

The Soul Winner

An Exposition of Proverbs 11:30

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FOREWORD

“He that winneth souls is wise.” Who wins souls? Is winning souls the work of man? Is it the work of the Church? What does it mean to win souls?

Men do not win souls for the simple reason that they cannot win souls. It is part of the perversity of human nature that it will not voluntarily ascribe salvation to the Lord, nor give him the glory for the same. Man must needs be his own Savior and he fain would save, not only himself, but certain of his fellow men as well. Man would be God.

Christ is the only soul winner. He alone wins souls. This work seeks to ascribe salvation wholly to Jesus Christ and give him all the glory. Behold here the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Of the ten lepers Christ cleansed, only one returned to give him glory. May this exalted view of the Savior’s glorious majesty constrain us, the other nine lepers cleansed, to return and give him the glory. In his Precious name. Amen.

THE SOUL WINNER

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life: and he that winneth souls is wise.” PROVERBS 11:30

THE BOOKS OF Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs are known as the wisdom books of the Old Testament because their common theme is wisdom. They contain the whole philosophy of the Hebrew religion which is one with that of the Christian religion. This text is a concise and accurate summation of that philosophy. It is vital to the understanding of our text that we understand this philosophy. Because men are either ignorant of this philosophy or simply ignore it, the profound error of the modern teaching called “Winning Souls” exists today in practically the whole of professing Christendom.

This false teaching is of such gigantic and stupendous proportions, and so venerable and well entrenched, that it is considered no less than sacrilege to say anything against it. It is one of the sacred cows of Christendom. But like all other idols it is “Nehushtan” and like Dagon it will be decapitated and lose its hands when brought into the presence of the Word. When the Philistines brought the ark of the Lord into the house of Dagon, their fish god, Dagon fell on his face, lost his head and hands, and only the “stump” remained. The stump was the lower or fishy part, the upper part resembled a man. This modern god of “Winning Souls” is fishy too, and we shall bring it face to face with the word of the living God. If we do not succeed in breaking it in pieces, as Hezekiah did Nehushtan, the brazen serpent, we shall at least reveal it to be a thing of brass, and show it for what it is, an idol partly man and partly fish, belonging not to God’s people but to his enemies.

The Bible philosophy begins with the affirmation of God. All other philosophies in the world begin with Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” The Bible philosophy begins with God; all others begin with man. It is important that we remember this great distinction, for it is the ground of our text. Our text, then, does not begin with man but God, it is first of all an affirmation of God and any reference it may have to man is secondary.

When we examine the Bible philosophy of wisdom or any other subject we find that the writers always begin with the affirmation of God. Never do they begin with Pilate’s question “What is truth?” They begin with the affirmation that God is truth. Proceeding upon this ground they declare that God is all-wise, that wisdom can be perfectly predicated of God alone, that apart from God there is no wisdom, that in God all

wisdom dwells. And this is the Bible philosophy, not only of wisdom, but of all the divine qualities or attributes.

From this ground the Bible doctrine of human wisdom comes. Man's wisdom results from his right relationship to God. God is the source of all wisdom. In proportion as man is brought into submission to God's law and rule, is brought to seek God's knowledge, guidance and direction; in a word, as man denies his own will and way and is submissive to God's will and way; in that proportion man is wise. The man who is the opposite of this is unwise; he is a fool, for, only a fool opposes God. Hear now the Bible definition of wisdom.

Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28:20-28).

"The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." This is the definition of wisdom in all the Old Testament. This definition is not changed in the New Testament. But it is illuminated. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul affirms that Christ Jesus was "made unto us wisdom" from God. He then analyzes that wisdom as "righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" and this is precisely what we find in Proverbs.

Wisdom exists only in God. Man is wise as he comes into right relationship with God. Man can be brought into this relationship by Jesus Christ alone. Christ, then, is the ultimate wisdom of God. And he alone is the one source of wisdom for man.

In order to make the meaning of our text plain we must first clear the ground. We must try to overcome the prejudice of long familiarity with the phrase: "He that winneth souls is wise." Our task here is a tremendous one but not impossible. There is a total misconception of the meaning of this phrase among religionists, fostered by Arminian teachers who exhort men to run to and fro through the earth and "Win" souls for Christ. That no man ever won a soul in the sense of this text will become evident as we proceed.

"He that winneth souls is wise." So reads the Authorized Version. The Revised Version reads: "He that is wise winneth souls." Either reading is correct. Both ideas are in the text. It is a wise thing to win souls. Wisdom is the requisite for winning souls. Winning souls is a wise business. It takes wisdom to win souls. He who wins souls is wise in himself and wise in his deed. Wisdom is necessary for winning souls and the accomplishment of this work is demonstration of that wisdom.

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." The Hebrew word translated "winneth" means "to take." It is translated elsewhere, to accept, to bring, to buy, to infold. This is the one instance where it is translated "winneth." We are at once arrested by the fact that the word "winneth" must necessarily carry all these other meanings. We must be able to read the text with all these words. He that accepteth souls is wise. He that bringeth souls is wise. He that buyeth souls is wise. He that infoldeth souls is wise. All that is involved in winning souls. He who wins souls accepts, brings, buys and infolds those souls. And finally, he that is wise takes souls. The word means to take by conquest and so is properly translated "winneth." What is taken by conquest is properly said to be won.

The word "win" appears only one other time in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word is different from the word translated "winneth" in our text, but the thought contained in the language is the same. That word is in 2 Chronicles 32:1. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, entered into Judah, encamped against the fenced cities and sought to "win" them for himself. The word means to cleave, to separate, to rend. The Assyrian king sought to cleave, to separate, to rend these cities from Judah and take them for himself. The word means to cleave, to separate, to rend. The Assyrian king sought to cleave, to separate, to rend these cities from Judah and take

them for himself. The word is translated “win” because conquest is involved. And that is the thought of our text. “Winneth” here means to take by conquest as the context plainly shows.

“He that winneth souls is wise.” The language is emphatic; it means that he alone is wise. He is supremely wise. He is all-wise. He has the wisdom of God, for that is the only wisdom mentioned in the book of Proverbs. Therefore, no other reading is possible.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” “Fruit,” “righteous” and “tree” are all singular; it is the fruit, the righteous, the tree. The writer does not mean to suggest that there are various kinds of trees of life. The case is generic. Each individual tree is a tree of life; but the whole of the trees, the species, is the tree of life. The expression, “tree of life,” does not often occur in Scripture. We find it in Genesis, 2:9; 3:22,24. It is found four times in Proverbs, 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4, it is found twice in Revelation in chapters 2 & 22. A reading of Revelation 22:2 will help us here:

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Note that it is “the” tree of life, yet there were many trees in the midst, and on either side of the river. These were not different kind of trees; each was “a” tree of life and all were “the” tree of life. The same idiom occurs in Galatians 5:22,23 where nine things are listed and all nine are called “The Fruit of the Spirit.”

The tree of life is a tree that lives. It is not a tree that dies. Nor is it a tree that is dormant at any time. It lives in all seasons and it bears fruit in all seasons. The fruit it bears is stated in Galatians 5:22,23. It bears the fruit of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Have we any of this fruit? If so, we are partakers of the tree of life and have life. If not, we are still dead in trespasses and sins.

This fruit is not produced all at once. The tree of life bears twelve manner of fruits and it bears fruit every month. So it is with God’s dear children. This fruit is life-long; this process spans the whole cycle of life. But if we are God’s children we will bear this fruit at some season of our life. We may bear the fruit of love at one season, the fruit of joy at another. Longsuffering may be ours today, peace may wait till tomorrow. Faith may be ours while as yet we have not attained unto meekness. We are not perfect, nor shall we attain perfection in this life. We have not yet attained unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. But we shall. Do not despair, wait. The Holy Spirit will not fail to do his work. Do not make the mistake of trying to produce this fruit yourself. You will thereby prove yourself to be no child of wisdom, but a child of folly. Man does not produce this fruit. It is the fruit of the Spirit.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” We come now to the arresting and vital word “life.” As we have said, fruit, righteous and tree are singular. But “life” is not singular. It is the dual number. The Hebrew has a singular, dual and plural number. The singular is one, the dual two, the plural three or more. Note this well. The Hebrew word for life is never singular. It is never plural. Always it is the dual number. We have two lives, one here, another hereafter; one in time, another in eternity. We do not simply live once and end all at death. Death is not the end, there will be a resurrection. We shall live again, not in time but eternity. But we live only twice. We do not have plurality of lives. There is no reincarnation or transmigration of souls.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that is wise winneth souls.” So reads the original. The verb “is” in the first clause is supplied. This makes the language ambiguous and difficult. When we supply the verb “is,” we make it read as though the fruit produced the tree. While this is possible it is not at all probable. It is true in a limited sense that the fruit produces the tree for the seed is in the fruit. What we must determine here is what the writer really said, and when we examine the language carefully there can be no doubt that the writer really said the opposite, namely, the tree produces the fruit.

There is only one pronoun in our text. The antecedent of the pronoun “he” is “the righteous.” Righteous is singular. This compels us to read “the righteous One.” We read it, “The righteous (one), He is the tree of

life: His fruit is the souls taken in conquest.” Again: “The righteous (one), the wise (one), He winneth (taketh) souls in conquest and they are his fruit.” This is most certainly the sense of the passage.

Who is this singular personage called the righteous one? Here we are not left to guess. The righteous one is Jesus Christ. He is also the wise one. He is the very “wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). Who is righteous? To ask the question is to answer it. No man is righteous. The word “righteous” in our text is “just.” The writer of our text also wrote Ecclesiastes 7:20. Hear him. “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” That the righteous one, he that winneth souls, of our text cannot be man, any man, is beyond question. “As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10).

“He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Sam 23:3). Some of the learned divines of yesterday, among them Dr. Pye Smith, Kennicott and John Owens, read it, “Ruling over man is the just (righteous) one, ruling in the fear of God.” They read correctly. All honest scholars agree that this is the sense of the passage. And who is wise? “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.” He that fears God is wise. Christ does rule in the fear of God. It is he of whom this scripture speaks as well as our text in Proverbs. Indeed, all the scripture speaks of Jesus Christ. He himself said so. “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth: with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins (Isa 11:1-5).

Upon none but Jesus Christ did this spirit of wisdom, of knowledge and understanding of the fear of the Lord ever rest in such a way and to such a degree that it made him of “quick” understanding in the fear of Jehovah. The word means keen of scent, quick to detect the faintest odor. The Spirit was not given unto Christ by measure as it is unto us. He had the fulness of the Spirit (John 3:34; 1:16). From this righteous Branch, Jesus Christ, comes “the fruit of the righteous.” And it comes from him in its entirety; seed, blossom, fruit; for Christ is both, the “Root” and the “Branch” (Isa 11:10; Rev 22:16; Jer 23:5,6; 33:15,16; Zech 3:8-10; 6:12,13; Pro 11:28; 12:3,12).

I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer 23:5,6). Of this man’s seed [David, Son of Jesse] hath God according to his promise [in Isa 11] raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus (Acts 13:23).

There is no escaping the fact that he who wins souls saves souls. These scriptures make it plain that the meaning of winning souls is to save them, for there is no other possible way to win them. We could very well read our text, “He that saveth souls is wise.” Jesus Christ is the only Savior (Acts 4:12). He alone is the righteous one, the wise one who wins souls: “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1), “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just” (Acts 3:14), “The Just One” (Acts 7:52), “That Just One” (Acts 22:14).

Every letter of Christ’s name in Jeremiah is capitalized: “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” The words “Just” and “One” in these other scriptures are also capitalized. All this literally shouts one thing, the singularity of Jesus Christ. And who is wise? “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17).

We remind ourselves again of the Bible doctrine that what is predicated of God is predicated of him alone. All things derive from God. In him we live, and move, and have our being. He gives to all life, and breath, and all things (Acts 17:24-28). Man has no vestige of any of the qualities found in God; for though he was

created in the image and likeness of God, he has by his fall into sin lost that image and likeness and is totally depraved in all his members and faculties, prone to all evil and averse from all good.

When any good whatsoever is predicated of man in the Bible it is predicated on the ground that God has given this good to him, and on that ground alone. This is also true of any capacity for good that any man may have. The good originates with God and not with man. Any gift man has, he has in proportion as God has given it, and only in proportion. When God sent his Son, he gave not the Spirit by measure unto him. To all others God gives the Spirit by measure. This is true whether it be the spirit of faith (Rom 12:3), or wisdom, or righteousness, or any other. To all men God gives all things by measure, including life. He measures the tears we drink (Psa 80:5). He gives the wicked man his portion (measure) (Job 20:29). He measures our days, our life span (Psa 39:4). He measures all creation, even the dust of the earth (Isa 40:12; Hab 3:6). He corrects or chastises by measure (Jer 30:11; 46:28). He numbers our days, our steps and the hairs of our head (Job 14:5,16; Matt 10:30). We are given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph 4:7). What we contribute in the church is by measure, and it is measured by Christ and not by us (Eph 4:13-17). This is God's absolute sovereignty over us; a sovereignty no man can escape. The one thing man has which does not come from God is his sin. And even there God is sovereign, for he sets the bounds to the sin which man commits, even to withholding him from sin when it pleases him to do so (Gen 20:6).

The term, "the righteous," is used not only of Christ, it is also used to designate the Lord's people. But nowhere does the Bible infer that the Lord's people, either as a whole or individually, are righteous in and of themselves. Their righteousness is of Christ, not of themselves. In themselves they are not righteous but unrighteous. "And their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD" (Isa 54:17). God "made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). Christ knew no sin, and that is the apostle's definition of righteousness in this scripture. Where is the man who never knew sin? There is no such man. Then there is no righteous man. Then the term, "the righteous," in our text being the singular number cannot refer to man. It can only refer to Jesus Christ. He alone is righteous.

"He that winneth souls is wise." What, then, are souls? Proceeding carefully with our investigation we must now answer this question. We must know what souls are before we can know what it is to win them. And here we cannot take the common usage of the word today or our own conception of its meaning. We must know what the writer meant by this word and we can determine that only by its Bible usage. What saith the Word? "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7).

How remarkably plain. Souls are men. Men into whom God has breathed the breath of life, not wind or air, but the breath which God himself breathes. This is what distinguishes man from beast. The Hebrew word "Nephesh" (soul) occurs 754 times in the Old Testament writings. It is translated "soul" 472 times. In the other 282 occasions it is translated forty ways, so that altogether the word is translated forty one ways. The word is used of animal life as well as that of man. But the Bible makes it very clear that the life or soul of man and beast is not the same. The grand distinction is set forth in Genesis 2:7 and is maintained throughout. God did not "breathe" the breath of life into beasts. He spoke that life or soul into being (Gen 1:20). We must not confuse the breath or the air that we breathe with life. When Paul says that God gives to all life, and breath, he shows they are not the same (Acts 17:25).

"And man became a living soul." Man does not have a soul, he is a soul. He is not a body possessing a soul, he is a soul tabernacling in a body. God breathed; as the result man became a living soul. It was man, the whole man, not just the spiritual side alone, that became a living soul. This Hebrew word "Nephesh" is used over and over of man as a person, of man as a being whose existence is due to this fact of life. The word does not refer to the spirit of man alone, or to the mind alone, and certainly not to the body alone. The word signifies the whole man: spirit, mind, body, the entire man. When the writer of our text uses this word "souls," he does not mean the spiritual side of man's nature only, nor his mental capacities only, nor his bodily powers only. He means them all. Our writer simply said, "He that winneth men is wise." Spirit is the essential in man. But man is not man in his spiritual nature alone. Man is not a disembodied spirit. The

whole man then is meant. He that winneth souls must win the entire man: his spirit, his mind, his body, and he wins all these to “life,” not mere existence, but life. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” He who wins souls must resurrect them: the spirit from sin, the mind from corruption and enmity against God, the body from death and the grave. This is what is involved in winning souls. This is the doctrine.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is the righteous, the tree of life, the wise. He alone wins souls. No man ever won a soul. Man cannot possibly win souls. The tree of life bears fruit. Every tree bears fruit after its kind: good trees bear good fruit, evil trees bear evil fruit (Matt 7:16-18). Being the tree of life Christ bears the fruit of life; life is the fruit of this tree and this fruit of life grows on no other tree. There is no other tree of life but Christ. He is the one source of life. “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

This life is inseparably bound with winning souls. He who wins souls must give those souls life. Here we must examine the context in this book of Proverbs, and, when we do, the revelation will be both vivid and startling. The subject of Proverbs is wisdom. It is wisdom as opposed to folly, God’s wisdom opposed to man’s folly, God’s righteousness opposed to man’s sin, God’s life opposed to man’s death. God’s wisdom is set forth under the metaphor of a virtuous woman, for wisdom is pictured as the handmaid of the Lord. Man’s folly is set forth under the metaphor of a “strange” woman, an adulteress who hunts for the precious life or souls of men (6:26), an harlot who lies in wait for her prey (7:10-12). Wisdom is life (3:13-22; 4:13; 8:35; 16:22). Folly or the “strange” woman is death (2:18; 5:5; 7:27). These two are always in direct contrast and opposition. Both have houses and both are vocal in their appeals to men. Folly’s house is death (2:18; 5:5; 7:27; 9:13-18). Wisdom’s house is life (9:1-6). All mankind is pictured as being in the house of death or passing to it down the path of death. they go down this path of death and heed the voice of this strange woman, folly, sin, death, who lies in wait enticing and alluring because they are void of wisdom or understanding (7:7). Nor can they recover themselves or gain wisdom of themselves, for wisdom is the gift of God (2:6), wisdom cries without, in the streets leading to this house of death, in the chief concourse, the town square, the gathering place of this city of death, in the opening of the gates and throughout the city; upon the highest most eminent places Wisdom puts forth her voice crying, “turn you at my reproof: Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you—Unto you O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things, and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth—forsake the foolish and live” (1:21-33; 8:1-21; 9:1-6).

Here and there some hear wisdom’s voice and see her excellency, for the Lord has given them the hearing ear and the seeing eye (20:12). They hear God’s word which proceedeth out of his mouth imparting knowledge and understanding (2:6), and are enabled to forsake the foolish and live. But the majority go unheeding on their way. Having neither the hearing ear nor the seeing eye, they see but do not perceive, they hear but do not understand (Mark 4:12). The god of this world having blinded their eyes, they see not the excellency of wisdom. They hear not God’s words because they are not of God (John 8:47). all these souls are in the house of death, on the way to hell (7:27; 9:18). These souls are dead and this “strange” woman, sin and death, holds them prisoner in her house of death. The word house means household, all that pertains to the house. Here it means all that pertains to death, and this is all; for all are spiritually dead. All are in the domain of death, for death’s house includes the way there, and this is all the ways of man, which are right in his eyes but the end thereof are the ways of death (14:12).

See, then, the picture. The whole world is passing down this path to death, allured by this mistress death, this harlot sin. Hear the writer:

For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night (7:6-9).

Then follows the harlot meeting him, enticing him with her fair speech, causing him to yield, forcing him with the flattering of her lips, till at last—

He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life” (7:10-23).

Little does the young man know that this fair and alluring woman whom he follows has cast down many wounded and slain many strong, and that “her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers [innermost recesses] of death” (7:26-27).

For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat [throne] in the high places of the city, To call passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell (9:14-18).

All men are swift passengers through life, from time to eternity. And this passing time, this lifetime is not a bright day, but first a twilight, then an evening, and finally, a black and dark night. And these passengers through this dim twilight are somnambulists who awake only in hell and are “brought to desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors, as a dream when one awaketh” (Psa 73:19,20). All these passengers are the walking dead, who, living in pleasure, are dead while they live (1 Tim 5:6).

These are the souls to be won. They must be taken by conquest. The house of death is well guarded. It is far better fortified than the fenced cities Sennacherib sought to win. It has gates of brass and bars of iron. It is a maximum security prison. The inmates sit in darkness and the shadow of death, bound in affliction and iron, the cords of their sins (Prov 5:22; Psa 107:10,16). Even the passengers, who go right on their way, are armed. “They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man has his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night” (Song 3:8). All that pertain to the domain of death, “die in youth and their life [soul] is among the unclean” (Job 36:14). They go to the strange woman’s house, which inclineth unto death, down the paths unto death, and none return to take hold of the paths of life (2:18,19). They cannot be conquered by any earthly means. Their way seems right to them, they cannot see the end which is death (16:25). They pursue evil to their own death (11:19). They seek not the Lord; they seek death (21:6). They seek death in the error of their life. They remain in the congregation of the dead (21:16).

This is their condition. Awful condition! Lost! Three classes are mentioned: “Passengers,” “Guests,” “The dead.” Some are passing over the way of death, other are guests in the depth of hell, still others are dead (9:18). The guests are all wounded, the dead are slain (7:26). The rest are passengers following the strange woman whose feet go down to death and whose steps take hold on hell (5:5). Ah, what is stranger than death?

All these souls are in the domain of death, the formidable fortress, as a “prey.” They are the “prey” of the mighty one, the lawful captives of the “terrible.”

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children (Isa 49:24,25).

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils (Luke 11:21,22).

This strong man armed, the mighty, the terrible, is Satan, king over this nether region of spiritual death, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue, Apollyon, both meaning destroyer (Rev 9:11). The strange woman, death, is his mistress. Death captured the first pair in Eden, the man and the woman, from whom all are descended; and by that one man’s sin, death came upon all (Rom 5:12). All souls then came under the domain of death.

These souls are lawful captives. They are not imprisoned unlawfully or unjustly. It is God’s law that forges their fetters. Satan is armed with the law and that law says, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:4).

These captives therefore can have no hope of being delivered by the law. The law can never give life or justify, it can only condemn. The bonds of these captives are as strong as the law they violated and that law is so strong that it will not fail though the heavens fall (Matt 5:18; Luke 16:17).

These captives are at peace: "His goods are in peace." They are not troubled. They do not want to be delivered. They are even unwilling. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. They will not come to Christ that they might have life (John 3:19; 5:40). None ever return from the domain of sin and death of their own will. Their will is stubborn like their mistress (Prov 7:11). And she like Pharaoh will not let the people go. Death and sin is never satisfied; the grave has never yet said, it is enough (Prov 30:15,16).

Coupled with all this is these prisoner's great fear of death which holds them all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb 2:15). This, too, must be overcome ere these prisoners can be delivered, their souls won. Who, then, can win souls? Only he who is mightier than the strong man fully armed. That this is Jesus Christ we in this hour know. But did the writer of our text know? Is Christ in the book of Proverbs?

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death (Prov 8:22-36).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-14).

Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3).

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev 19:11-16).

This entire chapter describes Christ's conquest of the domain of sin and death. In the portion penned here we have the scene as Christ goes forth to this conquest. In this beautiful and symbolic language of the apostle John we have a vivid and accurate account of Christ's conquest of death and his winning of souls. Although the language is symbolic, it is by no means fanciful but resembles the style of this book of Proverbs wherein is our text. The Hebrew title of Proverbs is "Mishle," the singular of which is "Mashal," usually translated proverb. The word really means likeness, a similitude or parable. This form of language is prevalent in Hebrew poetry especially, and is frequently in all the poetic language of the Bible. Certainly the parable was a favorite form of teaching with Christ. It is important that we remember that our text is really a parable, as

is this scripture in Revelation. The reader is asked to keep this in mind and to read the remainder of this chapter in Revelation, as well as the other scriptures cited in this study.

Christ came forth from heaven. He, very God of very God, left the realms of glory. He laid aside his form and appearing as God, came to earth as a babe begotten by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary. He, who was God, was incarnated as man. He tabernacled among men in man's mortal clay. He came to win souls, to seek and to save that which was lost. He lived and he died. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified. He was buried. He entered the domain of darkness and death. He entered this dark region through his own death. He poured out his soul unto death, was numbered with the transgressors and bore the sins of many (Isa 53:1-12). He, himself, who knew no sin, was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He, himself, became one of these dead souls. Hear his bitter and anguished cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He yielded up the ghost. He died. He left the realm of life for the realm of death, went down into the innermost recesses of death and descended into hell. Forsaken of God, he became a passenger over the way of death, a guest in the depths of hell, and took his place among the dead as one of the dead.

But his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption (Acts 2:31). He rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor 15:3-4). He who descended into the lower parts of the earth, not only rose again from the dead, but he ascended up far above all heavens that he might fulfill all things. And he gained the victory, for when he ascended he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men (Eph 4:8-10).

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; [Christ Jesus] yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them (Psa 68:18).

This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death (Psa 102:18-20).

"Those appointed unto death," literally, "the children of death." Christ freed the children of death, the children of wrath (Eph 2:1-4). Christ fulfilled the law and loosed the prisoners. They are no longer lawfully condemned. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes them free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2). All the "handwriting," the "dogmatism" of condemnation of the law, Christ cancelled with his blood, nailing it to his cross. He spoiled the principalities of sin and death, conquered death and hell, triumphing over them in himself (Col 2:14,15). Thus the dark domain of death was won.

"By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin" (Isa 27:9). "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life: and he that winneth souls is wise."

What think you now of the lovely Lord? Glory to the Lamb that was slain! O my sin, my sin! Dear Christ of God, evermore we praise thee, only thee. We bless thee out of Zion. We are not worthy of the least of thy mercies. Do what thou wilt and still we shall praise thee. Gentle Jesus, receive us. Cast us not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

"Lord I give myself to thee,
Thine for evermore to be."

The land is taken, the city won. But the individuals must be overcome, souls must be won. How? "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Phile 1). "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus" (Phile 23). "Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you" (Col 4:10). "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners" (Rom 16:7).

Prisoner is literal in the first instance. Paul was actually in jail. But Paul will not have it that he is the prisoner of men. He dismisses the jail as being of no consequence. He is Christ's prisoner.

Prisoner in these other scriptures is a different word. It means a prisoner of war, literally men taken at the point of a spear, captured in battle, men who have been conquered and have laid down their arms in surrender. The picture behind this word is that of a great General returning from a conquest. A vast host of

prisoners follow him. He leads them through the city, making a show of them openly. They are the proof of his victory.

Every soul whom Christ wins he wins in battle. The carnal mind is enmity against him, and this enmity of man is such that it is a battle unto death. This enmity must be slain. Christ alone does this. He who thinks salvation a matter that men themselves determine is under a great delusion. No, they must be taken, as Paul was, in battle. Men do not come to salvation by any effort or deed of their own. They do not accept the cross by their conceited wisdom, they rather reject it. Every soul saved is won in battle, his enmity slain at the cross, else he could not be a willing prisoner but still a rebel. If we have not been won by Christ, completely conquered by him, we are not Christians. If we have the least vestige of our own will left, if our enmity has not been slain, we are as bad as we ever were. Unless we have been brought into wisdom's house, we are still in the house of death.

Since we are Christ's prisoners we are no longer our own. Christ's victory is complete. We own him King and gladly enlist in his army. We are prisoners of his love. We joyfully do his bidding, for he has conquered. We are won. And in wisdom. He has made us willing in the day of his power. And he did so by taking (winning) us out of the domain of death and translating (carrying us over) to the domain of life (Col 1:13). We are in the paradise of God where the tree of life is ever blooming and ever fruitful, and this fruit is free. We "sit down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to our taste" (Song 2:3,4). Our blinded eyes are opened and we see Christ as the fairest, the chiefest, the standard-bearer among ten thousand and altogether lovely (Song 5:10-16). Our ears are open and we now hear his loving voice calling us from the winter and desolation of death, to the region of life where everlasting spring abides. Behold now the tender-mercy of thy Savior and hear the voice of his everlasting love:

The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether (Song 2:8-17).

How vividly does the Spirit breathed word here, describe the experience of the soul! When first quickened by the blessed Spirit the soul is painfully aware of sin. Sin appears as lofty and impassible mountains, towering to the sky. To the soul these sins are as the mountains of Bether, separating between the soul and the Savior. Bether means division. These mountains of sin hide the Savior's lovely face. The soul cannot see how Christ can come over these mountains, for, humanly speaking, they are impassible. When the fact of sin is homed to the soul by the Holy Spirit, the soul sees that there is no earthly way to overcome that sin. The unspeakable sadness of contrition overwhelms the soul. The unbearable sorrow of repentance engulfs the Spirit. In anguished mourning the soul exclaims: "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly" (Prov 5:12-14). The soul sits sad and lone in the region of darkness and death. Winter reigns without and within. No flower blooms, no bird sings. The anguish of godly fear seizes the soul. In this beginning of wisdom there is fighting without; the fears within. The heart is enveloped with a strange mixture of bitterness and joy. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness" (the bitterness of his soul); "and a stranger" (the strange woman: death) "doth not intermeddle with his joy" (Prov 14:10). The soul knows bitterness because it now sees how unutterably evil and unclean it is. The joy springs from the soul having caught the first faint glimpse of the rays of mercy. A hope, which the soul hardly dares entertain, springs up, creating a desire and breathing after the Savior. The soul begins

to pray and cry in the first stirrings of life. In great astonishment, wonder and awe, the soul sees itself as it really is and the prayer begins with confession:

Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; for my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand (Psa 88:2-5).

In utter amazement that such an evil wretch could be shown mercy and afforded one sweet taste of divine grace, the soul exclaims:

Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? (Psa 88:10-12).

Suddenly the Lord comes to the soul. He comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. The mountains of Bether, iniquities that separate the soul from God, the sin that hides his face from us (Isa 59:2), are no obstacle to the Savior. He comes over them with the greatest of ease and grace. He does not toil laboriously over them with an awkward gait; He leaps and skips over them with the ease and grace of a roe or a young hart. He is the heavenly Zerubbabel, which name means the dispeller of confusion, and before him the mountain of impossibility becomes the plain of reality where grace is the watchword (Zech 4:7).

While the soul sits desolate and lone in its felt darkness and winter of death, the Lord causes it to hear and recognize his glorious voice. In glad surprise of rapture the soul exclaims "The voice of my beloved!" The Lord manifests himself. The soul sees the Savior, not perfectly, the soul sees him as through a window or lattice. But though the soul does not at first see face to face but only through a glass darkly, and though its knowledge of the Savior is still an enigma, yet it is afforded a view of the Savior which is accompanied by abiding faith, hope and charity which enraptures and evermore wins the soul (1 Cor 13:12,13).

All things are changed when Christ comes to the soul. Old things pass away, all things become new. And the new things are all of God (2 Cor 5:17,18). Christ brings the springtime along with him. He speaks the word of power to the soul; "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." The soul is resurrected from its grave of lust, its winter of sin's dark desolation is dispelled, its dreary and cold rain of sorrow and despair is banished. The glorious day of divine forgiveness dawns bright and fair, the shadows of doubt and distrust flee away, the flower of faith blooms, the bird of hope sings and arm in arm the soul walks with the Lord. As the dove pursued by the vulture flees for its life and hides itself in the clefts of the rock, the secret places of the precipice, so the soul evermore hides itself in the wounds of the Savior. The soul is won and in the wounds of Jesus safely abides till the day of glory dawns and the shadows all flee away.

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life: and he that winneth souls is wise."

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding (Prov 9:1-6).

Wisdom has emissaries. She sends forth her maidens. These maidens are wisdom's children. They do not go forth singing the praises of folly; they tell of the excellency of wisdom, for "wisdom is justified of all her children" (Luke 7:35). This is allegorical. The antitype is the Lord ordaining his apostles and sending his church forth to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 10:7). This is the one role of human agency in the great enterprise of winning souls.

In the fortieth Psalm, David recounts how the Lord brought him up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, set his feet upon a rock, established his goings and put a new song in his mouth, even praise to our

God. "Many shall see it" (this), he declared, "and fear and shall trust in the LORD." He then preaches righteousness in the great congregation, publishing the Lord's faithfulness, salvation, lovingkindness, and truth. This after his ears are opened and he is brought to complete submission. "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." This scripture refers primarily to Christ but it is also true of his followers, "because as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). After being conquered by Christ on the road to Damascus, trembling and astonished, Paul cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). When the prophet Isaiah was afforded a vision of the Lord upon his throne, high and lifted up, and heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" answered, "Here am I, send me." He was sent and he was told that the people would not hear, but nevertheless this message of the Lord was to be proclaimed until the cities were without inhabitant, the houses without man and the land utterly desolate (Isa 6).

Every soul whom the Lord has won has the duty to bear witness to the Lord and to be the emissary of wisdom. This obligation obtains as long as life lasts. And this duty will be done by the souls won, for they are won and the love of Christ so enables them that "the people who know their God shall be strong and do exploits." Thus shall the gospel of the kingdom of life be proclaimed in the midst of the world's darkness and the kingdom of death until time shall be no more.

In the fifth chapter of Luke's gospel the Lord tells the church what their work shall evermore be. Said he, "From henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10). The disciples were fishing. They had toiled all night and caught nothing. At Christ's command they launched out into the deep, let down their nets and enclosed such a multitude of fish that the net broke and both ships began to sink. In astonishment Peter fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." To this confession Christ replied, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The word "catch" means "to take alive." The contrast is between the work they were then doing (fishing) and the work they would henceforth do (take men alive). Note the great disparity. They were taking the fish from the element and environment of life to that of death. Jesus tells them that from henceforth they shall be fishers of men and do the exact opposite for men that they were doing for the fish. From henceforth they would take men from the element and environment of death to that of life. They would take men alive. They could neither make them alive nor take them dead. This the Lord alone does and the church can in no wise do the Lord's work. The church can only do her own work and that work is to proclaim the Lord's work. By this faithful witness, not to herself, but to the Lord, the church is the emissary of wisdom, taking the men whom Christ makes alive from the environment of death to that of life. This the church does by means of letting down the gospel net at Christ's command. The church does not let down the gospel net at her own whim but at the Lord's word. "Nevertheless at thy word, I will let down the net." Only at his word can the church succeed. Only at his command can the church cast the net on the right side of the ship and find (John 21:6).

The church is the ambassador of Jesus Christ. She is the envoy of his kingdom. She bears the message of wisdom. She announces the good news that the sacrifice has already been made and there is no sacrifice left for the sinner to offer. The table is already furnished, the wine poured, the feast spread. All the sinner brings to the table is his hunger and thirst and even that is divinely given. There is nothing lacking in God's salvation. There is nothing wanting which the church supplies. The church neither saves nor helps to save. The church does not win souls. Too long have we labored under this delusion. The result is plain, because men imagine that they have themselves done the work of winning souls, they "Sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag" (Hab 1:13-17). Practically the whole of professing Christendom today is ensnared in this idolatry. Out of the entire ten lepers Christ has cleansed only one has ever returned to give him glory.

The work of the church requires divine wisdom. The church must learn the wisdom of obedience. Christ commands "launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." Poor church! She answers in the language of Peter, "we have toiled all night and taken nothing." And there the church stops. She must yet learn the rest of Peter's speech, "nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." How easily the Church is discouraged. How she loves to recount her little tale of woe. Were she obedient the church could never be

discouraged. But she is not obedient. There are not enough converts to suit the church. She thinks more ought to be saved, and she thinks this is the Lord's fault, because she has toiled all night. She will not see that her toil is fruitless and to no purpose because she goes forth in her own strength and not at her Lord's command. Here she proves she is the child of folly, for she questions the Lord's wisdom. The simple truth is that every soul is saved whom the Lord purposes to save and wants saved. The church must see this and bow to the Lord's wisdom ere she can be truly wise or learn obedience.

The church is still trying to take matters into her own hands. She has not yet learned that without Christ she can do nothing (John 15:5). The alien sinner is dead. The church cannot speak to the dead, nor can she raise the dead, nor can the dead raise themselves, nor can the dead raise the dead; the dead can only bury the dead. The church can speak only to the living. She can speak only to those whom Christ has raised from the dead, those who the Spirit quickens. The church cannot call Lazarus from the grave. Christ does this. But the church can and must loose the graveclothes that bind him hand and foot (John 11:44). The church cannot give the sinner life, but she can liberate the quickened soul from its rags of sin that still cling to it. She can remove the napkin that binds the sinner's face and stifles his breathing after the Savior and his praying to God. And thus she sets the sinner free. This she must do, for so her Lord commands. The church must not imagine that the power to do this is her own. She has no power of her own. The power comes by the Lord's word alone. Until the Spirit does his work we labor but in vain. John sent to Jesus and asked, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Mark Christ's answer. "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt 11:2-5). Who did this? Christ. It was when John had heard in prison of the "works" of Christ that he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with this question. All these things mentioned are the works of Christ. None of them are the works of the church. If the dead are raised up, it is Christ who raises them, not the church. If the poor have the gospel preached to them, it is Christ who preaches, not the church. Let the church cease from recounting her tale of woe, of her own toil without success, which is only self glorification, and learn obedience. She will then glorify her Lord.

The church must learn that she is sinful. Said Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." How the church in this hour needs this wisdom. Where is the church today that thinks she is sinful? Oh, proud, proud, hypocritical church! Revelling in her imagined holiness, wallowing in her self-righteousness, glorying in her supposed goodness. She has forgotten the goodness of the Lord. The church will acquire the wisdom of knowing her own sinfulness when she learns obedience, for this is the first lesson obedience teaches. In our astonishment at learning of our own sinfulness will come the wisdom of knowing that Christ alone wins souls and we are ourselves helpless. What is absolutely imperative in the church is the presence of Christ.

The work of the church is the opposite of that of the "strange" woman in Proverbs. "So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him" (Prov 7:4-27). Then follows her speech, the whole of which, together with her actions, is shameless, brazen, presumptuous. The modern church is the counterpart of this strange woman. The church must acquire the wisdom of humility. She must not go abroad with an impudent face and brazen effrontery. Above all, she must not praise herself. And she must not presume, for presumption is the great transgression (Psa 19:13). The church must be clothed with humility, not with the attire of an harlot (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (James 3:13-18).

The church must have the wisdom of meekness. Such wisdom is not of this earth; it descends from above. It is the fruit of the Spirit. It is not natural; it is supernatural. The church must have the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Cor 10:1). We must receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. The engrafted word is not the word written upon the page with pen and ink but the word written upon the heart by the Spirit of God (Heb 8:10). Only when this engrafted word is received with meekness of wisdom, do we become doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves (James 1:21,22). Only as this wisdom from above descends upon us can we sow the fruit of righteousness in peace and make peace. Do we have this wisdom from above today? Is this not why we have no peace, because we have not this wisdom? The church can never produce this holy fruit of righteousness. This is the “fruit of the righteous” of our text. Christ produces the fruit. The church merely disseminates it, and that only in meekness.

In describing this wisdom the apostle uses three small words that we must notice if we are to properly grasp his meaning. Those words are “first,” “then,” “without.” These words mark the method of wisdom, the method by which God imparts wisdom unto men, and the method by which wisdom works in enabling men. “First” marks that which is fundamental—purity. “Then” marks the qualities of this wisdom and which it imparts—peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits. “Without” marks that which is excluded—partiality and hypocrisy.

Wisdom exists in God alone. Man is wise only as God imparts wisdom to him. Wisdom is the gift of God and comes down from above. And it comes in entirety, in purity. It is not that men are in themselves wise to some degree and God’s wisdom merely supplies that which is lacking. It is rather that men are foolish. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. It is “sophia,” a false line of reasoning. This wisdom of man the apostle dismisses as being earthly, natural, devilish, resulting in bitter envying, strife, commotion, unquietness and every evil work. Every evil in this world springs directly from man’s wisdom which is sophistry. Man does not by his wisdom partake of God’s wisdom. By his own wisdom man lies against the truth. God’s wisdom is pure, it is not mixed with the wisdom of man. Of and in himself man has not the least vestige of divine wisdom.

God’s wisdom is chaste and it chastens. The word “pure” here is chaste. And it has to do with thinking as well as acting. God’s wisdom alone enables man to think rightly and act rightly. Of ourselves we are not sufficient to think a right thought or do a right deed. Our sufficiency is of God (2 Cor 3:5). When God’s wisdom enters the soul it chastens the spirit, removing its impurities of envy, strife, tumult and lying against the truth. This divine wisdom is corrective and its final fruit is patience. When patience comes to fruition the soul is perfect and entire, lacking nothing. But until then the soul lacks wisdom and must ask that wisdom of God. The soul is a suppliant, a beggar before God. No man can claim God’s wisdom as a right or privilege, it comes only as a gift. And that only in grace. And the Lord is pleased to impart this wisdom only through divers temptations, various trials of faith, which chasten the soul, purging the vain wisdom of man, causing us to cease from our own wisdom which has an eye only to the material things that are temporal and vanish away as an eagle flies toward heaven (Prov 23:4,5). When divine wisdom comes faith no longer wavers like a storm tossed wave of the sea. The soul is no longer double minded but has an eye single to the glory of God and is therefore stable. We then are enabled to see that our light affliction, our chastening, is momentary and works an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Through this divine chastening of wisdom we cease to look at the things that are seen and look to the things that are not seen. The temporal fades from view and we look away to things eternal. We can then see that every good or temporal gift and every perfect or spiritual gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:2,8,17; Luke 11:34-36; 2 Cor 4:17,18).

The wisdom from above is peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits. These qualities are not earthly but heavenly, they are the very qualities of God. The peaceableness of wisdom is in the peaceableness of God. It is not the peace which the world offers. It is the peace which Christ gives, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Christ gives us his peace and it is peace beyond conflict with the divine will, peace that bows to God’s holy sovereignty and prays that his will be done

simply because it is his will. It is peace beyond the possibility of fear of the trouble of this world; peace beyond the possibility of envy, for it is the peace of God and God cannot possibly be envious of any. Peace that passes the understanding. It is the peace of wisdom and wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace (Prov 3:17). If we walk in a path not peaceable, we are not walking in the path of wisdom.

This wisdom does not lie against the truth. It does not represent man as other than he is: vile before God, wicked beyond degree, with a thousand abominations in his heart, utterly devoid of spiritual understanding and divine wisdom. A fool in God's sight, so foolish and ignorant as to be a beast before him (Psa 73:22). This is the truth of God and wisdom never misrepresents God's truth.

The wisdom from above is gentle or patient and easy to be intreated. It is patient. It will wait upon God. It is longsuffering. It will commit all into the Lord's will. Those who have this wisdom are perfectly resigned. They say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15). The qualities of the divine wisdom is exactly as Christ taught in his sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Matt 5:3-9).

The wisdom from above is without partiality and without hypocrisy. It is without partiality. What is the meaning of that? Let the writer explain. "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:8,9). We are told that God is no respecter of persons. We read this in Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Proverbs 18:5; 24:23; 28:21. In each of these scriptures the word translated "persons" is "faces." The scriptures do not say that God is no respecter of persons. They say he is no respecter of faces. He is no respecter of appearances. He takes nothing at face value because he knows the true worth. He seeth not as man seeth. Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The church must have this wisdom. She must learn that to have respect to faces is sin. We cannot love our neighbor as ourself if we look at appearances. We do not walk by sight or appearance, but by faith (2 Cor 5:7-12). We must not glory in "appearance," literally, "in the face," but in heart. We must learn to take nothing at face value. No man is accepted of the Lord because of his face, his appearance, his deeds.

The church must have the wisdom of impartiality and sincerity. The church that is partial cannot be sincere. Hear the apostle:

Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons [faces]. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor (James 2:1-6).

Comment is unnecessary. This is the very thing of which the church has always been guilty. And today the church is more guilty than ever. The church today presumes to choose for God and dictate terms to him. The church today is not content to be fishers of men; to take them alive. They must needs win souls, they must save men. Thus with a hypocrisy beyond description and a presumption Satanic the church today seeks to usurp the prerogative of Christ and glorify itself. The choice of man is never the choice of God. The wisdom of man is not the wisdom of God.

Finally, we must have the wisdom of faith. We must trust our Master implicitly. We must believe in Christ fully and only. We must have no confidence in the flesh. We must not believe in ourselves. To speak of ourselves winning souls is not faith but unbelief. We can add nothing to our Saviour. He needs us not. It is we who need him and need him desperately. Indeed, we must have him else we are forever undone. Christ alone wins souls. He cannot and will not fail. For us to seek to win souls is to betray a wicked heart of unbelief and manifest our distrust, for in so doing we say in effect that Christ is not a complete Savior, that he might fail. To carry this to its final conclusion is to really say that Christ is no Savior at all. This modern doctrine of men winning souls is in reality atheism. If we are Christians, let us be Christians. It is time that we give up our pretense of saving men and come to the true wisdom of knowing that salvation is of the Lord.

It is enough for us that we are allowed to be the emissaries of wisdom. This is no small honour. The enterprise of calling men to Christ by preaching the gospel of his kingdom is a high and holy one. To be chosen to bear the news of the Savior to a ruined race is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon sinful mortals. That the Lord would condescend to use us is nothing short of miraculous. But he has. He has given us the word of reconciliation. We are not soul winners for Christ, that is blasphemy. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life: and he that winneth souls is wise."

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever (Rev 5:11-14).