he has been growing away from the necessity of Jesus Christ's saving work still in his life. Every fresh vision of Christ gives a fresh vision of the man's own selfishness, and every fresh sense of divine power is a fresh sense also of human shortcoming. If Jesus Christ is to be pre-eminent with me, Jesus Christ must be my Saviour to-night in a sense more real, more complete, more overwhelming than I have ever known him as Saviour before,—Jesus Christ the pre-eminent Master, Jesus Christ even still the pre-eminent redeemer of life. He said to his disciples on the last evening of his life, "I call you no longer servants, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." We were his slaves. He does not release us from the bondage of servitude in calling us friends.

No servant owes so much to his master as a friend owes to his friend. Every friend will yield to his friend a pre-eminence ten thousand times greater than any slave will yield to his lord. And if Jesus Christ is our friend in any such real sense as we want to make him the friend of other men, he must become in a new sense pre-eminent in our lives.

Jesus Christ the Saviour? Yes, but more than that, too. It was not enough for him that he should die for us. He insists also that he must live in us. Jesus Christ will be pre-eminent in my life not alone as my Saviour from sin, but as my life itself, until at last, if I will let him, he will make that true in me which he made true in the Apostle Paul, so that I shall be able to say what now, alas, I cannot say, "For to me to live is Christ." Christ my life! I met last summer a year ago going home from a meeting in the mountains of this State a man now in the Christian ministry. He told me as we sat in the same seat in the car something of his past life. He had run away from home as a boy of sixteen and enlisted as a private soldier in the Union Army in the Civil War. He had yielded up his life to vice until it was just rotting his character and his will away, and at last one dark day he touched bottom and Jesus Christ caught him. And he told me that from that day there had stood out before his mind without failure by day or by night the message that flashed across his soul that hour, "He died my death for me that I might live his life for him." Eighteen hundred years ago he did what he did on my account that now I might do something which is in a real sense the same on his account. He made me pre-eminent then that I might make him pre-eminent now. Shall we not do it, dear fellows—give Christ the real first place in our lives—I do not mean professionally, I do not mean theologically merely, I mean vitally, so that when we lie down to sleep to-night it shall be with the living sense that Jesus Christ is our Lord, our King and Ruler really in our wills? When Cyrus took captive the King of Armenia and Tigranes, his son, with their wives and families, and carried them off to his capital, for several days they lay under sentence of death, and then at last, on pledge of relinquishing all their claims to their throne and all their possessions, he set them free and let them return to their own land. It is said that on the way

back they fell to discussing among themselves the glory of the Court of the Great Conqueror, and one spoke of the splendid jewels, and another spoke of the majesty of the King, and at last Tigranes turned to his wife, who had been silent during all the discussion, and he said to her, "And what didst thou think of Cyrus?" "In truth," replied she, "I never saw him." "Where were thine eyes?" said he. "I fixed them," said she, "upon him," referring to an offer that Tigranes had made; "I fixed them," said she, "upon him whom I heard in my presence offer to lay down his life for me." She had eyes for none other than him. I wish I had eyes for none other than Christ, that in a real sense he might have with me "in all things the pre-eminence." Oh! let us give it to him now.