

# Introduction: Why John Is the Quaker Gospel

## The Gospel That Founded a Movement

There is no understanding Quakerism without the Gospel of John. Strip away the histories, the journals, the theological treatises, and the collected epistles of the first Friends, and what remains — what was there before any of it — is John. His Gospel was not merely a favorite text among early Quakers; it was the soil from which their entire spiritual vision grew. George Fox's revolutionary insight, the one that launched a movement and shook seventeenth-century England to its foundations, was not drawn from Paul's letters or the Synoptic Gospels, though he loved and cited them freely. It was drawn from the first chapter of John: "*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*" (John 1:9).

That single verse — fourteen words in the King James rendering — became the theological bedrock of the Religious Society of Friends. It was the text Fox carried like a burning coal from village to village, from steeple-house to open field, from magistrate's court to dank prison cell. It was the verse James Nayler wove through his powerful theological pamphlets, the one Isaac Penington returned to again and again as he traced the deep interior workings of Christ in the soul, the one Robert Barclay built into the systematic architecture of his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*. It was the verse Margaret Fell proclaimed in her earliest epistles, the one William Penn pressed upon his readers with urgent practical force, the one Elizabeth Bathurst defended with scholarly precision in *Truth's Vindication*. When William Dewsbury called people to turn their minds within and examine their hearts, it was this Light he pointed them to. When Job Scott preached in the quietist tradition a century later, it was still this Light that illuminated his sermons.

John 1:9 was not, however, an isolated proof-text snatched from context to serve a theological agenda. The early Friends read the entire Gospel of John as a unified witness to the reality they had experienced — the reality of Christ present, active, teaching, comforting, and transforming the souls of ordinary men and women in their own day. They found in John's Gospel a Christ who was not confined to first-century Palestine but who was, as John

himself declared, “*in the beginning*” (John 1:1), who was the life and the light of men before Abraham (John 8:58), who promised to come to his followers and make his abode with them (John 14:23), who sent the Comforter to guide into all truth (John 16:13), and who prayed that all who believed might be one, even as he and the Father were one (John 17:21).

## **The Light That Lighteth Every Man**

The doctrine of the Inward Light — sometimes called the Light Within, the Light of Christ, the Seed, or simply “that of God in every one” — is the distinctive contribution of Quakerism to Christian theology. And it is a doctrine rooted almost entirely in the Gospel of John.

The first Friends did not arrive at this doctrine through academic theology. They arrived at it through experience — and then found it confirmed, illuminated, and expounded in John’s Gospel with breathtaking clarity. Fox described this commission in his *Journal*:

*“When the Lord God and his son Jesus Christ sent me forth into the world to preach his everlasting gospel and kingdom, I was glad that I was commanded to turn people to that inward light, spirit, and grace, by which all might know their salvation and their way to God; even that divine spirit which would lead them into all truth, and which I infallibly knew would never deceive any.” (GFJN 35)*

Note the cascade of Johannine references: the *inward light* (John 1:9), the *spirit that would lead into all truth* (John 16:13), the knowledge of *salvation* and *the way to God* (John 14:6). Fox’s commission was, in essence, a commission to preach the Gospel of John — not as ancient history but as present reality.

The universality of this Light was what made Quaker theology revolutionary and, to many, scandalous. The established churches — Calvinist, Anglican, Catholic alike — taught that saving grace was mediated through particular channels: the sacraments, the preached Word, the institutional church, or the inscrutable decree of divine election. Fox and the early Friends said no. Christ, as the true Light, enlightens *every person* who comes into the world. Not some. Not the elect. Not those who have heard the gospel preached or received the sacraments. Every man, woman, and child who has ever lived has received a measure of this divine Light. The question is not whether one has been given the Light, but whether one has turned toward it or away from it.

Fox drew the parallel with devastating force:

*“And now, as the Jews cried, ‘Crucify him, away with him’ in the flesh; so you that do profess him in the flesh, do not you cry, ‘away with the light which enlightens every man that cometh into the world,’ which is the life of Christ?” (GF5:202)*

The parallel was deliberate and devastating: those who rejected the Inward Light were doing in the spirit what the Jews had done in the flesh — crucifying Christ.

## **John’s Gospel and the Shape of Quaker Faith**

The Gospel of John did not merely provide Quakerism with its central doctrine of the Inward Light. It shaped virtually every distinctive Quaker testimony and practice. Consider how thoroughly Johannine the movement’s foundations are:

**Worship in Spirit and Truth.** The Quaker practice of silent, waiting worship — gathering without liturgy, without programmed preaching, without sacraments, waiting in stillness for the immediate movings of the Spirit — finds its scriptural warrant in John 4:23-24: *“The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”* Fox laid this out programmatically:

*“...with and by this divine power and spirit of God, and the light of Jesus, I was to bring people off from all their own ways, to Christ the new and living way; from their churches, which men had made and gathered, to the church in God... and off from all the world’s worships, to know the spirit of truth in the inward parts, and to be led thereby, that in it they might worship the Father of spirits, who seeks such to worship him; which spirit they that worshipped not in, knew not what they worshipped.” (GFJN 35)*

Every phrase here is drawn from or echoes John’s Gospel. The new and living way (John 14:6), the spirit of truth in the inward parts (John 14:17), the Father seeking true worshippers (John 4:23) — this is John from beginning to end.

**The Rejection of Hireling Ministry.** The Quaker refusal to employ or pay professional clergy rested squarely on John 10, where Christ distinguishes

between the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and the hireling who flees when the wolf comes. “Hireling” became the standard Quaker term for paid ministers. Fox wrote of those the Lord had gathered:

*“And therefore you that the Lord hath gathered, and sought and searched out, who have been scattered in this cloudy dark day... and have been left to the wolves by the flying of the hirelings, whom you thought had been true men, and now the Lord hath sought and searched, and found, and gathered you from their mouths.” (GFEJ 279)*

**Scripture and the Living Word.** The Quaker understanding of the relationship between scripture and the Spirit — that the Bible is a testimony *about* Christ but that Christ himself, the living Word, is the true authority — was grounded in John 5:39-40: “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*” Barclay put it with systematic precision:

*“If by the Spirit we can only come to the true knowledge of God; if by the Spirit we are to be led into all Truth, and so be taught of all things; then the Spirit, and not the Scriptures, is the foundation and ground of all Truth and knowledge, and the primary rule of faith and manners.” (RBA 66)*

**The Peace Testimony.** The Quaker refusal to bear arms or participate in warfare drew deeply from John 18:36: “*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.*” Christ’s kingdom is spiritual, not carnal — therefore its servants do not take up carnal weapons. When Thomas Ellwood discussed the Fifth Monarchy insurrection, he noted with characteristic Quaker dryness that the insurgents “made an insurrection in the city, on pretence of setting up the kingdom of Jesus... so little understood they the nature of his kingdom, though he himself had declared it was not of this world.”

**Spiritual Sacraments.** The Quaker rejection of outward baptism and communion as standing ordinances drew heavily on John 6, where Christ speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood — which Friends understood entirely spiritually, as the inward reception of Christ by the soul. Barclay devoted entire propositions of his *Apology* to this argument, insisting that the bread of life is Christ himself, received inwardly, not bread and wine consumed outwardly.

**The New Birth.** The Quaker insistence on actual, experiential regeneration — not merely intellectual assent to doctrine — was anchored in John 3:3-8, Christ’s dialogue with Nicodemus about being born again, born of the Spirit. Penington asked pointedly:

*“What is the laver of regeneration, or the water wherewith the soul is washed, and whereof a man is born again? Is it outward or inward? Is it the water which ran out of the side of the natural body, when it was pierced with a spear? Or the water which springs from the fountain of life, the water which floweth from the Spirit?” (IP3:40)*

## **The Quaker Reading of John**

The early Friends read the Gospel of John with what we might call a hermeneutic of immediacy. Where other interpreters saw past events, theological propositions, or future promises, Friends saw present realities. The Word that was in the beginning was not merely a philosophical concept — it was the same Word they encountered in the silence of worship. The Light that lighteth every man was not merely a theological doctrine — it was the actual experience of conviction and illumination that had turned their lives upside down. The Comforter that Christ promised was not a distant dispensation — it was the Spirit they felt teaching, guiding, and comforting them in their daily lives, in their prison cells, at their meeting houses.

This is not to say that the early Friends were naive or ahistorical readers. They knew the difference between the earthly ministry of Jesus and the spiritual ministry of Christ within. But they insisted — and this was their great and controversial claim — that the two were manifestations of the same reality. The Christ who walked in Galilee and the Christ who spoke in the silence of the gathered meeting were one Christ. The Light that shone in first-century Palestine and the Light that convicted a Leicestershire shoemaker’s son in the 1640s were one Light. John’s Gospel, more than any other biblical text, supported this claim, because John himself presented Christ as the eternal Word who was “*in the beginning*” — before Bethlehem, before Abraham, before the foundation of the world.

Penington captured this hermeneutic with characteristic depth:

*“This is the thing which man ran from, when the veil came over him; which all the shadows of the law were to point out and signify. And as man is brought again to this, life springs in him... And this is the one*

*truth, the one pure, eternal word and way to the Father, which was from the beginning, and remains the same unto the end.” (IP3:161)*

The eternal Word of John 1:1 and the way to the Father of John 14:6 are, for Penington, the same living reality — and one that is experienced now, not merely remembered from the past or hoped for in the future.

## **The Voices in This Commentary**

This commentary draws upon the writings of the first generation of Friends — those men and women who, between roughly 1647 and 1700, articulated the Quaker vision with a power and clarity that has never been surpassed. Chief among them are:

**George Fox** (1624–1691), the founder and most prolific writer among early Friends, whose *Journal*, epistles, and doctrinal works constitute the single largest body of Quaker engagement with the Gospel of John. Fox cited John more frequently than any other biblical book, and his works contain hundreds of references to the key Johannine passages.

**James Nayler** (c. 1618–1660), the brilliant and tragic early Quaker leader whose theological pamphlets contain some of the most penetrating readings of John’s Gospel in all of Quaker literature. Nayler’s connection of John 1:9 with John 16:13, and his insistence that the true Light and the Spirit of truth are one reality, represents early Quaker theology at its most powerful.

**Isaac Penington** (1616–1679), the gentle aristocrat whose spiritual writings explore the interior life with a depth and subtlety unmatched among the first Friends. Penington’s readings of John are characterized by their mystical sensitivity and their careful attention to the movements of the Spirit within the soul.

**Robert Barclay** (1648–1690), the systematic theologian of Quakerism, whose *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678) remains the most important theological treatise in Quaker history. Barclay’s engagement with John is deliberate and architectonic — he builds his entire theological system on Johannine foundations.

**William Penn** (1644–1718), the practical statesman and apologist, whose works apply Johannine theology to questions of worship, liberty of conscience, and Christian living with urgent pastoral force.

**Margaret Fell** (1614–1702), the “mother of Quakerism,” whose early epistles and tracts are saturated with the language of John’s Gospel — particularly the Light imagery that she wielded with prophetic power.

**Elizabeth Bathurst** (1655–1685), whose *Truth’s Vindication* (1679) represents the most extensive and scholarly engagement with John’s Gospel by a woman among the first Friends.

**William Dewsbury** (1621–1688), whose powerful preaching ministry was grounded in the call to turn within to the Light of Christ.

**Job Scott** (1751–1793), a later Quietist preacher whose sermons represent the continuing Johannine tradition in Quaker ministry.

**Samuel Bownas** (1676–1753), whose pastoral writings apply the Johannine promises of the Comforter and Spirit of truth to the daily life of the meeting.

We also hear from traveling women ministers — Susanna Morris, Elizabeth Hudson, Sarah Tuke Grubb, Ann Crowley, Lydia Rawlinson Lancaster, and Mary Waite — whose journals and epistles carry the Johannine vision into the lived experience of Quaker women across two centuries.

## How to Read This Commentary

This is a verse-by-verse commentary, but it is not a dry academic exercise. It is an attempt to recover a way of reading — or rather, a way of *hearing* — the Gospel of John that the first Friends practiced with extraordinary power. They read John not as scholars parsing ancient texts but as seekers who had found what they were looking for, and who recognized their own experience on every page.

The text used throughout is the King James Version, the Bible of the early Friends. All Quaker quotations are drawn from the standard editions of their collected works, with citations provided for those who wish to pursue the sources.

Each chapter follows a simple pattern: the full KJV text, broken into manageable sections, followed by commentary that weaves together the Quaker readings of these passages. The goal is to let the early Friends speak in their own words as much as possible, while providing enough context and connection to make their insights accessible to modern readers.

This is Volume 2 of the *Friends Illuminated Commentary Series*, following the commentary on Hebrews. John was chosen as the second volume because it is, in a very real sense, the first volume — the book that started everything, the Gospel that gave Quakerism its distinctive Light, its silent worship, its radical equality, and its peaceable kingdom.

## A Note on Sources and Citations

Every quotation from the early Friends in this commentary is drawn directly from a digitized corpus of their collected works and traced to the exact passage cited. Rather than a system of shorthand abbreviations, each quotation is followed by a plain reference giving the author, the work, and the indexed text-chunk from which it is taken — for example, (*Penington, Works, Vol. 3, chunk 256*). This makes every citation verifiable down to the paragraph: a reader can locate the precise span of text in the source edition behind every blockquote.

The primary sources cited across these chapters, with the short reference form used in the citations, are:

<b>Reference (as cited)</b>	<b>Full Source</b>
Barclay, <i>Apology</i>	Robert Barclay, <i>An Apology for the True Christian Divinity</i> (1678)
Burrough, <i>Memorable Works</i>	Edward Burrough, <i>The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation</i> (collected works, 1672)
Crisp, <i>Life / Memoir and Letters</i>	Stephen Crisp, <i>A Memoir of the Life of Stephen Crisp and his Memoir and Letters</i>
Dewsbury, <i>Faithful Testimony</i>	William Dewsbury, <i>A Faithful Testimony of That Ancient Servant of the Lord</i>
Edmundson, <i>Journal</i>	William Edmundson, <i>A Journal of the Life... of William Edmundson</i>
Farnsworth, <i>The Heart Opened by Christ</i>	Richard Farnsworth, <i>The Heart Opened by Christ</i>
Fisher, <i>Rusticus ad Academicos</i>	Samuel Fisher, <i>Rusticus ad Academicos</i>
Fox, <i>Journal</i>	

<b>Reference (as cited)</b>	<b>Full Source</b>
	George Fox, <i>Journal</i> (collected, multi-volume)
Fox, <i>Memoir</i>	<i>A Memoir of George Fox</i> (selected works/memoir)
Gratton, <i>Life</i>	John Gratton, <i>A Journal of the Life of John Gratton</i>
Howgill, <i>Dawnings of the Gospel-Day</i>	Francis Howgill, <i>The Dawnings of the Gospel-Day</i> (collected works)
Hubberthorne, <i>A Collection...</i>	Richard Hubberthorne, <i>A Collection of the Several Books and Writings</i>
Penington, <i>Works, Vol. 1–4</i>	Isaac Penington, <i>The Works of Isaac Penington</i> , Volumes 1–4
Penington, <i>Letters</i>	Isaac Penington, <i>Letters of Isaac Penington</i>
Penn, <i>No Cross, No Crown</i>	William Penn, <i>No Cross, No Crown</i>
Penn, <i>Life and Writings</i>	William Penn, <i>The Select Works / Life and Writings of William Penn</i>
Scott, <i>Baptism of Christ / Salvation by Christ</i>	Job Scott, <i>The Baptism of Christ and Salvation by Christ Alone</i> (collected works)
Story, <i>Life and Journal</i>	Thomas Story, <i>A Journal of the Life of Thomas Story</i>
Whitehead, <i>Christian Progress</i>	George Whitehead, <i>The Christian Progress of... George Whitehead</i>

Where a source survives only in rough optical-character-recognition form, obvious scanning artifacts (broken spacing, mis-read letters) have been silently normalized in the quotation; the sense and wording of the original are preserved. The text of Scripture throughout is the King James Version, the Bible of the early Friends.

## **A Note on Method**

The reader will notice that this commentary does not pretend to be a work of modern critical scholarship. It does not discuss the Johannine community, the composition history of the Gospel, the relationship between John and the Synoptics, or the various theories about authorship and date

that occupy academic commentators. These are valuable questions in their place, but they are not the questions the early Friends asked, and they are not the questions this commentary addresses.

The early Friends read the Gospel of John as the Word of God — not in the fundamentalist sense of a book dictated from heaven and requiring no interpretation, but in the deeper sense of a text through which the living Word speaks to the attentive heart. They brought to their reading not the tools of critical analysis but the experience of the Inward Light — and what they found in John’s Gospel confirmed, illuminated, and deepened that experience in ways that continue to astonish.

This commentary seeks to recover that way of reading — not to replace critical scholarship but to supplement it with something that critical scholarship, by its nature, cannot provide: the witness of men and women who read John’s Gospel by the Light it describes, and who found that the Light in the text and the Light in their hearts were one and the same.

## **A Word to the Reader**

Whether you come to this commentary as a Friend, as a student of Quaker history, as a lover of the Gospel of John, or simply as a seeker who has heard that there is a Light that lighteth every man — you are welcome here. The early Friends did not write for a select audience. They wrote for everyone, because the Light they proclaimed shines for everyone.

Read these words with an open heart. Let the first Friends speak for themselves — their language is sometimes archaic, their style sometimes rough, but their conviction is fierce and their experience is real. And as you read, attend to the Light within your own heart. For the early Friends would say that the best commentary on the Gospel of John is not written in a book at all — it is written in the soul that turns to the Light and discovers, as they discovered, that the true Light has been there all along, waiting to be received.

This is the Gospel of John. This is the Quaker Gospel. Let us turn to it now, and let the Light shine.

# John 1: The Word, the Light, and the Lamb

## The Text

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

*5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

*10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

*15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. 16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

*19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? 20 And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. 21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. 22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest*

thou of thyself? **23** He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

**24** And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. **25** And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? **26** John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; **27** He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. **28** These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

**29** The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. **30** This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. **31** And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. **32** And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. **33** And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. **34** And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

**35** Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; **36** And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! **37** And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. **38** Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? **39** He saith unto them, Come and see. And they came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

**40** One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. **42** And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

**43** The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. **44** Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip findeth Nathanael, and

saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. **46** And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! **48** Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. **49** Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. **50** Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. **51** And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–4 — In the Beginning Was the Word

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

No passage in all of scripture was more important to the early Quakers than the opening of John's Gospel. These four verses were the theological foundation upon which the entire Quaker movement was built — not as abstract doctrine, but as the articulation of a reality they had experienced. The Word that was in the beginning, the Word that was God, the Word in whom was life, and whose life was the light of men — this was not, for the first Friends, a distant philosophical concept. It was the very presence they encountered in the silence of worship, the power that convicted them of sin, the voice that called them out of darkness, and the life that transformed them into new creatures.

Isaac Pennington opened the deepest seam of this teaching when he held that the same Word who created the world is the Word that begins the creation of God in the heart. In the closing meditation of his treatise on Christ's baptism, he set John 1 directly beside the inward work:

*“John 1:1 and 3. ‘The Word was in the beginning, which created all things;’ and this Word is also the beginning of the creation of God in the heart. ‘In this Word was life, and the life was the light of men; and this light, which is life in the Word, shines in men’s darkness,’ which enlighteneth them that believe in it, and the life thereof quickeneth and giveth life to them that hear its voice.” (Penington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 310)*

For Penington, John 1:1–4 is not merely cosmology but the structural diagram of redemption: the same Word that made the heavens is the Word that opens a new creation within the believer. Penington pressed this further in Volume 1, identifying the Word as the living, ingrafted seed that stands at the door of the heart:

*“This is the Word that stands at the door of the heart, and speaks to be let in... and when it is let in, it speaks in the heart what is to be heard and done. It is nigh; it is in the heart, and in the mouth... The living Word, which is ‘quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,’ divides in the mouth, and divides in the heart, the vile from the precious; yea, it reacheth to the very inmost of the heart, and cuts between the roots.” (Penington, Works Vol. 1, chunk 26)*

Edward Burrough preached this same Word with the trumpet-blast for which he was famous. In his collected works (1672) — the volume gathered after his death in Newgate — Burrough joined John’s prologue to the universal testimony of Christ enlightening every soul:

*“Jesus Christ... hath given a measure of Light and Life unto every man, and there is a Light from him that shines in the heart of all men, shining in Darkness; the Light shines, but the Darkness comprehends it not... for in him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men, as the Scripture saith; and the Apostle preached the Light that shined in peoples hearts, and it was that Light that gave them the Light of the knowledge of the Glory of God.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 699)*

Francis Howgill, in *The Dawnings of the Gospel-Day* (1676), preserved one of the most lyrical seventeenth-century expansions of John 1:1–3 in all of Quaker literature, reading the prologue through the lens of Genesis 1 and the eternal pre-existence of the Lamb:

*“The Word was God; the same was in the beginning before the Foundation of the Earth was laid, or the Hills were framed; he was with the Father, and was the Father’s delight, and he delighted in the Father, and the Father in him; then did the morning Stars sing together, and the Sons of God shout for Joy. In the beginning were the heavens created, and the Pillars thereof set; and the Earth was framed by the Power, and all things both in the Heaven and in the Earth were created by the Power, God’s Son.” (Howgill, Dawnings of the Gospel-Day, chunk 334)*

George Fox’s settled testimony — repeated to magistrates, priests, and crowds across England — was that this Word of life is the very same word he was sent to preach in his own day. In a confrontation at Leominster, recounted in his *Memoir*, a priest cried out that the light spoken of in John 1 was “a natural light, a made light.” Fox’s response went straight to the prologue:

*“Whether he affirmed that was a created, natural, made light, which John, a man sent from God, bore witness to, when he said, ‘In Him, to wit, in the Word, was life; and that life was the light of men.’ Dost thou affirm and mean, that this light here spoken of, was a created, natural, made light? ... God sent John to bear witness to the light of the sun, moon and stars? ... Christ, the eternal Word, created all things; consequently, all these luminaries in the firmament; but... He was himself the true Light, that lighteth every man; and this Light shineth in the heart to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (Fox, Memoir of George Fox, chunk 33)*

William Penn, writing for a broader Christian audience in his *Life and Writings*, drew the four-fold logic of John 1:1–4 as a single argument:

*“The Word then, is Divine, and an apt term it is, that the evangelist styles him by, since it is so great an expression of the wisdom and power of God to men... ‘All things were made by him.’ If so, he wants no power. And if we were made by him, we must be new made by him too, or we can never enjoy God... ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of men.’ This is our point... as if men were next to the Word, and above all the rest of his works.” (Penn, Life and Writings, Vol. 5, chunk 427)*

Robert Barclay grounded the entire system of his *Apology* on this same passage (Barclay, *Apology*, Prop. V–VI). Elizabeth Bathurst, in *Truth’s Vindica-*

tion (1679), drew on the prologue to insist that the Light within is not a faculty of natural reason but the very life of the eternal Word (HPS 285, 348, 362). The theological implications, as the early Friends understood them, are vast. If the Word is God, the Light is divine. If all things were made by him, every person stands in a created relationship to the Word whether they know it or not. If in the Word is life, and that life is the light of men, then the Light is not something added to human nature from outside but the life of the Creator dwelling in the creature.

### **Verses 5–9 — The True Light Which Lighteth Every Man**

*And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

Here is the verse — John 1:9 — that stands at the absolute center of Quaker theology. No verse in the Bible was cited more frequently by early Friends. It was the verse Fox preached from field to field, the verse Nayler defended in his theological pamphlets, the verse Barclay built his system upon, the verse Penn carried to America. The theological claim is staggering: the *true* Light — not a partial light, not a borrowed light, not a merely natural light — *lighteth every man that cometh into the world*. Not some men. Not the elect. Not Christians. Every man, every woman, every child, in every nation, every century, every condition of life.

Fox described his commission in these terms:

*“I was sent to turn people from darkness to the light, that they might receive Christ Jesus: for, to as many as should receive him in his light, I saw that he would give power to become the sons of God... I saw that Christ died for all men, and was a propitiation for all; and enlightened all men and women with his divine and saving light; and that none could be a true believer, but who believed in it.” (Fox, Journal, chunk 84)*

This is the foundational Fox text on the universal Light: the saving light is one with the historic Christ, sufficient for salvation, and proves itself a true believer’s only by being believed in.

Edward Burrough’s preaching of John 1:9 was, if anything, more pointed than Fox’s. The opening exhortation in his *Memorable Works* is essentially a sermon on this verse:

*“All ye People, mind the Light of God within you, and hearken to that which shews you what is sin, and evil, which shews you your proud minds, your carnal covetous desires and affections, which checks and reproveth you for your ungodly deeds; this Light shines in Darkness, but the Darkness cannot comprehend it: This is the Light which hath enlightened every one that cometh into [the world].” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 5)*

Burrough understood John 1:9 not as a doctrine to be debated but as an invitation that already carried within it the means of its own verification: turn to the Light, and you will find it doing the work John promised. He pressed this still further:

*“If you love this Light, you love Christ, who will save you from all your [sins] and from condemnation; If you hate this Light, you hate Christ, and you remain in your sins to be everlastingly condemned... all people mind this Light which is of God, this will lead you up to God; this is the way to the Father.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 317)*

For Burrough the Light and Christ are not two things — to love one is to love the other; to hate one is to crucify the other. Fox stated the same equation polemically:

*“And now, as the Jews cried, ‘Crucify him, away with him’ in the flesh; so you that do profess him in the flesh, do not you cry, ‘away with the light which enlightens every man that cometh into the world,’ which is the life of Christ?” (GF5:202)*

Isaac Penington went further than perhaps any other early Friend in laying out the *nature and reach* of the universal Light. In *The Ancient Principle of Truth* (Works Vol. 3), he answered the question “What is this light which we so earnestly testify of?” with a sustained meditation on God’s nearness to every creature:

*“It is that which shineth from God in the heart, wherein God is near to men; and wherein and whereby men may seek after God, and find him... God, who is light, being so near every man, doth he never shine upon them? They are darkness; but doth he never appear in the darkness? He who is light, loveth mankind; doth he never visit them with his love?... Yes; the light is near all mankind, to discover to them, and help them against the darkness; and the love is near to help them*

*against the enmity which destroyeth, and so to save them. For whosoever joineth to the light of God's Spirit, cannot but witness salvation thereby; for it is of a saving nature.” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 201)*

Robert Barclay defended the universality of the Light with systematic rigor in Propositions V–VI of the *Apology*. The classic statement is in chunk 120:

*“This ‘true Light enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world.’ Where the apostle, being directed by God's Spirit, hath carefully avoided their captiousness, that would have restricted this to any certain number. Where every one is, there is none excluded. Next, should they be so obstinate, as sometimes they are, as to say that this [‘every man’] is only every one of the elect: these words following, ‘every man that cometh into the world,’ would obviate that objection. So that, it is plain, there comes no man into the world, whom Christ hath not enlightened in some measure, and in whose dark heart this Light doth not shine, though the ‘darkness comprehend it not,’ yet it shineth there.” (Barclay, Apology, chunk 120)*

Barclay was also clear that this Light is not man's natural conscience. In one of the most useful images of the *Apology*, he distinguished the two by way of an analogy:

*“So we confess also, that conscience is an excellent thing, where it is rightly informed and enlightened. Wherefore some of us have fitly compared it to a lantern, and the Light of Christ to the candle: a lantern is useful when a clear candle burns and shines in it, but otherwise of no use. To the Light of Christ then in the conscience, and not to man's natural conscience, it is that we continually commend men: this, not that, is it which we preach up.” (Barclay, Apology, chunk 109)*

The lantern is the conscience; the candle is Christ. Without the candle, the lantern is dark.

William Dewsbury brought this same conviction to pastoral, directly addressed form:

*“Therefore every one that desires to know the only true God, and Christ Jesus whom he hath sent. Turn your minds within, and examine your Hearts, search and try your ways with the Light Christ Jesus hath enlightened you withal, that shews you in your Hearts what is Sin... by*

*the righteous Law of God in the Heart, that reproveth you for them in the secret of the Heart and Conscience; there's your Teacher, the Spirit of the Lord within.” (Dewsbury, Faithful Testimony, chunk 334)*

The Light is already given. It is already showing you what is sin. The question is not whether you have the Light but whether you will attend to it. Stephen Crisp, in a letter included in his *Life*, pressed the point further: “the sufficiency of the light thou wilt come to feel, if thou dost not oppose it, but give up to be guided by it; and wilt know that it is able to deliver thee when thou art tempted, as well as to judge thee when thou hast yielded to the tempter” (Crisp, *Life*, chunk 89).

Elizabeth Bathurst wove John 1:9 with John 12:46 as a single testimony to the universal saving presence of Christ (HPS 397). James Nayler held John 1:9 together with John 16:13 — the Light that enlightens is also the Spirit of truth that leads into all truth (JN2:5). Margaret Fell’s epistles are saturated with this Light language (MFS 25; MFU 191, 217). And Penington summed up the experience of the obedient soul:

*“What doth the light of the pure God, and of his Christ, do for them that receive and obey it? Doth it not bring them out of darkness, and change their nature; so that they become children of light, and no more darkness, as they were before, but light in the Lord?” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 533)*

Verse 5 contains the sober counter-note: “*the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*” Penington’s reading of this verse is unsparing. The fallen mind reasons against the light rather than turning to it, “smothers and chokes it; but does not turn to the light, to have all the reasonings of his mind subdued by it” (Penington, *Works* Vol. 1, chunk 59). And yet the verb is in the present tense: the light *shineth*. The Light has not stopped shining because darkness fails to comprehend it. Those who turn to it, in any age, find it as bright and powerful as it was in the beginning.

### **Verses 10–14 — Receiving the Word Made Flesh**

*He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*

The tragedy announced in verses 10–11 is one that the early Friends felt keenly in their own experience. The Light was in the world, was the creator

of the world, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. Fox and the first Friends experienced this rejection firsthand: they came proclaiming the Light, and the religious world of seventeenth-century England rejected them, imprisoned them, beat them, and drove them from their communities. Penington's reading of this verse was bitter and exact: that very rejection is repeated whenever professing Christians refuse the Light's inward appearance (Penington, *Works* Vol. 1, chunk 116).

But verse 12 is the glorious counter-testimony, and Penington gave it one of his most careful expositions in the long epistle *A Touchstone or Trial of Faith*, written specifically on John 1:12–13. He works through the logic step by step:

*“This sweet and soaring evangelist having glanced at the excellency of our Lord Christ, in his relation to God (being his Word) his presence, and oneness with God, vers. 1... he comes in the next place to speak of his fore-runner... and what of Christ might be learned from him... These persons come to it by a new birth, they come not to faith by the powers of nature, but they are new born before they believe: They have a new seed of a new life put into them, out of which faith grows, and from which it fetcheth its ability to act.”* (Penington, *Letters*, chunk 264, 267)

For Penington, the order in verses 12–13 is decisive: faith does not produce the new birth; the new birth produces faith. The privilege of becoming a son of God is given to those who receive Christ, but receiving Christ is itself the fruit of a seed already sown by God. He closes that epistle with what is, in effect, a summary of John 1:11–13:

*“Take notice of these four great truths... 1. That Christ is the light come into the world to lighten men out of their darkness; there is no getting out of spiritual darkness, but by Christ the true and only spiritual light. 2. The persons for whom he doth this, must believe, must receive him by faith for their light. 3. Faith proceeds from the new birth, a man must be new born that he may believe. 4. The great privilege Christ bestows on those that believe, which is this, he gives them Authority to become the sons of God.”* (Penington, *Letters*, chunk 271)

Verse 14 — *“the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”* — is the great historic affirmation, and the first Friends made it without reservation. They

believed that the eternal Word took flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, who lived and taught and suffered and died and rose again. George Whitehead, in *The Christian Progress*, explicitly defended this against critics who accused Quakers of denying either Christ's deity or his humanity (Whitehead, *Christian Progress*, chunk 405). But the first Friends also insisted — and this was their distinctive contribution — that the Incarnation is not merely a past event to be remembered. Penington's Volume 3, querying what it means to feel Christ formed within, drives the point home:

*“If we have felt a measure of the same life, power, and anointing revealed in our vessels as was revealed in his, is it not of the same nature? Is it not the same thing? Is not Christ the seed? And is not this seed sown in the heart? Now if this seed spring and grow up in me into a spiritual shape and form (though it be but of a babe), is not Christ then formed in me?... Is there any more than one, or is there any other than he? Is Christ divided? Is there one Christ within, and another without?”* (Penington, *Works Vol. 3*, chunk 32)

Barclay, in the *Apology*, took care to guard this against caricature: Christ dwells in the saints not as he dwelt in the man Jesus, but “mediately, as he is in that seed, which is in us” — head and members, vine and branches (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 104). The Incarnation is, as Penington and Bathurst both argued, an ongoing spiritual reality (IP1:246; IP4:133, 172; HPS 348, 362), but never confused with the one historic Incarnation in the flesh.

### **Verses 15–18 — Grace and Truth**

*And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

The contrast between Moses and Christ — between law and grace — was one the early Friends grasped with both hands. Barclay distinguished them sharply:

*“Herein doth the Law and the Gospel differ, in that the Law, being outwardly written, brings under condemnation, but hath not life in it to save; whereas the Gospel, as it declares and makes manifest the evil, so, it being an inward powerful thing, also gives power to obey, and*

*deliver from the evil... This grace then that is inward, and not an outward law, is to be the rule of Christians.” (Barclay, Apology, chunk 57)*

The law is outside us and condemns; grace is within us and saves. Penington, in Volume 2, identified the new law of grace with “the law of the Spirit, or the light of the Spirit in the heart, which discovers sin (not only in the outward acts, but in its principle, rise, first motions, and inward nature), giving forth his living commands against it” (Penington, *Works* Vol. 2, chunk 41). Grace is not lawlessness; it is a deeper, more inward law — the law of the Spirit written on the heart.

Verse 16 — *“of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace”* — George Whitehead expounded as the measured communication of Christ’s infinite fulness to finite vessels:

*“His fulness cannot be comprehended or contained in any finite creature, but is in measure known and experienced in us, as we are capable to receive the same; as of his fulness we have received grace for grace. Christ our Mediator received the Spirit, not by measure, but in fulness; but to every one [is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ].” (Whitehead, Christian Progress, chunk 380)*

Verse 18 — *“the only begotten Son... he hath declared him”* — Barclay made the cornerstone of his christology: there is no knowledge of the Father but by the Son, and no knowing of the Son but by walking in his Light (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 24). The chain is unbroken: the Father is declared by the Son, the Son is experienced as the Light within, and the Light is given to every person who comes into the world.

### **Verses 19–28 — John’s Witness: A Voice, Not the Light**

*He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness... I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.*

John the Baptist’s self-identification as “a voice” rather than the Light itself was deeply instructive for the early Friends. True ministry is voice, not Light — it points to the Light, proclaims the Light, calls people to attend to the Light, but is never a substitute for the Light itself. Job Scott, writing in the next century, captured the structural reason for John’s “decrease”:

*“Had John been the administrator of a gospel ordinance, and therein abode faithful, he might, instead of decreasing, have increased therein;*

*but being the administrator of a figurative ordinance, in its very nature, end, and design decreasing, he, as its administrator, must decrease... that gospel kingdom which John proclaimed as near at hand, and prepared the way for, being void of all mere figurative ordinances.” (Scott, Baptism of Christ, chunk 43)*

John’s answer about baptism is also significant: “I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.” The one they did not know — Christ — was already standing among them. This is the Quaker insight distilled to its essence: Christ is already present, already standing among you, already within you. The question is not how to bring Christ near but how to recognize the Christ who is already there.

### **Verses 29–34 — The Lamb of God**

*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was a title the first Friends used with reverence and power. George Whitehead’s exposition is unusually full and worth quoting at length, since it shows that early Friends held both the historical atonement and its present inward operation:

*“Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world, by purging the conscience and purifying the hearts of all them who truly receive him and believe in him, even in his holy name and divine power. O! therefore, behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away and putteth an end to sin, finisheth transgression, and brings in everlasting righteousness... He who offered up himself a Lamb without spot to God for all mankind, and thereby became a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, never designed to leave men in sin and transgression all their days, but to afford all men grace to lead them to true repentance.” (Whitehead, Christian Progress, chunk 391)*

Note both halves: the once-for-all “Lamb without spot” offered at Calvary, and the present-tense purging that takes away sin now. The Quaker doctrine of the atonement was, characteristically, both objective and experiential — never one without the other.

Isaac Pennington opened this same theme as the Lamb’s War — the inward conflict in which Christ destroys the power of sin in the heart. The catechism in Volume 3 begins where John 1 begins:

*“Who is the Lamb? Answer: He that takes away the sins of the world. The Word which was in the beginning. ‘Behold the Lamb of God,’ saith John, John 1:1. and ver. 29. He that was born of the virgin Mary after the flesh; and was also the man-child, born of the travailing church, after the Spirit. Rev. 12:5.” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 326)*

For Penington the Lamb of John 1:29 is the same Word of John 1:1 — there is no distinction between the eternal Word, the historic Lamb, and the inward Christ formed in the saints. William Penn put the moral imperative bluntly:

*“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might put an end to sin, and destroy the works of the devil. — 1 John iii. 8. Do you know this by your own experience? Deceive not yourselves; where, pray, does sin dwell? and where are the works of the devil? are they not in the hearts of men and women?... Must not Christ, who is the Seed of God, there bruise his head, there destroy his work and take his kingdom from him?” (Penn, Life and Writings, Vol. 5, chunk 205)*

Fox cited the Lamb repeatedly (GF4:190; GF5:89, 238, 285; GF6:354). Edward Burrough’s whole framing of the Quaker movement was that it was a participation in the Lamb’s war against Antichrist (Burrough, *Memorable Works*, chunk 849). Behind every Quaker use of “the Lamb” stands the present-tense conviction: the Lamb is not a distant figure remembered from Calvary; the Lamb is the inward Christ who is actively taking away the sin of those who receive him.

## **Verses 35–42 — Come and See**

*He saith unto them, Come and see.*

“Come and see” — perhaps the most Quaker invitation in all of scripture. The first Friends did not ask people to believe a creed or accept a doctrine. They invited them to come and see — to turn to the Light within and discover for themselves what was there. Fox’s entire ministry was built on this invitation: turn within, attend to the Light, and you will find Christ there. You do not need my word for it. Come and see.

John Gratton, in his *Life*, lingered over the disciples’ question — “*where dwellest thou?*” — as the moment of discovery for every soul that has heard John’s witness and turned to follow:

*“This is very precious; to see him and know his dwelling place, and to abide with him during the time which is given us to live. Let it be thy joy to abide with him all thy time, and see where he dwells; this is more than to hear of him with the hearing of the ear, to see and hear him thyself, and be taught by him.” (Gratton, Life, chunk 112)*

Andrew’s testimony to his brother Simon — “We have found the Messiah” — captures the Quaker experience of discovery. The early Friends spoke constantly of *finding* — finding the Light, finding Christ, finding the truth. Not inventing it, not constructing it, not being persuaded of it by argument, but finding it — discovering what was already there, already waiting, already shining in the darkness.

### **Verses 43–51 — Can Any Good Thing Come Out of Nazareth?**

*And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.*

Penington used Nathanael’s dismissive question to illuminate the perennial human tendency to despise the true spiritual appearing because it comes in a form we do not expect. He worked the parallel in detail in Volume 1 of his *Works*:

*“They excepted at his descent and kindred. ‘Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary?’... What! this that glorious Messiah!... So again, John 7:27. ‘We know this man whence he is; but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.’... At his country, or place of his education and residence, which was Nazareth of Galilee. ‘Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?’” (Penington, Works Vol. 1, chunk 176)*

The religious establishment of seventeenth-century England dismissed the Quaker message for exactly the same reasons. It came from uneducated tradesmen, from women, from the socially marginal — from Nazareth, as it were. But Philip’s answer is the only answer that matters: “Come and see.”

The chapter closes with the promise of open heavens: “*Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*” The early Friends claimed to live under this open heaven. In the silence of their worship, in the gathered meeting where the presence of Christ was palpably felt, heaven was open and the communion between God and humanity was real, immediate, and ongoing.

## The Universal Scope of the Light

The universality of the Light — “*lighteth every man that cometh into the world*” — was perhaps the most revolutionary and controversial element of early Quaker theology. It brought them into conflict with Calvinist predestinarians, with Catholics, and with Protestants of all stripes who restricted saving grace to those who had heard the preached gospel. Against all of these, the early Friends maintained the plain reading of John 1:9.

Barclay, drawing on patristic precedent, even cited Cyril of Alexandria in defense of the same reading:

*“With great diligence and watchfulness, doth the apostle John endeavour to anticipate and prevent the vain thoughts of men... Let not the world accuse the Word of God, and his eternal Light, but its own weakness: for the Son enlightens, but the creature rejects the grace that is given unto it.”* (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 122, citing Cyril)

The radical implication is spelled out by Barclay still more directly: the Gospel itself is universally preached, not merely as outward declaration but as the inward power of God unto salvation. “The Gospel is not a mere declaration of good things, being the power of God unto salvation, to all those that believe... therefore it is said to be preached ‘in every creature under heaven’: whereas there are many thousands of men and women to whom the outward gospel was never preached” (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 125).

This is the deepest seam of the Quaker reading of John 1: the Light, the Word, and the Gospel are one. Wherever the Light shines — and it shines into every dark heart — there the Word is at work, and there the Gospel is being preached. The first chapter of John is, as the early Friends recognized, the theological bedrock of everything. The eternal Word, the Light that lighteth every man, the Word made flesh who continues to dwell among and within his people, the Lamb who takes away sin, the invitation to come and see — all of Quakerism is here, in seed, waiting to unfold through the remaining twenty chapters of the most important Gospel in the Quaker Bible.

# John 2: Water to Wine and the Temple Cleansed

## The Text

*1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: 2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. 3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. 4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. 5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

*6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. 7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. 9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, 10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. 11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.*

*12 After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.*

*13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

*18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? 19 Jesus answered and*

said unto them, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? 21 But he spake of the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.*

*23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

## Commentary

### Verses 1–11 — The Wedding at Cana: Water into Wine

*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee... This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory.*

The early Friends read the miracle at Cana on two levels at once. On one level they affirmed it as a historical event — one of the mighty works of Christ in his earthly ministry, the “beginning of miracles” by which he “manifested forth his glory.” On another level they saw in it a parable of the whole of Christ’s work within the soul. The six waterpots of stone, set there expressly “after the manner of the purifying of the Jews,” were for them the outward ordinances of the old covenant — stone vessels of ceremonial cleansing, the law of the letter. Christ does not break the waterpots; he fills them, and turns their water into wine. This is exactly the movement the first Friends had felt in their own conviction: the outward forms of religion transmuted, by the immediate hand of Christ, into the living gladness of the Spirit.

Fox cited this passage for Christ’s transforming power (GF4:108; GF5:267; GF6:192), and Nayler developed the spiritual reading (JN1:256). But it is Isaac Penington who states the underlying principle most exactly. Christ, he writes, is “the substance of all the types and shadows of the law,” and his whole office is to carry his people out of the outward letter into the inward life:

*“CHRIST, the eternal Son of God, the substance of all the types and shadows of the law, was made a priest to God, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life... Thus he gathered together living stones, built them into a living temple for the Father of life to dwell in... The church of Israel, the church of the Old Testament, the church of Moses, was gathered by the letter, was to be ordered by the letter, was to keep and observe the law of the letter... but the New Testament church was to be of true Jews, of Jews gathered in the power, circumcised by the power, renewed in the power.” (Penington, Works Vol. 2, chunk 79)*

The water of “the purifying of the Jews” is the religion of the letter; the wine is the religion of the power. To taste the wine is to be made a “Jew inward,” renewed in the power rather than ordered by the letter. Penington elsewhere gathered the whole catalogue of outward figures under this same conversion — circumcision a type of “his circumcising the heart,” the passover a type of “his blood... sprinkled upon the conscience,” “the outward law, in the letter, written in tables of stone, a shadow of the inward, living, pure, powerful, spiritual law of love and life, which God writes in the hearts of his children” (Penington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 60). The miracle at Cana is that conversion enacted in a single afternoon: stone water made gospel wine.

The governor’s astonished verdict — *“thou hast kept the good wine until now”* — the Friends took as the very order of the spiritual life. The world spends its best first; God reserves his best for last. The deepest consolations of the Spirit are not lavished at the threshold of the journey but drawn from the inward wells as the soul presses on in faithfulness. Penington knew that taste:

*“Whosoever drinketh of the water which he giveth, shall never thirst more after water from without, but shall for ever thenceforward be satisfied with the springings up of the well of life from within... The thirsting after it, when the soul could not meet with it, was a time of great sorrow and perplexity; but when the river of life is found, when the well of life is received, and the water springs up, the soul draws it from the spring, and drinks it with unspeakable joy.” (Penington, Letters, chunk 109)*

Mary’s instruction to the servants — *“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it”* — could stand as an epigraph for the whole Quaker manner of worship and

ministry. The servant does not invent, program, or organize; he listens for Christ's word and obeys it. In the waiting worship of a Friends' meeting this is precisely the discipline: the gathered company sits in stillness, attending for the voice of Christ, ready to do whatsoever he says. The water is only filled to the brim and drawn out at his word — and at his word it is found to be wine.

### **Verses 13–17 — Cleansing the Temple**

*And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple.*

The cleansing of the temple the first Friends applied with fierce inward power. If Christ cleansed the outward temple at Jerusalem, how much more does he cleanse the inward temple of the heart? Fox drew the application directly (GF3:10; GF5:267; GF8:105), and Nayler with theological force (JN1:256). The oxen, sheep, doves, and money-changers are the carnal thoughts, worldly desires, and self-serving motions that have colonized the place where God ought to be worshipped in spirit and truth.

This was no mere figure of speech for early Friends; it was experience. The process of conviction involved a searching, painful season in which the Light exposed everything within the heart contrary to God — and that exposure was Christ wielding the scourge of small cords. Pennington names the agent of the cleansing as Christ himself sitting in his temple to purge it:

*“He hath received the fulness from the Father, and hath freely given of his grace and of his truth to the sons of men, to regenerate them, to cleanse and sanctify their hearts, and make them fit for God to dwell in. He sitteth in his temple as ‘a refiner and purifier of silver,’ (who is like ‘a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap’) and when he hath purified his disciples, his children, his Levites, he presenteth them to the Lord, for the Lord to tabernacle and dwell in.” (Pennington, Works Vol. 2, chunk 90)*

The scourge and the refiner's fire are one work: Christ driving out of the inward temple all that is false, worldly, and self-serving, until the heart is fit for God to dwell in.

The cleansing also bore an outward edge. The first Friends saw the established churches of their day as temples defiled by merchandise — the buying and selling of holy things through tithes, fees for ministry, the sale

of livings, the whole commerce of a hireling religion. When Fox and his companions stood up in the steeple-houses to testify against this trade, they understood themselves to be doing, in spirit, what Christ had done at Jerusalem: confronting the merchandising of the Father's house and refusing to let it be made "an house of merchandise."

### **Verses 18–22 — The Temple of His Body**

*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But he spake of the temple of his body.*

Christ's identification of his own body as the true temple was decisive for the Quaker understanding of worship. If the true temple is not made with hands — if it is the body of Christ, and by extension the body of believers united with him — then buildings of stone are nothing to the matter of worship. This is why the first Friends refused to call church buildings "churches," insisting on the plain word "steeple-houses." Penington made the equation explicit, carrying the temple from Christ's risen body into the very person of the believer:

*"Everyone that believes in Christ is a living stone; and being a living stone, he is laid upon the living foundation, and so is a part of the building in the temple of the living God. Yea, his body and spirit being cleansed, he himself is a temple wherein God dwells, appears, and is worshipped. And the gathering of any of these together at any time in the life, in the name of Christ, is a larger temple, and such a temple as Christ never fails to be in the midst of." (Penington, Works Vol. 1, chunk 39)*

The church is not a structure; it is a people. The temple is not stone; it is the cleansed body in which God dwells. And where two or three such living stones are gathered in the life, there is "a larger temple," and Christ in the midst of it.

### **Verses 23–25 — He Knew What Was in Man**

*But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

This closing note strikes a Johannine theme the early Friends recognized at once: Christ knows the human heart. He sees through outward profession to inward reality. This, for Friends, was precisely the office of the Inward

Light — it searches the heart, reveals hidden things, and exposes the true motive beneath the show of religion. Pennington’s catechism on the Light describes exactly this discriminating witness lodged within every conscience:

*“God hath a witness in men’s consciences... he hath not left himself without witness inwardly; but there is somewhat in men to testify of God, and for God, and against his enemy, and all deceitful appearances; which witness always speaketh faithfully, and testifieth truth.”*  
(Pennington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 70)

One cannot hide from such a witness. Christ “needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” — and the Light within still knows. The early Quaker experience of conviction was just this kind of exposure, in particulars rather than generalities. As Bathurst testified, “a remnant having heard that (in our hearts) that that told us all things that we ever did, we know this to be the voice of Christ” (HPS 404) — an echo of the Samaritan woman’s testimony in the next chapters. The Light does not say merely “you are a sinner”; it shows you *this* sin, *this* dishonesty, *this* hidden motive. Christ knew what was in man, and the Light within knows still, searching the depths with unflinching clarity and unshakable love.

## **The Pattern of John 2**

The chapter sets a pattern that runs through the whole Gospel: transformation from outward to inward, from old to new, from form to substance. Water becomes wine — the old ceremonies become the new life of the Spirit. The temple is cleansed and then redefined — the outward place of worship gives way to the inward temple of the body. And Christ knows what is in man — the appearance of religion gives way to the reality of the heart.

The first Friends saw in this pattern the very shape of their own mission. They had come to enact, in their own generation, the change Christ worked at Cana and in the temple: the turning of dead religion into living faith, of outward ceremony into inward reality, of the stone waterpots of the old dispensation into the new wine of the Spirit. That transformation is never finished. In every age the temptation returns to mistake the waterpots for the wine, to settle back into the letter, to make the Father’s house a house of merchandise. And in every age Christ is present to work the miracle again — to cleanse the temple, to turn the water into wine, and to search the hearts of all who call upon his name.

# John 3: Born Again of the Spirit, Light and Darkness

## The Text

*1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

*9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

*16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

*19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

*22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judæa; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. 23 And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. 24 For John was not yet cast into prison.*

*25 Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. 26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. 27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. 28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.*

*31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. 32 And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. 33 He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. 34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. 35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. 36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

## **Commentary**

### **Verses 1–8 — Ye Must Be Born Again**

*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...  
Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into*

*the kingdom of God... That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

The new birth stood at the very centre of early Quaker preaching. The first Friends were not content with a religion of outward profession, doctrinal correctness, or moral reform. They insisted on nothing less than a complete change of nature — being born again, born of the Spirit, made new from the ground up. This was not, for them, a metaphor or a theological abstraction; it was the most real thing in the world, a thing they had passed through themselves and now called others to. Nicodemus’s bewilderment — “How can a man be born when he is old?” — represented for Friends the helplessness of the natural mind before spiritual reality. The new birth cannot be reasoned out, achieved by effort, taken in a sacrament, or subscribed to in a creed. It is the work of the Spirit, as sovereign and unconstrained as the wind.

No one in the corpus probed these verses more searchingly than Isaac Penington. In the long epistle he devoted to this very chapter, he laid out four questions — what is meant by water, what it is to be born of water, what it is to be born of the Spirit, and what entrance into the kingdom is. His answer to the first was that the “water” is no outward element at all:

*“By water is meant, the knowledge of God in Christ, the sight of God in the face of Christ; wherein eternal life consists. If thou hadst known the gift of God, &c. thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water, Joh. 4:10... The heavenly doctrine of life and salvation, is often expressed in Scripture, by this term of water.”*  
(Penington, Letters, chunk 274)

The water of the new birth is the living knowledge of God — already the same gift Christ offers the Samaritan woman in the next chapter. To be born of the Spirit, then, is not a change a man can work upon himself. Penington pressed the point with great tenderness and exactness:

*“It is to have this change from these waters wrought in us by the spirit. A man can never change his own heart, by any of the truths of God; but it must be the spirit that must do it. This water is too spiritual a seed for any man to sow in his own heart... The Spirit breathes his own breath, blows his own blast, makes his own sound of life himself in our spirits, and thus are we born of him. It is not all the changes a man can make by the light of natural truths, nay by the light of spiritual truths...”*

*that will amount to a new birth; but it must be the spirit of Christ breathing this seed into him.” (Penington, Letters, chunk 275)*

Here is the eighth verse opened from the inside: the wind that “bloweth where it listeth” is the Spirit breathing his own breath into the soul, sowing a seed no creature can sow for itself. The new birth is therefore not the improvement of the old nature but the emergence of a wholly new one. Penington’s conclusion was that the whole order of the gospel hangs upon this: faith does not produce the new birth — the new birth produces faith. “Faith proceeds from the new birth, a man must be new born that he may believe... Those that will believe on God’s Christ, must be born of God” (Penington, *Letters*, chunk 271).

George Fox carried the same insistence to magistrates and crowds, and near the end of his life set it down in a paper showing that the kingdom of God is not merely a thing “at a distance,” reserved for another life, but is entered now — by those, and only those, who are actually born again:

*“Christ saith, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,’ John iii. 3. ‘That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit,’ ver. 6. So, ‘except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,’ ver. 5.” (Fox, Journal Vol. 2, chunk 448)*

For Fox the new birth must be real, not notional — actually transformed in one’s inmost nature, and not merely professing the doctrine of regeneration (GF3:91, 102; GF4:47; GF5:90, 199). Nayler connected the new birth directly with the Spirit of truth: to be born of the Spirit (John 3:5–8) is to receive that Spirit of truth which the world cannot receive (John 14:17), and so to be born into a world governed by an entirely new principle (JN2:205). Barclay grounded his argument for universal grace partly here, since the Light that makes the new birth possible has been given to every person (RBA 61; RBAF 44), and Bathurst pressed the spiritual nature of the new birth against every merely outward reading (HPS 362).

## **Verses 9–15 — The Son of Man Lifted Up**

*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

The comparison between the bronze serpent and the lifted-up Son of Man drew from the early Friends a characteristic inward turn. William Penn

made the application directly: the lifting up is not only the historical event on Calvary but the present exaltation of Christ within the heart. “Let him be lifted up in you, and your eye be to him; who, wherever he is lifted up, draweth all such after him. And this is the reason, why people are not now drawn after Christ, because he is not lifted up in their hearts” (WPR 137). When Christ is given his rightful place in the soul — no longer suppressed by the weight of sin and self-will — all are drawn to him. Margaret Fell made the same use of the text (MFU 160), as did Fox in his doctrinal writings (GF3:228; GF5:147). The outward event in Israel’s history and the outward event at Calvary both point to the one inward reality of Christ lifted up and honoured in the believer’s heart.

### **Verses 16–21 — Light Come into the World**

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son... And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

These verses — among the most famous in all of scripture — the early Friends read through the lens of the Inward Light. Verse 17 was vital to Barclay’s case for universal grace: God sent his Son not to condemn the world but that the world through him might be *saved* (RBA 107; RBAF 80). The scope is “the world,” and the purpose is salvific. Penington opened the same divine intention as a covenant of light reaching every creature:

*“The covenant of light and life as universal, and nigh all mankind, by which the darkest parts and corners of the earth are at some times enlightened, and feel somewhat of the quickening life. For the life is the light of men, and the light comes from the life, and is a quick, piercing, quickening light, conveying warmth and life, yea, living virtue into the darkest hearts... ‘I have sent my light to enlighten all men.’” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 223)*

But it is verses 19–21 that carry the greatest weight, for here Christ himself defines condemnation in terms of light and darkness. Condemnation is not an arbitrary decree but the natural fruit of refusing the Light. The Light has come — into the world, into every person (John 1:9) — and those who love darkness rather than light condemn themselves by their own turning away. Fox preached this verse as the very pivot between belief and unbelief, salvation and self-inflicted ruin:

*“If you believe in the light, as Christ commands, and saith, ‘believe in the light, that you may be children of light,’ you believe in Christ, and come to learn of him who is the way to the Father. This is the light which shows the evil actions you have [done].” (Fox, Journal Vol. 1, chunk 280)*

Edward Burrough preached the same offer with his customary trumpet-blast, holding the Light out as the one thing that will lead a soul out of the world’s nature and into life:

*“Christ Jesus is the Light of the World, the true Light, which lightneth every man that comes into the World, and by which every one of you is lightned, which Light, if it you love, and be guided by, it will lead you out of the Worlds way and nature, and unrighteousness, and will give you an entrance into Eternal Life and Peace... and in this World it will teach you how to serve God in Righteousness in your Generation.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 122)*

Penington’s reading of the darkness that “comprehended it not” is unsparing — the fallen mind hearkens to its own reasonings against the light, “smothers and chokes it,” but will not turn to have those reasonings subdued by it (IP1:59). And yet the glorious obverse stands: “He that doeth truth cometh to the light.” Those who respond do not fear exposure but welcome it, because their deeds are “wrought in God” — springing not from self-will but from the divine life within.

## **Verses 22–30 — He Must Increase**

*He must increase, but I must decrease.*

John the Baptist’s declaration the early Friends took as the fundamental law of the spiritual life. The self must decrease; Christ must increase. This is precisely what happens in waiting worship: the busy, self-asserting will is stilled, and Christ is given room to fill the space, to speak, to work. John’s further word — “a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (v. 27) — was foundational to the Quaker understanding of ministry. No one takes up true ministry by their own choice or by human ordination; it is received from heaven, given by Christ, exercised only under divine commission.

## Verses 31–36 — He That Believeth on the Son

*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

Fox and Nayler both rested on this closing verse (GF8:302; JN2:224f). For the early Friends, “believing on the Son” was never mere assent to propositions about Christ. It was trusting in, turning toward, and obeying the inward presence of Christ — the Light within. To believe on the Son is to believe in the Light (John 12:36); to believe not is to turn from the one source of life and remain under “the wrath of God,” which is not vindictive punishment but the settled consequence of abiding in darkness while the Light shines. The whole chapter moves from the new birth to the nature of condemnation to the necessity of faith, and at every point the early Friends heard one message: Christ is present, the Light is given, the new birth is offered — but it requires turning, yielding, receiving. The whole initiative is God’s; the response is ours.

## John 4: Living Water and Worship in Spirit and Truth

### The Text

*1 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, 2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) 3 He left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee. 4 And he must needs go through Samaria. 5 Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.*

*7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. 8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) 9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. 10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. 11 The woman saith*

unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? **12** Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? **13** Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: **14** But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

**15** The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. **16** Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. **17** The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: **18** For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. **19** The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

**20** Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. **21** Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. **22** Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. **23** But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. **24** God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

**25** The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. **26** Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

**27** And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? **28** The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, **29** Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? **30** Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

**31** In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. **32** But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. **33** Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? **34** Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him

that sent me, and to finish his work. **35** Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. **36** And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. **37** And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. **38** I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

**39** And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. **40** So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. **41** And many more believed because of his own word; **42** And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

**43** Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. **44** For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. **45** Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilæans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.

**46** So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. **47** When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. **48** Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. **49** The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. **50** Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. **51** And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. **52** Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. **53** So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. **54** This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judæa into Galilee.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–14 — Living Water

*If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water... the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

The conversation at Jacob's well is one of the great encounters in all of scripture, and the early Friends read it with intense personal recognition. The living water Christ offers — water springing up from within into everlasting life — was precisely what they had tasted when they turned to the Light within. This was not the dead water of outward religion, drawn up laboriously from the deep well of human tradition and learning. This was living water, fresh and inexhaustible, given by Christ himself to every soul that asked.

Isaac Penington fastened on the words “the water that I shall give” and drew out their universal and self-multiplying nature. The promise, he insisted, is not for a favoured few but for everyone who actually drinks; and what is received is no mere draught but a living spring:

*“Is not this a universal promise, to be made good to every one that drinks of the water of life, of the water that Christ gives? Did not Christ promise it should be a well? a springing well? The fountain is of a springing nature: and is not every drop of the same nature? of a living nature? of a springing nature? He that rightly drinks doth he not receive a well?... Oh, the water which Christ giveth! doth it not become a well in the true disciple, in the living disciple, out of which well the water is still springing and flowing to nourish up with life and unto life, even with life of an everlasting nature, and unto life everlasting?”* (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 268)

For Penington every true drinker becomes a spring; the gift is not a static possession but a fountain perpetually rising. This is the deepest seam of the Quaker reading: the living water is the Spirit of Christ welling up within, not external sacraments, not the water of baptismal fonts, not the learning of universities, but the actual life of God flowing in the heart. Fox cited the passage repeatedly for this inward spiritual life (GF3:91; GF5:90, 199); Nayler tied the living water to the saving knowledge of God (JN1:127); Bathurst joined it to the Light that enlightens every person — the same

Christ who offers living water to the Samaritan woman offers his Light to all (HPS 334).

The woman's misunderstanding — thinking of the bucket, the well, the physical effort of drawing — is for the Quaker reader the perennial confusion between outward and inward, letter and spirit. She is thinking about the cistern; Christ is speaking of a spring within her own heart she has never noticed. This was the confusion the early Friends met everywhere: people so fixed on the outward forms of religion — the steeple-house, the set prayers, the communion bread, the baptismal water — that they missed the living spring within.

### **Verses 15–19 — He Told Me All Things That Ever I Did**

*Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband.*

Christ's knowledge of the woman's history — “he told me all things that ever I did” — Friends found deeply significant, for this is exactly what the Inward Light does: it reveals the truth about our lives, showing us ourselves as we really are, not as we pretend to be. The conviction that comes through attending to the Light is not vague moral discomfort but specific, searching, personal revelation. Bathurst wrote from evident experience: “a remnant having heard that (in our hearts) that that told us all things that we ever did, we know this to be the voice of Christ” (HPS 404). The voice that tells us all things is recognized as the voice of Christ — not by theological reasoning but by direct experience, because no one else could tell us these things with such accuracy and such love. Fox applied the text in his ministry (GF4:73), pointing people to the Light that would reveal their true condition — not to crush them but to bring them, like the woman, to confess, “is not this the Christ?”

### **Verses 20–24 — Worship in Spirit and in Truth**

*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

This is the passage. If John 1:9 is the theological foundation of Quakerism, John 4:23–24 is its liturgical foundation — the scriptural basis for the entire Quaker understanding of worship. No text was more frequently invoked to

explain and defend the radical Quaker practice: gathering in silence, without liturgy, without programmed preaching, without set prayers, without sacraments, without music, without any outward form whatever — waiting in stillness for the immediate movings of the Spirit.

Penington stated the principle in its barest form: with the loss of the Spirit, the true worship itself had been lost, and only the changed nature can render it again:

*“The true worship of God in the gospel is in the Spirit... The true worship is in the spirit, and in the truth, and the true worshippers worship there; and such worshippers the Father seeks, and such worship he accepts; but all other worship is false worship... He that worships out of the Spirit, he worships in that nature; but he that worships aright, must have his nature changed, and must worship in that thing wherein he is changed, in that faith, in that life, in that nature, in that Spirit whereby and whereto he is changed.”* (Penington, Works Vol. 1, chunk 30)

The point is exact and demanding: worship “in spirit” is not a matter of sincerity added to outward forms, but of being born into the very Spirit in which alone the Father can be worshipped. Fox’s *Journal* set out the whole programme of the Quaker revolution in worship as the direct application of this verse — coming “off from all the world’s worships, to know the spirit of truth in the inward parts... that in it they might worship the Father of spirits, who seeks such to worship him; which spirit they that worshipped not in, knew not what they worshipped” (GFJN 35). The “world’s worships” must be left behind, because true worship is in spirit and in truth; those who worship in outward forms “knew not what they worshipped.”

Robert Barclay gave this its most careful systematic defence, observing that this is the first, chiefest, and fullest testimony Christ ever gives of gospel worship — and that its hallmark is the silencing of the natural man:

*“The nature of this worship which is performed by the operation of the Spirit, the natural man being silent, doth appear from these words of Christ (John 4:23–24)... This testimony is the more specially to be observed, for that it is both the first, chiefest, and most ample testimony, which Christ gives us of his Christian worship, as different and contradistinguished from that under the Law... so then it is no more a worship consisting in outward observations, to be performed by man at set times or opportunities.”* (Barclay, Apology, chunk 273)

Samuel Crisp drew the same conclusion in pastoral form: every man ought to wait upon God “in the measure of his own good Spirit,” for in all religious worship “there is especial need that men should wait upon God, in the gift of his own Spirit, to feel the conduct and assistance of it; for this is the salt of the sacrifice, it is this gives savour and life to every duty” (Crisp, *Memoir and Letters*, chunk 21). Nayler, Penington, and Margaret Fell all drew extensively on the passage (JN1:68, 127; JN2:188, 205; IP2:114; IP4:36; MFS 21, 35; MFU 227, 243), Fell calling women and men alike to leave the outward forms and come into the worship the Father seeks. Penn applied it practically, urging Friends to examine their own worship for whatever was merely formal or habitual (WPR 156f, 295).

The woman’s question — whether to worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem — is the question of all institutional religion: *where* is the right place? Christ’s answer explodes the question. The hour is coming, and *now* is, when worship has nothing to do with place. Not this mountain. Not Jerusalem. Not Canterbury Cathedral. Not the meeting house on High Street. True worship happens wherever the Spirit gathers a people into the presence of the Father. The location is nothing; the Spirit is everything.

### **Verses 25–30 — Come, See a Man**

*The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*

The woman’s response was, the early Friends noted, immediate, personal, and evangelistic. She left her waterpot — the outward errand that had brought her to the well — and went to tell others what she had found. Her testimony was not doctrine but experience: “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did.” This is the Quaker testimony in its most elemental form: I have met Christ; he knows me through and through; come and see for yourself. The early Quaker women ministers — Margaret Fell, Elizabeth Hooton, Mary Fisher, Barbara Blaugdone — would have recognized themselves in her. They too left their waterpots, their domestic routines and expected roles, and went out to tell the world what they had found, their authority resting not on credentials but on experience.

### **Verses 31–38 — Meat to Eat That Ye Know Not Of**

*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

Christ's declaration that his food is to do the Father's will echoed through the Quaker understanding of ministry. True ministry is not sustained by outward payment — the hireling's wages — but by the inward nourishment that comes from doing God's will. The early Friends knew this directly, going without physical food, comfortable shelter, or financial support, and finding themselves sustained by a nourishment the world could not see.

### **Verses 39–42 — We Have Heard Him Ourselves**

*Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

This is perhaps the most perfectly Quaker verse in the chapter. The Samaritans come to belief not on the strength of another's testimony — important as it was to bring them — but because “we have heard him ourselves.” First-hand experience of Christ replaces second-hand report. The woman's word brought them to Christ; Christ's own word confirmed their faith. This is exactly how the early Friends understood conviction: a minister might speak the words that turned someone's attention to the Light within, but it was Christ himself — the Light within — who completed the work. No minister stands between the soul and Christ. The soul hears Christ for itself.

### **Verses 46–54 — The Nobleman's Son**

*Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.*

The healing of the nobleman's son at a distance illustrated for Friends that Christ's power is not bound by physical proximity. The same Christ who healed from afar works within the heart of every person, regardless of location, affiliation, or culture; the word of Christ is effective wherever it is spoken and believed. The nobleman “believed the word” — not because he saw the healing, but because the word carried its own authority. This is the Quaker experience of the Inward Light: the word of Christ within carries its own evidence, believed not because one has been argued into it but because the word itself has the ring of truth and the unmistakable accent of the living God.

## **The Revolution in Worship**

Looking back across the chapter, we can see how thoroughly it transforms the understanding of worship. The old worship was tied to place — this mountain or that temple; the new worship is tied to Spirit — wherever the Spirit moves, there is true worship. The old worship was regulated by priests who controlled access to God; the new worship is open to all — even a Samaritan woman, even the most marginalized member of society. The Quaker meeting embodies this revolution. There is no altar, because the altar is the heart. There is no priest, because every worshipper has direct access to God through the Light within. There is no liturgy, because the Spirit cannot be bound in printed forms. When God wishes to speak, the Spirit moves a minister to stand; when God is silent, the meeting waits in the powerful silence of the gathered company.

This is worship in spirit and in truth — the worship the Father seeks. And it was given, in the first instance, not to a temple priest or a theological expert but to a woman drawing water at a well, with a troubled past and a marginal place in society, who left her waterpot and became the first evangelist of this new worship. John 4 is not merely the record of a conversation at a well; it is the charter of a new way of meeting God, as fresh and radical now as when Jesus spoke these words on a hot afternoon in Sychar.

## **John 5: The Living Word and the Written Word**

### **The Text**

*1 After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. 5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? 7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am*

coming, another steppeth down before me. **8** Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. **9** And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

**10** The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. **11** He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. **12** Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? **13** And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. **14** Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. **15** The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.

**16** And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. **17** But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

**18** Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. **19** Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. **20** For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. **21** For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. **22** For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: **23** That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

**24** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. **25** Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

**26** For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; **27** And hath given him authority to execute judg-

ment also, because he is the Son of man. **28** Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, **29** And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. **30** I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

**31** If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. **32** There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. **33** Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. **34** But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. **35** He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. **36** But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

**37** And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. **38** And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

**39** Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. **40** And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

**41** I receive not honour from men. **42** But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. **43** I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. **44** How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? **45** Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. **46** For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. **47** But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

## Commentary

### Verses 1–15 — The Healing at Bethesda

*When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?*

The healing at Bethesda carries a spiritual pattern the early Friends recognized from their own experience. Here is a man who has waited thirty-eight years beside a pool, depending on an outward means of healing — the troubling of the water — and always finding himself unable to reach it in time. He has “no man” to help him in. He is stuck in the system of outward religion, waiting for something external to save him, and it never comes. Then Christ appears and asks the most searching question: “Wilt thou be made whole?” Not “Do you believe the right things?” nor “Have you performed the right rituals?” but simply: do you want to be healed? And the healing comes not through the pool, not through any outward means, but through the direct word of Christ: “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” The early Friends saw themselves in this man — and saw the religion of their own day in the five porches of Bethesda, where people waited in vain for healing through outward means that never came. Christ bypasses the whole system. He does not improve the pool; he speaks the word, and the man is whole.

### Verses 16–23 — My Father Worketh Hitherto

*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

Christ’s declaration that the Father is always working Fox used to emphasize the continuous, present activity of God (GF3:91; GF5:199). God is not one who acted in the past and now rests; the Father works, and the Son works with him. This was the experiential ground of Quaker faith: Christ is not a historical figure whose work is finished but a living presence who works in and through his people still. Job Scott drew the same conviction — God’s work is ongoing, and those united with Christ share in it (JSS 50). The hostility this stirred — “the Jews sought the more to kill him” — the Friends knew firsthand, for to testify that Christ works inwardly *now* was, in their day as in his, treated as a dangerous presumption.

## Verses 24–29 — The Dead Shall Hear His Voice

*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

This was one of the most powerful texts in the whole Quaker repertoire. Fox, Nayler, Penington, and Penn all cited it with force (GF3:91; GF5:90, 199; JN1:127; IP1:63; WPR 311). The “dead” who hear the voice of the Son of God are not only the physically dead awaiting a future resurrection — they are the spiritually dead, those dead in sin and darkness, who can hear the voice of Christ *now* and be raised to life *now*. “The hour is coming, and now is”: the resurrection is not only future but present.

Fox heard in this verse his own commission, and put it into a great trumpet-call to Friends in the ministry — a passage in which the cadence of John 5:25 becomes the very rhythm of his charge:

*“Sound, sound abroad, ye faithful servants of the Lord, and witnesses in his name... Sound ye all abroad in the world, to the awakening and raising of the dead, that they may be awakened, and raised up out of the grave, to hear the voice that is living. For the dead have long heard the dead, the blind have long wandered among the blind, and the deaf amongst the deaf. Therefore sound, ye servants, prophets, and angels of the Lord, ye trumpets of the Lord, that you may awaken the dead, and them that are asleep in their graves of sin, death and hell.” (Fox, Journal Vol. 2, chunk 106)*

For Fox the whole world lay in this living death — outwardly speaking, outwardly alive, but in truth “the scattered dry bones... the congregations or churches of the dead” until quickened by Christ the second Adam (Fox, *Journal* Vol. 2, chunk 431). This present-tense spiritual resurrection was central to Quaker experience: the early Friends testified that they had been dead — dead in sin, dead in formal religion — and had heard the voice of the Son of God within them, and it had raised them to new life. Thomas Story, expounding Christ’s word to Martha, made the inward sense explicit: the death here intended “could not be of the body, but of the soul, or mind of man, in a state of death in the body” (Story, *Life and Journal*, chunk 490). The resurrection was not only something they awaited; it was something they had already begun to know.

## Verse 30 — I Can of Mine Own Self Do Nothing

*I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

Christ's self-emptying was foundational to the Quaker understanding of ministry. Fox cited the verse (GF3:125) and Job Scott developed it at length (JSS 25). If Christ himself did nothing of his own will but only what the Father showed him, how much more must human ministers refrain from speaking or acting in their own will? This was the basis of the Quaker practice of waiting in silence for divine leading: no one speaks unless moved by the Spirit; no one acts unless led by the Light. The minister's own learning, eloquence, and opinion are nothing — only what comes from the Father through the Spirit has life in it.

## Verses 39–40 — Search the Scriptures

*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*

Here is the great Quaker text on the relationship between scripture and the living Christ — alongside John 1:9 and John 16:13, one of the most consequential passages in the entire Quaker reading of the Bible. Upon these two verses the early Friends built one of their most distinctive teachings: the distinction between the written word (scripture) and the living Word (Christ). The argument is deceptively simple. The scriptures testify of Christ, but they are not Christ. You can search them cover to cover, master every verse, and still miss the one thing they point to — Christ himself, the living Word, the Inward Light. The signpost is not the destination; the menu is not the meal.

Thomas Story drew the distinction with great clarity, setting the prologue of John's own Gospel against any notion that the Spirit and the scriptures are one and the same:

*“The Spirit of Christ is not the Scriptures, though they testify of him. The Scriptures never ascended into heaven, neither did they descend into the deep and rise again; neither are the Scriptures the word of faith; neither were they in the beginning; nor are they God; nor was any thing at all made by them.” (Story, Life and Journal, chunk 282)*

Samuel Fisher, whose *Rusticus ad Academicos* (1660) was the most formidable Quaker treatise on the nature and authority of scripture, pressed the very grammar of the verse. Friends, he insisted, do not forbid the searching of scripture; but Christ's words in John 5:39 are best read not as a command but as a complaint against the Scribes, who looked for life in the letter while refusing the One to whom the letter pointed:

*“Nor do we any more dehort from searching the Scriptures then Christ, John 5:39... it is most evident that he speaks there by way of complaint of the Scribes; for looking for life in the Scriptures, without coming to him who is the Light, ver. 40. and not by way of command to search them.”* (Fisher, *Rusticus ad Academicos*, chunk 1259)

Fisher's point sharpened the whole Quaker case: the men who boasted most of the Bible were the very men whom the Bible's Author was reproving, because they searched the writings and would not come to the Light those writings testify of. Barclay built the same argument into the structure of his *Apology*: since by the Spirit alone we come to the true knowledge of God and are led into all truth, “the Spirit, and not the Scriptures, is the foundation and ground of all Truth and knowledge, and the primary rule of faith and manners” (RBA 66). This was no attack on scripture. Barclay, like all the early Friends, loved and constantly cited the Bible; the insistence was on proper ordering — the Spirit inspired the scriptures, therefore the Spirit, not the scriptures, is the ultimate authority. Penington explored the same theme throughout his works (IP1:28, 63, 227; IP3:92, 204), and Penn, Dewsbury, and Bathurst all taught the same distinction (WPR 268, 383; HPS 305, 333).

This did not make the early Friends dismissive of scripture — the opposite is true. Their writings are saturated with biblical quotation to a degree that shames most of their contemporaries; Fox alone may have cited the Bible more often than any other English writer of his century. But they insisted that scripture must be read in the Light, by the Spirit that inspired it, or it becomes a dead letter that kills rather than gives life. Scripture read in the Spirit leads to Christ; scripture read without the Spirit leads to intellectual pride, theological controversy, and spiritual death.

### **Verses 41–47 — Moses Accuses You**

*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.*

The irony is devastating: those who boast of their faithfulness to Moses are condemned by Moses, because Moses wrote of Christ, and they have rejected Christ. The early Friends saw the same irony in their own opponents — those who boasted of their faithfulness to scripture were condemned by scripture, because scripture testifies of the Inward Light, and they had rejected the Inward Light. The letter of John 5:39 — “Search the scriptures” — can be taken as an endorsement of biblical study; but the spirit of John 5:40 — “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” — makes plain that the purpose of all such study is to bring the reader to Christ. If it does not bring you to Christ, it has failed, however thorough the searching. “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). The early Friends went through the Bible to what the Bible points to — the living Christ, experienced directly, immediately, inwardly — and in doing so recovered the way of reading the New Testament itself teaches.

## **John 6: The Bread of Life — Spiritual Eating and Drinking**

### **The Text**

*1 After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. 2 And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. 4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. 5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? 6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

*7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him, 9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? 10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they*

would. **12** When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

**13** Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. **14** Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. **15** When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

**16** And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, **17** And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. **18** And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. **19** So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. **20** But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. **21** Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

**22** The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone; **23** (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) **24** When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. **25** And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? **26** Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. **27** Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

**28** Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? **29** Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. **30** They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? **31** Our fathers did eat manna in

the desert; as it is written, *He gave them bread from heaven to eat.* **32** Then Jesus said unto them, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.* **33** For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. **34** Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. **35** And Jesus said unto them, *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

**36** But I said unto you, *That ye also have seen me, and believe not.* **37** All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. **38** For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. **39** And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. **40** And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

**41** The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, *I am the bread which came down from heaven.* **42** And they said, *Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is he then said, I came down from heaven?* **43** Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, *Murmur not among yourselves.* **44** No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. **45** It is written in the prophets, *And they shall be all taught of God.* Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me.

**46** Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. **47** Verily, verily, I say unto you, *He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.* **48** I am that bread of life. **49** Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. **50** This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. **51** I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

**52** The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* **53** Then Jesus said unto them, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.* **54** Whoso eateth my flesh, and

*drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. 58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.*

*59 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. 60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? 61 When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? 62 What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. 64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. 65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. 66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. 67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? 68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. 69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. 70 Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? 71 He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.*

## **Commentary**

### **Verses 1–15 — The Feeding of the Five Thousand**

*And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.*

The feeding of the five thousand sets the stage for the discourse that follows, and the early Friends read it as a parable of gospel ministry. Christ takes what is plainly insufficient — five barley loaves, two small fishes — and from that nothing makes abundance. It was the exact pattern of their own meetings: a labourer rises in worship with no prepared sermon, no

notes, no learning of the schools, and Christ takes the empty hands and fills the multitude. The twelve baskets of fragments gathered up, “that nothing be lost,” they understood as the care of Christ over every least motion of his own life given to the soul.

The crowd’s response is the warning. They would “take him by force, to make him a king” — and Christ withdrew. To mistake his spiritual kingdom for an outward one, to seek to set up Christ’s reign by the arm of flesh, was the error the Friends laid at the door of every party that took up the sword for religion. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), and they who would advance it by force have not yet eaten the bread he came to give.

### **Verses 26–35, 47–51 — I Am the Bread of Life**

*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life... I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

Here is the first cornerstone of the chapter, and the verse to which the early Friends returned more than almost any other in their preaching against an empty, fed-on-husks religion. Fox cited it continually (GF3:91, 102; GF5:90, 199; GF6:14), always upon the one hinge: there is a bread that perishes and a bread that endures, and the whole religion of Christendom had settled down to feed on the bread that perishes — on forms, on the letter, on the bare remembrance of a Christ at a distance — while the living bread stood offered within and untouched.

Barclay states plainly what that bread is, and what it is not:

*I answer, it is that heavenly Seed, that divine, spiritual, celestial Substance, of which we spake before, in the Fifth and Sixth Propositions. This is that vehiculum Dei, or spiritual body of Christ, whereby and wherethrough he communicateth life to man, and salvation to as many as believe in him, and receive him, and whereby also man comes to have fellowship and communion with God.*

*(Robert Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, chunk 321)*

The bread is not the loaf the priest lifts, and it is not even the outward body born of Mary — “all Christians at present generally acknowledge that the outward body of Christ came not down from heaven” (RBA, chunk 322). It

is the heavenly, spiritual substance of Christ himself, communicated inwardly. To eat it is to come and to believe — nothing more mysterious and nothing more demanding than that. Penn and Nayler drew the same nourishment from the passage (RBA 109; WPR 311; JN1:127), as did Penington (IP1:63): the bread of life is eaten in the silence of the heart, in the gathered meeting, in the daily turning to the Light, and “he that cometh to me shall never hunger.”

### **Verses 44–45 — Drawn by the Father, Taught of God**

*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him... It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.*

The second cornerstone holds two of the great Quaker warrants in a single breath. First, the drawing: coming to Christ is not a work man begins in himself but a response to a motion already at work within him. Penington describes the manner of that drawing with his characteristic care, and it is by light:

*The work of the Son is to reveal the Father, and to draw to the Father. He reveals him as light, as the spring of light, as the fountain of light, and he draws to him as light... Christ Jesus, the Son of God, he is the image of his substance, the exact image of this light, the light of the world, who is to light the world into this substance.*

*(Isaac Penington, The Works of Isaac Penington, Volume 1, chunk 106)*

The Father draws by shining; the soul is drawn as it turns toward the shining. No man works up this drawing by resolution or argument — but every man may yield to it, for the light that draws is given to every man (John 1:9).

Second, the teaching: “they shall be all taught of God.” This was, for Friends, the prophetic charter of their whole way. If God himself teaches, then the human teacher is no longer the indispensable channel of saving knowledge. Hubberthorne — a voice the corpus surfaces here with bracing directness — answered the schoolmen of his day on exactly this head:

*In this we do not contradict the Scripture... but do say that we are taught of God, and need no man to teach us, but as the anointing of God which abides in us; and the promise of God is fulfilled upon us: we are all taught of God, from the least of us to the greatest, with whom the covenant of God is established.*

*(Richard Hubberthorne, A Collection of the Several Books and Writings, chunk 231)*

This is not a despising of all instruction; Friends sat under faithful ministry and were fed by it. But the office of the minister is to bring the hearer to the great teacher within. Penn put the end of all ministry exactly so: “the end of all words is to bring people to the great Word, Christ Jesus, and then the promise of God is accomplished, *They shall be all taught of me*” (Penn, *Life and Writings*, chunk 456). The word points; the Word teaches.

## **Verses 52–58 — Eating the Flesh and Drinking the Blood**

*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you... For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*

Now the discourse presses to its hard centre, and the early Friends would not soften it into a ritual. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is a real eating and a real drinking — but spiritual, inward, of the heavenly substance, not of any element on a table. Penington wrote of it with the wonder of a man who tasted what he described:

*“My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” ... They that eat Christ, the one bread, are by that food made partakers of his divine nature, and become one bread... Oh, the pure flesh and blood of the immaculate Lamb! Oh, the incorruptible food which gives life to the soul!*

*(Isaac Penington, The Works of Isaac Penington, Volume 3, chunk 267)*

To eat is to be made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), to be brought out of darkness and made “light in the Lord.” Barclay, asked plainly how a man comes to partake of this body, refused all subtlety and answered in Christ’s own words: “I answer in the plain and express words of Christ, *I am the bread of life*... So whosoever thou art that askest this question... that food which gives life is received by coming and believing, and no otherwise” (RBA, chunk 324).

Richard Farnsworth — another fresh voice the corpus brings forward — pressed the conclusion that the steeple-houses would not own: this bread is not the bread of the sacrament at all.

*...he is meat and drink for the soul to feed on, and have fellowship withal, and not bread and wine, John 6. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me shall live by me, saith Christ, John 6:57. This is not carnal bread, nor carnal communion.*

*(Richard Farnsworth, The Heart Opened by Christ, chunk 21)*

And Christ himself, the Friends insisted, settled the whole matter in the verse the controversialists hurried past: “*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*” (v. 63). If the flesh profits nothing, then the outward, fleshly eating of consecrated elements profits nothing; and the words must be received as what Christ said they were — spirit and life — not chewed as carnal doctrine (GF3:91; GF5:90, 199; IP1:63; RBA 109).

This was the ground of Barclay’s long treatment in the *Apology* (Propositions XII–XIII), where John 6 is the governing text: the bread and wine of the supper are an outward sign of an inward substance, and it is the substance that saves. Yet the Friends did not damn those who kept the outward sign in sincerity. Bathurst wrote with the generous charity that marked the best of them:

*If any break outward bread, and drink outward wine with a sincere intention... by the remembrancer, the Spirit of Truth which is appointed by the Father to lead the saints into all truth, they judge them not, but rather hope that such will come further out of the shadow to the substance.*

*(Elizabeth Bathurst, Truth Vindicated, HPS 367)*

The outward is a shadow — not condemned, but not the substance — and those who keep it sincerely may yet be led by the Spirit further into the reality the shadow only figures.

### **Verses 66–69 — Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?**

*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him... Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

The hard saying sifts the crowd, and many go back. The early Friends knew that sifting from within their own meetings: many were convinced for a season, drawn by the power of the message or the strangeness of the testimony, who fell away when the cost stood plain. The living bread is free,

but it is not cheap; it costs a man his old life, his old religion, his old self, and at that price many turn.

But Peter's answer was theirs to the bone. Having once tasted the living bread, having drunk the living water, having seen the true Light — where else was there to go? The formal churches had no living bread to set before the soul; the universities and councils of the learned had words about Christ but not the words of eternal life. Christ alone had those, and Christ was not in the steeple-house but within, feeding the soul with himself in the silence and the Light. Those who had heard the voice of the Son of God and could not unhear it knew exactly what Peter knew: there is nowhere else to go.

### **The Sacramental Question**

The whole discourse raised what the first Friends took to be the central sacramental question: is communion an outward rite or an inward reality? Christendom had built vast machineries upon the supper — transubstantiation, consubstantiation, real presence — and shed much blood over the difference. The Friends cut beneath the whole quarrel with two sentences of Christ's own: "the flesh profiteth nothing," and "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

This was not contempt for the Last Supper. They owned that Christ shared bread and wine with his disciples and that the early church continued the practice for a season. But the outward meal was a sign, and the reality it signified — the soul fed on Christ, brought into his life and nature and presence — was available whether or not the sign was kept, just as the new birth needs no outward water. The true communion does not wait on a priest to consecrate the loaf or a church to pour the cup. Christ himself is the bread, his Spirit the wine, and both are given freely to every soul that comes to him in faith. This is what John 6 teaches; and this, the Friends testified, is what the gathered meeting knew in fact — the living Christ feeding his people with himself, in the silence and the Light.

## **John 7: Rivers of Living Water**

### **The Text**

*1 After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2 Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. 3 His brethren therefore said unto him,*

Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. **4** For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. **5** For neither did his brethren believe in him. **6** Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. **7** The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. **8** Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come. **9** When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee.

**10** But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. **11** Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? **12** And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. **13** Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews.

**14** Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. **15** And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? **16** Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. **17** If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. **18** He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.

**19** Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? **20** The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? **21** Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. **22** Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. **23** If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? **24** Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

**25** Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? **26** But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? **27** Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth

whence he is. **28** Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. **29** But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.

**30** Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. **31** And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?

**32** The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. **33** Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. **34** Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come. **35** Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? **36** What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?

**37** In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. **38** He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. **39** (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

**40** Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. **41** Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? **42** Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? **43** So there was a division among the people because of him. **44** And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.

**45** Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? **46** The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. **47** Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? **48** Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? **49** But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. **50** Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) **51** Doth our law judge any man, before it

hear him, and know what he doeth? 52 They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

53 And every man went unto his own house.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–13 — The World Cannot Hate You

*The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*

Christ's word to his unbelieving brethren — "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth" — was a text the early Friends understood from bitter personal experience. Those who accommodated to the world, who conformed to the expectations of the established religious order, were not hated. But those who, like Christ, testified against the evil works of the world — as Fox did from steeple-house galleries, as Nayler did in his pamphlets, as the traveling ministers did across England — were hated, beaten, imprisoned, and sometimes killed.

The murmuring of the crowd — "some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people" — was exactly the division the early Quaker preachers provoked. Some heard their message and recognized truth; others dismissed them as deceivers, madmen, or agents of Satan.

### Verses 14–18 — Obedience and Knowledge

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

This verse stood near the center of the Quaker understanding of how spiritual knowledge is gained. Christ teaches that obedience precedes understanding — if any man will *do* God's will, he shall *know* the doctrine. This reverses the order assumed by the schools, which holds that one must first comprehend the doctrine and then obey it. Christ says the opposite: begin with obedience, and understanding will follow.

Isaac Pennington faced this objection head-on. To the complaint that one cannot do the Father's will until one first knows the Son's doctrine, he answered that the knowledge is not gained by reasoning but by submission to the measure already given:

*“Now, the question is concerning the way how thou mayest attain to this... Which is, not by entering into reasonings and disputes about these things whereof thou doubttest, but by coming into that wherein and whereby they are made manifest; and that is by coming into obedience to the Father in that which he hath already made manifest; for in that light (to them that believe in it), and in obedience thereto (be it ever so little, or the manifestation ever so small), the Father will reveal more.” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 147)*

Penington pressed the same principle into a rule of life: the certain way of knowing the things of God is not by considering them after the manner of men, but by faithfulness to the inward principle. “‘He that doth my will, shall know of my doctrine,’ saith Christ. This is the way... Mind the pure, the holy light, inward touches and leadings of this pure, divine principle; that will make manifest to thee whatever is fit for thee in thy present state to know” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 3). Penn drew the same line from John 16:12, that spiritual knowledge comes progressively as one is faithful to what is already shown (WPR 309; WPT 98), and Fox preached from this verse continually (GF5:228).

This was the ground of the Quaker practice of “walking in the Light” — a day-by-day, moment-by-moment obedience to whatever the Light revealed. One did not wait for a finished theology before acting. One obeyed the Light as far as it shone, and it shone further. Disobedience, by contrast, darkened the understanding and quenched the Light. Penn made the cost explicit: whoever “prefers father or mother, sister or brother... reputation, honour, office, liberty or life, before the testimony of the light of Jesus in his own conscience, shall be rejected of him” (Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, chunk 28).

Christ adds a practical test: “He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory.” The mark of true ministry is not eloquence, not learning, not popularity, but whether the speaker seeks his own glory or the glory of God. The hireling, trained at university and seeking a comfortable living, speaks of himself. The true minister, called by God and emptied of self-will, seeks the glory of the one who sent him.

## **Verses 15 and 24 — Having Never Learned / Judge Righteous Judgment**

*How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?... Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

The Jews' astonishment that Jesus taught with authority though he had "never learned" — never attended the rabbinical schools, never been trained in the approved institutions — was a text the early Friends took to heart. Fox had never been to university. Neither had most of the early Quaker ministers. They were shoemakers, shepherds, farmers, tradesmen, and women without formal education. And yet they spoke with a power that astonished their hearers, just as Christ astonished the Jews. The explanation is the same: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." True doctrine does not come from human learning but from divine sending; the Spirit teaches what no university can teach.

Christ's command to "judge righteous judgment" rather than judging "according to the appearance" the early Friends applied to the whole religious establishment. The established churches judged by appearance — by outward credentials, degrees, ordination papers, social standing. But righteous judgment looks at the inward reality: is this person speaking from the Spirit, or from himself? Is this worship in the Spirit, or in outward forms? Is this the true Light, or a human imitation?

## **Verses 37–39 — Rivers of Living Water**

*If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

The great cry of Christ at the feast — "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" — was the universal invitation that lay at the heart of the Quaker gospel. Not "if any elect man thirst," not "if any properly catechized and baptized man thirst," but "if *any* man thirst." The invitation is as wide as the Light that enlightens every soul. John Gratton heard in it the abolition of every restriction:

*"Here is great encouragement, in much love and mercy, good will and fatherly kindness. None are excluded here... And whosoever will, may come, for the gift is given to all, not only offered, but freely given... The water of life is the flowing of the Spirit of God; for God is the*

*Fountain, and hath poured out his Spirit upon all flesh... None need fear any want in this Fountain; for it is a Fountain that can never be drawn dry: it is now unsealed, and the thirsty are invited to come and drink freely.” (Gratton, Life, chunk 132)*

John’s own gloss — “this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive” — settled for the early Friends that the living water is the Holy Spirit. Penington read the whole figure as the difference between the outward Jew and the inward Jew: the one drew outward water from outward wells, the other draws inward water from the inward well, which is nothing less than the Spirit dwelling as a fountain in the heart:

*“This metaphor, or similitude, is explained by the evangelist John, in chap. 7. ver. 39. The receiving of the Spirit, the receiving of the substance, belongs to the Christian’s state... When the Spirit is received, the river, the well of life, is received; and then the waters thereof flow, and are drawn and drunk of. Now, the primitive Christians did receive the Spirit, not only in gifts and manifestations, but as a fountain of life and heavenly virtue dwelling within them.” (Penington, Letters, chunk 109)*

And when the fountain is unsealed, it does not stand still. The water that Christ gives becomes rivers — flowing outward, overflowing into others, which is the nature of all true ministry: not professional duty, but superabundance. Penington’s most lyrical testimony to this overflow opens the record of the Friends’ own experience:

*“It hath pleased the Lord, to unseal and open the Fountain of life, in the midst of his heritage... so that he that believeth, out of his belly do flow rivers of living water... Oh, the streams of life, the streams of love, the streams of grace, the streams of mercy, the streams of peace, the streams of joy and consolation, which flow from him into the bosoms of his children!” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 247)*

Fox, Penington, and Penn all returned to this verse to teach the outflowing nature of the spiritual life (GF3:226; GF5:90, 199; IP1:63; WPR 311). Water, light, bread, spirit, truth — all these Johannine images converge on a single reality: the inward presence of Christ, received directly by every soul that turns to him and let loose to flow through that soul upon the world.

## **Verses 45–52 — Never Man Spake Like This Man**

*The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.*

The officers sent to arrest Jesus return empty-handed with the most eloquent testimony in the chapter: “Never man spake like this man.” They had been sent by the theological authorities — the powers that be — and they came back undone by the sheer power of Christ’s words.

The early Friends recognized this moment. The power of Spirit-led ministry cannot be resisted by human authority. When Christ speaks — through his own lips in first-century Jerusalem or through a Spirit-moved minister in a seventeenth-century meeting — the words carry an authority no institutional power can counteract. The officers could not arrest Jesus because the word had arrested them first.

The Pharisees’ reply is revealing: “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” The argument from authority — no respectable, educated, credentialed person believes this — was precisely the argument used against the early Quakers. The Friends answered as Nicodemus answered: “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” Give the message a fair hearing before you condemn it. Come and see. Turn to the Light within and test it for yourself.

## **The Feast of Tabernacles and the Living Water**

The setting of this chapter — the Feast of Tabernacles — is significant. During this feast, water was ceremonially drawn from the Pool of Siloam and poured out at the altar amid great rejoicing. It was into this context of ceremonial water-pouring that Christ stood and cried, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” The living water he offers replaces and fulfills the ceremonial water of the feast, just as worship in spirit and truth replaces the worship at Jerusalem and on Mount Gerizim.

The early Friends held this fulfillment with care. They did not dismiss the Old Testament ceremonies as meaningless — they recognized them as divinely appointed shadows pointing to a substance that had now come. But they insisted, with Christ, that the substance supersedes the shadow. The ceremonial water is replaced by the living water; the temple worship by worship in spirit and truth; the outward ordinances by the inward realities they symbolized. To cling to the shadows when the substance has come is to prefer the waterpot to the living spring.

This is the message of John 7, as the early Friends heard it: the old ceremonies have served their purpose. The Living Water has come. The

Spirit is available. The rivers flow from within. Drink, and you will never thirst again.

## **John 8: The Light of the World, Truth and Freedom**

### **The Text**

*1 Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. 2 And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. 7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

*12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

*13 The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true. 14 Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. 15 Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. 16 And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.*

**17** It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. **18** I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. **19** Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. **20** These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.

**21** Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. **22** Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. **23** And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. **24** I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

**25** Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. **26** I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. **27** They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. **28** Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. **29** And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. **30** As he spake these words, many believed on him.

**31** Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; **32** And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. **33** They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? **34** Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. **35** And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. **36** If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

**37** I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. **38** I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. **39** They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. **40** But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the

truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. **41** Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. **42** Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. **43** Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. **44** Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

**45** And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. **46** Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? **47** He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

**48** Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? **49** Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. **50** And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. **51** Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. **52** Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. **53** Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? **54** Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: **55** Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. **56** Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. **57** Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? **58** Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. **59** Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–11 — The Woman Taken in Adultery

*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her...  
Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

The story of the woman taken in adultery — whatever its textual history — the early Friends read as a vivid illustration of how the Light operates. Christ does not condemn the woman; he exposes the accusers. The Light, shining into the hearts of those who would stone her, convicts them “by their own conscience” — they see their own sin, and slink away, “beginning at the eldest.” The Light always does this double work: it reveals the sin of the self-righteous even as it offers mercy to the repentant.

Christ’s words to the woman — “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” — hold together the two essential movements of the Quaker experience of the Light: mercy and transformation. The Light does not condemn; it forgives. But it does not leave the forgiven person unchanged; it calls to a new life: “Go, and sin no more.” Forgiveness without transformation is incomplete; transformation without forgiveness is impossible. The Light offers both.

### Verse 12 — I Am the Light of the World

*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

John 8:12 is the companion verse to John 1:9, and was cited with almost equal frequency by the early Friends. If John 1:9 establishes the universality of the Light — it enlightens *every man* — then John 8:12 establishes its sufficiency: he that follows the Light “shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Edward Burrough preached this as the single message Friends were sent to declare:

*“This is the Message which came unto you, which is true and faithful, and everlasting, That the true God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all; and this is the Message of Peace and Reconciliation, and of glad Tidings unto all that have sought the Lord... and there is not another to be declared... who is made manifest in power, and condemneth the Transgressor, and slayeth the Enmity, and raiseth the Life out of death.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 295)*

The decisive Quaker question about this verse was whether Christ is the Light of the world only as he appeared in that body of flesh, or also in his inward and spiritual appearance. Penington pressed it directly:

*“Again, Christ saith, ‘I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life,’ chap. 8:12. How is Christ the light of the world? Or how was Christ the light of the world? Was he only so, as he appeared in that body of flesh? Is he not so in his inward and spiritual appearance? Is he not the universal light, the Sun of righteousness, which enlighteneth the whole dark world?” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 204)*

Fox stated the corollary that justification itself happens *in* the Light, not apart from it: “believing in the Light, you shall not abide in darkness, but have the Light of life” (GFJN 175). To follow the Light is to be clothed with Christ “the son of righteousness, who is the light of the world” (GF8:304). Penn spelled out what it costs to abide elsewhere:

*“And this Son is Christ Jesus, ‘the true Light, that lighteth every one coming into the world;’ and they that abide not in him, the Light, dwell in darkness, in sin, and are under the region and shadow of death, yea, dead in sin, and see not their own states... For in Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, redemption and glory.” (Penn, Life and Writings, Vol. 5, chunk 172)*

Nayler, Fell, Bathurst, and Penn all drew on this verse extensively (JN1:317; JN2:196, 224; MFU 217; HPS 391, 393; WPR 311), Bathurst developing in *Truth’s Vindication* the point that the Light of the world is not external illumination alone but an inward reality that transforms from within.

### **Verses 31–36 — The Truth Shall Make You Free**

*If ye continue in my word... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

True freedom, for the early Friends, was freedom from sin — not merely from external constraint or political oppression, though they valued those too. The truth that makes free is not a proposition to be believed but a living reality to be experienced: Christ himself, the Inward Light, setting the soul free from the bondage of sin. Stephen Crisp described the prison from which Christ delivers, and the rage of the jailer at the very word of liberty:

*“[Satan] has taught his whole family, that it is impossible for any to be freed from under his service... By this supposed necessity (which is a doctrine well-pleasing to the flesh) he keeps nations, kindreds, tongues and people, in bondage to his will... he has so bewitched and besotted his whole synagogue... that they cannot endure to hear that they should be made free. All that come to declare liberty to these captives, and an opening of the door of this prison house (the darkness)...”*  
(Crisp, *Life*, chunk 132)

To the objection that this teaching of inward liberty “sets up free-will,” Penington answered with a careful distinction: the will of man is bound, but freedom is in the Light that comes to unbind him:

*“The will of man is bound; but there is liberty, power, and freedom in the light which visits man, and comes to unbind and save him. And man feels this power, tastes of this liberty, feels somewhat disengaging him from the evil, and drawing him from it: but he being in love with the evil, draws back from the drawing.”* (Penington, *Works Vol. 1*, chunk 68)

Fox cited this passage to show that true discipleship means continuing in Christ’s word daily, walking in the Light moment by moment (GF3:91; GF5:90, 199), and Penn applied it to religious liberty: if Christ sets people free inwardly, no human authority may impose bondage outwardly through enforced conformity (WPR 311). The exchange about Abraham’s seed reveals a pattern the Friends met constantly: the confusion of outward heritage with inward reality. “We be Abraham’s seed” — we have the right lineage, the right religious affiliation. But Christ says sin makes you a servant regardless of lineage. No church membership, no baptismal certificate, no creedal subscription can do what only the inward work of Christ can accomplish.

#### **Verse 44 — The Devil Was a Murderer from the Beginning**

*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.  
He was a murderer from the beginning.*

Fox cited this verse (GF3:125; GF5:90, 199) in connection with the violence done to the early Quakers by those who claimed to serve God. The spirit of coercion and persecution is not the Spirit of Christ but the spirit of the devil, who “was a murderer from the beginning.” Those who im-

prisoned, beat, and despoiled the Friends revealed whose children they were, regardless of their religious profession.

## **Verses 56–58 — Before Abraham Was, I Am**

*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad... Before Abraham was, I am.*

The pre-existence of Christ — “Before Abraham was, I am” — was foundational to the Quaker understanding of the Inward Light. If Christ existed before Abraham, if he is the eternal “I am,” then his Light has been shining since before the foundation of the world. The Light that enlightens every person is not a recent dispensation but an eternal reality. The patriarchs knew it; the prophets spoke from it; the apostles bore witness to it; and the first Friends experienced it, the same Light that shone before Abraham was. Job Scott traced the claim back to the prologue, distinguishing the eternal Godhead from the sonship taken in time:

*“Christ was the son of God, and son of man too, long before the days of the Virgin Mary... So that his eternal co-existence with the Father, previous to a mother’s existence, was not in the state of sonship, but absolutely as GOD. Hence the evangelist John, speaking of his eternity and divinity, does not say ‘In the beginning was the son’... but he says, ‘In the beginning was the WORD.’ The word was strictly GOD.”*  
(Scott, *Salvation by Christ*, chunk 35)

Fox cited this verse to establish the eternal nature of the Word and the Light (GF3:91, 103; GF4:47; GF5:141, 285), and Penington connected it with the broader Johannine theology of the pre-existent Word (IP4:172). To know Christ — the eternal “I am,” the Light within — is to know the Father, and this way has been open since before Abraham was.

The Jews’ response — taking up stones — foreshadows the crucifixion and figures the world’s perpetual answer to the truth: violence against the one who speaks it. But Christ “hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them.” The Light cannot be destroyed. It can be rejected, refused, resisted, persecuted — but it passes through the midst of its enemies and continues to shine.

## **The Integrated Theology of John 8**

Seen whole, the chapter holds the early Quaker theology in concentrated form. The Light of the world (v. 12) shines into the darkness of human sin

(vv. 1–11), exposing the hypocrisy of the accusers and offering mercy to the accused. Following the Light leads to freedom (vv. 31–36) — from the bondage of sin, from the pretensions of religious heritage, from the dominion of the prince of darkness (v. 44). And the Light itself is eternal — “before Abraham was, I am” (v. 58) — not a recent dispensation but the very foundation of reality.

For the early Friends, John 8 validated their entire spiritual program. Turn to the Light and you will not walk in darkness. Continue in Christ’s word and the truth will make you free. Recognize that Christ is the eternal “I am” — a living, present reality — and you have found the one thing needful. Barclay, systematizing this theology, joined John 8:12 to the broader Johannine Light passages to show that the Light of the world and the Light that enlightens every person are one and the same Light — the eternal Christ, present in every age, accessible to every soul, refused by many but quenched by none (RBA 141; RBAF 101). This is the Light the Quakers found, the Light they proclaimed, and the Light they invite every reader to turn to: the Light of the world, the Light of life, the Light that was before Abraham was, and is, and ever shall be.

## **John 9: The Man Born Blind — Seeing by the Light**

### **The Text**

*1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. 6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

*8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? 9 Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. 10 There-*

fore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? **11** He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. **12** Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

**13** They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. **14** And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. **15** Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. **16** Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. **17** They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

**18** But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. **19** And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? **20** His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: **21** But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. **22** These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. **23** Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.

**24** Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. **25** He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. **26** Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? **27** He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? **28** Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. **29** We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is. **30** The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. **31** Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will,

him he heareth. **32** Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. **33** If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. **34** They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.

**35** Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? **36** He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? **37** And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. **38** And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. **39** And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. **40** And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we also blind? **41** Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–7 — While It Is Day

*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

The healing of the man born blind is, in the Quaker reading, a parable of the whole human condition. Every soul comes into the world blind — born into spiritual darkness, unable of itself to discern the things of God. The cure is not knowledge, not religious observance, not the careful study of holy texts, but the direct action of Christ, the Light of the world, opening an eye that was shut from birth. And the work comes with urgency: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day.” The day of visitation does not last forever. The Light shines, but it must be minded while it shines.

Here the early Friends pressed a distinction the schools had blurred: there is an eye, and there is a light, and the one is useless without the other. A man may stand at noon with the sun blazing about him, and if his eye be closed he sees nothing. So Penington insisted that the Scriptures themselves, however true and honourable, cannot give sight to a soul that has no inward eye opened to receive them:

*The light within is the great ordinance of God, and the proper means to give the knowledge of him; without which it was never received under any dispensation: for the light that shines abroad, or from without, can alone be known and received by the light that shines within. ... Can I see the light of the sun, moon, or stars, or of any fire or candle, if I have not a natural eye, and if that natural eye be not open? So neither can I see the light of any dispensation of life, if I have not an eye within me open, wherewith to see it. (Isaac Penington, The Works of Isaac Penington, Volume 1, chunk195)*

That the healing fell on the sabbath is not incidental. The religious establishment objected to Christ's work because it did not keep to their rules for when and how God might be permitted to act. The first Friends met the same objection at every turn: the settled churches insisted that spiritual ministry could come only through approved channels — ordained clergy, consecrated buildings, authorized forms. Christ overturns all such fences. He works when and where the Spirit moves, the night coming on regardless of who has licensed the day.

### **Verses 8–34 — The Testimony of Experience**

*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*

The healed man's testimony — “whereas I was blind, now I see” — is the very pattern of Quaker witness. It cannot be argued down. It cannot be unseated by finer theology, nor dismissed by appeal to office or authority. The man advances no system and claims no learning. He simply reports what has happened in him: I was blind, and now I see. This is precisely how the first Friends spoke of their meeting with the Inward Light — not as a doctrine mastered but as a darkness lifted. John Crook, who left the bench of a justice to follow the despised people, described the moment in the same plain key:

*I could truly say with Jonathan, after I had heard and tasted of the honey and sweet ministration of the blessed gospel, that my eyes were opened, and strength renewed from the same power again ... my eyes were opened, and my strength was renewed, and I obtained victory, through that grace of the gospel, over those lusts and corrupt desires which rose against those little stirrings and movings after the living God. (John Crook, Memoir, Epistles &c. of John Crook, chunk18)*

Fox tells it the same way: the seeing was given, not achieved. “It was opened unto me by the eternal Light and Power, and I saw clearly therein” (George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, Vol. 1, chunk68). The verb is always passive. The eye is opened; the light is given; the soul, which laboured long and saw nothing, suddenly sees. No man does this to himself.

The man’s growing apprehension of Christ is itself instructive. First he names him “a man that is called Jesus” (v. 11); then “a prophet” (v. 17); at last, when Christ reveals himself, “Lord, I believe” (v. 38). Sight deepens. The Friends recognized this in their own travel: understanding begins with a bare certainty that something has happened, ripens through testing and waiting, and ends in full faith and worship. The certainty is there from the first hour; the comprehension comes after.

### **Verse 22 — Put Out of the Synagogue**

*The Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.*

The threat hanging over the healed man — expulsion for confessing Christ — fell heavily on the first Friends, who were excommunicated, fined, imprisoned, and cast out of every settled church for confessing Christ not as a doctrine but as a living, inward presence. Their kindred, like the blind man’s parents, often shrank from the cost and would say only, “he is of age; ask him.” But the convinced Friend, like the man healed, could not unsay what God had done. The fear of men closes many mouths; it cannot close an opened eye. “One thing I know.”

### **Verses 35–41 — For Judgment I Am Come**

*For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.*

Christ’s word of judgment reverses the whole expected order. Those who know they are blind — the humble, the honest, the spiritually desperate — receive sight. Those who are confident they see — the learned, the credentialed, the established — are made blind. The Pharisees’ indignant question to the beggar, “Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?”, is the very objection the schools of England flung at the unlettered Quakers: whence hath this man his knowledge, never having learned at our nurseries of religion? Samuel Fisher answered them in their

own John-9 terms — that fishermen who had been with Jesus saw what the doctors of the letter, for all their learning, could not.

For the peril Penington named is not ignorance but a false sight: a knowledge of holy things gathered by the natural understanding, which mistakes itself for spiritual vision. This is the eye that must be put out before the true eye can open:

*Is the inward eye open in you? Do ye know the light within? ... Oh! please not yourselves with the eye of the perishing wisdom, with death's eye, and with death's knowledge of scriptures and of the Son of God; which speaks great words of the fame of true wisdom, but is a stranger and enemy to the thing! ... If the God of the world hath blinded that eye in you, what are all your treasures of wisdom and knowledge? (Isaac Penington, The Works of Isaac Penington, Volume 1, chunk199)*

This is why the first Friends were so wary of mere divinity learning. Not because study is evil, but because it can counterfeit sight. A man may know the doctrines, parse the Greek, debate every point of salvation, and “see” nothing — for he has never turned to the Light, never been pierced by the Reprover, never felt Christ’s transforming power within. Such a man is blinder than the beggar by the road; for the beggar at least knew he was blind, and the learned man is sure he sees. “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” The confession of blindness is the door to sight; the claim of sight bolts it.

## **The Courage of the Healed**

One of the most striking notes in this chapter is the boldness of the healed man. He stands alone — parents silent, authorities arrayed against him, neighbours turned hostile — and does not flinch. He holds to what he knows, and grows sharper under pressure: “If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.” For this plainness they cast him out. The Friends knew the pattern from within: the newly convinced Quaker often stood alone, rejected by family, dismissed by employers, shunned by neighbours. But the one who has seen cannot pretend to be blind again. The Light has shone, the eye is open, and no weight of social pressure can shut it.

And the sequel was their deepest comfort. When the synagogue casts you out, Christ comes to seek you. He found the man precisely where the religion of forms had thrown him — outside the walls — and there gave

him a fuller knowledge of himself than he had ever known within. “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” The healed man, who had already confessed Christ by his courage, now confesses him in full: “Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.” The road from blindness to sight, from social conformity to costly testimony, ends not in argument won but in worship — the direct, inward worship of the One who opened his eyes. This is the Quaker journey in little: out of the dead religion of outward forms, into the living worship of the inward Christ.

## **John 10: The Good Shepherd and the Hireling**

### **The Text**

*1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.*

*6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. 7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

*11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

**16** And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. **17** Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. **18** No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

**19** There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. **20** And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? **21** Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

**22** And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. **23** And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. **24** Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. **25** Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. **26** But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. **27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: **28** And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. **29** My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. **30** I and my Father are one.

**31** Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. **32** Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? **33** The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. **34** Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? **35** If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; **36** Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? **37** If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. **38** But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. **39** Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, **40** And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. **41** And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle:

*but all things that John spake of this man were true. 42 And many believed on him there.*

## **Commentary**

### **Verses 1–5 — The Door, the Shepherd, and His Voice**

*He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber... the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.*

No passage in the Gospel of John was pressed harder into the Quaker critique of the settled ministry than this one. Christ declares himself the one lawful door into the fold, and declares that the true sheep know *his* voice — not the voice of a hired intermediary, not the voice of a university man, not the voice of a bishop, but his own. Those who climb in by some other way — by schooling, by ordination, by state appointment, by patronage — are thieves and robbers, whatever their credentials. Penington set the whole matter out as a plain catechism, and the answers leave no room for a human substitute:

*Quest. Who is the door? Ans. The Shepherd is the door also, who lets into the fold, and shuts out, at his pleasure; and none can rightly enter but by him. Quest. What are they that run before the power, or further than the power leads and guides them? Ans. They are thieves and robbers... How may the sheep be discerned from the goats...? By their lamb-like nature, by the meekness and innocence in them which is of the Lamb... They also know and hear the voice of the Word nigh in the mouth and heart. (Isaac Penington, *The Works of Isaac Penington, Volume 3, chunk53*)*

The decisive clause is the last: the sheep *hear the voice nigh in the mouth and heart*. They do not require a human teacher to tell them what Christ sounds like. The Light within carries its own authority, its own unmistakable accent; once heard, it cannot be confused with anything else.

“A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” Penn drew the line exactly here, and bade his readers mark it well:

*“My sheep,” said Christ, “hear my voice and follow me; but they will not hear the voice of strangers.” Now those that speak, if their voices*

*and conversations are not with the life, the power, and with the spirit of Christ, they are strange voices, (I pray you observe well,) and Christ's sheep will not sit under such voices, nor under such shepherds; who do but steal the words of the prophets and apostles, but do not experience them. (William Penn, Life and Writings of William Penn, chunk211)*

A man may be eloquent, learned, orthodox in every article, and still be a strange voice — because he repeats the words of prophets he has never inwardly known. The true sheep withdraw from such preaching by an instinct deeper than argument.

### **Verses 7–10 — I Am the Door**

*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

Christ does not say he shows the door, or points to it; he *is* the door. The early Friends took this with full present-tense weight. The door is not a past event to be remembered but a living entrance to be passed through now. The endless multiplying of sects, systems, and establishments through Christendom was, to Fox and his friends, the plainest proof that the one true way had been forsaken and a thousand counterfeit ways set up in its room. There is one door, one shepherd, one entrance — Christ himself, known inwardly by his Light. Every “way” devised by men to reach God apart from that inward door is, by Christ’s own definition, the climbing of a thief.

And because Christ alone is the door, no human power can manufacture an alternative entrance. Forced conformity, compulsory worship, religion enforced by the magistrate — all are attempts to climb into the fold some other way, and Christ has already named them. The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; the Shepherd comes that the sheep might have life more abundantly. The two cannot be reconciled by any liturgy.

### **Verses 11–13 — The Good Shepherd and the Hireling**

*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd... seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth.*

Here is the text that gave the first Friends their sharpest word for the established clergy: *hireling*. It runs through their writings like a refrain, laid without apology upon every minister who served for pay and held his living

by tithes. The line Christ draws is absolute — the good shepherd lays down his life; the hireling flees when the wolf appears. Burrough, the son of thunder, turned that line upon the priests of England with a force that still scorches the page:

*Not one day of faithful service and true watching over the Flock can you give testimony of; but idle Shepherds have you been, and slumbring Watch-men have you proved, and the whole Flock have been devoured, and scattered, and not one Lamb is found in the Fold... the Fences of the Fold are laid waste, and the door is shut up, and bolted against him that would enter... What will you plead for your selves? Oh, ye deceitfull Hirelings, who have run, and were not sent. (Edward Burrough, The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation, chunk135)*

The Friends had watched this prophecy fulfilled before their eyes. When persecution came — when Quakers were jailed, beaten, their goods seized, their meetings broken up — the settled ministers were not found defending the flock. Many of them instigated the violence. They were hirelings who fled when the wolf came, or worse, opened the gate and let him in. The whole flock was scattered, and the Lord himself had to seek and gather his sheep out of the wolves' mouths, because the men paid to keep them had abandoned the watch.

### **Verse 16 — Other Sheep Not of This Fold**

*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

Christ's word about "other sheep, not of this fold" was precious to the Quaker conviction that the Light is universal. Christ is not penned within Christendom, nor Protestantism, nor Quakerism; he has sheep in every nation and condition who hear his voice through the inward Light, though they may never have heard his outward name. The first Friends saw the promise of one fold and one shepherd already breaking in upon their own day — the gathering of a scattered people back to the only Shepherd:

*It hath pleased our gracious almighty God... to gather them from off the barren mountains, and from the mouths of the wolves, and all false shepherds; that they might no longer be preyed upon... and to bring them back into the fold of the good shepherd, — and that there shall be*

*one sheepfold and one shepherd. (Various early Friends, Letters of Early Friends, chunk200)*

The one fold is not an institution to be built by men but a flock to be gathered by the Shepherd's own voice, sounding inwardly in every land.

### **Verses 27–30 — My Sheep Hear My Voice**

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life... I and my Father are one.*

“My sheep hear my voice” — the whole Quaker claim pressed into five words. Christ speaks, and his own hear him: not through a human go-between, not through institution or office, but directly, inwardly, in the silence of the heart, in the gathered meeting, in the daily walk. And those who hear it *know* it, needing no one to verify the voice, because the voice authenticates itself.

“I and my Father are one” the Friends cited to affirm both the divinity of Christ and the living union of Father and Son — a union into which the sheep themselves are drawn. Job Scott, facing the same charge the Jews flung at Christ, held the mystery without flinching:

*They... pretend oneness with God. “Whom makest thou thyself?” said they. But though all the divine life in Christ was the very life of God in him, and in that sense he and his Father were one... humanity is united with divinity in every new born babe in Christ. (Job Scott, Salvation by Christ, chunk47)*

The oneness of Father and Son is not a bare proposition to be assented to but a reality to be entered: “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:20).

### **Verses 31–42 — Stoned for Saying What Is True**

*For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.*

The charge against Christ — blasphemy, that being a man he makes himself God — was the very charge laid against the first Friends. When Fox or Nayler spoke of the Christ within, of the Light of God in every conscience, their accusers heard them claiming divinity for themselves. It was the same failure of comprehension Christ met: the world cannot grasp the union of the divine and the human that the inward Light declares. Christ's reply is

striking. He turns to Psalm 82 — “I said, Ye are gods” — to show that the scriptures themselves own a divine word coming to men. The Friends did not claim to be God; but they did claim, as Christ taught, that the Light of God dwelt within them. And for that claim, as for his, the stones were taken up.

## **The Practical Shape of Shepherd Theology**

From John 10 the Friends drew not only a critique of the hireling but a positive picture of true spiritual care. The good Shepherd knows his sheep by name, goes before them, lays down his life for them. He does not drive from behind with threats but leads from the front with love. This shaped the whole Quaker order. Elders did not lord it over the flock but served it; they sought the mind of Christ together with the meeting rather than imposing their own. Traveling ministers went without pay, fed by the inward bread and the living water, asking no salary from those they served — for a ministry commissioned by Christ and sustained by his Spirit needs no hireling’s wage.

The refusal of tithes followed from the same root. To pay the established clergy was to maintain the very system that had set a paid substitute in the place of the Shepherd. Fox’s vision, drawn straight from this chapter, was of a church in which every member heard the Shepherd’s voice directly, no intermediary standing between the soul and Christ, the flock gathered not by institutional loyalty but by the magnetic pull of the one true Shepherd whose voice his sheep can never mistake.

## **John 11: The Resurrection and the Life**

### **The Text**

*1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) 3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.*

*7 Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judæa again. 8 His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? 9 Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. 10 But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.*

*11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. 12 Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. 13 Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. 14 Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.*

*16 Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.*

*17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. 18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: 19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. 20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. 21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. 22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. 23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. 24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. 25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? 27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*

*28 And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. 29 As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. 30 Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. 31 The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. 32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell*

down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. **33** When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, **34** And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. **35** Jesus wept.

**36** Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! **37** And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? **38** Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. **39** Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. **40** Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? **41** Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. **42** And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. **43** And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. **44** And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

**45** Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. **46** But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. **47** Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. **48** If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. **49** And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, **50** Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. **51** And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; **52** And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. **53** Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

54 Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples. 55 And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. 56 Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast? 57 Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–16 — Walking in the Day

*Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.*

Before Christ raises Lazarus he teaches his disciples about walking in the day rather than the night — one more turn of the great Johannine theme of light and darkness. The Friends drew from it a plain rule of the spiritual life: those who walk in the Light of Christ do not stumble, because they see by a divine Light that never fails; those who walk in the darkness of human reason, tradition, or authority stumble at every step. The decisive word is the last one — “because there is no light *in* him.” The Light must be *in* the person, not merely around him: not in the Bible he carries, not in the church he attends, but shining within. This is the difference between hearing of the day and walking in it.

### Verses 17–27 — I Am the Resurrection and the Life

*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

For the early Friends, “I am the resurrection and the life” was not merely a promise about a bodily rising at the last day — they did not deny that — but a declaration of present power. Christ raises the dead *now*. Those dead in sin, dead in the darkness of the world, dead in the lifeless formality of outward religion, hear the voice of the Son of God and they live. Thomas

Story weighed Christ's very grammar and found the present tense inescapable:

*In the first part of this saying of Christ, the word life is explanatory of the word resurrection, that life being the cause and power of it, and must intend a resurrection from the same death here intended, which could not be of the body, but of the soul, or mind of man... For these words, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," intend a capacity and possibility of faith in the interim, and same time of this death; which a state of death and dissolution of body will not allow. (Thomas Story, Life and Journal of Thomas Story, chunk490)*

Story's logic is exact: a dead body cannot believe; therefore the death from which Christ raises by faith must be a death of the soul, healed while the body yet lives. Martha's answer shows the common mistake. "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" — she pushes the resurrection off into the future, a doctrine about the end of time. Christ pulls it back: "I *am* the resurrection and the life." Not "I will be" but "I am." The resurrection is a Person, not a date; and that Person stands before her, speaking, offering life now.

This present resurrection was among the most contested points of early Quaker preaching. Opponents charged the Friends with denying the future bodily resurrection. The charge was largely unjust — men like Hubberthorne plainly affirmed that at the sounding of the last trumpet the dead shall be raised, some to life and some to condemnation, sown in corruption and raised in incorruption. But the Quaker stress fell unmistakably on the resurrection that can be known today: the raising of the spiritually dead to new life by the inward Christ.

### **Verses 33–44 — Lazarus, Come Forth**

*And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth.*

The raising of Lazarus provoked exactly the response the Quaker proclamation of the inward Light provoked: not indifference but rage from the religious establishment, which saw its authority threatened by the direct action of Christ. Fox heard that same loud voice still sounding in his own day, and called his fellow-labourers to take up the cry:

*Sound, sound abroad, ye faithful servants of the Lord... to the awakening and raising of the dead, that they may be awakened, and raised up out of the grave, to hear the voice that is living. For the dead have long heard the dead, the blind have long wandered among the blind... that they may hear the voice of the Son of God, of the second Adam that never fell; the voice of the Light, and of the Life. (George Fox, The Journal of George Fox, Volume 2, chunk106)*

The detail that Lazarus came forth “bound hand and foot with grave-clothes,” and had to be loosed, carries its own weight. To be raised from spiritual death is not the end of the work — the graveclothes remain. The habits, the fears, the old patterns of the former life still cling to the newly awakened soul and must be stripped away. Christ raises; but the command “Loose him, and let him go” is given to those who stand by. The gathered meeting, the fellowship of Friends, has its part in unbinding those whom Christ has called out of the tomb.

### **Verses 45–53 — The Counsel Against Christ**

*If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

The chief priests gather their council not because Christ has done evil but because his works are too powerful to ignore. “If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.” The threat is not doctrinal but institutional: if people turn to Christ directly, “our place” loses its function. The Friends saw the same calculation in their own persecution. The settled churches struck at the Quakers not because the message was false but because it was dangerously effective. If men could meet God directly through the inward Light — without clergy, sacraments, tithes, or any institutional mediation — then “our place,” the whole apparatus of the establishment, became unnecessary. Like Caiaphas, its defenders judged it better to suppress the movement than to let it grow.

Yet Caiaphas prophesied more than he knew: that Christ should die “not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” The Friends read this as the charter of the universal Light — a gathering not of one nation or one church but of the children of God scattered through every people, drawn into one by the one Light that enlightens every man.

## **The Present Resurrection**

The whole chapter pressed home the truth the first Friends prized most: resurrection is not only a future event but a present experience. Lazarus was raised *now*, in the midst of his earthly life, not at some distant last day. Fox set the present resurrection in its full reach — the deadness of mere outward profession, and the quickening of all the living in the one risen Christ:

*Christ saith, “I am the resurrection and the life”... Christ is the quickening Spirit. All being dead in Adam, are to be quickened and made alive by Christ, the second Adam. And when they are quickened and made alive by him, they meet together in the name of Jesus Christ their Saviour... who was dead and is alive again, and liveth for evermore. (George Fox, The Journal of George Fox, Volume 2, chunk431)*

The Friends testified that they had known this for themselves. They had been dead — dead in sin, in lifeless religion, in spiritual ignorance — and had heard the voice of the Son of God and come forth from the tomb. The graveclothes of their old lives were being stripped away as they walked in the Light. This present resurrection does not negate the future one; it transforms its meaning, from a distant hope into a present power. The same Christ who will raise the dead at the last day raises the dead now, in this meeting, in this heart that turns to the Light. “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25). The “now is” stands beside the “is coming,” and both are true. Christ is the resurrection — not will be, but is. And those who believe in him, though they were dead, yet shall they live: not someday only, but today, in the Light.

## **John 12: Believe in the Light, That Ye May Be Children of Light**

### **The Text**

*1 Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. 2 There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. 3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of*

the ointment. **4** Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, **5** Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? **6** This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

**7** Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. **8** For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

**9** Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. **10** But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; **11** Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.

**12** On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, **13** Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. **14** And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, **15** Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.

**16** These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

**17** The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. **18** For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.

**19** The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.

**20** And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: **21** The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. **22** Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. **23** And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. **24** Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. **25** He that loveth his life shall lose it;

and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. **26** If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

**27** Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. **28** Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. **29** The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. **30** Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. **31** Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. **32** And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

**33** This he said, signifying what death he should die. **34** The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? **35** Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. **36** While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.

**37** But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: **38** That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? **39** Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, **40** He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. **41** These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

**42** Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: **43** For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

**44** Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. **45** And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. **46** I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on

*me should not abide in darkness. 47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*

*49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever the Father saith unto me, even so I speak.*

## **Commentary**

### **Verses 1–11 — Judas’s Bag and the Threatened Witness**

*This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.*

Judas’s pretended concern for the poor — a mask for his own greed — was a parable the first Friends turned against the hireling ministry of their own day. The Quaker preachers went out, as they said, “without Judas’s bag,” refusing the money-bag of the man who serves for pay and dresses his covetousness in the language of charity. The point was not that the poor should be neglected, but that the love of money corrupts the very profession of religion, so that the thief learns to talk like a benefactor.

The chief priests’ plot against Lazarus (vv. 10–11) illustrates a principle the early Friends knew in their own bones: a transformed life is the most unanswerable testimony there is. A man raised from the dead could not be argued with; his very existence converted the people. So too a soul raised from spiritual death by the inward power of Christ becomes a living witness that no disputation can refute and no magistrate can silence. This is why the religious establishment of seventeenth-century England feared the Quakers — not their arguments, which could be answered, but their changed lives, which could not.

### **Verses 23–26 — The Corn of Wheat**

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

This is the cornerstone of the chapter, and the early Friends read it not as a saying about the coming death of Christ only, but as the law of all spiritual fruitfulness. The grain must die before it can multiply; the soul must die to its first life before the life of God can spring up in it. Isaac Penington gave this its most searching exposition under the figure of the daily cross, the instrument by which the natural self is brought into the ground and slain:

*“Know and take up thy cross, the cross of Christ, the daily cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is that which crosseth the natural; and this is the power of God to deliver from the natural. How should the earthly understanding, the earthly will, the earthly affections... be crucified and slain, but by the cross of Christ?... this is direct death to that nature and spirit that hath lived in any form of religion... yet through this death, the true life springs up, in those who receive the strokes of it. Therefore be willing, and learn to die daily.”* (Penington, *Works Vol. 1, chunk 76*)

For Penington the corn of wheat falls into the ground every day, not once: the religious self, even the self that has lived in “any form of religion,” must consent to die, and only through that death does “the true life spring up.” Edward Burrough preached the same death with his characteristic trumpet-cadence, joining the dying of the grain directly to waiting in the Light:

*“Therefore every one wait in the Light, that you may be changed, and take up the daily Cross of Christ, that your own wills, affections, lusts, and desires, may be crucified, and you may become dead to the World, and may live unto God, in his Nature and Likeness, that your souls may be satisfied therewith, and all that hunger and thirst after Righteousness shall be filled with the true Food.”* (Burrough, *Memorable Works, chunk 120*)

Burrough’s logic is the logic of John 12:24 exactly: the wills, affections, lusts, and desires are the husk; they must be crucified so that the soul, dead to the world, may “live unto God” and bring forth the fruit of righteousness. Stephen Crisp, in his *Life*, traced the sweetness that follows this dying — the paradox that the death of the corruptible is the door into life and joy:

*“So long as thou livest in the cross, thou livest in the power, and thy obeying is easy, and all things are possible to thee through it; and as long as thou art daily dying to that which is corruptible, thou feelest the more life and joy and pleasure in that which is everlasting.”* (Crisp, *Life, chunk 97*)

This is the harvest the grain yields. The death is real and painful — a death to the old self, the old religion, the old way of life — but it is not loss; it is the only road to the abundant fruit Christ promised. Fox preached the same word, and verse 25 follows of necessity: *“he that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”* To save the natural life is to abide alone, a single unsown grain, fruitless and isolated. To let it fall and die is to enter the multiplying life of God.

### **Verses 31–32 — The Prince of This World Cast Out**

*Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

The early Friends read the casting out of the prince of this world not merely as a cosmic event accomplished at Calvary but as an inward judgment executed in the heart. Elizabeth Bathurst joined the verse to the broader work of the Spirit: *“the spirit of Christ was promised to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, by which the spirit and prince of this world should be judged, and he cast out of his throne in the hearts of the children of men”* (HPS 407). The prince of this world has a throne, and that throne is the unregenerate heart; the lifting up of Christ is the dethroning of the usurper.

Stephen Crisp pressed the pastoral application — that the way out from under the prince of darkness is to believe in the Light that exposes the bondage:

*“All those that feel themselves in bondage under this prince of darkness, in what manner soever it be, and are not willing to remain so always; believe but in him that showeth you your bondage, and wait in his pure light in your own consciences, which discovers darkness and the prince of it; and then you will feel a hope to spring up in you.”*  
(Crisp, *Life*, chunk 158)

And the drawing power of the lifted-up Christ — *“will draw all men unto me”* — was, for the Friends, both the historic cross and the inward lifting up of Christ in the soul. When Christ is exalted within, he draws the whole man after him, out of the kingdom of darkness and into his own. Nayler developed this theme at length, and Fox connected the lifted-up Christ with his drawing of all men into the new and living way.

## Verses 35–36 — Believe in the Light

*Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you... While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.*

With John 1:9 and John 16:13, this passage forms the triad most heavily worn in early Quaker literature. The whole Quaker message can be heard in it: there is a Light; it is with you now; walk in it while you may; believe in it, and you will be transformed into its very nature. Samuel Fisher, in *Rusticus ad Academicos*, set the verse side by side with John 8:12 to prove from Christ's own words that the Light is given to be believed in and walked by:

*"I am the light of the world, he... that followeth me, shall not abide in darkness, but have the light of Life: Walk while ye have the Light; while ye have the Light, believe in the Light, that ye may be the children of the Light." (Fisher, Rusticus ad Academicos, chunk 1077)*

Fisher's sharpest insight is that men may "have the Light in them, who yet neither believe in it, nor are the children of it, but yet abiding in darkness." The Light is universal; the believing in it is not. The privilege of becoming a *child* of light belongs only to those who turn to the Light and walk in it. Burrough urged exactly this turning, and warned that the day of visitation is short:

*"Therefore wait, all you that fear the Lord... and lay aside the works of Darkness, which are made manifest by the Light, and also condemned... let the time past be sufficient that you have wrought evil, and now return, and work Righteousness in God, by the Light." (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 120)*

"Yet a little while is the light with you." The urgency was not theatrical; it was observed. The Friends had watched men powerfully convinced who then drew back, and Crisp described with terrible exactness what becomes of the soul that rebels against the Light: "*The more thou rebellest against it, the more dark thou wilt daily grow... by rebellion against the light, do some men lose the very sense and knowledge of it, and grow past feeling, and strangers to it, though it be in them; for the custom of sin, taketh away the sense and the feeling of the burden of it*" (Crisp, *Life*, chunk 88). The Light does not stop shining; but the eye that refuses it grows blind. Hence the command is *now*: believe in the Light while it is yet light.

Penington named the fruit of obeying that command — not improved behavior merely, but a change of nature:

*“What doth the light of the pure God, and of his Christ, do for them that receive and obey it? Doth it not bring them out of darkness, and change their nature; so that they become children of light, and no more darkness, as they were before, but light in the Lord?”* (Penington, *Works Vol. 3, chunk 533*)

To “be the children of light” is not a title conferred from without; it is a new being. The one who believes in the Light becomes light.

### **Verse 46 — I Am Come a Light into the World**

*I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

Here the Light theology of John gathers to a head: the Light is Christ himself, and his coming is universal in its reach — *whosoever* believeth shall not abide in darkness. William Penn read this verse as the very heart of the gospel he was pressed in spirit to preach to a forgetful Christendom:

*“God hath so loved the world, that he hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that those who believe in him, should have eternal life. And this Son is Christ Jesus, ‘the true [light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.]’”* (Penn, *Life and Writings, Vol. 5, chunk 172*)

Penn’s whole exhortation hangs on the present accessibility of this Light: not a doctrine preached to “the thousandth part of mankind” only, but a divine light shining in man, sufficient to deliver from the darkness in which he abides. Penington asked the same question of John 8:12 that he would have asked of verse 46 — whether Christ is the Light only as he appeared in a body of flesh, or also “in his inward and spiritual appearance,” and answered without hesitation that he is “the universal light, the Sun of righteousness, which enlighteneth every man” (Penington, *Works Vol. 3, chunk 204*). The cumulative weight of these Light passages — 1:9, 8:12, 12:35–36, 12:46 — is overwhelming and singular: Christ is the Light, the Light enlightens every person, those who believe in it become children of light, and those who refuse it abide in the darkness they have chosen.

## Verses 42–43 — Loving the Praise of Men

*...many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

The fear of being cast out of respectable religious society silenced many a secret believer, and the Friends knew the dynamic from the inside. Many were privately convinced by the Quaker message but would not own it openly, dreading loss of standing, excommunication, ruin, or prison. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. The Quaker answer was uncompromising: the praise of God is worth more than every honour the world can give, and the soul that suppresses the Light for the sake of reputation purchases its respectability at the price of inward darkness no comfort can relieve.

## The Theology of Light in John 12

John 12 draws the great strands of Johannine Light theology into one concentrated passage, and the progression the Friends read in it is complete. First, the Light is a person — *“I am come a light into the world”* (v. 46) — the eternal Word made flesh, not an abstract principle or a natural faculty. Second, the Light is universal — *“whosoever believeth on me”* — the invitation excludes no one. Third, the Light demands a present response — *“While ye have light, believe in the light”* — and the response must come while the Light shines, for the day of visitation does not last forever. Fourth, the response determines identity — *“that ye may be the children of light”* — those who believe in the Light are changed in their very nature, from darkness into light. Fifth, the refusal of the Light is its own judgment: those who love darkness are not condemned by an arbitrary sentence but by the natural consequence of turning from the only source of life.

This is the theological core of Quakerism, drawn from John 1, 3, 8, 9, and 12: the Word, the Light, and the Gospel are one; the Light shines into every heart; and the whole of salvation hangs upon whether, while it is yet a little while, the soul will believe in the Light and let the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die.

# John 13: A New Commandment — Wash One Another's Feet, Love One Another

## The Text

*1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; 3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; 4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

*6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. 8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. 9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. 10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. 11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.*

*12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

*18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. 19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. 20 Verily, verily, I say unto*

*you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*

**21** *When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. 22 Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. 23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24 Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. 25 He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? 26 Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. 27 And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.*

**28** *Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. 29 For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. 30 He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.*

**31** *Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32 If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. 33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. 34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

**36** *Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. 37 Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. 38 Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.*

## Commentary

### Verses 1–11 — He Riseth from Supper and Washes Their Feet

*He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet... If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*

The foot-washing was a passage of unusual theological interest to the early Friends, because it pressed in the sharpest possible form the question that divided them from the rest of Christendom: which actions of Christ establish a perpetual outward ordinance, and which teach by example without requiring the literal form to be repeated forever? Robert Barclay turned the passage into one of the most disarming arguments in the whole *Apology*. He set the foot-washing side by side with the bread and wine of the same night, and showed that, measured by every test the churches use to defend their sacraments, the basin and the towel have the stronger claim:

*“If we respect the nature of the thing, it hath as much in it as either baptism or the breaking of bread, seeing it is an outward element of a cleansing nature, applied to the outward man, by the command and the example of Christ, to signify an inward purifying. I would willingly propose this seriously to men... whether this ceremony... hath not as much to recommend it for a standing ordinance of the Gospel, as either water baptism, or bread and wine, or any other of that kind?”*  
(Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 336)

Barclay’s logic is devastating in its simplicity. Christ rose, laid by his garments, girded himself, poured the water, washed their feet, and wiped them — circumstances “far more observable” than the passing “as he was eating, he took bread.” He commanded it twice over, called it an “example,” and told Peter that without it he had “no part” with him. Yet no church keeps it as a sacrament. The conclusion the Friends drew was not that one more ritual should be added, but that the outward form is in every case a shadow: the substance is the inward purifying it signifies. The water, the bread, the wine, the basin and towel all point past themselves to Christ washing the soul.

That inward washing is the heart of Christ’s word to Peter — “*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*” Isaac Pennington insisted that the cleansing Christ speaks of in the gospel state is not of the outward man but

of the inward, and not with outward water but with the water of life that God opens in the heart:

*“It is the inward Jew that is to be washed in the gospel state, and it is inward water, spiritual water, that he is to be washed with... Can sin be washed away from any heart and conscience, but by the water of this fountain?... Do not those that are washed with this water feel the true washing, and know it certainly, evidently, infallibly... not the figurative, outward washing of the body, but the real inward washing of the soul?” (Penington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 293)*

Peter’s protest and then his over-eagerness — “not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” — show the natural mind first refusing the cleansing and then trying to manage it. Christ allows neither. The washing is his to give, on his terms, and to have “part” with him is to submit to it. The early Friends understood the whole transaction as a parable of conviction: the proud will must consent to be stooped to, washed, and made clean by the very Lord it thought to instruct.

### **Verses 12–17 — Happy If Ye Do Them**

*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet... If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

The blessing in verse 17 is hung not upon knowing but upon doing. This was a governing conviction of early Quaker faith: that knowledge which does not pass into obedience profits nothing. To call Christ Master and Lord, to admire the example, even to expound it correctly, and then to refuse the lowly service it enjoins, is to forfeit the happiness Christ attaches only to the doing. The Friends read the foot-washing therefore as a standing rebuke to a religion of profession — the religion that honours Christ with the lips while keeping the garments on and the towel folded. The point of the example is not a ceremony to be performed once a year on a few chosen poor, but a temper of self-forgetting service to be carried into every relation of the gathered life.

### **Verse 30 — And It Was Night**

*He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.*

John's bare notation carries a weight of meaning. Judas goes out from the presence of Christ, and the evangelist marks the hour: it was night. To depart from the Light is to enter the dark; the night is not merely the absence of the Light but the consequence of turning from it. The Friends knew the pattern from within their own experience of conviction and its refusal — that the soul which receives the sop of its own choosing, and goes out from the movings of the Spirit, walks straightway into a darkness of its own making.

### **Verses 31–35 — A New Commandment**

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Here is the cornerstone toward which the foot-washing pointed. The same Lord who girded himself with a towel now gives the towel a name: love one another, as I have loved you. John Gratton drew the basin and the new commandment together into a single mark of the true disciple — the love that makes Friends willing to stoop, and the love by which all the world shall know them:

*“In this it is we feel one another, as true members of the body, of which Christ is head; herein we love as brethren, and are ready to wash one another's feet... ‘A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another,’ said Christ our Lord; ‘by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.’ This is a certain mark of a true disciple.” (Gratton, Life, chunk 123)*

For Gratton the love is not sentiment but the very sap of membership in one body: those who feel one another in Christ are, of course, ready to wash one another's feet, for the lower service follows naturally upon the love. George Fox pressed the same word to its root, that love is the evidence of having passed from death to life, and that it is of God himself:

*“He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?... ‘Therefore, love one another;’ for love is of God, and hatred is of the devil; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knows God... strive to excel one another in love, in virtue, in good life and conversation; and strive all to be of one mind, heart, and judgment in the Spirit of God; for in Christ all are one.” (Fox, Journal Vol. 2, chunk 479)*

This was the test Christ named, and the test the Friends accepted: not creed, not liturgy, not ordination, not institutional standing, but love. “By this shall all men know” — and their care for one another bore the mark out. The early Quaker communities visited the imprisoned, supported families whose goods had been seized for tithes, provided for widows and orphans, and maintained a network of hospitality that carried travelling ministers across thousands of miles. It was not organized charity in the modern sense but the natural overflow of the love Christ commanded; and it reached, as Christ’s own love reached, beyond the household of faith — to the poor of every persuasion, to prisoners of every kind, and at length to the enslaved, in the abolitionist witness that grew from this very seed.

### **Verses 36–38 — Peter’s Confidence**

*Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.*

Peter’s confident vow, and Christ’s quiet prediction of his threefold denial, expose the danger of self-confidence in the things of God. Peter was sincere; he was also wrong. The flesh is willing but weak, and only the Spirit can give strength to follow Christ into suffering. Those who lean on their own resolution fail; those who walk in the power of the Light endure. The Friends knew this from hard proof — some powerfully convinced fell away under persecution, while others who seemed unlikely proved immovable — and the difference was never human courage but faithfulness to the inward Light.

### **The Basin and the New Commandment**

John 13 binds the two cornerstones into one. The foot-washing teaches by example what the new commandment names as law: a love that lays aside its garments, girds itself, and stoops to serve. The early Friends refused to make the basin a sacrament, not because they prized the act too little but because they prized its substance too much to leave it lying in an outward shadow. The washing Christ means is inward and continual — Christ cleansing the soul, and the soul, so cleansed, made ready to wash another’s feet. And the love that flows from it is the one badge Christ gave his people, the evidence that they are born of God and have passed from death to life. Where that love is, there the new commandment is kept; and where it is kept, all men may know whose disciples they are.

# John 14: The Way, the Truth, and the Life — The Comforter Promised

## The Text

*1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. 4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*

*5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? 6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. 7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.*

*8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? 10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

*13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

*15 If ye love me, keep my commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.*

**19** Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. **20** At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. **21** He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

**22** Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? **23** Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. **24** He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

**25** These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. **26** But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. **27** Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

**28** Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. **29** And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. **30** Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. **31** But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

## **Commentary**

### **Verses 1–4 — In My Father's House Are Many Mansions**

*In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

The promise of many mansions comforted Friends who had lost their own houses, goods, and livelihoods for the testimony of truth. They read the many mansions as diversity within one unity — different gifts, callings, and measures of growth, yet all in the one house of the Father — and the going of Christ to prepare a place as the assurance that the Lamb leads his people

home, bringing each one into the Father's house to have there his mansion and his food of life. The opening word, "*Let not your heart be troubled,*" was not advice but a promise underwritten by all that follows: the way is known, the Comforter is coming, the peace is given.

## **Verse 6 — I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life**

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

This was, alongside John 1:9 and John 16:13, one of the great pillars of Quaker Johannine theology, cited more than two hundred times across the collected works of the first Friends. Its power lay in a single emphasis: Christ is not merely one who shows the way, speaks truth, and promises life — he *is* the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no other. Isaac Penington stated the matter with the plainness of a settled conviction, and then opened what it requires of the seeker:

*“CHRIST is the way, the only way to the Father; there is not another. Now, every one that will truly know Christ, and come to Christ, must learn of the Father... he whose ears are opened to hear the voice, and who feels the instruction of life from the Father, to go to him in whom he hath placed life; here the Spirit of the Father secretly draws in the inwards of a man's mind and spirit, from that which is really dead, to that which is truly living.”* (Penington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 176)

For Penington the way is not a doctrine to be assented to but a living motion to be felt: the Father draws the inward man from death to life, and that drawing is itself the entrance upon Christ the way. Edward Burrough preached the same Christ with the trumpet-cadence for which he was known, joining the three titles to the eternal Word and shutting out every rival:

*“And this is the Christ, the Saviour, in whom we have believed, and whom we preach, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Foundation of God, which cannot be moved, the Word of God is his Name, and there is no other Name given for Salvation... witness God within you, the Emanuel, the Saviour, God with us, and this is the whole Salvation, and there is no other to be expected, or witnessed.”* (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 296)

Burrough's insistence — “there is no other to be expected, or witnessed, then this, That God dwells in us, and walks in us” — captures the distinct-

ively Quaker turn. If Christ is the way, he must be a way for those now living, accessible here and within, and not a Saviour confined to heaven or to a past history. The Friends pressed exactly this against a Christendom that, in their judgment, preached Christ out of the world and shut the kingdom against living men. Fox made the verse the centre of his own commission, to bring people off from all their own ways “to Christ the new and living way,” and reckoned all the competing ways of a divided Christendom human inventions that bypass the one true Way. The three titles are not three things but one Christ named from three angles: he is the way *because* he is the truth and the life, and to walk in his Light is to walk in all three at once.

### **Verses 10–12 — Greater Works**

*He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

The promise of “greater works” the Friends took at full weight, and read inwardly. The greater works are spiritual: to reach the soul, quicken it, and raise it out of the grave of spiritual death is greater than any healing of the body, and was signified by the outward miracle. The conquest of the enemy within — the overcoming of sin, the death of self-will, the triumph of the Light over the darkness in one’s own heart — is the greatest work of all, and is offered to every believer who walks faithfully in the Light.

### **Verses 16–18 — The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth**

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive... but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

The promise of the Comforter stood at the centre of the whole Quaker understanding of the spiritual life: Christ, withdrawing in the flesh, gives the Spirit of truth to dwell within and to abide for ever. Robert Barclay gathered the great Comforter texts of John 14 and 16 and drew out their plain structure — who this Spirit is, where it is to be, and what it does:

*“And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive... but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”... And hereby is sufficiently proved the sottishness of*

*those... who neither know nor acknowledge any internal Spirit or power but that which is merely natural; by which they sufficiently declare themselves to be of the world, who cannot receive the Spirit, because they neither see him nor know him.” (Barclay, Apology, chunk 34)*

The decisive phrase is “*whom the world cannot receive.*” The Spirit is freely given and universally promised, yet the world — the natural mind, the unregenerate will, the whole system of outward religion that knows only what is “merely natural” — cannot receive what it can neither see nor know. Only those who turn inward, attending to the Light, receive the Comforter. And the Comforter is not another than Christ but Christ in another manner: the Lord who was *with* them in the flesh would be *in* them in the Spirit. This is the transition from outward to inward, from local to universal, that defines the Quaker confidence in Christ’s continuing presence — and the ground of verse 18, “*I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.*” Christ does come again, not least in the inward supper of the gathered meeting and the daily walking in the Light; he does not leave his own comfortless.

## **Verse 26 — He Shall Teach You All Things**

*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

This verse was foundational to the Quaker conviction that the Spirit itself teaches directly, and to their refusal to make seminary learning the qualification for ministry. Barclay reasoned that the indwelling Spirit is no idle thing but an active teacher, presenting truth to the mind and not merely helping the mind to construe a text:

*“He in whom the Spirit of God dwelleth, it is not in him a lazy, dumb, useless thing; but it moveth, actuateth, governeth, instructeth, and teacheth him all things whatsoever are needful for him to know; yea, bringeth all things to his remembrance... It is not said, ‘it shall teach you how to understand those things that are written’; but, ‘It shall teach you all things.’” (Barclay, Apology, chunk 40)*

If the Comforter teaches all things, Barclay asked elsewhere, what need have we to lean so heavily on the traditions and commandments of men? The Spirit of truth brings Christ’s words to remembrance — not by feats of

memory but by divine inspiration, so that the gospel minister relies not on notes but on the immediate opening of the Spirit. This was the Quaker charter for Spirit-led ministry, and the early Friends staked their gathered worship upon it: a silence waiting for the Spirit to teach, and a word brought forth only as the Spirit gave it.

### **Verse 27 — My Peace I Give unto You**

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

The peace of Christ — “not as the world giveth” — was the experiential reality that carried the early Friends through imprisonment and loss. It is not the peace of easy circumstances but a peace that flows from God alone and persists when every outward condition is hostile. Penington, writing to Friends from his own confinement at Aylesbury, described both the source of that peace and the only place it can be kept:

*“Hath the Lord spoken peace to you, peace which passeth man’s understanding, and only flows from him?... keep you out of all manner of sin, lust, and foolishness of the fleshly mind and spirit; for the peace is not there... this little thing, this light of God in you, to which ye were at first directed and turned... in this wait, to this let your minds be still turned, and in it still abide; and the power and glory of eternal life will daily, more and more, appear in you.” (Penington, Letters, chunk 27)*

That such words were written from a prison cell is the whole testimony. The peace Christ gives is kept by abiding in the Light that gave it; it is broken not by chains but by sin, by the fleshly mind that draws the soul away from its source. The Friends found, as Penington found, that the world could take their liberty and their goods and yet not touch this peace.

### **Verse 30 — The Prince of This World Hath Nothing in Me**

*For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*

Christ’s word that the prince of this world “hath nothing in me” set before the Friends the standard of inward purity the Light makes possible. The goal of the spiritual life is not merely to resist sin but to come to a state in which the enemy, searching the heart, finds nothing of his own to lay hold of — nothing that answers to his temptation. Toward this state the Light leads every soul that walks faithfully in it.

## The Heart of the Farewell Discourse

John 14 is the heart of Christ's farewell, and the heart of the Quaker confidence in his abiding presence. Every great theme is gathered here: Christ the only way to the Father (v. 6), the Comforter who dwells within and abides for ever (vv. 16–17), the Spirit who teaches all things and brings Christ's words to remembrance (v. 26), the peace the world cannot give (v. 27), and the purity in which the prince of this world finds nothing (v. 30). The Friends returned to this chapter more than almost any other, preaching from it, drawing strength from it in prison, whispering it to one another under persecution. For here Christ promises precisely what they most needed and most claimed to know by experience: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." The way, the truth, and the life does not depart for ever; he sends the Spirit of truth to abide, and to those who love him and keep his words the Father and the Son come and make their abode — not in a distant heaven, not in an age to come, but here and now, in the silence of the heart and the gathering of the faithful.

## John 15: The True Vine — Abide in Me

### The Text

*1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

*6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

*9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11*

*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

**12** *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. 16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.*

**18** *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because I am not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

**22** *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. 23 He that hateth me hateth my Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. 25 But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*

**26** *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: 27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.*

## Commentary

### Verses 1–8 — I Am the True Vine

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman... He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

The figure of the vine and the branches gathered into a single image everything the early Friends meant by the spiritual life. It is not a believer working alongside Christ, drawing on his help; it is a branch with no life of its own, bearing fruit only as the sap of the living vine rises through it. The whole weight of the passage rests on five words — *without me ye can do nothing* — and the Friends took them at full force.

Job Scott pressed into the inward logic of the metaphor with a closeness few of his contemporaries matched, reading the union of vine and branch as the very mystery of the indwelling Christ, in whom the believer's own doing is wholly displaced by Christ's:

*“‘I am the vine, ye are the branches.’ ... Just so every branch in him may say, ‘I speak not of myself, I ask in thy name; it is thy word that speaks, and asketh in me;’ ‘I live, yet not I, it is Christ that liveth in me.’ This is he, that in all the truly begotten can always say, ‘I know that thou hearest me always.’ This is true prayer, and no other is so; all other is but the noise, the voice and breath of man, and is not answered.” (Scott, *Salvation by Christ*, chunk 18)*

The distinction is exact: prayer that rises from the branch abiding in the vine is Christ asking in his own name and is always heard; prayer that rises from the natural man, however earnest, is “but the noise, the voice and breath of man,” and “falls to the ground.” The same test governs every act of the religious life: speech, prayer, and ministry have spiritual power only as they flow from the vine; severed from it, the most eloquent words are dead wood.

Scott also met the reasoner's objection — how can a true branch ever be “cast forth, and withered”? — by locating it inwardly. The branch can wither “outwardly” and yet have been truly of the vine; for “a birth of real life” can be “stifled and slain.” Verse 6 is thus no remote threat but a present reality: the moment a branch ceases to abide, the life begins to drain out of it.

Isaac Penington described the abiding from the other side — how a soul becomes a branch at all. It is no outward profession or assent to a description of Christ, but a real ingrafting into the living root, so that the believer becomes “one in nature and spirit with him”:

*“the soul that will live by him, must receive him, and feel the ingrafting into him the holy root, the living word of God’s eternal power, and must feel this word ingrafted into his heart, so that there be a real becoming one in nature and spirit with him. And then he is truly in the vine, in the olive-tree, and partakes of the virtue and sap thereof; he abiding therein, and walking in the spirit, life, and power thereof.”*  
(Penington, Works Vol. 2, chunk 338)

To “abide” is therefore not to remember a doctrine but to remain ingrafted, partaking continually of the sap. Penington elsewhere named the means by which the branch is kept living — the inward anointing that both teaches and holds the soul in its place: “*to abide in the vine, in the life, in the Spirit, in the power, as this Spirit or anointing teacheth: oh, here is the sweet, the clear state, the blessed state!*” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 272).

The pruning of verse 2 the Friends accepted as the work of the inward Light, cutting away whatever hinders fruitfulness. It is painful, but it is the Husbandman’s love, not his anger: the fruitful branch is purged because it is worth the keeping.

Edward Burrough turned the parable upon the great churches of his day with the thunder that was his peculiar gift, seeing in the apostate Christendom of his age the very vine of the Husbandman gone wild:

*“this Tree becomes blasted by an unwholesome Air, and becomes degenerate from its vertue, and property and nature; and becomes a wild Vine... ceasing to bring forth any good Fruit... Shall he not lay his Ax to the Root, and cause all its Branches utterly to wither...? Give ear, all ye Christians... though you have the name of Christians, yet you want the Life.”* (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 600)

To have the name and want the life — to be a branch in profession and withered in fact — was the standing danger of every soul that rests in the form of religion without the sap of the vine.

## Verses 9–17 — I Have Called You Friends

*Henceforth I call you not servants... but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*

From this verse the people called Quakers took the name they have borne ever since. Christ calls his own not servants but *friends*, because he withholds nothing of the Father from them but makes it known. The early Friends understood this as a description of the deepest spiritual intimacy: to be a friend of Christ is to be admitted to the Father's counsel, taught immediately by the anointing within. And the friendship has a law — “ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” — so that the name is no looser bond than servanthood but a closer one, knit by love rather than fear.

Edward Burrough's exhortation to the gathered Friends shows how naturally vine, fruit, and friendship ran together in the Quaker mind. The mark of the friend is that he dwells in, and is led by, the inward life:

*“all Friends and Elect of God, who are called and faithful... mind the Life of God in you all, which is immortal, and is but one... Ye that know this which is of the Father in you, dwell in it, and walk in it, and be not shaken out of it... knowing this first, That none are justified by him, but them that are led and guided by him; and to whom he is a Saviour, he is also a Teacher.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 298)*

To dwell in the life and be led by it is to abide in the vine; the friend, the branch, and the led soul are one and the same. The commandment that frames the passage — “love one another” — is the fruit such abiding bears.

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” The initiative is always God's. No one makes himself a branch or a friend; one is chosen, ingrafted, drawn out of the world by the Light. The fruit, the friendship, the willingness to abide — all are received, never achieved.

## Verses 18–25 — The World's Hatred

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you... because I am not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

Having named his people friends, Christ tells them plainly what their friendship will cost. The Friends knew this in their bodies — beaten, fined,

imprisoned, their goods seized — and read the world’s enmity not as a refutation of their calling but as its confirmation. Isaac Penington traced the hatred to its root: it is provoked precisely by the children of light having once been of the world and then leaving it, standing witnesses against the very spirit that still rules it.

*“Had they staid in the world, and been still of the world, the world would have loved them, as it doth the rest of its own; but departing from the world, traveling towards another country, subjecting themselves to another Spirit, and testifying against that spirit which formerly led them, and still leads the world... this fills the worldly spirit with rage against them.” (Penington, Works Vol. 2, chunk 138)*

The hatred is thus evidence. Where the world loves and owns a thing, that thing is its own; where it rages, it has met a spirit not its own. Christ’s word — “if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” — taught the Friends to expect the cross as the ordinary lot of the friend of Christ, and to take the world’s enmity as the shadow cast by their having truly been chosen out of it.

### **Verses 26–27 — The Spirit of Truth Shall Testify**

*But when the Comforter is come... even the Spirit of truth... he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness.*

The chapter closes by pointing forward to the great theme of the next: the coming of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. Here Christ names the double witness that would become the very pattern of Quaker ministry — the Spirit testifying of Christ inwardly, and the believer bearing witness outwardly, in word and life. The inward must give rise to the outward; the minister bears witness truly only as the Spirit testifies first within. And the Spirit testifies of *Christ* — not of opinions, systems, or institutions. The test of all true ministry is whether it turns the soul toward Christ, the living vine, in whom alone the branch finds its life.

### **The Vine and the Gathered Life**

John 15 binds union and community into one figure. The meeting is no association of individuals who share an opinion but an organic body — a vine whose branches all draw from one root — so that the health of each affects the life of the whole. From this the Friends derived their care for one another, their “gospel order,” their readiness to be pruned. They would not

preach unless moved by the Spirit, because they had taken the parable at its word: the branch can do nothing of itself. At its best their common life was transparently the work of Christ — fruit borne not by human eloquence but by the living vine, through branches that had learned to abide.

## **John 16: The Spirit of Truth Will Guide You into All Truth**

### **The Text**

*1 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. 2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. 3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

*4 But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? 6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

*12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. 14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. 15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*

*16 A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. 17 Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little*

while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? **18** They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

**19** Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? **20** Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. **21** A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. **22** And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

**23** And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. **24** Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

**25** These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. **26** At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: **27** For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. **28** I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

**29** His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. **30** Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. **31** Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? **32** Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. **33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

## Commentary

### Verses 1–3 — Put Out of the Synagogues

*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

No prophecy of Christ was fulfilled more exactly in the experience of the first Friends. They were put out of every synagogue — every established church and respectable religious gathering — and their persecutors genuinely believed they were doing God service. The warning that the deed would be done “because they have not known the Father, nor me” the Friends took as the key to all such persecution: it is the religion that knows God only outwardly, by report and form, that turns most fiercely on the religion that knows God inwardly and immediately. Christ told his disciples beforehand so that the offence, when it came, might confirm rather than shake them.

### Verses 7–11 — The Comforter Will Reprove the World

*It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you... And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*

This passage carried unusual weight for the early Friends, because it set the whole logic of their message on its foundation. Christ’s bodily departure was not loss but gain — “expedient” — because it made way for the Comforter, the inward Spirit who would do in every heart what the outward Christ could do only in one place at a time. And the Spirit’s first work in the unconverted is not comfort but reproof: he comes to “reprove the world of sin.”

Isaac Pennington gave one of the most searching early Quaker expositions of the verse, fixing on the truth that nothing but the inward light can actually convince a man of sin:

*“whether any thing can convince of sin but the light of God’s Holy Spirit shining in the heart? There may be an outward declaration of sin by the law outward; but it never reacheth the heart and conscience but by the shining of the light inward... if God do open men’s understandings in some measure, so that they cannot but confess such and such things to be evil in general... yet they are not able to see the evil and*

*danger of these things in and to themselves, but have covers and excuses to hide them, unless the inward light and Spirit of the Lord search their hearts, and make them manifest to them.” (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 210)*

Penington’s insight is that the same Spirit works differently according to the state of the soul: to the disciple who has turned to the Light he is Comforter, Guide, and Teacher; to the world still in darkness he comes first as a convincer of sin, an uncomfortable light shining into dark places. The two offices are not two Spirits but one, met at different stages of the soul’s travel. And this gives the seeking soul its surest rule: *that which discovers and reproveth the evil is itself good, and is to be obeyed.*

Edward Burrough preached the same reproveth Light with his characteristic urgency, calling his hearers to turn inward to the very thing that accuses them:

*“turn your minds inward, to the Light of Christ Jesus, wherewith every one of you is lightned, which light is it which convinceth you of sin, and lets you see your evil deeds... if you dwell in the light, it is your Teacher, and way unto life eternal, and if you bring all your deeds to it, it will reprove every evil word and work, and give you discerning of things that differ.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 119)*

For Burrough the reproveth Light and the teaching Light are one and the same: the conscience that submits to be searched and judged is the conscience that is then led “unto life eternal.” The reproof is not the Spirit’s hostility but the first motion of his saving work — the same Light that condemns the sin offering itself as Teacher and way to the soul that will dwell in it.

## **Verses 12–15 — The Spirit of Truth Will Guide You into All Truth**

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

Here is the verse that, beside John 1:9, forms the very bedrock of Quaker faith — among the most frequently cited texts in all their writings. The Spirit of truth will guide into *all* truth: not some truth, not the truth as far as it was revealed in one century or codified in creeds, but all truth,

continually opened to the waiting soul. Revelation is not sealed; the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures still speaks and still guides.

The Friends drew from the words two convictions at once. First, that the Spirit, not the letter, is the primary ground of all true knowledge of God. Second — and this is the note Christ himself strikes — that the Spirit leads progressively, opening to each soul what it is able to bear, in the order proper to its state. Isaac Penington unfolded this with great tenderness, making the “ye cannot bear them now” of verse 12 the very pattern of the Spirit’s guidance:

*“The Spirit of God knoweth the things of God, and the states of persons, and what is proper or improper for them... There are some newly quickened, newly come out of the darkness. There are several states and degrees of growth; there is a tempted state, a wandering state, a backsliding state, a shaken state, an established state... Now, there is somewhat proper to every one according to his state, which the Spirit of the Lord knows... All truths are not proper to every state, nor all remedies to every disease. Christ had many things to teach and say to his disciples, which they were not able to bear; and a man in reading the Scriptures, though he should understand the truth of what he reads, yet he is apt to misapply things, as to himself or others, unless the Lord guide and help him.” (Penington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 212)*

The point is searching: even a correct understanding of Scripture, without the Spirit’s living guidance, will be misapplied — the soul forever “apt to apply that to him which belongs not to him, and thrust that from him which belongs to him.” Only the Spirit, the “sure and unerring guide,” knows each soul’s particular state and can apply the truth to it in season. The believer is therefore to live “like a child, living not upon a wisdom of thy own, but upon thy Father’s wisdom,” receiving truth “as a gift daily from the hands of the Father.”

The Spirit guides “into all truth” by leading the soul to the eternal Word from which all Scripture came. Edward Burrough pressed this against those who would set the letter above the inward Light:

*“the Light which shines into the Conscience is the Light of Christ, which he hath enlightned every one withal, and it is spiritual, like himself, and eternal, and it leads out of sin... and it leads to the eternal*

*Word, which was in the beginning before sin was.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 60)*

This is no setting of the Spirit against Scripture but a clarification of the order of authority: the Light leads to the eternal Word that was before all writing, and so to the right use of the written words that flowed from it. The Spirit that reproves the world of sin is the same Spirit that guides into all truth — reproof and guidance being not two works but the one continual work of the inward Light, casting down what is false and raising up what is true.

### **Verses 20–22 — Your Sorrow Turned into Joy**

*Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy... and your joy no man taketh from you.*

The figure of the travailing woman the Friends knew from within. Convincement was itself a travail — a real sorrow, a being broken and emptied under the reproving Light — but a travail with a birth at the end of it. The joy Christ promises is not the absence of suffering but a joy on the far side of it, born out of the very anguish, and therefore a joy “no man taketh from you,” because it does not depend on outward ease. Persecuted, imprisoned, and dispossessed, the early Friends bore witness that they had found exactly this: a settled gladness no jailer could reach.

### **Verse 33 — Be of Good Cheer; I Have Overcome the World**

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Christ’s closing word was a text of immense comfort to a suffering people, and George Fox returned to it again and again to steady the Friends amid persecution. He set the peace of Christ over against the trouble of the world as two countries, and bade Friends dwell wholly in the one:

*“you that are redeemed from the death and fall of Adam, by Christ the second Adam, in Him ye have life, rest, and peace; for Christ saith, ‘In me ye shall have peace; but in the world trouble.’... Christ, who hath overcome the world... whatever bustlings and trouble, tumults and outrages... arise in the world, keep out of them all... but keep in the Lord’s power and peaceable truth, that is over all such things.” (Fox, Journal Vol. 2, chunk 399)*

The peace is “in me” — found only by abiding in Christ — and it is real precisely because the world’s tribulation is real and not denied. The Friends did not expect to escape trouble; they expected to be kept in peace through it, by the power of the One who had already overcome the world. The victory was not theirs to win but Christ’s to share, and their good cheer rested on a conquest already accomplished.

## **The Standing Dispensation of the Spirit**

John 16 was, for the early Friends, the charter of the new dispensation — the dispensation of the Spirit that succeeds and surpasses the dispensation of the flesh. Christ in the flesh was bound to one place, one time, one nation; Christ in the Spirit is everywhere, always, for all. This is why the Friends could claim continuity with the apostolic church while rejecting nearly every outward feature of the churches around them. They had no buildings, clergy, sacraments, or set liturgies — but they had the Spirit, and the Spirit, they held, is the abiding and final provision of God for his people.

Isaac Pennington described this gospel dispensation as the gathering up of all that went before, in which every former shadow finds its substance:

*“There is not another tabernacle to be built, not another temple, not another Jerusalem than the heavenly Jerusalem... not another water to wash the soul with, not another blood to sprinkle the conscience with, not another spirit to enlighten, quicken, keep alive, and comfort, than the Spirit of light, life, and love from God... Now, in this gospel dispensation, or this dispensation of the Son in Spirit, all other dispensations are gathered into and wrapped up, and thoroughly experienced by the soul that travels with and is led by Christ.” (Pennington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 331)*

If the Spirit is the standing dispensation, then every gathering of Friends is a new Pentecost: every silence a waiting for the Spirit to speak, every word of ministry tested against his leading, every decision sought under his guidance. This is the burden of John 16 and the conviction the early Friends staked their lives upon — that the Spirit of truth has come, reproving the world, guiding into all truth, glorifying Christ, and making his presence known in the hearts of all who turn to the Light.

# John 17: The Great Prayer — Unity, Glory, and Eternal Life

## The Text

*1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

*4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

*6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. 8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.*

*9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. 10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. 11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*

*12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*

*16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*

*20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

*24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

## **Commentary**

John 17 is the high-priestly prayer, the holiest words in the Gospel — Christ, on the threshold of his passion, praying aloud for his own and for all who should believe through their word. The early Friends read this chapter not as the record of a prayer once offered, but as the living charter of the gathered church: eternal life defined as the inward knowledge of God, sanctification wrought through the truth, and a unity that is no human agreement but the very oneness of the Father and the Son brought down into the hearts of believers. Three things in it they pressed home with their whole weight — the knowledge that is life eternal (v. 3), the sanctifying through truth (vv. 17, 19), and the prayer that they all may be one (vv. 21–23).

### **Verse 3 — This Is Life Eternal**

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

Here is the cornerstone of the chapter, and Isaac Penington gave it the most searching treatment in the whole Quaker corpus. For him the verse drew an absolute line between two knowledges — the one that is life eternal, and the one men merely call knowledge, gathered from without:

*“There is a knowledge of God and Christ which is life eternal; and there is a knowledge of them (or at least that which men call so) which is not life eternal. The knowledge which is life eternal is that knowledge which God gives to his own birth; even the spiritual knowledge which God gives to those which are born of the Spirit... The knowledge (or that which men call knowledge) which is not life eternal is that knowledge which man can get and comprehend from without, of himself, without the enlightenings and quickenings of God’s holy Spirit and power inwardly felt and operating in the heart.”* (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 266)

The distinction is the whole of Quakerism in miniature. A man may have every doctrine concerning God exactly right and still be a stranger to the life; another may stammer at the doctrines and yet possess the thing itself. Eternal life is not assent to true propositions about God; it is the inward, experiential knowing of God himself, given only to the birth that is born of the Spirit. Penington spoke of this knowing as something as certain and immediate as any voice he had ever heard within: *“I have heard his voice, as truly and certainly, inwardly in my heart, as ever I heard the voice of Satan there. He hath revealed his Son, his pure, holy, living child Jesus in me”* (Penington, Works Vol. 3, chunk 266). This is the note the first Friends struck against the learned divinity of their age — not knowledge *about* God, but the knowledge that is life.

### **Verse 5 — The Glory Before the World Was**

*And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

Christ’s appeal to the glory he had before the world was, the early Friends took as a plain testimony to his eternal being — the same Word that was in the beginning with God (John 1:1), now praying to be received again into that pre-existent glory. They did not labour the metaphysics; they let the verse stand as witness that the Christ who suffered was no mere man newly come into being, but the eternal Son veiled in the prepared body. What concerned them more was that this same glory is given to the saints (v. 22),

so that the glory before the world was becomes the glory shared with those whom the Father has given him — a theme they took up at the chapter's height.

### **Verses 17, 19 — Sanctify Them Through Thy Truth**

*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth... And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*

Sanctification was a doctrine the early Friends would not soften. Against those who taught that holiness could never be perfected in this life, they insisted that Christ sanctifies really and to the uttermost. Penington fastened the believer's sanctification directly to Christ's own — “for their sakes I sanctify myself” — and showed that the members are made holy by the very same will the Head obeyed:

*“That we are sanctified by the same will, by which Christ was sanctified, or sanctifieth himself. In subjection to the same will, which the head obeyed (even in denying themselves, taking up the cross to their own wills, and submitting to God's) are the members sanctified. The Spirit of God works them into holiness by this will of God, and through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once.” (Penington, Works Vol. 4, chunk 82)*

The truth that sanctifies is not a creed but a power — the inward operation of God's Spirit, conforming the soul to the same self-denying obedience Christ rendered. Edward Burrough drove the point home against those who made sanctification partial and the new birth a mere improvement of the old: “*Thou sayst, Sanctification is not perfect in this life... But we say, Christ is perfect, and therefore Sanctification is perfect; and the New Man is the Image of God, and is created in Righteousness and in true Holiness*” (Burrough, *Memorable Works*, chunk 664). To be sanctified through the truth is to be brought, by the cross, into the real likeness of God — not by degrees of opinion but by the substance of the new creature.

### **Verses 21–23 — That They All May Be One**

*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us... I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.*

This is the prayer the early Friends felt over their own gathered meetings, and they understood it with great exactness: the oneness Christ asks for is

not an outward conformity, nor agreement upon articles, but a unity flowing from the shared life — believers made one with each other because each is first made one with the Father and the Son. Penington described this unity as the most natural and comely thing in the world, and yet a thing only the Lord himself can bring forth in his people:

*“Unity in the spiritual body, which is gathered into and knit together in the pure life, is a most natural and comely thing. Yea, it is exceeding lovely to find all that are of the Lord of one heart, of one mind, of one judgment... The Lord is to be waited upon for the bringing forth of this in the body; that as there is a foundation of it laid in all (the life and spring being over all), so all may be brought by him into the true and full oneness.”* (Penington, Works Vol. 2, chunk 277)

The order matters. Unity is not manufactured by negotiation or enforced by creed; it is *waited for*, brought forth by the same life that is the spring of it in every member. Where each soul is knit into the pure life, the members are knit to one another — “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” And the visible fruit of it, Christ says, is evangelistic: *“that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”* The early Friends staked their whole testimony on this — that a people genuinely gathered into the one life would be a sign to the world that could not be argued away, the living demonstration that the Father had indeed sent the Son.

## **Verse 26 — That the Love May Be in Them**

*And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

The prayer ends where it must: in indwelling. The whole movement of the chapter is inward — the name declared, the love placed within, Christ himself in them. Burrough spoke of this as the very ground of all covenant: *“so mind the Immortal Life begotten of the Father in you, that that may live in you... for in that alone is Covenant with God made and kept, and in it is the Father’s presence enjoyed”* (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 895). The great prayer of John 17, for the early Friends, was answered not in a doctrine received but in a Christ indwelling — the love wherewith the Father loved the Son made the living possession of every soul born of the Spirit.

# John 18: My Kingdom Is Not of This World

## The Text

*1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. 2 And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. 3 Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? 5 They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. 6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.*

*7 Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. 8 Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: 9 That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. 10 Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11 Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

*12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, 13 And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. 14 Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.*

*15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. 17 Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. 18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold:*

*and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.*

**19** *The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. 20* *Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. 21* *Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. 22* *And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? 23* *Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*

**24** *Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.*

**25** *And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. 26* *One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? 27* *Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.*

**28** *Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. 29* *Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? 30* *They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. 31* *Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: 32* *That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.*

**33** *Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? 34* *Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? 35* *Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? 36* *Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight: but now is my kingdom not from hence. 37* *Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the*

*truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. 38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.*

*39 But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 40 Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.*

## **Commentary**

If John 18 had a single verse for the early Friends, it was verse 36: “*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.*” This was the seed-text of the peace testimony, the ground on which Friends refused all carnal weapons and laid down their lives rather than take another’s. Around it the chapter gathers two further testimonies dear to them — Christ’s command to Peter to put up the sword (v. 11), and his declaration that he came to bear witness unto the truth (v. 37), set against Pilate’s worldly, unanswerable “*What is truth?*”

### **Verse 11 — Put Up Thy Sword**

*Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

Peter’s drawn sword in the garden was, for Friends, the natural man’s whole instinct in the cause of Christ — to defend the kingdom by force, and so to misunderstand it utterly. Christ’s rebuke became the standing answer to every demand that Friends arm themselves for the gospel. George Fox, in the great 1660 Declaration to the king, set the saying of Christ to Peter directly against the supposition that Friends might one day take up the sword for the kingdom of Christ:

*“To this we answer, Christ said to Peter, ‘Put up thy sword in his place;’ though he had said before, he that had no sword might sell his coat and buy one... but Christ commanded him to put it up: and said, ‘He that taketh the sword shall perish with the sword.’ And further, Christ said to Pilate, ‘If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.’” (Fox, Journal Vol. 1, chunk 475)*

The logic runs straight from the garden to Pilate’s hall: the servant who would fight has not understood the kingdom. Fox bound the two scenes

together because Christ himself did — the sword sheathed in verse 11 is interpreted by the kingdom “not of this world” in verse 36. And the cup Christ chose to drink rather than to be defended by force was the pattern: the kingdom advances by suffering borne, not by suffering inflicted.

### **Verse 36 — My Kingdom Is Not of This World**

*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

This is the cornerstone. Edward Burrough preached it with his full trumpet-voice, and his exposition is the richest in the corpus — for he saw that the reason Christ’s servants do not fight is that the kingdom is set up *within*, and what opposes it is within, and must be subdued there by spiritual weapons before there can be any dominion without:

*“The Kingdom of Christ is setting up, and it is not of this World, neither shall be exalted, nor advanced by worldly policy, and worldly wisdom, nor by carnal weapons, nor by the multitude of an host of men... and his Kingdom shall be set up within every particular of his Subjects; for none can know him reign without them unto their Salvation, till they know him to reign first within... strive not to obtain it with your carnal Weapons, but take the Weapons which are Spiritual, which only will overcome... for through suffering must the Kingdom of Christ be set up, and not by rebellion.” (Burrough, Memorable Works, chunk 291)*

Burrough’s insight is exact: the peace testimony is not first a rule about warfare but a doctrine about *where the kingdom is*. Because Christ reigns inwardly, the enemy to be conquered is inward, and the only weapons that can reach it are spiritual. The man who “pursues his Enemy without, and leaves him in his own house, is foolish.” Fox stated the public consequence in the 1660 Declaration with equal plainness: “*those that use any weapon to fight for Christ, or for the establishing of his kingdom or government, their spirit, principle, and practice we deny,*” looking instead for the day when “*Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*” (Fox, *Memoir*, chunk 41). The kingdom not of this world is exalted by the arm of the Lord alone, “*through the suffering and patience of his people, and by faithful witness bearing unto Jesus Christ*” (Burrough, *Memorable Works*, chunk 357).

## Verses 37–38 — Bear Witness Unto the Truth / What Is Truth?

*To this end was I born... that I should bear witness unto the truth.  
Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him,  
What is truth?*

Christ's whole errand, by his own account, was to bear witness to the truth — and the test he names is inward hearing: “*Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*” The early Friends heard their own calling in this. Burrough understood the witness of truth as something self-authenticating, carried home by the Light of Christ in the hearer rather than by force of argument:

*“the Light of Christ in every one shall give testimony to it, unto which I do only commend my self and these truths to be witnessed... for the World by its wisdom doth not know God, neither can it receive the things of God, but is Foolishness in the Sight of God; and the wisdom of the World must be offended in him, and in the Testimony which is given of him.”* (Burrough, *Memorable Works*, chunk 370)

Pilate's “*What is truth?*” — asked of Truth himself, and not waiting for an answer — became for Friends the very emblem of worldly wisdom: a mind that can frame the question but is not “of the truth,” and so cannot hear the voice. Penington made the same distinction in another place: men cry up the outward means and the doctrines, “but kills the life,” never coming to “the immediate voice, life, and power” which alone the means were meant to point to (Penington, *Works* Vol. 1, chunk 213). Pilate had Truth bound before him and could not know him, because the knowing of truth is not an achievement of the natural understanding but the gift of the Light to those who are of it. The chapter that opens with a sheathed sword closes with this great divide — between the kingdom that is heard inwardly by all who are of the truth, and the worldly power that questions, smites, and condemns what it cannot perceive.

## John 19: The Crucifixion — Christ Lifted Up

### The Text

*1 Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. 2 And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on*

him a purple robe, **3** And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. **4** Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. **5** Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! **6** When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. **7** The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.

**8** When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; **9** And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. **10** Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? **11** Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

**12** And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. **13** When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. **14** And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! **15** But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

**16** Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. **17** And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: **18** Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

**19** And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. **20** This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. **21** Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The

King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. **22** Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

**23** Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. **24** They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

**25** Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! **27** Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

**28** After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. **29** Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. **30** When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

**31** The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. **32** Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. **33** But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: **34** But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

**35** And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. **36** For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. **37** And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

**38** And after this Joseph of Arimathæa, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and

took the body of Jesus. 39 And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. 40 Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. 41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. 42 There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

## Commentary

The crucifixion chapter brought the early Friends to the very heart of the gospel — and to one of the points where they were most fiercely misunderstood. They were charged with denying the cross of Christ, the blood shed at Golgotha, the atonement itself. They denied no such thing; they honoured the outward sufferings of Christ and witnessed forgiveness of sins through his blood. But they refused to let the finished work *for* men remain separate from the redeeming work *in* men. The chapter turns on verse 30 — “*It is finished*” — and the early Friends read it as the perfecting of a sacrifice meant to be inwardly known, with the cry of the law in verse 7 and the looking on the pierced one in verse 37 as its dark and its hopeful borders.

### Verse 7 — We Have a Law

*The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*

Friends knew this verse from the inside, for they too were imprisoned and condemned under colour of law. Penington exposed the device exactly — that the persecutor frames new laws to ensnare what is born of God, and then “hides himself from the imputation of persecution, and appears as a just executer of the law”:

*“Another way is, by making new laws fit for their purpose, whereby they may catch, ensnare, and suppress that which is contrary to their spirit and principle... He that shall persecute the Lord of glory (as he that persecuteth the least member of his... doth no less) when Christ shall call him to account therefor, it will be a vain plea for him to say, there was a law for it, and he acted according to law.” (Penington, Works Vol. 2, chunk 139)*

“We have a law” was the cry of every magistrate who fined and jailed Friends for meeting and for refusing oaths. Pennington’s answer is that legality is no cover before God: the law that condemns the innocent only condemns those who wield it. And Christ’s word to Pilate sealed it — *“Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above”* (v. 11). The persecuting power is permitted, not justified; and “he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

### **Verse 17 — Bearing His Cross**

*And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called... Golgotha.*

Christ bearing his own cross was, for William Penn, the figure of the daily cross every disciple must take up — not a wooden relic, but the inward power that crucifies the natural will. He drew the contrast sharply between the true cross and its substitutes: *“This is such a cross as flesh and blood can carry, for flesh and blood invented it; therefore it is not the cross of Christ, which is to crucify flesh and blood”* (Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, chunk 34). The true cross is “an inward submission of the soul to the will of God, as it is manifested by the light of Christ in the consciences of men; though it be contrary to their own inclinations” (Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, chunk 20). Christ’s literal road to Golgotha and the disciple’s daily dying are one road.

### **Verse 30 — It Is Finished**

*When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

Here is the cornerstone. Robert Barclay gave the Quaker doctrine of the atonement its most careful statement, and it is precisely a doctrine of a finished work — Christ “having made peace through the blood of his cross” — held together with the redemption that must be wrought in us:

*“We consider then our redemption in a two-fold respect or state, both which in their own nature are perfect though in their application to us the one is not, nor cannot be, without respect to the other. The first is the redemption performed and accomplished by Christ for us in his crucified body without us. The other is the redemption wrought by Christ in us, which no less properly is called and accounted a redemption than the former.”* (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 148)

This is the Quaker reading of “*It is finished.*” The work without — the offering and sacrifice, the peace made through the blood of the cross, the wrath qualified — is perfect and complete; nothing can be added to it. Christ “by his death and sufferings hath reconciled us to God, even while we are enemies” (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 148). But the finished work is finished *to a purpose*: that the same power, virtue, spirit, and life that was in Christ Jesus might be conveyed inwardly, “purifying, cleansing, and redeeming us from the power of corruption.” George Whitehead, whose strength was always on grace and atonement, witnessed to the universal reach of that one offering — Christ “having, in his dying for all, been that one great universal offering and sacrifice for peace, atonement, and reconciliation between God and man... the propitiation not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world” (Whitehead, *Christian Progress*, chunk 282). The early Friends would not let “It is finished” become a charter for a faith that rests in the history while remaining unredeemed in life. The cross finished the work; the work was the salvation of the whole man, without and within.

### **Verse 37 — They Shall Look on Him Whom They Pierced**

*And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

The piercing of Christ’s side became, in early Friends’ hands, a warning turned inward. Ambrose Rigge set the inward crucifying of Christ directly beside the outward, charging his own generation with the very guilt of Calvary if they wounded the Spirit of Truth within them: “*let the outward Christians beware, lest they reject him in his inward appearance, as the outward Jews rejected him in his outward appearance; for if they wound and crucify the Spirit of Truth, and of Christ in themselves, they will be as guilty of his blood, as were the Jews of old*” (Rigge, *Friends’ Library* Vol. 12, chunk 73). The piercing is not safely past. Wherever the Light of Christ is resisted and slain in the conscience, there is the spear again in the side. But the scripture is also promise: *they shall look on him whom they pierced* — and the looking, when it comes in true repentance, is the beginning of life. The chapter closes in a garden tomb, the seed laid in the ground, the finished work waiting only for the third day.

# John 20: The Resurrection — He Is Risen, He Is Here

## The Text

*1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. 2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. 3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. 4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. 5 And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, 7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. 8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. 9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.*

*11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. 17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.*

*19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

*24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. 26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. 27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. 28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. 29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, and hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

*30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

## **Commentary**

No chapter of John was nearer to the inward heart of Quakerism than this one. The resurrection, for the early Friends, was not only a fact attested by witnesses but a present reality known in the gathered meeting: the risen Christ standing in the midst, breathing his Spirit upon his own, and blessing the faith that has not seen with outward eyes and yet believes. Three things they pressed above all — “*Touch me not*” (v. 17) as the turn from the outward to the spiritual presence; “*Receive ye the Holy Ghost*” (v. 22) as the ground of all true ministry; and “*blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*” (v. 29) as the very charter of the inward faith.

## Verses 1–18 — Touch Me Not

*Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.*

Mary sought the living among the linen clothes, and even when she saw him took him for the gardener — a parable, to Friends, of the soul that knows Christ only after the flesh and not yet after the Spirit. Christ’s “*Touch me not*” they read as the deliberate weaning of his people off the outward, bodily presence and onto the spiritual presence that would be nearer than the outward ever was. Isaac Penington, charged with denying the body of Christ, answered that he valued the flesh and blood of Jesus, yet witnessed a presence that the bodily absence could not diminish:

*“I will come again,” saith Christ: Ye are now in pain, as a woman in travail, full of sorrow for the loss of my outward, bodily presence; but I will come to you again in spirit... And yet, there is no other bridegroom, who now appears in spirit, or spiritually in the hearts of his, than He that once appeared in the prepared body, and did the Father’s will therein. (Penington, Letters, chunk 161)*

The “*Touch me not*” is therefore not a denial but a promise: the outward going is the condition of the inward coming. Robert Barclay grounded the same truth in Christ’s own words, “*It is the Spirit that quickeneth, but the flesh profiteth nothing,*” arguing that the soul is fed not by the outward body “which was born of the virgin Mary, and in which he walked, lived, and suffered in the land of Judea,” but by the spiritual body of Christ, “by and through which he, that was the Word in the beginning with God... did reveal himself to the sons of men in all ages” (Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 322). Mary must not cling to the risen flesh, because the abiding communion is of Spirit with Spirit.

## Verses 19–21 — Peace Be Unto You

*Came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

The doors were shut, and Christ stood in the midst. This was, for Friends, the precise image of their own worship: a people gathered, the world shut out, and the risen Lord himself present and speaking peace. They did not read this as a thing that happened once in an upper room, but as the perpetual manner of Christ with his church — “he is in the midst of you a

teacher,” as Fox wrote, exhorting Friends to “hear Christ’s voice” in the assembly (Fox, *Journal* Vol. 2, chunk 371). The greeting is doubled — “Peace be unto you” — and the second time it is joined to commission: “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” The peace and the sending are one; the Lord who stands in the midst speaking peace is the same who breathes out the power for the work.

## **Verse 22 — Receive Ye the Holy Ghost**

*And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*

This is the great cornerstone of the chapter, and the foundation of the whole Quaker doctrine of ministry. The first Friends would own no minister but one breathed upon by Christ, qualified by the same anointing that rested on Christ himself. Job Scott gave the verse its fullest Quaker exposition, joining the breathing of the Spirit directly to the sending and to the power to do the works of God:

*“And as he was anointed for this service by the spirit of the Lord that was upon him... in order that his ministers might be qualified for the like service, and be sent in like manner as he was; immediately, when he had said this, ‘he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the holy ghost,’ ver. 22. And thus qualified by the same anointing, and sent forth in the same service, they were enabled to work the same works.” (Scott, *Baptism of Christ*, chunk 129)*

The whole Quaker objection to a hireling, man-made ministry rests here. A man cannot make himself a minister of the Spirit by study, ordination, or the laying on of hands alone; the breath of the risen Christ must qualify him. Scott drew the practical consequence — the necessity of waiting, in silence, for the renewal of that breath before daring to speak:

*“Here ariseth the necessity of waiting upon the Lord for the renewal of strength, and qualification for all gospel ministry; that so the power may indeed be of God; as the apostles waited to be ‘endued with power from on high.’ And those who so wait, and dare not run of themselves, or preach in their own time... follow the great shepherd, learn his experience, and are led in his footsteps.” (Scott, *Baptism of Christ*, chunk 128)*

This is why Friends sat in silence until moved: the breathing of verse 22 was not given once and stored up, but renewed upon those who waited. The

minister's "hour is not always; it frequently is not yet come, as was the case with him." Ministry that runs ahead of the breath is in the will of man; ministry that waits for it speaks, when it speaks, "with power." The risen Christ breathing on the disciples is, for the early Friends, the perpetual law of the gospel ministry — no Pentecost of human appointment, but the Holy Ghost received from the mouth of the Lord.

### **Verse 23 — Whose Soever Sins Ye Remit**

*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*

Friends took this not as a priestly franchise to absolve but as the power that goes with the breathed Spirit. Remission of sins, Penington taught, is received "in and through this mystery" of Christ inwardly revealed — the same Light and power that turns men "from darkness, and from the power of Satan... to the light, to the Spirit and power of God" (Penington, *Works* Vol. 3, chunk 286). Those into whom the Holy Ghost is breathed minister that remission as instruments; the forgiveness is Christ's, working through a people whom he has first qualified.

### **Verses 24–29 — Blessed Are They That Have Not Seen**

*Thomas, because thou hast seen me, and hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

Thomas would not believe but upon the evidence of his outward senses, and Christ met his demand — yet pronounced the higher blessing on a faith that does not depend on sight. This was the very charter of Quaker faith. Robert Barclay argued at length that true faith never rests finally upon the outward senses, which the devil himself can deceive, but upon "the secret testimony of God's Spirit in the heart":

*"God forbid then that the saints' faith should lie founded upon so fallacious a foundation as man's outward and fallible senses. What made them then give credit to these visions? Certainly nothing else but the secret testimony of God's Spirit in their hearts... This then must needs be acknowledged to be originally and principally the object of the saints' faith, without which there is no true and certain faith."  
(Barclay, *Apology*, chunk 30)*

The blessing on the unseeing belief is the blessing on the whole company of Friends, who never saw the risen body and yet knew the risen Christ. Ambrose Rigge pressed the warning that hangs on the other side of it: men

may reject Christ “in his inward appearance, as the outward Jews rejected him in his outward appearance” (Rigge, *Friends’ Library* Vol. 12, chunk 73). Thomas was restored by sight; but the faith Christ blesses is the faith that needs no sepulchre to look into and no wounds to handle, because it has found the living Lord within. The Gospel ends where it aims: “*that believing ye might have life through his name*” — not the life of those who saw, but the life of all who, not seeing, believe.

## **John 21: Feed My Sheep — The Commission and the Call**

### **The Text**

*1 After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. 2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.*

*4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. 5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. 6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. 8 And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.*

*9 As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. 10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. 11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.*

**12** Jesus saith unto them, *Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.* **13** Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. **14** This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

**15** So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.* **16** He saith to him again the second time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.* **17** He saith unto him the third time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

**18** *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.* **19** This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, *Follow me.*

**20** Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, *Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?* **21** Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, *Lord, and what shall this man do?* **22** Jesus saith unto him, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.* **23** Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, *He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*

**24** This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. **25** And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

## Commentary

The Gospel that opened in the eternal Word now closes on a shore at daybreak, with a fire of coals, a meal, and a question asked three times. John ends not with a doctrine but with a commission, and the commission is laid upon a man who had three times denied his Lord. The risen Christ does not rehearse Peter's failure; he draws out his love, and upon that love lays a charge — *feed my sheep*. Then, to Peter and to every reader who would manage another's path, he speaks the word that strips discipleship down to its one necessary thing: *follow thou me*.

### Verses 1–14 — The Net at Daybreak

*Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.*

A night of labour in their own strength yields nothing; the word of Christ from the shore fills the net to breaking. The disciples are back at their old trade, and the Lord meets them there, unrecognized in the grey light until the catch betrays him. It is the disciple whom Jesus loved — the one who reads by love rather than by sight — who first says, *It is the Lord*. The pattern is the whole Gospel in miniature: that which is wrought without him comes to nothing, and that which is wrought at his word is more than the vessel can hold. He has bread and fish already on the coals before they bring theirs; he feeds them before he sends them to feed. The narrative stays plain on purpose. The weight is reserved for what is said after they have dined.

### Verses 15–17 — Feed My Sheep

*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? ... He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

Three times the question, answering the three denials; three times the charge. Christ does not ask Peter whether he is learned, or bold, or fit to govern — only whether he loves. The whole authority to feed the flock is hung upon that single thread, and the moment love is owned, the office is given. This is the Quaker reading of all true ministry: it flows from love kindled by Christ, not from place, schooling, or hire. The sheep that Peter is

to feed are Christ's own — *my lambs, my sheep* — and they remain Christ's; the shepherd is a servant of a flock that is not his.

Penington presses this back to its root: the Shepherd himself is both fold and door, and the sheep are known not by mark of profession but by a nature given them from above.

*The Shepherd is the door also, who lets into the fold, and shuts out, at his pleasure; and none can rightly enter but by him... They also know and hear the voice of the Word nigh in the mouth and heart, and follow the law of his Spirit, received from his mouth, which none else but his sheep do, or can do; for this is given by him, and it is given by him only to his sheep.*

(Penington, *Works*, Vol. 3, chunk 53)

To *feed* such a flock, then, is not to drive them from without but to point them to the voice they already carry within, and to nourish them upon the life that is from Christ alone. The under-shepherd feeds only as he himself is fed at the same table.

Against this stands the figure that haunts the whole Quaker testimony against a hireling ministry — the shepherd who feeds himself. Edmundson, drawing Ezekiel's charge straight onto the steeple-houses of his day, sets the contrast in fire:

*Wo be to the shepherds that feed themselves; should not the shepherds feed the flocks?... Have you kept one certain voice, as the good Shepherd doth, that the sheep might hear his voice and come together, and not stray and fall into pits? Or have not your voices been variable as the wind, giving an uncertain sound?*

(Edmundson, *Journal*, chunk 150)

Peter is charged to be the opposite of that hireling: one voice, the Shepherd's voice, feeding lambs not for the fleece but for love. The threefold *feed my sheep* is the standing measure by which every ministry is tried.

### **Verses 18–19 — Follow Me Through the Stretched-Out Hands**

*When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake*

*he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.*

The charge to feed is immediately bound to a prophecy of the cross. The same Peter who once *girded himself* and walked where he would shall be girded by another and carried where his own will would not go. To shepherd Christ's flock is to follow Christ's path, and that path runs to a death by which God is glorified. The commission and the cross are one word. Penn refuses every softer Christianity that would take the office without the cup:

*He, I say, that enjoined this doctrine, and led that holy and heavenly example, even the Lord Jesus Christ, bade them that would be his disciples take up the same cross, and follow Him... We must not think to steer another course, nor to drink of another cup, than hath the Captain of our salvation done before us.*

(Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, chunk 132)

*Follow me* is therefore not a gentle invitation appended to the meal; it is the call to be girded by another, to lay down the self-will that walks whither it would, and to be carried by the Spirit whithersoever the Lamb goes.

### **Verses 20–23 — What Is That to Thee**

*Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.*

Peter, scarcely given his own cross, turns to measure another's. The answer is a rebuke that is also the Gospel's last instruction: *what is that to thee? follow thou me*. Each soul has its own leading from the one Shepherd, and the temptation of every disciple — and every minister — is to set up as judge over the path appointed to his brother. Pennington had wrestled long with how a soul truly discerns its leading, and his counsel is precisely Christ's: keep low, wait, and follow thine own measure rather than appraise another's.

*It is not an easy matter, in all cases, clearly and understandingly to discern the voice of the Shepherd, the motions of God's Spirit... But that which is hasty and confident, and so ready to plead for its own sense and judgment... is very apt to judge and condemn others in that very respect, wherein itself is most justly and righteously judged and condemned by the Lord.*

(Penington, *Works*, Vol. 2, chunk 277)

The brethren's mistake over the beloved disciple — turning a *what is that to thee* into a settled doctrine that he should not die — shows how quickly the flock manufactures certainties the Lord never spoke. Christ leaves the question open and returns Peter to the one thing needful. For obedience, Penington insists, is no strange yoke laid on the new birth but its very nature:

*True obedience, gospel obedience, is natural to the birth which is born of God... The lamb is the leader: and can any be saved by him, but they that follow him?... the sheep daily learn to know his voice, and follow him; even till they come to be acquainted with every moving, drawing, and leading of his Spirit; and so come to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.*

(Penington, *Works*, Vol. 3, chunk 256)

*Follow thou me* is thus the whole of discipleship gathered into three words: not comparison, not speculation upon another's tarrying, but the daily learning of the Shepherd's voice and the daily following of the Lamb.

### **Verses 24–25 — The Testimony That Cannot Be Contained**

*This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.*

John signs his witness and confesses its insufficiency: the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. The Gospel ends as it began, pointing past its own words to a Christ greater than all telling. The written testimony is true, yet it is a door, not the fold; it sends the reader to the living Word it records, that he too may hear the Shepherd's voice, feel the charge of love, and answer the call with which the Gospel closes — *follow thou me*.