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Man's Responsibility

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Subject: Man's Responsibility.

Scripture: Job 28¹⁻²⁷ Gal 6¹⁻¹⁰.

Text. Gal. 6⁵ "For each man shall bear his own burden."

Such a bald and apparently cold-blooded statement of a fact of life which most everyone is fully aware of from his own experience, seems all most unnecessary, and at first thought seems rather inconsistent as a teaching of a gospel in which one of the strictest statements is "Love unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." How many times in the course of the year we become discouraged, tired and weary

and long for one moment of relaxation,
 one moment in which to throw aside
 the responsibility, and feel the relief which
 might come to us in knowing that
 there is nothing at that moment that
 we must do. We stand at the dock
 watching the unloading of a big ocean
 steamship, and we wonder how that
 great ship ^{must} ~~would~~ feel, if she had ^{her} fewer
 of feeling to find herself safely in
 dock, protected from the winds and
 storms, and free from the burdens
 of freight which she has been
 carrying. I fancy we would say that
 she ^{must} ~~would~~ have a feeling of satis-
 faction, and joy to know that she

is ~~was~~ free from responsibility and care, and safe from all dangers. What a delight, too, it would be for her to slip out of the harbor, and free from all burden to dance merrily ^{over} of the surface of the water, untrammelled by the cares of a cargo.

Such a picture is alluring and attractive, and it may seem that it is just the kind of a picture that a host of peace and joy might bring. We call our gospel of the liberal religion a gospel of peace and joy, and ^{we very} think that it faints for us a picture such as I have described, care free and irresponsible. But far from being

true is that idea, However much we
 may feel that a gospel of peace and
 joy cannot bring with it this message,
 "Each man ^{shall} ~~must~~ bear his own burden"
 it will appear upon second thought
 that the fundamental message of
 liberal religion is just this, that
 "Each man ^{shall} ~~must~~ bear his own burden"
 When the distinctions between the old
 conceptions of religion and the modern
 conceptions of religion have been
 stripped of all the attendant para-
 phernalia, and we lay before us
 view the very essence of the distinction
 we still find that this thought
 which Paul has so cleverly put into

these words, "Each man ^{shall} must bear his own burden" is the foundation stone upon which liberal religion is constructed. It is because we believe that it is true that each man must bear his own burden, that we feel that the Gospel of liberal religion has much more of real manliness and womanliness, and therefore much more of satisfaction and force, than the old message where such a principle seemed to ^{have} been to cost your burden upon some one else.

Now let us see how it will work out if we compare one or two of the old ideas with the corresponding modern ones for the purpose of discovering whether or not it is true that Liberal religion will in each case will say that each man must bear his own burden" while the old thought will say; "Shift the burden to some other shoulder."

For example take the question of Revelation. The old point of view says. "Oh, you need not disturb yourself about Revelation. God has provided for all that in advance. The Bible is a complete and perfect revelation of God's will, accurate, and in =

possible in every detail. The only thing
 that you have to do, is to have faith, and
 then you will believe it all, the im-
 possible, as well as the possible. That
 blind belief in Revelation is the basis
 of your religious life."

Now I am not resurrecting these
 bygone ideas on the assumption that
 any man of sense today believes in them
 although I have heard these very ideas
 preached from a pulpit in Massachusetts
 within a month. I simply speak of
 them to show the changed point of
 view. Modern religion would say
 on this point of Revelation something like
 this, "Yes, God has spoken in the Bible,

at least in some parts of it. He has also spoken elsewhere. In the sacred books of all religions we may find passages where the divine spirit is evident. God has also revealed his truth in other ways than by the printed book. "That which inspires me, is inspired" was the way Coleridge determined what was Holy writing. It does not make any difference when we find ^{Scriptures} in the Bible or not. If it is true, and has the power of arousing the noblest aspirations in a human soul, it is a Revelation from God. Now here it is evident that each man must determine very largely for him-

self what his Holy Scripture shall be. In other words instead of having someone else tell you what Revelation is and in what book it is to be found you have to find out for your self. This is just the same as saying "Each man ^{shall} must bear his own burden".

Let me take an illustration of the distinction between the old and new in question of moral conduct. Again the old says that rules of conduct for every man are very explicitly laid set forth in the Bible. The only thing necessary is to follow that. On the other hand modern thought says, "Just as there are certain

passages of Scripture which every one accepts or inspired because they inspire every one. so there are certain great principles which guide our conduct, because every one can see that they are by the very nature of things right. Every one can see that the ten commandments are principles which must be observed in every community. but when it comes to decide the question of right and wrong in the thousand and one little details that make up the problems of daily life, there is no fixed law or no five scale or standard by which we can

make an absolute decision. "For thy neighbor or thyself" is a very beautiful and far reaching principle, but how can one know just what is for the best interests of his neighbor. "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you," is so superficially far reaching answer in question of conduct. but how are you going to do unto others or you would that they should do unto you, when you do not know what you would wish to have them do unto you. In other words modern thought says "You are enclosed with a reciprocity

of choosing between right and wrong but it must rest with you our self to decide upon the particular action in a concrete case.

In other words, in the world world as well as in the ^{intellectual} ~~spiritual~~ world, modern thought says the responsibility rests with the individual man. "Each man ^{shall} must bear his own burden."

I see it is that Channing stood for the dignity of human nature and Emerson for the divineness of human nature, but to accept these lofty standards of the nature of humanity, carries with it the

obligation to accept the corresponding
responsibilities. These corresponding
responsibilities reduced to limit laws
are stated in these words: "Each
man ^{shall} ~~must~~ bear his own burden."

Now the meaning of this is quite evident.

The spirit of God speaks to us, ^{to} each one of us directly, and not through and arbitrary mechanical system.

Doubtless God did speak to men through the pages of the Bible, but that is not the only medium of Revelation from God to men. Every book, every sentence that has been the means of uplifting a human soul, that is a revelation of God. Every thought or ideal that frames itself in our mind, and impels us to noble conduct, that is the spirit of God revealing itself to us.

Beyond all doubt the spirit of God was revealed to a wonderful

degree in the life of Jesus, but it does not follow that in him we have the only revelation of the moral and spiritual ideals of God. Every man who has lived a life of love and devotion to what is right has been a revealer of the moral and spiritual purposes of God.

Beyond doubt the church has been a great moral and spiritual force in the world's history, but it does not follow that the church is the only institutions of moral and spiritual power.

Let me illustrate. We see about us every moment of our life evidences

of a great force in the world which we call energy. Now one of the farther ways in which this energy is manifested is in electric lighting. It is evident that at some time was devised the first electric light, and that that first electric light would have a peculiar interest for us, but it does not follow that all the electric lights we use now can receive that power necessary to make them burn, only through the medium of that machine which made the first light burn. Now now are we confined to receiving

spiritual Revelation through one particular book.

Or it may be that some particular machine can claim to be the most powerful generator of electricity. Let it be so, and we will give it our admiration, and use its power if we are so situated that we can. But again it does not follow that all electrical energy must be generated by that machine, or flow through its coils of wires. A smaller, very much less perfect mill generate just as good electricity, and just as fine a quality.

All this goes to show that we can

we begin hold to a conception of our relationship with God, which will permit us to look to some agency outside our own power as a medium through which we are informed of God's will, and his wondrous purpose.

The conception of a system by which the duty of discovering God's law can be put upon the shoulders of some external agency, such as the Bible, the church, or Christ is no longer tenable. But you and I are brought into direct communication with God's spirit, and each one must bear in our burden in this world forever, and accept

the responsibility which the con-
ception of being a co-worker with
God places upon. As one of the
direct agencies through which the
fruit of God is working out a
world forever, each one ^{shall} bear
his own burden. That is the one
great message of modern thought.

As to the relation that this truth bears to our daily life, there are two ideas which ^{are} enlightening. Let us go back to the illustration with which we started, and let us assume again that we are tired and weary and dis-
 couraged, and long for a moment of relaxation. Is it true that the picture of the ship softly in dock, and entirely free from the burden of cargo — is it true that such a picture is the one that we really want? On the contrary I think that the picture that we really want long for, is the one of a ship locked to the very water line, steaming wroth:

ically out of port to face the storm
and winds of the great ocean beyond
the harbor. It is such a picture that
gives us courage, and ~~not~~ recalls us
to the duty of life, and refreshes to
what is divine in us. Discouraged
and weary with the weight of our
cargo do we turn for inspiration
to him who, without aim or burden
floats listlessly over the sea of life,
or do we turn to one whom we
know is also carrying a heavy burden
and is doing day by day the things
that such a burden demands. It is
the sympathy of like locked vessels
that helps, not that we expect to

to rest our burden upon him who is already burdened, but side by side with him to toil and labor.

Knowing that we are doing our part in the world's work. Not to rest the burden upon another, but to know that "Every man shall bear his own burden" is the great truth the great comfort of wider thought.

But we must remember that the electric machine in order to do its work, in order to transform the energy of the universe into the form which will serve for working and light bulb glow with light, must come into communication with that all

fervent energy. In our lives, too,
 if we are to use the mental power
 which are given us, and make use of
 for work the knowledge that we have
 we must let God's spirit have con-
 trol of our lives. Giving up all conceit
 and vain glory, and selfishness
 we must become the medium through
 which God's spirit may bring wisdom
 and light, and love into the world.

The duties, which are our duties, the work
 which is our work, the responsi-
 bility which is our responsibility are
 too us, not a burden which we would
 cast upon the shoulders of another.

Not the burden which with a brave

heart
 and a consciousness that we are
 working together with God, we shall
 carry on bravely and on bravely
 as becomes the dignity of one who
 is the spiritual son and co-worker
 of the Infinite power of the universe.

Not the safely wooded, cargo-laden ship
 but the heavily laden vessel on the
 sea of life is the true and deep aspi-
 ration of our soul to be. For we know
 that it is not a hardship, but a privilege
 for each one to feel that in doing the
 world's work, God's work, each man
 must bear his own burden."

Man's Responsibility

E. C. Davis

November 27, 1904

Pittsfield, MA*

Scripture: Job 28:1-27; Galatians 6: 1-10

Text: Galatians 5:5, "For every man shall bear his own burden"

Such a bold and apparently cold-blooded statement of a fact of life which most everyone is painfully aware of from his own experience. Seems almost unnecessary, and at first thought seems rather inconsistent as a teaching of a gospel in which one of the choicest statements is, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." How many times in the course of the year we become discouraged, tired and weary and long for one moment of relaxation, one moment in which to throw aside the responsibility, and feel the relief which might come to us in knowing that there is nothing at that moment that we must do. We stand at the dock watching the unloading of a big ocean steamship, and we wonder how that great ship must feel, if she has power of feeling, to find herself safely in dock, protected from the winds and storms, and free from the burdens of freight which she has been carrying. I fancy we would say that she must have a feeling of satisfaction and joy to know that she is free from responsibility and care, and safe from all dangers. What a delight, too, it would be for her to slip out of the harbor, and free from all burden, to dance merrily over the surface of the water unrestrained by the cases of a cargo.

Such a picture is alluring and attractive, and it may seem that it is just the kind of a picture that a gospel of peace and joy might bring. We call our gospel of the liberal religion a gospel of peace and joy, and we may think that it paints for us a picture such as I have

* According to the notes on this text, this sermon was also given in Canton, MA (December 4, 1904), Billerica, MA (no date given) and Sterling, MA (January 22, 1905).

described, carefree and irresponsible. But far from being true is that idea. However much we may feel that a gospel of peace and joy cannot bring with it this message, "Each man shall bear his own burden," it will appear upon second thought that the fundamental message of liberal religion is just this, that "Each man shall bear his own burden" when the distinctions between the old conceptions of religion and the modern conceptions of religion have been stripped of all the attendant paraphernalia, and we lay open to our view the very essence of the distinction we shall find that this thought which Paul has so clearly put into these words, "Each man shall bear his own burden" is the foundation stone upon which liberal religion is constructed. It is because we believe that it is true that each man must bear his own burden, that we feel that the gospel of liberal religion has much more of real manliness and womanliness, and therefore much more of satisfaction and force than the old message where [the] cardinal principle seemed to have been to cast your burden upon someone else.

Now let us see how it will work out if we compare one or two of the old ideas with the corresponding modern ones for the purpose of discovering whether or not it is true that liberal religion in each case will say that "each man must bear his own burden" while the old thought will say, "Shift the burden to some other shoulders."

For example take the question of Revelation. The old point of view says, "Oh, you need not disturb yourself about Revelation. God has provided for all that in advance. The Bible is a complete and perfect revelation of God's will, accurate, and infallible in every detail. The only thing that you have to do is to have faith, and then you will believe it all, the impossible as well as the possible. That blind belief in Revelation is the basis of your religious life."

Now I am not resurrecting these bygone ideas on the assumption that any man of sense today believes in them, although I have heard these very ideas preached from a pulpit in Massachusetts within a month. I simply speak of them to show the changed point of view. Modern religion would say on this point of Revelation something like this,

"Yes, God has spoken in the Bible, at least in some parts of it. He has also spoken elsewhere. In the sacred books of all religions we may find passages where the Divine spirit is evident. God has also revealed his truth in other ways than by the printed book. 'That which inspires me is inspired' was the way Coleridge determined what was Holy writing. It does not make any difference where we find scripture, in the Bible or not. If it is true, and has the power of arousing the noblest aspiration in a human soul, it is Revelation from God." Now here it is evident that each man must determine very largely for himself what his Holy Scripture shall be. In other words, instead of having someone else tell you what Revelation is and in what book it is to be found, you have to find out for yourself. This is just the same as saying "Each man shall bear his own burden."

Or take an illustration of the distinction between the old and new in questions of moral conduct. Again the old says that rules of conduct for every man are very explicitly set forth in the Bible. The only thing necessary is to follow that. On the other hand, modern thought says, "Just as there are certain passages of scripture which everyone accepts as inspired because they inspire everyone, so there are certain great principles which guide our conduct because everyone can see that they are by the very nature of things right. Everyone can see that the ten commandments are principles which must be observed in every community. But when it comes to decide the question of right and wrong in the thousand and one little details that make up the problems of daily life there is no fixed law or no fine scale or standard by which we can make an absolute decision. 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' is a very beautiful and far-reaching principle, but how can one know just what is for the best interests of his neighbor? 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you' is a comparatively far-reaching answer in question of conduct, but how are you going to do unto others as you would that they should do unto you when you do not know what you would will to them to do unto you? In other words, modern thought says, 'You are endowed with a capacity of choosing between right and wrong, but it must rest with your own self to decide upon the particular action in a concrete case.'"

In other words, in the moral world as well as in the intellectual world, modern thought says the responsibility rests with the individual man. "Each man shall bear his own burden."

True it is that Channing stood for the dignity of Human nature and Emerson for the Divineness of Human nature. But to accept these lofty standards of the nature of humanity, carries with it the obligation to accept the corresponding responsibilities. These corresponding responsibilities reduced to lowest terms are stated in the words, "Each man shall bear his own burden."

Now the meaning of this is quite evident. The spirit of God speaks to us, to each one of us directly, and not through an arbitrary mechanical system. Doubtless God did speak to man through the pages of the Bible, but that is not the only medium of Revelation from God to man. Every book, every sentence that has been the means of uplifting a human soul, that is a revelation of God. Every thought or ideal that frames itself in our mind, and impels us to noble conduct, that is the spirit of God revealing itself to us. Beyond all doubt the spirit of God was revealed to a wonderful degree in the life of Jesus. But it does not follow that in him we have the only revelation of the moral and spiritual ideals of God. Every man who has lived a life of love and devotion to what is right, has been a revelation of the moral and spiritual purposes of God.

Beyond doubt the church has been a great moral and spiritual force in the world's history. But it does not follow that the church is the only institution of moral and spiritual power.

Let me illustrate. We see about us every moment of our life evidences of a great force in the world which we call energy. Now one of the particular ways in which this energy is manifested is in electric lighting. It is evident that at some time man devised the first electric light, and that that first electric light would have a peculiar interest for us. But it does not follow that all the electric lights we use now can receive that power necessary to make them burn only through the medium of that machine which made the

first light burn. No more are we confined to receiving spiritual Revelation through one particular book.

Or it may be that some particular machine can claim to be the most powerful generator of electricity. Let it be so, and we will give it our admiration and use its power if we are so situated that we can. But again it does not follow that all electrical energy must be generated by that machine, and pour through its coils of wires. A smaller, very much less perfect [machine] will generate just as good electricity, and just as fine a quality.

All this goes to show that we can no longer hold to a conception of our relationship with God which will permit us to look to some agency outside our own person as a medium through which we are informed of God's will, and his moral purpose. The conception of a system by which the duty of discovering God's laws can be put upon the shoulder of some external agency, such as the Bible, the church, or Christ, is no longer tenable. But you and I are brought into direct communication with God's spirit, and each one must bear his own burden in this world process, and accept the responsibility which the conception of being a co-worker with God places upon. As one of the direct agencies through which the spirit of God's working out a world process, each one shall bear his own burden. That is the one great message of modern thought.

As to the relation that this truth bears to our daily life, there are two ideas which are enlightening. Let us go back to the illustration with which we started, and let us assume again that we are tired and weary and discouraged, and long for a moment of relaxation. Is it true that the picture of a ship safely in dock, and entirely free from the burden of cargo, is it true that such a picture is the one that we really want? On the contrary, I think that the picture that our souls must long for is the one of a ship laden to the very waterline, steaming energetically out of port to face the storms and winds of the great ocean beyond the harbor. It is such a picture that gives us courage, and recalls us to the duty of life, and responds to what is divine in us. Discouraged and weary with the weight of our cargo do we turn for inspiration to him who, without aim or burden floats listlessly over the sea of

life, or do we turn to one whom we know is also carrying a heavy burden and is doing day-by-day the things that such a burden demand. It is the sympathy of like burdened vessels that helps, not that we expect to cast our burden upon him who is already burdened. But side-by-side with him to task and labor knowing that we are doing our part in the world's work. Not to cast the burden upon another, but to know that "Every man shall bear his own burden" is the great truth, the great comfort of modern thought.

But we must remember that the electric machine, in order to do its work, in order to transform the energy of the universe into a form which will serve for making our light bulb glow with light, must come into communication with that all-pervasive energy. In our lives, too, if we are to use the mental powers which are given us, and make valuable for mankind the knowledge that we have, we must let God's spirit have control of our lives. Giving up all conceit and vainglory, and sordid selfishness, we must become the medium through which God's spirit may bring wisdom and light, and love into the world. The duties which are our duties, the work which is our work, the responsibility which is our responsibility are to us not a burden which we would cast upon the shoulders of another. But the burden which with a brave heart and a consciousness that we are working together with God, we shall carry as manfully and as womanly as becomes the dignity of one who is the spiritual son and co-worker of the Infinite power of the universe. Not the safely moored cargo-less ship, but the heavily laden vessel on the sea of life is the true and deep aspiration of our own soul to be. For we know that it is not a hardship, but a privilege for each one to feel that in doing the world's work, God's work, "Each man must bear his own burden."