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What God Regards as of Supreme Value

by T. Austin-Sparks

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In the Foreword to their book *The Making of a Pioneer*, Mildred Cable and Francesca French have this:

'Certain characteristics are common to all pioneers, and some of these characteristics are pleasant while others are unpleasant.

'They are not an easy-going class of people and are subject to an inarticulate urge, the impact of a driving-force pushing them forward to further effort and carrying them into what other men call "impossible situations".'

There is a sense in which only a comparatively few are God-appointed pioneers, and therefore it is true of them, as of all pioneers, that theirs is a lonely way.

But there is another sense in which every Christian is a pioneer. It is not long after we begin in the Way that we come to feel as though no one has ever been this way before, and we are having to learn everything from the beginning and for ourselves. In the deepest depths of our hearts we feel that no one really knows and therefore no one can really help.

This is *the* innermost reality of the life with God. It is true in a much greater way of the greater pioneers of the Kingdom. It is true of every venturer on the way of the heavenly calling. But whether it be pioneers such as a Paul, a Luther, a Livingstone, a Hudson Taylor, an A. B. Simpson, in their

respective specific vocations; or whether it be all the 'rank and file' for whom - in Christ - "all things have become *new*" and we start with only the axe, pick and spade of the Word of God, faith in God, and the urge of God, there is one thing manifestly common to all. To recognise and grasp this one thing is to stand possessed of one of the most vital factors in endurance and attainment.

It is this: under the hand of God there is always maintained the balance of inward education or knowledge with any outward achievement. The real value of any true pioneer is not that he, by sheer force of will, got somewhere; but that at every stage and in every phase he gathered knowledge, by which knowledge he learned the very laws of life, of survival, of salvation; of effectiveness, conservation, and wisdom. He was not merely a doer, he was a learner in his doing, and a doer by his learning.

If we take the names mentioned above, this is perfectly patent. Paul, Simpson, Taylor, were doers, but their whole course was one of spiritual learning. God held them very rigidly to this. There were times when they could go no further, do no more, unless they had some new and fresh knowledge of the Lord. That knowledge resulted in a new phase of practical progress. It is of great educative value to see in such lives how each step in the work was the result of some new spiritual lesson learned in an inner walk with God.

If we try just to imitate the outward aspects and copy the resultant framework of such work, without the same inward history, we are in danger of being saddled with a corpse without life; a machine without power; a body without personality. All the reproductive works of God begin with an *inward organic life*, not with an outward form. Jesus has once and for all defined the law of that life in saying: "This is life eternal, that *they may know* thee... and him whom thou didst send". The law of life is spiritual knowledge of God, and there is really no other true knowledge of God.

It is not true knowledge to have all the information about God that can be obtained by hearing, reading or studying, however much application there may have been, and for however many years it may have gone on. There are all too many who know it all in that way, who have been hearing it for years, but who, when really put to the test, cannot 'make the grade', but break down. The test is twofold: What does it mean to us in deepest hours, and what does it mean to others as perceived in us in their deepest need?

So, the Lord says:

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches ; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me..." Jer. 9:23,24.

The context shows that this knowledge is related to the character of God. The attributes mentioned are those that can only be known by experience. Lovingkindness, judgment, righteousness, demand a background or foundation which makes those characteristics of God our very salvation from the desolating effects of their opposites. What a life it would be without lovingkindness; that is, unmitigated cruelty: without judgment; that is, no discrimination and recompense: no righteousness; that is evil, wickedness, and iniquity with no virtue or rectitude, and no appeal because there was no integrity. The true knowledge of God lies in our very lives having been saved by what He is. How much we owe to His longsuffering patience, His faithfulness, His truth, and much

more, having been made our rock when all else gave way; our anchorage in tempest; our hope when there was none apart from Him!

This knowledge comes by adversity, and if it is true that such knowledge is paramount and supreme, then we have the explanation of the whole problem of the adversities which befall the godly by the permission of God. It works both ways. Those who know the Lord best are those who have gone the deepest way. Those who go the deep way of trial do so because God puts the premium upon their knowledge of Him. They are the people who are shut up to God. But this knowledge is, firstly, constitutional: that is, it is to constitute a certain kind of person and character; and secondly it is vocational. It does not end with the person concerned, but is the essence of service, in time and eternity. God is very practical, and requires that things in His service are never merely theoretical but real and true to life.