

A Christian Science lecture entitled:

## HOW THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE BIBLE HEALS

by Charles W. Ferris, C.S.B., of Minneapolis, Minnesota

Member of the Board of Lectureship of The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston Massachusetts  
©1984 The Christian Science Board of Directors All rights reserved

My wife, Rosemarie, and I were driving from Tucson to El Paso when a tire blew out. I flagged down a truck to take me into the next town. While I was gone, Rosemarie said several people stopped to offer help.

One man, heading in the opposite direction, drove to the next cross-over, turned around, and came all the way back to see if she was all right. He said to her, "I'm not a religious man. My religion is helping people."

We were both moved by the love expressed by this man, who obviously was dedicated to helping others. We thought of Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan, who helped a total stranger.

We wondered why the man didn't think he was religious. Doesn't the Bible identify such unselfishness as a Christian good work—a work of the Christ, the effect of the divine power in our lives?

I'm sure there are a lot of people like this who believe the ideals in the Bible and really live them. Yet why are they reluctant to identify themselves with God and the Bible in a direct way?

Is it because they haven't seen how the message of the Bible gives a deeper dimension to the wonderful qualities they're already expressing? And how it gives solutions to problems a human approach alone can't provide? Do they fail to see beyond a surface view of the Bible?

### A Spiritual View of the Bible is Needed

Jesus had this to deal with in his teaching and preaching. He spoke to listeners who had all kinds of views of the Scriptures.

What did he do?

Well, as many of you know, to help people understand his points better, Jesus spoke to them on vari-

ous levels. On one level, for example, he told stories, or parables, about familiar, everyday things.

His disciples asked him why he spoke to the crowds this way. He said, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." And he added, "Because they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

The people judged primarily by what their eyes and ears told them. And they didn't readily see beyond this view to the deeper Christly message Jesus had for them. But the parables themselves had deeper levels of meaning. We see some of these levels when we read Jesus' interpretations of the parables for his disciples.

But even to them he said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Then he assured them, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."

To me, Jesus could be speaking to the man I mentioned earlier and, in fact, to all of us, saying, "Don't just take the surface meaning of the Bible. Look for the deeper, more spiritual meaning, too."

### A Young Woman Gains the Spiritual View

To show the difference it can make when we do look for this deeper spiritual meaning, let me tell you about an insight a young woman gained and the effect it had on her life.

She'd grown up in a very religious household. She was satisfied with her religion and her view of the Bible. She married a man who'd also grown up in a religious household. However, he hadn't felt his questions about life and God were being

answered.

Before they met, he'd picked up a piece of Christian Science literature. This opened up a new view of reality and the Bible—exactly what he'd been searching for.

When he got married, his young wife realized how important his new-found religion was to him. So she began to read the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science. But she didn't understand what she read.

After their first child was born, the woman became very sick. The symptoms were those of tuberculosis, the disease her father had died from at a relatively early age. As the symptoms grew worse, her husband said she had to do something—either go to a doctor or ask for treatment through prayer from a Christian Science practitioner.

The woman chose Christian Science and went to see a practitioner some miles away. The practitioner talked with her about an hour, explaining various biblical points in the light of Christian Science, but she still didn't understand.

That evening the practitioner had been invited out to dinner. Since the young woman was staying in the city overnight, she was invited to come, too. During the evening, the subject of Christian Science came up.

The practitioner talked about the first record of creation in the book of Genesis, where God beheld everything He'd made and saw it was good. Then she compared this with the second record of creation when a mist went up from the earth, obscuring the true view of creation. This the young woman understood! It made a deep impression of her. She returned home and said to her husband, "I know it's only the mist."

What did she mean?

Previously, she'd looked only at the surface level of the stories of creation in Genesis, and that made it difficult for her to grasp fully an explanation of their deeper significance.

But when she saw the mist, not as a material weather condition, but as a symbol, her whole viewpoint changed. She could see the mist symbolized whatever would obscure God's reality. She realized this material picture of illness, too, was only an obscured view of her real being as God had created her.

The Bible had become spiritually illuminated for her. This inspired her to study more in the Bible and in *Science and Health* and to learn more of God's nature and her own true nature.

She continued to have Christian Science treatment also, and in just a few weeks all the symptoms of disease were gone.

### Mrs. Eddy Saw the Literal and Spiritual Meaning of the Bible

The young woman realized in a degree what Mary Baker Eddy had found out about the Bible. Mrs. Eddy had seen in her deep and prayerful study of the Bible—and particularly through noting that Jesus spoke in parables—that the Bible is often written on various levels: for example, the more obvious, literal level, the historic level, the symbolic level, and an even deeper, more spiritual level.

Mrs. Eddy found this applied to many parts of the Bible, especially to the first and second accounts of creation in Genesis. Mrs. Eddy recognized, as Bible scholars point out, that there are two distinct accounts in the book of Genesis. She saw that one is symbolic of the spiritual, and the other, of the material.

Listen to how she contrasts these

two accounts of creation. In *Science and Health* she writes: "The first record assigns all might and government to God, and endows man out of God's perfection and power." This was the inspired perception the young woman gained, and which brought about her healing.

*Science and Health* continues: "The second record chronicles man as mutable and mortal, — as having broken away from Deity and as revolving in an orbit of his own."<sup>3</sup> This is the widely held material view and the view the young woman had before she realized such a concept was an obscured and inaccurate view of true creation.

Mrs. Eddy draws this conclusion: "No one can reasonably doubt that the purpose of this allegory — this second account of Genesis — is to depict the falsity of error and the effects of error."<sup>4</sup>

### **Bible Revelation Shows God to be Entirely Good**

As you read the Bible, you find many statements that refer to God. Sometimes they can make God sound like a human being — anthropomorphic. But there are many statements that present the purely spiritual concept of God that's the true one. These clear revelations coincide with the first record of creation, where spiritual perfection is the standard of both God and man.

One of the most profound examples of this is the concept of God as infinite Love. The Psalms speak of God — "who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."<sup>5</sup> Isaiah presents God as Love through the image of a mother comforting her babe.<sup>6</sup> Jesus set forth the concept of God as Love with his demand that we be loving and supportive to each other in order, as he said, "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."<sup>7</sup> John states plainly, "God is love."<sup>8</sup>

God is also presented as Truth in the Bible. Moses saw God's nature as Truth. He used the symbol of a rock to convey it. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."<sup>9</sup>

The Bible speaks of God's wisdom and perfect thoughts. All of these statements point to a perfect, loving, omnipotent God as in the first account of creation in Genesis.

### **The Bible Shows Evil to be a Falsity**

But what would the man who described his religion as helping people say about this concept of a perfect God? He — and for that matter some of you — might well ask, "If God is entirely good, how do you explain all the evil we see — the cruelty, disease, death, poverty?"

How do we answer this?

Let's approach it from the

standpoint of logic. If the enlightened view of God sees Him as entirely good, the only power, and the creator of all, and if He pronounced His creation good, then we'd have to identify evil as part of the mist, as an unenlightened (in fact, impossible) view of creation. Isn't this what the young woman did? Didn't she identify the disease as an unenlightened view of creation? The disease was eliminated when she gained the enlightened view — the certainty that God didn't create disease.

This is exactly the approach the Bible so often takes. It identifies evil as a deception, symbolizing it with various names.

The first name for evil appears in the book of Genesis. It's called "the serpent." Notice what it does. It makes subtle suggestions to Adam and Eve.<sup>10</sup>

Another name for evil appears in the book of Chronicles. Here it's called "Satan." Again it makes suggestions of the same sort Adam and Eve heard. It suggests to King David that he act contrary to God's command and number the people.<sup>11</sup>

In the New Testament, Satan or devil is called "the tempter," as when Jesus was presented with three suggestions to act contrary to his worship of God. But during his ministry, Jesus exposed this tempter for what it is. He called it "a liar, and the father of it," and said "there is no truth in him."<sup>12</sup>

To illustrate how the devil is a lying suggestion that would try to work within our own thought and not some independent evil personification, remember how Jesus said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me."

How could he have meant that Peter was the devil when just before this he'd said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church?"<sup>13</sup> Wasn't he instead referring to what appeared as the resistance in Peter's thinking to certain sayings of Jesus, but was not, in fact, Peter's real thinking?

Finally, in Revelation, evil is given the name of "dragon." The Bible triumphantly says, "The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world."<sup>14</sup>

The devil, all evil, is a persistent lie about the everlasting fact of God and His spiritual creation. The way to cast out this lie is to recognize it as just that and to begin to live only from the basis of God's creation.

### **The Spiritual View of the Bible is Consistent with our Human Experience**

Some of you might say, "What you've said may be logical, but it just isn't consistent with my experience, with what I see around me."

That's probably what the young woman with tuberculosis thought at first. In her initial contact with Chris-

tian Science, she heard about a perfect God and His perfect spiritual creation. This didn't seem consistent. It didn't agree with what she saw around her. Especially, it didn't agree with the pain and distress she felt as the disease grew worse.

But when she saw that the material view was really a kind of mist concealing her spiritual perfection, then the spiritual message of the Bible did become consistent with her experience. Not only did she see the nature of God's creation more clearly but she felt the freedom of this perfect creation when the disease disappeared.

She was healed when she accepted the pure spiritual facts presented repeatedly in the Bible. These facts contradicted the assumption that man is an organism made up of material chemicals that pretty much sets its own pattern.

Actually, quite a few people today are beginning to question the belief that the body is an independent physical mechanism operating entirely separate from thought. A few years ago a book was on the best-seller list for more than 40 weeks. It was called *Anatomy of an Illness*.<sup>15</sup> You may remember it. Its author, Norman Cousins, long-time editor of the *Saturday Review*, described how he recovered from an illness the doctors gave him only one chance in 500 to recover from. His analysis rejected many common medical procedures but, importantly, focused on the nature of his thought.

He'd read about the effects of negative emotions on body chemistry, and he said, "The inevitable question arose in my mind: What about the positive emotions? Is it possible that love, hope, faith, laughter, confidence, and the will to live have therapeutic value?"

In a sense, the Bible has been answering Mr. Cousins' question for thousands of years. It's been answering it on one level by warning people against hatred, jealousy, lying, and bitterness — and by assuring them that health and longevity come from their expression of God-derived qualities.

But stressing positive qualities is only part of the answer. It doesn't go nearly far enough. To get the full impact of the Bible message, we have to start, as I said earlier, much deeper — from the radical spiritual premise of perfect God and perfect man. This is the deeper level of the Bible. At this level we see that these higher qualities point to the true identity of each of us, that we actually consist of qualities and ideas derived only from God, and that this identity is entirely spiritual.

From this standpoint we can replace the misconception of our identity with the clear view of what God has created. Health is established because it's the natural status of our being and consistent with reality. The woman healed of tuberculosis found this out.

The Bible gives a familiar, but good, example of how this spiritual view is consistent with our everyday experience. It tells of a woman who'd been crippled 18 years. Jesus said to her, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity."

When the religious ruler saw the healing, he protested because Jesus had healed on the sabbath day. The Master rebuked him for his narrow interpretation of the Scriptures, citing how the ruler himself released his animals to be watered on the sabbath.

And he continued, "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?"<sup>16</sup>

We don't know what caused her to be stooped over — heredity, disease, being weighed down by life — but with his profound spiritual insight, Jesus classified her problem simply as "whom Satan hath bound," meaning any belief opposed to the perfection and goodness of God. What holier action could he perform on the sabbath day than to free her and show that spiritual perfection was consistent with her present experience?

### **The Spiritual View Doesn't Ignore Problems but Solves Them**

"But," you may ask, "even if spiritual perfection is consistent with human experience, don't you run into another conflict? When you're taking the spiritual view of the Bible and looking at the perfection of God and man, aren't you liable to ignore the human problems going on around you?"

How does the Bible respond to this?

The first chapter of Genesis metaphorically describes a perfect and good creation, as we've said. But does it stop there? No. It then takes up the various misconceptions about this creation. If the Bible did stop with describing *only the true and perfect*, it would ignore the falsehoods people believe, and it wouldn't deal with them.

As we perceive the deeper meaning of the Bible, we learn to take the same approach. Here's how this works in actual practice. A woman who owns a restaurant found that by establishing in her thought the ideal of spiritual perfection described in the Bible, she wasn't ignoring problems but was dealing with them more effectively.

Her restaurant serves pizza and spaghetti. It's open late at night, and she gets some rough types of people at times.

One evening as she was thinking about the drunkenness she continually encountered, she decided not to ignore it any longer and not to react by using human means, like getting huffy. She resolved to make an extra effort to see everyone as God's perfect creation. She soon had

a chance to do this!

That very evening the staff came to her and said there was a drunk who wouldn't pay his bill. When she approached him, his face was filled with rage. Although it took quite an effort, she determined to see him as a child of God. She didn't know what words to say, so she just stood there and smiled.

The rage began to drain from his face. He said, "I paid my bill."

She said, "You may think you did, but really you didn't."

After a few moments, he said, "All right, I'll pay it because you're a nice person."

She said, "You're a nice person, too." He paid the bill.

When she came back to the kitchen, the employees asked her, "Did he pay?"

She said, "Yes."

They were stunned.

Later, she walked by the man. He was calm and sober. He said to her, "I don't have to be like this. I could go back to school and make something of myself."

He came back various times. One night he'd obviously had a haircut, had shaved, and was clean and neat. He even showed his money before ordering so she wouldn't worry about his paying.

He said, "I'm doing a lot better now."

He was pleasant, controlled, made no more trouble. He confided to her, "I don't know what you've done, but you've made me feel everything is going to be all right."

This is what the spiritual sense of the Bible does. By drawing on it, the restaurant owner didn't ignore the problem, but she was convinced of the young man's perfection as the expression of God. Not only did he feel the benefit but others did too. The incidence of drunkenness in the restaurant markedly decreased.

As we gain more of the Bible's spiritual meaning, we feel God's support more and more in finding answers to our human needs.

We also perceive those areas of behavior that are contrary to God's nature. We don't ignore them. We replace them with what's truly satisfying.

Notice how Jesus did this. A woman was brought to him who'd committed adultery. It might have appeared at first that he was ignoring what she'd done.

The religious leaders challenged him, "Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" Jesus didn't answer.

But when they persisted, he replied, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."<sup>17</sup>

They left, convicted by their own conscience.

Was Jesus ignoring this breaking of moral law? Was he saying the offense shouldn't be punished because the others weren't perfect

either? Wasn't he rather seeing *beyond* the narrower interpretation held by the religious leaders?

The book of John explains earlier, "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup> Moses gave the moral guidelines for society to function effectively. He put them in terms adapted to the level of thought at that time. But as people advance in their spiritual understanding of the Mosaic laws, it doesn't mean they ignore their most basic moral requirements.

Jesus emphasized this when he said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."<sup>19</sup>

The ideal solution for the woman's problem was, as Jesus said, "Go, and sin no more."<sup>20</sup> She was helped to reach this ideal through the grace that's God's unceasing love and through the truth that's man's reflected Godlikeness.

### Reality is not a Mixture of Spirit and Matter

But even if we do admit the substance of Spirit, many people would say our life is a *combination* of the material and spiritual. Jesus told a parable that reflected this view. It's the parable of the tares and the wheat.

You remember he said a man sowed some seed in his field. Later, an enemy came and sowed tares. And, indeed, our lives do seem like this. We have the wheat of good character traits: affection, honesty, courage. Right alongside them: the tares of resentment, deceit, fear. We have happiness and health. Right alongside appear sorrow and disease. And all of this is regarded as the general nature of life. This is the way life seems to be.

But what did Jesus recommend? He said, "Let both grow together until the harvest."<sup>21</sup>

This might sound like strange advice. You'd think we'd want to dispose of the tares as soon as possible. But Jesus explained that before the harvest, we can't accurately distinguish the tares from the wheat. So, in trying to gather up the tares, we may root up the wheat.

Isn't he again saying we have to develop our spiritual perception? After all, how can we eliminate the seeming *dualism* of good and evil, Spirit and matter, before we've reached the point of harvest?

Our view of reality has to mature to the point where we begin to see the allness and supremacy of God — the central spiritual message of the Bible. Then evil — by whatever name you call it — is exposed as illegitimate and, in fact, as unreal. The tares are burned and eliminated.

The Founder of Christian Science faced the same picture of tares mixed with wheat. Mrs. Eddy had been raised in a strict Calvinist household where Bible reading was a part of daily life. So she knew the Scriptures

well and loved their promise. Through the Bible she developed deep love for God and great trust in His care.

But along with this wheat of good character and devotion came the tares of difficult human experiences. Through the years, she was separated from those dearest to her and was frequently ill. She tried various medical systems, but they failed to heal her. The tares of human problems wouldn't disappear.

She was, however, continuing to cultivate the wheat of spiritual understanding through her deep study of the Bible. The result was that her own health was restored, and she was able to heal others as well.

But her new insights into the Bible didn't produce simply another novel healing approach. They were revolutionary insights into the nature of God and man. In fact, they were so revolutionary they sometimes even brought denunciations from some of the clergy. However, other clergymen defended her.

For example, one minister, listening to her, said, "I have preached the living God for forty years but never felt his presence and power as you do." Another, Edward Everett Hale, probably the most popular minister in Boston at the time, wrote of her, "She has taught me more truth in twenty minutes than I have learned in twenty years."<sup>22</sup>

At one point when Mrs. Eddy and her husband were visiting Washington, D.C., she went to the church President Garfield had attended. The minister asked if he could come and see her. They spent several hours talking about the Bible and Christian Science.

The minister then asked if he could remain through dinner, though he wouldn't be able to eat. He'd been suffering for many years with stomach difficulty that his doctors told him had developed into cancer. When Mrs. Eddy proposed testing the validity of the truth they'd been discussing, he said he couldn't risk his life with such a test.

However, as the meal progressed, he forgot his fear and ate heartily. There were no adverse aftereffects. He was completely healed.<sup>23</sup>

You may remember in Jesus' parable of the tares and wheat he wasn't concerned that they continued to grow together. Isn't this because the tares can't really harm the wheat? Doesn't this healing of the minister show that even though our lives *seem* to be a mixture of good and evil, the spiritual and the material, we can know this is a misrepresentation of reality? That spiritual understanding frees us from this belief?

As long as we're cultivating the wheat in our lives and working toward the harvest — the acceptance of God as the only power — we can be sure the tares will be rendered harmless and disappear. The spiritual will then ultimately be seen and experienced as the only reality.

### The Spiritual View Shows the True Meaning of Jesus as Saviour

One of the mistaken charges some ministers made was that Mrs. Eddy didn't believe in Jesus' atonement for sin. Christians get great comfort from thinking of Jesus as their personal friend and saviour. They're deeply moved by his sacrifice on the cross to take away their sins.

Like other Christians, Christian Scientists, too, are deeply moved and grateful for Jesus' life and sacrifice. This gratitude grows even stronger as we see the nature of the salvation Jesus brought.

For centuries the mission of the Christ had been promised. It would come to free humanity from its problems. And Jesus' life and works were the fulfillment of that prophecy. He brought this freedom by showing the power of God and the true nature of man as God's expression.

How do these views of Jesus' mission help us understand atonement? Two overriding events stand out to me in the Bible. One is the Exodus of the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. The Bible is filled with references to God's preserving power at this time and to the laws of Moses, set forth to guide his people.

This first event, this freedom from human bondage, foreshadowed the still more significant freedom that would come with the second major and crowning event — the appearing of Jesus Christ. As you know, most people of Jesus' time took only a literal interpretation of the Messiah and looked for a *temporal* king. But the Master said, "My kingdom is not of this world."<sup>24</sup>

The kingdom Jesus referred to was the kingdom of heaven. He said it wasn't a physical location, but was within each of us now. He said it was at hand and as close to us as our repentance, or, to use the original meaning from the Greek, as close to us as our profound "change of mind."

Jesus showed the quality of this kingdom, or *state of spiritual* thought, in his love for us when he willingly submitted to the crucifixion. He allowed the force of hatred to try to destroy him.

His blood on the cross evidenced the sacrifice he made to show that this sinful force couldn't succeed. His resurrection proved the power of the Christ, that is, of his God-derived selfhood, to triumph over mortality.

Jesus said he was the way. This means we have the potential to, and must, experience the Christ-power as Jesus did, although we don't submit willingly to the carnal mind's attack. He did it for us, and it doesn't have to be repeated in that particular form.

So, I think you can see, Christian Scientists do accept the atonement of Jesus in its fullest meaning.

## Conclusion

As I was researching this subject of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, I studied a number of reference books and talked with some authorities in this field. One professor of religion brought up a word over and over again. The word was "hermeneutics." It means the study of the principles of interpretation, as of the Bible.

The professor said to me, "Your hermeneutical base is perfect God and perfect man."

This does sum it up well. Ultimately, everything in the Bible leads — when spiritually seen — to deeper understanding of this central message. Either the text is pointing to the truth of this theme and how to achieve it, or it's pointing out the departures from the basis of perfect God and perfect man and warning us against them.

True Bible study isn't just an intellectual exercise, then. It's coming into a closer awareness of our relationship to God. In fact, it's the action of God, revealing Himself directly to *you*.

Mrs. Eddy found our effort to perceive the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures may stir up resistance, so don't be surprised if it occurs. She writes, "There will be greater mental opposition to the spiritual, scientific meaning of the Scriptures than there has ever been since the Christian era began."<sup>25</sup>

But she also recognized the reward of making this effort. She adds, "It is this spiritual perception of Scripture, which lifts humanity out of disease and death and inspires faith."<sup>26</sup>

Thousands of people have found the value of the spiritual meaning of the Bible.

So can you.

1. Matthew 13:11, 13
2. John 16:12, 13
3. *Science and Health*, p. 522.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 537
5. Psalms 103:4
6. See Isaiah 66:13
7. Matthew 5:45
8. I John 4:16
9. Deuteronomy 32:4
10. See Genesis 3:1
11. See I Chronicles 21:1
12. John 8:44
13. Matthew 16:23, 18
14. Revelation 12:9
15. Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness*, Norton, New York
16. Luke 13:12, 16
17. John 8:5, 7
18. John 1:17
19. Matthew 5:17
20. John 8:11
21. Matthew 13:24-30
22. Norman Beasley, *The Cross and the Crown*, p. 124
23. Irving C. Tomlinson, *Twelve Years with Mary Baker Eddy*, The Christian Science Publishing Society, Boston, 1945, p. 70
24. John 18:36
25. *Science and Health*, p. 534
26. *Ibid.*, p. 547