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FORGETFULNESS  
OF SELF

GENEVIEVE BURNELL

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FORGETFULNESS OF SELF

By

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THIS INSTRUCTION  
IS NOT A METHOD,  
BUT A MESSAGE.

FORGETFULNESS OF SELF

Today being Septuagesima Sunday I am going to begin by giving you an infallible rule by which you can be delivered from all your predicaments. Does that sound extravagant? The extravagance is the proportion of benediction which comes from the practice of this rule, a rule that on the face of it sounds very simple. All the simplest things, you know, seem to our complex minds to be the most difficult to attain, we are so used to the complexities of things and the proportions of these complexities. This rule--the quotation is in my father's words--is an infallible rule. If you can hear the word of God it is because you have God in you to hear. Those who are of God hear the Word of God and they are concerned with this word, not indifferent to it. So the rule:

\*Turn your heart away from your troubles and pray for all people who have ever been or ever will be. Pray for them [and then you will] forget yourselves.

Turn your heart away from yourself and your troubles. Pray for them and forget yourself.

And out of this death of yourself, there may come a living, divine Self that shall comprehend that which is greater than life or death.

This is a simple rule. All truth is a divine simplicity. The complexity is not in the truth but in ourselves. We seem to have so many obstacles in accepting such a rule, tremendous obstacles that divert the simplicity and seem to prevent us from enjoying this deliverance.

The first obstacle is dependent upon what we consider to be our necessities, our physical, bodily, environmental, necessities. The struggling and the striving of humanity is to provide these necessities, and all the sense of

\*Chronicle of Reality 155, by  
George Edwin Burnell, page 16

false proportions in everything is due to our feeling that we do not successfully provide these necessities. That is the first obstacle--complexity that seems to stand in our way when we try to do this simple thing of turning our hearts away from our troubles to pray for all people that ever have been and ever will be. That is why it seems so difficult for us to forget ourselves because of these plaguing necessities that keep irritating and dragging us down.

We seem always to be fighting to keep our heads above water lest we drown in our necessities. And yet there is a spiritual drowning, a sacramental drowning that is called Baptism, in which all these plaguing necessities are shed along with that kind of nature that seems only concerned with its own predicament. And out of this very same point rises up this divine self, the birth of the divine in us. It is so far beyond our concept of life and death and has such tremendous value that we in our little predicaments

seem entirely heedless of it. This great obstacle of our own necessities, our own problems, is built up out of what we call the disproportion of things. We have lost the true proportion; we have forgotten the true values for which we should be concerned. Instead, we are concerned for the necessities of life. It is not that these will not be provided; they are provided for us as gifts, not as earnings.

Today is Septuagesima Sunday, and it is the Sunday when we turn the pages of spiritual history back to the very beginning. It is also called The Prodigal Son Sunday by the Greek Church because it was on this Sunday that the parable was told of the Prodigal Son. We have provided for us this Sunday another one of the Lord's parables in which is described the laborers in the vineyard and their sense of disproportion due to time and energy expended. There is deep significance in both of these parables. The vineyard of the Lord, symbolically, is the world, in which we are invited to participate, to

keep and care for His vineyard, to carry on the Lord's work in this vineyard. And yet we are depressed by time and excessive labors, heedless of the fact that there is no tyranny of time in divine work--impossible to have it in divine work.

Today we turn back these pages of history, history which can only be His story because there is no other. Rationally perceived there is no other than this One Who is the Child, the Son of God. And yet, in turning back these pages of history, we seem to see discrepancies and contradictions. We turn back the pages of history to the very beginning of things. And during this period that has dawned today we will review, in the coming Sundays, the significance of this history and what we can discover in it. We are not to dwell upon the problems and the predicaments of man and his grievous mistakes--plenty of these. We are not to dwell upon these except that we may know the magnificence of his remedy, that the Lord Himself entered into what we term the

actuality of our time and space to actualize the essence of truth in the existence of man.

We could just tell you the story, but why do this, for you can read in Genesis the account in its story form. And you say, "Well, of course, that's simply a myth, a legend." True; if it were not, if it were just an event in history, it would not be applicable to you. But when we realize that it transcends history and yet is the key of understanding of all of history, when we turn back these pages to that moment of beginning, we can look upon these wondrous possibilities held in escrow, as it were, in nature for us, and glimpse the significance of these events to us at this moment. We can look back to that very beginning of things.

What is described here in the first chapter of Genesis? When the history of man is first touched upon he is said to have been in a state of innocence, free from all predicaments, free from all sense

of limitation, all tyranny of time, all problems. The state of innocence is a sort of state of potentiality. We use these terms because they are provided for us in the story, but we must look deeper than just the story, or what seems to be real on the surface, to look back and see what is really real. Symbols they are. But what is the good of a symbol if we cannot find the meaning which is the very substance of the symbol, the true meaning of it?

What is the so-called "fall of man?" It was not just an event in history. It was trans-historical, before history, above history. It wasn't just an event that took place at one time, in one person, but it was a cosmic event, from that state of potentiality into a state of actuality. That is why we feel that our predicaments and our problems are actual. And when somebody comes along and says, "Your predicaments, your problems, are mere illusions," you are ready to fight because you can show exactly how real they

are. You know, our judgment of what is real and what is unreal is not dependable. The physicists today can show how the things that seem so real to us are not the solid things we think they are; they are not really at all what we think they are. Because of the "fall," we have simply lost the proportions of things.

But if we are to have a deliverance and a salvation and if we are to have truth available to us, we do not want it in a potentiality. Truth is not potential. The state of innocence is more or less potential, and certainly idealistic to us; but we can not settle for that. We want truth right here and now, tangible and actual, in the very place where we experience our situation in time and space. And therefore the truth comes to an actuality. To do this it is necessary to make that transition from essence to existence which technically is termed a "fall." The fall is not of itself evil, it is a transition from essence to existence. True it has given us a different sense of proportion

and it has made us feel that our predicaments are very actual. But into this very state of existence the Lord Himself comes as the divine remedy to heal the discrepancies, to restore the true values, to bring the proper proportion and to reveal, right in the place where we need it, the actuality of truth.

We begin today turning back to those first pages of the history of man and we will continue on through, showing the miracle that takes place in this very state of our transition in which we seem to be so estranged from truth, so exiled from the kingdom of heaven that the Lord has told us is here at hand. It is not in some other place, not in some other world, but here. We seem unable to have contact with it; try as we will it seems as though we are barred from it. And yet Truth Himself came into existence, the actuality of truth into our actual existence, that He might reveal to us that this world, when properly seen, is indeed the kingdom of heaven. When we have discovered in this

vineyard its true values, then we find no tyranny of time, no curse of labor, but only joy of participating in a revelation of truth.

We seem to have fallen into a state that man calls cursed. He thinks he has been cursed with labor, with demands of these necessities of his own body. But there is a place where necessities themselves are translated into the glory of an obedience to truth.

We will bring out these points as we move along in this history of man. Today, in our recollection, we stand upon those first pages of history. We dwell on them, not because we delight in wallowing in the false values of humanity, but that we may bring them to the revelation of truth. You know there is just one cure for a lie.

\*The only thing that will trip up a lie is the nothingness of that lie.

\*Chronicle of Reality 556 by  
George Edwin Burnell, page 3

And yet people beat their heads against the wall of lies, trying to break down the wall, trying to break through.

We are not going to beat our heads against the predicaments of humanity that have seemed to develop out of man's transition from essence to existence. We think in our existence we are just full of these predicaments and must beat ourselves to death against them. What is the remedy? Truth itself, which exposes the nothingness of the lie and doesn't have to beat itself against these lies, is the remedy. That is why Jesus said, Resist not evil. Why should you resist the lie?

So our review, turning back these pages is not to become caught and involved in these predicaments or to beat ourselves to pieces against the injustice of the world because of the curse of labor, of working in this vineyard. This should be, ought to be, the greatest privilege man can have; and it is, when his values have been restored and he is not looking to his labor to bring his reward. He labors

because he cannot help but take part and participate in the activities. His reward is in that gift of God Himself, the answer to all prayer.

It is not in the necessities of life that you think you are struggling and striving for, and praying for, with your heart turned toward these necessities so that you can't see anything else. Any answer to prayer is God Himself. Even if you receive these necessities of life they are no good to you unless you have in them that subsistence which is God Himself-- God in existence. That is what is provided for you.

People say, "Well, why should we ever have had this experience at all, if there is no reality to it? Why?" Why should we seem to have, as Hegel says, this estrangement from God, if there is no reality to it, and no real value in it? Are we simply being disciplined as disobedient children?

The estrangement is only in ourselves. You are God's masterpiece, and He

provided you with wonderful standard equipment, provided you with a magnificence; You are made in His image and likeness. And you say, "Well if I am made in the image and likeness of God, why in the world do I have this experience of estrangement? Certainly there's something wrong. How can the image and likeness of God reveal estrangement?" And, do you know, it is the very fact that you have the essence of your being, this image and likeness, that you can also have the sense of estrangement. Does this seem contradictory?

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: the Godhead. The distinction between God the Father and God the Son and that wondrous action, the Spirit, is ever the oneness. And yet there is in this Son--Who is called the Image, with a capital "I", that capital "I" the head of all "I's"--distinction without difference. And you are made in the image and likeness, this word spoken in you. Having within you this image

enables you also to distinguish yourself; and yet you cannot distinguish anything in which there is **not** fundamentally and basically oneness. That is something to remember.

Consciousness, you know, seems to have two availabilities--rememberance and forgetfulness. You are forgiven because you are God's masterpiece, this image and likeness prevailing in you. You have a consciousness of self, a consciousness of "I"; and if you have a consciousness of "I" you have two possibilities, remembrance and forgetfulness.

A wheel is often used as an example of the action of life itself; call it the wheel of life if you like, the cycle from God to God. Like every cycle, like every wheel it seems to have an up and a down. And yet, which is up and which is down? It only seems to be up or down according to your relationship to it. The zenith and the nadir are both the circle. The forgetfulness and the remembrance both pertain to a consciousness, that can

forget or can remember; and if it could not remember it could not forget, if it could not forget it could not remember. The Prodigal Son forgot who he was, and then suddenly he remembered. In the very depth of his predicament is when he remembered; he was overwhelmed with his situations and could not go any deeper into them; and it was at that point, that very point of his supreme weakness, that he found his strength.

This very possibility of a transition from essence to existence is that place where we can have, in existence, the transition from existence to essence. Does this seem complicated? Let me give you this account which is worth meditating upon:

\*...it is the image of God in man which gives the possibility of the Fall.

And what is the fall? Not an event in history, but a cosmic quality called a transition from essence to existence, so

\*Systematic Theology II  
Paul Tillich, page 33

that in actual time and space we have the place provided in which we can actualize for ourselves, in our own experience, this revelation of truth, a real experience with truth in a world. Instead of looking at what seems to be real we look at what is really real. And at the very points where we seem to be so confused by the complications of what seems to be real, at that very same point, we look through to find what is really real. We don't have to change positions; we have the ability to see through things.

...it is the image of God in man which gives the possibility of the Fall. Only he who is the image of God has the power of [distinguishing himself,] of separating himself from God. His greatness and his weakness are identical.

We speak of the fall and the seeming predicaments of man which are termed the consequences of this fall, falling into a state of existence. And the only reason we dwell upon these things is so that we may know, that we may see and

recognize the magnificence of the remedy.

And therefore we speak of the two Adams. The first Adam is the forgetfulness, the unconsciousness of this divinity within. But divinity is not lost because we are unconscious of it. You know, in ancient times exile was accomplished simply by removing from one's consciousness the idea, the recognition, of home--certainly a most tragic kind of exile. Travel as one might, he never could return. So people travel even today to find the kingdom of heaven. With space ships they will go to the moon, they will go on beyond the moon; and that is just the first step you know--on and on and on and on--trying to find the kingdom of heaven. And the farther they go the more it seems to recede, because it is not a matter of traveling or of doing something; it is a matter of awaking from this hypnosis of exile.

Septuagesima, you know, is most significant, and symbolical of man's

exile from the kingdom of heaven, the holy city, the heavenly city, to Babylon. That is the explanation given, seventy years of exile, Septuagesima, ten and seven--exile. What is this exile? It is not that we are removed from one place to another. It is because the sense of proper proportion, that sense of true value, that sense of what actually is, of what is really real, has been removed from our minds. We have become unconscious of it.

And why do we have instruction today? That we may have an awakening in us, that we may, by the word of truth, hear stirring within us that call to what is really real. You know, people hear the word of truth, and they may be so concerned about their predicaments that they miss the true significance of the word. Our concern is with God, with the word of truth, with what is really real. That does not make us afraid of what seems to be so, but it enables us to meet these things in their seeming values and penetrate through them to that which is

the true value. No longer are we impeded by our sense of self getting in the way of that simple presence of truth that is available here and now in space and time; it does not contend with space and time even when it is omnipresent.

We are called today. Those who are of God hear the word of God. Why do you hear the word of God? Because you are of God. St. Bernard introduces his sermon for today by that reminder. Because you are of God, therefore you hear this word. You are concerned with it and with nothing else. You can face these troubles and look through them, and you turn your heart away from your troubles and pray for all the people who have ever been who ever will be. Pray for them and forget yourself. This seems the most difficult of all. We are so persistently ourselves! And yet we do not have to go some other place, certainly not a reincarnation to get away from this incarnation.

Right here at our very weakest point in ourself is also this strength. This is

a transition back from existence to essence without any break or interruption, because actually there is no separation between essence and existence. It may seem as though estrangement has become very factual. But you could not have estrangement did you not have that unity, that oneness, where at the very point where you are able to forget, you are also able to recollect, to remember. At the very point where you say that you are unconscious, that is the very same point where you become conscious. This state of consciousness must be rational. In the axioms you have been told how tricky the consciousness can be. You are given an example that if you should wake up some morning and your whole world was reduced to the size of a pea and your consciousness along with it, you would not know anything about it. Your sense of values would all be in proportion to your own reduced consciousness. But at that same point where you could have that reduction of consciousness, there

is also that ability to have the horizon of consciousness. This horizon is not something that spreads out into space or expands in time, but is that revelation of truth which is the very essence of being, and all there is to any existence. It is right there at the point where you seem to have forgotten it. You could not forget it if you did not have it.

And so, when you find yourself in the depths of despair, overwhelmed by your problems and predicaments, this is the moment to remember--not yourself as you think yourself to be with this reduced sense of consciousness, this self so surrounded and obsessed with problems--this is the time when you turn your heart away from yourself. This does not mean you really have to do anything with your heart at all; you do not cut your heart out and turn it around; it is not a device, it is not an operation. It is an affection. It is that place in you where your awakening begins, the awakening of coming into your own without having to

change place or situation or time or space. Right where you are, turn round your heart, away from yourself and your troubles and these necessities which you seem to feel belong to your life.

The fall is nothing but that sense of separation of self. Where we have a sense of separation of self we can have also that perception of the oneness of self, at the same point. And therefore we offer you again this infallible rule for your practice during Lent:

Turn your heart away from your troubles and pray for all people who have ever been or ever will be. Pray for them that you may forget yourselves. And out of this death of yourself, there may come a living, divine Self that shall comprehend that which is greater than life or death.

Mercifully hear, we beseech Thee, Oh Lord, the prayers of these people that we may be lifted out of our sense of affliction and be delivered into this wondrous place in which we discover the true values which are the gifts of God Himself.

We will now take into our hearts and meditation the names of those who have turned their hearts away from their troubles and to the truth and to the prayers of all people. Let us hold in our hearts this divine and simple solution to all problems. Let us not just pray to be delivered from our problems, with our attention on the problems, but turn away from the problems. We do not give our attention to these things that seem to be real, but to that which is really real, that our prayers may embrace all people of all times in all places with the benediction of the truth that:

\*All the presence there is and  
all the power there is and  
all the consciousness there is  
is Love, the Living Spirit  
Almighty.

\*Cf. AXIOMS, by George Edwin Burnell, p. 80



