

Make No Provision for the Flesh

Reading: Pages 75-80

"He (Christ) preferred the grace of God with suffering, to the gratification of his flesh with all pomp and pageantry of this vain and transitory world. Its "glory" is indeed delivered to the adversary of God, his people, and his truth: and to whomsoever he wills he gives it. The knowledge of this truth ought to deter every righteous man from seeking after it; or even accepting it, when offered upon conditions derogatory to the truth of God" — Elpis Israel, p. 79.

The most simple of all Bible truths has long been discarded by popular theology. It is, as stated succinctly by Brother Thomas, that "a man cannot honor God more than in believing *what He promises*, and doing what He commands" (p. 75). Christendom is sadly astray from the Bible because they have nullified this basic premise. This policy is not new. In apostolic times men who claimed to be disciples of Christ gave free reign to their fleshly minds, corrupting and apostasizing the Truth. Paul not only prophesied a "falling away" (Gr. *apostasia*), but stated that such declension was already at work in his own day (2Thes. 2:2-7).

By repudiating this singular means of honoring God, mankind would "highly gratify all his senses, and place at his disposal the kingdoms of the world, and all their glory". This is the way of flesh, unenlightened and undisciplined by God's Word. Self-gratification is the primary objective of "the natural man", who "receiveth not the things of the spirit of God" (1Cor. 2:14). This is why the world will

remain unprepared for the return of Christ and the judgments he will pour out upon the nations. Their culpability is beyond question. Brother Thomas concisely defines the position of professing christianity: "Not to believe the promises of God is, in effect, to call God a liar, and no offence, even to men of integrity in the world, is so insulting and intolerable as this". Is it any wonder that Yahweh considers Himself as having been rejected and despised by the world? Justly, He has "appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31).

"Let God Be True"

Brother Thomas points out that the Biblical ground upon which mankind should humbly accept the divine revelation in its purity is simply stated: "Let God be true". This statement is supported by John the Baptist, and endorsed by the Lord Jesus: "He that sent me is true" (Rom. 3:4; Jn. 3:33; 7:28). The world at large refuses to accept these words; and even professing christians give nothing more than lip-service to them, superimposing

their own fleshly philosophies upon their claims to be "christian", thereby annulling for themselves the "true words" which have been set before mankind by the One True God.

The "unswerving obedience of faith" is that which God desires to see in humankind. "God is pleased with this faith", says Brother Thomas, "because it honors Him. It is a working faith... Such a man it is God's delight to honor". And, not only so, but "the time will certainly come when God will acknowledge him in the presence of the Elohim, and overwhelm his enemies with confusion of face". With this the Scriptures agree: "Roll on Yahweh thy way, trust also in Him, and He will effectually work: So will He bring forth, as the light, thy righteousness, and thy vindication as the noonday" (Psa. 37:5-6; Roth.).

Suffering Before Glory

God has, however, established a means whereby claims to "faith" may be tested and proven. If a man's faith accord with the Truth as taught in the Scriptures, it will be a "working faith": therefore such a faith is intended to function positively, whether circumstances be favorable or adverse. "Probation before exaltation" is the way Bro. Thomas describes the process (p. 76). He adds: "There is no exemption from this ordeal. Even Christ himself was subjected to it". In proof of this statement he quotes Heb. 2:9-18 and ch. 5:8-9, affirming that God made "the Captain of their salvation *perfect through sufferings*... For in that he himself hath suffered *being put to the proof*, he is able to succour them who are tried. And, though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience *by the things which he suffered*..." By following this pathway to perfection, the Son became the author of eternal salvation "*unto all them that obey him*". His "morally perfected" life was manifested in "obedience unto death" (Phil. 2:8).

Brother Thomas regarded the proving of Christ's faith, or his period of "probation", as "an interesting and important study". Since he was "found in fashion as a man" it follows that "the infirmities of human nature were thus laid upon him".

Though the Lord was "led of the spirit into the wilderness" the reader is reminded that "God cannot be tempted with evil, *neither tempteth He any man*" (Jas. 1:13). Therefore, when Matthew adds that the Lord was to be "tempted of the devil" it should be noted that, whilst God had deemed it necessary that His Son's professed faith should be put to the proof, it was "the devil" who would become the advocate in this matter.

Diabolos ("devil") signifies slanderer, calumniator, from *dia*, through, and *ballo*, to throw, hurl or thrust. It is difficult to reject the idea that the word conveys a picture of a fleshly mind "hurling" a philosophy or ungodly action "through" the divine precepts, by which the Word of God is negated, for this, after all, was precisely the action of the serpent in the garden of Eden.

The Testing of Faith

The Lord was "led of the spirit into the wilderness to be *tempted* of the diabolos". It should be understood that the word rendered "tempted" (*peirazo*) means, "to make trial of, to try, to put to the test (gen., in a good sense, in order to ascertain the character, views or feelings of anyone); also in a bad sense, with ill intent, to tempt" (Bullinger). Obviously, care must be exercised in determining where and how the latter meaning of the word may be applied, in view of the reference in James 1:13.

It was necessary that the Lord's faithful obedience should be tried, or put to the test. Brother Thomas says that the "enemy within the human nature is the mind of the flesh, which is

enmity against God; it is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). The Lord's life of perfect obedience to his Father revealed beyond doubt that he did not have "the mind of the flesh" since he was never at any time in a state of "enmity against God". However, this reality had to be proven — not only to Yahweh's satisfaction, but also unimpeachable evidence for the conviction of all humanity. The evil propensities in human nature are styled "*pre-eminently a sinner*", or, as Bullinger defines it: "exceedingly, or super-eminently" sinful (Rom. 7:13).

Sin possesses a "stronghold", Brother Thomas wrote, and that bastion is "the flesh. It is the devil and satan within the human nature". This much should be obvious to any careful reader of Scripture, for there is no other place where sin may be manifested. Paul uttered the anguished cry: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Rom. 7:24). The phrase may also be rendered: "this body, doomed to death" (Roth.); "this body which is dragging me down to death" (TCNT). Or, as in the AV mg., "this body of death". In every case it will be noticed that emphasis is laid upon the *body*. The body of fallen human nature is the only arena in which King-Sin can hope to reign (Rom. 6:12); hence Paul's fervent plea to be delivered from the shackles of a nature which could never bring him eternal redemption. And whilst he thanked God that salvation could be found in Jesus Christ (v. 23), he was also aware that he would remain a "wretched man", doomed to eternal oblivion, were it not for the mercy of Yahweh in providing atonement for humanity through His Son.

Forbidden Fruit

"Human nature, or 'sinful flesh', has three principal channels through which it displays its waywardness against the law of God. These are

expressed by 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'. All that is in the world stands related to these points of our nature, and there is no temptation that can be devised, but what assails it in one or more of these three particulars" (p. 77).

The serpent presented himself before Eve and put her to the test in this three-fold manner. Hamor, the father of Shechem, stood before Jacob and offered him the same three-fold attractions (Gen. 34:8-10). Numerous similar cases could be advanced. One of the most notable concerns the circumstances of Job. "Satan", (Job's "adversary"), was numbered among those who assembled to worship Yahweh. He was jealous of Job, and of Job's standing in the eyes of God. The adversary wished to discredit Job. To that end he confronted God with the outrageous suggestion that Job was only religious because it *paid him* to serve Yahweh (Job 1:8-10). He claimed that Job received great blessings from God because God afforded Job special "protection" in return for what Satan saw as a kind of simpering pretension on Job's part. Brother Thomas makes the point that "someone came" to the Son of God on the "same principle that the adversary was permitted to put the fidelity of Job to the proof. The trial of this son of God was perhaps recorded as an illustration of the temptation of the Son of God, even Jesus, to whom there was none like in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (p. 77).

Who Was the Adversary?

Who was the one who put the Son of God to the test? "Who he was does not appear", says Brother Thomas. Quite so. But may we suggest that five interesting passages of Scripture be considered?

The expressions which occur in Mat. 4:3 and Lk. 4:3 are identical: "If thou be the Son of God..." The Greek

reads *ei huioi tou theou*; lit. "If a son thou art of the God". The only other passage where this statement is found, in this exact form, is in Mat. 27:40. Those who had taken pleasure in the Lord's crucifixion "reviled him, wagging their heads" as they beheld his body nailed to the tree. They sneered: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Mat. 27:40). Who was the spokesman? Who, among the Jews, uttered the final words which condemned the Lord to death? None other than the high priest, Caiaphas (Jn. 11:49-53). Almost these identical words, with the addition of *Christos* (Messiah), are to be found in Mat. 26:63. And the speaker? None other than the high priest!

Could there be any other man among the Jews more suited to be the *Satan* to the Son of God? The man who, in his heinous disregard for divine precepts and prophecy, apostasized the very office intended for God's own Son?

What Fellowship Hath Christ with Belial?

The *Diabolos* knew that the Lord was "destined to possess" all things, and that "he was to obtain them through suffering. Jesus knew this too. Now, as the flesh dislikes suffering, the tempter proposed to gratify *the desire of his eyes* by giving him all he saw on the easy condition of doing homage to him as the god of the world" (p. 78). An alliance between the ruling classes of the Jews, with the high priest the dominant figure, and the Son of God, would have given Christ incalculable benefits — provided he had been willing to use his miraculous powers for the self-indulgence of the flesh. But "he preferred the grace of God with suffering, to the gratification of his flesh with all pomp and pageantry of this vain and transitory world" (p. 79).

The flesh, given free reign to pursue every form of rich and sensual pleasure is the very antithesis of self-

denial and suffering in humble submission to the will of God. The Son of God refused to be diverted from giving total commitment to fulfilling the will and purpose of his Father.

"What fellowship hath Christ with Belial?" asks Brother Thomas. Then comes the unequivocal answer: "Certainly none". And all who claim to be numbered among his true disciples are called upon to follow his pattern of behaviour, as he is their singular exemplar. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1Pet. 2:21).

Testing the Two Adams

In view of the fact that Yahweh is able to "declare the end from the beginning" and be fully aware of "things not yet done" (Isa. 46:10), it is obvious that "God's knowledge of what a man's character will be" will not alter the divine principle of subjecting him to trial. God "rewards and punishes none upon foregone conclusions. His principle is to recompense men according to what they *have done*, not for what they would do" (p. 79).

Upon this basis, the first Adam was placed on probation that his faith and obedience might be tested. Not having been created with "the mind of the flesh" — a state which results only from actual transgression (Rom. 7:13-14; 8:5-8) — the serpent, through the outworking of circumstances, became the tempter. His reasoning — emanating only from his natural mind, since he possessed no other source of knowledge and had been given no ability to moralise — penetrated into the mind of the woman. This is evident from the fact that she ruminated carefully upon his words. She compared them with what God had said. In making her decision, she decided to follow the philosophy of the serpent.

The Son of God did no such thing.

The "last Adam" (1Cor. 15:45) was tested and put to the proof in similar

fashion as was the first Adam. One of the most important differences between the two was that the "last Adam" was "the Word made flesh", despite the weakness of the nature he bore. "This sinful nature we inherit", wrote Brother Thomas; but then added, significantly: "it is our misfortune, not our crime" (p. 77). Thus, God does not attribute any form of *guilt* to mankind because of the nature they bear. Guilt is imputed and ascribed only when sin has been committed.

Deceitfulness of Sin

The Son of God was completely attuned to the teaching of Scripture. He was aware that "the thought of foolishness is sin"; and that as a man *thinketh* in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 24:9; 23:7).

He illustrated the awesome need for mind-control, for the thought processes to be totally under the influence of God's commandments, by making reference to one of flesh's most common weaknesses: "Whosoever *looketh* on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her *already* in his *heart*" (Mat. 5:28). In contemplating the Lord's thirty-three and a half years of bearing all the weaknesses of human nature, yet never once sinning, it is evident that he never at any time experienced this state of mind. We do not always appreciate precisely what is meant by the term "the Lord's perfection of character". Had his character not been perfect, it would have been imperfect, blemished. And, the only element which can produce an imperfect character is sin.

Sin is deceitful; it is fraudulent, a deceiver, a trickster; it ruthlessly and craftily misleads (Heb. 3:13). Christ was aware that "the *imagination* of

man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 6:5). The word relates to "that which is *formed in the mind*; e.g., plans and purposes". Hence the warning from the Lord himself: "for from *within*, out of the *heart* of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries..." (Mark 7:21).

In referring to Deut. 8:2, Brother Thomas has pointed out that Yahweh "knew what was in the *heart* of Israel, and whether they would obey Him; but He subjected them to such a trial as would cause them to reveal themselves in their true character and thereby justify Him in His conduct towards them" (p. 80). Had not God subjected the first Adam to this same form of testing? And has not this remained His unchanging method of putting men to the proof in all their generations?

Is it not also true that "thus He dealt with the *two Adams*", as Brother Thomas asserts?

With grateful and humble hearts, men and women should offer their fervent praise and thanks to Yahweh that "the last Adam" did not fail, as did the first. With what joy his disciples should receive his words: "Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).

Eternal redemption has been provided for sinful humanity because the Lord "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:8-11).

— John Ullman

"If we are inspired we do not know it. We wish we were; for then we could speak and write by inspiration, which would save us much labor and anxiety. We know the truth, which is, indeed an inspiration to any man who understands it. But beyond this we make no pretensions, and have no sympathy or fellowship with any that do" — Bro. Thomas.