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### The Christian Character: The Teachings of the Apostles II

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*St. James: The apostle of “works.”* St. James somewhat stands in antithesis to St. Paul in his conception of the gospel in that whereas Paul stresses faith as an approach to the Christian life, St. James emphasizes works as the essential thing to the forming of a Christian character. His epistle urges the things to be done, and the excellence to be attained by doing. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves,” is the keynote of his message.

If any ⟨man⟩ be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in ⟨the⟩ [a] glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso⟨ever⟩ looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. . . . Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:22-27)

And so he argues it out to the end of his message. It amounts to the same thing all the way through. “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well” (James 2:8). This an echo from the generalization of the “law and the prophets” given by the Christ. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19). Let it be understood however, that while St. James stresses works, he would have faith combined with works. “What doth it profit, my brethren, ~~that~~ **though** a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” And now he puts his principle to a practical illustration:

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and ~~fed~~ **filled**; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to

the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. (James 2:14-18)

The Epistle sets out in bold form the richest of the Christian doctrinal standards that characterize the epistles of St. Peter and St. Paul; and the Gospel and Epistles and Revelation of St. John. It is the practical application of the principles of the Christian faith that constitutes the uniqueness, and gives value to the Epistle of St. James as a contribution to Christianity.

***Things of special value: (a) Men not tempted of God.*** Two things above all others make the Epistle of value: one is the admonition which forbids men saying when they fall into divers temptation[s] that they are tempted of God; for “God cannot be tempted (of) [with] evil,” says St. James, “neither tempteth he any man.” Then with a master stroke he points to the source of man’s temptation: “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Then in antithesis to this the solemn averment: “Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:13-17). Solid ground, this. God [is] not the source or cause of evil, neither is God the cause of men’s temptations.

The other thing of high value in the Epistle of **St.** James is the counsel which places men, so to speak, next to God, immediately in contact with him, as the source of wisdom and guidance.

***(b) The golden text: The key to wisdom.***

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven (by) [with] the wind and tossed. [For] let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. (James 1:5-7)<sup>1</sup>

If this principle be applied in the practical spirit **of** ~~which characterizes~~ the Epistle of St. James, then we have for the ~~fashioning and~~ molding of the Christian character and ~~the Christian~~ life the **very** ~~counsel and~~ guiding hand of the Lord himself; and what could be

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<sup>1</sup>It was this text, be it remembered, that led Joseph Smith, the Prophet, to seek for wisdom by asking God for it, that led to the open vision of God, with which the work of the Lord in these last days began.

better than that for ~~the~~ fashioning ~~of~~ the Christian character and ~~the~~ **Christian** life?

*St. Jude's warning and promise.* Of St. Jude, the minor writer in the New Testament, it need only be said that his Epistle contains a warning and a promise. A warning against false teachers, who are always evil, that had crept into the church to work mischief: "Spots" in the Christian feast of charity are they, "clouds <that> [they] are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 1:12). There let them lay!

The promise of St. Jude is concerning the glorious coming of the Lord, of whom Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied; saying,

Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (Jude 1:14-15)

The ethical value of St. Jude's Epistle consists of his denunciation of evils, gross self-indulgences of certain church members by which it is to be understood that the attainment of the opposite virtues to the vices denounced by Jude is the Christian objective: This, and his solemn admonition that those whom he addresses "earnestly contend for the faith . . . once delivered unto the saints."

*St. John: His place in the apostolate and in the church.* St. John was one of the earliest of the apostles to come into contact with the person of the Christ, and to enter into the spirit of his mission. It is generally thought that he was of a family in rather better worldly circumstances than the families of the other apostles. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome,<sup>a</sup> and had some connection with members of the Sanhedrin, though the father, Zebedee, and his two sons, James and John, followed the vocation of fishermen. It was while engaged in this

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<sup>a</sup>That Salome is the mother of James and John is inferred from a comparison of the crucifixion accounts in Matthew and Mark. Matthew 27:56 says that the women present at Christ's crucifixion were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and "the mother of Zebedee's children." In the account of the same event in Mark 15:40, "Salome" is found instead of "the mother of Zebedee's children." John's connection with members of the Sanhedrin is inferred from John 18:15, "And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple [John] was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest."

pursuit that the two brothers were called by the Master to become his followers. St. John who was of a deeply pious mind, had previously come in contact with John, the Baptist, forerunner of the Christ; and had already given evidence through his association with the Baptist of the profoundly religious nature which so characterized him in his associations with the Christ, and afterwards through long years with the church.

His great influence in the church is to be traced to his association with the Christ, all which is set forth in his marvelously spiritual Gospel, in his Epistles and in the rather mysterious, yet wonderful book, known as the Apocalypse, or the Revelation of St. John. His Gospel, which stands fourth in the series of the accounts of the life of the Christ, is supposed to be the last written of the New Testament documents. It is generally thought that in writing his gospel he had before him the writings of the three other evangelists, and therefore his own account of events took on its supplementary character, mentioning many things omitted by the earlier writers, and probably omitted many things which he perhaps thought sufficiently stated by them. It is quite clear that the object of his writing the Gospel was to emphasize clearly (1) the deity of Christ, and (2) the power of love, as the means by which men ~~were~~ **are** to be brought to acceptance of the truth and obedience to its laws. We shall find the emphasis placed upon these two things in the written contributions made by this apostle to the literature of Christian origins is distinctively characteristic.

*Distinctiveness of St. John's doctrines.* The deity of the Christ, his relation of one-ness with the Father, the new birth into fellowship by union with these—the Father and the Son—and the indwelling of God in the human soul—these with love of God and man as the solvent of all duties, constitute the ground plan of the ethic of St. John: “the Life.” “Except a man be born again,” he records the Christ as saying, “he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). But so born? Then what?

Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. . . . If we say that we have fellowship with him (God—the Christ), and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:3, 6-10)

*The doctrine of St. John's Gospel and ~~the~~ Epistles.* This is the doctrine of St. John's Gospel: “That they might know thee the only

true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). And this the doctrine of the First Epistle: “Hereby we [do] know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4).

Again: “Whoso keepeth his ⟨God’s⟩ word ⟨*i.e.*, lives in harmony with God’s law⟩, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” And now the test: “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he ⟨the Christ⟩ walked” (1 Jn. 2:5-6). Also again: “The darkness is past, and the true light ⟨the Christ⟩ now shineth”; and again the test: “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him” (1 Jn. 2:8-10).

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” And should one ask what is “the world” that one must not love, save at the sacrifice of his fellowship of the Father, the answer is immediate: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust [thereof]: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Again, and harking back to the premise of St. John’s ethic—the birth into fellowship with God:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: who[soever] doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ⟨we have⟩ [ye] heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. (1 Jn. 3:9-11)

Further he saith, “he that keepeth God’s commandments dwelleth in God, and God in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (cf. 1 Jn. 3:24).

*Exposition of St. John’s chief ethic.* There is much iteration to that same effect, but this is sufficient to make “the Life” apparent according to St. John: the true disciple of the Christ is born of God, and by that birth men participate in the divine nature, and that nature abiding in men (and so long as that relationship obtains) men will not sin, but will be righteous. Here, of course, must be recognized the fact that the full attainment of righteousness is a matter of growth as well as of birth.



In this our mortal life, even disciples of Christ are but men and women in the making; and perfection in righteousness is an attainment reached by slow degrees and by painful striving. It is a matter of character-building under God's guidance and helpfulness, in which there may be many lapses, many failures, and much discouragement; but the spirit into which one has been born, according to St. John's ethic, will impel the renewal of the struggle. There will be no permanent yielding to evil so long as that spirit remains alive in the soul. There will be no silencing his demand for the renewal of striving for righteousness until a complete victory has been achieved. I adjudge this to be the attitude of St. John himself; for he says: "These things write I unto you (the church), that ye sin not." And yet, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation (of) [for] our sins" (1 Jn. 2:1-2). And again:

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin [not] unto death. (1 Jn. 5:16-17)

In the light of St. John's view of the Life, that "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his (God's) seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9), the doctrine must be understood within such relative lines as those defined above, and in no absolute sense. But how noble the conception of St. John (and of all the apostles whose testimony is of record—only he has stressed it more than the others) that the disciples of Jesus have been born of God, and hence have partaken of the "divine nature," and as that is righteous they too must ultimately become righteous. There has been planted in them a spiritual life by the "rebirth" contemplated in the gospel, and that spirit born in them must develop according to the great law of life—*each* "after its kind." It must and will develop according to type, after the type of the God-life, and with this we may bring to its climax and glory the ethic of St. John.

*Men as the sons of God.*

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 Jn. 3:1-3)

And here St. John's ethic joins the Christ's: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

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Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: Revelation 1-3; sources mentioned in books referred to in the footnotes to this chapter.