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# **STUDIES**

## **IN THE**

# **SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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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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## IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY – 2

In our last, we virtually covered the ground intended; but after pondering the same, we feel there are one or two points rather in need of clarification and amplification. For example, the presence of so many nominal Christians among the regenerate, and the task of distinguishing the one from the other. It is true that in every age, there have been a large number of empty professors; yet for the most part, they were easily recognised—by those who measured their outward conduct by the rules of Scripture. It is equally true that some of God's own children suffer spiritual declines; and while they be in a backslidden state, they differ, practically, very little from the unregenerate—as Paul said of the Galatians, “I stand in doubt of you” (Gal 4:20). Backsliders have no Scriptural warrant to regard themselves as children of God; still less to expect others to accredit them as such. But it is not of them we write; but rather of the ones who bear the marks of those who are in Christ Jesus.

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall *suffer persecution*” (2Ti 3:12). It is to be duly noted that this verse occurs in a passage which describes a time of apostasy; and therefore, it is one which is most pertinent to our own day. “The last days” of verse 1 do not signify the closing days of this era, but mean this Christian age itself, which is the *final one* in the earth's history. In this last dispensation, there would be “perilous times” (2Ti 3:1)—there would occur and *recur* seasons of declension and departure from God, for the passage is describing not the profane world, but the professing world; not the character and condition of men in general, but that of nominal Christians in particular. This is clear from “lovers of pleasures *more than* lovers of God” (2Ti 3:4), for those in the professing world do not pretend unto any love for Him. It is further borne out by what is said in verse 5. It is this feature of it which makes the passage of such deep importance to us at the present juncture.

Now, if one carefully notes the different characteristics enumerated in verses 2 to 4, there should be no difficulty in identifying those who possess the same. Not that *all* of those features are stamped on each one of them, yet sufficient to classify them. And it is not the slightest breach of charity—but rather, a sober statement of fact—when we say that many, in fact most, of those very features are now borne by the majority of “church members” professing to be Christians; yet who are highly indignant if any one dared to challenge their claim. But God requires us *to* judge them and act accordingly: “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such *turn away*” (2Ti 3:5). That clearly implies two things: That God's people are able to clearly recognise such characters; and that they must have no fellowship with them. Should they disregard that injunction, the consequences would be most serious—compare Revelation 18:4.

Those mentioned in verse 5—and there are a multitude of such today—are described as, first, “having a form of godliness,” which means that they have a religious veneer. They bear the name of Christ, belong to some so-called evangelical church, and seek to create the impression that they are regenerate people. But like the foolish virgins, they “took their lamps, and took no oil with them” (Mat 25:3, 4)—they are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, nor made partakers of the transforming grace of God. For it is said of them, secondly, “but denying the power thereof” (2Ti 3:5)—the *reality* of vital godliness is lacking, the beauties of holiness are not found in them. By their lips, they claim to be godly, but by their lives, they give the lie to it. “They profess that they know God; but in *works* they *DENY* him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Tit 1:16). And with such, the children of God are to have nothing to do—to shun them as they would the plague.

In contrast from such characters, the apostle said to Timothy, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, *manner of life*, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, *persecutions*, afflictions” (2Ti 3:10, 11). There is the genuine gold, set over against the tinsel. There is the power of godliness, set over against the mere “form” of it. It consists of soundness in doctrine, for where there is not *that*, there can be none of the others. It consists of a definitely-marked “manner of life,” treading the path of obedience, in subjection to God's authority. It consists of the presence and exercise of spiritual graces. It consists of evoking and encountering the hatred and opposition of godless religionists. Then Paul adds—as though to say, *my* testimony and experience is common to the redeemed—“Yea, and *all* that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Ti 3:12).

Once more, we would emphasise the fact that 2 Timothy 3:12 occurs in a passage which is describing a season of declension and departure from God—as the verse which immediately follows also goes on to show. Those seasons of declension are designated “perilous times” in the opening verse of the chapter; and

therefore, we must supply answer to the question, What is it that particularly constitutes any “time” or season “perilous” to Christendom? Surely, the reply is obvious: It is the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit’s power, when His gracious operations and unction are withheld, because despite has been done to Him. Then it is that the restraining hand of God is also removed, and the flesh is given more or less free rein. The consequences are obvious: Instead of peace, there will be strife, prayer becomes formal, preaching is flat and profitless, hoary “tradition” supplants “the present truth” (2Pe 1:12); and a dead orthodoxy is the result. Soon, a dead orthodoxy is followed by heterodoxy, the Standard is lowered, worldliness comes in apace, and Christ is shut out (Rev 3:20).

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2Ti 3:13). It is *religious* “seducers” who are in view, the unregenerate men who occupy most of our pulpits today; and who by their “form of godliness” (2Ti 3:5) delude the unwary—delude them, because they fail to perceive that their lives (moral and respectable though they be) deny the power or reality and efficacy of the same. “Perilous” indeed is a season when such preachers abound. And what the special word to *us* at such a time? The next verse answers: “But *continue thou* in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of” (2Ti 3:14). Be not swayed by what nearly every other professor is doing—look well to thine own bearings. “Continue thou,” depart not from “acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Tit 1:1). If others are determined to make shipwreck of the faith, see to it that you “work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling.”

But remember that faithfulness will cost you something. In a “perilous” time, you may—probably will—have to walk *alone*, as Enoch did. If you resolve that by Divine grace you will “live godly in Christ Jesus,” then know you that “persecution” must be your portion. And that persecution will come upon you not from atheists and infidels, but from those bearing the name of Christians. It will issue from those who still keep up a “form (or semblance) of godliness,” but who are strangers to its living power. It will come to you from empty professors whose compromising ways are condemned by your refusal to conform thereto; whose worldliness and carnality is rebuked by your spirituality. It was the religious leaders of Israel who hounded the Saviour to His death! Thus, it is by their godly living the true are distinguished from the false, and by the *opposition* which they meet with from the latter, that they may be clearly identified. Their care to avoid what they call “singularity” and “puritanism”—and thus, to escape “persecution”—is what *exposes* the empty professor!

The true people of God, then, are clearly distinguished from empty professors. The characteristic marks of the former, being: Their determination to live, at all costs, a godly life; and, in consequence, their suffering persecution in various forms—not only from open infidels, but particularly, from unregenerate church-members. The latter have something of “the form of godliness,” but are strangers to its *power* or vital influence. Genuine “godliness” is consistent, all of a piece, evidencing itself in every situation and circumstance. Those with merely the “form” are “religious” only at certain times, and in certain relations. The one is a new nature within manifesting itself without; the other is naught, but an external cloak, seeking to hide the old man. The one issues from filial fear and spiritual love; the other, from servile fear and selfish love. The one is vitalized by the Holy Spirit; the other is regulated by selfish considerations, or is stimulated by emotion. The one is lasting; the other is only evanescent.

## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 16. Ephesians 1:15-23 – Part 2

Our fathers were wont to say, “A word to the wise is sufficient,” and so it ought to be—to a receptive mind and responsive heart, a hint should be enough. Thus, if a godly and mature saint who is deeply interested in my spiritual welfare and more or less acquainted with me, wrote to say he was praying ceaselessly that God would grant me a larger measure of patience, or that He would make me more humble, then if I value his judgment, I shall at once regard that as a gracious word from God, informing me what *I* specially need to be petitioning Him for. It is thus we should look upon this prayer we are now considering. In making known to these saints what he sought from the Throne of grace on their behalf, the apostle intimated—indirectly, yet none the less really—what they needed to make the particular burden of *their* supplications; and hence, if the Ephesian saints required to ask these blessings of Heaven, most certainly, God’s people today need to do so. Let us then view this prayer as a Divine revelation to us, instructing us of the things which we most need to pray for.

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph 1:17). In addition to the notes given in our last—upon the particular titles accorded the Object now supplicated—we believe that Deity is here viewed thus, for the strengthening of our faith and the firing of our hearts. Request is to be made for a fuller knowledge and a closer communion with God, and to encourage us to ask for this in confidence, we are assured that it is “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and to stimulate our aspirations, we are reminded that He is “the Father of glory” (Eph 1:17). Then with what trustful reliance should we present these petitions! With what ardour should we seek for their fulfilment! If God be believingly viewed in these characters, it will have a most animating effect upon the soul. It is the God who so loved us as to give His only-begotten Son for us, the God who was the all-absorbing “Portion” of our Saviour during the days of His flesh; it is His and our *covenant God*. Further, it is the most glorious Father whom Christ revealed and of whom we have already obtained a glimpse in the face of the Redeemer.

We are living in a day of such appalling ignorance that nothing may be taken for granted; and therefore, it needs to be pointed out that in asking God for these particular things, the apostle did not signify the Ephesians were totally devoid of them, any more than his opening, “Grace be to you, and peace” (Eph 1:2) implied they possessed neither the one nor the other, but rather that he desired for them an increase of both. Thus, it is here. They already had a saving knowledge of God, or he would not have addressed them as “saints” and “faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph 1:1). In asking God to grant them “spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:17), he most certainly was not making request for the Spirit to be given them for the first time, for he had just affirmed in the context that they were “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). No, rather was he making request for further supplies and a richer outpouring of the Spirit upon them. Thus, too, must we understand the words, “in the knowledge of him”—it was for a fuller, deeper, closer acquaintance and fellowship with Him, an “*increasing* in the knowledge of God,” as Colossians 1:10 expresses it. So, too, must we regard each of the other things prayed for.

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the [S]pirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:17). The careful reader will note that the word “Spirit” is spelt with a small “s” in his Bible, and our capitalizing of it calls for an explanation. The original Greek manuscripts were written in capitals throughout, so that there is nothing to distinguish between “the Spirit” and “the spirit”; and thus, it is entirely a matter of interpretation on the part of the translators in using the small or capital letter. Where it is “the Holy Spirit” or “the Spirit of God,” all is quite clear; but when it is simply “the spirit,” it is not always easy to decide. To Nicodemus, Christ said that which “is born of the Spirit is *spirit*” (Joh 3:6)—the principle of grace or “new nature,” which is imparted to the regenerate, partakes of the character of its Beggetter or Communicator, and is named after Him. Consequently, there are some passages when it is rather difficult to determine whether it be the Giver or His gift which is in view, whether the reference be to the Person of the Spirit, or to His gracious operations—the one being so inseparably connected with the other. In such cases, this writer includes *both*.

The word “spirit” is sometimes used as expressive of such mental states and acts as the new nature brings forth in the believer, yet under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we read of “the spirit of meekness” (1Co 4:21), “the same spirit of faith” (2Co 4:13), “the spirit of your mind” (Eph 4:23). On the other

hand, when we read of “the Spirit of truth” (Joh 15:26), “the spirit of holiness” (Rom 1:4), “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9)—that it is the person of the Spirit who is in view. But when we are told, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” etc. (Gal 5:22), what are we to understand? In the context, the apostle has described some of “the works of the flesh” or old nature (Gal 5:19-21); therefore, we conclude that it is the products of the new nature or “spirit” which are set over in contrast from them; yet, since the new nature only bears fruit as it is energized by the indwelling Spirit, then He is the real Author of that fruit and is to be acknowledged as such. Thus, this writer would give the two-fold meaning to “the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22—namely, what the Spirit of God produces through the principle of grace in the regenerate. And it is *thus*, he regards the expression in the verse now before us.

It is true that the saint received “the spirit of wisdom” (Eph 1:17) at the time of his regeneration (adumbrated by the case of the one described in Mark 5:15, and compare 2 Timothy 1:7)—for that is one of the things which distinguishes him from the natural man who is possessed of a spirit of folly and ignorance; nevertheless, it was the Holy Spirit who imparted the same to him and who is also the Author of its development and activities. But something more than “the spirit of wisdom” is here included—namely, “revelation,” which cannot be understood of a gift inherent. Had it been only “the spirit of wisdom,” we should have regarded it as referring to a principle infused into Christians, but “revelation” necessarily implies a Revealer—for revealing is an act of one without us, of a person distinct from us; and who that person is, Scripture leaves us in no doubt. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath *revealed* them unto us *by his Spirit*...we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1Co 2:9, 10, 12).

Our understanding, then, of this opening petition is that the apostle first sought from God an increased measure of the Spirit for the Ephesians from whom all spiritual wisdom comes to us, and who reveals or discovers to our hearts the certainty, the reality, the surpassing blessedness of Divine things; and second, that there might be an enlargement of the gift of wisdom bestowed upon them, a fuller capacity to take in the things of God, that He would make unto them further “manifestations” of Himself (Joh 14:21), that they might perceive more clearly His ineffable and soul-satisfying glory, that He make good His promise, “all thy children shall be taught of the LORD” (Isa 54:13)—for it is in such ways that we obtain “the knowledge of him” (Eph 1:17; 2Pe 1:3). And that leads us to ask more distinctly: *Of whom?*—of the Father, or of Christ? Some answer of the former, but the majority of the latter, being unduly influenced by Philippians 3:8. The “Father of glory” (Eph 1:17) is the One spoken of in the immediate context, and it is to Him that the “*his* calling,” “*his* inheritance,” and “*his* mighty power” of verses 18 and 19 clearly refer. Yet it was as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” that He is specifically viewed; so putting the two together, it is the knowledge of *God in Christ* which is here referred to.

Coming to the substance of this petition, what is meant by “in the *knowledge* of him”? As there is more than one kind of faith spoken of in Scripture, so there are several species of “knowledge”—not only of different objects and subjects known, but ways of knowing the same. One may know or be fully assured from the testimony of reliable witnesses that fire produces most unpleasant effects if an unprotected hand be thrust into it. But if I have personally felt the consequences of being burned, then I have quite a different order of knowledge: The one may be termed notional; the other, experiential—usually, though wrongfully, termed “experimental.” The distinction which is frequently drawn between “real” and “assumed” knowledge does not define the difference. When the unclean spirit said to Christ, “*I know thee* who thou art” (Mar 1:24; Luk 4:34), his knowledge was both a real and accurate one, but it profited him nothing spiritually. On the other hand, “they that *know* thy name *will* put their trust in thee” (Psa 9:10) speaks of a knowledge which inspires such confidence that its possessor cannot but believe.

As there are *degrees* of trusting God, so there are in our knowledge of Him, and the measure in which we know Him savingly will determine the extent of which we love Him, trust and obey Him. Since that be the case, we may at once perceive the vital importance of obtaining a fuller knowledge of God, and why this is the *first* petition of the four. The defectiveness of our faith, love, and obedience is to be traced to the inadequacy of our knowledge of God. If we were more intimately and influentially acquainted with Him, we should love Him more fervently, trust Him more implicitly, and obey Him more freely. The value of a better knowledge of God cannot be sufficiently realised by us. But let us again remark, it is not a mere notional knowledge of Him, but a visual and vital one. The former kind is one in which ideas or mental images are presented to the understanding to work upon; but the latter is what brings the reality of them

down into the heart. It is such a knowledge in the soul, as whereby we behold the glory of the Lord and are "changed into the same image" (2Co 3:18).

There is also a knowledge by way of special "gifts," which is quite distinct from this spiritual knowledge. One may have much of the former and very little of the latter, as with the Corinthians. They "come behind in no gift," being "enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1Co 1:7, 5). They were not only well informed, but able to so express themselves upon spiritual things, as to stamp upon the minds of their hearers an accurate image of them. Yet of those same highly-gifted and talented Christians, Paul said, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1Co 3:1)—thus, they were largely deficient in spiritual knowledge. But there are other saints with a much deeper and closer acquaintance of God, yet being less talented, are incapable of expressing themselves so freely and fluently as the former. It is a heart knowledge—and not a head knowledge of God—which makes a person more holy.

The opening petition was that the saints might be granted through the operations of the Spirit a fuller entry into that knowledge of God in which "eternal life" primarily consists. It was a request that they might perceive more clearly the glory of God, to give them an inward realisation of His ineffable perfections to make their hearts so in love with them that their wills would choose them for their chief delight. God first prepares the mind by an act of renewal to receive spiritual instruction, giving His people "an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1Jo 5:20); and then He imparts to them a larger measure of "the spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph 1:17). At the new birth, we are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light; yet, further light—fuller manifestations of Himself to us—are needed, if we are to know Him better.

God has promised "all *shall* know me" (Heb 8:11), that "all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Isa 54:13)—and those are for faith to lay hold of and plead before God. Neither the arts, nor the sciences, can impart one spiritual idea to the soul; still less, can they impart any vital knowledge of God Himself. It is only in His light that we can see light. It is only as He shines upon our understandings and reveals Himself to our hearts that we can become better acquainted with Him. It is by means of the Word that the Holy Spirit carries on the work of God in the soul; therefore, whenever we read or meditate upon it, we need to beg Him to take of the things of God and of Christ and "show them" unto us, to apply them to our hearts, that we may be more and more changed into their very image. But it is one thing to be convinced of that need, and another to put it into practice. Pride, self-sufficiency, is the chief deterrent. The things of God are only "revealed" to those who preserve this humble characteristic of the "babes" (Mat 11:25).

The Greek word rendered, "knowledge" in the verse we are pondering is "epignosis." "Gnosis" signifies "knowledge" and "epi-" *upon*—so as our moderns would express it, it is "knowledge plus," or as the lexicons define it, "full knowledge." The word occurs in Romans 3:20, which will enable the average reader to better perceive its force: "by the Law is the knowledge"—or "full knowledge of sin." A man knows something of what sin is by the light of nature, but only as sin is viewed and measured in the light of the authority, the spirituality, the strictness of the Divine Law, does he obtain a fully and adequate knowledge of the sinfulness of sin. Thus, it was for something more than a bare, fragmentary inchoate acquaintance with God which was here prayed for, even a full knowledge of Him—not a *perfect* knowledge, but a first hand, well-rounded, an intimate and thorough knowledge of His person, His character, His perfections, especially as He is revealed in and by Christ.

It is to be noted that the margin of our Bibles gives "for the acknowledgment of him," for the Greek may also be thus rendered. To "acknowledge" is to *own* a knowledge of, to admit the same; and this, we do of God—first in our secret communion with Him; and then outwardly, by confessing Him before men with our lips and lives. Goodwin pointed this distinction thus: "One knoweth a stranger, but he doth 'acknowledge' he knew before his *friend*—so that the intimate knowledge of God as of a friend is the thing which the apostle meant. As He said of Moses, 'I know thee by name' and Moses knew God in turn; and John 10:14, 'I...know my sheep, and am known of mine.' It is to have this mutual knowledge, God knowing me, and I knowing God, so as to converse daily with Him and to have communion with Him as with a friend." Thus, we see the *excellency* of this particular knowledge. It is not only a more enlarged knowledge about the things of God, such as Christ communicated to His disciples in Luke 24:27, but the end or issue of such knowledge—namely, such a knowledge as leads to real fellowship with Him, intimate communion with Him as with a Friend.

This is the ultimate intent of God in His grace and favour to us—that we may *so* “know” Him as to acquaint ourselves with Him, delight ourselves in Him, make free with Him, enjoy mutual converse with Him. “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jo 1:3), so that He knows you and you know Him; He owns you, and you own Him; and that as the consequence, you cleave to Him as your supreme Good, give up yourself to Him as your absolute Lord, delight yourself in Him as your everlasting Portion. That “acknowledgment” will be evidenced in your daily walk, by submitting to His authority, seeking to please Him in all things; and thus, becoming more and more conformed to His holy image. If we dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty, our affections will be warm and lively toward Him, and then obedience will be spontaneous and joyful. The more we increase in *this* knowledge of God, the easier shall we find it to “acknowledge him” in all our ways (Pro 3:6).

Now, this spiritual knowledge of God which leads to the practical acknowledgment of Him, comes to us in a way of wisdom—that is, faith exercising itself on the Word; and of revelation—that is, the Spirit operating by the Word. The word “revelation” in this connection signifies the *particularity* of it—something is made known by the Spirit unto the saints which is hidden from the wise and prudent of this world, as is clear from Matthew 11:25 and 27. It is a knowledge which is peculiar to the regenerate. It also connotes a knowledge which is *additional* to what “wisdom” or the workings of faith produces—not a different kind of knowledge, but in the *degree* thereof. Faith obtains clear apprehension of God, but when the Spirit shines through the Word upon the understanding, God’s glory is more awe-inspiring to the soul. It also emphasises the *excellency* of this knowledge—that of “wisdom” is discursive or acquired by information, but that of “revelation” is intuitive. That difference has to be experienced in order to be understood. But has not the Christian reader, when at prayer, been favoured at times with a revelation of God to his soul, which, at other seasons (though conscious of access to Him) was not the case!

In conclusion, we will summarise the exposition of Goodwin, who pointed out the bearing of each word of the text on its central theme. An increased, more intimate knowledge of God may be obtained *in a way* of “wisdom”—that is, by faith making a sanctified use of reason, by meditating on the various parts of Truth wherein God’s excellencies are revealed. That is the ordinary way, for “wisdom” is a rational laying of things together, perceiving their harmony. But there is also *a way* of “revelation,” whereby the Holy Spirit comes down into the heart with a beam from Heaven, enabling us to discern the glory of God, such as no cognition can produce. It was thus with Job when he said, “But now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5). It is thus when Christ makes good that word, “I will come in to him and sup with him” (Rev 3:20). It is not apart from the Word, but God causing a beam of light from that Word to suddenly and powerfully strike into the heart.



## THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

### 28. *Seventeenth Miracle*

The opening verse of 2 Kings 8 informs us that the Lord had called for a seven years' famine on Samaria, and in our last, we considered one of the things which transpired during that "sore judgment" from Heaven. That which is now to engage our attention is not to be regarded as something which occurred after the expiration of the famine, but rather, as what took place at its beginning. After tracing out the experiences of the woman from Shunem, the Holy Spirit picks up the thread of verse 1 and informs us of the movements of the prophet himself. "And Elisha came to Damascus" (2Ki 8:7). He, too, left Samaria, for it was no place for him, now that the indignation of the Lord was upon it. When God deals in judgment with a people, His temporal plagues are usually accompanied by spiritual deprivations often by "removing" His servants "into a corner" (Isa 30:20), and then the people of God are left "as sheep that have no shepherd" (2Ch 18:16)—one of the acutest afflictions they can experience. It was thus with Israel in the earlier famine in the days of Ahab. There is no intimation that Elijah did any preaching during these three and a half years, for the Lord sent him to Cherith, and then to Zaraphath.

Sad indeed is the plight of any people when they are not only scourged temporally, but have their *spiritual* blessings taken from them too. During the times of the Judges, when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jdg 17:6; 21:25), we are told, "in those days; there was no open vision" (1Sa 3:1)—which signifies there was no accredited servant of God to whom the people could go for a knowledge of the Divine mind and will. So again, in the days of Ezekiel, it was announced, "Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour;" and as the climacteric calamity: "Then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest" (Eze 7:26). Little as it is realised by the present generation, the most solemn, fearful, and portentous of all the marks of God's anger is the *withholding* of a Spirit-filled, faithful and edifying ministry, for then, there is "a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amo 8:11). There is much more than appears on the surface in that short statement, "And Elisha came to *Damascus*" (2Ki 8:7).

Solemn indeed is that brief and simple sentence, denoting as it does, that the prophet had *left Samaria*—left it because his ministry there was unwelcome, wasted. How often we find a parallel to this in the Gospels. At the very beginning of His public ministry, we read that Christ "came down to Capernaum" (Luk 4:31). Why? Because at Nazareth, they were "filled with wrath" at His teaching (Luk 4:28, 29). "And he entered into a ship, and passed over" (Mat 9:1). Why? Because at Capernaum, the whole city "besought him that he would depart out of their coasts" (Mat 8:34). He "withdrew himself from thence"—because the Pharisees had "held a council against him" (Mat 12:14, 15). "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Mat 13:58). What follows? And He went round about their villages teaching (Mar 6:5, 6). "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you...lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Act 13:46). When God calls a pastor to another charge, the church he has left has reason to search itself before the Lord as to the cause.

First, *its connection*. "And Elisha came to Damascus" (2Ki 8:7). The opening "And" links the incident which follows (8:7-15) with the first verse of our chapter (8:1)—but more, as was the case in several previous instances, it points a series of striking contrasts between this (8:7-15), and the events recorded in the context (8:1-6). There (8:1-6), the central character was a godly woman; here (8:7-15), it is a wicked man. In the former, the prophet took the initiative, communicating with the woman; now, a king sends to inquire of the man of God. There, his prophetic announcement was promptly credited; here, it is scornfully ridiculed (8:13). In that, the king's servant told him the truth (8:5); in this, another king's servant tells him a lie (8:13). There, God put forth His power and graciously provided for one of His own; here, He removes His restraining hand and suffers one of the reprobate to meet with a violent end. The previous miracle closed with the restoration of the woman's property to her; this, with a callous murder and the usurper occupying the throne.

Though there be nothing in the narrative to intimate specifically when it was that Elisha "came to Damascus;" yet, the introductory "And" seems to make it clear that the prophet took this journey during the "seven years of famine," and probably at an early stage of the same. As the Lord was not pleased on this

occasion to work in a mysterious and extraordinary way for the temporal preservation of the woman of Shunem (as He had for the widow at Zarephath), but provided for her needs by the more regular, yet not less, wonderful orderings of Providence on her behalf—so it would seem that He did for His servant. And as she sojourned in the land of the Philistines, so he now sought refuge in the capital of Syria, even though that was the very country which had for so long been hostile to Samaria. Nor did he go into hiding there, but counted upon his Master protecting him, even in the midst of a people who had so often preyed upon Israel. That Elisha's presence in Damascus was no secret is clear from what follows.

Second, *its occasion*. "And Elisha came to Damascus" (2Ki 8:7)—the most ancient city in the world, with the possible exception of Jerusalem. Josephus says that "it was founded by Uz, the son of Aram, and grandson of Shem." It is mentioned as early as Genesis 14:15, in the days of Abraham, 2000 B.C. It was captured and occupied in turn by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Paul commenced his ministry there (Act 9:19-22). It remains to this day. In the time of Ahab, Benhadad—after his defeat by the Samaritans and the sparing of his life—said to the king of Israel, "thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." Upon which Ahab said, "I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away" (1Ki 20:34). Whether Benhadad ever made good his promise, Scripture does not inform us, but his "covenant" with Ahab certainly gave Elisha the right of asylum in Damascus.

That Elisha had not fled to Damascus in the energy of the flesh in order to escape the hardships and horrors of the famine, but had gone there in the will of the Lord, is evident from the sequel. In what follows, we are shown how, while here, he received communications from God and was used by Him. That is one of the ways in which the child of God may ascertain whether or not he is in the place he should be, or whether in self-will, he has forsaken the path of duty. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and I will love him, and will *manifest* myself to him" (Joh 14:21)—make Myself a living reality to his soul, make discoveries of My glory to him through the written Word. But when we take matters into our own hands, and our ways displease the Lord, communion is severed, and He hides His face from us. When we choose our own way and the Spirit is grieved, He no longer takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us, but disquiets our hearts because of our sins.

Yes, God made use of Elisha while he sojourned in Damascus. But how varied, how solemnly varied are the several ways in which He is pleased to employ His servants. Not now was he commissioned to heal a leper, nor to restore a dead child to life, but rather to announce the death of a king. Herein, we have shadowed forth the more painful and exacting side of the minister's duty. He is required to set before men the way of life, and the way of death. He is under bonds to faithfully make known the doom awaiting the wicked, as well as the bliss reserved for the righteous. He is to preach the Law, as well as the Gospel; to describe the everlasting torments of Hell, as well as the unending glory of Heaven. He is bidden to preach the Gospel to every creature, and announce in no uncertain tones, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be *damned*" (Mar 16:16). Only by so doing will he be warranted in saying, "I am pure from the blood of all men. *For* I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Act 20:26, 27).

"And Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither" (2Ki 8:7). The wearing of a crown does not exempt its possessor from the common troubles unto which man is born, rather does it afford additional opportunities for gratifying the lusts of the flesh, which will only increase his troubles. It is only by being temperate in all things that many sicknesses can be avoided, for walking according to the rules of Scripture promotes health of body, as well as health of soul. When sickness overtakes a saint, his first concern should not be its removal, but a definite seeking unto the Lord to ascertain *why* He has afflicted him (Job 10:2). His next concern should be to have his sickness *sanctified* to the good of his soul, that he may learn the lessons that chastisement is designed to teach him, that in the issue, he may be able to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Psa 119:71). But it is the privilege of *faith* to become better acquainted with Jehovah-Rophi—"the LORD that *healeth* thee" (Exo 15:26).

In the case before us, it was not a child of God who had fallen sick, but a heathen monarch. "And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" (2Ki 8:8). What a startling antithesis this presents from what was before us in 2 Kings 6:31! Only a short time previously, the king of Israel had sworn a horrible oath that Elisha should be slain; here, a foreign king owns him as "the man of God" and makes

enquiry concerning his own life or death. Striking too is the contrast between Benhadad's action here, and the last thing recorded of him when he sent his forces to take Elisha captive (2Ki 6:14)! How fickle is human nature: One day, ready to pluck out their eyes and give them to a servant of God; and the next, regarding him as their enemy, because he told them the truth (Gal 4:15, 16). But now the Syrian king was concerned about his condition and anxious to know the outcome of his illness.

It appears to have been the practice in those days for a king who was seriously ill to make a formal inquiry from one whom he regarded as endowed with supernatural knowledge. Thus, we read that when Jeroboam's son fell sick, he sent his wife to ascertain of Ahijah the prophet, "What shall become of the child" (1Ki 14:3); and again, we are told that Ahaziah sent messengers to "enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease" (2Ki 1:2). From what is recorded in 1 Kings 20:23 and the sequel, we may conclude that Benhadad had lost confidence in his own "gods" and placed more reliance upon the word of Elisha; yet it is to be noted that he neither asked for his prayers, nor expressed any desire of a visit from him. Seriously sick as he felt himself to be, he was not concerned about his soul, but only of his body. Throughout the whole of his career, there is nothing to indicate he had the slightest regard for the Lord, but much to the contrary.

"So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Benhadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" (2Ki 8:9). The "present" was to intimate that he came on a peaceful and friendly mission and with no design of doing the prophet an injury, or carrying him away as a prisoner. This, too, was in accord with the custom of those days, and the ways of Orientals. Thus, when Saul wished to consult Samuel about the lost asses of his father, he lamented the fact that he had "not a present to bring to the man of God" (1Sa 9:7), and when the wife of Jeroboam went to inquire of the prophet Ahijah, she took a present for him (1Ki 14:3). But looking higher, we may see in the lavish nature of Benhadad's present, the guiding hand of God and an "earnest" for His servant that He would spread a table for him in the presence of his enemies! We are not told that Elisha refused this present, nor was there any reason why he should—perhaps he sent a goodly portion thereof to relieve the distress of the schools of the prophets still in Samaria.

"And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die" (2Ki 8:10). Observe first a significant omission. Elisha did not offer to go and visit Benhadad! That was not because he was callous, for the very next verse shows he was a man of compassion—rather, was he restrained by the Lord, who had no design of mercy unto the Syrian king. Very solemn was that. But what are we to make of the prophet's enigmatical language? Why this: The disease from which your master is suffering will not produce a fatal end; nevertheless, the Lord has showed me that his death is imminent: By violence—another proof that the Lord God "revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amo 3:7). It is on this same principle we discover the harmony between there being "an appointed time to man upon earth" (Job 7:1), and "why shouldest thou die before thy time?" (Ecc 7:17)—before the normal course of nature; and the fifteen years "added to" the course of Hezekiah's life—God intervening to stay the ordinary working of his disease.

Third, *its accompaniment*. "And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept" (2Ki 8:11). The first clause requires to be interpreted in the light of all that follows. Had it stood by itself, we should have understood it to signify that Hazael was deeply grieved by the prophet's announcement and sought to control his emotions—though that had not accounted for the prophet bursting into tears. But the sequel obliges us to conclude that—so far from being horrified at the news he had just received—Hazael was highly gratified, and the settling of his countenance was an endeavour to conceal his elation. Accordingly, we regard the "until he was ashamed" (the Hebrew word is often rendered "confounded," and once "put to confusion") as denoting that—under the piercing gaze of Elisha—he realised he had not succeeded and was chagrined that his countenance revealed the wicked pleasure he found in the prophet's reply. God has wisely, justly, and mercifully ordered it that, to a considerable extent, the countenance is made to betray the workings of our minds and the state of our hearts.

The servant of God was not deceived by Hazael's play-acting, for he not only had the aid of his own eyes to perceive the attempted deception, but also had a direct revelation from Heaven concerning the sequel. The weeping of the man of God was not occasioned by his knowledge of the violent end awaiting Benhadad, but rather, from what the Lord had also shown him concerning the fearful horrors which should shortly be inflicted upon Israel. In his tears, we behold Elisha foreshadowing his incarnate Lord who wept

over Jerusalem (Luk 19:41)—he was no heartless stoic. Even though he knew that his nation fully deserved the still sorer judgments—which God would shortly visit upon it through the agency of the man who now stood before him—yet Elisha could not be unmoved at his prophetic foreview of their terrible afflictions. The prophets were men of deep feeling, as the history of Jeremiah abundantly manifests. So, too, was Paul (Phi 3:18). So is every true servant of Christ.

“Fourth, *its nature*. “And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child” (2Ki 8:12). Like the two preceding ones, this miracle consists of a supernatural disclosure, the announcing of a prophetic revelation, which he had received direct from God—in this case, a double one: The death of Benhadad, and the judgments which should come upon Israel. So far was Hazel from being melted by Elisha’s tears, he was probably non-plussed by them; and in order to gain time for composure of mind, asked the question which he did. It is solemn to note that while Elisha announced what he foresaw would happen, he made no effort to dissuade or deter Hazael—as our Lord foretold the treachery of Judas, but sought not to turn him from his evil purpose.

Fifth, *its challenge*. “And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2Ki 8:13). Hotly did he resent such a charge, nor did he at that moment deem himself capable of such atrocities, nor did he wish the prophet to regard him as such a wretch. How little do the unregenerate realize or suspect the desperate wickedness of their hearts! How anxious are they that others should not think the worse of them! When not immediately exposed to temptations, they do not believe they are capable of such enormities, and are highly insulted when the contrary is affirmed. “And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria” (2Ki 8:13). Again, we see the extraordinary powers with which the prophets were invested, though Elisha gives God the glory for his. When he ascended the throne, all human restraint would be removed from Hazael, and enlarged powers and opportunities would be his for working evil.

Sixth, *its fulfillment*. “So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover” (2Ki 8:14). Thus, did Hazael seek to put off his guard from the one he intended to murder by deliberately lying to him. “And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead” (2Ki 8:15). And this was the man, who, a few hours before, indignantly denied he had the character of a savage dog! In the fearful doom of Benhadad, we see the righteous retribution of God: Having been a man of violence, he met with a violent end—as he had lived, so he died (see 1 Kings 20: 1, 16, 21, 26, 29; 22:1; 2 Kings 6:8, 24). And for Hazael in the future: 2 Kings 10:32

Seventh, *its meaning*. This is so obvious that very few words are needed: It is the glaring contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful servant. Elisha had unflinchingly declared the counsel which he had received from the Lord, however unpalatable it was to his hearer. But Hazael gives us a picture of the hireling, the false prophet, the deceiver of souls. Ostensibly, he went forth in obedience to his master’s commission (2Ki 8:9); in reality, he was playing the part of a hypocrite (2Ki 8:11). When he delivered his message, he falsified it by withholding the most pointed and solemn part of it (2Ki 8:14). How many there are like him, uttering “smooth things” and remaining guiltily silent on the doom awaiting the wicked. As surely as Hazael slew Benhadad, the unfaithful preachers of our day are murdering souls. As Hazael became “king,” so the most faithless now occupy the seats of power in Christendom.

## THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

### 6d. *Its Effectuation*

In seeking to show what Christ did in order to effect reconciliation between God and His people, two methods of presentation were open to us—each warranted by the analogy of Scripture: To begin with the work of Christ as it is usually apprehended by us, working back to its ordination by God; or to start with the Divine appointment and trace out the progressive accomplishment of the same on the plane of human history. In the last three articles, we followed the former plan; now, to aid the reader still further, we will reverse the process. Under our fifth main division, we saw how that a Covenant was entered into between the Father and the Son, in which everything necessary for the redemption of His elect was mutually agreed upon and settled; here, we are to contemplate what was actually done in fulfilment of that covenant engagement.

First, having agreed to become the Mediator or Daysman betwixt God and His people, the Beloved of the Father became *incarnate*. Oneness of nature was indispensable, for there must be a conjunction effected between the Redeemer and the redeemed, if He was to be identified with those on whose behalf He acted. Accordingly, “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham” (Heb 2:16), that He might have a right of property in us *as Man*, as well as God. In Galatians 4:4, 5, we are told that the Son became incarnate “to *redeem* them that were under the law.” By the law of Israel, the right of redemption belonged to him that was next of blood (Lev 25:25; Rut 2:20 [margin], 4:4-9). It was by being made like unto His brethren that Christ acquired the human and legal title to pay the ransom-price for His Church.

The obedience of *man* to the Divine Law is that to which “life” is promised (Mat 19:17, Rom 7:10). An angel’s obeying in our stead would not have been the establishment of the original law, nor could life for men be claimed as the reward of angelic obedience. By man came death; and consequently, by man must come the resurrection from the dead (1Co 15:21, 22). It was essential that the Son of God should become incarnate and be in full possession of our humanity that He might obey the Law and bring in everlasting righteousness for His people. It was His becoming flesh which laid the foundation for the imputation of our liabilities unto Christ and His merits, obedience, and sufferings unto us.

Second, in becoming incarnate, the Son of God “took upon him [voluntary action!] the form of a servant” (Phi 2:7)—God’s Servant, but on our behalf. That service consisted of His entering into the office of Surety. “Suretyship is a relation constituted by covenant engagement, by which parties become legally one so that they can be dealt with as such in law” (J. Armour). Or to state it in other words, a surety is one who gives security for another that he will perform something which the other is bound to do, so that in case of the failure of the first party, he will perform it for him. It was His natural union with His people that made possible and proper Christ’s federal oneness with them. Thus, Christ as “the surety of the covenant” came under obligation to perform the condition of the covenant in lieu of and behalf of His elect (Heb 7:22).

It must be carefully borne in mind that the Covenant was made with the covenantees (the saints) in the person of their Head. Thus, when Christ came forth as the Surety of the covenant, He appeared as the Representative of His people, assuming their liabilities and discharging their responsibilities, making satisfaction for their sins and bringing in an everlasting righteousness; and that, in such a way that the Law was magnified and made honourable (Isa 42:21), and that He (and His people in Him) became entitled to the award of the Law. We shall devote a disproportionate space to this essential point.

Third, in becoming our Surety, Christ *engaged to do* all that was necessary in order to restore His people unto the favour of God and to secure for them the right of everlasting felicity. The first of those engagements or terms was His meeting the original and righteous demands, which God made of them in Adam under the Covenant of Works—namely, to render in their place perfect and perpetual obedience to the Divine Law. The second of those terms was that He should endure the penalty of the Law which they had broken; and this, He did when He was “made a curse” (Gal 3:13) for them and suffered the wrath of God on their behalf. From the first Adam, the law demanded naught, but full conformity to its precept. But from the last Adam, it necessarily demanded not only holy obedience; but also penal suffering, that He might atone for our sins and blot out our iniquities.

It has been rightly pointed out that "In the original institute, the whole substance of moral obedience was summed up in the single precept, relative to the fruit forbidden. As the Law is a unity, and he who offends in one point is guilty of all; so when the spirit of obedience is tested in a single point only, and confined to that point, a failure here, brings upon man the guilt of the whole—he is liable to the whole penalty. Now, this was the sum total of the Law, as a covenant given to Adam that he should obey, and as the reward of obedience, should receive life. This glorious reward was held up as the motive prompting to choice on the side of law and right. The law was ordained unto life (Rom 7:10). This is its object, and to this, it was adapted. But it failed in the hands of the first Adam; and the last Adam comes in to make it good, to establish its principle and secure its object." (G. Junkin on "Justification").

When Christ appeared as the Surety of His People, it was with the affirmation, "Lo, I come to *do* thy will, O God" (Heb 10:9). Note well the word we have placed in italics: To "*do*" God's will (ere He suffered His wrath for our sins)—to "*do*" what the first Adam failed to perform. The fundamental nature of God's government must needs have been changed had He granted unto men "*life*" on any other terms than what He had presented under the Covenant of Works, and to which man agreed. The Gospel contains no substitute for the Law, but reveals that remedial scheme by which is confirmed and made good the principles of righteousness originally laid down by God to Adam. "Do we then make void the law through faith [in the Gospel]? God forbid: Yea [is the triumphant answer], we *establish* the law" (Rom 3:31).

The unchanging terms of the Covenant of Works is "This do [obey the Law] and thou shalt live" (Luk 10:28). And since I have broken the Law and am incapable of keeping it, then "*life*"—the reward of the Law—could never be mine unless the Surety had "*this*" *done* on my behalf. Therefore was He "made under the law" (Gal 4:4)—for His appointed and agreed-upon task was not only to "make an end of sins," but also to "bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan 9:24); that is, a justifying righteousness for the whole election of grace. The Lord Jesus freely consented to pay His people's debts, both in making satisfaction to the Law which they had broken, and in rendering perfect obedience in their stead. That "righteousness," Christ was working out for us from the moment of His birth—until upon the Cross He cried, "It is finished" (Joh 19:30).

In executing the great work of our redemption and reconciliation, the incarnate Son paid homage to the Divine Law. He was not only "made under" it, but as He declared, "Thy law is within my heart" (Psa 40:8)—enshrined in His affections, and His whole life was one of complete subjection to it. Christ as the Sin-bearer and Sin-expiator only gives one side of His work; the other is His holy *obedience*—the two together furnishing us a complete view of the satisfaction which He rendered to God. Christ's obedience was equally the work of the One for the many, the Head for His body, and equally essential as His death. His first recorded utterance, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luk 2:49) shows clearly that He had entered this world on a special errand, that He was engaged in a specific work unto the Father, that He owed obedience to Him—as the "must" plainly intimates.

His first utterance on emerging from His private life struck the same note. When presenting Himself for baptism, John demurred, for to comply made Christ appear to be a *sinner*, for it was "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luk 3:3). But it was not as a private person Christ presented Himself, but as "the Lamb of God, which taketh [or "beareth"] away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29). To His fore-runner's objection, the Saviour replied, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Mat 3:15). The "now" is emphatic in the Greek—now that I have made Myself "of no reputation" (Phi 2:7), now that I am discharging My suretyship. It "became" Him to fulfil His engagement. As the One obeying for the many ("us"!), it was requisite that He "fulfil all righteousness"—submit to God's positive institutions or ordinances, as well as the moral Law.

In His first public address, Christ declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to *fulfil*" (Mat 5:17). Those words supply us with a clear-cut definition of His mission, and the character of the work in which He was engaged. In what way did He "*fulfil*" the Prophets? Why, *by doing* those things which they had foretold—such as preaching good tidings (Isa 61:1) and healing the sick (Isa 35:4-6)—and *by suffering* the indignities and pains which they had announced. In precisely the same way, He "*fulfilled*" the Law—namely, by rendering the obedience which its precepts required, and by enduring the punishment which its penalty demanded. The grand end of the incarnation was that Christ should provide for His people a righteousness, which excelled that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mat 5:20).

“To satisfy both the requirements of His justice and the abundance of His mercy, God determined that a full satisfaction should be made unto His Law, and such a satisfaction that it was thereby more honoured than if it had never been broken, or the whole race damned. In order thereto, He appointed that Christ should serve as the Substitute and Surety of His people. He must stand as their Representative and fulfil all righteousness for them and endure the curse in their stead, so that they might be legally reckoned to have obeyed and suffered in Him” (T. Goodwin, 1600-1680, Puritan). Accordingly, we find Christ saying, “My meat is to *do* the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (Joh 4:34). The single principle that guided His holy life was *obedience to God*. Therein, He not only left us an example to follow, but was working out for us a righteousness to be imputed to our account, and by which we are justified and entitled to the reward of the Law. Calvary was not the beginning, but the end of His life of perfect obedience—as the “obedient unto death” of Philippians 2:8 testifies.

Fourth, God *transferred the sins* of His people and placed them upon their Surety the moment He assumed that office. “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6)—not experimentally, but legally; not the corruption of them, but the guilt; not that He was defiled by them, but that He became subject to their penalty. The sins of His people were charged to the account of the Holy One. So truly was this the case that He acknowledged the actuality thereof, crying, “For innumerable evils have compassed me about: *mine* iniquities have taken hold upon me” (Psa 40:12); and again, “O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and *my sins* are not hid from thee” (Psa 69:5). That was the language of the Surety, as the context clearly shows.

Fifth, because Christ entered this world charged with the guilt of His people, Divine justice dealt with Him accordingly—as was shown under the first article on Christ effectuating reconciliation as our Substitute. Because Christ had shouldered the awful burden of His people’s sins, He must be paid sin’s wages. Because the Just had so united Himself to the unjust, He must suffer “the due reward of our deeds” (Luk 23:41). He must, accordingly, be “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 53:4, 5). It was fore-announced, “He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11); and iniquities and guilt are inseparable, and since guilt signifies liability to punishment, Christ must be penalised in our stead. O that this article may be so blest to some reader that he may, for the first time, be able to truly say:

“Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die—Another’s life, Another’s death, I rest my soul eternally.”

Sixth, because Christ was “made...to be sin” for His people (2Co 5:21), He was “*made a curse*” for them (Gal 3:13)—that curse consisted of the avenging wrath of God. The Sinbearer was “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). The august dignity of Christ’s person did not avail to any abatement of the Divine curse. God “spared not his own son” (Rom 8:32). So far from sparing Him, the Judge of all the earth, the moral Governor of this world, the Administrator of the Law cried, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7). Though “He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth, Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; *he* hath put him to grief” (Isa 53:9, 10). The wages of sin is death, and as physical death consists of the severance of the soul from the body, so spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God; and on the Cross, Christ was forsaken by God.

We must, therefore, look higher than the “band of men and officers” (Joh 18:3)—as the servants of the chief priests and Pharisees sent to apprehend Christ in the Garden—and see in them the agents of Divine justice, though they knew not what they did. We must needs direct our eyes above the Roman soldiers, as they “platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his [Christ’s] head” (Joh 19:2), and see in them the executives of the Divine Law, branding our Surety with the mark of the curse (see Gen 3:17, 18). We are required to exercise the vision of faith and behold in Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate doing “whatsoever *thy* [God’s] hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Act 4:28) in order that the terms of the Everlasting Covenant should be carried out, the requirements of righteousness satisfied, the holy wrath of God appeased, and the sins of His people forever removed from before Him “as far as the east is from the west” (Psa 103:12).

Seventh, because Christ rendered full satisfaction to Divine justice, He redeemed His people unto Himself, and they are not only absolved from all guilt, but are *reconciled to God*. Not only are they no longer under the frown of the Divine Judge, but His smile rests upon them; not only are they freed from His displeasure, but they are restored to His favour; not only do they stand “unblameable and unproveable in his [God’s] sight” (Col 1:22), but they have an inalienable title to everlasting felicity. There cannot be a

substitution without a *dual imputation*: If the debt of the debtor be charged to the surety, then upon his discharge of the same, the payment of the surety must be credited to the debtor. Accordingly, we are told, "For he hath made him [legally] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made [legally] the righteousness of God in him" (2Co 5:21)—*there* is the counter-imputation: Christ's righteousness is reckoned to the account of His people.

"As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners [legally constituted so; and then, as the consequence, experimentally became such] so by the obedience of one, shall many be *made* [legally constituted so, and then as the consequence, experimentally become such] *righteous* (Rom 5:19). Christ took our place that we might take His. Christ removed our sins that we might be clothed with His merits. Because Christ kept the Law for us, we are entitled to "reign in life" (Rom 5:17). "The forerunner is *for us* entered [into Heaven], even Jesus" (Heb 6:20). Observe well how Christ demanded this as His legal right: "Father, *I will* that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (Joh 17:24)—I have fully discharged their obligations, I have wrought out for them an everlasting righteousness; now give them that which, for My sake, they are justly entitled to.

"The moment the believing sinner accepts Christ as his Substitute, he finds himself not only cleared from his guilt, but rewarded—he gets all heaven because of the glory and merits of Christ. The Atonement we preach is one of absolute exchange. It is that Christ took our place literally, in order that we might take His place literally—that God regarded and treated Christ as the sinner, and that He regards and treats the believing sinner as Christ. From the moment we believe, God looks upon us as if we were Christ. He takes it as if Christ's atonement had been our atonement, and as if Christ's life had been our life; and He beholds, accepts, blesses, and rewards on the ground that all Christ was and did is ours" (G. S. Bishop, "Doctrines of Grace"). What a glorious Gospel! Then proclaim it freely and boldly, ye ministers of Christ.

From all that has been pointed out, it should, we think, be more or less clear to the simplest reader that the breach between God and His sinning people has been righteously healed—that is to say, reconciliation has been effected in a way both gracious and legal. To have brought this suit into the court of Divine Law had availed nothing, unless provision had been made for so ordering its process and judgment that the sinner might be honourably accepted, and that God might be both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). The Law must be on the sinner's side—his absolver, and not his condemner; his justifier, and not his accuser. That provision has been made by means of the Surety-Substitute, by the transference of total indebtedness from those who incurred it to One who incurred it not, and fully discharged the same.

It is by the principle and on the ground of Suretyship and Substitution that God's justice is displayed in all His transactions with the believing sinner. It is this which is the climacteric in the Good News proclaimed by the heralds of Christ. The grand Evangel not only exhibits the knowledge-surpassing *love* of God, but as the apostle declares, "therein is the *righteousness* of God revealed" (Rom 1:17). Grace indeed reigns, but it does so "through righteousness" (Rom 5:21). "Christ bears the sins of many because in His covenanted identification with those 'many,' their sins are sinlessly and truly His. And unto the many sons and daughters of the covenant, the Father imputes the righteousness of the Son, because, in their covenant oneness with the Son, His righteousness is undeservedly, but truly, their own righteousness. And all throughout, 'the judgment of God is according to truth' (Rom 2:2) and equity" (H. Martin, on "The Atonement"). Thus, we behold once more that, at the Cross, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psa 85:10). It is not a peace at any price, a peace wherein justice is sacrificed and the law is flouted, but a righteous peace, one that glorifies *all* the Divine perfections. Such is the wondrous and blessed message of the Gospel.



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

### 8. *Its Promotion*

We have now arrived at what is perhaps the most important aspect of our subject—not from the doctrinal side, but from the practical standpoint. It will avail us little to discover that there is a manifold need—be why the Christian should grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, as it would advantage us nothing to be quite clear in our minds as to what Christian progress is not, and what it really consists of, if we continue to be stationary. While it may awaken interest to learn that in certain fundamental respects, the growth of saints is like unto trees in their upward, downward, inward, and outward development—yet such information will prove of no real value, unless the conscience be exercised thereby, and there be definite effort on our part. Trees do not grow mechanically, but only as they derive nourishment from the soil and receive water and sunshine from above. It is instruction to find out there are different grades in God's family, and to ascertain the characteristics of each, but of what service will that be to me—unless I personally pass from spiritual infancy to youth, and eventually become a "father" in Christ?

While there is a close analogy between the manner of a Christian's growth and that of a tree, it must not be lost sight of that there is a real and radical difference between them considered as entities, for *we* are moral agents, accountable creatures—while they are not so; and it is the exercise of our moral agency and the discharge of our responsibility which is now to engage our attention. Spiritual growth is very far from being a fortuitous thing, which occurs irrespective of the use of suitable means—nor does it take place spontaneously, or apart from the availing ourselves of our privileges and the performance of our duty. Rather is it the outcome of God's blessing upon our employment of the aids which He has provided and appointed, and the orderly development of the different graces He has bestowed upon us. As it is in the natural, so it is in the spiritual: There are certain things which foster, and there are other things which hinder Christian progress—and it is the lasting obligation of the saint to make full use of the former, and to resolutely avoid the latter. Spiritual growth will not be promoted while we remain indifferent and inactive, but only as we give the utmost diligence to attending unto the health of our souls.

In seeking to treat of the spiritual growth of a saint, it needs to be borne in mind that here—as everywhere in the Christian life—there are two different agents at work, two entirely different principles are concerned: There is both a Divine and a human side to the subject, and much wisdom and care are required if a proper and scriptural proportion is to be maintained. Those two agents are God and the saint; those two principles are the operations of Divine sovereignty, and the discharge of Christian responsibility. The difficulty involved—admittedly a real one—is to recognise the existence of each and to maintain a due balance between the one and the other. There is a real danger that we become so occupied with the believer's duty and his diligence in using the proper means, that he takes too much credit to himself; and thereby, robs God of His glory—as in large measure do the Arminians. On the other hand, equally real is the danger that we dwell so exclusively on the Divine operations and our dependence on the Spirit's quickening, that a spirit of inertia seizes us, and we become reduced to unaccountable non-entities—as is the case with Fatalists and Antinomians. From either extreme, we should earnestly seek deliverance.

It is of vital importance at the outset, that we clearly recognise that God alone can make His people grow and prosper, and that we should be deeply and lastingly sensible of our entire dependency upon Him. As we were unable to originate spiritual life in our souls, so we are equally unable to preserve or increase the same. Deeply humbling though that truth be unto our hearts, yet the declarations of Holy Writ are too implicit and too numerous to leave us in the slightest doubt upon it. "None can keep alive his own soul" (Psa 22:29)—true alike naturally and spiritually; positively, "O bless our God...which holdeth our soul in life" (Psa 66:8, 9). "Thou maintainest my lot" (Psa 16:5), said Christ Himself. "Thy God hath commanded thy strength" (Psa 68:28). "From me is thy fruit" (Hos 14:8). "Thou also hast wrought all our works in us" (Isa 26:12). "All my springs are in thee" (Psa 87:7). "Without me ye can do nothing" (Joh 15:5). Such flesh-withering statements as those cut away all ground for boasting, and place the crown of honour where it rightfully belongs.

But there is another class of passages, equally plain and necessary for us to receive at their face value and be duly influenced by them: Passages which emphasise the Christian's accountability, which inculcate

the discharge of his responsibility, and which blame him when he fails therein. Passages which show that God deals with His people as rational creatures, setting before them their duty and requiring them under pain of His displeasure and their great loss to diligently perform the same. He expressly exhorts them to "grow in grace" (2Pe 3:18). He bids them to be "laying aside" the things which hinder and to "desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:1, 2). So far from holding the Hebrews as being without excuse for not having grown, He *blames* them (Heb 5:11-14). Though He has promised to do good unto His people, nevertheless, the Lord has declared, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Eze 36:37), and hesitates not to say, "Yet ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jam 4:2).

At first sight, it may appear impossible for us to show the meeting-point between the operations of God's sovereignty, and the discharge of Christian responsibility; and to define the relation of the latter to the former, and the manner of their interworking. Had we been left to ourselves, it had indeed been a task beyond the compass of human reason; but Scripture solves the problem for us, and in terms so plain that the simplest believer has no difficulty in understanding them. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1Co 15:10). It is true that the apostle was treating more immediately with his ministerial career; yet, in its wider application, it is obvious that the principles of the verse apply with equal propriety and force to the practical side of the Christian's life—evidenced by the Lord's people in all ages appropriating to themselves its first and last clauses—but equally important and pertinent is that which comes in between them.

In some passages, "the grace of God" signifies His eternal good will unto His people; in others, it connotes rather the *effect* of His favour, the "grace" which He bestows upon and infuses into them—as in, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph 4:7). Christ is "full of grace and truth...and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (Joh 1:14, 16). Just as sin is a powerful principle working within the natural man, inclining him to evil, so at regeneration, God's elect have communicated to their souls Divine grace—which acts as a powerful principle working within them and inclining unto holiness. "Grace is nothing else but an introduction of the virtues of God into the soul" (T. Manton, 1620-1677). That principle of grace which is imparted to us at the new birth is what is often termed "the new nature" in the Christian, and is designated "the spirit," because "born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:6, 8); and being spiritual and holy, it is opposed by indwelling sin—called "the flesh" (Gal 5: 17)—and that, in turn, opposes the workings of sin or the lusts of the flesh, the one being contrary to the other.

The principle of grace or new nature—which is bestowed on the saint—is but a *creature*, and though intrinsically holy, it is entirely dependent upon its Author for strength and growth. And thus, we must distinguish between the *principle* of grace and fresh *supplies* of grace for its invigoration and development. We may liken the newly-born babe and the young Christian subsequently to a fully-rigged yacht—though its sails be set, it is incapable of movement until a wind blows. The Christian is responsible to spread his sails and look to God for a breeze from Heaven; but until the wind stirs (Joh 3:8), he will make no progress. To drop the figure and come to the reality, what has just been said receives illustration in the apostolic benediction; wherein Paul so uniformly prayed for the saints, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Col 1:2; 1Th 1:1); or as Peter expresses it, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you" (2Pe 1:2)—for nothing less than grace "multiplied" will enable any Christian to grow and thrive.

We must distinguish, then, not only between the eternal goodwill and favour of God unto His people (Eph 1:4, 5), and the effect or fruit of it in the actual infusion of His grace (Eph 4:7)—or bestowal of an active principle of holiness—but we must also recognise the difference between that principle and the *daily renewing* of it (2Co 4:16), or energizings of it, by the influences of the Holy Spirit—which we deserve not. Though that new nature be a spiritual and holy one which disposes its possessor unto the pleasing of God, yet, it has no sufficiency in itself to produce the fruits of holiness. Said the Psalmist, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes" (Psa 119:5): Such a desire proceeded from the principle of grace, but having not the power in itself it needed additional Divine enablement to carry it out. So again, "Quicken thou me according to thy word" (Psa 119:25): The sparks of grace under the ashes of the flesh needed fanning into a blaze. The life of grace can only be carried on by complete dependence upon God and receiving from Him a fresh "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phi 1:19).

"Ye must depend upon Christ for strength, ability to repent: All evangelical duties are done in *His* strength. Christ must give us soft hearts, hearts that are repentant; and must teach them by His Spirit before they will repent. Except He smite these rocks, they will yield no water, no tears for sin; except He break these hearts, they will not bleed. We may as well melt a flint, or turn a stone into flesh, as repent in our own strength. It is far above the power of nature; nay, most contrary to it. How can we hate sin, which naturally, we love above all? Mourn for that wherein we most delight? Forsake that which is as dear as ourselves? It is the almighty power of Christ which only can do this: We must rely on, seek to Him for it—Lamentations 5:21" (David Clarkson, 1670). The same applies just as truly to faith, hope, love, patience—the exercise of any and all of the Christian graces. Only as we are strengthened with might, by the Spirit in our inner man, are we enabled to be fruitful branches of the Vine.

In its final analysis, the spiritual growth of the Christian turns upon the grace, which he *continues to receive* from God; nor is the measure obtained, determined by anything in or of us. Since it be grace, its Author dispenses it according to His own sovereign determination: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13). It is God "that giveth the increase" (1Co 3:7)—to some, an increase of faith and wisdom; to others, of love and meekness; to yet others, of comfort and peace; to yet others, strength and victory—"dividing to every man severally as He will" (1Co 12:11). Our concern and co-operation is equally due to enabling grace—for of ourselves, "not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2Co 3:5). All that is good in us is but a stream from the fountain of Divine grace; and naught, but an abiding conviction of that fact will keep us both humble and thankful. God it is who inclines the mind and will unto any good, who illumines our understandings and draws out our affections unto things above. Even the means of grace are ineffectual, unless God blesses them to us; yet, we sin if we use them not.

But let us turn now to the human-accountability-side of this subject: We are required to "grow in grace" (2Pe 3:18), it is our responsibility to obtain "more grace" (Jam 4:6), and the fault is entirely ours if we do not—for "the God of all grace" (1Pe 5:10) is infinitely more willing to give than we are to receive. We are plainly exhorted, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Mat 7:7; Luk 11:9)—where the reference is to our obtaining fresh supplies of grace. No fatalistic apathy is inculcated there; no sitting still with our hands folded until God be pleased to "revive us" (Psa 85:6). No, the very opposite: A definite "asking," an earnest "seeking," an importunate "knocking" until the needed supply is obtained. We are expressly bidden to "*be strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2Ti 2:1). We are freely invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16)—pardoning grace, sanctifying grace, persevering grace, as well as grace to faithfully perform the common tasks of life.

It is then both our privilege and duty to obtain fresh supplies of grace each day. Says the apostle, "let us have grace" (Heb 12:28). But let us note the whole of that verse and observe the five things in it. "Wherefore [an inference drawn from the context] we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved [the privilege conferred upon us], let us have grace [the enablement], whereby we may serve God acceptably [the task assigned us] with reverence and godly fear"—the manner of its performance. Such a duty as serving God acceptably, we cannot possibly perform without special Divine assistance. That assistance or strength is to be definitely, diligently, constantly sought by us. To quote from John Owen on this verse—who is one of the very last to be accused of having a legalistic spirit: "To have an increase of this grace as unto its degrees and measures and to keep in exercise in all the duties of the service of God, is a duty *required* of believers by virtue of all the Gospel privileges, which they receive from God. For herein consists that revenue of glory which on their account He expecteth and requireth." Alas, that so many hyper-Calvinists have got so far away from that holy balance.

In order to the obtaining fresh supplies of grace, we need first to cultivate a sense of our own weakness, sinfulness, and insufficiency, fighting against every uprising of pride and self-confidence. Second, we need to be more diligent in using the grace we already have, remembering that the one who traded with his talents was he to whom additional ones were entrusted. Third, we need to supplicate God for the same—since Christ has taught us to ask our Father for our daily bread, how much more do we need to ask Him for daily grace! There is a mediatorial fulness of grace in Christ for His people, and it is their privilege and duty to draw upon Him for the same. "Let us therefore come boldly [freely and confidently] unto the throne of grace" (Heb 4:16)—the verb is not in the aorist, but the present tense, signifying a *continuous* coming. Form the habit of so doing—it is both our privilege and duty to come, and to come "boldly." The

apostle did not say none may come, except they do so confidently—rather is he showing (from considerations in the context) how we *should* come. If we cannot come with boldness, then let us come asking for it.

We can advance nothing but the most idle and worthless excuses for our non-compliance with the blessed invitation of Hebrews 4:16, and our failure to “find grace to help in time of need;” yea, so pointless and vain are those excuses, it would be a waste of time to name and refute them. If we traced them back to their source, little as we may suspect it, it would be found that those excuses issue from a sense of self-sufficiency, as is clearly implied by those words, “God resisteth the *proud*, but giveth grace unto the humble” (Jam 4:6). God says to me, to you, “Let him take hold of my strength” (Isa 27:5); and again, “*seek* the LORD and his strength” (1Ch 16:11; Psa 105:4). Therefore, we should come before Him with the prayer, “Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” (Neh 6:9), pleading His promise, “I *will* strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee” (Isa 41:10). In an earlier paragraph, we quoted the words, “thy God hath commanded thy strength;” yet, so far from the Psalmist feeling that relieved him of all responsibility in the matter, he cried “strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us” (Psa 68:28).

And now let us show how that 1 Corinthians 15:10 reveals the meeting point between the Divine operations of grace and our improvement of the same. First, “But by the grace of God I am what I am”—a brand plucked out of the fire, a new creature in Christ Jesus. Second, “and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain [contrast 2Co 6:1]; but *I laboured* more abundantly than they all”—so far from grace encouraging unto listlessness, it stirred up to earnest endeavour and the improving of the same, so that the apostle was conscious of and shrank not from affirming his *own* diligence and zeal. Third, “yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1Co 15:10)—he disowns any to himself, but gives all the glory to God. It is our bounden duty to use the grace God has bestowed upon us, stirring up and exercising that holy principle, yet this is not to puff us up. As the apostle said again, “Whereunto I also labour, *striving* according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col 1:29)—he took no praise unto himself, but humbly ascribed what he had done entirely unto the Lord. Fourth, thus grace is given the Christian to make use of, to labour with—in striving against sin, resisting the Devil, running in the way of God’s commandments; yet in so labouring, he must be mindful of the Source of his spiritual energy. We can only work out what God has wrought in us, but remember, it is our duty *to* “work out” (Phi 2:12, 13).

Not only is it the Christian’s responsibility to seek and obtain more grace for himself, but it is also his duty to stimulate and increase the grace of his brethren. Re-read that sentence and let it startle you out of your lethargy and self-complacency. It is of no avail to reply, “I cannot increase my own stock of grace, let alone that of another.” Scripture is plain on this point: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may *minister grace* unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29)—note well that verse is addressed not specially to the ministers of the Gospel, but the rank and file of God’s people! Yes, you may—you *ought* to—be a helper, a strengthener, a builder up of your fellow saints. Grumbling about your lot, groaning over your state, will not be any stimulus to them—rather, will it depress and foster unbelief. But if you speak of the faithfulness of God, bear testimony to the sufficiency of Christ, recount His goodness and mercy to you, quote His promises—then will your hearers experience the truth of that proverb, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Pro 27:17).

