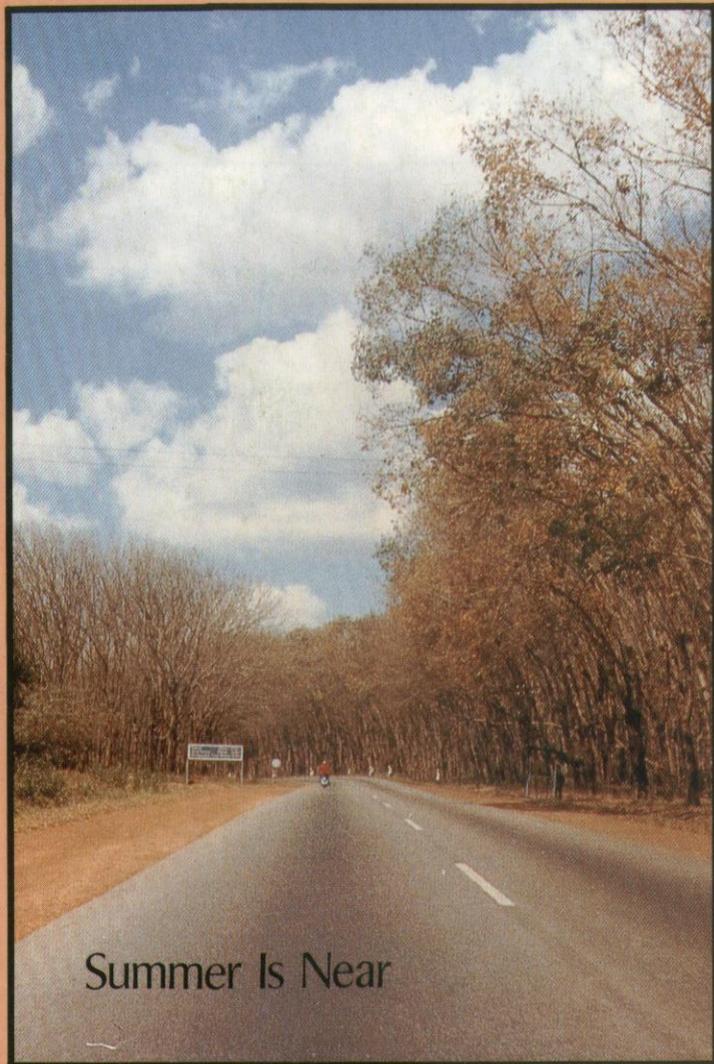


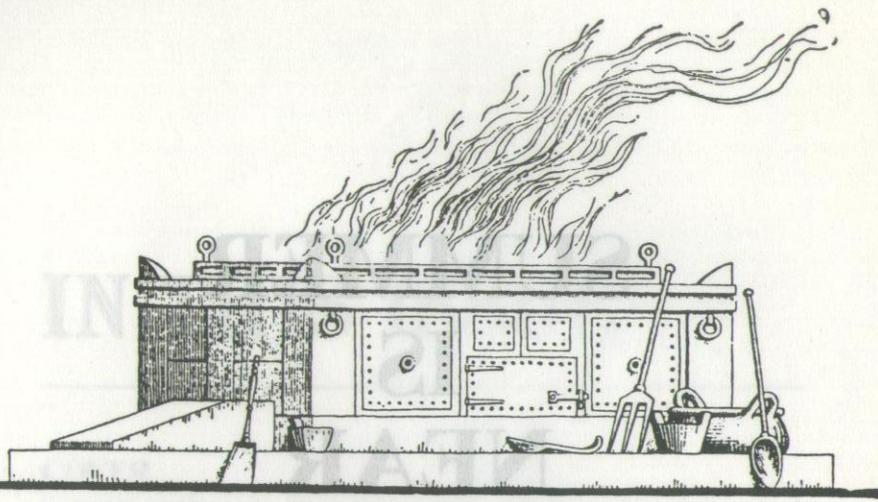
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Summer Is Near

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ATONEMENT IN PAUL

By M. T.

A cursory reading into Paul's letter will lead one to discover that such key terms as justification, reconciliation, and expiation are all interrelated. This essay focuses on how these three concepts receive their efficacy through or in the blood of Jesus Christ which he shed on the cross. With the supporting scriptures in Paul's letters, let us examine "atonement" in Paul's soteriology (i.e. doctrine of salvation).

1. As is well known in the Epistle to Romans, justification by faith is given by God through the blood of Christ and the faith of men. Paul uses justification in its religio-forensic sense. The righteousness of God is the quality of God's nature, and just requirements of the divine law, the way of eradicating sin, i.e., making righteous before God through the atoning death of Jesus. This is how "to be justified" means "our being acquitted by God"

in Romans 5:9,10. The resurrection of Christ is therefore the divine reversal of Christ deliverance by God into death, so He executed our acquittal and justification (i.e. declaring our righteousness) in Christ's blood.

2. Reconciliation, which originates from the social sphere, refers to the restoration of the right relationship between two parties. Theologically it speaks of the removal of God's wrath from the people whose sin has been forgiven in the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7). As a result of justification, God and men are reconciled. In Romans 5:10 it states that when we were yet enemies, we were reconciled through the death of the Son of God. In Ephesians and Colossians a whole series of expressions established the connection between Christ's death and the peace and reconciliation wrought by him (Eph 2:13). Christ is "our peace who abolished in his flesh the enmity"

(2:14). Through the cross he reconciled Jews and Gentiles in one body unto God. In Colossians 1:20 God has reconciled all things through Christ, "making peace through the blood of his cross ... and you ... he has now reconciled into the body of his flesh through death". For this reason, the gospel is called "the ministry of peace" (II Cor 5:18 cf. Eph 6:15).

3. The idea of atoning death as expiation (*histerion*) is the concept of paramount importance for Paul's whole doctrine of redemption. The word *histerion* is far more frequently used either of expiating sins, (removing sins or guilt as expressed in Ps 65:4, Sir 5:6, 28:5), or of expiating some object, person or place (i.e. performing some purificatory rites to remove cultic defilement in Lev 16:16, 20, 33; Eze 43:20, 26). It frequently translates the Hebrew *kipper* which has God for its subject and means "wipe away" or "cover over".

Several passages in Paul's use of "in or through his blood" must be understood as a reference to Christ's death as a sacrifice (Romans 5:9; Eph 1:7, 2:13; Col 1:20). Paul retains an important: place for the category of sacrifice in describing the effect of Jesus' death (I Corinthians 15:3). "Christ died for our sins" expresses the earliest confession of the primitive church, fully unfolded as the content of the apostolic message. In Romans 3:21-25 it states that God put forward Christ as an expiation which receives its efficacy from his blood. In Christ's death the righteousness of God reveals itself in the demanding and vindictory sense of the word. His atoning blood covers the sin which God until now has passed over, when as yet he kept back the judgment.

The idea of the substitutionary character of Christ's death is another concept. Christ on the cross "died for our sins" (I Cor 15:3; II Cor 5:14), "died for us" or "gave himself up for our sins" (Rom 5:6-8, 14, 15; I Thess 5:10; Rom 4:25; 8:32). Paul considers Christ as the paschal lamb sacrificed for us (I Cor 5:7) and the passover is associated with the atonement in Ezekiel 45:18-22 and is linked with the words used by Jesus in the last supper in terms of the "blood poured out for many". Jesus' language is sacrificial and signifies atonement. In II Cor 5:21 that God "made him into sin, him who knew no sin" is an echo of Romans 8:3 "God sent his son in the precise likeness of sinful flesh and for sin". Apparently, sin offering comes to mind (Lev 5:16f, 11; 16:3, 5, 9; Num 6:16, 7:16). It suggests that on the one hand the clean and unblemished animals — the scapegoat used on the day of Atonement, are used for the cultic sacrifice, and on the other hand is the allusion to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 which is of sacrificial terminology and imagery.

In Paul's theology Jesus represents man in his fallenness at the moment of his crucifixion, bearing the sin of the whole humanity. He died for all, so that they might identify themselves with Christ and die in his death. Jesus' resurrection ushers in the new era of humanity. By the washing of regeneration (Tit 3:5) the believers are no longer contaminated by sin, and through the Spirit of life they are not subject to death. And this gift of God is wrought by the cross of Jesus Christ who brings justification, reconciliation and redemption to the believers who have been baptised and have received the indwelling Holy Spirit.

That I May Know Him



“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me . . .” (Jer 9:24).

“Indeed I count everything as loss because of the unsurpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8).

In the Old Testament, the Lord through the mouth of the prophets told the people that they must strive to know Him (Ps 100:3; Hos 6:3, 6). But though He continually called, exhorted, and chastened His chosen people, they failed to recognize Him (Is 1:2-3). They were sinful, and forgot their own God, who had delivered them out of Egypt. Because of this, they were rejected and destroyed, their children forsaken by God.

Today we realize that a knowledge of Jesus Christ is life (I Jn 1:3), that He is the “Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6). Yet Philip in John 14:8-9 asked Jesus to show him the Heavenly Father. Jesus replied that he who had seen Him had seen the Father. Philip, though he was one of the twelve disciples, had only a superficial knowledge of the Lord. He did not realize that the person he followed was God Incarnate. Unfortunately, many Christians today do not really know who they worship.

No matter how much we study the Bible, we cannot come to understand Jesus on our own (I Cor 2:11), for that of the flesh cannot expound the mysteries of the Spirit. The people in Jesus’ time, too, tried by their own reasoning to identify Jesus, but failed (Matt 16:13-14). The people of Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown, thinking they knew Him only saw Him as the carpenter’s son (Matt 13:55-58). It was as the Lord Jesus had said, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (Matt 11:25), while Paul added in I Corinthians 1:20-21 that the world through its wisdom did not know God. As a contrast, Peter declared that Jesus was “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:15-16). Jesus went on to bless him, saying, “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Indeed, it is only God who can reveal to man who He really is (Matt 11:27). Thus Jesus said, “when the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:13), and in I Cor 2:10-11, “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of

man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God”.

Just as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, we hope that God may grant us the Spirit of wisdom, revelation, and knowledge (Eph 1:17). It was this knowledge that motivated Paul to preach the salvation of Christ to all men, enduring all hardships and persecutions. He had received this deep and profound understanding from the Lord Jesus Himself (Gal 1:12, 17). He knew that knowing the Lord was to know the “hope to which He has called you”, “the riches of His glorious inheritance”, and “the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe” (Eph 1:18-19). It is peace (Jn 16:33), rest (Matt 11:29), joy (Rom 14:17), guidance (Matt 28:20), strength (Phil 4:13), hope (Tit 3:7), love (Jn 3:16) and comfort (I Cor 1:3, 4). For this reason, we must seek the Lord while His mercy is still freely given and while he may be found (Is 55:6). May we be able to say, as Paul did in II Timothy 1:12, “I know whom I have believed.”

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SUMMER IS NEAR

SUMMER IS NEAR

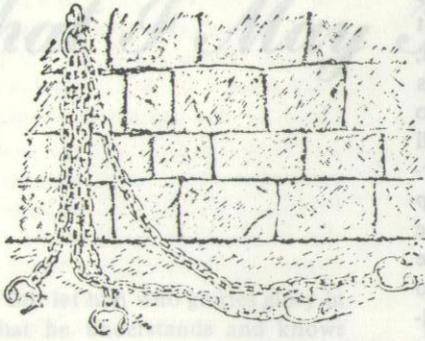
“Summer is near” was the reply given by the Lord Jesus to his disciples with regard to the signs of the times.

On one occasion, when the Lord was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately saying, “Tell us when will these things be, and what will the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?”

Among other things, the Lord said, “Now learn the parable from the fig tree; when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves; you know that summer is near. Even so, you too when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.” (Mt 24:32, 33) NASB

In some ways the rubber tree, cash crop of Malaysia; resemble the fig tree. Once a year they will shed their luxuriant leaves; starting from early December right up to mid-February. Then, very soon the branches will put forth their new “clothes” in preparation for the uncomfortable March weather. The cover-picture shows the rubber trees in Malaysia before the approach of March.

PERSECUTION



FRIEND OR FOE ?

It was a grim victory. They took him down; the wounded, now lifeless body of a man, whom hours earlier they had scourged. His body still bearing the marks of the cruel whip, his head scarred by the mocking crown. The scorn, the jeers of the mob echo in the recesses of men's conscience.

It was the end, they thought. They had finally put away a troublemaker, a man who disturbed their conscience when he spoke, a man who fearlessly exposed the hypocrisies of the religious leaders.

But no. It was only the beginning. The pain, the humiliation, the suffering, the death — all were revealed centuries ago, but no one had understood. Now they witnessed it executed to the very last detail. The persecution was the herald of a new era that was to sweep across the world.

After three days, Jesus stunned the Roman world by coming back from the dead. It had never happened before. He was alive. Even his own dis-

ciples were startled to see him. He had risen, just as he said he would. With a dramatic twist, Jesus turned the darkest hour of seeming defeat — being impaled helplessly on the cross — into the brightest moment of triumph. The persecution and death was not their victory, but the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Forty days later in the form of the Holy Spirit, he brought to life the infant church. They were transformed from a motley group of weak and frightened followers, into a valiant company of men who were destined to change the world. From a humble beginning in an upper room, their influence spread to Asia Minor, Northern Africa and the rest of the Hellenistic civilisation. Nothing seemed possible to hold them down. So many accepted Christ that Satan began to move against them. He stirred up the Romans, turned it against the Christians, and brought the wrath of the whole Empire down upon them. They were accused of causing a severe famine that struck the land. Nero laid the blame on the

Christians for the fire that devastated Rome. They were seen as the object of the wrath of the gods. As if to appease the angered deities, the Christians were hunted down, chained and thrown to the lions. As they had been warned by their Master, the persecutions had come.

The Acts of the Apostles documented only a handful of their painful experiences as a lesson for latter day Christians; the rest were left to historians, notably Josephus in his classical work, *Antiquities of the Jews*, as well as archaeologists.

Persecution and the constant threat of death and pain hung over their heads and were so much a part of their lives that in I Thessalonians 3:3, Paul was moved to write: "this is to be our lot". More pointedly, in II Timothy 3:12, he made clear that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted".

Jesus himself spoke in similar terms: "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master' — If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20).

The meaning of these statements is indisputable — persecution follows a Christian. But to many Christians today, it seems distant and far away. Perhaps we tend to associate Christianity with a happy life, and unconsciously block out the thought of any suffering from our minds.

While some have encountered persecution in the forms of social ostracism and family rejection, the large majority of us only hear or read about it. It is not something we expect or hope for.

"If I live a life of obedience to God, isn't that not enough?"

"Haven't I been regular in church?"

"Why should I be persecuted?"

What follows seeks to explain the role of persecution in Christianity in the hope that it may prepare us for what is sure to come. If we know why we must go through it and be spiritually prepared, we can weather the storm when it comes.

Jesus Christ once pointed out that His disciples would suffer for the sake of the kingdom and the righteousness of God: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:10-11).

Persecution, as understood in Christianity, is not any form of suffering while being a Christian, but suffering 'for righteousness sake' or 'on account of Christ'. In other words, what provoked the persecution must have arisen from the desire to preserve one's righteousness given through faith or from a zeal for Christ. Peter, put it this way:

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrong-doer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God."

(I Peter 4:14-16)

Persecution — God's Vindication

Paul in II Thessalonians 1:4-5 said:

".... we ourselves boats of you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering — since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted,"

Can Satan and his demonic host not protest against the injustice of God in choosing and ultimately rewarding some while neglecting and then punishing others, when both lead similar lives on earth? But God's provision subjects Christians to persecution, so that in due course when they are rewarded, it is clear that they deserve the justice of God. By the same token, justice demands that the persecutors be punished. Therefore in persecution God's righteous judgment is vindicated before one and all.

Persecution — Christians' Test

In I Peter 4:12 it is written:

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you."

Here the apostle reveals another facet of persecution which he calls 'fiery ordeal' — possible an oblique reference to the primitive procedure of

ascertaining the veracity of the accused's testimony by passing him through a trial by fire. It was assumed that if the accused could endure the trial, he had spoken the truth, and if he could not, the pain would urge him to confess. In the same way, persecution separates a true Christian from a false one. A Christian who does not have a strong conviction in his heart and has not transformed falters when persecuted, whereas a Spirit-filled Christian is purified as he passes through it. It also provides this Christian with an insight into his spiritual development; how much he has progressed, if at all, since his conversion. It lights up the dark corners of his soul, revealing the stains of sin that lurk within. In this sense persecution proves us and is a means of telling us how much we have advanced — or gone back.

Persecution And You

Only when we see persecution in this light can we appreciate how the Thessalonians could maintain their faith and perseverance despite all tribulations, and the apostles could rejoice after being flogged (II Thessalonians 1:3-5; Acts 5:41).

Indeed, there is a cause to rejoice. In Matthew 5:11, Jesus encouraged his disciples: "rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

And the greater the degree of suffering, the greater the degree of rejoicing at the revelation of His glory (I Peter 4:13).

Many of us may not have gone through persecution yet. As it is a privilege of a Christian to be persecuted, we can, by re-examining ourselves, see if our faith is genuine. May God help us, to be fully prepared and be able to withstand persecutions when they come upon us.

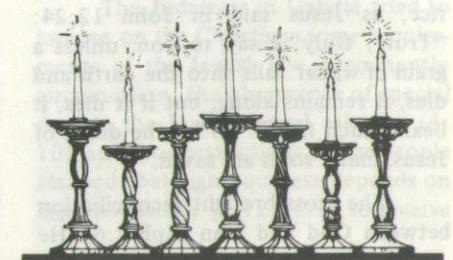
THE CROSS AND US

In I Corinthians 1:18 Paul said, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" Here we can see that Paul cherished the cross of the Lord Jesus and often preached about it. This does not mean that he idolized it, however. Rather, the cross he talked about was not the cross of wood, but the cruci-

fixion and death of Christ. Because it was there that the Lord Jesus died for him, it meant a lot to him. The mercy, sufferings, and great love of the Lord must have come to his mind whenever he thought of the cross, and this so moved him to say, "Jesus loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

What, then does the cross mean to us? Here are a few points for our mutual exhortation:

*FOR I DETERMINED NOT
TO KNOW ANYTHING
AMONG YOU, SAVE
JESUS CHRIST, AND HIM
CRUCIFIED. (1 COR 2:2)*



His Love and Suffering—Our Remembrance

Whenever we remember the death of our Lord, we cannot but think of his love and suffering. Undeniably, Jesus went through the most painful type of death by being crucified. But for our sake, He was willing to do this, and as Paul said in Phil. 2:8, Jesus became "obedient to death, even death on a cross". If we ask ourselves, "Why has Jesus shown such great love to me, to ransom me with his own precious blood? Who am I that he should undergo such agony on the cross, to die for me?", we may begin to see just how much Jesus has loved us and done for us. We often feel grateful when a friend has done some small kindness to us, and try to repay him as best as we can. How much more should we feel grateful to the Lord, who has given us everything, even himself! And how shall we repay him? The new commandment Jesus gives to us in John 14:34 is that we love one another as He has loved us. And this love should not be shown only to those who love us, but to all men. For the love Jesus has shown us is deep, unconditional, and everlasting. If His love fills us and controls us, it will motivate us to love others in the same way, and we shall all be as one in Christ Jesus.

His Crucifixion—Our New Creation

There is no life without a sacrifice, as Jesus said in John 12:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit". So by the death of Jesus, many souls are saved.

The cross brought reconciliation between God and men (Eph 2:6). He

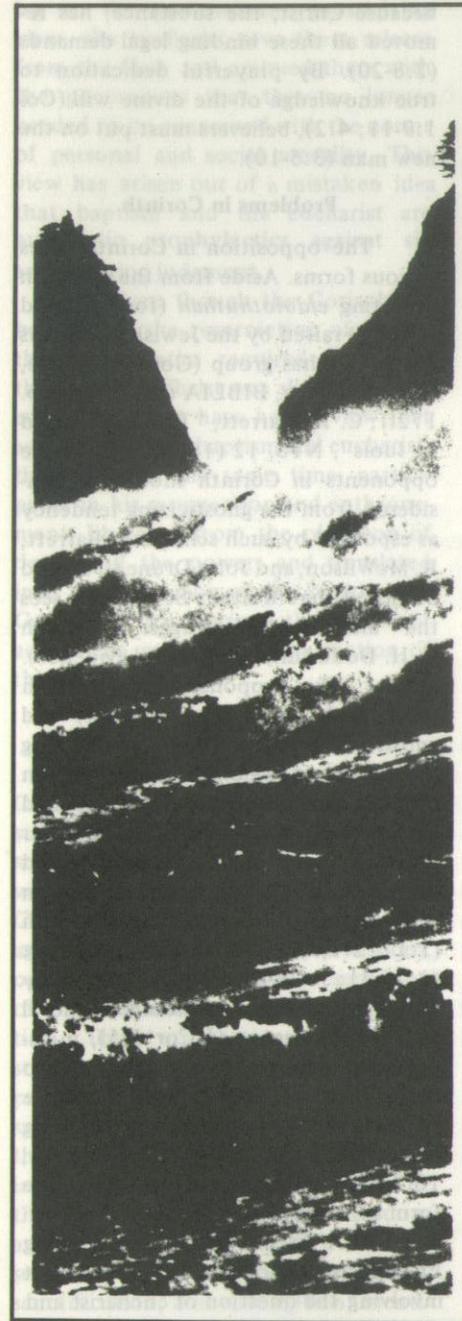
conquered death and brought life. The precious blood He shed washes away our sins, and we become part of Him. Called out of the bondage of sin into freedom, we are a new creation. Romans 6:4-11 tells us that a new creation must walk in the newness of life. By belonging to Christ we crucify our flesh with all its passions and desires, and strive to live a new life worthy of our Lord.

His Commission—Our Duty

Since we have been redeemed by Him, let us also bring salvation to all men; this is our commission. Preaching the gospel is a "necessity" to the apostle Paul (I Cor 9:16-17). This should also be our attitude towards preaching, for Jesus has told us: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation". When others receive the glad tidings, they too will rejoice with us.

Our "cross" that the Lord speaks of in Matthew 10:38 signifies our responsibilities and commission. It also implies our share of sufferings and toils. Thus, carrying the cross may be difficult and painful at times. But as this is our responsibility, let us not be discouraged in the face of hardships since we serve God, whose grace is sufficient for our use.

At the thought of the cross, we remember His love and sufferings for us. Let us do the same for Him. The cross reminds us that we are a new creation. Let us be transformed by His Word. We remember our commission. Let us carry our cross to the very end.



SPIRITUAL PROBLEMS AT THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

By M. T.

Early Christianity at Galatia, Colossae and Corinth provides a many-sided picture of the problems in the apostle Paul's days, and Paul's theological convictions in response to these problems. This essay attempts to discuss the nature of Paul's opposition in two main categories, namely, (1) Judaizing and (2) Incipient gnosticism, Jewish or Hellenistic, to be followed by Paul's theological solutions to these Problems.

Judaizers in Galatia and Colossae

The Judaizers in Galatia tried to impose on the Christians some requirements of the Jewish law, preeminently circumcision, the observance of special days in the Jewish sacred calendar (4:10), and food restrictions. These people claimed that righteousness depends on legal obedience (3:12), even to receive

the Spirit is inseparable from subjection to the Law (3:2, 3; 5:18, 23; 6:1-2). The inheritance promised to Abraham and his offsprings is received through keeping the covenant with Abraham, circumcision included.

Another epistle, Colossians, shows the same Judaizing imposition on the Christians. In addition to the persuasive but false reasoning (2:8), the *stoicheis* (elementary spirits) of the world involve subjection to human regulations ("Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch . . . according to human precepts and doctrines" —2:20-22). The seductive regulations and standards allegedly promote divine growth (2:19, 6) and by them the Colossians believers are judged (2:16) in eating, drinking, feast, new moon, and sabbaths.

Paul had a vehement polemic against the Judaizers, whom he called "trouble makers" or "agitators" (Gal 1:7; 5:10, 12), and their "other gospel" (1:6-9). To refute their notion that man is justified before God and made alive by the works of the law, Paul's message is clear: true Christian liberty is from the Lord, the Holy Spirit (5:1, 13; 2:5), righteousness is derived from the faith in Christ (2:16, 21; 3:11; 5:4), and there is a need to serve in love (5:13-15; 5:22; 6:1-6) and above all to remain undefiled as a new man (Gal 5:19-25; 6:15).

Paul's Opponent

With regard to Colossians error, Paul's polemic is clearly stated: The believers must have firm foundation in Christ — faith, love and hope (Col 1:23; 2:6, 7; cf. 1:3-5). They must guard against the beguiling false reasoning and seductive regulations concerning food, drinking, festivals, and others,

because Christ, the substance, has removed all these binding legal demands (2:8-20). By prayerful dedication to true knowledge of the divine will (Col 1:9-11; 4:2), believers must put on the new man (3:5-10).

Problems in Corinth

The opposition in Corinth takes various forms. Aside from the question of eating *eidolothuthan* (food offered to idols) raised by the Jewish Christians or the Cephas group (Gordon D. Fee, "Eidolothutan, BIBLIA 61 (1980), pp. 172ff; C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols", NTS, 12 (1865), 146ff), the opponents in Corinth should be considered from the gnosticizing tendency as espoused by such scholars as Barrett, R. McWilson, and John Drune (it should be noted that Walther Schmithals sees the "anti-Gnostic" struggle for which C. H. Dodd finds no material evidence).

1. The opponents in Corinth took pride in *sophia* (wisdom) and *gnosis* (knowledge), by envisioning themselves as *pneumatics* in possession of a special wisdom in this age and within the cosmos. These *pneumatics* regarded the preaching of the crucified one as folly (1:18) for their wisdom was expressed in persuasive speech (1:17; 2:1,4,13) which led to boasting (1:26-31; 4:6-8). Meanwhile they allowed themselves to indulge in moral and sexual licence (I Cor 5:5), indiscriminate eating of the food offered to idols (10:23ff). They claimed that since by *gnosis* they were spiritual, anything was permissible to them (I Cor 8:11; 10:23ff; 6:12ff; 6:23 refers to the form of voluptuousness).

2. A discussion of the gnosticizing libertinism cannot be complete without involving the question of eucharist and the belief in the resurrection. Accord-

ing to the predominant gnosticizing view, the eucharist gave them release from the flesh and embued them with the *pneuma* so that they no longer needed to be concerned with the norms of personal and social morality. This view has arisen out of a mistaken idea that baptism and the eucharist are automatic prophylactics against sin and ensuring judgment.

3. Even though the Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Christ, their *pneumatics* required that only the ascended Christ was all that mattered. They might have held a view that as participants in baptism and eucharist, they were at the same time, participants in his resurrection and enthronement, liberated from the old aeon of death and the powers and translated into the new aeon of the kingdom of God. For this reason, they did not accept the prospective resurrection of the Christians.

Paul's Polemic

1. Paul's response to *sophia* at Corinth is presented in two related stages: 1:18-2:5 and 2:6-16. In the first section, Paul sets the *kerygma*, the word of the cross, in opposition to the Corinthians claims to wisdom. He argues that theirs was not true wisdom, opening the way for the presentation of the true wisdom in the second section. The two sections reveal the struggle between two opposing standpoints in Paul's and the self-styled spiritual men. Paul is concerned with the paradox of *sophia* in Christ which is a means to overthrow the rulers of this age and negate the human wisdom and cleverness (3:18; 8:2ff). As Paul sees, Christ is power, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, identical with the wisdom of the cross (I Cor 1:30).

2. As for the *pneumatic* libertines, Paul insists on the holiness of the whole lump. Admittedly, the Christ party among the divided groups (I Cor 1-3) did much harm to the community for their indulgence in sexual licence (5:5). While most scholars have failed to comment on the true meaning of I Cor 5:5, we must view that Paul's argument was against the prevailing libertine thought concerning the delivery of the incestuous person to Satan (i.e. excommunication) for salvation of the spirit of the same person on the day of the Lord's second coming. Quoting their saying (5:5, cf. 6:23) as a foolish boasting, Paul took pains on chapter 5&6 to emphasise the need to condemn the sinner now and future. Paul's message is definite: sexual immorals and other evil doers cannot inherit the holy kingdom of God (I Cor 5:6, 6:9-10. cf. Gal 5:19-21).

3. To refute a certain form of hedonism (I Cor 15:12) and the disbelief in the resurrection (15:12), Paul makes it clear that the resurrection of Christ is the primary exemplar of the believer's resurrection (15:14-20). At the *parousia*, the dead will be raised and those who are still alive will be changed into the glorious, imperishable spiritual bodies (15:50-52, Phil 3:20-21).

Paul took up the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness and the spiritual drink and food (I Cor 10:1-7) as a warning to those who harboured a wrong thinking, the baptismal or eucharistic sacramental release from the moral norms. To Paul, true Christians' obedience should find its source and fulfillment in Christ himself, and not through the legalistic framework even of a sacramental system or a false claim to spiritual

liberty. In other words, one must not commit idolatry, fornication, murmuring, or covetousness as the Israelites did. Instead, one must stand firmly and be watchful (I Cor 10:1-12).

To conclude this essay, a word is needed concerning Paul's opponents in II Corinthians. The traditional view is that they were Judaizing emissaries from Palestine (or it is safer to regard this intruders as Palestinian Jews, not the Judaizers in the Galatians sense), invoking the authority of the Jerusalem apostles (cf. II Cor 11:5; 12:11). Paul attacked the controversy on legal righteousness as "false prophets, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as the apostles of Christ" (II Cor 11:14). The apostle Paul emphasises the glorious life in the Spirit rather than the written legal code that kills (3:6-7). And what is more important, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (3:17). And this is the answer to the false prophets who are opposed to the gospel of God and the truth as preached by Paul (11:7, 10).

The Body Which God Prepared

"Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sufferings and offerings thou has not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me, Lo, I have come to do Thy will, O God.'"

(Heb 10:5, 7)

Under the Mosaic law everything was purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there was no forgiveness of sins. For this reason, the chosen people under the Old Testament were frequently required to sacrifice calves and goats to God. However, since the law was but a shadow of better things to come, it follows that the sacrifices demanded by the law could not make perfect those who drew near, for the sacrifices in effect only brought into remembrance the existence of sin. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, He knew very well that the sacrifices stipulated by the law were not in truth desired by God, and that the will of God was that He should offer Himself up as a Lamb for atonement. It is only through the blood that He shed that the world can receive pardon, and it is only through His death that peace can be made between God and men. In keeping with this, and in order to accomplish the mission for which He was sent, to satisfy the demands of a just and loving God, Christ came with these words upon His lips, "Lo, I have come to do Thy will, O God."

UNDERSTAND YOURSELF



"Do you understand yourself?"

Yes, without much prior thought, many people assume that they do, and are in full control of themselves. But it is these people who are often heard to say, "Why did I do that?"

Man struggles to come to terms with himself. This view is endorsed by Paul in his disclosure on the double nature of man (Rom 7). We try to live within the standards laid down by God but often find it difficult to keep with them as our emotions govern us to do otherwise. Paul calls the opposing elements in this human dichotomy the *carnal* and the *spiritual* man. To appreciate this dichotomy in oneself and to begin to nurture the spiritual side is the key to understanding oneself.

In the Bible we read of men who lacked in self-understanding, many meeting with failure. Two of them provide interesting points for thought:

Cain was envious of his brother Abel, whose offering God accepted. Though God advised, he persisted in his anger and later killed Abel. In letting the carnal man dominate, he, as an animal, destroyed what he saw to be a threat, even his own brother (Gen 3:1-16).

Failure to understand the dual nature in himself made Cain deaf to the spiritual man in him. Unheeding advice from others, he thought he knew what was best for himself. He did not realise that it was only half of him speaking, and being the worse half, it would not do him any good. It is the same with us—wrong decisions are made because many times we only listen to the weaker side of us, the carnal man. A Christian should, however, not be a totally passionless creature. The difference between the carnal man and the spiritual man is not a simple demarcation between passion and reason as the worldly philosopher would have us believe. Instead, it is the difference between decisions made within the law of God and decisions made solely through human impulse and reason.

The story of Job provides another angle on understanding oneself. Job was blameless and upright, feared God and turned away from evil. Then calamity befell him, his children and wealth were taken away, and he was afflicted with sores all over his body. Still, he held fast to his faith, saying that if he had accepted happiness from God, he must also accept sorrow. Such was his attitude, initially. But he became confused when his three friends came to see him. They reasoned with him, saying that God would not punish a good man. Job argued that he was innocent and could not understand why he was being punished. So he asked God to tell him why (Job 6:24). He felt ready to prove himself if only God would give him a fair trial.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt. Who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9). We cannot understand ourselves without help, for even if we realise the existence of a dual nature within us, we still need to determine which part is speaking within us. We often deceive ourselves, thinking that our conscience is always at hand. Job could find no fault in himself and so reasoned that he was perfect, thinking that he had arrived at this conclusion based on God's words.

He felt ready to challenge the Author of the Word Himself. It needed God to expose his self-righteousness and pride. God answered him out of a whirlwind (Job 38 & 39), questioning him about the majestic and mysterious workings of the universe. Fortunately, Job humbled himself and admitted his sin. The same cannot be said for Satan, who thought he knew better than God. His sad end is a constant reminder to those who think they know everything. Understanding

oneself requires the acknowledgement that God understands you better. As such, the man who tries to understand himself also leaves his life to God.

Job's humiliation in the face of God's might shows the imperfection of man. We cannot for a moment imagine that we can be "like God, knowing good and evil", as whispered by the serpent to lure Adam and Eve.

To understand the basic nature of man — that we have a double nature, that we are imperfect and that God, the Creator knows us best — is the basis of a true understanding of oneself. From here we progress to understand ourselves as individuals.

Only by knowing ourselves can we correct and improve our ways. Not realising our faults, we may be unrealistically self-confident. Self-knowledge is therefore a condition to progress. To enable us to live well and progress spiritually, we must pray that God will help us to really understand ourselves, and not be deceived by our own hearts. Here are three things in which we ask God's assistance:

1. *Help us to know our own ignorance*, that we may always be willing to learn. In this, we can emulate the Ethiopian eunuch recorded in Acts 8, a well-read man of great authority. Yet he readily admitted that he did not understand what he was reading, even when asked by a stranger, Philip. Because of his humility, he received God's grace. As the Word of God is good for reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16), it is suitable for *all* Christians.

2. *Help us to know our own weaknesses*, that we may always be aware of temptations, which can easily overcome us (I Pet 5:8). From the beginning, the devil has been trying to

make man fall. The Lord Jesus has saved us from the bondage of sin, but the evil one tries to lure us back. Preaching to a friend, we are trying to save and snatch a soul from Satan's clutches, but the Christian is always at war in his life. His is a spiritual warfare. From the scriptures we can learn how the struggle between the spirit and the flesh persists, and how believers have coped with them. From those who overcame, we take their qualities, and from those who fail, we learn from their mistakes and try to get rid of any wicked traits we have similar to theirs. Relying on our own efforts, we cannot withstand Satan's wiles. Paul warned the Ephesians that they were not wrestling with flesh and blood, but confronting powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness. To be a victorious Christian soldier, we must put on the whole armour of God as described in Eph. 6:13-16.

3. *Help us to know our own strength*, that we may fully use the gifts and talents that God has given us. Many of us excel in certain areas, some in music, some literature, etc. But we have not come this far by our own effort and intelligence (Dan 1:17). Rather, everything is from God. God gives talents, not only in learning but also in handicraft (Ex 31:2). In the Bible, God gave Joshua the spirit of wisdom to succeed Moses; Solomon's wisdom was granted through his prayer. As God told Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit"; it is only proper that we request for the fullness of the Spirit of God and His gifts, so that we may use them to serve the Lord.

By understanding ourselves we can progress spiritually, and come close to the goal of perfection. Let us try our best to live a life of a true believer. When the Lord comes again, we will meet Him with glad, joyful hearts. Amen.



The book of Job

- a book of wisdom -



I. THE VALUE OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The Book of Job was placed in the centre portion of the Old Testament in the Bible and it is the first of the five 'books of wisdom'. It is the oldest book of the Bible and also the oldest existing literature piece in the world. Many scholars regard it as the greatest literature in the world.

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CONTENTS

The Book of Job has much to reveal to mankind, especially on the question why suffering exists, the reasons for man's sufferings and the consequences of suffering. It also contains perfect instructions to God-fearing people on faith, the way to live and ways to edify one's spiritual self.

Presented in lyric, the book records the incidences which happened to a God-fearing righteous man, Job. The book tells how great sufferings were suddenly upon him when he was fervently serving God in peace and prosperity. Also, it records of the encounters he had during his suffering and of how he finally received peace again. The book contains 42 chapters covering a very wide scope. It touches deep into the philosophy of men and science. In all these it is remarkably accurate and indeed it is a marvelous book of wisdom. The main theme of the book is an answer

to a major problem of life – ‘Why do the righteous also suffer?’ It also reveals certain spiritual mysteries such as the boundary of Satan’s territory and the limitations of his abilities. It reveals the coming of Christ’s salvation, His Second Advent and the resurrection of the saints to meet God (19:25, 26). Any single one of these recordings is indeed a great marvel by itself. So the Book of Job is indeed an important book which Christians should study diligently in order to build up the foundation of their faith.

III. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Though the Book of Job was written in dramatic form, the characters are not mythical. Job’s name was quoted in the other books of the Bible (Ezek 14:14, 20; Jas 5:11).

Though there is nothing definite, records of events and places from the same book indicate that Job lived circa 1700 BC, i.e. about the period of the Israelites’ stay in Egypt before the Exodus.

The place where Job lived, Uz, was an Arabian wilderness situated to the south-east of Canaan. Uz is the name of the eldest son of Nahor, the brother of Abraham. In the older days, very often the name of a place was named after the person who dwelled there. Since Uz was a nephew of Abraham and Job was living in the place where Uz’s descendants were living, indications are that Job was living in a period not very long after Abraham. Job lived at least 140 years (42:16). This indicates that he was probably a man of the patriarchal period. During that period, whenever the people worshipped God, they would offer burnt offerings (1:5). Since there was not priest, this indicated that it was not after the exodus but more likely of the period of Abraham when they made offerings by themselves.

However, Job was not a descendant of Abraham, i.e. he was not of the chosen people of God but a gentile. Furthermore, Uz was not in Canaan but was a gentile land. It is indeed amazing to have such a great gentile man of faith as an example in the Bible for future Jews.

IV. THE GREAT DEBATE IN THE BOOK OF JOB

‘Why do the righteous suffer?’ There are various views offered by various characters in the book. However, all but God’s are erroneous:

- * Satan’s – fallacious view (1:9-11; 2:4, 5)
- * Job’s wife – FOOLISH VIEW (2:9)
- * Job’s – prejudiced view, i.e. he considered himself highly and did not understand the will of God (cf: chp 29 – 31).
- * Job’s three friends’ – superficial view. They all thought that Job’s sufferings were due to his own sins.
- * Elihu’s – eminent view (chp 32 – 37). However, it is still not thorough.
- * Only through God’s revelation is a clear and distinct view possible (chp 38 – 41).

* The Book Of Job records 7 arguments:—

- * The first two were the arguments between God and Satan (The arguments in Heaven as recorded in Chap 1 and 2).
- * These are followed by the three arguments between Job and his three friends (Chp 4 – 31).
- * Next, the argument by Elihu (Chp 32 – 37).
- * Finally God’s discourse in the theophany (Chp 38 – 41).

* The three arguments of the three friends of Job are recorded in the following chapters:

* 1st cycle of speeches (Chp 4 – 14)

1. Eliphaz (Chp 4 – 5)
2. Job’s reply (Chp 6 – 7)
3. Bildad (Chp 8)
4. Job’s reply (Chp 9 – 10)
5. Zophar (Chp 11)
6. Job’s reply (Chp 12 – 14)

* 2nd cycle of speeches (Chp 15 – 21)

1. Eliphaz (Chp 15)
2. Job’s reply (Chp 16 – 17)
3. Bildad (Chp 18)
4. Job’s reply (Chp 19)
5. Zophar (Chp 20)

* 3rd cycle of speeches (Chp 22 – 31)

1. Eliphaz (Chp 22)
2. Job’s reply (Chp 23, 24)
3. Bildad (Chp 25)
4. Job’s reply (Chp 26 – 31)
5. Zophar did not make any speech in the 3rd cycle.

* After the arguments between Job and his three friends, Elihu delivered his eminent speech. Job just quietly listened without making any reply (Chp 32 – 37).

* Lastly God appeared and through His instruction, Job was enlightened and his problem was solved. After the sufferings, he was blessed with a double amount of peace, joy and blessings.

V THE VARIOUS FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The Bible is essentially a book of Theology. However, in the various books of the Bible are contained surprising facts from the various fields of human knowledge. The fields of study covered in the Book of Job are indeed many and often the book delivers quite deep into the particular subject. This is, in a way, a source of additional knowledge for the Bible scholar. The various fields of study covered are briefly as follows:

- a. Literature : This book is one of the greatest poetical pieces ever written.
- b. Philosophy : It answers the question: Why do the righteous suffer?
- c. Logic : The whole book deals with the reasons and causes for man's suffering.
- d. Science : The various scientific facts recorded in the book are all in accordance with the findings of modern science, for e.g.:
 1. Geophysics : It records that the earth is hung upon nothing (26:7).
 2. Meteorology : It records many principles concerning wind, rain, cloud, mist, ice and snow (28:25; 36:27; 37:9-12; 38:25-30).
 3. Electricity : 38:35 – The advance application of electricity fulfilled these words.
 4. Zoology : Chp 39 – 41 records in detail more than ten kinds of animals.
 5. Mineralogy : Chp 28 records about the extraction of gold and silver and the uses of metals.
 6. Mechanics : 38:31 – 33 These few words give the hint that there exist gravitational force between stars.
- e. Theology : The whole book centers on God. It speaks clear concerning God's power and will, the Holy Spirit, man's spirit, angels, devils and especially the coming of Christ to be our mediator and redeemer, His resurrection and second coming and also the works of the Holy Spirit.

VI THE THEME OF THE BOOK OF JOB

Very briefly, the book records how Job's faith was edified and built up to a very pure and sincere degree through the sufferings he encountered. Initially Job was "blameless and upright, feared God and turned away from evil". However, Satan complained before God saying that his fervency in serving the Lord was due to the physical peace and material gain which he had received from God. So he wanted to have Job tested by undergoing sufferings. It is indeed true that many people's faith in God is based on material and purely for satisfying their own passions and desires. A true faith does not grow from selfish motives but rather out of a desire to fulfill the duty of man (Eccles 12:13; Rom 12:1; Jn 6:63). If one does not have a true faith, he will surely fall when tempted by Satan (Mt 4:3-11).

In order for believers to attain true faith, they must be trained by undergoing sufferings. This has been destined by God (1 Thess 3:3) and it is considered something good (Phil 4:14), something to rejoice about (Rom 5:3,4) and to glory in (1 Pet 4:12-14).

The reasons that believers have to undergo sufferings are as follows:—

1. Due to Satan's temptation (Jas 1:13, 14). However, such temptations are to be approved by God first (cf: Job Chp 1, 2).
2. Due to God's chastisement – when believers commit sins (Rev 3:19; Heb 12:6-8, 10, 11).
3. Due to God's test and trial (Gen 22:1; Jas 1:2-4).
4. For edification (Ps 119:67, 71): The experiences of Jacob, Joseph and Job are of this category.
5. For the glorification of both God and man: If one succeeds in overcoming the sufferings, not only does one receive glory but God too is glorified. This was so in the case of Job (Job Chp 42 last portion; 1 Pet 1:7; 4:12, 13).

Job's faith and endurance is a remarkable example for present day Christians. He was a fine example of one who relied on faith and endurance to undergo all sufferings. The last days is a period of great disturbances and suffering (2 Chron 15:5; Is 24:21; Rev 18:14-19). Nuclear destruction is imminent. When this takes place, many constructions and buildings will be destroyed. People then will face the same, or even worse, sufferings than Job had encountered – houses completely destroyed, family dead and the body afflicted with incurable diseases from the radioactive fallout. Then "men will seek death and will not find it" (Rev 9:6). When believers encounter such sufferings, a recollection of Job's faith and endurance may help cheer us up.

ecclesiastes

PART 2



Life as a Shadow

For who knows what is good for a man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

(Ecc 6:12)

Solomon, the philosopher king, compares life to a shadow, referring to the present life. The presence of a shadow requires a source of light behind a solid object. In this sense, we as the shadow are being constantly sustained by the life-giving power of the Light, Jesus Christ. While the shadow, life on earth is unreal, the reality is the soul. This is indestructible and incorporeal, and the state of our soul, the inner man, determines the outer—the one that is known and seen by others.

Here in this passage, the transience and brevity of life is also shown. Death is inevitable, and it is an un-

pleasant thought. Yet not one of us can be sure of when it will come. James, the Elder, offered this thought (Jas 4:13-15). This does not tell us to stop planning, but rather that all plans should be made in the light of God's will.

The fact that life is short reminds us that all is from God, and apart from him we are nothing. As in Proverbs, "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Prov 3:5-6). While death comes to the great and the small, it is a blessing to we as Christians, a release from the bonds of the flesh. It is not a frightening spectre, but a joyful reunion with God. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (Jn 11:25). Paul confirms this in his letter to the church in Thessalonica, saying, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the

dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord".

Better Is the End

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

(Ecc 7:8)

Death is but a return from whence we came. God beckons human beings, His children, to return to the dust as a course of nature (Ps 90:3). This is also His desire, that all mankind returns to Him. Just as the death of His saints is precious in His sight (Ps 116:15), for Christians this is something good beyond comparison (cf Phil 1:23).

Justice Will Come

Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.

(Ecc 8:11)

The author of Hebrews says that all men must die once, after which comes judgement. Why doesn't God punish the wicked immediately? It is because He is merciful and wants all men to repent rather than fall; so he patiently waits. But the time will come, when His justice shall come. While salvation is offered fully, it should be taken and when Christ comes in He will fill and rule our hearts with love.

To be continued

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