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# **STUDIES**

## **IN THE**

# **SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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*Studies in the Scriptures* appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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## BURDEN BEARING

“Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee” (Psa 55:22). What a remarkable statement is that! Probably our very familiarity with it has prevented any sense of wonderment over it. Try and conceive what would be its first effect upon a converted heathen! He has been brought to a saving knowledge of the living God and granted a measure of light on His august Being and Majesty. He has learned that by His mere fiat, the universe was called into existence: That so infinitely is He exalted above all creatures, the nations of the earth are regarded by Him as but a drop in the bucket; that He sits enthroned on High, where myriads of creatures bow before Him in worship crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). And now he learns that this King of kings and Lord of lords invites him to “Cast thy burden upon the LORD” (Psa 55:22)! Must not such a discovery be overwhelming to his mind and heart! And ought it not to have the same effect on us?—that He who “humbleth himself to [even] behold the things that are in heaven” (Psa 113:6) deigns to bid us lay upon HIM what *we* find too heavy to carry.

What a striking thing it is that when a Christian has perceived the amazingness of such an invitation, or at least is acquainted with it, that he is so slow in profiting from it. We know not which is the more wonderful that the Lord should be so condescending in granting us such a privilege, or that we should be so slow and reluctant to avail ourselves of it. We know not which is the more surprising: That we are vouchsafed the opportunity of easing ourselves and laying on the Lord what is too heavy for us to carry; or our failure to embrace such an opportunity—and in consequence, continuing to stagger beneath a load which cripples us. It makes us think of a famished man being so foolishly proud as to refuse food when it is offered to him; or one in daylight closing and bandaging his eyes, and then complaining that he cannot see. Like Martha of old, many of the saints are “careful and troubled about *many* things”—when “but one thing is needful” (Luk 10:41, 42).

The one thing needful for ease of mind and peace of heart is to “cast thy burden upon the LORD” (Psa 55:22), instead of attempting to carry it thyself. There is our blessed recourse: That is the grand remedy for anxiety. Why, that was the very thing we learned at the beginning, was it not? When convicted of our lost condition, when “heavy laden” with a sense of guilt and the wrath of God upon us, how did we obtain relief? Was it not by heeding that blessed Gospel invitation, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28)? We found rest of conscience and soul by coming to Christ just as we were, by acknowledging our wretchedness, by casting ourselves on His grace and mercy. And, my reader, we are to obtain relief of heart and mind from the carking cares of this life in precisely the same way that we obtained relief of conscience at the beginning: By unbosoming ourselves to the Lord, by asking Him to undertake for us, by trusting Him to do so.

While it be true that (as mentioned in the opening paragraph) an apprehension of the infinite greatness and absolute supremacy of God will fill us with wonderment at His amazing condescension in bidding us cast our burden upon Him, yet it needs to be pointed out that a sense of His dominion and all-mightiness will never move the soul to respond to this invitation. The contemplating of Jehovah upon His throne will awe; but unless we also view Him in other relations and consider other aspects of the Divine character, the heart will never be melted before Him and drawn out to have free dealings with Him. There is a balance which needs observing here too. God is not only transcendent, but imminent. He not only resides in the highest Heaven, but “he be not far from every one of us” (Act 17:27). He not only dwells “in the light which no man can approach unto” (1Ti 6:16), but He is also “a very *present* help in trouble” (Psa 46:1); and for the believer, “a *friend* that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24).

The last quoted passages need to have a real place in our hearts if we are to respond to the invitation of our opening text. They need to be frequently meditated upon and require faith to be mixed with them. To view the Lord only as in Heaven produces a sense of remoteness in the soul. We should also cultivate a sense of His nearness to us. Is not that clearly presupposed by the language of Psalm 55:22?—how could one cast his burden on Another who was far away! God is near to His people not only by virtue of His omnipresence—for in *that* sense, He is equally near to the wicked—but He has come close to them in the Person of Christ, and *He* has brought them unto God (1Pe 3:18). That needs to be realised in the soul, as well as understood in the mind. The Lord is constantly near us: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5)—which is not only a blessed fact, but one that needs to be *acted on*. Since He is by thy side,

“Cast thy burden upon the LORD” (Psa 55:22). “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art *with me*” (Psa 23:4).

Others are, perhaps, deterred from availing themselves of this privilege—through regarding God as being of such greatness and majesty that it would be presumption to suppose He notices our petty trials and troubles. In the human realm, high office and pomposity usually go together, for those in authority rarely pay much attention to the personal affairs of those under them. But far different is it with the Lord. The One who created the universe also planted the blade of grass. The One who governs the planets also numbers the hairs of our heads. The One who is worshipped by the angels also observes the fall of a sparrow. The One who holdeth our souls in life bids us to cast our “burden upon” Him. It is true that He is Almighty, but He is also our Father. If I called upon the king of England, or the president of the U.S.A., he would not receive me; but he would his own child! Cultivate the thought of God’s *Fatherhood*: It implies nearness, access, sympathy, readiness to sustain.

Another thing which hinders many is the limitations which they place upon the Lord. They believe that Christ bore their sins in His own body on the tree, but that is as far as their faith goes. They trust Him with the eternal interests of their souls, but largely lose sight of Him for their temporal supplies. They betake themselves to Him as their spiritual Physician, but not as their bodily. We read, “Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Mat 8:17). He took them upon His spirit, entering sympathetically into the condition of the sufferers. And today, He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15). Then contemplate Him as the compassionate One who has at heart your temporal interests, who is willing to supply *all* your need. He is not only a Deliverer from the wrath to come, but a Sustainer in trouble, a Strengtheners in weakness, a Succourer in trials. Then make use of Him as such, and cast thy burden upon Him.

Note well, it is not “burdens” but “burden”—for we are not to allow them to accumulate. As soon as you are conscious of one, cast it on the Lord, by taking Him fully into your confidence, freely unbosoming yourself to Him, and familiarly acquainting Him with what weighs upon you. If it be the burden of sin, confess it frankly to Him and plead the promise of 1 John 1:9. If the burden of sustenance, anxiety over the morrow, troubled about meeting your obligations, acknowledge your fear, unbelief and distress, and remember it is “the Father of mercies” (2Co 1:3) you are talking to. If of sorrow, grief over wayward children, or the anguish of bereavement, pour out your lamentations into the ear of Him who wept by the graveside of Lazarus. Then plead His promise, “he shall sustain thee” (Psa 55:22)—expect Him to make it good in your case, and you shall prove the grand truth, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9).

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). A very needful word is that in this exceptionally selfish age, when, beyond contributing to public appeals for charity, few have any regard for the needs and rights of others, and when so many of the present and the rising generation are devoid of even “natural affection.” True Christianity fulfils *both* tables of the Law. Genuine piety consists not only of giving God His proper place in my life, but in seeking the welfare of my neighbours. I may be diligent in keeping the Sabbath, singing Psalms, and attending church, but if I am *lacking in love* to those I profess are my brethren and sisters in Christ, then my religion is no better than that of the Pharisees. If the love of God has been shed abroad in my heart, then I shall sympathise with His children in their varied trials and troubles, be ready to counsel and comfort, and assist them so far as lies in my power. Only thus shall I fulfil the law of Christ’s precepts and the law of His example (Joh 13:14, 15), for He enjoins us to be compassionate to others and is Himself touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

“For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal 6:5). Needless to say, there is no conflict between this verse and the others which have been before us. There is a “burden” of which we cannot rid ourselves—and that is, the discharge of our responsibility, the performance of duty. For the fulfilment of that, we may—we should—seek grace from the Lord; but to be relieved of it, we must not pray. Nor may we legitimately look to our brethren and sisters to shoulder it for us. We are not warranted in imposing on *their* benevolence, or so trading on their kindness that we become drones. If a man will not work, neither shall he eat (2Th 3:10). If he refuses to use the strength and talent God has given him, he has no right at all to expect others to come and feed him.

## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 14. *Ephesians 1:3*

This epistle presents to our view the inestimable treasures of Divine wisdom, the knowledge-surpassing manifestations of God's love unto His people. Therein are set forth "the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7); yea, "the exceeding riches of his grace" (Eph 2:7), "the riches of his glory" (Eph 3:16), and "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). In it, there is the fullest opening up of "the mystery" or the contents of the everlasting covenant. Here, we are shown in greater detail than elsewhere, the intimate and ineffable relation of the Church to Christ. Here, as nowhere else, we are conducted unto and into "the heav-enlies." Here are revealed depths which no finite mind can fathom, and heights which no imagination can scale. Writing upon "its excellency," Thomas Goodwin said, "It hath been esteemed among the choicest of Paul's epistles, and is accordingly placed in the midst of them, as is the most sparkling gem in a casket of jewels, or as the heart in the midst of the body, for as it is the principal seat and fountain of our spirits, so this epistle contains more of the spirit, the quintessence of the mystery of Christ, than any other, and is made up of the most quickening cordials to the inner man."

Before the apostle proceeded to the orderly development of his wonderful theme, he bows in worship. As his mind was absorbed with the transcendently-glorious subject—which was to engage his pen, as he contemplated the exceeding riches of God's grace unto His people—his soul was overwhelmed, 'lost in wonder, love and praise.' The heart of Paul was too full to contain itself and overflowed in adoring gratitude—that is what the highest form of worship is; and it is only in such a spirit, we can truly enter into the contents of this epistle. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3). As a prayer, those words may be viewed thus: First, its *nature*—an ascription of praise; second, its *Object*—the God and Father of Christ; third, its *incitement*—because He has so enriched us in Him. Were we to sermonize the verse, our divisions would be: 1) The believer's excellent portion: Blessed "with all spiritual blessings." 2) The believer's exalted position: In the heav-enlies in Christ. 3) The believer's exultant praise: "Blessed be the God and Father."

"Blessed be the God and Father." That those words signify an act of *prayer* is clear from many passages. "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psa 34:1). "Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name" (Psa 63:4 and compare 1Ti 2:8). "Sing unto the LORD, bless his name" (Psa 96:2). "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD" (Psa 134:2). To "bless" God is to adore Him, to acknowledge His excellency, to express the highest veneration and gratitude. To "bless" God is to render unto Him the homage of our hearts as the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The three principal branches of prayer are humiliation, supplication and adoration: Including in the first, confession of sin; in the second, making known our requests and interceding on the behalf of others; in the third, thanksgiving and praise. This action of the apostle here is a summons to all believers to unite with him in magnifying the Source of all our spiritual blessings: "Blessed be the God and Father."

By way of infinite eminency, God is "the Blessed" One (Mar 14:61)—a title which is solely proper and peculiar to Himself. Nevertheless, He is graciously pleased to hear the "Amen" of His saints thereto. This was intimated by our apostle when, after declaring Him to be "the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Rom 1:25), he at once added his "Amen" to the same—which was not a "so be it" added to a blessing of invocation, but to a joyful acclamation, as expressing his own satisfaction and joy therein. "All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints [a word which also includes the holy angels] shall bless thee" (Psa 145:10)—they alone "bless" Him, for they alone bear Him good will. "It was His very end in choosing forth a select company of saints, that He Himself first blessing them, they then might bless Him again" (T. Goodwin). They bless Him not only for what He is unto themselves and for what He has done unto them, but for what He is in Himself.

The nature of this prayer then is not a petitionary one—like those which come later in this epistle—but is an ascription of praise, evoked by an apprehension of the spiritual blessings wherewith God the Father hath blessed His people, the principal ones of which are described in the verses which immediately follow. It was an adoring of God for such an amazing portion, such inestimable treasure, such a glorious inheritance. The apostle was filled with overwhelming gratitude for such infinite love and grace, and like new wine bursting of the old bottle into which it was poured, fervent thanksgiving flowed forth from him. As

one has beautifully said, "The first notes of the everlasting song of the heavenly world are sounded here below, and are produced and drawn forth by a sense of God's goodness and mercy as revealed to the soul, and especially when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit." This it was, which made David exclaim, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa 103:1)—he blesses God for having so richly blest him.

We turn now to consider *the Object adored*. It is not God the Father absolutely considered, for as such, out of Christ, He is "a consuming fire" (Deu 4:24, 9:3; Heb 12:29) to sinners such as we are. Nor is it simply as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, for we could have no approach unto Him as such. Rather, is it as "the God and Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ" (2Co 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1Pe 1:3), as the One who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Him, that He is here worshipped. There is a wealth of theological instruction in the Divine titles, and we are greatly the losers if we fail to pay due attention unto them. This title is the peculiar and characteristic designation of the Father as the God of accomplished redemption—compare 2Co 1:3; 1Pe 1:3. It is *this* blessed relationship which is the ground of our confidence. We stand related not to the absolute Jehovah, but to the God of redemption as He is revealed in Jesus Christ: The One whom the Saviour declared, whose will He perfectly accomplished. It is because God spared not His own dear Son, but "delivered him up for us all" (Rom 8:32), that He is *our* "God and Father," and that through Christ and by the Spirit, we have access to Him.

As we have so often pointed out in these pages, when the Deity is said to be "the God" of any person or persons, it signifies He is his or their *covenant God*. Thus, after the first "covenant" described in Genesis, we find Noah speaking of "the LORD God of Shem" (Gen 9:26)—for it was through *that* son God's covenant with Noah was to be accomplished. Later, He became known as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exo 3:6). In the names of those patriarchs, the conveyance of the covenant blessings ran; and consequent thereto, their return of praise and blessing unto God again. Thus, Noah exclaimed, "Blessed be the LORD God of Shem" (Gen 9:26); and later, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel." Now, as in a parallel case, the prophet declared, "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt" (Jer 16:14); and "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel" (Jer 31:31)—so we may say that, under the fuller revelation of the Gospel, God has said, I will no longer be known as "the God of Abraham" etc., but as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and owned and adored as such.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3; 1Pe 1:3). This unspeakably-precious title views God as He is related to us in Christ—that is, Christ as the covenant-Head and His elect in Him. He was, is, and ever will be "the God and Father" of the Lord Jesus. We question whether there is here any direct reference to the miraculous begetting of our Lord: Rather do we consider that He is contemplated in His mediatorial character—that is, as the eternal Son invested with our nature. In view of our Lord's own utterances, it is abundantly clear that He owned the Father as *His* "God." "I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa 22:10). "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa 40:8). On the Cross, He owned Him as His "God" (Mat 27:46). After His resurrection, He spoke of Him as "my God" (Joh 20:17). Enthroned in Heaven, He is Him to be "my God" four times over in a single verse (Rev 3:12). God the Son, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, He assumed the form of a Servant.

The Father is the "God" of Christ in the following respects. 1) In regard of His human nature, which being a *creature* ("a body hast thou prepared me"—Heb 10:5) was subject to God. 2) In regard of His human nature being predestinated to the grace and union with His Divine person. "Christ as man was 'foreordained' [predestinated] (1Pe 1:20), as well as we; and so hath God to be His God by predestination, and so by free grace, as well as He is our God in that respect" (T. Goodwin). 3) In regard of His well being: "God is the Author and immediately the matter of Christ's blessedness (as He is man); and therefore, blessed be God as the God of Christ, who hath 'blessed thee for ever' as appears in what follows—'God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows'—Psalm 45:2, 7" (T. Goodwin, 1600-1680). 4) In regard of the covenant there was between Them: "Thus saith God the LORD...I the LORD have called thee...and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;" (Isa 42:5, 6). 5) In regard of His relation to the Church: As the Head and Representative of His people—"For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb 2:11).

God must be “the God and Father” of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be “the God and Father” of His people whom He chose in Him. The relation which the Church sustains to God is determined by Christ’s own relation to Him, for she is “Christ’s and Christ is God’s” (1Co 3:23). The general principle of this is established by those words, “God sent forth His Son...that we might receive the adoption of *sons*” (Gal 4:4). Still more explicitly, it is found in His own words, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (Joh 20:17)—not “our,” be it carefully quoted, but “my,” first Mine, and then yours: Mine originally, and yours by participation. In view of all that follows in Ephesians 1, it is clear that the apostle’s design here in verse 3 was to show us that *the ground* on which all those “spiritual blessings” are conveyed to us is that they issue from God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus in verse 5, God the Father “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself.” It should also be pointed out that “*our* Lord Jesus Christ” pertains only to His people. In a special way, He is Lord of the saints, as He is called “King of the saints” (Rev 15:3) in distinction from His being King of the nations (Jer 10:7); and certainly, He is the Saviour of none others.

And *what was it* that occasioned this outburst of joyous praise unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? This: “Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” As God alone is styled “the Blessed” One (Mar 14:61), so (as T. Goodwin points out) He alone blesseth or is able to do so. When creatures bless, they can only do so “in the name of the LORD” (Psa 129:8). When man is made an instrument to convey good things unto us, yet he cannot make them “blessings”—for *that* we are to have recourse to *God*. It is under the relation of His being—through Christ, our covenant God and our Father—that He has blessed us. “God, even our own God, shall bless us” (Psa 67:6), for having taken upon Him to be such unto us, He cannot but bless us; for such is obviously the force of the duplication, which immediately follows—“God *shall* bless us” (Psa 67:7). He has blessed us by giving Himself to us. And whence comes it that He became “*our own* God”? Why, by choosing us to be His; and therefore, we are termed, “His own elect” (Greek of Luke 18:7)—made His own by sovereign choice.

Likewise, God blesses us under the relation of “our Father.” This was designedly adumbrated of old—for the first human beings who pronounced (invoked) blessing upon others were those who bore the relation of *fathers*. Having love and good will to their children, it was natural to wish them well; and therefore, they had recourse unto God to perform their desires, as that which was not in their own power to do. Thus, we find the patriarchs blessing their children and posterity (Gen 27:27, 33, 36; 48:9). So, too, we recall that utterance of our Lord’s, “If ye then, being evil [filled with self-love, yet moved by natural affection], know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat 7:11)—for it was to this very end that He was pleased to become a Father to us. Being “the Blessed” One, He is in Himself an ocean of all blessings, which seeks an outlet for itself to communicate unto those whom He hath loved and chosen. He has become our Father for the very purpose of lavishing His love and grace upon His dear children.

But let us notice carefully the tense of the verb here. It is not “who will bless us,” nor “who is blessing us”—but “who hath blessed” us. The time when God bestowed all spiritual blessings upon His people in Christ was when He chose them in Him—even before Heaven and earth was called into existence. It is super-creation blessings which are here in view. In His eternal decree, God the Father gave unto His people both being and wellbeing in Christ, in the order of His counsels that was prior to His foreview of their fall in Adam. This is evident from what follows: “According as he hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph 1:4)—and note the “having predestinated” in verse 5, and the “hath made us” in verse 6, and contrast the “in whom we have redemption” in verse 7. With which accords, “according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9)—the “purpose” there being all one with the “blessing” of Ephesians 1:3.

“Who hath blessed us with all spiritual *blessings*.” Each word is selected with Divine precision and propriety. It is not “all spiritual gifts” or “enrichments”—but “blessings,” because it accords with God’s new-covenant title here and emphasises that these are *covenant* bestowments. As Goodwin so helpfully reminds us: This is “that original word under which the promise of the covenant of grace was at the first given to Abraham the father of the faithful, as that which contained all particular good things—as his loins did that ‘seed’ to whom that promise was made.” “I will bless thee... in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:2, 3); and again, “in blessing I will bless thee” (Gen 22:17). Though the N.T. uses higher terms than the Old to express spiritual things, it altered not this one, for no better was to be found. In His

first public sermon, Christ repeatedly declared, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," etc., etc. When He ascended, His last act was to bless (Luk 24:50); and at the last day, when Heaven's doors are opened to all the righteous, their eternal felicity is expressed by "Come, ye blessed of my Father" (Mat 25:34).

"Who hath blessed us with all *spiritual* blessings." 1. In contrast from the blessings promised to the nation of Israel under the old covenant, which were material and temporal—Deu 28:1-8. 2. In contrast from the common blessings of creation and providence, which the non-elect share with the people of God—for He "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat 5:45). 3. In explanation of His promise to Abraham: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:14)—the second clause being an exposition of the first, showing what sort of blessing was meant. 4. Because spiritual are the ones for which we should especially bless and praise God—seeing they are withheld from the reprobate and are earnest of our eternal heritage. 5. Because these are what actually dispose the heart unto thanksgiving—temporal mercies, but furnish motives thereto.

"Who hath blessed us with *all* spiritual blessings." Note well, it is not simply, "who hath blessed me"—but "us": The spiritual blessings which God bestows upon one of His people, He bestows upon them all. "Whom he did predestinate, *them* he also called: and whom he called, *them* he also justified: and whom he justified, *them* he also glorified" (Rom 8:1-30). The 'perfectionists' idea of some believers being justified—and yet not sanctified—is an utter delusion. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us *all* things?" (Rom 8:32). If Christ be mine, then "all spiritual blessings" (Eph 1:3) are mine. As our apostle declared in another epistle, "all things are yours" (1Co 3:21), and the proof he gave was, "ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1Co 3:23). As Goodwin puts it, "If any one blessing, then with all, they hang together and go in a cluster." Everything necessary to give each Christian title and meetness for Heaven is his.

"Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in *heavenly* places in Christ." The Greek has the article before "heavenly" and nothing to warrant the "places" supplied by our translators. Bagster's Interlinear is much to be preferred—"in the heavenlies." Nor need the English reader have any difficulty: The self-same expression occurs again in Ephesians 1:20, where its meaning is plain. Our spiritual blessings are said to be "in the heavenly places" to mark the distinction between them and what Israel enjoyed *in Canaan*. More remotely still, they point a contrast from those blessings God blessed us with in Adam *in Eden* (Gen 1:27, 28). Christians have their "citizenship" in Heaven (rendered "conversation" in Phi 3:20). They are "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1). They have been begotten unto an inheritance which is "reserved in heaven" (1Pet 1:4) for them. Christ being "the Lord from heaven," a "heavenly" man (1Co 15:47, 48); therefore, "being blessed in and together with Him, we are blessed with heavenly blessings and raised up to heavenly places in Him (Eph 2:6)"—T. Goodwin.

"Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Out of Christ, there is no spiritual blessing whatever for any soul, but in Him, there is abundantly sufficient for all eternity. The words "in Christ" signify in union with Him: First a mystical, then a legal, and then a vital. It is in Christ, we are loved by God (Rom 8:39). It was in Christ He chose us (Eph 1:4). In Him, we are made "new" creatures (2Co 5:17). In Him, we are "sanctified" (1Co 1:2). In Him, we are "made nigh" unto God (Eph 2:13). In Him, we are "complete" (Col 2:10). We are "all one in Christ" (Gal 3:28). The departed saints are still "in Christ" (1Th 4:16). And it is of the Father that we are "in Christ" (1Co 1:30). But though all our blessings be in Him, we can only live in the power and enjoyment of them, as faith looks away from self and all its concerns and is occupied entirely with Him. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2Co 9:15).



## THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

### 26. Fifteenth Miracle – Part 4

In continuing our contemplation of this miracle, let us now pause and admire the *marvel of it*. Benhadad had become dissatisfied with the results achieved by his marauding bands and gathering together the whole of his armed forces determined to reduce Samaria to utter helplessness. Throwing a powerful force around their capital, he sought to bring its inhabitants to complete starvation by means of a protracted siege. In order to carry out his scheme, he had brought with his army large supplies of food and clothing, so that they might be in comfort while they waited for the stores of his victim to give out. How nearly his plan succeeded, we have seen: The Samaritans were reduced to the most desperate straits in an effort to keep life in their bodies. Yet as T. Scott pointed out, “In extreme distress, unexpected relief is often preparing; and whatever unbelievers may imagine, it is not in vain to wait for the Lord, how long soever He seems to delay His coming.”

But in the instance now before us, there is not a word to indicate that the Samaritans had been crying unto the Lord and looking to Him for relief. They had openly turned away from Him and were worshipping idols. This it is which renders the more noteworthy the act of Jehovah on this occasion: He was “found of them that sought” Him not (Isa 65:1). He showed Himself strong on the behalf of a people who had grievously despised and insulted Him. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. It was the Most High acting in His absolute sovereignty, having mercy on whom He pleased, to have mercy and to show favour unto those who not only had no claim thereto, but who deserved nought but unsparing judgment at His hands. The means which the Lord used on this occasion was as remarkable as the exercise of His distinguishing mercy. He was pleased to use the stores of the Syrians, their deadly enemies, to feed the famished Samaritans: “Out of the eater came forth meat” (Jud 14:14). Thus were the wise taken in their own craftiness.

Four lepers outside Samaria’s gates said, “Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die” (2Ki 7:3, 4). Observe how God wrought: It was not by an audible voice that He bade these lepers act—not such are the mysterious, but perfect, workings of Providence. It is by means of a secret and imperceptible impulse from Him, through the process of natural laws, that God usually works in men, “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13). Those lepers acted quite freely of their own volition, in response to simple, but obvious, thoughts on their situation; and followed the dictates of common sense and the impulse of self-preservation. Mark, we are not here attempting to philosophise or explain the conjunction between the natural and the supernatural, but merely calling attention to what lies on the surface of our narrative, and that which is recorded for our instruction.

When the four lepers arrived at the enemy’s camp, they found it to be deserted: “For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life” (2Ki 7:6, 7). *That* was indeed the employment of the supernatural—something over and above the ordinary workings of Providence, for though the Syrians misinterpreted the sound, we believe (as stated in our last) that what they heard was the movement of angelic horses and chariots (compare 2Ki 6:17)—the Lord allowing their ears to register what normally would have been inaudible to them. Yet even here, there was a blending of the supernatural with the natural: Those celestial beings did not slay the Syrians, but only terrified them by the noise which they made.

“And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it” (2Ki 7:8). Solemn indeed is this, first, from the negative side. There was no recognition of the Divine hand, no awesome exclamation, “What hath God wrought!” (Num 23:23), no bowing before Him in thanksgiving for such a signal favour. They con-

ducted themselves like infidels, accepting the mercies of Heaven as a mere matter of course. And remember, they were lepers: Even such an infliction had not turned their hearts unto the Lord. Be not surprised then that those whose homes are destroyed and whose bodies are injured by the bombs are not brought to repentance thereby. But positively, after satisfying their hunger, they plundered the Syrian tents. Verily, “there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecc 1:9). There was *looting* then as there is now—though theirs was not nearly so despicable and dastardly as what is now so common in this country.

And why is it that “there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecc 1:9)? Because “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19). Whether he be a man living in centuries B.C. or A.D., whether he be civilized or uncivilized, his heart is depraved. Civilisation effects no change *within* any person—for civilisation (not to be confused with morality and common decency) is but a veneer from without. But to return to our passage. The lepers enriching themselves from the spoil of the Syrians did not contribute unto the relief of the starving Samaritans, and *that* was what Jehovah had promised. Mark then the sequel: “Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household” (2Ki 7:9). The Divine design of mercy unto the starving city was not to be thwarted by the greed of these lepers, for His counsel must stand—yet note how it was now effected.

As God had wrought secretly in those lepers in verses 3 and 4, so again did He now. There, it was by an impulse upon their instinct of self-preservation; here, it was upon their *conscience*. Yet observe how conscience acts in the unregenerate, producing not horror and anguish at having offended a gracious God, but causing fear of the consequences. This is made clearer by the marginal rendering: “If we tarry till the morning light we shall find punishment.” But unless God had wrought secretly upon them, they, too, had been like our own generation—from whom His restraining hand is removed, and who are given up to “the lusts of their own hearts” (Rom 1:24), utterly reckless and regardless of consequences. In this instance, in order to the carrying out of His benevolent purpose, God put a measure of fear upon these lepers and caused them to realise that not only were they playing an ignoble part, but were likely to swiftly be smitten by His wrath if they failed to announce the good news to their famished fellows.

“Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household” (2Ki 7:9). Here, as everywhere, we need to be much on our guard against making a *misapplication* of Scripture. It is so easy to read our own thoughts into the Word; and thus, find what we are looking for. Those who are so enthusiastic in urging young believers to become evangelists by preaching the Gospel to all and sundry, would likely find in this verse what they considered was a striking passage on which to base an address on “the necessity of personal work,” yet it would be an altogether unwarranted use to make of it. This verse is very far from teaching, by typical implication, that it is the duty of every Christian to announce the “good tidings” to all they contact. Holy Writ does not contradict itself, and none other than the Lord Jesus has expressly bidden us, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” (Mat 7:6). That command is designed to bridle the restless energy of the flesh.

It was unto those who had been prepared for those “good tidings” who would *welcome* them, these lepers went forth; namely, to those who were fully conscious of their starving condition! There is a radical difference between those who are “lovers of pleasures” (2Ti 3:4) and satisfied with what they find therein, and the ones who have discovered the emptiness of such things and are deeply concerned about their eternal welfare; and there should be an equally radical difference in the way we deal with and speak to each of them. The Gospel would not be “good tidings” to the former, but would be trodden beneath their feet if offered to them; yet, it is likely to be welcomed by the latter, and if we unmistakably meet with the latter, it would be sinful for us to remain selfishly silent. “So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were” (2Ki 7:10).

Not being permitted to enter the city, the four lepers called out to those who were keeping watch at its gate. They announced the good news in plain and simple language, and then left the issue with them. The chief porter did not receive the strange tidings with incredulity, but “he called the [subordinate] porters;” and while he remained at his post of duty, “they told it to the king’s house within” (2Ki 7:11), middle of the night though it was. Here, too, we may perceive the continued—though secret—workings of the Lord. He it was who caused the porter to give heed to the message he had just heard. Altogether unexpected as it must have been, too good to be true as it would have sounded; yet, he was—unknown to himself—Divinely in-

clined to *credit* the glad tidings and promptly acquaint his royal master with the same. Yet the porter acted quite freely and discharged his personal responsibility. How wondrous are the ways of Him with whom we have to do!

“And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city” (2Ki 7:12). The king’s reaction to the good news was thoroughly characteristic of him, being all of a piece with everything else recorded of him. Instead of expressing gratitude at the glad tidings, he voiced his scepticism; instead of perceiving the gracious hand of God, he suspected his enemies of laying a subtle snare. Perhaps some may be inclined to say, It was very natural for Jehoram to argue thus: The king was acting in prudence and wise caution. Natural it certainly was, but not *spiritual*! There was no thought that the Lord had now made good His Word through the prophet, but simply the reasoning of a carnal mind at enmity against Him. One of the ways in which the carnal mind expresses itself is by a reasoned attempt to *explain away* the wondrous works and acts of God.

When God has spoken—plainly and expressly—it is not for us to reason, but to set to our seal that He is true and receive with unquestioning faith what He has said: If a promise, expecting Him to make it good. The scepticism of the king only serves to show how the tidings borne by the lepers had been lost on the porters, and the entire royal household had not God wrought secretly—but effectually—in the one and the other. Accordingly, we are next told, “And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see” (2Ki 7:13). That too was “of the Lord.” He it was who gave this servant both courage and wisdom to remonstrate with his master. He knew the man he had to deal with as his “send and see” showed—reminding us at once of 2 Kings 6:10 when the king “sent” to see if Elisha’s warning was a true one.

Nothing could be lost (unless it were the horses) by pursuing the policy proposed by the servant, and much might be gained thereby. As the Divine purpose could not be thwarted by the greed of the lepers, so it should not be by the scepticism of the king. It was God who gave the servant’s counsel favour in his master’s sight; and therefore, we are told, “They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see” (2Ki 7:14). God’s ways and works are as perfect in their execution as they are in their devising. But be it noted that though Jehoram yielded to the solicitation of his servant, it was with some unbelief he did so, as his sending them “after the host of the Syrians” rather than “unto the camp” (2Ki 7:5) indicates. Nor was their errand in vain: “And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste” (2Ki 7:15). It was no temporary spasm of fear that possessed them, but a thorough and lasting one. When God works, He works effectually.

“And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour *was* sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD” (2Ki 7:16). Of course it was, for no word of God’s can possibly fall to the ground, since it is the Word of Him “that cannot lie” (Tit 1:2). Men may scoff at it, kings may not believe it, even when its definite fulfilment is declared unto them; but that affects not its infallible verity. “Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to *all* that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise” (1Ki 8:56): Such will be the ringing testimony—individually and collectively—of the spiritual Israel when, for all eternity, they shall rest in the antitypical Canaan. It is to be noted that the prediction made through Elisha was fulfilled in no vague and mere general way, but specifically and to the letter. That, too, is recorded both for our instruction and our consolation.

Sixth, *its meaning*. After all we have sought to bring out upon this miracle, its typical significance should—in its broad outline at least—be plain to the simplest Christian reader. We say, “its broad outline,” for every detail in connection therewith is not to be regarded as a line in the picture. *First*, the starving Samaritans may surely be viewed as portraying of perishing sinners. They were not seeking unto God, nor looking to Him for relief. So far from it, they had turned their backs upon Him and given themselves up to idolatry. They were reduced to the most desperate straits, being quite unable to deliver themselves. As such, they accurately represented the condition and position of the fallen and depraved descendants of Adam. *Second*, in Benhadad and his hosts who sought the destruction of the Samaritans, we have a figure

of Satan and his legions who are relentlessly attempting to destroy the souls of men—"seeking whom he may devour" (1Pe 5:8). *Third*, in the Divine deliverance of the famished Israelites, by a miracle of sovereign mercy, we have a striking foreshadowment of the saving of God's elect. The particular aspect of the Gospel here adumbrated appears in the *strange means* which God employed to bring about deliverance; namely, His causing the Syrians themselves to supply the food for those they had designed to be their victims: Compare Judges 14:14. Does not this remind us forcibly of that verse: "That *through death* he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14)! As the Saviour Himself declared, "but this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luk 22:53), yet by allowing the Serpent to bruise His heel, He set free his captives. Incredible as it seems to the proud philosopher, it is by Christ's humiliation, His people are exalted; by His poverty, they are made rich; by His death, they have life; by His being made a "curse," all blessing comes to them!

Seventh, *its sequel*. "And the king [God working secretly in him to do so] appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God [not simply "Elisha"! ] had said, who spake when the king came down to him. And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king...And so it fell out unto him" (2Ki 7:17-20). Thus, in due course, the Divine threat was executed, fulfilled—be it noted, to the very letter. Solemn indeed was this, being the awful sequel to what was before us in verses 1, 2. In like manner, God will yet answer the scepticism and blasphemous scoffing of this degenerate age. The great of this world may laugh at the Lord's servants now; but in eternity, they shall gnash their teeth in anguish. This sequel completes the typical picture, showing as it does, the doom of the reprobate. The Gospel is a savour of death unto death, as well as of life unto life. Unbelievers will "see" the elect feasting with Christ, as "the rich man" saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, but shall not partake thereof (Luk 16:19-26).

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

### *7b. Its Stages*

"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1Jo 2:14). At the close of our last, we sought to describe some of the characteristic features of those whom we consider may justly be regarded as belonging to that class of Christians who are here designated "young men"—particularly as they are distinguished from the "babes" or "little children" (1Jo 2:13). Let it be understood that what we wrote thereon was in no spirit of dogmatism, but merely an expression of personal opinion. We consider that the spiritual "young men" are believers who have acquired a considerable knowledge of the Truth and are well established in the whole plan of doctrine as set forth in the Scriptures—though as yet lacking the deeper understanding thereof, as pertains to the "fathers." To which, we would add, they "*know* whom they have believed"<sup>1</sup> and "committed" their all—for we would certainly regard a Christian without assurance that Christ is *his* as still but a "babe"—though we do not expect all will agree to that.

"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." How different are the ways of God from men's—even those of good men! Many elderly Christians today would deem it most imprudent to write or say to their younger brethren, "Ye are strong...and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1Jo 2:14), fearing that such an assertion was "dangerous," because having a strong tendency to "puff up" its recipients—which only goes to show how little some of our thoughts are formed by the Word of God and how prone we all are to fleshly reasoning. Such an attitude is but a "shew of wisdom" (Col 2:23)—and a poor show at that, for it betrays both ignorance and silliness. Those who are "strong" spiritually are not at all likely to be puffed up by telling them the *truth*. Contrariwise, any who *are* puffed up by such a statement would demonstrate they were *weak*! Let us not seek to be wise above what is written, but rather set aside our proud reasonings and receive what God says, "as a little child" (Mar 10:15; Luk 18:17).

In making the above assertion, the apostle was certainly not seeking to flatter them—for he did not say, "ye have made yourselves strong." Rather, he was making a factual statement. In doing so, he, first, honoured the Holy Spirit, by owning *His* work within them: The explanation of that statement of fact was the gracious operations of the Spirit in their hearts. Second, he was expressing his own *joy*: It was a matter of delight to him that they *had*—by the grace of God—reached this stage of spiritual health and vigour. Third, it was said by way of encouragement to them. If, on the one hand, it be our duty to rebuke and reprove what is evil in fellow Christians, it equally becomes us to recognise and own whatever is good in them. A word of cheer and stimulus is often a real help. If there be "a time to break down," there is also "a time to build up" (Ecc 3:3). Paul did not hesitate to tell the Thessalonians, "your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth" (2Th 1:3).

By nature, the Christian was entirely devoid of spiritual power. Writing to the saints at Rome, Paul said, "For when we were yet *without* strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). Now that "yet" would be quite pointless if those to whom he was writing were *still* "without strength." "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of *power*, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2Ti 1:7). We dishonour the work of the blessed Spirit, if we view the regenerate as being in the same helpless plight as the unregenerate. At regeneration, we received spiritual life, and as Goodwin pertinently asks, "What is strength but life in an active vigor?" Are we not told, "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10), i.e. the more the believer delights himself in the Lord and rejoices in His perfections and his relation to Him, the more will his soul be invigorated, and his graces quickened. Does not the Psalmist acknowledge, Thou "strengthenedst me with strength *in my soul*" (Psa 138:3), so that he was no longer feeble in himself.

But let us not be misunderstood at this point. We are not arguing in favour of any kind of "strength" being imparted to the Christian which renders him in any wise self-sufficient. No indeed, perish the thought. Even the "fathers" are as completely dependent, moment by moment, upon Divine grace, as the youngest and feeblest babe in Christ. Paradoxical as it may sound to the carnal mind, the very "strength"

<sup>1</sup> hymn: "I Know Whom I Believed;" words: Daniel Whittle, 1883; Music: James McGranahan.

which is communicated at the new birth makes its recipient conscious (for the first time) of his utter *weakness*. It is the purity of the new nature in the soul which makes manifest the corruptions of his flesh. It is his reception of the earnest of his inheritance which makes him poor in spirit. It is the gift of faith which causes him to be sensible of the workings of unbelief. It is the life of God in the renewed which causes them to thirst and pant after God. Nevertheless, there is a real sense in which the Christian *is strong*—both comparatively with his unregenerate impotency, and relatively in himself.

“A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength” (Pro 24:5). In proportion as spiritual knowledge increases, so also does spiritual strength. The spirit is nourished and enriched both for spiritual work and warfare by true wisdom. As we have so often reminded the reader, growth in grace and in spiritual knowledge are inseparably connected (2Pe 3:18). There is a strength of courage, of fortitude, of resolution, which enables its possessor to stand firm against opposition, to overcome difficulties, to endure trials and afflictions. But the reverse of that is expressed in, “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small” (Pro 24:10). If, in the day of testing and trial, thy spirits sink so that thy hands hang down and thy knees become weak; if, when afflictions come, thou takest the line of least resistance, neglect the means of grace, and are unfitted for duties—then “thy strength is small,” and such an attitude will further weaken it. Unto such, that word is especially appropriate, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psa 27:14).

The order there is to be carefully noted: First, an acknowledgement of our dependency upon the Lord. Second, a being of good courage. Third, the Divine promise unto those who are of good courage. Fourth, trusting God for the fulfilment of His promise of further strength. It is unto those who have, that more is given (Mat 25:29); it is those who make use of the grace bestowed, who receive larger supplies. “God more ordinarily vouchsafeth adjuvant (extra-assisting) efficacious grace to overcome temptations according to the measure of grace, habitual or inherent; and therefore, when men (we) are grown up to more radical inward strength, He gives more effectual assisting strength, and (accordingly), He meeteth forth temptations to the ability our inward man is furnished withal, as that we are able to bear them (1Co 10:13). He vouchsafes His actual supplies of aiding strength according to the proportion of that inherent stock of ability He sees in the inner man; and then, as the conflicts grow greater, our additional aids are together therewith increased” (T. Goodwin).

Without further quoting verbatim from this writer, we will summarise and paraphrase his next paragraph, with which we are in hearty accord. The grace of God indeed works freely, and He ties Himself absolutely to no rules and measures, but ever acts according to His own good pleasure. He takes liberty to withhold His supplies of assisting grace—even from those who have most inherent grace, to show us the weakness of all our grace as it is in us, withholding from the “strong” (Rom 15:1), His further influencing grace, which moves us both to will and to do—to evidence that His grace is tied to none. This we see, both in David and Hezekiah, when they had grown up to this middle age in grace. Yet, that alters not the fact that in His ordinary dispensations, God gives more grace to those who make good use of what they already have: “every branch that *beareth fruit*, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (Joh 15:2). The promise of being “made fat” is not to the sluggard, but to “the soul of the diligent” (Pro 13:4).

To sum up. By the apostle’s “young men, because ye are *strong*” (1Jo 2:14), we understand that through using the means of grace, by increased spiritual knowledge, by appropriating the strength which is in Christ Jesus (2Ti 2:1), through exercising the graces of the new man, by improving (profiting from) the varied experiences through which they had passed, and by the assisting operations of the Holy Spirit—they had developed from “babes” into a higher spiritual stature and were the better qualified to use their spiritual muscles. It is written, “But they that wait upon the LORD [which refers not so much to an act as it is descriptive of an attitude found in all the regenerate who are in a healthy condition] shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:31). There *is* such a thing as overcoming spiritual weakness or babyhood, but not of continual dependence on the Lord. There is such an experience as going on “from strength to strength” (Psa 84:7). Though without Christ, I can do nothing (Joh 15:5); yet through Him strengthening me, “I can do all things” (Phi 4:13).

“And the word of God abideth in you” (1Jo 2:14). We regard that clause as connected first with the preceding one, as casting light upon and furnishing a (partial) explanation of *why* these “young men” were “strong,” as revealing to us one of the principal sources and means of their spiritual strength. And at the same time, it also serves to define the nature of the strength mentioned—namely, as inherent grace, as some

thing *within* themselves. It is by the pure milk of the Word that the babe in Christ grows (1Pe 2:2), and it is by that Word abiding in him that he becomes strong, that the faculties or graces of the new man are kept healthy and vigorous. But, second, we regard that clause as having an intimate bearing on the one that follows—seeing that it ends, as well as begins with the word, “and.” For it was by means of the Word of God abiding in them that these young men had been enabled to “overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:13, 14)—by the “word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psa 17:4).

“Ye have overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:13, 14). Note, first, this is not an exhortation or intimation of duty: It is not “ye ought to”—but “ye have.” Second, this is not predicated as a rare experience peculiarly to some exceptionally exalted saint, but is postulated of the whole of this company—“*ye* have.” Third, it is not described either as a present process or a future attainment, but as an accomplished thing: Not “ye are overcoming” or “will” do so—but “ye *have* overcome the wicked one.” Little wonder that Goodwin said on this point, “There is a second and greater difficulty [beyond defining the “ye are strong”]; namely, How and in what respect they are said more eminently [i.e. than the “babes”] to have overcome Satan? For are they not in their conflicts apt to be overcome and to yield to corrupt affections? and how far they may be overcome [by those] is not to be determined by man”—the words in brackets are, in each instance, our own additions.

“Ye have overcome the wicked one.” Whatever difficulty we may experience in understanding the meaning of those words, there is surely no occasion for us to needlessly add to the difficulty. We must be very careful with this verse—as with all others—not to read into it what is not there. It does not say, “ye have overcome the *flesh*”—that the young men had obtained victory over their inward corruptions. It is a most significant fact, and one which should exert great influence on our thinking at this point, that while this Epistle speaks of overcoming “the wicked one” and overcoming “the world” (1Jo 5:4), it does not speak of believers overcoming their lusts. It is true, we are bidden to mortify our members which are upon the earth (Col 3:5); and that in varying degrees, all the regenerate do so. It is also true that the grace of God effectually teaches its recipients to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit 2:12); but Scripture nowhere affirms that any saint “overcame the flesh.”

As intimated above, we believe that the preceding clause, “and the word of God abideth in you” throws light upon those words which have presented such a difficulty unto so many—“and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1Jo 2:14). First, because they declare unto us the principal *means* by which the Enemy is overcome; namely, the Word of God, which is expressly designated, “the Sword of the Spirit”—the one offensive weapon which is to be used against the “wicked” (Eph 6:16, 17). Supreme demonstration of that was given by the Lord Jesus when He was attacked by the Devil. He then gave proof that the Word dwelt richly in Him, that the Word of God abode in His affections and thoughts, and was the Regulator of His ways. To each of Satan’s temptations, He replied, “It is written.” He did not parley with the Enemy, He did not reason or argue with him; He took His stand on the authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God and refused to turn aside therefrom; and *thereby*, He overcame him. In *that*, Christ has both left us an example that we should follow His steps and given us such encouragement as ensures success.

But second, it seems to us that the clause, “and the word of God abideth in you” not only signifies the means to be used; but also—and perhaps chiefly—intimates the very nature of *wherein* the young men had “overcome the wicked one.” In other words, the very fact that it could be said of them, “the word of God abideth in you” was itself the grand *proof* of their victory over the great Adversary. In His parable of the Sower, our Lord taught that the seed sown was the Word, and that which fell by the wayside, “the fowls of the air came and devoured it up” (Mar 4:4). In His interpretation, Christ explained that to signify: “Satan cometh immediately and *taketh away* the Word that was sown in their hearts” (Mar 4:15). That shows plainly that the primary and principal aim of the Devil is to prevent the Word of God finding a permanent abode in the human heart; and in the case of the vast majority of our fellows, he is permitted to succeed. To a very large percentage of professing Christians, the Lord says—as He did to the Jews who had much head knowledge of the Son—“And ye have *not* his word *abiding* in you” (Joh 5:38).

We are living in a day of such darkness that this generation *is* “ignorant of his devices” (2Co 2:11). Many of God’s own people seek to blame Satan for what originates with themselves. Note well the following statements: “From within, out of the heart of men [not ‘from the Devil’], thoughts, adulteries, fornicators, murders...all these evils come from *within*” (Mar 7:21, 23). “Now the works of the flesh [not ‘of the Devil’] are manifest, which are these; adultery...envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and

such like” (Gal 5:19-21). “But every man is tempted, when he is [not ‘assailed by the Evil one,’ but] drawn away of his *own* lust” (Jam 1:14). But pride works, and we do not wish to think that we are so evil and vile, and so we attempt to escape the onus by attributing to Satan what we—ourselves—are responsible for. There is no need for Satan to tempt men to such things as those passages mention. He works far more subtly and insidiously than that.

If we go back to Genesis 3, where we have the earliest mention of Satan—and the first mention of any thing in Scripture invariably supplies the key to subsequent references—we are shown the realm in which he works and the central object of his attack. That realm is the *religious*, and that object is the Word of God. His opening words to Eve were, “Yea hath God said?” calling into question a “thus saith the Lord.” As he seeks night and day to *prevent* God’s Word entering the human heart, so he labours incessantly to *remove* it when it has entered. One of his favourite tactics is to inject of spiritual babes, to get them to question the inspiration of the Scriptures. Under the imposing terms of “modern thought,” “scholarship,” “the discoveries of science,” he seeks to sap the foundation of faith. Where that fails, appeal is made to the conflicting views to the sects and denominations to discredit the inerrancy of the Word. Where that fails, recourse is had to human “tradition” in order to set aside the Oracles of God.

It is far too little realised that every attack which is made upon the Word of God, every denial of its verbal inspiration and Divine authority, repudiation of its sufficiency as being our alone Rule of faith and practice, every corruption of its doctrine, and every perversion of the ordinances and worship of the Triune God, are *from the Devil*. Many of the “babes” in Christ are severely shaken by those attacks and are tossed to and fro by various winds of erroneous doctrine. Nevertheless, Divine grace preserves them, and as they grow in grace and knowledge, as they become more cautious of whom they hear and what they read, as they become established in the Truth, they triumph over the Enemy. He *fails* to destroy their faith in the Scriptures, to lead them astray by “damnable heresies” (2Pe 2:1), to catch away the Seed sown in their hearts; and therefore, the Word of God abiding in them is sure *proof* that they *have* “overcome the wicked one.” As the same apostle goes on to say in his fourth chapter, “many false prophets are gone out into the world,” and then he added, “ye are of God little children [the term of endearment], and have *overcome*” (1Jo 4:1, 4)!



## THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

### *6b. Its Effectuation*

That which is here to engage our attention is the work performed by the Mediator, in order to heal the breach between a righteous God and His sinful people—and thus, effect a mutual reconciliation. This will bring before us the most wonderful, awe-inspiring, and glorious events in all the ways and works of God. It will conduct us to ground, which is ineffably holy, and on which it becomes to tread with the utmost reverence and circumspection. The work of Christ is absolutely unique, being without precedent or parallel. Nothing whatever can be known about it—save that which is revealed thereon in Holy Writ—neither philosophy, science, nor metaphysics, can afford us the slightest assistance in the understanding thereof. Carnal reasoning concerning it is utterly worthless and highly presumptuous. The great mystery of godliness is made known unto *faith*: Yet, the utmost diligence and earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit's aid, are called for in our searching of the Scriptures, and in carefully weighing all they make known on the Death Divine—that faith may lack no part of the foundation on which it is to rest, and none of the materials on which it is to feed.

In our last, we sought to present more or less a general survey of the ground we hope to cover under this particular aspect of our subject: Now we must proceed to more detail. This will require us to examine closely what the Incarnate Son did in order to “make peace” between an offended God and His lawbreaking people, what was the relation Christ bore to them, the character in which He acted in that stupendous undertaking, and what was the office He discharged therein. It is all important at the outset to recognise that *the Person* we are to be occupied with was none other than Jehovah's “fellow” (Zec 13:7)—co-essential and co-equal with the Father and the Spirit. Though God the Son took upon Him human nature and became the Son of man; yet in so doing, He ceased not to be a Divine Person. It was the theanthropic (Divine human) constitution of His person which qualified Him for His mediation—for as the God-man, nothing could be too difficult for Him to effect, or too great for Him to accomplish: The dignity of His person gave infinite value to His work.

The wrong done by sin unto God was so incalculably enormous; and His hatred of the same is so great that only a perfect and infinitely meritorious satisfaction could appease Him—and obviously, such a satisfaction could be rendered by none, but a person of infinite dignity and worth. Our sins are committed against the infinite Majesty of Heaven; and therefore, are they infinitely culpable, and unless an atonement of infinite value is made for us, our sins must entail infinite suffering—hence, the punishment of the wicked is necessarily *eternal*. Sin—so far as it could do so—struck at the very throne of God: It was an act of high treason, a disowning of His authority, an attempt on the part of the creature to overthrow the Divine government. Sin has made such a breach in the order of things appointed by God, that no mere creature could possibly repair it—least of all, man, for *he* is the culprit, guilty and defiled. If, then, the breach is to be healed, God must lay “help upon one that is *mighty*” (Psa 89:19).

Writing on “The heinousness of human guilt,” James Hervey said,

“Ten thousand volumes, written on purpose to display the aggravations of my various acts of disobedience, could not so effectually convince me of their inconceivable enormity, as the consideration of that all-glorious Person, who, to make an atonement for them, spilt the last drop of His blood. I have sinned, may every child of Adam say; and what shall I do unto Thee, O Thou Observer of men? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Vain commutation! and such as would be rejected by the blessed God with the utmost abhorrence. Will all the potentates—that sway the sceptre in a thousand kingdoms—devote their royal and honoured lives to rescue an obnoxious creature, from the stroke of vengeance? Alas! it must cost more, incomparably more, to expiate the malignity of sin and save a guilty wretch from Hell. Will all the principalities of Heaven be content to assume my nature and resign themselves to death for my pardon? Even this would be too mean a satisfaction for inexorable Justice—too scanty a reparation of God's injured honour.

“So flagrant is human guilt that nothing but a victim of infinite dignity could constitute an adequate propitiation. *He* who said, ‘Let there be light: and there was light’ (Gen 1:3), ‘Let there be a firmament’ (Gen 1:6), and immediately the blue curtains floated in the sky; *He* must take flesh, *He* must feel the fierce torments of crucifixion and pour out His soul in agonies, if ever such transgressors are pardoned.”

There could be no satisfaction for the sinner without atonement, for God has declared He “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7). Equally evident is it that no atonement can be made by the violator of God’s Law, for he can neither provide reparation for past offences—being a moral bankrupt, devoid of any merit; nor render perfect obedience in the present—being a depraved creature. God’s Law requires righteousness of character before it will receive righteousness of conduct; and therefore, a fallen creature is utterly disqualified to render acceptable obedience. The Law will not compound with our sinfulness by modifying its holy requirements: “Pay that which thou owest” is its unchanging demand.

After what has been pointed out, it should be quite clear that, first, in order to save His people from their sins, the incarnate Son of God must serve as their *Substitute*—acting in their stead and rendering satisfaction to the Law for them. By substitution, it is meant, the transference of obligation from those who incurred it to One who willingly shouldered the same in their stead. The substitutionary death of Christ means far more than that He died for the *benefit* of all who savingly believe in Him: It signifies that He entered their Law-place and received what was due them; and that through His sacrificial death, He so expiated their sins that nothing can be laid to their charge—that they stand “unblameable and unreprouvable” in God’s sight (Col 1:22). “But he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with *his* stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18).

Though there be no parallel to the greatest transaction in all history, though there be no analogy to the relations Christ sustained to God and to His people in any of the relations of mere creatures to one another, yet God has graciously adapted a series of *types*—historical and ceremonial—to the illustration of His grand plan of redemption, and to adumbrate various aspects of the office and work of Christ; and in them, the wisdom of God is signally displayed. Of the first person to whom the Holy Spirit ascribes faith, it is recorded that, “Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb 11:4). Cain brought of the fruit of the ground (the product of his own toil) an offering unto the Lord; but unto it, He “had not respect” (Gen 4:5). But Abel brought “of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” (Gen 4:4)—showing it had been slain. Realising that death was his due—but that God graciously accepted a substitute in his place—he put a bleeding lamb between his sinful self and the Holy God.

The same elementary, yet fundamental, truth was taught the Hebrews on that most memorable night in their history. Jehovah had declared, “About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And *all* the firstborn *in* [not ‘of’] the land of Egypt shall die” (Exo 11:4, 5). Sufficient attention had not been paid to the words we have put in italics. There were to be no exceptions: The firstborn sons of Israel equally with the Egyptians were to be slain. But though no exception was made, a difference was drawn: A *substitute* was provided for the former; though not for the latter. The Israelites were bidden to take a male lamb, without blemish, to slay it, and sprinkle its blood on the posts of their doors, and the Lord promised, “when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exo 12:13). The angel of death entered not their houses, for judgment had already been executed there, the lamb being slain as the substitute. In the light of that, we are to understand, “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1Co 5:7).

But it was in the wilderness—after the Levitical priesthood was appointed and the tabernacle had been erected—that the Lord taught His people more fully the grand truth of pardon and cleansing, acceptance and blessing, through a substitute. A wide field of study is here opened to us, but we can only now briefly mention its outstanding lessons. First, in the unblemished animal required for sacrifice, God showed His people the perfections of the substitute in the room of their imperfections. Second, in their being required to bring such an offering, the claims of God were enforced. Third, in the words, “he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him” (Lev 1:4), there was an identifying of the offerer with his offering. Fourth, on the great day of atonement, Aaron was required to “lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat” (Lev 16:21); thereby, a transfer of guilt being signified.

Fifth, an Israelite was not only required to furnish the offering, but “he shall *kill* the bullock before the LORD” (Lev 1:5) was the order: Thereby, he acknowledged that death was his own due and proof was furnished of God’s displeasure against sin. Sixth, “And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces” (Lev 9:24, and compare 1Ki 18:38; 2Ch 7:1). In that *fire*, we see the holy wrath of the

Judge consuming the victim in the sinner's room. Seventh, "And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin" (Num 19:9). "In the *ashes*, we have the proof that the wrath had spent itself, that the penalty was paid, that the work was done. 'It is finished' was the voice of the ashes" (H. Bonar). Thus was God's mercy expressed in a righteous way.

The main thing to grasp in connection with the sacrifices—to which we have all too briefly alluded—is that they were not Eucharistic, but expiatory; not tokens of thanksgiving, but vicarious oblations. The animal or bird was put in the place of the one who brought it, and is termed, an "offering unto the LORD *for his sin*," and it would "make an atonement for him concerning his sin" (Lev 5:6). It was, then, a substitutionary sacrifice—slain in the stead of the offerer, to signify what he deserved, and by which, he was personally saved from undergoing the penalty. It was literally and specifically a life for a life; a life devoted to God in sacrifice. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement [a propitiation or appeasement] for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev 17:11). Therefore, did God enjoin upon His people, "No soul of you shall eat blood" (Lev 17:12), it was to be held sacred by them.

Should it be asked, Why did God appoint the slaying of animals, the bringing of so many costly offerings to His altar, which were so frequently repeated? The answer is simple and conclusive, though it may be stated in a variety of ways. It was to signify that, in the purpose of God, the antitypical Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. It was to inform His people that they must look outside themselves for salvation. It was to keep before them a continual reminder of His righteousness and what sin called for at His hands. It was to educate men for "the good things to come" by shadowing forth the great sacrifice (Heb 9:11). It was to furnish the N. T. saints with an infallible dictionary, for if we would understand the language which Christ and His apostles used in connection with the Sacrifice of Calvary, we must needs define the terms employed of the grand Antitype by the meaning they obviously bear in the types—as 1Co 5:7 is to be interpreted in the light of Exodus 12.

It is in the light of the Levitical offerings that we should read "the Gospel of Isaiah 53" and regard the N.T. references to the atoning sacrifice of our Saviour. Who can fail to see that the words, "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6) look back to: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall *bear upon him* all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited" (Lev 16:21, 22); and that "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1Pe 2:24) is an echo of the same language. When we read that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1Co 15:3), are we not to regard the reference as being both the types and the prophecies of the O. T.? When we are told that, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died *for us*" (Rom 5:8), can it signify anything else than that—as a sacrificial offering was slain in the stead of the offerer—so Christ endured the penalty which our sins call for!

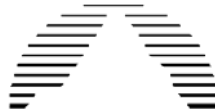
It needs to be insisted upon that the death of Christ was something more than an unparalleled act of benevolence, enduring crucifixion for the good of others: It was a penal death, in which He vicariously endured the penalty of the Law in the stead of others. The suffering of martyrs for the good of their cause, of patriots for their country, of philanthropists for mankind, are *not* "vicarious"—for they are not *substitutionary*. Vicarious suffering is suffering endured in the place of others. Christ's sufferings were vicarious in precisely the same way that the death of animals in the O.T. sacrifices was in lieu of the death of the transgressors offering them. While in many passages of the N.T., the Holy Spirit has used the Greek "*huper*" which is rendered "for"—yet in Mark 10:45, He has employed the decisive "*anti*"—"give his life a ransom for [*anti*—in the stead of] many;" and in Matthew 2:22, "*anti*" is rightly rendered "in the room of": Compare Matthew 5:38, Luke 11:11, Romans 12:17, where "*anti*" is rendered "for."

But does not the substitutionary sufferings of Christ raise a difficulty even in the minds of the reverent? Let us face it squarely and state it frankly: Was it altogether *just* that an innocent person should suffer in the stead of the guilty? At the back of many minds, there lurks the suspicion that—though it was amazing grace and surpassing love which gave the Lord of glory to die for poor sinners—yet was it not, strictly speaking, a breach of equity? Was it right that One who perfectly honoured God and illustriously magnified His Law by a flawless and perpetual obedience, should have to suffer its penalty and endure its awful curse? To answer, It *had* to be: There was no other way of saving us, supplies no direct answer to the ques-

tion; nay, it is merely arguing on the jesuitical basis that “the end justifies the means.” Far better to remain silent in token of our ignorance, than thus to sully the character of God. But such a suspicion is groundless; and such ignorance, causeless—as we hope to yet show.

To say that sin must be punished, that the penalty of the broken law could not be revoked, is but to repeat what Scripture clearly affirms; but to draw the conclusion that, therefore, an innocent Substitute had to be penalized in the stead of the guilty, is to impeach the Divine justice. Every regenerated person must feel that it had been infinitely better for the whole of Adam’s race to have suffered eternally in Hell, rather than that God should act *unrighteously* in delivering His people therefrom. Such a thing could not be, for God “cannot deny himself” (2Ti 2:13)—i.e. act contrary to His own perfections. “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psa 145:17); and most certainly, the greatest and grandest of His works—that which supremely manifested and promoted His glory—is no exception to that rule. He has declared Himself to be “a *just God* and a Saviour” (Isa 45:21), and never was His justice more gloriously displayed than at the Cross.

Of old, the question was asked, “who ever perished, being *innocent*?” (Job 4:7); and surely, we may unhesitatingly reply, No one ever did under the righteous government of God. He who “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7), will by no means afflict the innocent. Startling as it must sound, it was not the innocent whom the sword of Divine justice smote at Calvary. And this brings us to say, secondly, in order to be our Saviour, Christ had to act as the Substitute of His people; and in order to be their Substitute, He first assumed the office of *Surety*. As their Surety, as their legal Representative, Christ took upon Him their legal obligations—as the husband assumes the debts of the woman he marries. The guilt of His people’s sins were charged to Christ’s account; and therefore, justice legally and righteously exacted payment from Him. Though personally innocent, Christ was *officially guilty* when He suffered, “the just for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18). Much remains yet to be said, but here we must stop.



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