

July 31, 2006 – Subject: Spirit.

Dear Friends: Mary Baker Eddy gave her students 26 subjects for weekly Bible Lessons, to be covered twice yearly. Flowing through the year in her order of the subjects, we hereby present fresh views of each one by outstanding Christian Scientists. In this way, we hope to partake with you of new unfoldments of her infinite revelation.

Our selection this week is from: A SCIENTIST OPENS HIS BIBLE by Clifford and Daisy Stamp.

THE SECOND DAY (3): DISCERN THE SPIRITUAL FACTOR BEHIND THE HUMAN EXPRESSION

Let us now examine this second day, which describes symbolically that activity which we shall learn to classify under the heading of Spirit.

In all that we have just considered, we can see that the great impulsion of Spirit is towards progress,— the progress of man towards his increasing recognition of the spiritual factor as the one governing factor of his life. Through this progressive impulse man is always receiving advanced ideas, and to be advanced they must be less material and more spiritual in purpose. Every stage of progress has come about through man being impelled towards his natal and natural spiritual being.

So as we read the first verse (first, that is, to our way of approach) of this second day, we can readily agree that the “evening and morning” of Spirit, or its one main purpose is to lead man forward along the path of progress.

The verse reads, *“And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.”*

The Meaning of the Firmament

Having admitted that the major purpose of Spirit is to impel men to recognize the spiritual influence in their lives and the blessings it brings, let us see what the firmament, which God named Heaven, has to do with this. It will be remembered that the firmament was a name for the heavens in those days, and it was thought to be a hollow vault, which separated the waters above it from the waters beneath it.

The cultured spiritual thinkers who wrote this Genesis story used the firmament as a symbol. We have seen that they were dealing wholly with thought-processes and used material phenomena simply as symbols for their teaching, – in the same way as Jesus used the mustard seed and the lily of the field to illustrate states of thought.

The firmament clearly represented to them that quality of understanding, which enables us to distinguish values and keep them distinct, to discern the actual purpose of anything, to perceive what it is and what it is not.

The meaning of the Greek word used in the Septuagint to correspond with the Latin firmamentum of the Vulgate describes what they had in mind: “something solid, a foundation.” These seers knew that an understanding of life based on the ability to discern the spiritual factor is the only type of understanding, which will stand the test of time, and be “something solid,” “a foundation” for all true progress.

Unless the child, for instance, learns to discern the higher spiritual motive at the back of the care and kindness which it receives from its mother, it will never make any progress in its own understanding of motherhood.

The Firmament Named Heaven

Heaven means harmony, and any condition which we call heavenly is one which to us embraces a perfect sense of harmony and consequently of happiness. So the words “And God called the firmament Heaven” imply that when anyone has attained to this measure of understanding, which gauges all things on the basis of the spiritual factor, which impels them, he has found the secret of heavenly or harmonious thought-processes. He is able to go beyond the superficial reading of experience, and who can be satisfied with mere appearances? Who wants to go no further than accepting the surface picture of life? Surely no one normal, for a man in any walk of life recognizes that unless he goes beneath the surface readings, he is liable to be badly misled and cannot properly understand or appreciate even what those surface readings are telling him.

This verse is describing the third motion in this day of Spirit, and therefore it must come under the heading of Spirit operating as Soul. Even that naming – “And God called the firmament Heaven” – conveys a sense of Soul, for as we have seen, the true identifying or naming of anything depends on qualities which we come to classify

under the term Soul, in contradistinction to the misleadings or misnamings of the senses. Moreover, when we look for the spiritual reason behind phenomena, we are bound to use processes of thought, which we have admitted to be impelled by Soul, as opposed to physical sense. We are bound to rebuke and silence the cries and claims of the senses with a higher, a deeper, understanding.

Paul wrote, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him: But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man, which is in him? ... the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. "

The Water Turned into Wine

Was it not this spiritual discernment, this "firmament named Heaven," which the Master exercised at the wedding feast (described in the second chapter of John's Gospel) when he turned the water into wine?

On being told that there was no more wine, Jesus must have looked beyond the immediate picture of a good human marriage, which, because it was only this, could run short of its inspiration, its real "wine." He surely looked past this to the spiritual fact of man's individual completeness which lay behind it; and therefore he discerned in that wedding the happifying picture of two whole units coming together to, merge their wholeness in the obvious increase of joy and strength of purpose which this would bring. He did not see two incomplete units coming together to lean on each other in an endeavor to find wholeness, for it would be by that very leaning that they would put certain strains on one another which could deprive them of the full joy of expression, – dry up their "wine" of inspiration.

Because of this clear discernment, the Master was able to bring into complete subjection the human symbol for expressing the happiness and inspiration of the occasion, – the wine. His "firmament" of understanding, his perception of the spiritual factor at the back of the wedding, was indeed "heaven," not only to him but also to all who were present.

From Strength to Strength

A man who looks at the whole of human life, as Jesus did, with a desire to see through it the signs and teachings of a fundamental Spirit Cause, is one who will go from strength to strength and finally become convinced of the allness and onliness of Spirit. As time and experience go on, he will find himself agreeing more and more with that statement of the Master's already quoted: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

He will also be the best judge of this world's values, the best confidant, the finest adviser, and the greatest and most appreciative of friends. And why? Because he will always be able to see the fundamental reason, the higher impulse, at the back of all activity and thought-inclination. He will not judge by appearances, but by the forces, which he will have learnt to discern beneath the appearances; and those forces without exception are always found to be spiritual. The conviction of this spiritual impulse at the back of all human phenomena will give any man a serenity, which will establish him in heaven.

The great rule of life's game implied in this verse is that if you want to find heaven here, you must be prepared to admit that the only actual thing going on is the spiritual expression by spiritual man of the one Spirit. You must then demand of all human activity and phenomena that they reveal to you this vast purpose; and when you have made this demand upon yourself and the great stage before you, you will gradually come to translate surface readings back to higher impulses and instincts, and then from higher impulses and instincts back to the realization of one fundamental Cause expressing itself through all its creation.

Looking thus, as the poet would have it, "through nature up to nature's God," you will come so to admit that fundamental Cause and its expression that you will then turn wholly to that Cause in your reckonings and reason from it down to a translation of its effect. Then at last will you possess the true firmament, the immense strength of conviction such as that master thinker Jesus possessed. Just as he did at the wedding feast and on so many other occasions, you will be able to demand of the phenomena before you a harmonious subjection or healthy response to the spiritual impulses, which you will know to be at the back of, and the reason for these phenomena. Then will you understand even more fully why these

clear teachers wrote, “And God called the firmament Heaven.” And you will also see how this fits into the overall “evening and morning” purpose of Spirit to bring about real progress.

THE SECOND DAY (2): DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE HIGHER SPIRITUAL IMPULSE AND ITS HUMAN EXPRESSION

We now come to the verse, which must describe Spirit as Spirit, – Spirit as the essence of itself, – for that is the order of the placing of our symbolic names for God.

The verse reads, *“And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above ‘the firmament: and it was so.”*

As we have seen, the term “waters” was used to symbolize states of thought as yet elementary in their realizations of fundamental fact. These are never static and fixed – that is why waters symbolize them so aptly – but change with the tides of progress through which our understanding grows.

In this second movement of the second day, or Spirit symbol, we come face to face with a major purpose of Spirit, a veritable “Spirit plus” purpose or Spirit operating as Spirit to establish a basis for logical reasoning in the calculus of ideas. Man is thereby impelled to distinguish between his “waters beneath,” those everyday human activities by which he is deeming himself to himself here on earth, and his “waters above,” his growing understanding of the fundamental spiritual activity which impels those lower patternings. Through distinguishing between them, and keeping them distinct and separate in his thought, he recognizes the true value of each.

All constructive reasoning is based on understanding the value of each of these spheres. First, there are the “waters above,” – the actual spiritual impulses of man as dimly discerned and deemed by men, – and then there are the “waters beneath,” – the effect of this spiritual animus on all the actions and reactions of men in their responses to it in daily living.

The recognition of these two spheres, and their separation through the use of that clear, strong understanding symbolized by the firmament, will enable men to be active in the calculus of dynamic spiritual reasoning, as the Master was. Did he not set human forms of expression in proper shape and order through recognizing the

spiritual impulses, which governed them, and then restoring a recognition and use of those spiritual impulses to those who needed it?

The Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand

We read, for instance, in the sixth chapter of Luke's Gospel that when Jesus told a man with a withered hand to stretch it forth, the aroused mentality of the patient caused him to do so and thus to restore the purpose of his human hand. Was not Jesus addressing himself fundamentally to the higher nature of his patient, the "waters above," and rousing some specific spiritual instinct of usefulness and power back into activity? It would appear that the man in becoming an habitué of the synagogue or temple, – that is, a parasite on the belief in vicariousness, – had allowed this higher active instinct to fall out of use, with the consequent ill effect on his human means for expressing it, – his hand.

We might say that that hand was a "waters beneath" manifestation of his "waters above" instinct, and there had to be the restoration to usefulness of the hand as an expression of this particular spiritual or character power which the Master had awakened into activity. He had drawn forth from the man the sense of conscious worth which was inherent in his true and ever-present selfhood.

It may be asked: Was that hand, then, an expression of Spirit? The answer is emphatically that it was not. The only expression of Spirit is spiritual, - in this case the instinct to function as a man, to be useful, and the ability and power to put it into effect. But having had that instinct instantaneously restored by the Master, the patient could express it only through the temporary symbol which he as a human cognized for this purpose, – namely, his hand. That symbol is, however, unknown to Spirit, even as the rag doll is wholly unknown to the cause of those maternal instincts, which well up to expression in the little girl who endows her doll with the qualities of a child....

The Master did not ignore either the "waters above" or the "waters beneath," nor did he ever confuse them to the point of an attempted submergence of one in the other, by giving actual substance to the fleshly symbol or by allowing the governing spiritual animus to be considered of no relevance to the situation.

His understanding was a "firmament" that kept the correct distinction and relationship between the human expression and the spiritual

idea, which it expressed, to men. Without this distinct separation the human expression could be elevated above its levels as a human expression and consequently magnified to a reality it could never possess: and on the other hand, the higher spiritual fact could be brought down to admixtures impossible to its nature....

The Ideal and the Practical

This rule of the dual appearing is essential to our here-and-now existence. It involves first an admission once and for all that the actual character and nature, in fact the whole of man, is spiritual and functions as an expression of the one Spirit; and second, a practical reasoning that that being so, all earth's experience must be the human effort to respond to these higher spiritual impulses in some symbolic degree.

The Christian or the idealist must not make the mistake of trying to keep his head in the clouds at the level of the "waters above," his elementary yet noble concept of a world of spirituality alone, – and so ignoring the human experience which stares him in the face. Nor can the man who professes to be practical, and to occupy himself solely with dealing with earth's phenomena as he finds them, expect to be successful unless he looks to see the evidence of the constant presence of that "something" completely outside and above those phenomena and their thought-processes, which yet impels and influences them all.

Thank God this practical and wholly sensible "firmament" of a clear understanding does exist for men to make their own, for there is nothing worse than an idealist with his head fully in the clouds, and nothing more depressing than a man determined to keep his eyes on the ground of no other experience than the material, whilst nothing is more welcome than the man or woman who has learnt how to lift the one to serve the other.

Is not that what the master musician does who makes finite sounds serve the inspiring purpose of defining his intangible-to-sense musical experience? And he does this even whilst he knows that with the passage of but a little time those sounds will vibrate themselves out into the silence of their own nothingness, whereas his musical experience will gain stronger foothold in the path towards the actual substance of it all, – the spiritual joy and certainty of which even his musical experience is only some instinctive awareness.

The entire realm of practical spiritual reason depends on this rule of the “firmament” dividing the “waters above” from those “beneath” for its forwarding of the beneficial and uplifting ideas upon which humanity wholly relies for its progress out of itself into a higher spiritual divinity.

The Waters Above Are Only Symbols

Let us realize that our understanding of the spiritual is quite elementary in character, and will develop and change with progress; and so the term “waters,” as a symbol of elementary and transitory thought-processes, applies to our understanding of the higher spiritual nature of man no less than to our ever-changing expression of that fact here on earth.

For intelligent reasoning we must see that when we recognize genuine human goodness as expressed in some form, it is entirely apart from that higher and wholly spiritual goodness or good instinctiveness which evolved it; and even that recognition of the higher spiritual instinct, that “waters above,” is still not final, but only elementary, for the final spiritual recognition will reveal no process towards perfection, but actual perfection here with no process towards it.

Our highest and purest vision of spiritual good is but a rudimental sense of the ultimate spirituality. Could we see final spirituality in all its beauty, form, and color, we should have reached its own conscious experience, where physical phenomena and symbols would no longer be either necessary or possible.

We have progressed, then, along a line of clear reasoning by separating “waters beneath” from “waters above,” for we have gained some sense of the value of good as we know it, but we have also seen that it is dependent on a higher value, the Cause which in this case would rightly be called Spirit. Yet in all this separating process we have not dealt with anything negative. In all reasoning there is a higher purpose and value related to a lower or more human purpose and value, but both are values and neither is a negative.

The Waters Beneath Are a Positive Symbol

It should be obvious that this firmament separating waters above from waters beneath implies no suggestion that the waters beneath represent an erroneous state of thought which by the use of reason

must be separated from a true state of thought symbolized by the waters above. We have a complete refutation for such a suggestion when we find that it is from these very waters beneath that the dry land appears and the subsequent ideas of perfection and its activity are developed.

We must realize also that in this first chapter of Genesis, and the first few verses of the second chapter, no negative element at all is introduced. The purpose of this first part of Genesis is the definition of the symbols of good alone, and not until they have been defined are their apparent opposites revealed in the later chapters and then only for scientific analysis, through the basic understanding of the wholeness of good as defined in this first part. In all forms of teaching the positive processes have to be grasped by the student before he can deal with the negatives, which in human experience would oppose them, and it is not otherwise here.

...Certainly we cannot dismiss that vast activity of earth's preparatory school consisting of the separation of fact from fiction, right from wrong, truth from error, which is our first sense of the "firmament." That is vital to a great extent, for we live in a world where erroneously based conceptions constitute the atmosphere of mortality through which we have to cleave a path to our higher and more native realm.

But to accomplish even this we must reason with positive values. Unless we know what good is and can define it to ourselves by reckoning the qualities that make up any particular phase of it, we can neither recognize nor reject the specific misconceptions of it which false education may present for acceptance....

...so although we may begin by thinking of the "firmament" as a separator between good and evil, clean and unclean, pure and impure, we shall come to see that it is not actually concerned at all with myths or mistakes, but rather with the reckoning of distinct ideas of good, for good's sake alone, in ever-rising ways.

The second aspect, then, of this great second day of Spirit reveals that we must make and maintain through the strong "firmament" of understanding the distinction between "waters above" and "waters beneath," – between our highest present up reaching sense of good and its human expression here on earth. Both these are ever-changing – hence the appropriateness of the term "waters" to symbolize them – but neither is negative. With the distinction between

these held in mind, and yet their interdependence also clearly defined, we may expect the human means of expression to respond immediately to the higher impulses which govern them.

No Good Is To Be Despised

As we realize this, we are saved from one of the greatest mistakes which mortals may make when they turn their thoughts from earth to heaven,-namely, belittling earth's experience and extolling that which they call heaven's, and even coming to despise the one in their desire for the other.

Men must have a true appreciation of the "waters above" and the "waters beneath," - first, the ever-advancing spiritual instincts and awareness of men and then their reflection and influence in all human activities and in the progressive steps of civilization; but this verse shows them how to avoid those extremes of thought which swing them to giving importance to one while disparaging or even looking down on the other.

To Spirit in its continual impelling of something new and good for man, all things in this line of progress are important, and not one least thing belittled or decried. Jesus taught this with implicit care in such utterances as "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." To him everything told the one story of infinite good expressed everywhere and in every detail.

...THE SECOND DAY (I): SPIRITUAL FACTOR AND HUMAN EXPRESSION BOTH ESSENTIAL

The first verse of this second day symbol of Spirit reads, "*And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters*" By the order of our symbolic names for God this must be summed up in the phrase Spirit as Mind.

Here we find mention of "waters," or transitory and progressive thought-processes, and of those waters divided,-that is, classified in purpose,-but there is no mention of waters above waters, or any indication that one is more important than the other. Our wise teachers are now introducing this further rule of the equality in purpose of these thought-processes, for whilst it is necessary to distinguish

“waters above” from “waters beneath,” as in the previous verse, it is just as necessary to see that they are equal in overall purpose.

...Every human activity speaks to men of that which they call the spiritual, and each step to a closer understanding of that spiritual factor only serves to enhance the beauty and value of everything good in human experience. So must not all this activity of good be actually one activity?...

Have we not been so educated to separate the spiritual from even all human goodness that we have forgotten that that human goodness is our expression of the spiritual? In their expression of the spiritual men naturally employ symbols equal to their understanding. These symbols are of course as temporary and changing in nature as men’s present levels of understanding, but to men where they are they are as important as that understanding.

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