Jesus and religion

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JESUS AND RELIGION

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

We are told that man is incurably religious. Religion in turn is said to be the outward act or form by which men indicate recognition of a God or gods to whom obedience and honor are due. Religion then has to do with divine things and is primarily a matter of human experience with things divine.

Men in general have some kind of religious experience and some kind of conception of religion. Jesus had his religious experience and conception of religion. But Jesus was so far ahead of the general human religious experience that there seems to be a "missing link" between his experience and that of human experience in general. Everyone gets his genuine conception of religion through his own experience. So did Jesus. His experience was a unique experience, so also his conception of religion and of God was unique.

The influence of Jesus' religious experience and
consequent teaching in the world has been very great. He is the general figure in the great movement called Christianity. Other religions are founded upon principles but the Christian religion is founded upon the person of Jesus Christ as the perfect revelation of God. His influence is great not only in the Christian movement itself but far and wide outside that movement. Within Christianity all the worthwhile institutions are founded upon the name of Jesus. By his life, teaching, and death he has won and is continually winning his way into the hearts of men. He left no literary documents. We are informed that he once wrote on the sand of Palestine. But no one knows what he wrote — the feet of men trampled on it and the wind levelled it — but what he has written and is writing in the hearts of men, that remains written. Others have written about him and the writings have become a "Disturbing Gospel," but also a guide and comfort to the untold millions through the centuries.

That which has been written of Jesus and his teachings in the Gospels is only a fragment of what could have been written of him. But even the fragments indicate the greatness and majesty of the Person of whom they are written. The teaching material in the writings is beyond com-
parison, by reason of its sublimity, with the best in the literature of the world, and the Person and the experience behind all this is infinitely more than the teaching. The religious experiences were the sources from which his teachings sprang. Behind all this was naturally the influence of his home, rabbinic tradition, and the Jewish religious literature and practice in general.

The world in which Jesus worked was a unified, civilized world in which law and order were established. It was the great Roman Empire. Jesus probably was acquainted with the history of the Roman Empire and knew its strength and weakness at that time. He knew the history of his own people and understood the situation of his people at that time. Undoubtedly he felt keenly the need of their emancipation from the yoke of Rome. He knew that Israel was God's people in a special sense and that his people lived in their own land as foreigners, in the land which God had promised them for an eternal heritage. He also recognized the wrongs which needed to be righted and perhaps momentarily felt that he was the man of the hour to accomplish this. But it was his conception of the character of God which directed and decided him always. His future work was to be first of
all among his own people and in the Roman Empire but the nature of his work was to be according to the nature of the God of Israel, the God of the Prophets. He had noticed that the Scriptures of his people were the story of human cry to God and God's answer to that cry, but he felt that God was going to give answer to the cry of human need more definitely through him than he had done previously and that the answer would be God's love manifested in him. This naturally did not come to him suddenly, but through a long painful process of finding the will of God.

Jesus came to his own people but they received him not. His revelation of God's character was too radical for them to understand. It did not fit into their conception of God, and therefore they rejected him. But this truth concerning God which Jesus had gained and confirmed through painful struggle and deep experience, was the truth with which he would change and save the world. First of all the Gospels bear the record of the greatness of this truth. Not only the canonized scriptures but many other Gospels and letters bear witness to it. It has been too conspicuous to be left unnoticed by the writers of secular history. Even catacombs in Rome tell
unmistakably the power of the story of Jesus' conception of God. The Church of Christ from its beginning to our own day is a living monument to the truth and power of Jesus and his religion.
Anthropologists tell us that in their study of man they have not found any race without some form of religion. A race may be in the most primitive stage in every respect but not void of religion. Religion has been recognized therefore as a universal fact. But how has religion begun? Is it possible to find an adequate answer concerning the question of the genesis of religion? There are several guesses made concerning this question of which some will be mentioned here.

1. Theories of the Genesis of Religion.

The following theories may be called Psychological, Sociological, and Intellectualistic.

The Psychological theory is represented by such men as Lucretius, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Sigmund Freud. Lucretius taught that the origin of religion is in the fear of the gods and of death. Ludwig Feuerbach thought that religion owed its origin to human desire, the main force being in the instinct of self-preservation and quest after happiness. Sigmund Freud sees the roots of religion in perverted sexuality, that is in "physical and
psychological causes of a pathological nature."

The Sociological theory says that the roots of religion are to be found in an "unjust structure of human society and the evils that result from it." It is a device of state and priestcraft in the interest of the property owners or the ruling class. The main representatives of this theory as it is today are Karl Marx and Otto Gruppe.

In addition to these already mentioned theories is a third type, namely, Intellectualistic. Men holding this theory derive religion from the (a) primitive belief in the animation of all nature, or (b) from the still more primitive belief in an impersonal power, mana, or (c) religion is a primitive method of explaining phenomena by referring them to personal wills. The main representatives of this theory are Emile Durkheim, Auguste Comte, James G. Frazer, F. A. Lange, and Paul Natorp. Without adding any more theories of the genesis of religion we will consider some of the definitions of religion.

3. Definitions of Religion.

Religion professes to be concerned with truth.

1Knudson, The Doctrine of God, pp. 20-38.
It goes behind the mere appearance of events in order to understand the deeper things of life and reality and to get in harmony with the reality that lies behind appearances and is to be known only spiritually.

a. Religion in General.

Schleiermacher defines religion as a unique feeling, the feeling of absolute dependence.¹

Mackintosh in his *Christian Apprehension of God* asks "What is religion?" and answers: "Conceivably we might set about answering the question by simple logic. We might say: What God is, is known; what man is, is also known; if we look closely at both we shall be able to tell by inspection what religion must be, since it is the essential relation between them."²


There are many definitions of Christian religion, but two may be sufficient in this connection. Schleiermacher defines it thus: "Christianity is a monotheistic faith of the theological type, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that everything in it is related to the redemption accomplished by

Jesus of Nazareth. ¹

The definition of Christianity by Ritschl is a little more elaborate: "Christianity is the monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion, which, based on the life of its Author as Redeemer and as Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God, involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love, aims at the moral organization of mankind, and grounds blessedness on the relation of sonship to God, as well as the Kingdom of God." ²

3. Primitive Religion.

Everything of which human mind has any knowledge has had beginning (and generally very small beginning). The idea of God has had very small beginning but it has grown and keeps growing. The idea of God grows with men. It is impossible for the human mind to understand anything outside of its own realm of experience; therefore men give even to God the same attributes of character as they have.

According to students of religion, the primitive conception of God is anthropomorphic in a crude way. To some, God is like a chieftain who rules as a crude human ³

¹Knudson, The Doctrine of God, p. 120.
²Ibid, p. 121.
chief would rule. This kind of a god needed to be appeased by some sacrifice or dominated by magic.

It is generally understood that all the religions of the world have had simple beginnings; so also had the Hebrew religion but it had been wonderfully developed and refined by the great Hebrew Prophets through the inspiration of the Divine Spirit and furnished a background that made Christianity possible.

4. Hebrew Conception of God.

Like the primitive conception of God in other religions, the Hebrew conception of God was also anthropomorphic, that is, God was thought of as a man and in terms and characteristics of man. Like a man God was walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. Adam had a conversation with him like a man with a man. But the Hebrews had only one God in comparison with many other nations who had many gods. To the Hebrews, Jehovah was at first only a tribal God but later on was understood to be the God of the universe. Then came the discovery that He was a just God, and also a merciful, loving, and forgiving God. Doubtless Christianity owes much to Hebrew thought and teaching.
Like the Hebrew religion, other religions have their own conception of God. Of all the religions of the world, the Christian religion, it is generally agreed, embodies the noblest conception of God and the highest conception of religion.

5. Christianity.

Ritschl says in his definition of Christianity that Christianity is the "monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion." No one who has studied the Christian principles can deny this. Yet, although Christian religion has the highest principles, its foundation is not merely a set of principles, but the personal manifestation of God in the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth.

As to how Christianity has reached its high standard, there are two points of view: one holds that Christianity is like an isle in the universe, isolated from all other religions, and has received its lofty content only through revelation. The other holds that Christianity is the climax of all other religions and is a result of evolution of religion. The truth, however, seems to be that Christianity involves both the idea of evolution of religion and revelation in Jesus Christ.
III. JESUS HIMSELF - MAN OF RELIGION.

1. Jesus, the Man of Religious Experiences.

Jesus was not a man of philosophy but primarily a man of religion. Everything in his life was determined by the experience which was a result of constant contact and communion with God. There are men who have aesthetic experiences, patriotic experiences, and many other kinds of experiences depending on their natures, but Jesus was essentially a man of religious experience. Undoubtedly he had many kinds of experiences, but all of them were subordinated to his religious experiences, for religion was the dominating feature of his character. God was the central fact in his life and therefore his experiences were God-experiences. He was the mirror of the Infinite, the image of God in a unique way. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," he says. "I and the Father are one," is his testimony again. All this was manifested in his teachings and in his life. The message of love which was at the center of his message was overflowing in his service to his fellow men. His good will was overflowing also toward unfriendly people, manifesting the nature of his Father who caused His sun to shine and his rain to
fall upon the ungodly as well as upon the godly. His magnanimity which he gained in communion with his Father became a power toward which people could not be indifferent: they either had to come to his side in reverence and love or begin to fight against him. No one who came in contact with him was able to remain neutral. It was the greatness both of his message and his person which caused people to adhere to him or to work against him. Those who were on his side said many glorious things about him, but Jesus, the man of religious experience, is "much greater than the tradition about him", or even his own sayings. Abraham was called a "Friend of God", but when men wanted to call Jesus by his right title, the men who knew him best called him "the Son of God" in a unique sense.

2. **Definite Religious Experiences of Jesus.**

Jesus had definite religious experiences. We know but very little of his life until he came to Jordan to listen to John's preaching and was there baptized by John. Matthew and Luke tell of his birth; Luke alone adds certain ceremonial details of his infancy and of his visit to Jerusalem when twelve years of age. Matthew
tells of the coming of the Wise-men from the East and also of the flight into Egypt. Both Matthew and Luke make mention of his growing up in Nazareth; Luke says, "And the Child grew and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him." The period of eighteen years at Nazareth is in obscurity so far as the present known literature is concerned. According to the synoptic Gospels, the first definite religious experience took place in his baptism by John at the Jordan.

a. Experience in Baptism.

The canonical Gospels do not tell why Jesus went to hear John the Baptist. The Gospel according to the Hebrews tells that the mother and brethren of Jesus exhorted him to go with them to be baptized by John. The reason may be more fundamental. Both Jesus and John were students of the great Hebrew prophets and therefore had much in common in understanding the spiritual situation of their day. Both had noticed and despised the shallow and superficial teachings and lives of the Pharisees and the other religious leaders and saw the need of a more vital religious appeal and demand.


2Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, p. 309
There is no way of knowing whether or not Jesus and John, although they were cousins, had met previous to the time Jesus went to Jordan, but John's preaching made a profound impression on Jesus mind, according to modern interpretation, so much so that he was willing to be baptized by John. Dr. Lowstuter thinks that Jesus probably spoke with John about the Kingdom of God idea, which was the nucleus of John's message, long enough to understand thoroughly the situation before he committed himself to that movement, and then asked John to baptize him into relation to the Kingdom of God.

Did Jesus know what was going to happen to him at his baptism? Did he know before he left his home and his carpenter shop in Nazareth that he was never to return to take up his carpenter work? No one knows definitely but modern scholars are prone to think that he did not know beforehand what was going to happen in this respect. But what happened was of significance: He received his Messianic call. The supreme hope of his people was going to be realized in him!

All the Gospels tell of this wonderful experience of the baptismal vision. Mark says that the call came to
Jesus only; according to Matthew the message was for the people; John's Gospel tells that John the Baptist saw the vision; Luke's testimony is the same as that of Mark's, but he adds that the vision occurred when Jesus was praying. This experience was primarily Jesus' experience. Undoubtedly he later told his disciples what he experienced in that solemn hour. As was his custom, he used symbols to express what he had experienced in his inner self. That may help explain the various accounts of the significant moment.

Jesus knew that God spoke directly to his soul. "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased," was the message to his soul. He understood that he was the Son of God in a unique sense, and he was to find his mission in relation to the Kingdom of God to which he gave allegiance in his baptism. The Messianic call implied more than the child-relation to God which was the fundamental fact in his religious life; it had an official meaning. He was to be the leader in the Messianic movement. The baptismal vision needed fundamental thinking and praying, and therefore he sought a solitary place.

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b. Wilderness Experience.

From the Jordan Jesus went to the wilderness, to a solitary place to contemplate his experience at his baptism. All we know about what happened in the wilderness, is what comes from the Gospel stories. Mark mentions it very briefly; Matthew and Luke give a full account, differing a little in the order of the events; the fourth gospel does not even mention the wilderness experience.

The temptation account is a bit of autobiography of Jesus. This was Jesus' experience. He was alone in the wilderness and he must have told of his experiences to his disciples in symbols as he had told them about his baptismal experience. All the temptations pictured in the story were the temptations within his soul. He was sure that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Montefiore says that Jesus was more sure of this fact than of his own relation to the Kingdom. The burning questions were: What kind of a Kingdom it would be, and what kind of a Messiah would be in that Kingdom. It has been thought (by some) that Jesus knew everything beforehand. If that were so, why then all the pains of temptation and the struggles between differing thoughts? Jesus was a sincere character and when he saw what was
right there was no temptation to depart from it. A struggle within the sincere soul always implies uncertainty about the matter in question. Just as soon as the light breaks in, the struggle ceases. Jesus did not know everything beforehand, but in praying and contemplation he sought God's will. Streeter says: "The belief that Jesus foresaw everything belittles the moral grandeur of Jesus' act." While Jesus grew in grace he also grew in wisdom, that is, in moral and intellectual insight.

Jesus knew now that he was the Son of God, the anointed one, to carry out God's plans. It was his innermost desire to help his fellowmen, perhaps, first of all, his own people, for he saw their physical and spiritual needs better than the people themselves saw them. How should he do this? What kind of a Messiah should he be? What kind of a Kingdom should he project? Was he to be a bread-king, a wonderworker, or an earthly ruler, was a question which he had to see and settle. "All his temptations were struggles not to misuse his power. The problem of the Master was a problem in self-restrain." He was tempted to use his power selfishly. But finally he came to the conclusion that men do not live by bread alone; that it was not right to tempt God by trusting his super-

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1Streeter, Reality, p. 189.  
2Fosdick, The Manhood of the Master, p. 98.
natural power to perform miracles in order to gain people's approval, and that it was eternal love and not the sword by which the world was to be conquered. This was the Father's holy will concerning his relation to the Kingdom. The Kingdom was not to be only external and temporal but also an internal, spiritual Kingdom. These temptations were settled but many followed. His sincere mind and a close communion with God never allowed him to be long in darkness concerning the great issues of life. After the wilderness temptations, he experienced an unusual joy. In the Gospel according to Matthew we read: "...and behold, angels came and ministered unto him." Likewise, the joy on the Mountain of Transfiguration might also have been the result of some great struggle, decision, or revelation.

c. Transfiguration.

Before his transfiguration Jesus had experienced much in his ministry. It had come to pass that the leaders of his people were bitterly opposed to him. In the baptismal and wilderness experiences he might not have thought of the possibility of a suffering Messiah, but by this time the conception of the suffering Messiah and the possibility of it had become clear. It might have been the very question of his becoming a suffering Messiah that caused

1Matthew 4:11.
him to take his closest circle to the mountain top to pray. There again he had a great experience. Luke tells that the great Transfiguration experience took place while Jesus was praying, as when the Messianic call came at his baptism. It might have been there that the question of his willingness to run the risk of becoming a suffering Messiah was settled; therefore, the overflowing joy and assurance.

Some take this story quite literally; others take it as an interpolation, as a post-resurrection appearance, as a myth, and otherwise. Whatever the case may be, the truth is that experiences like this and others mentioned above can not come to immature minds. Then, too, such experiences do not come to every soul; they come only to souls of great religious susceptibility and show clearly that Jesus was a man of the greatest religious susceptibilities. One must be prepared to have experiences like these. Jesus' earlier life was a preparation for these great experiences and therefore they were natural for him to have. The influence of these experiences were manifested in Jesus' life. He openly told his disciples about these experiences, and they were also manifested in his teachings and his doings.
3. Further Evidence that Jesus was a Man of Religion.

a. Conscious revelation of Jesus.

In his earliest ministry Jesus did not want to be known as the Son of God. The Gospel records tell that he forbade his disciples and others to call him by that name.¹ Some Bible students think that Messiahship as applied to Jesus was developed by the Early Church, but this supposition does not seem to have an adequate support. In his later ministry Jesus revealed himself first to his disciples and then to the public. Telling his baptismal experiences, wilderness experiences, and transfiguration experiences, he revealed himself to his disciples, but in a more direct way he revealed himself in Caesarea Philippi.² This conversation, in which he asked his disciples what the people were calling him, was planned by the Master beforehand. He had selected the time and place for his self-revelation to his disciples. When the disciples had expressed their opinion that Jesus was the Christ he did not deny it but began to tell them what kind of a Messiah he was. He told them that he was going to be a suffering Messiah. This really was a revelation to

¹ Mark 1:25.
² Mark 8:27-35.
his disciples, for they had an altogether different idea
of a Messiah: They were expecting a political Messiah.\(^1\)

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus is report-
ed using figures of speech, likening himself to several
objects and ideas, such as bread, vine, shepherd, door,
way, truth, life, resurrection, and light. The words, "I
am", which he used in likening himself to the objects and
ideas intimate his conscious self-revelation. The words,
for instance, "I am the way, the truth, and the life", and
"I am the resurrection and the life", are very clear,
conscious self-revelations of Jesus.\(^2\)

To the public he revealed his Messiahship by
riding to the city of Jerusalem on the beast of burden,
showing the kind of a Messiah he was.

b. Unconscious Revelation of Jesus.

As Jesus revealed himself consciously to his
disciples and the public, so, also, he revealed himself
unconsciously in his assumptions as we shall see. All
the prophets claimed to be spokesmen of God; and so did
Jesus. But he felt that the truth of God was revealed

\(^1\) Mark 10:35-40
to him in a greater measure than it was revealed to the prophets. When the grandeur of his message overwhelmed him, he said something which intimated that one greater than a prophet was speaking; one greater than the institution, greater than the Temple, greater than Solomon was there.\(^1\) He felt that he was God's messenger in a unique sense. "He declares that John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets, but with himself there has come a new age so much more wonderfull that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John"\(^2\) He esteemed the privilege of living in the new age to be the matter of great rejoicing: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not."\(^3\)

He assumed also a great authority: to forgive sins. This office was considered to belong to God only. "Who can forgive sins but one, even God," said the scribes when Jesus had said to a sick man, "Son, thy sins are forgiven."\(^4\) The proclamation of sins being forgiven belonged to a priest, but Jesus assumed this office.

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\(^1\) Matthew 12:11, 12, 6.
\(^2\) Rall, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 189-190.
\(^4\) Mark 2:5, 7.
Teaching his disciples his great message, he gave them a command to go and give the message to the people. This act indicates also his assumed authority in the matters of religion. There was absoluteness in his beliefs and teachings. There was nothing in the world so sure as the fact that his teaching was God's teaching, and that God worked through him. The seriousness with which he took his task is revealed through his teaching. One definite point may be sufficient to mention here. When he was curing people the scribes accused him of driving out devils by the prince of the devils. Jesus was sure that it was the Spirit of God working in him and through him, and answered: "Verily I say unto you, all their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme: but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."¹

Thus Jesus, as a man of religion, reveals himself consciously and unconsciously to his disciples and to the public. The fundamental reason for all this revelation is found in his experience of God. He saw himself holding such a relationship to God as no one had experienced and therefore he felt an enormous responsibility in represent-

¹Mark 3:28, 29.
ing God to men and calling men to repentance and into the new life he was experiencing.

c. Jesus' Unique Sonship.

The previously mentioned experiences of Jesus in the at baptism, wilderness, and on the mountain top, indicate that he was such a great soul as could have such experiences. He had come to realize his most intimate relationship with his Father which we call a unique sonship. There was no disharmony between God's will and his own will. He showed to his disciples the need of repentance but there is no intimation that he himself ever repented. He was in perfect rest in his relationship with God and called others to participate in the same rest in God. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Then he indicates that men must learn of him how to find rest: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Then we read the words in which he reveals his unique sonship: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."\(^1\) Here he

\(^1\)Matthew 11:27-29.
indicates that he knew the Father in the way that no one else knew him. He also says that he reveals the Father. Jesus reveals his sonship also in the parable of the vineyard. All the secrets concerning God Jesus had learned in the school of obedience.

d. Jesus' Unique Obedience.

The unique sonship of Jesus involved unique obedience to the Father's will. Jesus understood that he was to be the Saviour and the Servant of men. This required humility and obedience, and as it later on proved, obedience "unto death, even the death of the cross." Saviourhood meant service. In some places when the synoptists refer to Jesus' Sonship, they join the thought with his saving and serving men. To serve men as God would serve was Jesus' task. He understood this to be the will of the Father and he was willing to obey that will. He said once when he was serving an individual: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work." In his obedience he gave, not only his service, but also himself for the realization of the Kingdom of God. He had gained this inspiration and knowledge both from study of the Scriptures and also from

1Matthew 21:33-46.
2Philippians 2:8.
3Matthew 18:11, 20:28; Mark 10:45.
4John 4:34.
his own communion with God.

As a man of religion his unique communion with God determined his unique religious teaching concerning God and his relation to man and man's relation to God and men's relation to each other. He saw everything through God.
IV. RELIGION AND GOD ACCORDING TO JESUS.

Although Jesus Christ was the founder of a religion called Christianity, it does not mean that he founded altogether a new religion. He inherited the faith of Judaism, but he enlivened and invigorated the Jewish religion so thoroughly that the old guards did not recognize it as their own religion. They rejected him as a heretic and also his teachings of God. To Jesus the God of the Hebrew prophets was the only God of heaven and earth. He believed in this God and loved him as his divine Father. Through his communion with his heavenly Father Jesus gained a new conception of God. In this sense he had a new religion and indeed a new doctrine which he indicated as his own by saying: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old . . . but I say unto you."¹ But willing to take no credit for the new doctrine he said to the Jews when they wondered how he knew letters having never studied in their more advanced schools: "My teachings are not mine, but his that sent me."² But before considering further the religion of Jesus it may be well to consider the background against which Jesus' idea of God may be considered.

¹Matthew 5:21-48.
²John 7:16.

The Hebrew prophets had purified their religious conception of God. During the time of the literary prophets the conception of God was gradually being refined. It, however, tended to become ritualistic and formal. In the time of Jesus this was especially true.

a. God Was Just but Forgiving Repentant Sinners.

The God of Israel had many great characteristics. He was Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Just, and Holy. Possessing all these attributes he, nevertheless, was a forgiving God to those who confessed their wrong doings and wanted to start a better life. Thus God was not only a God who saw everything, knew everything, was very powerful, just and holy, but also a God who had a tender heart toward his creation. This tender heartedness of God connoted even a closer term which was applied to God.

b. God Was Understood also as a Father.

The term Father was applied to the God of Israel. It suggested a closer relationship between God and man. This is intimated in a few places in the Old Testament.¹

¹Exodus 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:10, 64:8; Jer. 3:4,19.
The fear of the Lord is emphasized rather than the love of God, and yet an element of love is found there. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so Jehovah pitieth them that fear him,"¹ and like passages indicate that God possesses a capacity to love like a father.


a. The Influence of the Immediate Environment.

Jesus' home life undoubtedly had a great influence upon his mind when he was a growing boy. The God of the family was his God whom he learned to fear and love. The teaching of the Rabbis was another factor in forming the idea of God while attending the Synagogue school, as all the Jewish boys did. Undoubtedly he also came in contact with the Pharisees and Sadducees, the two main religious parties in Jesus' time. There was also a party of the Essenes, the farmer monks at that time, with their moral but somewhat peculiar doctrines. They were famous for their truthfulness and kindliness. Jesus undoubtedly knew the doctrine and customs of these monks. Some writers go even so far in their imagination as to say that Jesus belonged to the party of the Essenes and learned

¹Psalm 103:13.
many secrets from them. All these factors had their part in forming Jesus' conception of God whether positively or negatively while he was yet by his carpenter's bench. But while he was under the forementioned influences his mind was open to the new and greater channels of information and knowledge: he held communion with the living God, and in contemplation and prayer many things were revealed to him which may be plainly noticed in his later teaching. To him the new attributes of God were revealed more fully than to the prophets. They were eternal love and mercy. In the center of Jesus' religious thinking was God, a personal God.

b. God is a Personality.

Through his immediate environment Jesus had become indebted to the Old Testament in his idea of God. He knew that the presence of God was felt in history, but it was lost and consequently all such was directed towards the future. God is far off now, but will draw near in the future.¹ Jesus added something new to their conception of God. Not only did he vivify the prophetic conception of God, but he also taught that God was a purely spiritual and personal reality. This God was ever present, almighty,

¹Bousset, Jesus, p. 101.
the Lord of heaven and earth. The God who was in heaven was also the God of nature.  

1 "It was the vision of God that had made the prophets; their work began when they saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. But Jesus saw this Lord not merely in the glory of the temple, but in all the world's life. He was not merely the God before whom the flaming spirits cried, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', he was the God near at hand to help even the little child, and without whom not even the sparrow fell".  

2 He also indicated that God was an ever present spirit working in the souls of men.  

3 Applying the term "Person" to God, Sheldon writes of the meaning of the word person: "The word 'person' denotes a being characterized by self-knowledge and by self-determination or will. In the normal personality feeling is also doubtless fundamental."  

4 We may well assume that God is infinitely more than the noblest in human personality and therefore infinitely more capable of fellowship with human beings than the human beings are of fellowship between themselves. Jesus taught and indicated in his own life that God could be known and that men may commune with him.

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1 Matthew 5:45, 6:26, 30, 10:29.  
2 Hall, *The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 35.  
4 Sheldon, *System of Christian Doctrine*, p. 34.
c. God Could Be Known by Men.

To the God of Israel sacrifices were offered, petitions made and praises sung but he was not thought of as a close companion of man. God was thought of as a King who had great power to rule over the earth and heaven and who was to be feared. The fear of the Lord was important for it was the beginning of wisdom. In Jesus' teaching the greatness of God is not diminished nor is the element of fear eliminated but the attitude is changed. God is still the ruler of the universe, but the kind of ruler who may also be a Father and with whom men may have fellowship. He is still to be feared, not with a slavish terror but with a reverent awe. He is to be looked upon as a loving Being who is eager to commune with men and to do them good, who is more ready to help than men are willing to be helped. Jesus thought that God is infinite mercy and good will, and this good will of God is initiative; it is eager, active, redemptive. This was the central thought in Jesus' idea of God. He indicated this in his parables of the lost coin, the shepherd going after the lost one, and the father going to meet his returning son.¹ With a God like this, Jesus most certainly believed, men may have fellowship. His whole life was moulded by

this faith and God-experience, and his teachings reflected what he thought of God. His conception of God was the light in which he himself, his relation to God and to everything else. All this is indicated in the Gospels.

In the same Gospels we read also about the most common religious practice of Jesus, his prayer life. His whole life was a fellowship with God and the most wonderful experiences, according the the Gospel stories, Jesus had while he was praying.

3. God's Attitude toward man.

No prophet ever brought God so close to human life as Jesus did. No one ever told about God's love and tenderness so understandably as Jesus did. Therefore he is the greatest authority in the field of religion. He indicated that God's goodness is an active love. He was not the first who spoke of God's love, but he revealed the best. "Originality is not to be identified with mere novelty. It is to be remembered that, among notable teachers, he is the greatest who presents the truth the best, and not he who utters it first."¹

¹Battenhouse, The Bible Unlocked, p. 385.
a. God Is Like a Father.

Mention has already been made that in Jewish literature God was considered as a father who has pity upon his children, but Jesus makes the comparison more vivid and real. In his parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son, Jesus depicts God as one who is seeking that which is lost, and as a father waiting for his wayward son to return.\(^1\) Thus, although God is the King of the earth and heaven, he is not far off, nor does he treat his subjects as if they were slaves, or servants of his, but as children of a loving father. He is eager to forgive his erring children and to help them in all of their troubles.

Although Jesus revealed God's nature, like that of a father's, he emphasized also the justice of God's nature which is characteristic of a father's nature. Fatherhood involved authority. In the Lord's Prayer the forgiveness is based on a forgiving heart, that is, the one who wants to be forgiven, must also forgive. "Jesus emphasized the moral supremacy of God. The mercy of God is for him not a refuge for men who wish to sin and yet feel secure; it becomes rather a challenge, the summons

\(^1\)Luke 15:11-32.
to lead a life of good-will and to hold the standards by which in the end their life will be judged." ¹

b. God's Estimation of Man's Value.

If God's love is surpassing all love, then his estimation of man is surpassing all other estimations of man. Jesus understood that the loving God who ruled the heaven and earth was mindful of everything in his creation. No sparrow "shall fall on the ground without your Father," says Jesus, and then adds; "Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." ² He also says in that connection: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Jesus was sure that he was representing God's estimation of man's value when he said: "For what doeth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and to forfeit his life." ³ He compared an individual to the whole world and esteemed an individual imcomparably more than the whole world. The idea that God had created man in his own image lifted him in Jesus' estimation, above everything else. Man is a moral being and should act like a child of the Most High. ⁴ Institutions also must become subservient to man. ⁵ "The good man is the end for which the religious ordinances

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¹Eiselen, The Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 907a.
³Matthew 19:3-9.
⁴Mark 8:36.
⁵Mark 2:28.
exist; when they cease to serve that end, their value is lost."¹ Jesus said that men should be perfect like their heavenly Father is perfect.² There is the supreme value of personality expressed, as Branscomb suggests, a germ for modern personalistic philosophy.³ This being the attitude of God toward man it follows that man should have a corresponding attitude toward God. Through his own religious experiences Jesus had learned also this secret and taught it.

4. Man's Attitude Toward God.

Jesus had been taught, as were all the Jewish people, to obey the Law. That teaching was concerned with the externalities of the Law. The doing was the main thing and not the character of the doer. Jesus taught that what one is determines what one does. "By their fruits ye shall know them," says Jesus.⁴ One's heart might be full of anger and evil desire, but if that is not manifested in action the law is powerless concerning him. Jesus put emphasis always on the motives, rather than on the actions of the person. Humility of the nature, sincerity of the character, and hunger after higher things in life

¹Stevens, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 107.
²Matthew 5:48.
³Branscomb, The Teachings of Jesus, p. 155.
⁴Matthew 7:16.
was an ideal attitude of man toward God. Only a person who is hungry after righteousness is teachable. God can speak to him as he spoke to Jesus. He is after God's approval and not after men's admiration. He is not so much after various virtues but certain qualities of life. He is doing what Jesus has exhorted him to do, namely to seek first the divine things.\(^1\) God first, was Jesus' teaching in question. When man's relationship with God is like Jesus' relationship with God, that is, perfect obedience and trustful dependence, the growth of a similar character will be the result and will take care of itself. The prescribed formulas of worship may be a help in one's religious life if they are aids to help men to get closer contact with God and to better their characters. In the following we shall consider Jesus' attitude toward this phase of religion.

5. **Jesus' Attitude Toward the Temple and Scripture.**

a. **Jesus and the Temple.**

Jesus attended the Temple services. His parable of the Pharisee and the Publican indicates that he was acquainted with the doings in the temple. Also the story of the poor widow casting her mite into the treasury of

\(^{1}\text{Matthew 6:33.}\)
the Temple, it indicates that he was in the Temple, at this particular time, in the Court of the Women. The cleansing of the Temple at the close of his ministry indicates that he was very much concerned about what was done in the precincts of the Temple. He considered the Temple the House of God and insisted it should be revered as such.

But Jesus did not agree with everything that was done in the Temple. He allowed ritualism if it did not take the place of personal relationship between God and man. Nothing must be substituted for the vital personal relationship with God: not even the Temple with its ritualism and ceremonies, nor should the Law be exalted so that it would become an obstacle between God and man. In the following we shall see the attitude Jesus took toward the Scriptures.

b. Jesus and the Scripture.

Jesus was a student of his people's literature.

"He was educated in the whole literature of his people, a literature which included history, poetry, law, the

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1 Mark 12:41.
2 Matthew 21:12,13.
utterances of prophets and the epigrams of wise men."

He held the sacred Scriptures in great honor. The God of Israel spoke in the Prophets to his soul as to any sincere Jew's soul. He quoted the words of the Scriptures on various occasions showing that he allowed them a certain authority—and perhaps more so because he knew that his accusers held them to be the ultimate truth in every question. Some quotations, on such occasions as in his wilderness experiences, cleansing the Temple, and his prayer on the Cross in the words of the Scripture, indicate that certain portions of the Scriptures had found a deep place in his life and experiences.

Although Jesus understood that the Scriptures were inspired, still he did not hold them to be infallible. He deliberately subordinated some portions of the Scripture to others. He quotes from Deuteronomy and Leviticus as follows and subordinates all the Law and the prophets to it: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Then he added:

1 Branscomb, *The Message of Jesus*, p. 31.
2 Deut. 6:3, 6:15, 6:13; Isa. 58:7; Psalm 22:1.
3 Mark 12:28-31; Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:18.
"There is none other commandment greater than these."

Neither did he require obedience to the letter of the Law like the Jewish authorities in his time did. Jesus "persisted in making a man's relationship with God depend on spiritual, not ceremonial conditions." ¹

Jesus was above not only the Jewish ceremonial Law but also the whole of the law of Moses. He rejected much that was current in the interpretation of the Law, but the Scripture as a whole he insisted he had come to fulfil. He re-established the principles which underlay them by fulfilling the Law. "It was the spirit, not the letter, which Jesus approved and continued; the high conceptions of God and man and the noble principles of moral obligation which are taught in the Old Testament, Jesus reaffirmed as true and perpetuated for ever." ² Jesus placed himself above the Law by saying: "Ye have heard it said ... but I say unto you." ³ His authority was not the negative religion of the Old Testament but the positive religion which was the result of the deep sincere study and the most perfect communion with God. This new vision determined his relation to God, the Scriptures, the authorities, and to all people. He became the Prophet and the Master

¹ Fosdick, The Manhood of the Master, p. 112.
Teacher of all ages.


Jesus' trustful dependence on God left no place for worry in his life. His idea of God gave him an assurance that everything in the whole universe is under God's care: as he takes care of the sparrows and the lilies in the field, so he takes care of everything in the whole universe. There is no way of knowing how vast the universe was in Jesus' conception, but one thing was sure: no matter how vast the universe might be, God is great enough to take care of it. Concerning Jesus' conception of God's relation to the world, Battenhouse writes: "In His relation to the world God is the personal and perpetually creating Spirit, Whose existence is the sufficient cause of all life, Who is Himself imminent in all forms and manifestations of life, and Whose beneficient will is revealed in the creatures and laws of nature."¹ But Jesus was not so much concerned with God's relation to the world as he was concerned with God's relation with men. He was working with men introducing them to God, to get them in harmony with him. He understood that God's Spirit was working in men's hearts,

¹Battenhouse, The Bible Unlocked, p. 386.
causing men to hunger and thirst after righteousness.\(^1\)

And as God was working in men, so Jesus was working likewise as God's co-worker for men's salvation, for Jesus was concerned with men's temporal good, he was much more concerned about their eternal good and happiness.

7. Immortality.

Men of all ages have thought much about immortality. Even men who have confessed to be atheists have been greatly concerned with the question: "If a man die, shall he live again?"\(^2\) Men have also thought much about eternity which is closely related to immortality. They consider eternity as endless duration, or timelessness, or a combination of both. Immortality on the other hand means deathlessness and therefore involves eternity—while there may be eternity without immortality.

The belief in immortality did not originate with Jesus. The Veda, the sacred literature of the Hindus, proclaims that there is personal immortality and personal responsibility. The Chinese believe that when a person dies he returns to his family. The Egyptians likewise were

\(^1\) Matthew 5:6.
\(^2\) Job 14:14.
familiar with the question of immortality, for they provided for the dwelling place of the dead and believed in future judgement. Zoroaster believed and taught about the existence of the future world with its governing spirits. The American Indian also believed that he was to be governed after his death by the spirit who had to do with the creation of his family. The students of the races of mankind have found the belief in immortality quite universal. In earlier Judaism, however, the question of individual immortality had received very little attention so far as the records are concerned. Some mentions are made concerning immortality both of good and of evil men but an activity in Sheol is denied. Later on the thought was developed by the apocalyptic type of literature, and in Jesus' time that belief was prevalent. It remained for Jesus to bring "immortality to light" from its dimness. As a man of religion Jesus was concerned not only with man's life with God in this life, but also in the life to come. He thought in terms of immortality and taught accordingly.

a. Jesus' Conception of Life and Death.

1 M'clintock, Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Encyclopaedia, pp. 513-515.
2 Psalm 49: , 73:18-25
3 Job 14:21, 25:5; Ps. 88:12, 94:17, 115:17; Ecclesiastes 9:10.
Jesus taught that man's life is a gracious gift of God and as such has a great value. Life is sacred and should be treated as a sacred gift. Life is greater than anything that is temporal: life is eternal in its nature. Personal existence after death was a fact with Jesus. After noticing the Centurion's faith, when he had asked Jesus to come to cure his servant, Jesus said: "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."\(^1\) To the kind of God Jesus believed in this was possible.

We do not have very many places where Jesus speaks of death, but from some sayings may be inferred his thought concerning death. Luke tells of a parable (some Bible students call it an example) of the rich man and Lazarus in which the question of death comes into consideration.\(^2\) Here our Lord indicates that death was only a natural consequence but what happened after death was the consequence of the life lived while on earth. Death was only a door and nothing was changed while going through it. Each party went to his own place suitable to his character. Thus real death is an alienation from God.

\(^1\)Matthew 8:11.
Luke tells us an incident which happened while Jesus was hanging on the cross between two thieves. One of the thieves rebuked the other thief who reviled Jesus and then said to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." To this Jesus answered: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."\(^1\) This again indicates that death is only a door to another world.

b. Jesus' Conception of Eternal Life.

This life, although imperfect, is great in fellowship with God, but the life to come is still greater for the will of God will be the only law in that life. Understanding God's character the way Jesus did it was natural to think of eternal life as Jesus thought: God is immortal and so must his children be immortal. God is a loving Father but his character requires obedience to the highest moral laws which are his laws. Whole heartedness was required in entering into fellowship with God,\(^2\) as well as keeping fellowship with God.\(^3\) Those who had been in fellowship with God in this life, giving up everything for the Kingdom of God's sake according to the teachings

\(^3\)Luke 9:23.
of Jesus, were to have blessings in this life and then eternal life.\(^1\) Jesus did not speak much, as far as the synoptic records are concerned, about the life to come, but he indicated unmistakably the condition under which men may enter into the life eternal. Whole hearted faithfulness and loyalty were absolutely necessary requirements for entering into eternal life.\(^2\) This life was considered subservient not only to the ideals Jesus taught, but also to the life which was to follow this life and which was also as a reward to the faithful ones. To live selfishly is to destroy life; to use it rightly is to save it.\(^3\)

John's Gospel connects eternal life with fellowship with Jesus. "...whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life."\(^4\) It is also indicated that Jesus has eternal life and he gives that life to his own,\(^5\) and that this eternal life is knowing God and knowing him.\(^6\)

In the synoptic Gospels eternal life is often connected with the Kingdom of God idea which is the embodiment of Jesus' teachings. In the following we shall consider Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom of God and men's relation to it.

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\(^1\)Matthew 19:29.  
\(^2\)Matthew 25:21-30.  
\(^3\)Mark 8:34-38.  
\(^4\)John 3:15.  
\(^6\)John 17:3.
8. The Kingdom of God as an Expression of Jesus' Teaching.

The Kingdom of God idea was the first and the last thing in Jesus' thinking. His religious thinking found expression in that thought. As a man of religion he was concerned with the rule of God in human lives and in the world. The Kingdom of God was the great goal toward which all his teachings and actions were directed.

The phrase "Kingdom of God" had not originated with Jesus. It belonged to popular religious phraseology. Joseph of Arimathaea is spoken of as looking for the Kingdom of God. The Hebrews thought Jehovah also as a King. Jehovah was regarded as Israel's divine King. Isaiah called Jehovah a King. In Hebrew thinking God as a King was far off in his majesty, but in Jesus thinking he was near. It has been already mentioned that he understood God as a loving Father, and therefore near. According to Luke, Jesus once said: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."^1

Mark tells that Jesus began his ministry by preaching the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist had begun to preach the Kingdom of God's message, but Jesus continued

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1 Isaiah 6:5.
3 Mark 11:14,15.
preaching the same message. In the Gospel records there are three terms used: Kingdom, Kingdom of Heaven, and Kingdom of God. Matthew prefers the term Kingdom of Heaven. In John's Gospel the term Kingdom of heaven is used only twice.\(^1\) John's favorite term is "Eternal Life". The terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are used interchangeably in the Synoptic Gospels and presumably "eternal life" in the Fourth Gospel is John's equivalent for these synoptic phrases.

The thought has been often expressed that Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom of God grew largely out of his own religious experiences which were affected by influences both from within and without, and that his vision of the Kingdom was shaped thereby in his own soul and so he devoted himself to meet the task of building the Kingdom.\(^2\) We may well presume that Jesus was familiar with the history of the past and knew that kingdoms founded on force did not have long endurance. Knowing God's character, and experiencing his love in his soul, and knowing the human heart, its strength and weaknesses in general, he had become convinced that the only power which is invincible is God's love. All the efforts initiated by human mind had little or no success. There was much wrong to be righted, much darkness to be lighted, much sickness to be healed, and therefore nothing less than God's rule, the rule of his love and righteousness.

\(^1\) John 3:5, 18:36.
\(^2\) Bosworth, The Life and Teachings of Jesus, p. 150.
would be sufficient. This was the reason why Jesus was so deeply concerned with the coming of the Kingdom of God.¹

a. The Time and Place of the Kingdom.

According to the Jews all history was divided into two parts: present and future. The present time is evil: the future will be good, for God is going to rule. Jesus might have shared that common thought, but at the same time he was sure that the time was fulfilled for the Kingdom of God to come, and therefore he proclaimed that it was at hand.

(1). Near at Hand.

Jesus preached: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel."² To indicate that the Kingdom of God was very near, Jesus said on another occasion: "Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God come with power."³ He also taught his disciples to pray: "Thy Kingdom come."⁴ But Jesus also indicated that although the Kingdom of God is at hand, it had in some respects come already. Jesus saw the Kingdom coming,

¹Kent, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus*, p. 156.
²Mark 1:15.   ³Mark 9:1.   ⁴Matthew 6:10.
proclaimed it, and led men into it. Thus in a certain sense it had come already. "Jesus' conception of the Kingdom is too rich to be confined in a single formula. The ministry of Jesus begins with the proclamation of the coming Kingdom, but it does not end there."¹

(2). Here and Now.

There were several signs indicating that the rule of God was already present. They are summed up in the message of Jesus sent to John: "Go tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them."² The Kingdom of God was not in political power nor any such outward manifestation as marked the rule of the kings of his day, but in the spiritual power to release men from the bondage of sin and to bring them into fellowship with God. Jesus indicated the presence of the Kingdom by saying: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence takt it by force."³ Not only was the Kingdom of God near at

¹Rall, The Teachings of Jesus, p. 167.
²Matthew 11:4-5.
³Matthew 11:12.
hand nor partly present, but also its greatness was to be manifested in the future. (Of this, mention will be made later on.) Thus, according to its nature, the Kingdom is both within and without.

b. The Kingdom of God Is Internal and External.

There is a difference of opinion among the New Testament scholars concerning the question what Jesus meant by the term Kingdom of God. Some think that Jesus was in every sense a man of his own age and race and expected an establishment of a temporal kingdom, he himself being the head of that kingdom. Others think that Jesus was an apocalyptist who thought that a supernatural kingdom was to be established miraculously. Still others think that Jesus worked for the purpose of establishing a world-wide spiritual kingdom, the rule of God. Jesus' conception of the matter seems to be that the Kingdom of God is an inner life in men. He answered the question of the Pharisees concerning the Kingdom: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you." It was manifested as already mentioned in forgiving sins and in conquering evil in men's lives. And although it

1Kent, Life and Teachings of Jesus, p. 160.
was spiritual it was not altogether other-worldly. "Many think," writes Deissmann, "that the Kingdom of God is a purely other-worldly matter and has nothing to do with this world." The Greek scholars say that the meaning of the text is that "the origin of the Kingdom of God is not from this world, that is, not from the world which is under the rule of Satan." It was therefore inward and spiritual, but manifested externally in the lives of men in whom the principles of the Kingdom were operating. It was a new life, "eternal life", as John puts it so often. There was no sign of political power or any outer authority, but it was to be ruled from within as its growth was from within.

c. The Kingdom of God Is Not Static but Growing.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. This suggests a small beginning and a possibility of growth. In another parable Jesus compared the "sons of the Kingdom" to a good seed, indicating that men had a part in the growing of the Kingdom of God. He also compared the Kingdom of God to a leaven which has a prevailing influence. This influence was to pervade not only the lives of the individuals but also the society of men.

d. The Entrance Into the Kingdom of God and Its Requirements.

There is no society without its definite requirements. So there are also definite requirements concerning the entering and remaining in the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught that men should seek the Kingdom of God before everything else, for only those who seek shall find.

(1). Through Repentance and Sacrifice.

The entrance into the Kingdom of God is through repentance. One must leave his selfish and sinful ways and become childlike in his attitude toward the Kingdom of God. Jesus said: "Except ye return, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."¹ The nature of the Kingdom of God also requires that before one may enter into it he must sacrifice and deny all after which men in the world are seeking. No one was deemed worthy of the Kingdom of God who did not deem the sacrifice of all Kingdom of God worth the else. Jesus taught plainly that those who were not willing to deny themselves could not be his disciples nor participators of the Gospel.² Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a pearl of great price for

¹ Matthew 18:3.
² Mark 8:34,35.
sake of which everything else could be sold in order to buy that pearl.\(^1\) It was also through continual self sacrifice that one became useful in the Kingdom of God and remained in it.

(2). Through Service.

It was generally understood that the greatest is he who has the greatest number of servants, but Jesus taught that he is the greatest who serves the most. Jesus indicated this by being a servant. He was the servant depicted by the prophet of old.\(^2\) When his ministry was at its close he said that he was among his disciples as one who serves, and also: "The Son of man also came not to be ministered unto but to minister."\(^3\) He set this as the standard of greatness for all times. The spirit of sacrifice and service was required in the realization of the Kingdom for that was the principle of the Kingdom of God.

e. Jesus Gave not only His Service but Himself.

To realize the idea of the Kingdom of God, Jesus gave not only his service but himself. Nothing was too costly if only the rule of God were realized. In one sense

the Kingdom of God was as a gift of God to men. Jesus said: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." But at the same time it was to be acquired. Men were to pray for it: "Thy kingdom come," and they had to work for it to realize it. They were to preach the Good News of the kingdom to the people and they had to teach people the ways of the law of love. They were to call people into the Kingdom. Jesus had taught the principles of love and service, of laying down one's life for his and the Kingdom's sake. He himself practiced what he preached: He gave his life as a "ransom for many". The rewards for service in behalf of the Kingdom of God were to follow; and in fact his disciples were enjoying in some measure the rewards already while they were working in the Kingdom's business.

f. The Rewards of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God was priceless. "Better bodily dismemberment than miss the Kingdom." Gaining the Kingdom guaranteed the greatest rewards. To be sure Jesus did not teach that wealth or immunity from sufferings will be

guaranteed for those who serve in the Kingdom, for Jesus rejected the mercenary doctrine of reward, but much more than that he promised, namely, the fuller and richer life and peace in the fellowship with God and his fatherly care.\(^1\) God who sees in secret will reward openly. His reward transcends even time for the fuller reward will be given in heaven.\(^2\) Even amidst sufferings those who are in right relationship with God may be glad: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."\(^3\)

Only he who was willing to become a servant of servants was entitled to become the head, the Messiah of the Kingdom of God. We have earlier mentioned that he had received a Messianic call and that he understood that he was the anointed One.

g. Jesus, the Messiah in the Kingdom of God.

We have marked already that Jesus had rejected the idea of becoming a leader in a political kingdom. His Kingdom was to be spiritual and through its spiritual power it was to influence the lives of men in every field of activity.

\(^{1}\)Matthew 6:27–34.
\(^{2}\)Mark 10:30b.
\(^{3}\)Matthew 5:12a.
The kind of Kingdom expected would determine the kind of Messiah. As the Kingdom was spiritual, so was the Messiah to be. It was to be the Kingdom of righteousness and of loving service. "His idea of the Kingship was that of Plato; he only is the true King whose life is given for his people. Kingship is service."\(^1\) Here the word "Kingship" may be understood as "Messianic". Deissmann thinks that Jesus' Messianic consciousness cannot be solved by his teachings because it is a secret. If it is possible to a certain extent to understand it must be understood from the point of view of his communion with God.\(^2\) The communion with God was naturally the secret of his new teaching and his power and in that was also the secret of his Messiahship. The result of his communion with God was that he was conscious of his calling. He felt a great urge to preach his message to the people. He felt that he was called to cast fire upon earth, to call sinners to repentance and to save them because they were lost.\(^3\) He knew that his message was not the message of peace so far as the political powers were concerned: it was a challenge, a sword.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Montefiore, Religious Teachings of Jesus, p. 136.  
\(^4\)Matthew 10:34.
conflict with the ruling powers and therefore of his passion and cross. According to Bosworth, "It may be... that he had combined the picture of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah with the Son of man". (Isa. 53:)\(^1\)

The life and light of God which had found expression in Jesus were the life and light of men, but also the judgment of men. It was generally believed that there was to be a judgment at the end of the Age. Jesus also taught so, but he indicated that he was to be the Judge and that the truth he taught was to be the standard by which men will be judged.\(^2\) He indicated this eschatological view by some parables such as the parables of the harvest and the net, pictured from the farm and seamen's life.\(^3\)

The kind of Kingdom expected would determine the Messiah and the kind of law in the Kingdom. God was the supreme ruler and the law in the Kingdom was according to his character. In the following we shall consider some of the ethical principles Jesus taught, namely, the relation between man and man in the Kingdom of God.

\(^1\) Bosworth, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus*, p. 239.
\(^2\) Matthew 25:31-46.
\(^3\) Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Mark 13:47-50.
V. INFLUENCE OF RELIGION WITH JESUS OVER ETHICS.

It has been emphasized already that Jesus was primarily a man of religion and from that point of view we have studied his teachings concerning God and his relation to man and man's relation to God. It is from this point of view that we shall continue our study when we consider Jesus' principles of conduct between man and man. There is a tendency to separate Jesus' teachings of religion and his teachings of ethics, but in reality these two phases cannot be taken apart from each other. All Jesus' teachings were determined by his understanding of the character of God. Bousset writes in regard to this relation: "Let us observe how intimately and in what mutual dependence the moral and the religious are interwoven throughout his preaching. His faith becomes inconceivable detached from his morality, and conversely the latter is only conceivable on the ground of his faith. . . . The religious and moral forces are intertwined in endless harmony; a freed religion and freed morality join in indissoluble alliance and flow on in one strong, united stream."1 It was the character of God which demanded that men should live in harmony with themselves as well as that men

1Bousset, Jesus, pp. 163-164.
should live in harmony with God. As he taught the Fatherhood of God, so also he taught the brotherhood of man. Jesus saw individuals in the presence and in the light of God. He saw all commandment embodied in two great commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."¹ The right relation between men depended on the right relation between God and man. Love is the binding power in Jesus' ethics. The old law said: Thou shalt not do, or, Thou shalt do, but the new law says: Love!

1. Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself.

The second commandment is "like unto" the first. These are the greatest commandments but their greatness depends on their interrelation to each other. One cannot love God and be indifferent toward his fellow men, nor can any one have right relationship with his fellow men unless he loves God and does his will; for God's love involves the love of men.

In the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples,

¹Matthew 22:35-40.
according to Matthew, the very beginning words are: "Our Father". In the same prayer the forgiveness of God is made dependent on the forgiving heart of one who prays for forgiveness: "as we also forgive our debtors."

Then Jesus adds: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."¹ Jesus spoke of this matter also in a form of a parable where he shows that unforgiving spirit towards fellow men imprisons the soul of the unforgiving man.² Loving God above all and his fellow men as himself, one is participating in the character of his heavenly Father.

Not only should man forgive his fellow men, but he should love even his enemies. No one before Jesus had given this commandment. Jewish ethics say: "Help and do good to your enemy wherever occasion offers",³ but Jesus said: "Love your enemies."⁴ The reason why Jesus taught that was because he understood that God's character was like that. Doing this, man is participating in God's character and becoming like him. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."⁵

In the great family of God there must be certain responsibility manifested in conduct among the members of the family. We call this sharing principle a stewardship.

2. Stewardship.

Man cannot love God above all and his neighbor as himself without becoming a steward.

a. Stewardship of Truth and Life.

God is the giver and man is the receiver. "Stewardship refers to all that a man is and all that he has, for there is not one thing that he has not gotten from God, nor one thing for which he is not responsible to God.\(^1\) Jesus' disciples were responsible for the truth he had taught them. That was a great treasure trusted to them. A person thus entrusted was "like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."\(^2\) The truth, the secret life in God, was like a seed which was not to be hoarded but scattered.\(^3\) The same principle of stewardship applies to everything else that a man possesses.

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\(^1\) Rall, The Teachings of Jesus, p. 140.
\(^2\) Matthew 13:51-52.
\(^3\) Mark 4:1-9.
b. Stewardship of Wealth.

Men have not been intended to become owners but stewards. That which men call their own now has been claimed by some one else before they called it their own, and soon some one else will put his stamp on it. Jesus considered the world as God's world and taught that it should be used as such. He gave a message of stewardship in the parable of talents, and also spoke of unfaithful and faithful servants. He tells another story of an unrighteous steward, commending the unrighteous steward because he was so wise in his unrighteousness; so the children of light were to be wise in their faithfulness.

Possessions, no matter in what form, bring responsibility through their influence. Wealth represented power and influence in the world also in the time of Jesus, but to him it meant stewardship and responsibility. Wealth was not to be used selfishly but for the good of one's fellow men. Thus even in the matters of wealth Jesus taught in terms of God's character. But not less so concerning family life, the basis of society.

3. The Family Life.

1Matthew 25:14-30, 24:45-51.
In the Greek and Roman world, the family life was not highly valued. Branscomb thinks that Greek and Roman influence being opposite to the Jewish idea of sex relations, finally changed the Jewish idea in this sphere.¹ If that were so the influence was only partial for in Jesus' time the family was still the strength of the Jewish society. Jesus did not consider it necessary to teach family relations, because Rabbis were teaching those matters, but he, nevertheless, revealed his conception concerning family life. He considered marriage as a sacred matter. "Marriage, he declares, is one of the goals of the divine purpose revealed in the natural world from the beginning, for, since human beings would cease to exist without it, man and woman are so created that they naturally enter into this sacred relation and are bound together by the closest bond known to society - that of parenthood."²

In general Jesus taught principles and not rules of conduct, but in the question of marriage he gave a rule in a definite situation. When the question of divorce was presented to him he stated what he considered a basis and the only basis for divorce.³ "Perhaps Jesus was not so much condemning either divorce or remarriage as the

²Kent, Jesus' Principles of Living, p. 87.
³Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11-12.
combination of the two in a divorce secured for the immediate marriage. Concerning other relations in family life, Jesus did not give any definite instructions, but he gave the "Golden Rule", which may be applicable in any situation arising in human life.

4. Men's Relation to Each Other.

If men would love each other as they should they would not need any rule - not even the "Golden Rule" - for love would create its own rules. "Love and do anything you want to", said Augustine. In regard to man's duty to his neighbor Jesus based his teaching on the principle of love stated in the Sermon on the Mount. He might have dealt in everyday affairs with the people who were both friendly and otherwise and reached the conclusion, that, as God's will and way of doing, love is the strongest motive in dealing with people both bad and good. The best thing to do even with an enemy is to love him. It was God's way of dealing with men. He loved his children and forgave them their sins, so also men were to do to each other.

It was not only the act with which Jesus was

1Robinson, The Sayings of Jesus, p. 165.
2Matthew 7:12.
concerned, but the motive from which the act resulted. Anger with Jesus was the same as murder, and impure thoughts the same as adultery. A judging spirit brought upon itself judgment, and therefore should be avoided. The question of low motives was a question of character. If men were in God's presence, they would feel a purifying effect of his love, and thus goodwill toward each other would be the result, and they would feel responsibility toward each other.


Jesus was keenly conscious of the fact that men should be responsible not only for each other, but also for society as a whole. It was his conception of God's character which demanded that. In the family question which we have already discussed, Jesus indicated very clearly the responsibility of thoughtless conduct of the parties involved. How easily one may cause another to sin, and to make him or her a menace to society is indicated in Jesus' thought on the divorce question.

Men have obligations not only to home circles, but also to society in the other fields of activity. Jesus

1 Matthew 7:1
himself supported the Temple, although he was not very enthusiastic about it. 1 When the Pharisees had planned to entrap Jesus by the question regarding tax paying to the Roman government, he indicated, that when they were under the protection of Caesar they had some obligation to him. They should render him taxes.

Man is responsible to society not only in his domestic affairs and his duties to the institutions and governments, but also the poor and helpless. Jesus taught this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. 2 He also indicated how men ought to be careful not to offend any of the little ones, children or the weak, in their attitude toward God or otherwise. The seriousness with which Jesus spoke about this is indicated in the words: "But whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea." 3 Jesus was greatly interested in individuals, in the "lost sheep of Israel." He said that he was sent for that purpose, and he taught others the importance of finding the lost ones. All these teachings of man's relation to man

1 Matthew 17:24-27.
were phases of his Kingdom's teaching. It was natural to
that his teaching in regard to the Kingdom of God should
include all he had said in the field of ethics or con­
cerning the relations between man and man.

Only the Prophet and the Master Teacher of all
the ages was and is able to participate in the life of
God, and to teach people as he taught, taking into con­
sideration the whole man and not only one phase of his
caracter, the way of life which continually emancipates
man from the degrading forces which bind him, and leads
him into the ways of abundant life here and hereafter.
VI. SUMMARY

We began with the thought that man is incurably religious, and that men in general have some religious experiences and certain conception of religion. No one knows the genesis of religion. Students of mankind think differently of the question, reflecting mainly their personal characteristics in the guesses. In comparative study of religions, the Christian religion has appeared to be superior to all others.

Jesus, the Founder of Christianity, was a man or religion more so than any other character in human history. Although he was familiar with the Jewish literature and was influenced by his environment, his home and Rabbinic teaching, his religious conceptions were determined but partly by them. The source of his conception of God was his religious experiences with God. We have mentioned three different religious experiences of Jesus: Baptismal, Wilderness and Transfiguration experiences. In his Baptismal experience, he received a definite call to his life's task. In the Wilderness experience, he was praying and meditating over the call received in baptism and the possible fulfilment of the same. His
decision was to become a servant of men. In the Trans-
figuration experience probably the thought of becoming a
suffering Messiah was settled and that was the reason of
the radiant, joyous victory.

Some more evidence that Jesus was a man of
religion is given by his conscious revelation of himself
as the Messiah, and his unconscious revelation by assuming
that he was greater than a prophet, a king, and a Temple,
and by assuming authority to forgive sins, sending out
his disciples with superior message, and by indicating
that those who blasphemed the Spirit that was in him, blas-
phemed God's Spirit which was an unpardonable sin.

Another phase of the fact that Jesus was a man
of religious experience was his unique Sonship experience.
In his perfect harmony with God he had found a rest into
which relation he also called others to come. He indicated
that no one knows the Father in the same measure he knows,
and that the Father only knew him fully. He also revealed
his unique Sonship in his parable of the Vineyard, indicat-
ing that he was the son in that parable. As he was unique
in Sonship, so also was he unique in obedience. It was
his meat to do his Father's will. From this unique rela-
tionship with God grew his religion and his religious
teaching.
Jesus built his religion upon the foundation the prophets had laid already. He had inherited the faith of Judaism, but adding his own conception of God to the teachings of Judaism he had created a new religion with life and light. God was a great personality, a spiritual, personal reality, who, although the God of heaven, was also the God of nature. This God could be known by men and men could have a communion with him in prayer and meditation like children with their father. God was a loving and forgiving Father, ever near and ever ready to help. No sparrow would fall to the ground without his knowing it; how much more of value then were men than the sparrows! A God like this was the God of Jesus.

It has already been mentioned that Jesus inherited much of his religion from his race, but added new conceptions to it. Concerning the ceremonial phase of religion, the God of Jesus did not require ceremonial worship as the Jehovah of Israel did, that is, as it was believed he did. Although Jesus had a different conception of God from that of his people, still he attended the worship in the Temple and synagogues "as was his custom." He seemingly allowed ritualism if it did not take place of the vital relation between God and man. Worship to Jesus meant personal relation between God and man.
In response to God's attitude toward man, Jesus taught what he had experienced in his communion with God. Over against the Jewish teaching that man ought to do certain things in Jehovah's service, Jesus taught that it is more important to be good than to do good. "By their fruits ye shall know them," he said.

As his attitude to the Temple with its ritualism was critical, so also was it toward the Scriptures. He selected his Bible. Some parts were close to his heart, giving him inspiration, strength, courage, and consolation as in the wilderness experience, debating with the Scribes and Sadducees, Gethsemane, and Calvary experiences have shown. Some parts of the Scriptures he overlooked and other parts criticised and completed or developed. He wanted to get the inner meaning of the Scriptures explained and put into practice.

Knowing the character of God, both from studying what others had said or written about him, and primarily through his own experience of God, he had a way of knowing more about God than anybody ever had known. He understood God to be the Ruler of the Universe but at the same time he was the Father and the Friend of men.

In the light of a God like this Jesus saw all
things possible. One was that of immortality: a life after physical death. God as Jesus understood him was immortal and eternal, and his children were to be like their Father, immortal. This life was to be eternal with their Father.

Although Jesus knew that a full life was waiting for God's children in the life to come, he was most anxious to have God's rule in the hearts of men also in this world. He preached and he worked for that purpose - he gave his life for the realization of that rule of God which he called the Kingdom of God. He knew that this Kingdom was partly present, but its full reign was to be in the future in the lives of men in this world and in the world to come. Repentance and submission to God's will were the requirements at the entrance to the Kingdom and sacrifice and loving service were the practices of the Kingdom for which peace and joy in the communion with God were the reward.

Jesus did not teach only how men were to get in good relation with God, but also how men were to live among themselves. The ethical teachings of Jesus were interwoven with his religious teachings and inseparable from them. It was God's character which demanded such relation between man and man as the Prophet and the Master Teacher of all the ages brought forth in the Sermon on the Mount.
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COMMENTARIES


