

RENUNCIATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY

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RENUNCIATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by

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PREFACE

The interest of the writer in this subject was awakened by a study of some of the great renunciatory figures of the church. Almost without exception, in seeking to exemplify the life of Jesus they found in the New Testament the basis for their own renunciations and the inspiration of their lives.

The purpose of this thesis is simply to investigate the teachings of the New Testament on the subject renunciation as an element of the Christian life. No attempt is made to distinguish between authentic and interpolated passages, nor to discuss historical or literary problems in the New Testament. For clearness of treatment the following books are attributed to St. Paul: The Letter to the Romans, The First and Second Letters to the Corinthians, The Letter to the Galatians, The Letter to the Ephesians, The Letter to the Philippians, The Letter to the Colossians, The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians, and The Letter to Philemon.

All Biblical quotations are from The Complete Bible: An American Translation, The Old Testament translated by J. M. P. Smith and a group of scholars, The Apocrypha and The New Testament translated by Edgar J. Goodspeed (Chicago, 1939).

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Introduction

It is impossible to survey Christian history without taking into account the renunciatory ideal, for it has laid its claim upon the seeker through the ages. The form of Christian renunciation has varied with the changing years, nevertheless, the essential meaning has always been that of withdrawal from the temporal world of the senses.

RENUNCIATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the origin and development of Christian renunciation as it is presented in the writings of the New Testament. The term "renunciation" cannot be taken in its usual sense synonymously with such terms as sacrifice or asceticism, for it bears a peculiar meaning in terms of its origin upon the individual seeker as it is revealed in the life patterns of the seeker. It is derived from the Latin *renunciare* and means to set or lay aside, to give up, sacrifice, reject, renounce, or deny. The act of renunciation is peculiarly

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objects or worldly goods or positions, or it may be more completely moral in terms of one's own desires, ambitions and selfishnesses. Since New Testament teachings are concerned with both types of renunciation--that is, the renouncing of worldly goods as well as of certain personality traits--this study will treat renunciation as the act of giving up or denying oneself the use of certain objects, relationships, attitudes, and positions in seeking religious service or satisfaction.

The origin of the idea and practice of renunciation is to be found in the early stages of man's social, moral and religious history. Many types of renunciation have found expression in the religious history of mankind. Among primitive religions a prohibition placed upon contact with or use of certain objects set aside as peculiarly sacred led to the designation of these objects as taboo.¹ It is not easy to answer the question why the prohibition is placed upon an object.

¹ Taboo, one of the few savage words that have struck root in the English language, is of Polynesian origin and has dialectical forms (tapu, kapu, tambu) in Polynesian and Melanesian; but the form tabu (or taboo) is the one which has become popularized, because it was as tabu (or taboo) that Captain Cook first discovered the notion and its associated customs at Tonga in 1771. The Encyclopedia Britannica, fourteenth ed., vol. 21, "Tabu" by Sona Rosa Burstein (New York, 1929), pp. 732-733.

Professor Frazer's explanation is that the object is considered taboo or prohibited because the animists believe that by doing the thing which is taboo, evil results will follow automatically by a kind of mechanical and impersonal necessity.² Another possible explanation is that the object is taboo lest it be defiled by human touch and its divine essence lost. Thus the idea is one of negative magic. Taboo then is a primitive idea according to which the act of renouncing an object is of far more importance than the belief concerning the nature of the object or the reason for renouncing it.

Closely akin to the custom of taboo is the idea of inherent evil. The primitive religious mind made no distinction between taboos placed upon objects believed to be sacred or holy and upon objects believed to be polluted, unclean, or inherently evil. There was no differentiation as to their practical effect between their conceptions of holiness and of pollution. Thus the common feature of all tabooed objects was that they in some sense were dangerous.³ It may be surmised that the origin of the renunciatory idea is to be ex-

² James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, vol. 1, abridged ed. (New York, 1923), p. 222.

³ Frazer, op. cit., p. 223.

plained both in terms of superstition and of danger to the common welfare.

This idea of the inherent evil of material things in the religion of the Hebrews was doubtless reinforced by elements from the Persian religions. To the Persian living in an unfavorable environment, life was an unceasing conflict with hostile powers both visible and invisible. Zoroaster saw everywhere in the moral world good and evil arrayed over and against each other. The two contrasted characters were believed to be two primal spirits, antagonists from the beginning of history.⁴ It was this dualism which brought the need of purification for the whole life. According to the Vendidad: "Purity is for man next to life the greatest good, that purity, O Zarathustra, that is the religion of Mazda for him who cleanses his own self with good thoughts, words, and deeds."⁵ From other writings it is evident that these purificatory rites refer mainly to the physical. The question of the origin of evil is followed back to the "primal" evil spirit. Where the evil spirit came from is lost in obscurity but a universal

⁴ George F. Moore, History of Religions, revised ed. vol. 1 (New York, 1927), p. 369.

⁵ Cited in Alban G. Widgery, Living Religions and Modern Thought, (New York, 1938), p. 150.

element in Zoroastrianism was the belief in the inherent evil of matter.

The Persian idea of evil became easily mixed with the idea of the evil of the material world found in India. From the Brahmanic period of speculative thinking it was universally believed that the visible world is unreal and must be renounced as an end in life. Salvation came only through the escape from an endless chain of bodily existences. Abnegation of the world, withdrawal from the world, repression of the body, meditation, and the methodical cultivation of trance-states are the means by which the Hindu renounced and sought to escape the evil world.⁶ The Hindus sought salvation by renouncing the phenomenal world as evil, but the Persians, on the other hand, sought salvation by conquering evil. They did not despair of the world for they believed that the good would overcome the evil. Since matter was held to be essentially evil this involved an ascetic life.

The Persian idea of evil influenced the thought of the Greco-Roman world and also affected sections of Judaism. The Jews did not accept the full idea of a dualism, but they did regard the existing world order as demonic. They believed in

⁶ Moore, op. cit., p. 359.

good and evil spirits as well as good and evil inclinations.⁷ This was in reality a modified dualism, with God and his hosts set over against the devil and his angels. Israel from the earliest times had believed that certain objects prohibited by Yahweh were inherently evil. They made no attempt to understand the evil nature involved; the fact that Yahweh forbade the objects was reason enough for them. Thus the idea involved became closely akin to that of taboo as is evidenced by the food taboos, etc. Probably Moses began the prohibitions because of either personal or communal superstitions. No matter what they believed concerning the prohibited objects, the Hebrews believed that through renouncing them the favor of Yahweh was gained and the common welfare served.

Almost all cultures have developed ceremonial forms of religion. These forms of religious ceremony vary greatly in different cultures; however, the offering of sacrifice is common to most of them. Naturally, the question as to what

⁷ Mervin M. Deems, "The Sources of Christian Asceticism", eds., John T. McNeill, Matthew Spinka, Harold R. Willoughby, Environmental Factors in Christian History (Chicago, 1939), p. 150.

objects were fitting and proper to be used in the ceremonies was fundamental. Subsequently, certain objects came to be accepted while others were rejected. Thus God would accept the firstlings from the flock of Abel but reject the first fruits brought by Cain. The rejected objects for many reasons were believed to be unworthy of the Deity being worshiped.

The ceremonials used by the Jews were supposedly given them by Yahweh through Moses. He gave them a list of animals and birds which were to be used in sacrifices and a list of those that were prohibited, the reason being given that these latter animals were impure. In the same way there was given a list of permissible and a list of prohibited agricultural products. Doubtless, these prohibitions came out of ancient Hebrew history with its superstitions and customs which were natural in any primitive group. Thus, all of these regulations were believed to be prescribed for the early Hebrews by Yahweh. By the covenant they were bound to his laws. If they were to live under the covenant they had to renounce those things which his laws prohibited.

Most of the world's great religious leaders have had a sense of moral good. And they have demanded of their followers that they choose the highest good. Confucius willed the good in a negative sort of way. But he failed to give a

challenge able to drive a man to persist when everything is against him.⁸ Essentially, Allah the god of the Mohammedans wills the good, but too often Mohammed made him out to be a typical Oriental despot.⁹ However, even Mohammed asked that his followers renounce the lesser good. Zoroaster taught an ideal of strenuous moral endeavor. He believed that man determines his own destiny by his choices of good or evil.¹⁰

Throughout the history of the Jews Yahweh called upon them to choose the greater good. As we turn backward in viewing the history we can see that they did not always choose the greater good, but the call from Yahweh was still there. Judaism became a great ethical religion because of its insistence upon the renunciation of the lesser good.

Before taking up the study of New Testament renunciation, it is desirable to look into its Old Testament background. For it was in the Jewish religion that Jesus was nurtured and his ideals developed. It must have been through its teachings

⁸ Edmund D. Soper, The Religions of Mankind (New York, 1920), p. 226.

⁹ Soper, op. cit., pp. 293-294.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

that he became concerned with its great truths which were being ignored because of legalism. Jesus' teachings had their beginnings in the literature of the Old Testament or in the customs and beliefs of contemporary Jewish life. Naturally, one would expect to find in this literature the germ of the idea of renunciation which was so important to him.

As we have said above, Yahweh not only willed that the Jews choose the greater good, but also he willed that they renounce all lesser good along with the evil. He set up laws by which evil was differentiated from the good. The prophets later made fuller distinctions between the good and the lesser good when they came with their ethical teachings. Amos, the first of the ethical prophets, called Israel to forsake her transgressions and follow in the ways of righteousness, having faith in God. Isaiah was especially conscious of the depth of the sin and evil of his people because he had a vision of the holiness of God. He was aware first of all of his own sinfulness, particularly the sins of thought and word indicated by the expression "unclean lips". Many of the prophets made great personal sacrifices in order that their ministry might be more effective. Isaiah's Oriental mind had borne the disgrace of his own nakedness as a sign and symbol to Egypt and Ethiopia, for so was the King of Assyria to lead them unto exile. Not to trust and follow God was evil, therefore,

Isaiah asked Judah to give up its immoralities and unfaithfulness. Isaiah's message was taken up a century later by Jeremiah. He, too, saw in Judah's apostasy the eventual downfall of the nation. In his own life, Jeremiah felt called upon to renounce marriage that he might better follow his calling. Ezekiel is called to renounce mourning over the death of his wife, for by this analogy God is telling the people of Judah that destruction is coming upon them. They were not to mourn, because they had failed to renounce their evil ways when it was still possible.

In Ezekiel 40-48, the plan of restoration was the fountainhead of both legalism and apocalypse.¹¹ However, neither of these escaped God's call to renunciation. The legalistic Jew was called upon to renounce for the sake of the Lord, and the apocalyptist was called upon to renounce for the sake of God's kingdom which was to come by supernatural means. In the thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy the Lord put two choices before his chosen people. He said that if they would walk in his ways and keep his commands he would give them the land which they were invading.

One of the first codes of laws formulated after the Exile

¹¹ Robert M. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York, 1941), p. 191.

was the Holiness Code,¹² so designated because of the frequently recurring phrase: "You must be holy; for I, the Lord your God, am holy." The holiness of Israel was demanded by the holiness, the purity and the awful majesty of the Lord.¹³ Because of his own holiness the Israelites were called upon to renounce that which infringed upon the holiness of God.

The Priestly Code is probably a fifth century document. It is a juristic codification of Israel's ritual laws.¹⁴ The aim of this code was to show how the only God in existence became the invisible sovereign of the Jewish community. God's kingdom was to be a theocracy of the present, and not in some future heavenly Jerusalem. The P Code made of the Jews a sort of monastic order, living in the world but apart from outsiders and under its own rules, theoretically impervious to political vicissitudes.

The Essenes represented a development of asceticism within Judaism of the first century.¹⁵ Although we call them a sect, they more closely resembled a monastic order. They

¹² Leviticus 17-26.

¹³ James E. McFadyen, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York, 1941), pp. 44-48.

¹⁴ Pfeiffer, op. cit., pp. 188-190.

¹⁵ Morton S. Enslin, Christian Beginnings (New York, 1938), pp. 120-123.

mostly lived in celibate communities and shared all possessions in common, observed strict rules of personal purity and daily labor, and emphasized ceremonial purity. Their doctrines are not well known, but many scholars maintain that John the Baptist was taught by them. We do know that they were strict ascetics who withdrew from the world. The search after God which inspired the Essenes to quietistic life was prompted by the same impulse that later was to inspire Jesus and his followers. Naturally, they held the typical ascetic view that the body was corruptible and perishable, but that the soul was immortal and would live forever. As with all ascetics they disciplined the body for the purpose of seeking spiritual richness. As we shall see Jesus accepted and developed their ideal of renunciation, but he did not accept their asceticism.

Chapter I

RENUNCIATION IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

The importance attached to the teachings of Jesus in both Christian and non-Christian circles is at once an obvious and hopeful phenomenon. Men in Christian circles, wearied of dogma and doctrinal controversy, still turn with eager expectancy to the Nazarene and his faith, believing that therein lie the answers to their needs and their questions. Not a few Christians have found in some phase of Mahatma Gandhi's life and conduct reincarnations of the attitudes which Jesus took, and in such an assertion they have felt that they paid Gandhi the highest possible tribute for his devotion. Admirers of the remarkable Japanese, Toyohiko Kagawa, consider that they have best described his influence and power when they say that his renunciatory spirit closely approximates that of Jesus. Not

in an isolated instance, but frequently during the last generation social groups hostile to and contemptuous of institutionalized religion have bowed in acknowledgment of the reality which was in the religion of Jesus. And it is well that it should be so. For whatever one's attitude toward the history of religion may be, no list of highly significant religious personages can omit him, and in most of them he will stand at the head.

Outstanding among the qualities of Jesus which have made him pre-eminent in the ranks of great religious personalities is the spirit of renunciation. He came among men humble in spirit himself, teaching that they must renounce all that stands between them and God; and finally in complete exemplification of this idea he gave up his life in full renunciation and self-abnegation upon the cross. His whole life was typical of his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane when he completely renounced his own will for that of his Heavenly Father. "Not my will but yours be done."¹

Jesus' acts of renunciation started before he began his teachings concerning the subject. The gospels tell of his

¹ Luke 22:42.

renouncing the temptations of worldly power in order that he might remain in God's service. Jesus said to Satan, "Be-gone, Satan! For the Scripture says, 'You must do homage to the Lord your God, and worship him alone!'"² This was the beginning of his great life and message of renunciation.

In Galilee Jesus began to preach repentance and belief in the coming kingdom of God. But because of the shameful actions of his own town's people he was forced to leave Nazareth. It must have been at this time that he came to a closer understanding of what true renunciation would mean. He must have been remembering that day when later he spoke of the many things which must be renounced for the sake of eternal reward, when he said:

'I tell you, there is no one who has given up home or brother or sisters or mother or father or children or land for me and for the good news, but will receive now in this life a hundred times as much in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and lands, though not without persecution--and in the coming age eternal life'.³

The Sermon on the Mount, which followed the choosing of the twelve, was the beginning of Jesus' training the apostles.⁴

² Matthew 3:10.

³ Mark 10: 29,30.

⁴ Matthew 5: 1,2.

It was his first effort to convey to others the gospel of the kingdom as it was within his own mind. The Sermon on the Mount is not a series of counsels of perfection, or of ideals for a far-off millennium. It was the groundwork of Jesus' training of those who were to be his assistants while he was here and successors, after he had ascended, in carrying the tidings of the good news to the world. It was his first attempt to state what kind of people and what kind of conduct were right according to the standards of the kingdom of God. Jesus said to the crowds: "Everyone, therefore, who listens to this teaching of mine and acts upon it, will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock."⁵ "And anyone who listens to this teaching of mine and does not act upon it, will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand."⁶ The first and last beatitudes close with the promise, "For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them."⁷ In this way the general theme of the sermon as a whole--the uprightness of the kingdom of heaven--is emphasized in the very opening section.

⁵ Matthew 7:24.

⁶ Matthew 7:26.

⁷ Matthew 5:3, 5:10.

The first beatitude of Luke's version reads: "Blessed are you who are poor."⁸ This is often understood to mean only those who are poor in material possessions. The Gospel of Luke shows a special sympathy for the lower classes, the poor, the exploited, the disinherited, and the oppressed. It is in keeping with this interest that he seems to report Jesus as speaking only of those who are poor in material goods. Frequently, contemporary religious literature designates a spiritual class by the term "the poor". This usage seems to justify Matthew's qualification, "those who feel spiritual need", but it is probable that Luke gives Jesus' words more exactly.⁹ Thus, Jesus promises the kingdom to a spiritual class composed of those who feel spiritual need. Those who feel their spiritual need are the simple, common people who are teachable, hopeful, patient, reliable, loyal and unselfish. This is the comprehensive designation which includes the classes cited in the other beatitudes. The first beatitude seems to be the text upon

⁸ Luke 6:20.

⁹ Elbert Russell, The Beatitudes: A Series of Studies (New York, 1929), p. 27.

which the others constitute comment.

As an example of what this first beatitude has meant to men one finds that Saint Francis of Assisi drew great inspiration from it. He felt that this attitude of "spiritual need" was as important a part of renunciation as was the giving up of wealth. In fact, to his way of thinking the two could not be separated. Francis, in his life and times, effectively reproduced the humility and poverty of the primitive church.¹⁰

It was this very emphasis which made his spirituality differ so radically from that of other followers of the renunciatory ideal. He believed that to be really poor in spirit, one must be so poor that all learning and all spiritual possessions mean nothing, and that true poverty of spirit consists only of the Divine which transcends the present life.

Saint Benedict of Nursia and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux came before Francis' time with their teachings on "spiritual need". They too believed that it is infinitely easier to surrender property and to crucify the flesh than it is to conquer the spirit. Both of them wrote treatises on the

¹⁰ Ray C. Petry, Francis of Assisi: Apostle of Poverty (Durham, 1941), p. 26.

subject of pride and humility.¹¹ Bernard defined humility as the virtue of honest self-depreciation being all the while aware of persistent dangers to the soul. Both of these men sought to emphasize that which Jesus had taught long before their day.

Jesus was quick to condemn spiritual pride wherever he found it. When the disciples asked him who would be the first in the kingdom, he replied, "If anyone wishes to be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all."¹² He knew that it would be difficult for the mighty to humble themselves sufficiently to gain admittance to the kingdom.

It is very easy to understand why Jesus laid such great stress on humility as a fundamental condition for entering the kingdom, or why he said that we must receive it as a little child receives it.¹³ The gifts of life are for those who have the eagerness, the humility, the teachableness, and

¹¹ Saint Bernard, The Twelve Degrees of Humility and Pride, trans. Barton R. V. Mills (London, 1929), p. viii.

¹² Mark 9:35.

¹³ Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17.

the receptivity of a child. The opportunities of life close one after another to men as they become content with their own achievements, lose their primitive curiosity as to the unknown, and grow disinclined to spiritual adventure. Those who earnestly seek the kingdom must renounce all feelings of contentment and self-righteousness, lackadaisical attitudes, and ideas of self-sufficiency.

"Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for uprightness", is the fourth of the beatitudes according to Matthew.¹⁴ It was a tragedy that the Pharisees were so content with their own uprightness that Jesus could not awaken them to the higher uprightness of the kingdom. He could not get them into the kingdom until he could arouse in them a hunger for something finer than their conventional uprightness. He said of them:

'But alas for you Pharisees! For you pay tithes on mint, rue, and every tiny herb, and disregard justice and the love of God. But you should have observed these, without neglecting the others. Alas for you Pharisees! For you love to have the front seats in the synagogues and to be saluted

¹⁴ Matthew 5:6.

with respect in public places. Alas for you!
For you are like unmarked graves which men tread
upon without knowing it!¹⁵

'You give up what God has commanded and hold fast
to what men have handed down.'

'How skillful you are,' he said to them, 'in nulli-
fying what God has commanded in order to observe
that has been handed down to you.'¹⁶

Until they came to the realization that they would have to
renounce their self-righteousness for the childlike atti-
tude of dependence Jesus could do nothing for them. Jesus
taught that all feelings of independence have to be renoun-
ced; these must be displaced by the feeling of need and
the attitudes of self-inadequacy.

The beatitudes, then, enumerate in succinct form some of
the things which Jesus called upon the would-be upright person
to renounce. Uprightness comes only through the renunciation
of the attitude of spiritual well-being, the feeling of self-
uprightness, the feeling of power and self-sufficiency, and
of selfish anxiety.¹⁷

In other sections of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus delves
much more deeply into this problem of renunciation. He reaches

¹⁵ Luke 1:42-44.

¹⁶ Mark 7: 8, 9.

¹⁷ Matthew 5:3-10.

into the innermost regions of the human heart and calls for the putting aside of all things that stand between the individual and God. Anger, the attitude of superiority, grievances, lusts, desire for revenge, hatred, ostentatious deeds of kindness and uprightness, love of material possessions--all of these must be renounced by those seeking to be perfect.¹⁸

'Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal lepers, drive out demons. Give without payment, just as you received without payment. Do not accept gold or silver or copper money to put in your pockets, and do not take a bag for your journey, nor two shirts, nor shoes, nor a staff, for the workman deserves his food! Whatever town or village you come to, inquire for some suitable person, and stay with him till you leave the place.'¹⁹

These were the words that Jesus used when he sent out the twelve disciples. These counsels of simplicity and efficiency for the disciples' preaching tour became the inspiration of one of the Church's greatest renunciatory movements. As Saint Francis of Assisi participated in the mass at the Chapel of the Portuincula he was struck with the words that the priest read concerning Christ's sending out the disciples with no

¹⁸ Matthew 5:20 - 6:34.

¹⁹ Matthew 10:8-11.

means of support.²⁰ In this commission Francis recognized his own specific calling to the vow of voluntary poverty. Along with his disgust for the wealth of the church of his day, this passage from the source of Christianity set Francis afire with a passion for gospel poverty. From this basis he built his positive program for a sacrificial apostolate not only for himself but for all who joined his voluntary society of renunciation.

Jesus urged his hearers to "make his Kingdom and uprightness before him, your greatest care."²¹ He also said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a hoard of money, buried in a field, which a man found, and buried again. And he was overjoyed, and went and sold everything he had and bought the field."²² "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dealer in search of fine pearls. He found one costly pearl, and went and sold everything he had and bought it."²³ To gain the kingdom is the most important thing in the world. To enter the kingdom one must do the will of God, and Jesus felt

²⁰ As cited by Petry, op. cit., pp. 20-21, from The Lives of St. Francis of Assisi by Brother Thomas of Celano.

²¹ Matthew 6:33.

²² Matthew 13:44.

²³ Matthew 13:45, 46.

that it was his mission to interpret this will, which he did in terms more rigid and at the same time more spiritual than those of the rabbis.

For I tell you that unless your uprightness is far superior to that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never even enter the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁴

His conception of the kingdom demanded an entire devotion. He constantly warned against devotion to the externals of life which tend to obscure the one important thing in the kingdom. In rabbinical Judaism the primary emphasis fell upon the correct performance of the requirements of the law. However, certain teachers had gone deeper than this and insisted on motives and attitudes as well as acts. But these were not the accepted teachings of Jesus' day. As a religion, a system of legal obedience is external and superficial. It fails to get beneath the surface of life. Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind."²⁵ Anything other than this consisted of externals and was therefore foreign to his

²⁴ Matthew 5:20.

²⁵ Matthew 22: 37, 38.

teachings. He condemned the Pharisees who took great pride in their uprightness; for they were concerned about outward expression rather than the inner motives of the heart.

'So you outwardly appear to men to be upright, but within you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.'²⁶

'You Pharisees clean the outside of cups and dishes, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.'²⁷

To the multitudes he gave these warnings:

'But take care not to do your good deeds in public for people to see.'²⁸

'When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they like to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the squares, to let people see them.'²⁹

'When you fast, do not put on a gloomy look, like the hypocrites, for they neglect their personal appearance to let people see that they are fasting.'³⁰

The Pharisaic system encouraged casuistry, the playing of one precept against the other. It made, or tended to make, all duties of equal value because all are commanded by the

²⁶ Matthew 23:28.

²⁷ Luke 11:39.

²⁸ Matthew 6:1.

²⁹ Matthew 6:5.

³⁰ Matthew 6:16.

law--the tithing of money on a moral level with justice, mercy, and faith. It limited and defined the moral ideal in terms of one set of acts and one set of restraints. Legalism, per se, hardens religion into the duties of one particular period or state of culture. Jesus, naturally repudiated any such definition of uprightness. Uprightness for him was a voluntary renunciation of externals, when that is necessary, for the full and perfect life in the kingdom.

The teachings on the kingdom of God are the very heart of Jesus' message. The idea of the kingdom had long been current among the Jews, but Jesus brought a freshness to it. To him the kingdom was a spiritual and inward reality to be realized and fulfilled in those who made it their central purpose in life.³¹ He differed from many of his contemporaries, and like John the Baptist, believed that the privileged position of Israel did not exempt it from the searching judgment of the Messiah.³² There was nothing political in Jesus' idea of the kingdom; for him its strictly national character

³¹ Luke 17:21.

³² Matthew 25:31-33.

was lost. It became a question of persons: persons whose relations to God depend upon their individual deserts, and no longer a kind of glorified Israel. Israel could not enter the kingdom, only individuals could enter it, but only then if the individual had made it his single aim in life. Jesus said that his way was the way into the kingdom. He said to the disciples:

'If anyone wants to go with me, he must disregard himself, and take his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to preserve his own life, will lose it, and whoever loses his life for me and for the good news will preserve it.'³³

Jesus had evidently pondered the significance of the economic conditions of his day. Many parables show that he recognized the importance of money and possessions. However, it was not the interest of the economist that he showed. He had no new system of economic organization to suggest. His interests were in the moral and spiritual values of wealth, and his unique contribution was the discovery that it is these moral values which give economics its greatest significance.

It is here that Jesus has been misunderstood by many individuals and groups. Certain radical leaders and Christian

³³ Mark 8:34, 35.

socialists have maintained that his interest was essentially economic, and that his program was the espousal of the poor as against the rich--the ownership by workers of the means of production--or the denial of the rights of private property altogether. They have contended that Jesus was a conscious socialist or communist. But it cannot be too emphatically stated that he did not present any systematic theory of any subject whatever, much less economics. He was not a systematic teacher in any field, even in those of ethics and religion where he had thought long and carefully. Only as economics carried with it moral and spiritual consequences and implications did Jesus concern himself with it. There is no evidence^{that} he had thought out any system or had consciously faced directly any of the great problems which engage the modern economist.

On the other hand, the conventional Christian usually supposes that economics have little to do with Jesus' teachings. He believes that they belong to a lower, secular plane, which makes him comparatively indifferent to all economic organization. And so business interests of men, the economic organization of society, and the commercial and financial relationships which exist between individuals and groups are supposed to be quite unaffected by the spiritual teachings and redemptive work of Jesus.

Neither of these conceptions resembles the teachings of Jesus as found in the Synoptic Gospels. His program cut deeper into the foundations of all social organizations than do most modern programs of social reform, because it included not only a change in the social order but in man himself. Evidently, he saw that economics ~~is~~ the test of reality, the brick and the mortar with which our world is built, and the material element with which men create that external structure which expresses their inner standards and aspirations. As a medium of exchange money carries with it inseparable spiritual values--like overtones in music. As they escape the notice of the untrained ear, so the moral and spiritual meanings of modern economics are unrecognized by the unawakened Christian.

Jesus did not espouse the cause of the poor against the rich. He looked into the motives which activate men. In condemning the rich he did not make it any easier for the poor. Money carries with it spiritual values which are binding upon all who possess it.³⁴ It was not because of his wealth that Jesus condemned the "certain rich man".³⁵

³⁴ Samuel Dickey, The Constructive Revolution of Jesus: A Study of His Social Ideas (New York), p. 127.

³⁵ Luke 16:19-31.

He did not blame the man with having caused the poverty of the beggar, Lazarus, who lay outside his gate. But he did condemn the rich man for not obeying the teaching of the law and the prophets in regard to the way one should treat his fellowmen. The rich man hoped to save his brothers from the place of torture, but Jesus says that Abraham answered his plea with these words: "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."³⁶

Yet, even the poor must still be good managers of the few things that they do possess. Jesus said, "The man who can be trusted in a very small matter can be trusted in a large one, and the man who cannot be trusted in a small matter cannot be trusted in a large one."³⁷ Among those who have little there is always the persistent danger of desiring more. The desire for great wealth is just as wrong as the possession of wealth which could be put to good use. Thus the poor are called upon to renounce the selfish desire for wealth just as strongly as the rich are called upon to renounce the selfish use of wealth. The "inwardness" observed in all of Jesus'

³⁶ Luke 16:31.

³⁷ Luke 16:10.

teachings is consistently exemplified here. He called upon men to renounce wealth or the desire for wealth if either of these separates one from the kingdom.

Jesus taught as a fundamental proposition that there must be no rival in the heart of the individual to the kingdom of God. He saw clearly how the love of money tended to become the dominant desire of life. Possessions begin to loom larger in the mind of the individual than his obedience to God. Money then becomes the object of worship. Jesus said that there is to be no membership in the kingdom of God without singleness of heart. This teaching is absolute with him.

"No servant can belong to two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will stand by one and make light of the other. You cannot serve God and money!"³⁸

Jesus understood this as a truth, because serving God is a thing of the whole direction and dedication of life, and life cannot be dedicated to two different ultimate objectives. He declared riches to be a danger to the soul when he saw money constantly usurping God's place in the life of his people.

Jesus warned the multitudes in these words: "Take care!

You must be on your guard against any form of greed, for a

³⁸ Luke 16:13.

man's life does not belong to him, no matter how rich he is."³⁹

It was only natural, then, for Jesus to call for the renunciation of wealth whenever it stood between an individual and his God. He recognized it as one of the great spiritual stumbling blocks for men. In warning his followers not to desire wealth and possessions above all else, he tells them that "these are all things the heathen are in pursuit of."⁴⁰ When he found money to be the predominating love, as in the case of the rich young man, he told him that he must renounce this love if he would be perfect and gain admittance to the kingdom.

'If you want to be perfect, go! Sell your property and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come back and be a follower of mine.'⁴¹

After the young man had gone, he said to his disciples, "I tell you, it will be hard for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of Heaven! And again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to get through a needle's eye than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of God!"⁴²

The Christian spirit declares that human values are above

³⁹ Luke 12:15.

⁴⁰ Matthew 6:32.

⁴¹ Matthew 19:21.

⁴² Matthew 19:23, 24.

all monetary returns. It says that men are more valuable than money, and that the claims of human life must never be sacrificed for anything material. This conception of the unique value of human life is fundamental with Jesus. "And how much more a man is worth than a sheep."⁴³ "Is not life more important than food, and the body than clothes? Look at the wild birds. They do not sow or reap, or store their food in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more account than they?"⁴⁴ Each man is put through a severe test of character and Christian discipleship. He has to make a choice between working for personal profit and working for a greater service to humanity. There is no doubt as to which Jesus would have each individual choose. If one works for personal profit alone he is bound to injure some of his fellowmen. He will either exploit them, or he will lead them astray. Jesus, very severely condemned this type of individual for he says, "And whoever causes one of these humble believers to fall might better have a great millstone hung around his neck and be thrown into the sea."⁴⁵

⁴³ Matthew 12:12.

⁴⁴ Matthew 6:25,26.

⁴⁵ Mark 9:42.

Jesus insists that a spiritual life purpose is necessary. He undertook to show that the prevailing life purposes were false. These must be renounced for the sake of the true life purpose, the Kingdom of God.

'Do not store up your riches on earth, where moths and rust destroy them, and where thieves break in and steal them, but store up your riches in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy them, and where thieves cannot break in and steal them. For where your treasure is, your heart will be also.'⁴⁶

Jesus also said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If then your eye is sound, your whole body will be light, but if your eye is unsound, your whole body will be dark. If, therefore, your very light is darkness, how deep the darkness will be!"⁴⁷ In this passage the "eye" is compared to a lamp, while "eye" itself is clearly used metaphorically. It is used as meaning the supreme and ruling choice. What the eye is to the body, the purpose is to life. For without a purpose, one is like a blind man. With a false purpose he goes astray like one whose eyes deceive him.⁴⁸ The man who persists in any way

⁴⁶ Matthew 6:19-21.

⁴⁷ Matthew 6:22,23.

⁴⁸ Edward Root, The Bible Economy of Plenty (New York, 1939), p. 107.

except the renunciation of all else for the kingdom misses the true life purpose. The choice of the kingdom demands complete renunciation of all false purposes. The only true purpose is this: "You must make his kingdom, and uprightness before him, your greatest care."⁴⁹

Jesus foretold persecutions and trials to come upon those who renounced all else and followed him. These were to be the results of true renunciation for the kingdom. He said to his disciples, "But you must be on your guard; they will hand you over to courts and you will be taken into synagogues and beaten, and you will be brought before governors and kings on my account, to testify to them."⁵⁰ "You will be hated by everyone, because you bear my name. But he who holds out to the end will be saved."⁵¹ He told them that he sent them out as lambs in the midst of wolves.⁵²

On the other hand, Jesus offered rewards for all who renounced things of this world for the kingdom. He said, "Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you, and falsely say everything bad of you, on my account. Be glad and exult over it, for you will be richly rewarded in heaven."⁵³ "Bless-

⁴⁹ Matthew 6:33.

⁵⁰ Mark 13:9.

⁵¹ Mark 13:13.

⁵² Luke 10:3.

⁵³ Matthew 5:11,12.

ed are those who have endured persecution for the uprightness of the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them."⁵⁴ The parable of the great judgment closes with these words: "then they will go away to everlasting punishment, and the upright to everlasting life."⁵⁵ Jesus is here promising the upright the "entering into life", the opposite of "going to Gehenna."⁵⁶

Jesus always speaks of reward for renunciation as coming only from God. He turns the motive away from the approval of men to the approval of God. There is a vast difference between working for God's approval and seeking a reward from men. In the former case, no outward show or pretense will suffice. Pride from approval by men was one of the main attitudes which Jesus' followers were called upon to renounce. He said that the reward is sure for those who place the kingdom as their central life purpose. Even the deeds done in secret are not overlooked for Jesus says, "But when you pray, go into your own room, and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen, and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you."⁵⁷ God sees into the inner heart and motive; he sees things as they really are. Hence, God knows when one

⁵⁴ Matthew 5:10.

⁵⁵ Matthew 25:46.

⁵⁶ Harvie Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus: A Textbook For College and Individual Use (Nashville, 1931), p. 133.

⁵⁷ Matthew 6:6.

sincerely renounces something for his sake; all insincerity and duplicity that attend work for human reward are eliminated before him.

When Jesus uses the word "reward", and speaks of working for it, what he really does is to assure men that their trust in God and in God's way of life is not a vain renunciation. The kingdom of God is truly the reward of those who renounce all else for God's sake. Other expressions are but figures of speech to illustrate or emphasize some phase of that inclusive hope.

Jesus was non-ascetic in his life and teachings. He did not think that the body was evil or that it had to be overcome. The baseness of the body is one of the primary beliefs of all ascetics. Many Christian ascetics received their stimuli from this passage:

'But if your right eye makes you fall, tear it out and throw it away, for you might better lose one part of your body than have it all thrown into the pit! If your right hand makes you fall, cut it off and throw it away, for you might better lose one part of your body than have it all go down to the pit!' ⁵⁸

From this passage combined with other popular religious concepts the early Christian ascetics received their inspiration.

⁵⁸ Matthew 5:27-30.

They were convinced that their religion made the highest possible demands upon them. They were to live in the world, but withdraw from it as far as possible so as to remain uncontaminated. Because of the baseness of the human it had to be overcome by an all-embracing mortification which led to the purification of the spirit. Later the ascetics came to the belief that asceticism was primarily the renunciation of the self-will. This became the motivating force which led to the monastic reform movements which supplanted the decadent monastic orders as they failed to do that for which they were originated. The ascetics were extreme in their way, but it was only by their faithfulness that the renunciatory ideal survived.

Chapter II

RENUNCIATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

Paul was, as he said, a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" and a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin.¹ However, his father was a Roman citizen.² His social heritage, comprising his home surroundings and the city and the country in which he lived, must be imagined rather than described, because Tarsus was a typical cosmopolitan city of the Greco-Roman world. How much he absorbed from his home city in Cilicia as a boy, and how much from Jerusalem as a student and a man, it is hard to say.

The education of the boy, Paul, came through the usual means--the home, the school, and social contacts. It is probable that he was from well-to-do parents. His studies must have begun and proceeded like those of any other Jewish boy

¹ Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5.

² Acts 16:37; Acts 22: 25-28.

similarly situated. Greek must have been his mother tongue, but he also knew Hebrew, Aramaic, and possibly Latin.³ The Greco-Roman world was his world, though his background in thought was principally Semitic, and his religion at first was Jewish. He was nourished on the Septuagint of the Old Testament and upon certain of the apocalyptic books. He says that he studied in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel.⁴ From his continual references concerning his life, it seems that his Semitic background affected his life to a much greater extent than did the Greco-Roman culture in which he was reared.⁵ He grew up to be an essentially devout and even fanatical Jew.

Paul attributed his Christian conversion to a direct act of God with the express purpose of commissioning him as an apostle to the Gentiles.⁶ It was this overpowering experience which made him renounce his old life and "become a new man" in

³ Acts 22:2; 26:14.

⁴ Acts 22:3.

⁵ William Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen, third ed. (New York, 1898), pp. 354-355.

⁶ Acts 9:15; Ephesians 3:1; Romans 1:1; Corinthians 3:10.

the spirit of Christ Jesus.

He yielded himself to Christ as the unseen master of his soul, and for at least thirty years afterwards he lived a life of service through fellowship with him. Paul began at once to preach the faith in Jesus Christ which formerly he had persecuted. There is practically no information concerning his experiences, his activities, or his preaching during the first fifteen years after his conversion. After that he becomes known as a man and as a teacher with a fullness and an intimacy to which ancient history provides few parallels. It is through his letters that he has become known wherever the Scriptures are read. His ten epistles cover a period of some ten years of his ministry.⁷ With the exception of the one addressed to an individual, Philemon, they were written to communities of people who were already Christian, most of whom had heard the gospel from Paul's own lips. It was not his purpose in these letters to set forth Christianity as he would have done it to unconverted people, whether Jews or Gentiles. Much

⁷ Charles A.A. Scott, Christianity According to St. Paul, (London, 1927), p. 1.

that is fundamental in either theology or ethics he takes for granted, or alludes to as already known. He wrote not primarily as a theologian, not even as an evangelist, but as a friend and a pastor to whom the faithfulness of his converts and their progress in the gospel was a matter of life and death.⁸

Among the many characteristics that Christianity shared with Judaism and some of the mystery cults was the conception that morals and religion are one. Paul especially emphasized this unity. In seeking such a unity he wrote these words to the Romans: "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers by this mercy of God, to offer your bodies in a living sacrifice that will be holy and acceptable to God; that is your rational worship."⁹

Paul's personality presents two distinct aspects.¹⁰ One side of him was turned perpetually heavenward, whence, in ways past analyzing, he received messages of strength, comfort and

⁸ I Thessalonians 3:8.

⁹ Romans 12:1.

¹⁰ Arthur Holmes, The Mind of St. Paul: A Psychological Study (New York, 1929), p. 15.

revelation. The other side of him was turned toward this world. These two sides combined gave us in him a union of two worlds.

Both Paul and Jesus shared the general world-view of Jewish apocalypticism. Both were interested in the messianic kingdom although Paul, thinking of relief from his mortal struggle and the removal of the danger of defeat, expresses the idea most frequently in the terms of salvation. These are his words in Romans:

For Christ died and returned for the very purpose of being Lord of both the dead and the living.¹¹

But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you get is consecration, and the final result is eternal life.¹²

It is not a consciousness of servitude that has been imparted to you, to fill you with fear again, but the consciousness of adoption as sons.¹³

The Spirit itself testifies with our spirits that we are God's children, and if children, heirs also; heirs of God, and fellow-heirs with Christ, if we really share his sufferings in order to share his glory too.¹⁴

¹¹ Romans 14:9.

¹² Romans 6:22.

¹³ Romans 8:15.

¹⁴ Romans 8:16,17.

The sudden closing of this age, now under the domination of the hosts of evil spirits, and the sudden inbreaking of the messianic age is part of the inheritance of both. For both of them the event is so near and so certain that they frequently interpret it as in some way already in process. This is indicated to Jesus by the breaking of the power of Satan through the exorcisms; while for Paul the death warrant of the evil persons and forces was signed by the death of Jesus.¹⁵

Both shared the view that a certain moral attitude was necessary for those who wished to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom. Paul, as did Jesus, called for many renunciations of those who would truly seek the kingdom. They both insisted upon the inner quality as essential to religion. Both of them represented the group in Jerusalem which laid stress upon the pious life as the only effective means of pleasing God. In that group the external, the perceptual, and the ceremonial yielded first place to the deeply moral. Paul says, "You have been bought and paid for; you must not let yourselves become slaves of men".¹⁶ If for Jesus love to God and to neighbor

¹⁵ Ernest W. Parsons, The Religion of the New Testament (New York, 1939), pp. 112-113.

¹⁶ I Corinthians 7:23.

are the chief commandments, Paul on his part can say, "Whoever loves his fellowmen has fulfilled the Law."¹⁷ The inwardness of religion is the cardinal idea of both.

Paul, too, was interested in man's uprightness before God. He believed that it was fundamental to the Christian life. His experience in his search for uprightness by obedience to the law was disappointing. His conscience was not satisfied by legalism. It was probably this conscientious dissatisfaction that was a major factor driving him to persecuting the church. In this enthusiastic suppression of wrong against his God he sought to attain that approval and peace for which his spirit longed. Then it is probable that he discovered in the lives of at least some of those whom he brought before the authorities an assurance and calm which had been denied him.

His critical attitude toward the law can be explained on two grounds. First, he himself had failed to find religious satisfaction, and second, he found the situation into which his Judaizing opponents were constantly trying to force him and his converts, to be a most exasperating one.¹⁸ He criticized the law as a way of obtaining divine approval, and while

¹⁷ Romans 13:8.

¹⁸ Parsons, op. cit., p. 104.

he gave as its highest function the awakening of the consciousness of sin, he did not criticize the moral ideals of conduct which the law set forth. He said in speaking of himself, "If it had not been for Law, I should never have known what sin was."¹⁹ When he became a Christian he felt the impossibility of uprightness by law and argued fiercely against the position he had once held.²⁰

In the letter to the Romans and the letter to the Galatians, Paul is clearly contending against those who think that they can become upright by observing the law.

Now we know that everything the Law says is addressed to those under its authority, so that every mouth may be shut, and the whole world be accountable to God. For no human being can be made upright in the sight of God by observing the Law. All that the law can do is to make man conscious of sin.²¹

We who are Jews by birth, and not sinful heathen, but who know that a man is not made upright by doing what the Law commands, but by faith in Christ Jesus--even we believe in Christ Jesus, so as to be made upright by faith in Christ and not by doing what the Law commands--for by doing what the Law commands no one can

¹⁹ Romans 7:7.

²⁰ Kirsopp Lake, Paul His Heritage and Legacy (London, 1934), p. 72.

²¹ Romans 3:19,20.

be made upright.²²

Anyone who reads the Old Testament and Jewish literature will recognize at once that the chief characteristic of Judaism was and is, that it provides in the law, not only a complete code of perfect conduct, but also a means of constant reinstatement for all who fall by the way. Paul, in casting off the law, provides a means of reinstatement for those seeking to be Christian--renunciation and repentance. Renunciation in giving up the old ways of offense, and repentance in sincere sorrow and restitution for the wrongs.²³

In a number of passages Paul calls to the attention of the Christians to whom he is writing the fact that Jesus renounced everything--even life itself--for their sake. He says that Jesus did this "so that through faith we might receive the promised Spirit."²⁴ "You know how gracious the Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was rich, he became poor for your sake in order that by his poverty, you might become rich."²⁵ "Christ ransomed us from the Law's curse by taking our curse

²² Galatians 2:15,16.

²³ Romans 6:12-23.

²⁴ Galatians 3:14.

²⁵ II Corinthians 8:9.

upon himself (for the Scriptures say, 'Cursed be anyone who is hung on a tree') in order that the blessing given Abraham might through Jesus Christ reach the heathen, so that through faith we might receive the promised Spirit."²⁶ "For when we were still helpless, at the decisive moment Christ died for us godless men."²⁷

In this, "the great renunciation", Paul says that Jesus showed his infinite love for mankind. Because of it men must love one another if they would seek to follow the Christ. "Be affectionate in your love for the brotherhood, eager to show one another honor, not wanting in devotion, but on fire with the Spirit."²⁸

Paul is very much concerned in his first letter to the Corinthians about the Christian group there. He asks that they maintain unity in their fellowship by renouncing dissension and strife. "I urge you all, brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree in what you have to say, and not to allow factions among you, but be perfectly united

²⁶ Galatians 3:14.

²⁷ Romans 5:6.

²⁸ Romans 12:10,11.

in mind and judgment."²⁹ Paul says that he could not treat them as spiritual persons in imparting to them divine wisdom, because they were "as babes in Christian living." More fully he wrote:

So, for my part, brothers, I could not treat you as spiritual persons; I had to treat you just as creatures of flesh and blood, as babes in Christian living. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Why, you are not ready for it now, for you are still worldly. For when there are still jealousy and quarrels among you, are you not worldly and living on a merely human level? For when one man says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another, "I am a follower of Apollos," are you not simply human?³⁰

In the letter to the Romans Paul calls upon the group to renounce the criticism which was disturbing the group. He says that it should be renounced because men are responsible, not to each other, but to God who will judge all men. "What business have you to criticize your brother? What business have you to look down upon your brother? We all stand before God for judgment."³¹ "Therefore let us not criticize one another any more. You must resolve instead never to put any

²⁹ I Corinthians 1:10.

³⁰ I Corinthians 3:1-4.

³¹ Romans 14:10.

hindrance or obstacle in your brother's way."³²

Along with this renunciation of criticism Paul calls for the renouncing of anything that offends one's fellowman even though it may not be harmful by its own nature.

I know and as a follower of the Lord Jesus I am convinced that nothing is unclean in itself; a thing is unclean only to the man who regards it as unclean. For if your brother's feelings are hurt by what you eat, your life is not governed by love. You must not by what you eat, ruin a man for whom Christ died. The thing you have a right to do must not become a cause of reproach. The Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of uprightness, peace, and happiness through the possession of the holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in that way pleases God and gains the approval of men. Let us, therefore, keep before us whatever will contribute to peace and the development of one another.³³

Paul does not refer to any other teaching of Jesus as frequently as he does to that of love. In his thought, Jesus was nothing less than the love of God. He says that in Jesus, and especially in his great renunciation of life itself, we have a historical embodiment of God's love.³⁴ One who truly

³² Romans 14:13.

³³ Romans 14:14-19.

³⁴ Romans 5:8-11.

loves is ready to renounce all for his brother and for God. Jesus himself laid down his life for the ungodly. This exhibits his great renunciatory spirit for it shows it as pure self-sacrifice. Love makes for the truly renounced life, and a life without love cannot be Christian. The Christian must love as Paul spoke of it when he said, "So faith, hope, and love endure. These are the great three, and the greatest of them is love."³⁵

In the second letter to the Thessalonians Paul urges them to renounce idleness. He says that he has heard that some of them are refusing to work. Paul asks that they renounce their old ways and become diligent in their work as follows:

When I was with you, I gave you this rule: "If anyone refuses to work give him nothing to eat!" For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ we charge and exhort such people to keep quiet and do their work and earn their own living.³⁶

Paul calls upon the people of Corinth to renounce the ecstatic state for use in public. He says, "For anyone who speaks

³⁵ I Corinthians 13:13.

³⁶ II Thessalonians 3:10-12.

ecstatically ~~is~~ speaking not to men but to God, for no one can understand him, though he is uttering spiritual truths."³⁷ Paul wants his people to have inspired wisdom, but he wants them also to speak so that all may understand them. He says, "I want you all to speak ecstatically, but I especially want you to be inspired to preach. The man who is inspired to preach is more useful than one who speaks ecstatically--unless he can explain what he says so that it may do the church good."³⁸ Also he says, "But in public worship I would rather say five words with my understanding so as to instruct others also than then thousand words in an ecstasy."³⁹

In the letter to Philemon Paul asks him to renounce whatever feeling of animosity he might hold for the slave, Onesimus.⁴⁰ He says that Philemon should accept him back not as a slave, but as a brother in Jesus Christ. Paul hopes that he will voluntarily renounce all but kindness for brothers in the Christian

³⁷ I Corinthians 14:2.

³⁸ I Corinthians 14:5.

³⁹ I Corinthians 14:19.

⁴⁰ Philemon 1:14-16.

fellowship.

In almost every one of his letters Paul gives a list of things which must be renounced if one seeks to enter the kingdom.⁴¹ All of these lists are very much alike because these are the things which all Christians are called upon to give up. These are typical of the lists:

I mean this: Live by the Spirit, and then you will not indulge your physical cravings. For the physical cravings are against the Spirit, and the cravings of the Spirit are against the physical; the two are in opposition, so that you cannot do anything you please. But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not subject to law. The things our physical nature does are clear enough--immorality, quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party-spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you as I did before that people who do such things will have no share in the Kingdom of God.⁴²

So treat as dead your physical nature, as far as immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed are concerned; for it is really idolatry. It is on account of these things that God's anger is coming. And you once practiced them as others do, when you lived the old earthly life. But now you too must put them all aside--anger, rage, spite,

⁴¹ Romans 12:14-21; Ephesians 4:17; 5:1-5; Philippians 4:8,9; I Thessalonians 4:3-8.

⁴² Galatians 5:16-21.

rough, abusive talk--these must be banished from your lips.⁴³

Paul, like Jesus, was also interested in the economic affairs of life. His interests, as were Jesus', were concerned with spiritual values which people attach to material possessions. Paul did not accept poverty as an ideal; he felt that wealth could be used for good purposes. He did not condemn wealth, but he did make it clear that each should give to the work of the Lord according to his ability.

The apostles agreed in their condemnation of covetousness or greed as the negation of Christian brotherhood. Paul classes "greed" with the sensual sin of fornication in his letter to the Ephesians.⁴⁴ In Colossians he identifies it with idolatry.⁴⁵

No human being can escape the necessity of some amount of wealth for food, clothing, shelter, and the means of mental and spiritual development. But some individuals have more than others. But Paul did not forget the poor for he says that: "Only we were to remember the poor, and that I have

⁴³ Colossians 3:5-8.

⁴⁴ Ephesians 5:3.

⁴⁵ Colossians 3:5.

taken great pains to do."⁴⁶ He appealed to the Corinthians to send money for the poor in Jerusalem and asks that each give according to his ability.⁴⁷

Along with his taking of offerings Paul urged the Christians to renounce idleness. He was quick to recognize that the system of mutual aid might defeat its purpose because of the selfishness of some individuals. He regarded those who shirk labor and take advantage of the generosity of others equally as guilty as those who steal.⁴⁸ In one of his earliest letters, II Thessalonians, he appealed to his own example and outlined the discipline by which a church should enforce industry.⁴⁹

Paul urged everyone to renounce for the sake of the Lord whatever stands in the way of realizing the Christian ideals. He said, "You must follow my example in this, as I follow Christ's."⁵⁰ He did not seek for his own advantage, but for

⁴⁶ Galatians 2:10.

⁴⁷ II Corinthians 8:1-15.

⁴⁸ Ephesians 4:28.

⁴⁹ II Thessalonians 3:7-15.

⁵⁰ I Corinthians 11:1.

the advantage of people generally. All must be renounced for the sake of unity in the brotherhood. "God has so adjusted the body and given such special distinction to its inferior parts that there is no clash in the body, but its parts all alike care for one another."⁵¹ "You know how gracious the Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was rich he became poor for your sake, in order that by his poverty you might become rich."⁵² Paul voiced this statement in his plea for brotherly love and care in the Christian fellowship.

Paul was mildly ascetic. He practiced asceticism as a means of renunciation. That is, he subjected his physical body to strict discipline in order to promote the internal or the spiritual. Later ascetics of the church went back to Paul as the initiator of Christian asceticism. However, they carried their asceticism to extremes which Paul could never have sanctioned.

Paul was entirely in accord with late Judaic and Greco-Roman ideology in regarding the world as demonic. Judaism had its good and evil spirits as well as its good and evil

⁵¹ I Corinthians 12:24,25.

⁵² II Corinthians 8:9.

inclinations.⁵³ Thus within later Judaism there was a modified dualism. It is natural this dualism played a great part in Paul's attitudes.

The conflict was very great for Paul, who not only practiced self-restraint but also disciplined and restrained his physical life. "But I beat and bruise my body and make it my slave," he said.⁵⁴ To Paul this is not a metaphysical discussion of flesh versus spirit, but it is a great cosmic contest between Christ and the believer on one side, and Satan and the flesh on the other.⁵⁵ He says that the Christian must lay aside with his former habits his old self which is going to ruin through its deceptive passions.⁵⁶

It is possible that demonic cosmology played a part in Paul's attitude toward marriage. In the Greco-Roman world the idea was widespread in the mystery religions that sexual relationships induced demonic influence, and the act made

⁵³ Mervin Deems, "The Sources of Christian Asceticism," eds. John T. McNeill, Matthew Spinka, Harold R. Willoughby, Environmental Factors in Christian History (Chicago, 1939), pp. 150-152.

⁵⁴ I Corinthians 9:27.

⁵⁵ Deems, op. cit., p. 150.

⁵⁶ Ephesians 4:22.

anyone impure. In late Judaism, although monogamy is emphasized, nevertheless, woman was regarded the origin of sin. A great majority of the Essenes forbade marriage, and Jewish apocalypticism advocated fasting and continence as preparation for revelation.⁵⁷ This fear of impurity may have influenced Paul's viewpoint.

However, it is more likely that Paul's reason for preferring the celibate state was his belief in the imminence of the kingdom. He does not condemn marriage for he speaks of the rightness of the laws concerning it, and urges everyone in that state to faithfully keep them.⁵⁸ He also said, "But if you do marry, there is no sin in that."⁵⁹ He gave his reasons for remaining in the unmarried state in these words:

I want you to be free from all anxiety. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's work and how he can please the Lord. A married man is concerned about worldly affairs, and how he can please his wife, and so his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or girl is concerned about the Lord's work, so as to be consecrated in body and spirit, but the woman who marries is concerned with worldly affairs, and how she can please her husband. It is for your benefit

⁵⁷ Deems, op. cit., p. 153.

⁵⁸ I Corinthians 7:10-16.

⁵⁹ I Corinthians 7:28.

that I say this, not to put a halter on you, but to promote good order, and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.⁶⁰

There are no passages which indicate that Paul believed celibacy to be a worthy mode of life in itself. To those who could not control their passions, he urged marriage for he said, "It is better to marry than to be on fire with passion."⁶¹ Then, to Paul, marriage was permissible but chastity was better because of the imminence of God's kingdom.

By Paul's time virgins in some Christian communities were especially recognized and their importance steadily grew. However, these groups were inspired by the ascetic spirit which certainly did not conform to Paul's teachings. The urge to present one's body to God free from contamination of any kind, was a carry-over from the Hellenistic dualism.⁶² Celibate groups later became very important in the life of the church.

Thus, it is evident that Paul was not truly an ascetic. His only tendency toward asceticism was his strict disciplining of his body. To him this discipline was a means toward a

⁶⁰ I Corinthians 7:32-36.

⁶¹ I Corinthians 7:9.

⁶² Deems, op. cit., p. 153.

more spiritual life, rather than an end within itself as it came to be with some of the later ascetics.

There is no evidence to show that fasting for Paul was ascetic in nature. In his second letter to the Corinthians fasting and prayer are linked together.⁶³ This fact indicates that fasting was not undertaken as an act of efficacious in itself. Paul urges that those who are fasting stop before they injure their health. The true ascetic would have believed fasting of this sort worth continuing. Therefore, one concludes that his conception of fasting is non-ascetic.

Paul's asceticism was of such a nature that it did not call for a withdrawal from the world. He urged the Christians not to mingle with the non-Christians, but he did not mean for them to withdraw from society. Realizing that of necessity Christians are in constant contact with the heathen, Paul urged that they be careful of their relationships with them. He said, "Do not get into close and incongruous relations with unbelievers. What partnership can uprightness have with iniquity, or what can light have to do with

⁶³ II Corinthians 6:5, 11:27.

darkness."⁶⁴

Paul was entirely friendly toward the state. He was a Roman citizen and did not fail to take advantage of its protection.⁶⁵ He recognized the state as having a divine obligation to perform, for it is the servant of God.⁶⁶ He says that it is the Christian's duty to submit to the laws of the state. According to Paul, then, the Christian should take his place, both politically and socially, alongside the rest of mankind.

⁶⁴ II Corinthians 6:14.

⁶⁵ Romans 12:17.

⁶⁶ Romans 13:1-7.

Chapter III

RENUNCIATION IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND IN THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES

John likes to view the problems of life in terms of great antitheses: light and darkness, sin and uprightness, truth and falsehood, belief and unbelief, God and the devil. He dwells on these great contradictory powers throughout his writings.¹ The Fourth Gospel does not have many teachings concerning renunciation, because in it, the ethical teachings of the synoptic records are replaced almost altogether by teachings relating to the disciples' mystical relation to Jesus and the Father. John does not attempt to stress the moral content of life; instead, he

¹ Elbert Russell, The Message of the Fourth Gospel (Nashville, 1932), p. 90.

points to a single decision that the individual must of necessity make. His chief concern is with Jesus' own person and his mission as the Son of God. His fundamental renunciation for the Christian life is the abandonment of the attitude of unbelief in Jesus as the incarnate Word of God. He calls for renunciation in order to gain eternal life, and says that this gift comes only through belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God, the incarnate Word. John says, "No one who believes in him has to come up for judgment. Anyone who does not believe stands condemned already for not believing in God's only Son."² The basis for the condemnation is this fact: "Light has come into the world, and yet, because their actions were wicked, men have loved the darkness more than the light."³

John bears witness that: "Life has been revealed, we have seen it and testify to it."⁴ Jesus once asked Martha the question: "Have I not promised that if you will believe in me you will see the glory of God?"⁵ The implication is

² John 3:18.

³ John 3:19.

⁴ I John 1:2.

⁵ John 11:40.

that if he were not divine he could not fulfill any such promise.

In speaking of those who have accepted him Jesus says, "I have come to let them have life, and to let them have it in abundance."⁶ The gift of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, is the great theme of the Fourth Gospel. In his final summary of the purpose of the Gospel John says, "But these have been recorded so that you may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and through believing you may have life as his followers."⁷

To the author eternal life is a present possibility and possession, but he believes that it comes only to the individual who has renounced the attitude of unbelief in Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual state for those who have put aside their old life and have been born again by the Spirit.⁸ Men cannot inherit eternal life, just as they cannot inherit religious character, virtue, and goodness; rather, it must come as an acquisition after birth. People have to choose

⁶ John 10:10.

⁷ John 20:31.

⁸ John 3:5.

and achieve character; in the same way they have to desire and go through a rebirth before they can acquire everlasting life.

These are Jesus' words as recorded by John:

'I tell you, if a man does not owe his birth to water and spirit, he cannot get into the Kingdom of God. Whatever owes its birth to the physical is physical, and whatever owes its birth to the Spirit is spiritual.'

By not believing in Jesus as the Son of God the individual loses his chance of eternal life. The Gospel stresses the voluntary nature of the sin of unbelief. It is a deliberate and conscious wrongdoing, as it is the refusal of the divine ideal. It is its purpose to call men to renounce the attitude of unbelief for the attitude of faith in Jesus Christ and his promise of eternal life.

John treats the problem of truth and untruth much as he did that of belief and unbelief. He records Jesus' saying: "I am the Way and Truth and Life. No man can come to the Father except through me. If you knew me, you would know my Father also. From now on you do know him and you have seen him."¹⁰ Repeatedly it is asserted that Jesus bore witness to

⁹ John 3:5,6.

¹⁰ John 14:6.

the truth.

'As you say I am a king. It was for this that I was born and for this that I came into the world, to give testimony for truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to my voice.' ¹¹

'If you abide by what I teach you, you are really disciples of mine, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.' ¹²

Men are called upon to renounce all doctrines, leaders, and religious loyalties which do not witness to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. He prayed to his Father for mankind: "Consecrate them by truth. Your message is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I have sent them to the world. And it is for their sake that I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated by truth."¹³ It is only by renouncing the untruth for the truth as found in Jesus Christ that one can come into union with the Son and the Father. For those who renounce the world Jesus promised to send the Spirit of Truth who was to represent him in the hearts of men after his departure.¹⁴

In the Johannine epistles the author is concerned with

¹¹ John 18:37.

¹² John 8:31,32.

¹³ John 17:17-19.

¹⁴ John 14:16,17.

false teachers who are teaching things which are untrue. He says to those to whom he writes, "You all know the truth; I do not write to you because you do not know it, but because you do know it, and because no lie can come from the truth."¹⁵ In the second letter the author says, "It makes me exceedingly happy to find that some of your children are guided by truth."¹⁶ These people knew the truth but now they were being besieged by false teachers who taught that which was untrue. John urges them to rid themselves of these teachers. He believes that they should test every utterance to see whether it comes from God.¹⁷ He advises them to act upon the truth which they already know.

You still retain in your hearts the anointing with the Spirit that you received from him, and you do not need to have anyone teach you. But just as that anointing of his teaches you about everything, and as it is true and no falsehood, keep in union with him just as it has taught you to do.¹⁸

According to the Gospel, Jesus says that men should have

¹⁵ I John 2:21.

¹⁶ II John 1:4.

¹⁷ I John 4:1.

¹⁸ I John 2:27.

but one aim in life--and that is eternal life. He believed that men should give up material things when they become the dominating motives in life. He says, "You must not work for food that perishes, but for that which lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for God the Father has authorized him to do so."¹⁹ Jesus claims to be the true vine, the true bread, and the living waters of life.²⁰ He is also the light of the world and the door by which one enters to walk in darkness no more. Through partaking of these one gains life everlasting in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is a specific kind of life. Like other kinds it can be enjoyed to the greatest extent only by the abandonment of all that hinders its growth or tends to destroy it. Everything sinful, sensuous, or temporal must be renounced. Although physical life, wealth, family, friends, and country are to be cherished in the proper place they sometime become barriers to eternal life. If any of these come between the individual and his desire for eternal life, then it has to be given up or renounced.

The author of the First Epistle urges everyone to renounce

¹⁹ John 6:27.

²⁰ John 14:1; 6:58; 4:13.

love of the world. He says that the flesh and the sensuous cravings of life do not come from God but from the world. If one loves the world there can be no love for the Father in his heart.²¹ Here he seems to imply a strong belief in a type of dualism which was derived from the Greco-Roman world. It was from this type of dualism that the later ascetics received a basis for their extreme practices. This type of dualism is different from that of Paul who received his from Judaic sources. However, both men would have agreed that the things of this world will pass away and only those who do God's will will endure.²²

After one has renounced the attitude of unbelief in Jesus, accepted him as the true Son of God, and given up all else for eternal life he is still called upon to live according to Jesus' teachings if he desires to continue as one of his disciples. Jesus says, "If you abide by what I teach, you are really disciples of mine."²³ "Anyone who loves me will observe my teaching, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and life with him."²⁴

²¹ I John 2:15.

²² I John 2:17.

²³ John 8:31.

²⁴ John 14:23.

He says that one should give up all selfish desires for a fuller satisfaction through a life of service. One should lose himself in his work for others, thereby gaining the reward of eternal life. No one can save his life for himself. Jesus says, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life."²⁵ He says further: "I tell you unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains just one grain. But if it dies, it yields a great harvest."²⁶

Jesus condemned attitudes of hatred and ill-will. In the place of these he taught love and kindness, for he says: "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must love one another. By this they will all know that you are my disciples--by your love for one another."²⁷

In his first letter John makes the idea of brotherly love extend over into the realm of material possessions. He asks the question: "If someone who is rich sees his brother in

²⁵ John 12:25.

²⁶ John 12:24.

²⁷ John 13:34,35.

need and closes his heart against him, how can he have any love for God in his heart?"²⁸ This love knows no limits or boundaries; one must renounce whatever separates him from love for all men.

John believes that the final evidence that an individual knows Jesus is a life lived in obedience to ~~the~~ teachings. He urges everyone to live according to the truth in Christ Jesus, the Son of God. One who lives in Jesus keeps himself free of sin and tries to make himself pure. To do this he must renounce all that stands between him and his achieving the ideal of Christian life.

²⁸ I John 3:16.

Chapter IV

RENUNCIATION IN THE OTHER NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES, THE PASTORAL EPISTLES, HEBREWS, AND THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Even though these books fall into natural groups or divisions their message is essentially the same, and the message is this: through Jesus Christ man's sins are forgiven and he is brought into union with the Son and the Father, to dwell in fellowship with them for eternity. Most of the writings teach that only through the renunciation of all for Jesus Christ can one inherit eternal life which should be the hope of every man. Most of them were written late in the first century or in the early part of the second century and they are concerned chiefly with the continuing growth and development of those already converted rather than in seeking to convert others.

The authors of these books urged men to renounce the obvious

sins which were contradictory to the Christian way of life. According to the record in Acts the necessity of renunciation for Christ's sake was laid upon the early Christians. Peter's early converts forsook their old ways and became busy in the work of the group. "And they devoted themselves to the teaching and the society of the apostles, the breaking of bread and prayer."¹

James urges people to renounce jealousy and rivalry, pointing out that, "wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there will be confusion and every low action."² The author of Timothy petitions the women to be careful in avoiding gossip. The young women must not go about from house to house where "they learn to be idle, and not only idle but gossips and busybodies, and talk of many things they ought not to mention."³

In James and First Peter the authors mention sins of pride and haughtiness. The sin of spiritual pride was contrary to the very heart of Jesus' message. He urged everyone to become as humble as a little child or there would be no hope of his

¹ Acts 2:42.

² James 3:16.

³ I Timothy 5:13.

entering the kingdom. James reiterates this teaching: "As the scripture says, 'God opposes haughty persons, but he blesses humble-minded ones'."⁴ First Peter also implores men to clothe themselves in humility, "for God opposes the proud, but shows mercy to the humble. Submit humbly, therefore, to God's mighty hand, so that he may in due time raise you up."⁵ Thus these men called upon people to renounce pride and to humble themselves before God, because one must feel a sense of spiritual need if he would be born again in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

In First Timothy the author points out the fact that the aim of all instruction must be love that springs from a pure heart and from a good conscience and from a sincere faith.⁶ All attitudes other than love toward one's brothers should be renounced. This is seconded in First Peter:

Now that by obeying the truth you have purified your souls for sincere love of the brotherhood, you must love one another intensely and heartily, for you have been born anew from a germ not perishable, but imper-

⁴ James 4:6.

⁵ I Peter 5:5,6.

⁶ I Timothy 1:5.

ishable, through the message of the living, everlasting God. ⁷

All contrary attitudes must be renounced in order that one may truly love his brothers. The writer implores his readers, "Above all keep your love for one another strong, because love covers up a host of sins."⁸

By the time that First Timothy and Titus were written the individual churches had come under the control of officers known as superintendents or bishops. These two urged that only those men who had proven their uprightfulness and faithfulness be elected to these positions. In Second Timothy the superintendent's necessary qualifications are given:

Whoever aspires to the office of superintendent sets his heart on a fine work. A superintendent must be a man above reproach, only once married, temperate, sensible, a man of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not addicted to drink or pugnacious, but a man of moderation and peace not avaricious, managing his own house well, and keeping his children under control and perfectly respectful--for if a man does not know how to conduct his own household, how can he look after a church of God? ⁹

The author of Titus gives similar criteria for choosing super-

⁷ I Peter 1:22, 23.

⁸ I Peter 4:8.

⁹ I Timothy 3:1-5.

intendents:

For as God's overseer a superintendent must be irreproachable, not arrogant or quick-tempered or given to drink or pugnacious or addicted to dishonest gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, sensible, upright, of holy life, self-controlled, standing by the message that can be relied on, just as he taught it, so that he may be qualified both to encourage others with wholesome teaching and to show the error of those who opposed him. ¹⁰

The superintendents were supposed to be men who gave themselves unreservedly to their calling. They were to be men who had renounced attitudes and relationships which might keep them from being living examples of Jesus' teachings.

In both James and First Timothy the sin of partiality is discussed. The author of James asks, "My brothers, do you try to combine faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with acts of partiality?"¹¹ He is particularly concerned lest the church leaders give more attention to rich men than to the poor who are in the Christian fellowship. The author of First Timothy urges the people not to listen to accusations against elders unless they are supported by two or three witnesses; ¹² they are not to be judged too quickly, for they should be judged impartially. After giving these rules he says, "I charge you

¹⁰ Titus 1:7-9.

¹¹ James 2:1.

¹² I Timothy 5:19.

before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels to observe these rules without any discrimination, and to be perfectly impartial."¹³ The sin of partiality had evidently crept in to the church and these men felt it to be their duty to call upon people to renounce.

Very much as in Paul's writings some of these books give lists of things which must be renounced by the Christian. The following are typical of these:

Free yourselves, therefore, from all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of any kind.¹⁴

People will be selfish, avaricious, boastful, arrogant, abusive, undutiful, ungrateful, irreverent, unfeeling, irreconcilable, slanderous, with no self-control, brutal with no love for what is good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, caring more for pleasure than for God, keeping up the forms of religion, but resisting its influence.¹⁵

These writers understood the temptations of life in the Greco-Roman world. Especially the author of First Peter warned against certain attractions which would tend to wean one from the true spirit of godliness. Particularly he enjoined

¹³ I Timothy 5:21.

¹⁴ I Peter 2:1.

¹⁵ II Timothy 3:2-5.

the women that they should not strive to conform with the customs of the day, pleading that:

You must not adopt the external attractions of arranging the hair and wearing jewelry and dress; yours must be the inner beauty of character, the imperishable attraction of a quiet and gentle spirit, which has great value in the sight of God.¹⁶

After Paul and his coworkers had converted large numbers of the Gentiles to Christianity it was only natural that questions concerning the practice of the law should arise. The Christians in Jerusalem who had not broken away completely from their Jewish faith felt that the law should be observed by all. This problem continued over a period of years until the final break with Judaism came. Although Paul practiced the law himself in many ways, he did not believe that a converted Gentile was under obligation to observe it. He believed that uprightness comes through faith rather than by law. In speaking of the "gospel" he says, "In it God's way of uprightness is disclosed through faith and for faith, just as the Scripture says, 'The upright will have life because of faith.'¹⁷ Because of the differing opinions on

¹⁶ I Peter 3:3,4.

¹⁷ Romans 1:17.

the matter, a compromise was reached by which, according to the book of Acts, the Gentile converts were to abstain from the most serious obstacles to the unity of Christian fellowship. Paul preached against doing anything which would offend a brother. So for the sake of the fellowship the group in Jerusalem believed that these things should be renounced. This was the decision of the group:

As for the heathen who have become believers, we have written them our decisions that they must avoid anything that has been contaminated by idols, the tasting of blood, the meat of strangled animals, and immorality.¹⁸

From the early times the Christians had been the victims of severe and ruthless persecutions. The strangeness of their customs coupled with an allegiance to a kingdom that was not of this world led to their being misunderstood and hated. First Peter offers encouragement to the persecuted, saying, "Dear Friends, do not be surprised that a test of fire is being applied to you, as though a strange thing were happening to you, but be glad that you are sharing the sufferings of the Christ."¹⁹ "If you are being abused for the sake of

¹⁸ Acts 21:25.

¹⁹ I Peter 4:12,13.

Christ, you are blessed, because the glorious Spirit of God is resting upon you."²⁰ By the time that First Peter was written the Christian persecutions were well under way, but it was after this time that they began to glory in their sufferings. In the earlier Christian group as described in Acts there was no spiritual pride in their renunciation. By the time of John's revelation the Christians had begun to take great pride in their sufferings and to look forward to the day when the Lord would take revenge upon their persecutors. John heard the souls of those who had been slaughtered on account of God's message cry out in these words: "Holy and true Master, how long is it to be before you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"²¹ John saw the ones who had died as martyrs, before the throne of God and proclaimed: "They shall never be hungry or thirsty again, and never again will the sun or any burning heat distress them."²² He heard a voice from the heavens commanding him to write, "Blessed are the dead who from this time forth die as Christians."²³

²⁰ I Peter 4:14.

²¹ Revelation 6:10.

²² Revelation 7:16.

²³ Revelation 14:13.

Paul became so convinced that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world that he gave himself without stint to the task of propagating the good news. Even before persecutions became common Paul made known his willingness to renounce everything for the sake of the Lord Jesus. He declared himself ready to sacrifice his own life if it became necessary: "My life does not matter, if I can only finish my race and do the service intrusted to me by the Lord Jesus, of declaring the good news of God's favor."²⁴ "I am ready not only to be bound at Jerusalem but to die there for the sake of the Lord Jesus."²⁵ According to tradition, Paul made this very renunciation when he died as a martyr at Rome.

In all these writings the people are urged to renounce false teachers along with their teachings, since they were an ever present menace to the salvation of the individual. The authors of First Peter and Titus especially warn men against false teachings and doctrines. In the letter to Titus the author urges that all groups preserve the purity of their doctrine by opposing those who were teaching false beliefs. He

²⁴ Acts 20:24.

²⁵ Acts 21:13.

mentions especially those of the party of circumcision.²⁶ "They profess to know God", he says, "but they disown him by what they do; they are detestable, disobedient men, worthless for any good purpose."²⁷ He also admonished the people to: "Have nothing to do with foolish controversies, pedigrees, strife, and wrangles."²⁸ In Second Peter these false prophets who are disrupting the group are also mentioned,²⁹ and Jude also mentions those who were teaching falsely.³⁰ In First Timothy it is asserted that unwholesome instruction results in "a morbid craving for speculations and arguments which result only in envy, quarreling, abuse, base suspicions, and mutual irritations."³¹ All of these things keep the individual from union with the Son and the Father; therefore they must be renounced.

There are no passages in these which call for the renunciation of all wealth, because the authors believed that some

²⁶ Titus 1:10.

²⁷ Titus 1:16.

²⁸ Titus 3:9.

²⁹ II Peter 2:1.

³⁰ Jude 1:4.

³¹ I Timothy 6:4,5.

wealth or personal property is necessary. However, there are a number of passages which are concerned with the use of wealth and its claim upon individuals. The apostles felt themselves called upon to limit or renounce personal possessions in order to devote themselves completely to the work of the kingdom. They felt that they should be occupied solely in the Lord's work. Early in the history of the church, the apostles gave up the management of the financial affairs of the community, saying,

It is not desirable that we should give up preaching the word of God to keep accounts. You, brothers, must pick out of your number seven men of good standing, who are wise and full of the Spirit, and we will put them in charge of this matter, while we devote ourselves to prayer and to delivering the message.³²

The Jerusalem Christians must have renounced some personal wealth, but they did not make total renunciation of all their wealth or property. Acts records: "The believers all shared everything they had with one another, and sold their property and belongings, and divided the money with all the rest, according to their special needs."³³ They lived as Jesus had commanded

³² Acts 6:2-4.

³³ Acts 2:43-45.

them sharing with one another in the true sense of brotherly love. "There was but one heart and soul in the multitude who had become believers and not one of them claimed anything that belonged to him as his own, but they shared everything that they had with one another."³⁴ The sin of Ananias showed the danger of hypocrisy creeping into the group and destroying the very foundations upon which it was built. Peter reprimanded him for his deceitfulness in this manner:

Ananias, why has Satan taken such possession of your heart that you should lie to the holy Spirit, by appropriating part of the price of your land? As long as it was unsold was it not yours, and after it was sold was not the money under your control? How could you think of doing such a thing? You did not lie to men but to God!³⁵

This shows that the sharing of goods was not compulsory, but so common and popular as to tempt men to hypocrisy. Thus it is evident that the early Christians accepted and began to follow in detail Jesus' teachings concerning wealth. Most of them felt called upon to renounce personal wealth in order that they might put their interests, not in things of this world, but in propagating the good news to men.

³⁴ Acts 4:32.

³⁵ Acts 5:3,4.

In other books of this section which were written later than Acts the interest is not in renouncing personal wealth, but in dangers caused by the acquisition of wealth and permitting it to be the dominating motive in life. The author of First Timothy feels that man should be content with what he has rather than absorbed in gaining possessions.

For we bring nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. If we have food and clothing we will be satisfied. But men who want to get rich fall into temptations and snares and many foolish, harmful cravings, that plunge people into destruction and ruin. For love of money is the root of all evils, and in their eagerness to get rich some men wander away from faith and pierce themselves to the heart with many a pang.³⁶

In order to escape from temptations brought on by wealth one should renounce all but the needs of life. Also he says, "Charge the rich of this world not to be arrogant, nor to set their hopes on such an uncertain thing as riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."³⁷ He was convinced that riches could not get one into the kingdom; he knew that the kingdom comes only through a will which has renounced all else. He charges the rich, "to

³⁶ I Timothy 6:7-10.

³⁷ I Timothy 6:17.

do good, to be rich in good deeds, open-handed and generous, storing up a valuable treasury for themselves for the future, so as to grasp the life that is life indeed."³⁸

The author of James is also concerned about those who have riches. He says, "A brother of low position ought to be proud of his eminence, but one who is rich ought to rejoice at being reduced in circumstances, for the rich will disappear like the wild flowers."³⁹ He too realized the danger of great riches and called for men to renounce them so as to be free from the attending dangers.

Asceticism is a practice very generally associated with the renunciatory ideal, concerning itself more particularly with the disciplining of the physical body. There are very few teachings in these books which can be interpreted as advocating any form of asceticism. The writers were aware of the spiritual dangers of the physical cravings and baser passions of which men were victims. In First Peter the author urges everyone "not to indulge the physical cravings that are at war with the soul."⁴⁰ In Second Peter he denounces

³⁸ I Timothy 6:18,19.

³⁹ James 1:9,10.

⁴⁰ I Peter 2:11.

those who "find pleasure in the indulgence of the moment; they are a strain and a disgrace, and they revel in their deceit while they join in your religious meals."⁴¹ Christians must renounce such conduct because it is unbecoming to a Christian as well as sinful in itself. In First Peter Christians are exhorted to conduct themselves, like obedient children, "Do not adapt yourselves to the cravings you used to follow when you were ignorant, but like the holy Being who has called you, you must also prove holy in all your conduct."⁴²

There are some passages in these books, however, which seem to condemn ascetic practices. The author of First Timothy points to some practices in which he does not believe:

The Spirit distinctly says that in later times some will turn away from the faith, and devote their attention to deceitful spirits and the things that demons teach through the pretensions of liars--men with seared consciences who forbid people to marry and insist on abstinence from certain kinds of foods that God created for men who believe and understand the truth to enjoy and give thanks for.⁴³

This writer believed in physical training, but only in so far as it aided the religious life. He did not believe in fasting or abstinence as acts of asceticism. He says, "For

⁴¹ II Peter 2:13.

⁴² I Peter 1:14,15.

⁴³ I Timothy 4:1-3.

everything God has created is good, and nothing need be refused provided it is accepted with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by prayer and Scripture used in it."⁴⁴

These writers like Paul did not call for withdrawal from the world. Following his teachings, the author of First Peter urges complete subservience to whatever authority is over one.⁴⁵ All officials were believed to be servants of God, and people were urged to renounce all feelings of enmity and hatred for them. Indeed, everyone should cooperate with them and live so as to be above reproach.

Thus it becomes apparent that these writers did not teach asceticism, but rather that they taught renunciation for spiritual perfection. And it is only through renunciation that the soul is cleansed, the way of God's mercy made open and men submit themselves to the Christ.

So strip yourself of everything that soils you, and of every evil growth, and in a humble spirit let the message that has the power to save your souls be planted in your hearts.⁴⁶

For God's mercy has appeared and brought salvation to all men, training us to renounce Godless ways and worldly passions, and live serious, upright, and godly lives in this world, while we wait for

⁴⁴ I Timothy 4:4.

⁴⁵ I Peter 2:13-15.

⁴⁶ James 1:21.

the fulfillment of our blessed hope in the glorious⁴⁷ appearing of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus.

Therefore, let us too, with such a crowd of witnesses about us, throw off every impediment and the entanglement of sin, and run with determination the race for which we are entered, fixing our eyes upon Jesus, our leader and example in faith, who in place of the happiness that belonged to him, submitted to a cross, caring nothing for its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Titus 1:11-13.

⁴⁸ Hebrews 12:1,2.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this study, it is evident that since the earliest days of the church the claim of renunciation has been laid on all who would follow the Christian way of life. The ideals of poverty found their source in the life and teachings of Jesus. He was born in lowly circumstances and humble surroundings. While others sought for wealth and riches Jesus had not a place to lay his head. The whole pattern of his life was the surrendering of earthly treasures in seeking things eternal. He pitied the rich and felt himself called to minister to the poor. In his life he exemplified the full renunciation which he lauded in the beatitudes. He insisted that self-preservation and genuine personal security come only through the unqualified surrender of the self. Those who would follow him must be prepared to renounce the most intimate family ties, and even life itself. His was an absolute demand which permitted no compromise. No sacrifice

was too great for those who manifested a yearning for perfection. Superficially regarded, Jesus' teachings seem to equate renunciation with material dispossession. But the true seeker sees that this is merely the starting point; to be in complete accord with Jesus means the full renunciation of the whole self. In the spiritual realm the most fully renounced soul stands first. The disciples were sent not to be ministered unto but to minister. Jesus ended on the cross a life of complete self-abnegation.

Jesus neither taught nor lived the ascetic life, for he found rather in the renounced life a complete consecration and devotion of the spirit. But in Paul we find the influences of his Judaic background in his writings urging certain ascetic tendencies. And in the later writings of the New Testament, we discover the Hellenistic influences increasing to a large degree the ascetic demands of the writers.

Thus out of the study, we see that the treasures for the Christian are not of this world. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find any evidence that material things were ever valued along with spiritual perfection and with the fully renounced life. On the other hand, all evidences show that the poverty of Jesus had laid its claim upon his followers, for by being truly poor in spirit they were to inherit the earth. This

was the precious promise to which the Christian renunciate clung. Poverty particularly has won the mystic. To the mystical soul, it has been the gateway of perfect union with the divine, and by humbling himself before the world and owing allegiance only to a kingdom that was not of this world, the soul may come at last to the true communion for which it exists.

Though the passing years have dimmed the appeal of the renunciatory ideal, still its positive claim upon the Christian faith remains untouched. It is the positive promise of life free from all the defilements and perplexities of unrighteousness.

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