Garibaldi recruited the army with which he liberated Italy by calling for such as were ready to accept cold, hunger, nakedness, and death. And Christ gets the soldiers who are really valuable to Him by proclaiming: “If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.” Real strength for the church has always come and always must come through unworldly conditions and claims. By repentance, faith, and self-denial Christ separates men from the world in order to join them to Himself.

A.J.G.

7. SEPARATION AND SERVICE

He gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.—Galatians 1:4.

Here Christ’s vicarious sacrifice touches its lowest depths of humiliation. Once we read that He “loved the church and gave himself for it”—wondrous grace, the Bridegroom for the Bride! Once we read, “Who loved me and gave himself for me”—wondrous love, the Son of God for a son of men! Here we read that He “gave himself for our sins”—the deepest condescension, wherein He “who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Consider now what was the end of this condescension.

I. The Divine Separation.

That he might deliver us from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4).

Attachment to Christ is the only secret of detachment from the world. Therefore, I do not say, “Break your fetters of evil habit that you may lay hold of the Saviour,”
but, "Lay hold of the Saviour in order that you may break your fetters of evil habit." I have never known a man to stop sinning until he had begun believing. I do not deny that unconverted men may carry on a tremendous warfare with their evil passions; but I do say that so long as it is only self against sin, it will be a drawn battle. In the seventh of Romans we have a picture of this warfare vividly portrayed, "For the good that I would, I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do." Here is the battle. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Here is our better nature, one of the combatants. "But I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Here is our evil nature, the other combatant. And these two keep up the struggle. It grows hotter and hotter. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary, the one to the other." And this conflict will go on, sorrowful defeat following sorrowful defeat till Christ comes into the soul. Then and only then will the shout be heard, "Jesus is victor!" This has happened repeatedly. I have seen and bear record to the fact: the drunkard victorious over his appetite, the worldling victorious over his pleasures, the self-seeker victorious over his avarice, the sinner victorious over his sins.

But how has the victory come? The Apostle answers: "The law of the spirit of life hath made me free from the law of sin and death." "But," it is asked, "is the battle won once and for all at conversion?" No, it has to be fought again and again. I believe that with most Christians the temptation is to the misuse of good things, in other words, that Satan turns our very peace into war in order to get the victory over us. Therefore, look out for the flag of truce that proposes a compromise with the world. Beware lest you be beguiled through your harmless pleasures. A traveler in Barbary mentions seeing a beautiful clear spring of water over which was inscribed this motto "Drink and be gone." Robbers infested the region, and were constantly on the track of the traveler, ready to pounce upon and destroy him. Therefore, he must snatch the cooling draught and hasten on. Shall we refuse ourselves all pleasure in this world? Shall we write, "Touch not, taste not," on every innocent gratification? No, but as soon as we have tasted the pleasant draught we must hurry forward lest we be overtaken by the destroyer of our souls. Drink and be gone! Hasten on from pleasure to life's serious business, from rest to life's serious toil, from peace to life's serious conflict. This is just what Peter meant when he wrote, "Dear beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." The citizen may tarry, build, plant, and reap; but the pilgrim must make haste lest he take root in this world, when his calling is to be rooted in heaven.

This deliverance from a present evil world means election, you see, not assimilation. As a sunbeam falls upon a muddy pool and draws up from it a clear crystal drop, leaving behind all the filth and sediment with which it was mixed, so Christ takes souls out of the world into His kingdom. Much of the religion of our day is an adulteration—a mixture of earth and heaven in the same compound. Those who want to popularize Christianity go in for this mixture. They think a religion of mingled secularity and spirituality will be more palatable and will win more disciples. But it is not so. Christ gets the soldiers who are
really valuable to Him by proclaiming: “If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.” Real strength for the church has always come, and always must come, through unworldly conditions and claims. By repentance, faith, and self-denial Christ separates men from the world in order to join them to Himself.

Here is the test of evangelical faith by which we ask to have it tried—it can take a sinner out of his sin. To keep a serious-minded man serious, to keep a moral man moral, to keep a respectable man respectable—this is not a very difficult matter, especially when your moral or respectable man has a good heredity behind him. But to change the immoral and the outcast into the sober and respectable is quite another matter. That is the work of the supernatural spirit operating through a supernatural Gospel. Nothing but an evangelical Christianity can do this. Go into the liberal churches where they boast so loudly of their ethical preaching, and their high morality, and their strict integrity, and ask them how many drunks they picked from the gutter last year, changing them into sober men who can pray and sing praises to God. They cannot show you one, and they are condemned by this test. The tall cedars can be easily sawed and planed, and polished, and fitted into their places in the temple of God; but the great problem in my boyhood was how to pull the stumps whose strong, deep, gnarly roots have struck down into the earth and grasped it with giant fingers. Only by a tremendous convulsion can these be uprooted. The world is full of such stumps of humanity, all beauty and grace gone, and they only a mass of deep-rooted and inveterate evil habits. “To deliver men from this present evil world”—this is the problem of humanity which the Gospel solves.

II. The Divine Standard.

According to the will of God (Galatians 1:4).

That is to say, God has His own sovereign method by which He works, and to this we are to conform. Often have I heard it affirmed by earnest reformers that the great problem which the church has to work out is that of adapting Christianity to the age. But if, as the text affirms, the age is evil, why should we attempt to conform Christianity to it? On the contrary, the word of Scripture is very explicit: “Be not conformed to this age, but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” There is nothing more needed than this demonstration. Exhibitions of the bad and selfish and imperfect will of man are common enough, but the divine will lived out in human lives, the perfect will exhibited amid imperfect surroundings—that is what our nonconformity should exhibit—"proving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

The will of God is the rule and measure by which all human conduct is to be rectified. If traders have fallen into the sin of measuring with a short yardstick, and weighing with a false balance, is he the best friend of society who succeeds in getting the standard of weight and measure changed so as to conform to this dishonest usage? Surely not. Well, sin has deranged our moral standards, and the Christian is set into the world not to adjust himself to the age, but to convince the age of its sin by exhibiting to it "the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

It strikes me as a most significant name by which Chris-
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tians are called in the Bible—"believers." That is, they are persons who accept what God says as final. They set their watches by the sun instead of by the town clock. One of our preachers lately declared that all thinkers now accept the doctrine of evolution as true. That may be or may not be—I will not discuss the question. But how is it about believers? Thinkers accept one another's opinions; believers accept the voice of God. Thinkers base their conclusions on a "Thus saith science"; believers rest their faith on a "Thus saith the Lord." I know that there are multitudes of believers who accept the doctrine of creation as true. They read in Genesis the simple and sublime record that in the beginning "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him," and they credit the record without question. They believe implicitly that creation proceeds from above, not from beneath; that God spake and it was done, not that chaos fermented and it was begun. "In the image of God created he him." It may seem like a very stupid and stubborn thing not to think with the great thinkers, but we prefer to believe with the great believers. Let who will choose for himself the encomium: "He thought with the great thinkers and it was counted to him for originality." We prefer to take our place with faithful Abraham, if with him we may win this epitaph: "He believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

This, my hearers, is the chief distinction of the Christian; he is delivered from the present evil world—from its way of thinking and reasoning; he is "separated unto the Gospel of God." When others walk by sight, he walks by faith; when others look at the things that are seen, he looks at the things that are not seen; while others say, "I have proved, therefore I affirm," he says, "I believe, therefore have I spoken."

How beautiful is the counterpart to this text which the Apostle gives us in another Scripture. He speaks of Christians as those who "have tasted the powers of the age to come." That is, they are delivered from the present age, and made partakers of the age to be. It is a strange paradox, but as true as strange: the pilgrim feeding from his father's table while yet in the wilderness, nourished by angels' food while yet in the earthly house of his tabernacle. "I have known more enjoyment in one hour of communion with God than in a whole lifetime of earthly pleasure," says an experienced Christian. If, then, you ever get weary and languid for a moment, "taste the powers of the world to come," and you will be refreshed and invigorated! Beautiful illustration of it we have in the story of the sick soldier. He was given up to die, and his father hastened from a long distance to his bedside in the hospital. He lay half conscious, and nothing that father or attendants could say could rouse him till the father said: "Here is a loaf of your mother's bread which I have brought you." "Bread from home!" said the dying man. "Give me some," and from that hour he began to mend. Bread from heaven! Don't fail to eat it every day, oh, Christian. You are in the world, but not of it, and you will die if you eat the native food. Feed upon the word of God; live upon the promise of God; satisfy your souls with the hope of God which He has revealed to you in the Scriptures. "This is that bread which cometh down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall never hunger."
III. Separation to What?

1. We are separated for our Lord's ownership.

We speak of losing the soul. Who is the loser? We speak of saving the soul. For whom is it saved? "All souls are mine," saith God. To lose the soul is to defraud Him of His redemption-right: to save a soul is to restore to Him that of which He has been defrauded. Gold cannot be used for currency so long as it is mixed with the quartz and rock in which it lies embedded. So your soul is useless to God till taken out from sin and earthliness and selfishness in which it lies buried. By the regenerating power of the Spirit you must be separated unto Christ, stamped with His image and superscription and made into a divine currency which will bear His likeness among men. The Christian is, so to speak, the circulating medium of Christ, the coin of the realm by whom the great transactions of mercy and grace to a lost world are carried on. As the currency stands for the gold, so does the Christian stand for Christ, representing His good and acceptable will.

2. We are separated for our Lord's service.

Christ takes us out of the world in order to send us into the world. His two great texts should never be forgotten. "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "As the Father hath sent me into the world, so have I sent you into the world." I am not advocating any surly asceticism, any monkish or selfish seclusion from society. It is the men and women who rise highest into fellowship with Christ who plunge deepest into the sin and woe of the world to rescue the lost. A swimmer who would dive to the bottom of a pool selects the loftiest point he can find from which to leap. It is to me one of the standing confirmations of the truth of our religion that its highest saints have been its deepest divers into the woe of our suffering race. A worldly man is in the world, not to make his neighbors more worldly, but to make himself more worldly. A heavenly man is in the world to lift men up to God. There is no peril to the true saint in going into the world; he can no more be hurt by it than a sunbeam can be defiled by falling into mud and slime. For the sunbeam has its origin and continuance in the sun, and the Christian has his source and being in God. "Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to every creature," is our Lord's command and in order to keep it, rise ye into living and constant communion with your risen Saviour; come out of the world by a true and separating faith, that you may be sent into the world bearing the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.