

THE THREE EXCUSES  
(Luke 14:18-20)

by

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The three excuses, located within the context of the great supper, of Luke 14 have long been overlooked by scholars. Their so-called ridiculous nature has prevented a thorough study of these excuses which has been long over due. This thesis will first take an overall view of the parable of the great supper and then proceed to examine the true meaning of the excuses and how they are related to the temptations of Christ (Mathew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-12) and 1 John 2:16.

Excusing oneself from a dinner banquet is usually a very uncomplicated matter. However, the excuses given to the host in Luke 14:18-20 are not simple, but are representative excuses, which reveal the three main temptations the world places before man. These temptations are the "pride of life, the lust of the eyes" and the "lust of the flesh."

Christ, as He was being tempted by Satan, presented the human side of His being. He underwent the same types of temptations which are revealed in the three excuses. His obvious dependence upon God, rather than the lusts of the world, indicates the strength of three temptations.

The Apostle John was the only one who gave titles to these three temptations. His presentation in 1 John 2:12-17 shows the physical source of the three temptations.

It is the conclusion of this writer that the three excuses are invaluable verses which, when seen as warnings from God, can prevent mankind from being controlled by the world.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary  
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## INTRODUCTION

The parable of the "Great Supper" has been almost unanimously viewed by scholars as a parable of the Kingdom of God. Therefore the teaching of the parable respective to the "kingdom" has historically been the primary point of interest. Ironside supports this view by saying, "In reply [to the Pharisee] Jesus related the parable of the Great Supper to show that there are few comparatively who are willing to avail themselves of the invitation to eat bread in the Kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup>

However, the parable also unfolds the reasons why men do not enter into the Kingdom of God. The teachings about these reasons are found in the three excuses of Luke 14:18-20. Although the parable of the "Great Supper" has always been popular, the three excuses contained within its context have not been thoroughly examined by scholars. A detailed examination of the three excuses is one that is long past due. The purpose of this thesis will be to examine the three temptations of the world ("lust of the flesh," "lust of the eyes," and "pride of life"), which are contained in the context of Luke 14:18-20. Although the three temptations are not readily seen within the three excuses, this

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<sup>1</sup>H. A. Ironside, Addresses on the Gospel of Luke (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947), p.470.

thesis will make them more visible.

In doing research for this thesis, it was this writer's approach to first investigate if the three excuses are the only excuses that were given to the slave, or if they represent many excuses. The next step was to make a complete in-depth study of the three excuses, without yet taking into consideration the temptations of 1 John 2:16. When this was completed, studies of the temptations of Christ and 1 John 2:16 were made, keeping in mind any comparisons which could be made.

This thesis will first identify the biblical meaning of "temptations" and the three major temptations of the world which are presented in 1 John 2:16. The association of the temptations with the three excuses of Luke 14:18-20 will then be examined. After a general overview of the parable is made, a detailed study of the three excuses will be presented. This study will investigate the representativeness and the meaning of the three excuses. Also included will be comparisons between the excuses and the temptations of Christ and the temptations of 1 John 2:16.

The only limitations which were placed on this study of the three excuses were that no other parables were examined and only the temptations Christ faced in the wilderness were examined.

## CHAPTER I

### THE INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS

#### Identification of Temptation

In beginning this study it might be well to define what is meant by "temptation." Unger's Bible Dictionary defines temptation as "the enticement of a person to commit sin by offering some seeming advantage."<sup>1</sup> While this seems to be a good definition, it does not stress that temptation attempts to draw the person being tempted away from God. Ivan French perhaps best defines temptation when he says that "temptation is literally a testing, to see whether the tested one will choose God's service or not."<sup>2</sup>

Temptations come in various forms and through various means. Although Unger's Bible Dictionary does correctly point out that temptations essentially come from three sources, Satan, the world and the flesh, it must be remembered that all three sources are merely components of the one true source of temptations, which is the "World" (with a capital "W"). This writer is using the term "World"

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<sup>1</sup>Merril F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), p. 1082.

<sup>2</sup>Ivan French, "Life of Christ." (Syllabus on the Life of Christ, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 34

to refer to the spiritual and physical surroundings in which each individual person lives. Therefore, within this environment exist the three sources of the temptations which are Satan (spiritual temptation), the world (temptations from outside influence) and the flesh (temptations brought about by one's own human weaknesses). It is the purpose of this paper to examine the three major avenues of temptation which exist in the "World". Hereafter, in this paper, the term "world" will refer to man's spiritual and physical surroundings.

#### Explanation of the World's Temptations

As has been previously stated, the world is the ultimate source of all temptations. However, this does not tell the whole story. That is, the temptations of the world come through various means. 1 John 2:16 states that these means are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. An examination of the three realms provides a basis for the remainder of this paper.

#### The Lust of the Flesh

Barnes defines this lust as "that which pampers the appetites, or all that is connected with the indulgence of the mere animal propensities."<sup>1</sup> One can clearly see that human desires are at the heart of this temptations. When

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: The First Epistle General of John (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 300

speaking about human desires one may look upon it as the lowest form of worldly indulgence. However, since man was made in the image of God, God placed within man certain legitimate desires. These desires may be lowly in the eyes of the world, but God always intended for these desires to be essential to the life of each human being. The problem arises when these legitimate desires are either satisfied by illegitimate means or when the desires become the controlling influence upon the person.

Since the "lust of the flesh" can also be referred to as "the desire which resides in the flesh",<sup>1</sup> all that the flesh wants and needs must be in view. Therefore such things as food, drink, clothing, shelter, companionship, sexual pleasure should all be regarded as legitimate human desires.

It must be also seen that these desires are not beyond the reach of every human, but are obtainable. In fact "the lust of the flesh involves the appropriation of the desired object."<sup>2</sup> However the desired object is actually what the person does need, but his extreme desire to have it, turns his desire into lust.

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<sup>1</sup>M. R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 530.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## The Lust of the Eyes

Just the title of this lust alone brings to mind the fact that a desire to possess something is involved. Proverbs 27:20 says "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied." How true this statement is because sinful man, by his nature, is never satisfied with the "status quo" but is always yearning to make things better for himself.

Barnes sees this lust as "that which is designed merely to gratify the sight."<sup>1</sup> While some scholars, such as Vincent, believe that the lust of the eyes does not involve the actual appropriation of the desired object,<sup>2</sup> it must be realized from a practical standpoint, that a person can lust after something by seeing it and then go on to actually acquire the object of his lust.

Unlike the "lust of the flesh," this lust does not deal with human physical needs, but rather with those things which are not critical to the existence of the person. Such things which may be seen as objects which gratify the lust of the eyes are costly clothes, jewels, automobiles, land, houses, boats, money, etc. As can be seen the lust of the eyes involves the gaining of things or possessions.

Since these objects of lust can be possessed, they must be acquired through certain means. The three most

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<sup>1</sup>Barnes, First Epistle of John, p. 300.

<sup>2</sup>Vincent, Word Studies, p. 530.



logical means for gaining these objects would be to either steal them, work for them or receive them as gifts. Since the last method would be through the initiative of an outside source, thievery and working would be the two primary means of acquiring the objects. The method of working to gain the objects of lust can also be termed "vocational success," which will be discussed in a later portion of this paper.

### The Pride of Life

The word for "pride" (ἀλαζονεία) only appears here and in James 4:16. Vincent correctly points out that "the pride of life" is ". . . an insolent and vain assurance in one's own resources. . . .<sup>1</sup>" The idea involved here is the individual's belief that he can rely on his own resources to achieve any goal or to overcome any obstacle in life. Therefore, man becomes the important entity and God becomes unimportant. The formal term for this lust is "humanism," where rationalism and man's pride in himself reigns supreme and supernatural things of life are deemed as unimportant, if not totally non-existent.

This lust differs from the "lust of the eyes" in that it deals with those things which tend to promote pride in a person. Therefore one can lust with his eyes to have something, but his pride does not come into play until that "something" is actually possessed. When possession occurs,

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<sup>1</sup>Vincent, Word Studies, p. 530.

the "lust of the flesh" has been fulfilled and the "pride of life" takes over. Therefore, while these two lusts are closely associated with one another, they are not interchangeable in meaning and thus must be seen as two distinct types of lusts.

#### Association with the Parable

While only the Apostle John gives titles to the three major temptations which affect mankind, these temptations are depicted in other portions of Scripture. One such portion of Scripture is Luke 14: 15-24, in which lies the Parable of the Great Supper. Although not plainly seen from the surface, these three temptations are contained within the three excuses given in verses 18, 19, and 20. The uncovering of these temptations requires the study of some governing principles which will result in a visible correspondence between the three temptations and the three excuses.

#### Governing Principles

Lust of the Flesh--This lust primarily affects the human appetites of people. Therefore, the first governing principle for determining if a given temptation falls under the category of the "lust of the flesh" is if the temptation deals with a human bodily need. Such needs are food, shelter, drink, clothing, companionship, sexual pleasure, etc.

The second governing principle is if the person directly involved believes that he cannot survive or maintain personal health without gaining the object of his lust. This is the overwhelming compulsion or feeling within a person who is being enticed by the lust of the flesh.

Lust of the Eyes--Since this lust deals with desiring to possess an object, the first governing principle for determining if a given temptation falls under the category of the "lust of the eyes" is that the object being lusted after must be seen by the one doing the lusting. It is very obvious from the title of the lust that a person's actual physical seeing of the object is very important.

The second governing principle is that the object being lusted after is not crucial to the existence of livelihood of the person. Unlike the "lust of the flesh" which deals with legitimate human needs, this lust deals with items which are not legitimate needs.

The third governing principle is that the object being lusted after must be obtainable either through thievery or through vocational means. While some objects of the "lust of the flesh," such as food, shelter, drink, clothing, etc. can be obtained through one of these two means, such things as companionship and sexual pleasure can not legitimately be obtained through thievery or vocational means. However, those items categorized as "lusts of the flesh," which can be acquired through thievery or vocationally, are all crucial to human existence or livelihood, and thus

would be eliminated from being included under the "lust of the eyes."

Pride of Life--As has been previously discussed, this lust involves man's belief that his own resources are all that he needs. Therefore the first governing principle for determining if a given temptation falls under the category of the "pride of life" is if the lust involves the use of man's own reason and abilities. The idea that man alone can handle any situation must be the thrust of the lust.

The second governing principle is that the importance of God and possibly the non-existence of God altogether is intimated by the lust.

The third governing principle is that the pride of the man who is gaining or has gained the object of lust, must be clearly in control of his personal behavior.

#### Resulting Correspondence

To Buying a Piece of Land--The man who could not come to the dinner because he had to see the land that he had purchased was overwhelmed by the compulsion to have and use the land for his own advantage. The word used in the text for land, Ἀγρός, is not land needed or used for agricultural purposes, but is just a piece of property to be possessed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 13

One can readily see that this man's actions do not fall under the "lust of the flesh" because having the land is not a human physical need. Examining the governing principles for the "lust of the eyes" does not reveal that the man's eyes and the fact he didn't need the land were both involved. Regarding the "pride of life," his possession of the land and God's involvement, can also be seen in the buying of the land. However, consideration of the third governing principle of the "pride of life" breaks the deadlock.

Since the man was overwhelmed by the fact that he had purchased a piece of land, his pride was definitely controlling his behavior. He might have previously lusted for the piece of property ("lust of the eyes"), but once he had ownership of that property that lust was fulfilled and the "pride of life" set in.

To Buying Five Yoke of Oxen--It can be readily seen that this is not categorized under the "lust of the flesh" because having oxen is not a human physical need. Examining the governing principles for the "lust of the eyes," reveals that the man was going to see the oxen. Second, it seems as if he did not need the oxen for his existence or livelihood, because owning five yoke of oxen would be a sign that this man was financially secure. Third, the oxen were obtainable either by thievery or vocational means.

However, on the other hand, the man seems to be

placing all his confidence in himself and God's part in this situation does not seem to be important. Although these criteria for the "pride of life" are met, the third governing principle which says that pride of the individual must be prevalent, is not fulfilled. The man's pride will not begin to take control of him until he tests the oxen to confirm the fact that they work hard and well for him. Therefore, buying the oxen must be categorized as a "lust of the eyes."

To Marrying a Wife--It can be seen that this cannot be categorized under the "lust of the eyes," because a wife cannot be legitimately obtained through thievery or vocational means. Although the criteria for the "pride of life" seem to be met, the man's pride was not controlling his behavior. It was the fact that he believed he had responsibilities at home to take care of, which caused him to excuse himself from the banquet. The responsibility in view encompasses the human need (either his or his wife's) for human relationships.

Summary--The interpretive considerations which have been presented in Chapter I provide the base upon which the remainder of the study of the three excuses can be built. The remainder of the subject study will broaden and deepen the meaning of the three excuses and also contribute to the fact that they are closely associated with the three temptations of the world.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PARABLE (Luke 14:15-24)

#### An Overview of the Entire Parable

The subject parable which can be entitled "The Great Supper" or "The Great Banquet" can also be categorized as a "Kingdom Parable": that is, a parable in which Christ describes and offers to the Jews the Kingdom of God. It must be remembered, however, that everytime Christ offers the Kingdom, He is not offering the people Heaven, but rather He is saying that if they accept Him, He will initiate the Millenium upon the earth. Therefore He is offering the people a better life than they have at the present time. As the subject parable reveals, man is concerned with his own selfish wants and needs, thus placing God toward the bottom of his list of priorities. A brief overview of the parable provides the basis from which a detailed examination of Luke 14:18-20, can be made.

#### The Invited are Called (14:15-17)

And when one of those who were reclining at table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>All Bible quotes are from the NASB

As Christ sat in the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath, He noticed that as the invited guests entered they picked out places of honor at the table. Disturbed by this, Christ told them that when they are invited to a wedding feast they should not take the places of honor. But rather they should take the place of lowest honor, so that they will allow the one who invited them to honor them by inviting them to move up to a place of higher honor at the table. Christ was clearly saying that man should not honor himself and consider himself with high regard, but be honored by others as a result of his good deeds.

Immediately after Christ spoke these words, one of those who were reclining at the table said, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" It is obvious from this statement that the man completely misunderstood (or refused to understand) what Jesus had so carefully explained about receiving honor. The subject comment by the man is in total opposition to Christ's statement in Luke 14:11 in which He says, "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." As Charles W.F. Smith says, this statement ". . . breathes [with] all the self-confidence of a privileged member of the chosen race. It assumes that the speaker, with becoming modesty but with assurance, is counting on



being among the blessed."<sup>1</sup> It is in reply to this attitude that Christ amplifies his teaching concerning self-exaltation, by applying it to man's response to His offer of the kingdom. Christ used a parable about a great supper because, "Every Jew believed that at the close of this present dispensation which is yet to dawn, a great festival would be provided, at which should be assembled together Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers and the children of that ancient and once illustrious race . . . ."2

Christ begins the parable by saying a certain man (referring to the Lord Himself) invited many to a big dinner which he was giving. These invitations were given some days prior to the actual date of the dinner. From the wording it is assumed that all who were invited accepted the invitation when it was given. Also, since this is a kingdom parable, it is most probable that those who were invited were Jews.

When the dinner was ready, the host sent his slave to tell the guests it was now time to come to the dinner. The host's attitude was one of anticipation in that he expected all who were invited to come to his dinner. However his expectations were shattered as a result of the response He received by those who were invited.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles W. R. Smith, The Jesus of the Parables (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1975), p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>J. Alexander Findlay, Jesus and His Parables (London: The Religious Book Club, 1931), p. 69.

### The Invited Decline to Come (14:18-20)

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, "I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused." And another one said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused." And another one said, "I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come."

When the servant confronted those who had been invited, each one made an excuse why he could not come. It may seem that Luke is presenting only three of the many excuses that were given to the servant. However it seems more reasonable to say that the three excuses are representative of all the excuses the slave received.

The first excuse given was that the invited guest had bought a piece of land and he needed to go see it. Here Christ presents the first human desire which draws man away from God; this temptation is known as "the pride of life." In this temptation, man is controlled by his own ego, pride and self exaltation. As was pointed out previously, the Pharisee's misunderstanding of Christ's teaching concerning this subject was the controlling factor which caused Him to tell the parable of the great supper.

The second excuse given was that five yoke of oxen were purchased and they have to be tried out by their owner. This is the second human temptation or desire which draws man away from God and can be entitled "the lust of the eyes." In this temptation, man is controlled by his desire to obtain possessions, power and wealth. This lust is very active in today's world because it is measured by how much

money a person makes or by the position he holds in the company or firm he works for.

The third and final excuse given was that a man had married a wife and thus the husband could not come. This is the third human temptation which draws man away from God and can be entitled "the lust of the flesh." Upon first glance this temptation may seem to be only referring to sexual desires. One scholar who believes this is G. Campbell Morgan who says that "the lust of the flesh" includes "the realm of natural affection."<sup>1</sup> However, the scope of this temptation is much broader, and includes not only sexual desires, but the human need for food, shelter, clothing, companionship, etc.

This seems to be indicated by the fact that the man did not explain in detail why his marriage to a wife kept him from coming to the banquet. Therefore he assumed the slave knew what he meant by his excuse. Normally when a person says he is married, he means that his life is centered around his family and all the responsibilities that go along with it. Such responsibilities would include providing food, shelter, clothing and leadership for his family. In these three excuses Christ has presented the three main attractions that the world has upon mankind.

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Luke (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931), p. 174.

### The Poor and Infirm are Brought In (14:21-22)

And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame." And the slave said, "Master, what you have commanded has been done, and still there is room."

When the head of the household heard that all those who had previously accepted his invitation to the dinner now declined to come, he became angry. Likewise, whenever Christ offered the Kingdom to the Jews and they rejected the offer, He became upset and righteously angry toward them.

Once the head of the household realized the invited people were not coming, he sent his slave out into the streets and lanes of the city to bring in the poor, crippled, blind and lame to his dinner. Since the Jews regarded the Gentiles as being outcasts,<sup>1</sup> the group of people the slave was to bring in symbolize that the Gentiles will be invited into the Kingdom after the Jews reject it for the final time. But after this group is brought to the dinner, there is still room for more to attend.

### Outsiders are Compelled to Come (14:23)

And the master said to the slave, "Go out into the highways and along the hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

To fill his house, the master sends his slave out

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Tenney, ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 697.

along the highways and hedges to compel others to come to his banquet. Since the group brought to the banquet in verses 21 and 22 were Gentiles, they are most assuredly the kingdom members that today would be in the Church. The group compelled to come in, in verse 23, may be either the group of believers who come out of the tribulation, or just additional members of the Church.

#### Those First Invited are Excluded (14:24)

For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.

The head of the household makes a concluding statement in which he says that all those who were first invited to his dinner will not be given a second chance to attend. Likewise in Acts 3, the Jews as a nation were re-offered the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> However, the time period of the Book of Acts (A.D. 33-62) passed without the offer being accepted. The closing of A.D. 62 brought with it an end to any further reofferings of God's Kingdom to the nation of Israel.

Christ earnestly urged the nation of Israel to accept Him as their king and savior, but they rejected Him. The reasons for their rejection of Him are essentially the same then as why men still reject Him today. While Christ, in His presentation of the parable, did not dwell upon the reasons for His rejection, the major thrust of this thesis

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<sup>1</sup>Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1968), p. 403.

will be to examine the reasons, which are contained in the three excuses of verses 18-20.

### Historical Background and Setting of the Dinner

As previously stated, the main thrust of this thesis is to examine in depth the three excuses in verses 18-20. To do this properly, the characteristics of Jewish dinner banquets must be taken into consideration. When Christ told the parable, He did not bother to explain these characteristics because they were common knowledge to the people of that day. A detailed study of such historical data will give a deeper insight into the meaning of the three excuses.

#### Time of the Dinner

William Arnot states emphatically that ". . . it plainly appears that the feast was a dinner at an early hour, and not a supper in our sense of the word."<sup>1</sup> His statement may be true, but he does not present any data to support his belief. However, the wording from the original text does give some clues as to the time of day the banquet probably was being held.

First, the greek word Christ used for dinner in verse 16 was δεῖπνον which means a "formal dinner banquet."<sup>2</sup> Arnot expands this meaning by saying ". . . in ancient times [δεῖπνον] was employed generally to signify the

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<sup>1</sup>William Arnot, The Parables of Our Lord (London: T. Ne.son and Sons, Paternoster, Row, 1865), p. 389.

<sup>2</sup>BAGD, p. 172.

principle meal, without reference to a particular period of day."<sup>1</sup> Also, the size of the banquet is described by the adverb μέγα which means "big" or "large." Therefore it seems that the subject dinner was an important affair which was to be attended by important people.

The centralness of the dinner is also seen by looking at the verb used in the verse. The subject verb is ἐποίει (imperfect, active indicative) and is translated "was giving." This translation is significant because it is only used when a verb form of ποίεω is referring to meals, banquets or festivals, of which a banquet is the most important part.<sup>2</sup> Such a translation gives evidence that the banquet was to be a unique one, with a significant importance. Although this is the case, the original wording still does not give a specific time of day when the banquet was to be given.

Eta Linnemann seems to present a solution to the problem of when the banquet was to begin by saying:

A banquet that begins in the late hours of the afternoon usually goes on far into the evening, often till after midnight. So at sunset it has really only just begun. since the excuses of the guests are not typical "weak excuses" nor bear the character of a deliberate slight, Jesus' listeners will hardly have understood them as refusals, but as excuses for coming late. The guests want first still to use the remaining hour or two of the day for business before they come to the banquet. They think it is still early enough to arrive at sunset,

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<sup>1</sup>Arnot, The Parable of Our Lord, p. 388.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

for-so we must understand their attitude-the banquet will not run away.<sup>1</sup>

Linnemann seems to take the view that the dinner was to begin sometime between noon and sunset. The reasoning being that the invited guests were really not excusing themselves totally from attending the dinner, but rather they were requesting that they be excused for just the beginning of the dinner. However, the words that the invited guests used to excuse themselves from the dinner do not seem to indicate that they were asking for permission to arrive at the dinner late. The first two invitees said "please consider me excused" (ἔχε με παρητημένον) which is a statement of a sincere request for permission to be excused. The third invitee said "I am unable to come" (οὐ δύναμαι ἐλθεῖν), thus presenting a statement of contempt for the courteous forms of excuses which the two previous invited guest gave.<sup>2</sup> Another possibility may be that the wording of the third excuse is alluding to the fact that the man's marriage brought responsibilities with it which he saw as extremely urgent at the time.

While it has been shown that the original language seems to indicate that the invited guests had no intention of arriving late at the dinner, Linneman's intimation that

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<sup>1</sup>Eta Linneman, Parables of Jesus (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1966), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Siegfried Goebel,, The Parables of Jesus, Trans. Professor Banks, Vol. 15 of Clarke's Foreign Theological Library (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1900), p. 174.



the start of the dinner was probably sometime between noon and sunset seems accurate. Such reasoning stems from the final verse of the parable, which reads, "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner." Here Christ is saying the master of the house believes that, although the guests had excused themselves from the dinner, they may attempt to enter the dinner after their personal business has been completed. If this is the case, then there must have been enough time from the start of the dinner until sunset for the men to complete their personal business. The master of the house obviously believes this because his statement in verse 24 intimates that he expects the men who were invited to show up at the door. To prevent this, he tells his slave they are not going to taste of his dinner. Here he is telling his slave that if any of these men show up at his home, they are to be refused entrance to the dinner. This is in complete opposition to the custom of Jerusalem which gave invited guests a second opportunity to attend a dinner. As the custom reveals, ". . . guests

could appear up to the end of the first course. It was then that a sign which had been set up at the entrance of the host's house was removed, to show that any further late comers were unwanted."<sup>1</sup>

Not only does the master of the house's statement point to an afternoon beginning for the dinner, but the

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<sup>1</sup>Linneman, Parables of Jesus, p. 89.

first and second excuses demand that the dinner begin in the afternoon. This is because a day's work in Palestine ended at approximately 6:00 p.m. (the twelfth hour), and therefore the man who wanted to go see his land and likewise the man who wanted to try out his five yoke of oxen, must have begun their ventures long before evening fell (by 6:00 p.m.). Even if only two hours are allowed for the men to perform their business, the latest the dinner could start would be 4:00 p.m. Therefore, without any doubt the dinner began sometime between noon and evening. This fact is important to the correct interpretation of the excuse which will be presented in the next Chapter of this thesis.

#### The Invitation to the Dinner

The format of giving invitations to banquets or dinners in the Near East in New Testament times is composed of unique characteristics. These characteristics, while they were well known to the people at that time, elude the comprehension of modern man. This is because modern man has failed to take an interest in studying the Jewish culture so that proper interpretations of the Bible can be made. Christ, in His presentation of the parable of the great supper, does not concern Himself with a detailed explanation of the Jewish invitation process, but rather assumes that the listeners already comprehend the specifics of it. However, to understand fully the teaching that Christ was giving through the three excuses, knowing the specifics of the Jewish dinner invitation is a must.

According to Jewish custom, invitations to dinner banquets were really two-fold. One invitation was given far in advance of the banquet day and then another invitation would be given just prior to the hour of serving. It is interesting that the second invitation seems to bear more weight than the first one.

It should be noticed that, though the invited guest in Palestine is asked to book the evening (or afternoon) sometimes weeks before hand, he is not expected to set off to keep his engagement until a servant comes to tell him that dinner is served.<sup>1</sup>

While this statement does point out that the invited guest is not required to set off for the dinner until he has received the second invitation, this does not relieve him of the responsibility of adjusting his schedule accordingly. Once the feast is ready ". . . the guests have not to bring food with them, but to seat themselves at the table, and eat what is provided for them."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the second invitation was so important also created two problems between the invited and their host. The first problem involved the boastful attitude which the invited guests sometimes had. This went to such an extreme that the boastful men of Jerusalem refused to attend a banquet unless they were invited twice.<sup>3</sup> The invited

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<sup>1</sup>Findlay, Jesus and His Parables, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>John Cumming, Lectures on Our Lord's Parable (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1851), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>William Hendricksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 731.

guests became so reliant upon the certainty they would always receive two invitations that they began to have a condescending attitude toward the host.

The second problem in connection with invitations to banquets or dinners arose when the invited guests refused the second invitation. ". . . everyone in Jesus' day knew the prevailing custom of honoring an invitation to a banquet. To refuse a second invitation constituted an outright insult to the host to such a degree that among Arab tribes it was equivalent to a declaration of war."<sup>1</sup> The cause for such an insult must have resulted from the fact that in such cases the invited guests accepted the first invitation without any intimation whatsoever that they might decline later on.

On the surface, the first invitation may logically seem to be the most important, due to the advance arrangements and plans that both the host and the invited guests must make. However, due to very strong customs and cultural requirements, the second invitation became the most important. The reason was that a man's word was at stake and if he refused the second invitation, once the first one had been accepted, then he not only insulted his host, but also himself.

Throughout the previous discussion, it has been shown that the invitation to a dinner in Christ's day was really composed of two separate invitations. While the

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<sup>1</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, The Parables of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 196.

first invitation would determine on the surface whether a person was interested in attending a dinner, the second invitation determined the depth of a person's commitment to his actual attending of the dinner. When studying the parable of the great supper, it must always be remembered that Christ was using well known Jewish culture and customs to teach spiritual truths. The spiritual truth which has almost virtually been overlooked by scholars is that which is locked up in the three excuses given by the guests. It is Chapter III of this thesis which will reveal the truth and the depth of their meaning to the Christian world today.

## CHAPTER III

### THE THREE EXCUSES

#### The Importance of the Excuses

The close of Chapter I indicated that the three excuses presented in Luke 14:18-20 are filled with spiritual truth that has been virtually overlooked by most scholars. The reason for this is that the teaching of the Kingdom of God is prevalent in the parable: therefore, any other teaching seems to be insignificant in comparison. However, such is not the case, because within these three excuses lies the test of man's commitment to God. Once again Christ has used well-know cultural events and customs of the day to teach the importance of God in the life of man.

#### The Question of Representation

Some scholars believe that the three excuses in Luke 14:18-20, 1)bought a piece of land, 2)bought five yoke of oxen; and 3)married a wife, are only three of many different excuses which could have been given. Marcus Dods seems to intimate this view when he says:

But the feast does not appear, to their minds, an affair of urgent or supreme importance. So they went on their several ways after receiving the invitation as if nothing had happened, forming new engagements, without

even recalling to their thoughts the prospective feast.<sup>1</sup>

A. B. Bruce believes that the three excuses are just a few of the many notions which fill the minds of men. He states:

Whatever preoccupies or fills the mind prevents the hunger which is necessary to the appreciation of God's feast of grace. Among the things which fills the mind and heart are worldly goods, cares about food and raiment and business, social relationships and enjoyments.<sup>2</sup>

Although such men as these believe the three excuses are just a few of the large number of excuses which Christ could have used in the parable, their beliefs are not based upon an exegetical evaluation of Luke 14:18.

In considering such data one must first examine the phrase ἀπο μιᾶς πάντες. This phrase, if translated as it stands, would read "with one all" which does not make sense. Therefore, to allow for a complete idea, some word such as γνώμης, ψυχῆς, or ὥρας must be placed between μιᾶς and πάντες. This would give a meaning to the phrase which would imply with one mind, or at one time, or in the same manner, respectively. Condensing all of these could result with the subject phrase having a meaning of "with one consent".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marcus Dods, The Parables of Our Lord (New York: Wilbur B. Ketcham, n.d.), p. 331.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885), p. 333.

<sup>3</sup>A. B. Bruce "The Gospel of Luke," in vol. 1 of Expositor's Greek Testament. Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), p. 573.

Second, the phrase ἀπο μιᾶς πάντες may not mean "with one consent" at all, but rather have a completely different meaning. This is because the phrase ἀπο μιᾶς is an obscure greek expression which when used was translated "alike" or "unanimously."<sup>1</sup> "However it is possible, due to recent papyri discoveries, that the expression means "at once" - 'thus all, without the blink of an eye, immediately began to excuse themselves.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if this second translation is accurate (and there is no reason why it should not be), then the three guests would still not be giving the same excuse. But in this instance, the guests' strong attraction to their own affairs, rather than the dinner is the main emphasis. Whichever of the two translations is the correct one, there is no possible way that the guests were giving the same excuse.

Third, when examining if the three excuses are representative, one must also take into consideration the terminology Christ used to describe the guests. In Luke 14:18a, Christ used an aorist middle indicative, third person plural form of the verb ἄρχω ("began"), within which lies the subject of the sentence. Clearly the subject is "they" which refers back to "those who had been invited" (τοῖς κεκλημένοις ) of verse 17. Verses 18b - 20 go on to list the components of "they." While it is logical to

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<sup>1</sup>Neil R. Lightfoot, Lessons from the Parables (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



say that there are more men than just three men, which comprise πολλούς (many) of verse 17, Christ only wanted to name three of them. Why?

The obvious reason is that He considered the three to be representative of the entire group. This can be seen by looking at the article ὁ preceeding πρῶτος in verse 18. Christ did not say "one of the men," but rather He said "the first one" which indicates a different meaning. The key to the argument is seeing ὁ as a "generic article." As John Sproule says "The principle of the generic article is to select a normal or representative individual . . . ." <sup>1</sup> Although many may argue that the generic article is normally used before nouns, it must also be remembered that an article can occur with an adjective (such as πρῶτος), which is functioning like a noun. Considering ὁ as a generic article makes good sense and does not stretch the meaning of the text.

When the first guest's excuse is seen to be representative of a specific group of excuses, then the other two excuses can also be seen as representative. Both of the remaining excuses begin with the phrase καὶ ἕτερος ("and another"). This indicates that both excuses are similar to the first excuse. That is they are both representative of a group of other excuses.

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Sproule, "Intermediate Greek Notes" (Grace Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 88.

One may argue that ἕτερος refers to "one of a different kind,"<sup>1</sup> and that is true in one sense. The difference is in the fact the substance (the reasons for not coming) of each excuse is different. This difference does not in any way indicate that the excuses are all not representative. The three excuses must be seen as one total entity of which the reasons for not coming are specific components.

The phrase ἕτερά γραφή ("another Scripture passage")<sup>2</sup> in John 19:10 is referring to Zech. 12:10 to make a specific point regarding Christ's death. While each passage has a different meaning, they both refer to Christ's death; they both are inspired by God; they both are portions of God's Word; and they are both essential for the understanding of John 19. Likewise, the three excuses can be seen as both different (in substance) and similar (representative).

In conclusion, the text and context of Luke 14:18 indicates that Christ in this verse was stressing the oneness of the three men's reaction to the second invitation, rather than their individual excuses. Christ was saying the three men were no longer interested in attending the dinner, but only could concern themselves with their own worldly interests. Therefore the representativeness of the excuses are seen in Luke 14:18b -20 and not in 18a.

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

### The Question of Meaning

The fact that there has been a lack of in depth study of the three excuses has caused a false concept to prevail with regards to their importance. For the most part, scholars have considered the excuses to be ridiculous and therefore Christ used them just to point out the vain and foolish reasons why men are not interested in the things of God.

Now of course, these excuses, if looked at by honest men, must be seen to be wholly hypocrisy, every one of them. Would a man have bought a piece of land without seeing it first? Would a man have purchased oxen without trying them out first? If a man was married why couldn't he bring his wife?<sup>1</sup>

Such statements as these have led scholars to study the parable of the great supper without giving the three excuses the attention they deserve. It is this writer's intention to alleviate this problem.

I Have Bought a Piece of Land--The first representative excuse is found in Luke 14:18. The excuse is that going to see a previously purchased piece of land is more important than attendance at the dinner. Initially it must be understood what type of property the man had purchased. The original text gives the word Ἀγορᾶς for the subject property. Although the word can have several meanings, as used in this verse it should be "viewed

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<sup>1</sup>William G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), pp. 35-36.

primarily as a piece of property."<sup>1</sup> Accepting this meaning reveals that the property purchased was not a plot of ground which was to be mainly used for agricultural purposes. If the land was not to be used for agricultural purposes, what other reasons would the man have for purchasing the land?

The delight of possession is seen in the case of him who has so prospered that he has bought a piece of land, and desire[s] nothing so much as that he should just walk over it, and look upon it, and consider how he may improve it.<sup>2</sup>

While at first glance it may seem that the man is just desiring to go see his land, the meaning of the excuse goes much deeper than that. The word ἀνάγκην gives the clue to the depth of the man's desire to see his land. The word is translated as a "necessity, compulsion of any kind, outer or inner, brought about by the nature of things, a divine dispensation, some hoped-for advantage, custom, duty, etc."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the man just did not want to go see his land, but rather he was overwhelmed by the compulsion to have the land and use it for his advantage.

The word ἀνάγκην not only means the man had a compulsion for the land, but he also needed to have the land. This can be seen in another definition of the word which says it "expresses a situation of need-afflictions which derive from the tension between the new creation in

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Calderwood, The Parables of Our Lord second edition (London: MacMillan and Company, 1881), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>BAGD, p. 52.

Christ and the old cosmos."<sup>1</sup> From this translation of the word, one gets the feeling that the man was in a conflict with God when he excused himself from the dinner. In a sense he was taking over the control of his life and pushing God aside, because he now had the piece of land which meant he was somebody special.

Although Luke 14:18 does not specifically state it, the man was apparently testing God. This came in the sense that he was exposing himself to the danger of forgetting that man must love God more than anything else. Ivan French states this danger more clearly by saying "To 'tempt' God is to expose one's self to self-sought danger, either physical, moral, or spiritual--to challenge Him beyond the scope of His promises."<sup>2</sup> The man has indeed succumbed to the temptation of "the pride of life." The "pride of life" is the pitfall of egotism, pride, self-exaltation, which the world uses to draw men away from God. Another name for this lust is "humanism." Since Christ knew it was a major problem in the lives of men, He spent time teaching its evil effects. The "pride of life" is the first of three reasons why men do not commit themselves to God.

Although the man is being boastful and prideful in his desire to see his land, he is still very courteous to the host. In the excuse the men used the phrase

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ἀνάγκη" by Walter Grundmann, 1:346-47.

<sup>2</sup>Ivan French, "Life of Christ." (Syllabus on the Life of Christ, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 38.

ἔχε με παρητημένον which can be translated "please accept my apologies" or "consider me excused."<sup>1</sup> One might expect that a man who was turning from God would be hostile toward God and His people. It seems that the man became so involved with his lust to see his land, that he became unconscious of God's alternate program.

I Have Bought Five Yoke of Oxen--The second representative excuse is found in Luke 14:19. The excuse given here is that going to try out five yoke of oxen is more important than going to the dinner. Unlike the first man who found it was a necessity for him to go see his land, the man who gave the second excuse simply states that he is going to try out a new set of oxen. ". . . he does not even condescend to say that there is a necessity, [but] simply states that he goes, as if everyone must at once recognize the reasonableness of his conduct."<sup>2</sup> Indeed the people of that time would understand the need to test out a yoke of oxen. But the key to the issue is not the fact he is going out to test five yoke of oxen, but rather the manner in which the five pairs of oxen were to be tested.

The manner in which the test was to be made can be determined by examining the aorist active infinitive, δοκιμάσαι. The verb from which this infinitive comes is

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 621.

<sup>2</sup>Dods, The Parables of Our Lord, p. 319.

δοκιμάζω and means "to put to the test, examine."<sup>1</sup> The subject infinitive is an infinitive of purpose in which it "expresses the aim of the action denoted by the finite verb."<sup>2</sup> Therefore the man was telling the truth because he truly intended to test his oxen. Not only does the infinitive indicate a test that was going to come to pass, but it was also an official test because the subject infinitive is a technical term.<sup>3</sup>

The owner of the oxen was concerned they be tested thoroughly. The reason for this is that the oxen were important to the man's vocation. He did not buy them just for the pleasure of it, but rather to use them for a specific purpose. In Palestine, "Oxen were especially used for plowing and threshing, which was done by pulling a hardwood sledge, on which the driver stood, around the threshing floor."<sup>4</sup> There is no indication from the passage which of these duties (or other duties) the five yoke (pairs) of oxen were to perform. However, this is not important. The fact is that their owner was more concerned with the continued propagation of his business or vocation, than attending the dinner. "Diligence in the management of worldly affairs, is

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto, Ontario: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 214.

<sup>3</sup>TDNT, s.v. "δοκιμάζω" by Grundmann, 2:256.

<sup>4</sup>Merrill Tenny, ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 766.

not only blameless, but commendable. The apostolic direction is 'Diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord'--But here it absorbed the whole man."<sup>1</sup>

Once again Christ has presented an excuse which men use in their reluctance to put God first in their lives. In this second representative excuse, Christ has presented the second temptation which the world uses to control the lives of men. This temptation can be entitled "the lust of the eyes." The emphasis of this temptation is the gaining of worldly possessions and high social and economic positions. The means through which these objects of lust can be acquired are by thievery and vocational success. The substance of this excuse is that it is more important for a man to be vocationally successful, than it is for him to allow God to control his life. How true this statement is today, with everyone trying to get ahead by whatever means they have to use to do it. Also the young people of today are being ingrained by the concept that being successful means making a lot of money and attaining high positions in the business world. Christ in Luke 14:19 is definitely attempting to dispell this belief, by revealing the consequences that could befall a person who becomes entrapped by this temptation. There is no greater consequence than to be omitted from the eternal Kingdom of God. The parable of the great supper teaches there are men who will never be one of God's

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<sup>1</sup>Jabez Burns, Parables and Miracles of Christ (Boston: Charles H. Peirce, 1848), p. 68.



chosen people.

The second excuse terminates with the same closing phrase; ἔχε με παρητημένον, as was found in the first excuse. Just to reiterate its meaning, the phrase is translated "please accept my apologies" or "consider me excused". As previously stated, this phrase indicates that the man is content with his situation. He has been so overcome with his striving for vocational success that God's way does not even have an effect on him. Therefore, he has been surrounded by the ways of the world and although he is being misguided, he is impervious to his error.

I Have Married a Wife--The third and final representative excuse is found in Luke 14:20 and states that attending the dinner is an impossibility because personal needs are more important. The human need for personal relationships is being used in this verse as a representative for all other human needs. Although when the specific human relationship of marriage is involved, sexual pleasure enters into the picture. This is not, however, the specific need being mentioned in Luke 14:20.

Examining ἔγημα, the main verb of the verse, reveals that it is an aorist active indicative from the root γαμέω and is translated "have married." The phrase within which the verb is found is Γυναῖκα ἔγημα. Since Γυναῖκα is translated "wife" the subject phrase is translated "I have married a wife." He did not say that he had married a woman because "By Semitic marriage law, the bride is already

called γυναῖκα [wife]."<sup>1</sup>

The verb action does not reveal when the wedding took place. If, however, it took place within the last year, the man may be stating that he is obeying an Old Testament law.

One of the beautiful laws of the Old Testament made allowances for a newly-married man: 'When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, to be happy with his wife whom he has taken( Deut. 24:5).'<sup>2</sup>

However, the law only applied to those men who were in the army and not to civilians. Therefore, if the guest was really using this law, he would be misapplying it. In reality, the verse seems to be saying that since the man is married (no need to know how long), his human desire to be with his family is more important to him than attending the dinner. Barclay said that "It is one of the tragedies of life when good things, the best things, can crowd the claims of God out of life. There is no lovelier thing than a home, and yet a home was never meant to be used selfishly."<sup>3</sup>

As has been previously emphasized, third representative excuse is not just one which deals with human relationships, but rather includes the human wants and needs of every person which lives upon this earth. Some believe that

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "γυναῖκα," by Albrecht Oepke, 1:776.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke (Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, 1953), p.201.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

since it was a custom in Palestine to marry at an early age, that the third excuse deals with youthful lusts.

Many are bent on worldly pleasures . . . . This is especially the case with the young. Youth is the season of enjoyment; all looks bright then, and no one would wish to dampen youthful spirits, or to interfere with the keen delight which the young take in what pleases them.<sup>1</sup>

However, the lust which this third representative excuse is revealing affects all ages of people. Like the previous two excuses, this third excuse can also be classified under a specific title and that title is "the lust of the flesh." In this temptation, as Ivan French points out, the false concept which man falls into is the belief that "the supreme needs of man lie in the realm of the physical and the spiritual should be subservient to those needs."<sup>2</sup> This physical realm includes the over-emphasis upon the human desire for food, drink, clothing, shelter, companionship, sexual pleasure, etc; of which all are good in themselves, but the problem occurs when one or more of these become the controlling factor in one's life.

Many scholars believe that the "lust of the flesh" is the supreme temptation which controls men. Support for this view can be found in the manner in which the third guest closes out his excuse. In Luke 14:20 the third guest does not say as the two previous guests stated "please consider me excused," but rather his reply was more intense.

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Courdillon, Parables of Our Lord (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, n.d.), p. 206.

<sup>2</sup>French, "Life of Christ," p. 37.

The phrase in question is οὐ δύναμαι ἔλθεῖν and can be translated "I cannot come." The key to the meaning of this phrase is contained in the word δύναμαι. Although it is usually used in a very weak sense, it may be used here in reference to a moral attitude. If so, it may even mean "to will" which would make the phrase more forceful, resulting in a translation which says "I will not to come."<sup>1</sup> Such a strong refusal to come seems to indicate that the "lust of the flesh" is a far greater, more powerful temptation than the previous two represented in Luke 14:18 & 19. This willful disregard for the host intimates the all consuming power this lust has on men.

Summary--The meanings of the three representative excuses have been examined in detail, resulting in each one being categorized under a specific heading. It has been shown that these excuses are types of various worldly reasons why people do not commit their lives to God.<sup>2</sup>

The first representative excuse of going to see the previously purchased piece of land was classified as a lust of "the pride of life." This temptation is an appeal to the ego, in which the person places himself above God because he believes that he has total control of his life. His attitude produces action in which he attempts to prove how great a person he is.

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "δύναμαι," by Walter Grundmann, 2:284.

<sup>2</sup>J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Luke, Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1875), p. 164.

The second representative excuse of trying out five yoke of oxen was classified as "the lust of the eye." As previously stated, this lust is the one in which success in the business world becomes the dominant force in a person's life. Success in the eyes of the world requires the attainment of economic and monetary wealth and position.

The final representative excuse of having married a wife was classified as "the lust of the flesh." While this temptation does include sexual desires, its meaning goes much deeper. This lust, which takes control of many men, includes the over emphasis upon the human desire for food, drink, clothing, shelter, companionship, etc. This lust, which focuses upon the physical realm, has more control over man than the other two lusts. Each lust attacks at a different point of man's human vulnerability.

#### Comparison with the Temptation of Christ

Did Jesus Christ in fact realize that the parable He told in Luke 14:15-24 contained three statements of excuses which were designed to warn men of "the pride of life," the "lust of the eyes," and the "lust of the flesh"? The answer to this question is obviously affirmative, because Christ Himself knew what it was like to be tempted. Since Christ was truly human, He was tempted by human desires throughout His life on earth, although He had no sinful nature Himself. However, the specific temptations which Christ underwent in the wilderness are the ones to be examined. If these three temptations are as important as the writers

(Matthew and Luke) believe they are, then it would seem logical that they may somehow be related to the three excuses given in the parable of the last supper. To see if this is the case, a comparison between the three temptations of Christ and the three lusts ("pride of life, lust of the eyes, and lust of the flesh") must be made. The following presents this comparison.

Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-12--After Christ was led into the wilderness by the Spirit, He fasted for forty days. When the fortieth day had been fulfilled, Satan came to Christ while He was in a state of great hunger. Satan offered the first temptation by telling Christ to make stones into bread (Matthew 4:3-ἐλεπε ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗ τοι ἄρτοι γένωνται; Luke 4:3-ἐλεπε τῷ λίθῳ τουτῷ ἵνα γένηται ) Satan was trying to make Christ use His powers to relieve Himself of the human state of hunger, which He was in, by creating food. Therefore, if He had done so, Christ would not have really been content in the human state God had placed Him. This temptation, probably more than any other, truly showed Christ's humanity. Just like any other human being, Christ needed to have food. One author has stated the fact correctly when he said that "hunger represents human wants . . . .<sup>1</sup> (that is, needs). Christ had human needs and desires just like every other human being that has lived.

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<sup>1</sup>A.B. Bruce, "The Gospel of Mathew," in vol. 1 of Expositors Greek Testament. Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d., p. 89.

This first temptation coincides beautifully with the temptation of the "lust of the flesh" which Luke 14:20 has in view. However, the "lust of the flesh" is the first temptation Christ faced, while on the other hand, it was the last one revealed by the three excuses. Remember that in the discussion of the third excuse it was stated that the "lust of flesh" was the temptation which had the greatest effect on men. This was revealed by the third guest's forceful refusal to come to the dinner. It may be also stated that the "lust of the flesh" was mentioned last to place stress upon the fact that this temptation, more than any other, could keep men from allowing God to control their lives.

However, the "lust of the flesh" is the first temptation that Christ faces in the wilderness. Why did not Matthew or Luke place this temptation at the end of the list, the same way Christ did in Luke 14? The reason seems to be that Matthew and Luke were, right from the first temptation in the wilderness, trying to break through the misconception that Christ in His incarnate form could not be tempted by human desires. To do this, the two authors stated first that temptation which would have its strongest effects upon Christ. Most assuredly the human need and desire for food would be the one that could have its worst effects upon the God-man.

Supporting this would be the fact that He never required food for nourishment when he was in Heaven with God the Father. Thus He was faced with a need that He never had

before. Also, it must be remembered that the other two temptations Satan placed before Christ were designed to make Him assert His godly powers and to make Him desire to acquire great wealth. However, He had already possessed these two items when He was in Heaven and had voluntarily and temporarily put them aside when He came to earth. Therefore these temptations would not have as great an effect upon Him as the "lust of the flesh."

The next two temptations Satan places before Christ are presented in different order by Matthew and Luke. Mathew mentions first the tempting of Christ to assert His godly authority and then the tempting of Him to acquire worldly possessions. On the other hand, Luke first mentions the tempting of Christ to acquire worldly possessions and then next comes the tempting of Him to assert His godly authority. The temptation to assert Christ's godly powers will be discussed first.

This temptation is presented in Matthew 4:7 by the statement, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου) and in Luke 4:12 by "You shall not force a test on the Lord your God" (οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ). It can be seen that the wording of both Matthew and Luke is exactly the same. Therefore there is no question that the translation of both verses is the same, which means that "shall not tempt" and "shall not force a test on" have the same meaning.

Some scholars believe, as does A. B. Bruce, that the



temptations represented here are "not temptations through vanity or presumption, but rather to reckless escape from desperate situations."<sup>1</sup> Although it is obvious that the Devil was attempting to make Christ test God's power by casting Himself down and believing that God will protect him, it also seems that the temptation is centered upon Christ's ego and pride. The verses which indicate this are Matt 4:6 and Luke 4:9 which quote Satan as saying to Christ, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down." Just from the tone of the expression it is obvious that Satan is tempting Christ to rely upon his personal position as the Son of God for His own security.

Satan's temptations are often the strongest immediately after we have been remarkably favored. Jesus had just been called the Son of God, and Satan took this opportunity to try him. He often attempts to fill us with pride and vain self-conceit when we have been favored with any peace of mind, or any new view of God, and endeavors to urge us to do something which may bring us low and lead us to sin.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the first of Satan's temptations coincided with the temptation of the "lust of the flesh," the second temptation from Satan (third in Luke) coincides with the lust of the "pride of life" which Luke 14:18 has in view. As has been previously stated the lust of the "pride of life" is the pitfall of egotism, pride and self-exaltation which the world uses to turn men away from God. There can

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: The Gospel According to Saint Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 33.

be no doubt that when Satan told Christ to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple he was tempting Christ with lust of the "pride of life."

The final temptation is found in Matthew 4:9 and Luke 4:7 and is designated by the statements "All these things I give You, if You fall down and worship me" (ταῦτα πάντα σοι δώσω, ἔαν πεσὼν προσκυνήσης μοι) and "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours" (σὺ οὖν ἔαν προσκύνῃσης ἐν ὧν μου, ἔσται σου πάντα ), respectively. In this temptation, Satan takes Christ up to a high mountain and offers Him all the kingdoms of the world, if He would worship Satan.

A. B. Bruce suggests that this temptation is ". . . pointing to a subtle form of temptation, to which all ambitious, self-seeking men succumb, that of gaining power by compromise with evil."<sup>1</sup> However, this temptation is not a subtle one at all, but rather one that the world openly offers to men. While this temptation is in the physical realm, it is placing its emphasis upon acquiring power and success, rather than on human needs as does the "lust of the flesh." Satan wants Christ to desire possessions rather than to follow the course which God had set for Him. This third temptation offered to Christ coincides with the "lust of the eyes" which is viewed in Luke 14:19, the excuse of the second guest. It might seem humorous that Satan would offer all the kingdoms of the world to the Son of God, the one who

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce, "Gospel of Matthew," p. 90.

ultimately would again have control of the universe. However, this just enhances the fact that the temptation of possessing wealth and success looms as a strong force against the ways of God. Once again, it has been seen that Christ was tempted by all of the three representative temptations which Christ taught about in Luke 14.

Summary--The temptations of Christ in the wilderness, while a confrontation between God and the Devil, were also a confrontation between man and the world. Christ, as He faced the temptations, was in his incarnate state, which meant that He had laid aside the independent use of some of His godly powers. But He was fully human (although also fully God), and thus He felt the pains and the desires that all humans face. Although some may say that the temptations faced were just picked arbitrarily by the author, they really are representative of the three major types of temptations man faces in this world. Luke 14:18-20, while being the section of the parable which is almost always overlooked by scholars, is saturated with the truth of these three temptations. Although the specific titles of the three temptations are not mentioned, there can be no doubt that the "lust of the flesh," the "pride of life" and the "lust of the eyes" are clearly synonyms of the three temptations Christ faced.

Comparison with 1 John 2:16--The titles of the three types of temptations are not mentioned in either Matthew 4, Matthew 14 or Luke 4. While the types of temptations which are in view in these respective chapters, have been exa-

mined, their titles are only mentioned in 1 John 2:16. This verse says "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." Previously these temptations have seemed to come from men's own hearts (Luke 14:18-20) and from Satan (Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-12). Viewing the temptations from the proper perspective will shed some light on this problem.

Initially, the confrontation between Christ and Satan in the wilderness was really a confrontation between good and evil, or, more specifically, between the spiritual realm and the world. Since Satan was the most powerful being on earth besides Christ, he was the only person or thing which could have been powerful enough to tempt Christ. The world could not do it, because it would be a battle between deity and physical environment, which would be no contest. However, the confrontation between Christ and Satan was a battle between deity and a spiritual being (an angel), which is comparatively a more evenly-matched contest.

Second, although the temptations which are imbedded in the three excuses of Luke 14 do come from the hearts of men, the influence which gave the temptations to the men was the world. Luke 14 emphasizes the physical actions which men perform to consummate each type of temptation. On the other hand, 1 John 2:16 takes an entirely different view of the temptations. This verse, taken in its context, is concerned with the sinful environment in which man finds him-

self as he lives upon the earth. The world most certainly has a negative effect upon the people who live within it. John, in the subject verse, warns that loving the world will result in submission to the worldly temptations of the lust of the flesh, the lust of th eyes and the pride of life.

The context in which 1 John 2:16 is found reveals something about the three temptations which neither the three temptations of Christ nor the three excuses presents. The fact in question is that the lusts have a short life span when compared with God's ultimate plan (see 1 John 2:17). All the previously discussed passages stressed the strong hold the three lusts have on man, rather than the fact they are passing away. This is probably due to the fact that the lusts were discussed from the vantage point of how they affected mankind, and from the viewpoint that God's plan so far exceeds every human lust that they are comparatively insignificant.

## CONCLUSION

The parable of the great supper not only presents truths about the Kingdom of God, but it also describes the three types of temptations which attack and keep men from walking with God.

These temptations are found in the section of the parable which could be entitled "The Three Excuses" (Luke 14:18-20). This section has long been overlooked by scholars because of the misconception that they were ridiculous excuses Christ presented in order to emphasize man's foolish rejection of the things of God. However, contained within these three verses is the key to the strangle-hold the world and its ruler, Satan, has upon the lives of men. The key is that men are drawn away from God by three types of lusts: the pride of life, the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh.

An examination of all three excuses has presented a vivid picture of how far men can stray from God, when worldly lusts control their lives. When a man is controlled by the "pride of life" (first excuse), he is wrapped up in his own ego. He places himself in authority over his life and believes he does not need God. The achievements that he does gain are attributed to his own knowledge and skill and

not to the will of God. The lust is very prevalent in today's society and has been given the title of "humanism."

The "lust of the eyes" (second excuse) is the second lust which can and does destroy man's relationship with God. When a man is being controlled by this lust, he has the unquenchable desire to gain material possessions and positions of power and authority. The source of this lust is a world which ingrains in its inhabitants the belief that success means the acquiring of wealth and power. Obviously this type of success is not that which God has in mind for his people.

Finally, when a person is controlled by the "lust of the flesh" (third excuse) he is consumed by the desire to be satisfied by one or more legitimate human needs. While it is proper that human needs should be properly fulfilled, the "lust of the flesh" takes this desire to the extreme and creates in man an over-emphasized desire for food, drink, clothing, shelter, companionship, sexual pleasure, etc.

The study of the three excuses has proved once again that every phrase and every verse found in the Word of God is important. Scholars throughout the years have consistently passed over the three excuses of Luke 14:18-20 without delving into the wealth which they contain. The world is an evil and wicked place in which man lives and if he is to be aware of the entrapments it contains, the truths contained in Luke 14:18-20 must be understood.

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