

A lit candle, a magnifying glass over an open book, and a quill pen. The candle is lit, casting a warm glow. The magnifying glass is positioned over the open book, which is lying flat. The quill pen is resting on the right page of the book. The background is dark, making the candle and the book stand out.

Annual Volume

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STUDIES IN THE
SCRIPTURES

ARTHUR W. PINK

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January

A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR

This is our desire both for our readers and for ourselves. But the mere wishing or desiring of it will not bring the same to pass. What more is necessary? Only God can grant us prosperity either spiritual or temporal, and we must submit to his good pleasure. True, but He is not capricious in this. Prosperity or the absence of it is not a fortuitous thing, nor is it the product of a blind and inexorable fate. If we enjoy not prosperity the fault is entirely our own, and we are dishonest if we ascribe it solely unto the sovereignty of God. “In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not” (Isa. 30:15)—had it not been flagrantly dishonest if they attributed their disquietude and fears to the sovereign will of God? “O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river” (Isa. 48:18)—then how wicked to charge God with being responsible for their lack of peace.

If we consult the Scriptures we shall find definite teaching on this subject: that there are clearly-revealed laws which *we* must observe, conditions which we are required to meet, if we are to enjoy prosperity. Let us first consider one or two things which *hinder* prosperity. “Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord that ye cannot prosper” (2 Chron. 24:20). Ah, here is the cause of all our troubles; disobedience, for “the way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:15). Observe how emphatically and absolutely it is expressed: “ye cannot prosper”—a holy God will not place a premium on insubordination. He may suffer “the wicked” to flourish as a green bay tree, for he is like a beast being fattened for the slaughter; but not so with those who profess His name. Disobedience, then, chokes the channel of blessing. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Prov. 28:13). Unconfessed sin in the heart of a believer is like a worm at the root of prosperity. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa. 66:18)—prayer is then futile. Unless we keep short accounts with God we shall not enjoy His smile. Jeremiah 10:21 tells us what prevents “pastors” from prospering: self-sufficiency, failing to be cast entirely upon the Lord.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for *then* shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and *then* thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8). Here is the positive side, the making known the conditions which regulate and determine prosperity, as the repeated “then” plainly intimates. The passage begins at verse 5, and the whole of verses 5-8 should be attentively weighed. Let us first anticipate an objection by asking the question “was it written for his sake alone” (Rom. 4:23)? Undoubtedly those words had a special reference to

Joshua himself, yet that they have a wider bearing is clear from other passages, and that they have a general application to God's children today is definitely established by the New Testament. But as some of our readers have come under the influence of those who would rob the Christian of his rightful portion, under the pretext of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth," we must labour the point.

Note then how unhesitatingly David appropriated these words of the Lord to Joshua when he spoke to his son, for he emphatically assured him that if Divine grace enabled him to "keep the Law of the Lord his God" taking heed to "fulfill the statutes and judgments" of it, "*then* shalt thou prosper" (1 Chron. 22:12,13). But more pertinently still, observe how the apostle expressly appropriates the promise of Joshua 1:5 "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" and insists that it belongs equally to the whole household of faith, immediately adding "so that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is *my* Helper" (Heb. 13:5,6). That precious promise of God, then, belongs as truly *to me* as it did to Joshua of old. Are not the needs of believers the same in one age as in another? Is not God affected alike unto all of His children: does He not bear to them the same love? If He would not desert Joshua, He will not desert you! Consequently, if I would ascertain the laws which will determine my prosperity, I must pay attention to those which regulated *his*.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth." It was the Rule given to act by. In Joshua's case it furnished him with Divine authority for his conduct in the governing of Israel. In our case we may give these words a spiritual meaning. God's Word is our appointed food: thus the "mouth" speaks to us of feeding upon it. In verse 6 God says, "Be strong and of a good courage," and in verse 7 adds, "only be thou strong and very courageous that [in order that] thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law." Obedience to God calls for firmness, resolution, boldness. Without it we shall yield unto temptations to compromise, being intimidated by the ridicule and opposition of our fellows. How, then, is this strength and courage to be obtained? By feeding on the Word, being "nourished up in the words of faith" (1 Tim. 4:6), having the Law of the Lord continually in our "mouth." This is the interpretation made by the apostle; appropriate that promise "I will never leave thee" and then, says he, every believer may confidently declare "The Lord is *my* Helper, and I will *not fear* what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6). There is the proof that feeding on the Word imparts strength and courage.

"But thou shalt meditate therein day and night." Only thus will its injunctions be fixed in the memory: only thus shall we be able to ascertain our duty: only thus shall we discern the rightful application of the Divine precepts to all the varied details of our daily lives. It is entirely our own fault if we be ignorant of God's "mind" in connection with any situation confronting us. God's will for us is revealed in His Word, and "a good understanding have all they that do His commandments" (Psa. 111:10). The more I am regulated by the Divine Rule, the more shall I be preserved from the "mistakes" or folly which characterises those who follow a course of self-pleasing. But in order to *do* God's commandments I must be conversant with them and in order to perceive their breadth and specific application unto any problem or decision confronting me, I must "meditate therein day and night." Meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. Prosperity eludes the dilatory and careless.

"That thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein." *This* must be the dominating motive and object. God's Word is to be appropriated and masticated—fed and meditated upon—first and foremost, day in and day out. Not for the purpose of understanding its prophecies or obtaining an insight into its mysteries, but in order to learn God's will for me, and having learned it to conform thereto. God's Word is given to us chiefly not to gratify curiosity or to entertain our imagination, but as "a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path" (Psa. 119:105)

in this dark world. It is a Rule for us to walk by: it is a heavenly Standard for the regulation of all our conduct. It points out the things to be avoided, the things which would harm us. It tells of the things to be followed and practiced, the things which are for our good, our peace. It contains not only good advice, but is clothed with Divine authority, commanding implicit and unqualified obedience.

“For then—if we feed on the Word, if we constantly meditate upon its precepts and promises, if we render to it entire obedience—shalt thou make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success.” The promise is emphatic, unqualified, sure. If then this new year is not a prosperous one for me the fault is entirely my own: it will be because I have failed to meet the conditions prescribed in the context. Turn to 2 Chronicles 20:20 and see how well Jehoshaphat understood the secret of prosperity. Mark what occasioned the prosperity of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 31:20,21). Compare Job 36:11. Ponder all that precedes the last clause of Psalm 1:3. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man *shall be blessed* in his deed” (James 1:25). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

1. Introduction

Much has been written upon what is usually called “The Lord’s Prayer” but which we prefer to term “The Family Prayer,” and much upon the High Priestly prayer of Christ in John 17, but very little upon the prayers of the apostles. Personally we know of no book devoted to the same, and except for a booklet on the two prayers of Ephesians 1 and 3 have seen scarcely anything thereon. It is not easy to explain this omission, for one had thought the apostolic prayers had such importance and value for us that they had attracted the attention of those who wrote on devotional subjects. While we very much deprecate the efforts of those who would have us believe the prayers of the Old Testament are obsolete and unfitted to the saints of this dispensation, yet that there is a peculiar suitability unto Christians of the prayers recorded in *the epistles* seems evident. Excepting only the prayers of the Redeemer, in them alone are the praises and petitions specifically addressed unto “the Father,” in them alone are they offered in the name of the Mediator, and in them alone do we find the full breathings of the Spirit of adoption.

How blessed it is to hear some aged saint, who has long walked with God and enjoyed intimate communion with Him, pouring out his heart before Him in adoration and supplication. But how much more blessed should we esteem it could we have listened to the utterances of those who had companied with Christ in person during the days when He tabernacled in this scene. And if one of the apostles was still here upon earth what a high privilege we should deem it to hear him engage in prayer! Such a high one, that methinks most of us would be quite willing to go to

considerable inconvenience and travel a long distance in order to be thus favoured. And if our desire was granted how closely we would listen to his words, how diligently we should seek to treasure them up in our memories. Well, no such inconvenience, no such journey is required: it has pleased the Holy Spirit to record quite a number of the apostolic prayers for our instruction and satisfaction. Do we evidence our appreciation of such a boon? Have we ever made a list of them and meditated upon their import?

In our preliminary task of surveying and tabulating the recorded prayers of the apostles two things impressed us: one, which at first seems quite surprising, the other which was to be expected. That which is apt to strike us as strange—to some of our readers it may be almost startling—is the book of Acts, which supplies us with most of the information we possess about the apostles, has not a single prayer of theirs in its twenty-eight chapters. Yet a little reflection should show us that this omission is in full accord with the special character of that book, for the Acts is much more historical than devotional, consisting far more of a chronicle of what the Spirit wrought through the apostles than in them. It is the public deeds of Christ's ambassadors which is there made prominent, rather than their private exercises. True, they are shown to be men of prayer, as is seen by: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4), and again and again we behold them engaged in this holy exercise (9:40; 10:9; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8), yet we are not told what they *said*, the nearest approach being 8:15, yet their words are not recorded—we regard the prayer of 1:24 as that of the hundred and twenty, and that of 4:24-30 as that of "their own company."

The second feature which impressed us while contemplating the field which is to be before us, was that the great majority of the recorded prayers of the apostles issued from the heart of *Paul*; and this, as we have said, was really to be expected. If it be asked, why so, several reasons may be returned. He was, preeminently, the apostle unto the Gentiles. Peter, James, and John ministered principally to Jewish believers (Gal. 2:9), and, even in their unconverted days *they* had been accustomed to bow the knee before the Lord. But the Gentiles had come out of heathenism and it was fitting that their spiritual father should also be their devotional exemplar. Moreover, he wrote twice as many epistles as all the other apostles added together, nevertheless there are eight times as many prayers in his epistles as in all of theirs. But chiefly, we call to mind the first thing said of Paul after his conversion; "Behold, he *prayeth*" (Acts 9:11): it is as though that struck the keynote of his subsequent life, that he would be, to an especial degree, marked as a man of prayer.

It is not that the other apostles were devoid of this spirit, for God does not employ prayerless ministers, as He has no dumb children. To "cry day and night unto Him" is given by Christ as one of the distinguishing marks of His elect (Luke 18:7). Yet certain of His servants and some of His saints are permitted to enjoy closer and more constant fellowship with the Lord than others, and such was obviously the case (excepting John) with the man who on one occasion was even caught up into Paradise. A special measure of "grace and supplications" (Zech. 12:10) was vouchsafed him, so that he appears to have been favoured with a spirit of prayer above even his fellows, which dwelt in him to a remarkable degree. Such was the fervor of his love for Christ and the members of His mystical Body, such was his intense solicitude for their spiritual wellbeing and growth, that there continually gushed from his soul a flow of prayer to God for them, and of thanksgiving on their behalf. If we are permitted to proceed with these expository meditations, many illustrations of what has just been said will come before us, examples of where ebullitions of devotion broke forth in the midst of his doctrinal and practical instructions.

Ere proceeding further it should be pointed out that in this series of articles I do not propose to confine myself to the petitionary prayers of the apostles, but rather to take in a wider range. In

Scripture “Prayer” includes much more than making known our requests unto God, and this is something which His people now need reminding of—some of them instructing, in these days of superficiality and ignorance. The very verse that presents to us the privilege of spreading our needs before the Lord emphasises this very thing: “in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6) unless gratitude be expressed for mercies already received and thanks be given for granting us the continued favor of petitioning our Father, how can we expect to obtain His ear and to receive answers of peace. Yet prayer, in its highest and fullest sense, rises above thanksgiving for gifts vouchsafed: the heart is drawn out in contemplating the Giver Himself so that the soul is prostrated before Him in worship and adoration.

In the above paragraph our pen traveled faster than it should have done. Though we ought not to digress from our immediate theme and enter into the subject of prayer in general, yet it should be pointed out that there is yet another aspect which needs to take precedence of those referred to above, namely self-aborrence and confession of our own unworthiness and sinfulness. The soul must solemnly remind itself of *Who it is* that is to be approached, even the Most High, before whom the very seraphim “veil their faces” (Isa. 6:2). Though Divine grace has made the Christian a “son,” nevertheless he is still a *creature*, and as such at an infinite and inconceivable distance below the Creator and therefore it is fitting he should both deeply feel and acknowledge this by taking his place before Him in the dust. Moreover, we need to remember *what we are*, namely, not only creatures, but (considered in ourselves) *sinful* creatures and thus there needs to be both a sense and an owning of this as we bow before the Holy One. Only thus can we, with any meaning and reality, plead the mediation and merits of Christ as the ground of our approach.

Thus, broadly speaking, “prayer” takes in or includes confession of sin, petitions for the supply of our needs, and the homage of our hearts unto the Giver Himself. Or, we may say its principal branches are humiliation, supplication and adoration. Hence we hope to embrace within the scope of this series not only passages like Ephesians 1:16-19 and 3:14-21, but also single verses such as 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3. That “blessed be God,” is itself a form of prayer is clear from Psalm 100:4, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, bless His name”—other references might be given, but let this suffice. The “incense” which was offered in the tabernacle and temple consisted of various spices compounded together (Exod. 30:34,35), and it was the blending of one with another that made the perfume so fragrant and refreshing. The incense was a type of the intercession of our great High Priest (Rev. 8:3,4) and of the prayers of saints (Mal. 1:11). In like manner there should be a proportioned mingling of humiliation, supplication, and adoration in our approaches to the throne of grace, not one to the exclusion of the others but a blending of them together.

The fact that so many prayers are found in the New Testament epistles calls attention to an important aspect of *ministerial duty*. The preacher’s obligations are not fully discharged when he leaves the pulpit, for he needs to water the Seed which he has sown. As this magazine is now being sent to quite a number of young preachers we will enlarge a little upon this point. It has already been seen that the apostles devoted themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” and therein have they left an excellent example to be observed by all who follow them in the sacred vocation. Observe the order, and not only observe but heed and practice the same. The most laborious and carefully-prepared sermon is likely to fall unctionless on the hearers unless it has been born out of travail of soul before God. Unless the sermon be the product of earnest prayer we must not expect it to waken the spirit of prayer in those who hear it. As we have pointed out, Paul mingled supplications with his instructions. It is our privilege and duty to

retire to the secret place after we leave the pulpit and beg God to write His Word on the hearts of those who have listened to us, to prevent the Enemy snatching away the Seed, to so bless our efforts that they may bear fruit to His eternal praise.

Luther was wont to say “There are three things that go to the making of a successful preacher: supplication, meditation, and tribulation.” This was taken down by one of his students from his “Table talks.” We know not what elaboration the great Reformer made, but suppose he meant that, prayer is necessary to bring the preacher into a suitable frame to handle Divine things and to endue him with power; that meditation on the Word is essential in order to supply him with material for his message; and that tribulation is required as ballast for his vessel, for the minister of the Gospel needs trials to keep him humble, as the apostle was given a thorn in the flesh that he might not be unduly exalted by the abundance of the revelations granted to him. Prayer is the appointed medium of receiving spiritual communications for the instruction of our people. We must be much with God before we can be fitted to go forth and speak in His name. The Colossians were reminded that their master was “always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Could your church be truthfully told that of *you*?

But let it not be thought that this marked characteristic of the epistles points a lesson for preachers only. Far from it. These epistles are addressed to God’s children at large, and everything in them is both needed by and suited to their Christian lives. Believers too should pray much not only for themselves but for *all* their brethren and sisters in Christ, and especially according to these apostolic models, petitioning for the particular blessings they specify. We have long been convinced there is no better way—no more practical, valuable, and effective way—of expressing solicitude and affection for our fellow saints than by bearing them up before God in the arms of our faith and love. It is by studying these prayers in the epistles and pondering them clause by clause that we may learn more clearly what blessings we should desire for ourselves and others—what spiritual gifts and graces we most need to ask for. The very fact that these prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have been placed on permanent record in the Sacred Volume intimates that the particular favors are to be sought and obtained from God.

We will conclude these preliminary and general observations by calling attention to a few of the more definite features of the apostolic prayers. Observe then, *to Whom* these prayers are addressed. While there is not uniformity of expression but rather appropriate variety in this matter, yet the most frequent manner in which the Deity is addressed therein is as: “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3); “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3); “the Father of glory” (Eph. 1:17); “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:14). In this we may see of how the holy apostles had heeded the injunction of their Master, for when they requested of Him saying, “Lord, teach us to pray,” He responded thus: “When ye pray, say, our *Father* which art in heaven” (Luke 11:1,2) an example of which He also set before them in John 17:1, 5, 11. This too has been recorded for our learning. We are not unmindful of how many have unlawfully and lightly addressed God as “Father,” yet their abuse does not warrant our non-use of owning this blessed relationship. Nothing is more calculated to warm the heart and give liberty of utterance as a realisation that we are approaching our “Father.” If we have received “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15) let us not quench the same.

Next, we note their *brevity*. The prayers of the apostles are short ones: not some, or even most, but all of them are exceedingly brief, most of them comprised in but one or two verses, and the longest in only seven verses. How this rebukes the lengthy, lifeless and wearisome prayers of many a pulpit. Wordy prayers are usually windy ones. I quote again from Martin Luther, this time

from his comments on the Lord's prayer to simple laymen: "When thou prayest let thy words be few, but thy thoughts and affections many, and above all let them be profound. The less thou speakest the better thou prayest... External and bodily prayer is that buzzing of the lips, that outside babble that is gone through without any attention, and which strikes the ears of men; but prayer in spirit and in truth is the inward desire, the motions, the sighs, which issue from the depths of the heart. The former is the prayer of hypocrites and of all who trust in themselves: the latter is the prayer of the children of God, who walk in His fear."

Observe too their *definiteness*. Though exceedingly brief yet their prayers are very explicit. There were no vague ramblings or mere generalisations, but specific requests for definite things. How much failure there is at this point. How many prayers have we heard that were so incoherent and aimless, so lacking in point and unity, that when the Amen was reached we could scarcely remember one thing for which thanks had been given or request had been made, only a blurred impression remaining on the mind and a feeling that the suppliant had engaged more in a form of indirect preaching than direct praying. But examine any of the prayers of the apostles and it will be seen at a glance that theirs are like those of their Master's in Matthew 6:9-13 and John 17—made up of definitive adorations and sharply-defined petitions. There is no moralising and uttering of pious platitudes, but a spreading before God of certain needs and a simple asking for the supply of them.

Consider also *the burden of them*. In the apostolic prayers there is no supplicating God for the supply of temporal needs and (with a single exception) no asking Him to interpose on their behalf in a providential way. Instead, the things asked for are wholly of a spiritual and gracious nature. That the Father may give unto us the spirit of understanding and revelation in the knowledge of Himself, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened so that we may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power to usward (Eph. 1:17-19). That He would grant us according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19). That our love may abound more and more, that we might be sincere and without offence, and be filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:9-11), walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (Col. 1:10), that we might be sanctified wholly (1 Thess. 5:23).

Note also the *catholicity* of them. Not that it is either wrong or unspiritual to pray for ourselves individually, any more than it is to supplicate for temporal and providential mercies; rather are we directing attention to where the apostles placed all their emphasis. In one only do we find Paul praying for himself, and rarely for particular individuals. His general custom was to pray for the whole Household of Faith. In this he adheres closely to the pattern prayer given us by Christ, and which we like to think of as the *Family* prayer. All its pronouns are in the plural number: "give us" (not only "me"), "forgive us" etc. Accordingly we find the apostle exhorting us to be making "supplication for *all* saints" (Eph. 6:18), and in his prayers he sets us an example of this very thing. He asked that the Ephesian church might "be able to comprehend with *all* saints what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (3:18). What a corrective for self-centeredness! If I am praying for "all saints" I include myself!

Finally, let us point out a striking *omission*. If all the apostolic prayers be read attentively it will be found that in none of them is any place given to that which occupies such prominence in those of Arminians. Not once do we find God asked to save the world or to pour out His Spirit on

all flesh. The apostles did not so much as pray for the conversion of the city in which a particular Christian church was located. In this they conformed again to the example set for them by Christ: “I pray not for the world,” said He, “but for them which Thou hast given Me” (John 17:9). Should it be objected that the Lord Jesus was there praying only for His immediate apostles or disciples, the answer is that when He extended His prayer beyond them it was not for the world, but only for His believing people unto the end of time: see verses 20, 21. It is true the apostle exhorts that prayers, “be made for all [classes of] men: for kings and all that are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1)—in which duty many are woefully remiss—yet it is not for their salvation, but “that *we* may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (v. 2). There is much to be learned from the prayers of the apostles. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

13. Ninth Miracle

It seems strange so very few have perceived that a miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 4:42-44, for surely a careful reading of those verses makes it evident that they describe the wonder-working power of the Lord, for no otherwise can we explain the feeding of so many with such a little and then a surplus remaining. It is even more strange that scarcely any appear to have recognised that we have here a most striking foreshadowment of the only miracle wrought by the Lord Jesus which is narrated by all the four Evangelists, namely, His feeding of the multitude from a few loaves and fishes. In all of our reading we have not only never come across a sermon thereon, but so far as memory serves us, not so much as a quotation from or allusion to this striking passage. Thomas Scott dismisses the incident with a single paragraph, and though Matthew Henry is a little fuller, he too says nothing about the supernatural character of it. We wonder how many of our readers, before turning to this article, could have answered the question, Where in the Old Testament is described the miracle of the feeding of a multitude through the hands of a man?

First, *its occasion*. Though there was a “dearth [famine] in the land” (2 Kings 4:38) yet we learn from the first verse of our passage that it was not a total or universal one: some barley had been grown in Baal-shalisha. In this we may perceive how that in wrath the Lord remembers mercy. Even where the crops of an entire country are a complete failure—an exceedingly exceptional occurrence—there is always food available in adjoining lands. Therein we behold an exemplification of God’s goodness and faithfulness. Of old He declared “While the earth

remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night *shall not cease*” (Gen. 8:22). Though more than four thousand years have passed since then, each returning one has furnished clear evidence of the fulfillment of that promise—a demonstration both of the Divine veracity and of God’s continuous regulation of the affairs of earth. As we have said, it is very rare for there to be a total failure of the crops in any single country, for as the Lord declares “I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon and the piece whereon it rained not withered” (Amos 4:7).

Second, *its contributor*. “And there came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits” (2 Kings 4:42). Let us begin by observing how naturally and artlessly the conduct of this unnamed man is introduced. Here was one who had a heart for the Lord’s servant in a time of need, who thought of him in this season of scarcity and distress, and who grudged not to go to some trouble in ministering to him. “Shalisha” adjoined “mount Ephraim” (1 Sam. 9:4) and probably a journey of considerable distance had to be taken in order to reach the prophet. Ah, but there was more behind this man’s action than meets the eye: we must look deeper if we are to discover the springs of his deed. It is written “the steps are ordered of the Lord” (Ps. 37:23). And thus it was in the case before us: this man now befriended Elisha because God had worked in him “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). It is only by comparing Scripture with Scripture we can discover the fullness of meaning in any verse.

Ere passing on let us pause and make application unto ourselves of the truth to which attention has just been called. It has an important bearing on each of us, and one which needs the more to be emphasised in this day of practical atheism. The whole trend of things in our evil generation is to be so occupied with what are termed “the laws of Nature,” that the operations of the Creator are lost sight of; man and his doings are so eulogised and deified that the hand of God in providence is totally obscured. It should be otherwise with the saint. When some friend comes and ministers to your need, while being grateful to him for the same, look above him and his kindness to the One who has sent him. I may pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” and then, because I am so absorbed with secondary causes and the instruments which He may employ fail to see my Father’s hand as He graciously answers my petition. God is the Giver of every temporal as well as spiritual thing, even though He uses human agents in the conveying of them.

“And there came a man from Baal-shalisha.” This town was originally called “Shalisha” but the evil power exerted by Jezebel had stamped upon it the name of her false god, as was the case with other places—(compare “Baal-hermon,” 1 Chron 5:23). But even in this seat of idolatry there was at least one who feared the Lord, who was regulated by His law, and who had a heart for His servant. This should be a comfort to the saints in a time of such fearful and widespread declension as now obtains. But however dark things may get, and we believe they will yet become much darker before there is any improvement, God will preserve to Himself a remnant. He always has, and He always will. In the antediluvian world there was a Noah, who by grace was upright in his generations and walked with God. In Egypt, when the name of Jehovah was unknown among the Hebrews, a Moses was raised up, who “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” So now there is one here and there as “a voice in the wilderness.” Though the name of this man from Shalisha is not given, we doubt not it is inscribed in the Book of Life.

“And there came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits.” Again we point out that there is more here than meets the careless eye or is obvious to the casual glance. Other passages which make mention of the “firstfruits” must be compared if we are to learn the deeper meaning of what is here recorded and discover that this man’s action was something more than one of thoughtfulness and kindness to Elisha. “The first of the firstfruits of

thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God” (Ex. 23:19—repeats in 34:26). The “firstfruits,” then, belonged to the Lord, being an acknowledgment both of His goodness and proprietorship: a fuller and very beautiful passage thereon is found in Deuteronomy 26:1-11. From Numbers 18:8-13 we learn that these became the portion of the priests: “whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they [the people] shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine [Aaron’s and his sons] every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it” (v. 13). The same holds good in the rebuilt temple: “the first of all the firstfruits... shall be the priest’s” (Ezek. 44:30).

This man from Shalisha then, was, in principle, acting in obedience to the Divine Law. We say “in principle,” because it was enjoined that the firstfruits should be taken into “the house of the Lord” and that they became the priest’s portion. But this man belonged to the kingdom of Israel and not of Judah: he lived in Samaria and had no access to Jerusalem, and even had he gone there, entrance to the temple had been forbidden. In Samaria there were none of the priests of the Lord, only those of Baal’s. But though he rendered not obedience to the letter, he certainly did so in the spirit, for he recognised that these firstfruits were not for his own use; and though Elisha was not a priest he was a prophet, a servant of the Lord. It is for this reason, we believe, that it is said he brought the firstfruits not to “Elisha” but to “the man of God.” That designation occurs first in Deuteronomy 33:1 in connection with Moses, and is descriptive not of his character but of his office—one wholly devoted to God, his entire time spent in His service. In the Old Testament it is applied only to the prophets and extra-ordinary teachers: 1 Samuel 2:27, 9:6; 1 Kings 17:18 etc., but in the New Testament it seems to belong to all of God’s servants: 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17.

What has been pointed out above should throw light on a problem which is now exercising many conscientious souls and which should provide comfort in these evil days. The situation of many of God’s people is now much like that which obtained when our present incident occurred. It was a time of apostasy, when everything was out of order. Such is the present case of Christendom. It is the clear duty of God’s people to render obedience to the letter of His Word wherever that is possible, but when it is not they may do so in spirit. Daniel and his fellows could not observe the Passover feast in Babylon, and no doubt that was a sore grief to them. But that very grief signified their desire to observe it, and in such cases God accepts the will for the deed. For many years past this writer and his wife have been unable to conscientiously celebrate the Lord’s supper, yet (by grace) we do so in spirit, by remembering the Lord’s death for His people in our hearts and minds. “Not forsaking the assembling of *ourselves* together” (Heb. 10:25) is very far from meaning that the sheep of Christ should attend a place where the “goats” preponderate, or where their presence would sanction what is dishonoring to their Master.

Ere passing on we should point out another instructive and encouraging lesson here for the humble saint. As this man from Shalisha, acting in the spirit of God’s Law, journeying with his firstfruits to where Elisha was, he could have had no thought in his mind that by this action he was going to be a contributor unto a remarkable miracle. Yet such was actually the case, for those very loaves of his became the means under the wonder-working power of God of feeding a large company of people. And this is but a single illustration of a principle which, by the benign government of God, is of frequent occurrence, as probably most of us have witnessed for ourselves. Ah, my reader, we never know how far-reaching may be the effects and what fruits may issue for eternity from the most inconspicuous act done for God’s glory or the good of one of His people. How often has some obscure Christian, in the kindness of his heart, done something or given something which God has been pleased to bless and multiply unto others in a manner and to an extent which never entered his or her mind.

“And brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof.” How it appears that it delighted the Holy Spirit to describe this offering in detail. Bearing in mind that a time of serious “dearth” then obtained, may we not see in the varied nature of this gift thoughtfulness and consideration on the part of him that made it. Had the whole of it been made up in the form of “loaves” some of it might have gone moldy before the whole of it was eaten: at best it would need to be consumed quickly: to obviate that, part of the barley was brought in the husk. On the other hand, had all been brought in the ear time would be required for the grinding and baking thereof, and in the meanwhile the prophet might be famished and fainting. By such a division both disadvantages were prevented. From the whole, we are taught that in making gifts to another or in ministering to his needs we should exercise care in seeing that it is in a form best suited to his requirements. The application of this principle pertains to spiritual things as well as temporal.

Third, *its generosity*. Before noting the use to which Elisha put this offering, let us observe that, gifts sometimes come from the most unexpected quarters. Had this man come from Bethel or Shunem there would be no occasion for surprise, but that one from Baal-shalisha should bring God’s servant an offering of his firstfruits was certainly not to be looked for. Ah, does not each of God’s servants know something of this experience! If on the one hand some on whose cooperation he had reason to count failed and disappointed him, others who were strangers have befriended him. More than once or twice have the writer and his wife had this pleasant surprise: we cherish their memory, while seeking to forget the contrasting ones. Joseph might be envied and mistreated by his brethren, but he found favor in the eyes of Potiphar. Moses may be despised by the Hebrews, but he received kindly treatment in the house of Jethro. Rather than Elijah should starve by the brook Cherith, the Lord commanded the ravens to feed him. Our supplies are sure, though at times they may come from strange quarters.

“And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat” (v. 42). In the preceding miracle this same trait is manifest: nothing is there said of Elisha partaking of the pottage, nor even of the young prophets in his charge, but rather “the people.” Such liberality will not go unrewarded by God, for He has promised “Give, and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). Such was the case here, for the very next thing recorded after his “Pour out for the people that they may eat” (v. 41) is the receiving of these twenty loaves. And what use does he now make of them? His first thought was not for himself, but for others. We must not conclude from the silence of this verse that the prophet failed either to perceive the hand of God in this gift or that he neglected to return thanks unto Him. Had the Scriptures given a full and detailed account of such matters, they had run into many volumes instead of being a single one. According to the law of analogy we are justified in concluding that he did both. Moreover, what follows shows plainly that his mind was stayed upon the Lord.

The situation which confronted Elisha is one that in principle has often faced God’s people. What the Lord gives to me is not to be used selfishly but is to be shared with others. Yet sometimes we are in the position where what is on hand does not appear sufficient for that purpose. My supply may be scanty and the claims of a growing family have to be met: if I contribute to the Lord’s cause and minister to His servants and people, may not my little ones go short? Here is where the exercise of *faith* comes in: lay hold of such promises as Luke 6:38 and 2 Corinthians 9:8, act on them and you shall prove that “the liberal soul shall be made fat” (Prov. 11:25). Especially should the ministers of Christ set an example in this respect: if they be close handed it will greatly hinder their usefulness. Elisha did not scruple to make practical use of what

was designed as an offering to the Lord, as David did not hesitate to take the “shewbread” and give to his hungry men.

Fourth, *its opposition*. “And his servitor said, What! should I set *this* before an hundred men?” (v. 43). Ah, the servant of God must not expect others to be equally zealous in exercising a gracious spirit or to co-operate with him in the works of faith, no not even those who are his assistants—none can walk by the faith of another. When Luther announced his intention of going to Worms even his dearest brethren sought to dissuade him. But was not such an objection a natural one? Yes, but certainly not spiritual. It shows how shallow and fleeting must have been the impression made on the man by the previous miracles. It was quite in keeping with what we read of this “servitor,” Gehazi, elsewhere. His language expressed incredulity and unbelief. Was he thinking of himself? Did he resent his master’s generosity and think, *We* shall need this food for ourselves? And this, after all the miracles he had seen God work through Elisha! Ah it takes something more than the witnessing of miracles to regenerate a dead soul, as the Jews made evident when the Son of God wrought in their midst.

Fifth, *its means*: faith in God and His Word. “He said again, Give the people that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof” (v. 43). Where there is real faith in God it is not stumbled by the unbelief of others, but when it stands in the wisdom of men it is soon paralyzed by the opposition it encounters. When blind Bartimaeus began to cry out, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me,” and many charged him that he should hold his peace, “he cried the more a great deal” (Mark 10:48). On the other hand, one with a stony-ground hearer’s faith endureth for awhile, “for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by [quickly] he is offended” (Matt. 13:21). When Elisha had first said, “Give unto the people, that they may eat” it was the language of faith. Verse 41 seems to show that the people had been seeking the prophet in the extremity of their need. His own barrel of meal had probably run low, and it is likely he had been praying for its replenishment. And here was God’s answer—yet in such a form or measure as to further test his faith! Elisha saw the hand of God in this gift and counted upon His making it sufficient to meet the needs of the crowd. Elisha regarded those twenty loaves as an “earnest” of greater bounties.

Do we regard such providences as “a token for good” or are we so wrapped up in the token itself that we look no further? It was a bold and courageous faith in Elisha: he was not afraid the Lord would put him to confusion and cause him to become a laughingstock to the people. At first his faith was a general (yet sufficient) one in the character of God. Then it met with a rebuff from Gehazi, but he refused to be shaken. And now it seems to us that the Lord rewarded His servant’s faith by giving him a definite word from Himself. The way to get more faith is to use what has already been given us (Luke 8:18), for God ever honors those who honor Him. Trust Him fully and He will then bestow assurance. The minister of Christ must not be deterred by the carnality and unbelief of those who ought to be the ones to strengthen his hands and co-operate with him. Alas, how many have let distrustful deacons to quench their zeal by the difficulties and objections which they raise. How often the children of Israel opposed Moses and murmured against him, but “by faith he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

Sixth, *its antitype*. There is no doubt whatever in our minds that the above incident supplies the Old Testament foreshadowment of our Lord’s miracle in feeding the multitude, and it is both interesting and instructive to compare and contrast the type with its antitype. Note then the following parallels. First, in each case there was a crowd of hungry people. Second, Elisha took pity on them, and Christ had compassion on the needy multitude (Matt. 14:14). Third, a few “loaves” formed the principal article of diet, and in each case they were “barley” ones (John 6:9).

Fourth, in each case, the order went forth “give [not ‘sell’] the people that they may eat” (cf. Mark 6:37). Fifth, in each case an unbelieving attendant raised objection (John 6:7). Sixth, Elisha fed the crowd through his servant (v. 44) and Christ through His apostles (Matt. 14:19). Seventh, in each case a surplus remained after the people had eaten (v. 44 and cf. Matt. 14:20). And now observe wherein Christ has “the pre-eminence.” First, He fed a much larger company: over 5,000 (Matt. 14:21) instead of 100. Second, He employed fewer loaves: 5 (Matt. 14:17) instead of 20. Third, He supplied a richer feast, fish as well as bread. Fourth, He wrought by His own power.

Seventh, *its meaning*. It will suffice if we just summarise what we have previously dwelt upon. 1. The servant of God who is faithful in giving out to others will not himself be kept on short rations. 2. The more such an one obtains from God, the more should he impart to the people: “Freely ye have received, freely give.” 3. God ever makes His grace abound unto those who are generous. 4. A true servant of God has implicit confidence in the Divine character. 5. Though he encounters opposition he refuses to be stumbled thereby. 6. Though other ministers ridicule him, he acts according to God’s Word. 7. God does not fail him, but honors his trust. —AWP

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS’ PERSEVERANCE

10. Its Benefits

It has been pointed out on a previous occasion that what has been engaging our attention is far more than a subject for theological debate: it is full of practical value. It must be so, for it occupies a prominent place in the Divinely-inspired Scriptures which are “profitable for doctrine” (2 Tim. 3:16), and that, because it is “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3)—revealing the standard of piety and actually promoting piety in the soul and life of him who receives it by faith. Everything revealed in the Word and all the activities of God have two chief ends in view: His own glory and the good of His people. And as we draw to the close of this series it is fitting that we should seek to set before readers some of the benefits which are conferred by a believing apprehension of this truth, some of the blessed effects it produces and fruits it yields. We somewhat anticipated this aspect of our subject by what we said under its Blessedness (in the Jan. and Feb. 1942 issues), yet as we then did little more than generalise it behooves us now to more definitely particularise.

In attempting to describe some of the benefits which this doctrine affords we shall be regulated by whether we are viewing it from the Divine side or the human, for as we have sought to make clear in the preceding articles, the perseverance of the saints in holiness and obedience is the direct effect of the continued operations of Divine grace and power within them, and those operations are guaranteed by the promises of the everlasting covenant. Viewed from the Divine side, perseverance in the faith and in the paths of righteousness is itself a gift, a distinct gift from God: “who shall also confirm you unto the end” (1 Cor. 1:8). Absolutely considered God’s preservation of His people turns upon no condition to be fulfilled by them, but depends entirely on the immutability and invincibility of the Divine purpose. Nevertheless, God does not preserve

His people by mere physical power and without their concurrence, as He keeps the planets steadfast in their orbits. No, rather does He treat them throughout as moral agents and responsible creatures, drawing them with the cords of love, inclining their hearts unto Himself, rendering effectual the motives He sets before them and the means which He requires them to use.

The infallible certainty of the Divine operations on behalf of and within His saints and the mode of their working cannot be insisted upon too emphatically or repeated too often. On the one hand, the crown of honor and glory must be ascribed to the King Himself; and on the other hand, the response and concurrence or loyalty of His subjects is to be made equally plain. God preserves His people by renewing them in the inner man day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), by quickening them according to His Word, by granting them fresh supplies of grace, and also by moving them to heed His warnings and respond to His exhortations; in a word, by working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Thus our portrayal of some of the benefits and fruits of this doctrine will be governed by our viewpoint: whether we trace out what follows faith's appropriating of the Divine promises or what follows from faith's appropriation of the Divine precepts. God has promised to carry forward in sanctification and complete in glorification the work begun in regeneration, yet not without requiring us to perform the duties of piety and avoid everything contrary thereto.

1. Here is cause *for adoring God*. The doctrine set forth in this series most certainly redounds more to the glory of God than does the contrary one, which leaves our everlasting felicity in uncertainty. It exemplifies God's *power*, whereby He not only restrains our external foes from overthrowing our salvation, but also by fixing the wavering disposition of our wills that we do not cease from the love of and desire after holiness. Also His *truth* in the promises of the Covenant, on which we securely rely, being assured that He who gave them will certainly make the same good. His *goodness*, whereby He patiently bears with our weakness and dullness, so that when we fall into sin, He does not cast us off, but by His loving chastenings recovers us through moving us to renewed repentance. His *holiness*, when because of our folly we trifle with temptation for a season, disregarding His warnings, He makes us conscious of His displeasure by withholding tokens of His favor and declining an answer to our prayers, bringing us to confess and forsake our sins, that fellowship with Him may be restored and that peace and joy may again be our portion.

2. Here is *peace for the soul* in a world of strife and where men's hearts fail them for fear of the future. This is evident if we consider the opposite. In themselves believers are weak and unstable, unable to do anything as they ought. They have no strength of their own to keep themselves in the love of God, but carry about with them a body of sin and death. They are continually exposed to temptations which ensnare the wisest and overthrow the strongest. Suppose then they had received no guarantee of the unchangeableness of God's purpose, no infallible word of the continuance of His love, no pledge that He will keep and secure them by the working of His mighty power, no declaration that unfailing supplies of His Spirit and grace shall be vouchsafed them, no assurance that He will never leave them nor forsake them, no revelation of an Advocate on high to plead their cause and of the sufficiency of His mediation and the efficacy of His intercession. But rather that they are left to their own fidelity: and in consequence some of the most eminent saints have apostatized from the faith, that thousands have utterly fallen out of God's love and favor, and so been cast from His covenant, from whence few have ever recovered; and all confidence and peace will be at an end, and fear and terror fill their place.

How vastly different is the teaching of the Word from what we have supposed above. There we find God, as it were, saying to His people: I know your weakness and insufficiency, your dullness and darkness, how that without My Son and continual supplies of His Spirit you can do

nothing. The power and rage of your indwelling sin is not hidden from Me, and how with violence it brings you into captivity against your desires. I know that though you believe, yet you are frequently made to groan over your unbelief, and that you are then ready to fear the worst. And when in that case Satan assaults and tempts, seeking to devour you; that first he acts like a serpent, attempting to beguile and ensnare, and then as a lion to terrify. But be not ignorant of his devices: resist him steadfast in the faith: take unto you the whole armor of God, watch night and day that ye be not seduced by him, and you shall overcome him by the blood of the Lamb. “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). Though you may be tripped up, ye shall not utterly fall. Though you be fearful, My kindness shall not be removed from you. So be of good cheer, and run with patience the race that is set before you.

3. Here is *solid comfort* for the saints in a day of declension, when there is a great “falling away” of those who once appeared to run well. Though what is termed “organised Christianity” be a demonstrated failure, though corporate Christendom be now in ruins, though ten thousands have apostatised yet let the saints be fully assured that God has and will reserve to Himself a remnant who bow not the knee to Baal; and therefore may those who have the living God for their “refuge” confidently exclaim “Therefore will not we fear though the earth [the most stable and ancient establishments] be removed, and though the mountains [the leaders and most towering professors] be carried [by the winds of false doctrine] into the midst of the sea”—the masses of the wicked: Isaiah 57:20. When many of the nominal disciples of Christ “went back and walked no more with Him,” He turned to the apostles and said “Will ye also go away?” Whereupon Simon Peter as their spokesman answered “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:66-68). Thus it was then, has been throughout the centuries, and will be unto the end of time. The sheep are secure, while the goats turn aside and perish.

Observe how Paul emphasizes this very note in 2 Timothy 2. Hymeneus and Philetus eminent men in the church had apostatised, and by their defection and false teaching had overthrown the doctrinal faith of some; yet says the apostle, This is no reason why the real children of God should be made to quake and imagine that their end is uncertain. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: the Lord knoweth them that are His; and, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (v. 19). Note the two sides of that “seal,” preserving the balance of Truth: on the one side there is a cordial—those who are built upon the foundation of God’s unchanging purpose and love shall not be prevailed against; on the other there is a warning—trifle not with “iniquity,” whether it be doctrinal or practical, but “depart” from it. Similarly John assures believers who might be shaken at seeing certain in their assemblies being seduced by the antichrists of that day, but such were only *unregenerate* professors (1 John 2:19), and therefore that the regenerate, held in the hand of Christ, shall not be overcome by deceivers.

4. Here is *ground for holy confidence*. The Lord knows how difficult is the task assigned His people and how deep is the sense of their own insufficiency. He knows too that nothing more enervates their hearts and enfeebles their hands than doubts and fears, and therefore has He made absolute promise to those who hear His voice and follow Him that “they shall never perish” (John 10:29). It was this which armed Joshua to the battle: “There shall not a man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.” And from thence the Lord drew an argument—the very opposite of that which the legalistic Arminian infers—namely, “Be strong and of a good courage” (Josh. 1:5, 6). Such a promise would not make a Joshua reckless or lax, whatever effect it might have upon a self-

righteous freewill. No, rather would it produce a holy confidence, which prompted to the use of lawful means and gave assurance of God's blessing thereon. Such a confidence causes its possessor to trust in the Lord with all his heart and lean not unto his own understanding.

Such encouragement is conveyed and such confidence is engendered by the Divine declaration "the righteous shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9). As the young believer contemplates the likely length of the journey before him and the difficulties of the road which has to be trod, he is apt to give way to despair; but if his faith lays hold of this promise that he shall certainly reach the desired goal, new strength will be imparted to his feeble knees and increased resolution to his fainting heart. It is the confidence that by continuing to plod along the weary traveler will reach home, which causes him to take courage and refuse to give in. It is the assurance of success which is to the right-minded and best stimulus of labor. If the Christian be persuaded that the world shall not overcome him, that sin shall not slay him, that Satan shall not triumph over him, then will he take unto him the shield of faith and the Sword of the Spirit and fight like a man and be more than conqueror. As it has been truly said "This is one of the reasons why British troops have so often won the fight: because the drummer boys know not how to beat a retreat and the soldiers refused to believe in the possibility of defeat."

5. Here is *consolation for us in the severest trials*. Let us illustrate this point from the case of Job, for it is difficult to conceive one more acute and extreme than his. You know how severe, how many, and how protracted were those afflictions. You know how far Satan was permitted to proceed with him. You know how his wife turned against and his so-called friends tantalised him. His cup of trouble was indeed filled to the brim, yet we find him looking above his afflictions and censorious critics, exclaiming "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as *gold*" (23:10). Weigh well those words and bring to mind the situation of the one who uttered them. Observe that there was no doubt or uncertainty in his mind about the issue of his afflictions: it was not "I fear I shall perish in the furnace," for he refused to allow those fiery trials to turn him into a skeptic. Nor did he merely cherish a faltering hope that things might possibly be well with him at the end, and say "I *may* come forth as gold." No, there was the undoubting, positive conviction "I shall"!

Ah, my reader, Job saw "the bright light in the cloud" (37:21). He drew comfort from what assured Cowper when he wrote those lines:

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace:
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.*

Job knew that God maketh "all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28), and therefore he knew there could be no possibility of his perishing in the fires. And why was there no doubting as to the outcome of his trials? Because he could say "For I know that *my Redeemer* liveth" and therefore could he add "and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh *shall I* see God" (19:25,26). That was the ground of his confidence—nothing in himself. That was what caused him to triumphantly exclaim "I shall come forth as gold." Cheer up fellow believer: the process may be painful, but the end is sure; the path may be rough and you may feel faint, but the prospect is entrancing and certain.

6. Here is *cause for praise*. Why should I be found still holding on my way when so many who made a bright profession and who appeared to make much faster progress in spiritual things

than I did, have long ago dropped out of the race, and have gone right back into the world? Certainly not because I was any better by nature. No, I freely ascribe all the glory unto God who has so graciously ministered unto me and continued to work in me; who has been so longsuffering and recovered me when I strayed. O what thanks are due unto Him. How often have I had occasion to say “He restoreth my soul” (Psa. 23:3)—as He did Abraham’s, Jacob’s, Peter’s. Thus I may say with David “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord *forever*” (Psa. 89:1). Not today or tomorrow, but for “forever”; not only when I come to the brink of the Jordan, but after I have passed safely through it, the high praises of His faithfulness shall be the theme of my song throughout eternity.

7. Here is *a powerful incentive to confirm Christians* in their spiritual lives and to spur them unto the duties of piety. This is evident from what regeneration works in them. All the arguments drawn from the possibility of the apostasy of saints are derived from the terror of dreadful threatenings and the fear of eternal punishment; whereas those taken from the assurances conveyed by the everlasting covenant breathe nothing but the sweetness of grace. Since the children of God have received “the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry Father, Father” (Rom. 8:15), they are more powerfully drawn by the cords of love than by the scourge of horror. Moreover since all acceptable obedience springs from gratitude, then that which most effectually promotes gratitude must be the most powerful spring of obedience, and as to whether a grace bestowed by the Lord is perpetual or one which may be lost is likely to inspire the deepest gratitude, we leave to the judgment of our readers. The more firmly be secured the reward of duty, the more diligent shall we be in performing duty.

8. Here is *an incentive to practical godliness*. If Christian perseverance is one of continuance in the path of obedience and holiness, then will the saints make diligent use of the aids which God has provided for them and eschew the contrary. Especially will they be encouraged to ask for and seek after the grace which God has promised. As it is a sight and sense of Christ’s being crucified because of *my* heinous sins which produces evangelical repentance (Zech. 12:10), so it is a realisation of the immutability of God’s purpose, the unchangeableness of His love, and the preciousness of His promises which strengthen faith and inflame love to serve and please Him. This twofold doctrine of Divine preservation and perseverance in holiness supplies effectual motives unto piety. Negatively, it removes discouragements by letting us know that our denials of self, mortifications of the flesh and efforts to resist the Devil, are not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9). Positively, it places upon us the most powerful obligations to live unto God, to show forth His praises, and adorn the doctrine we profess (2 Cor. 7:1).

9. Here we are shown *the need of continual diligence* in order to persevere unto the end. But, says the Arminian, I would have concluded the very opposite, since final perseverance be guaranteed. That is due to his misconception. God has declared “The righteous shall hold on his way”: not become slack and sit down, still less that he will forsake it for the way of the ungodly. That very promise is the best means of producing the desired result. If a man could be definitely assured that in a certain line of business he would make a fortune, would such assurance cause him to refuse that business or lead him to lie in bed all day? No, rather would it be an incentive to diligence in order to prosper. Napoleon believed he was “the man of destiny”: did that conviction freeze his energies? No, the very opposite. God’s promising a thing unto His children causes them to pray for the same with greater confidence, earnestness and importunity. God hath promised to bless our use of lawful means and therefore we employ them with diligence and expectation.

10. Here is *a truth to humble us*. Admittedly it has been wrested by Antinomians and perverted unto the feeding of a spirit of presumption. But it is “ungodly men” and not the saints

who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness (Jude 4). Different far is the effect of this truth upon the regenerate. It works in them a sense of their own insufficiency, causing them to look outside of themselves for help and strength. So far from rendering them slothful, it deepens their desires after holiness and makes them seek it more earnestly. As the Christian realises “Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently,” he is moved to pray “O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes diligently...Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for herein do I delight” (Psa. 119:4,5,35). The more he is taught of the Spirit the more will he cry “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa. 119:117). —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

1. Introduction

The name which is usually given to our subject by Christian writers is that of “Growth in Grace” which is a Scriptural expression, being found 2 Peter 3:18. But it appears to us that, strictly speaking, growing “in grace” has reference to but a single aspect or branch of our theme: “that your *love* may abound yet more and more” (Phil. 1:9) treats of another aspect, and “your *faith* groweth exceedingly” (2 Thess. 1:3), with yet another. It seems then that “spiritual growth” is a more comprehensive and inclusive term and more accurately covers that most important and desirable attainment “may grow up into Him in *all* things, which is the Head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Let it not be thought from this that we have selected our title in a captious spirit or because we are striving after originality. Not so: we have no criticism to make against those who may prefer some other appellation. We have chosen this one simply because it seems more fitly and fully describe the ground which we hope to cover. Our readers understand clearly what is connoted by “physical growth” or “mental growth,” nor should “spiritual growth” be any the less intelligible.

The subject which is to be before us is a “deeply important” one. First, that we may understand aright the Spirit’s teaching thereon. There seems to be comparatively few who do so, and the consequence is that the Lord is robbed of much of the praise which is His due, while many of His people suffer much needless distress. Because so many Christians walk more by sense than by faith, measuring themselves by their feelings and moods rather than by the Word, their peace of mind is greatly destroyed and their joy of heart much decreased. Not a few saints are seriously the losers through misapprehensions upon this subject. Scriptural knowledge is essential if we are to better understand ourselves and diagnose more accurately our spiritual case. Many exercised souls form quite an erroneous opinion of themselves because of failure at this very point. Surely it is a matter of great practical moment that we should be able to judge aright of

our spiritual progress or retrogression, that we may not flatter ourselves on the one hand or unduly depreciate ourselves on the other.

Some are tempted in one direction, some in the other—depending partly on their personal temperament and partly on the kind of teaching they sat under. Many are inclined to think more highly of themselves than they ought to, and because they have obtained considerably increased intellectual knowledge of the Truth imagine they have made a proportionate spiritual growth. But others with weaker memories and who acquire a mental grasp of things more slowly, suppose this to signify a lack of spirituality. Unless our thoughts about spiritual growth be formed by the Word of God we are certain to err and jump to a wrong conclusion. As it is with our bodies, so it is with our souls. Some suppose they are healthy while suffering from an insidious disease; whereas others imagine themselves to be ill when in fact they are hale and sound. Divine revelation and not human imagination ought to be our guide in determining whether or not we be “babes, young men, or fathers”—and our natural age has nothing to do with it.

It is deeply important that our views should be rightly formed, not only that we may be able to ascertain our own spiritual stature, but also that of our fellow Christians. If I long to be made a help and blessing to them then obviously I must first be capable of deciding whether they be in a healthy or unhealthy condition. Or, if I desire spiritual counsel and assistance then I shall meet with disappointment unless I know whom to go to. How can I regulate my course and suit my converse with the saints I contact if at a loss to gauge their religious caliber? God has not left us to our own erring judgment in this matter, but has supplied rules to guide us. To mention but one other reason which indicates the importance of our subject: unless I can ascertain wherein I have been enabled to make spiritual progress and wherein I have failed, how can I know what to pray for, and unless I can perceive the same about my brethren how can I intelligently ask for the supply of what they most need?

Our subject is a very mysterious one. Physical growth is beyond human comprehension. We know something of what is essential in order to it, and the thing itself may be discovered, but the operation and process is hidden from us: “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all” (Eccl. 11:5). How much more so must spiritual growth be incomprehensible. The beginning of our spiritual life is shrouded in mystery (John 3:8), and to a considerable extent this is true also of its development. God’s workings in the soul are secret, indiscernible to the eye of carnal reason and imperceptible to our senses. “The things of God knoweth no man” save to whom the Spirit is pleased to reveal them (1 Cor. 2:11,12). If we know so little about ourselves and the operation of our faculties in connection with natural things, how much less competent are we to comprehend ourselves and our graces in connection with that which is supernatural.

The “new creature” is from above, whereof our natural reason has no acquaintance: it is a product supernatural and can only be known by revelation supernatural. In like manner, the spiritual life received at the new birth *thrives* as to its degrees, unperceived by our senses. A child, by weighing and measuring himself, may discover he has grown, yet he was not conscious of the process while growing. So it is with the new man: it is “renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16) yet in such a hidden way that the renewing itself is not felt, though its effects become apparent. Thus there is no good reason to be disheartened because we do not *feel* that any progress is being made or to conclude there is no advance because such feeling is absent. “There are some of the Lord’s people in whom the essence and reality of holiness dwell, who do not perceive in themselves any spiritual growth. It should therefore be remembered that there is a real growth in grace where it is

not perceived. We should judge of it not by what we experience of it in ourselves, but by the Word. It is a subject for *faith* to be exercised on” (S. E. Pierce). If we desire the pure milk of the Word and feed thereon, then we must not doubt that we duly “grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:3).

To quote again from Pierce: “Spiritual growth is a mystery and is more evident in some than in others. The more the Holy Spirit shines upon the mind and puts forth His life-giving influences in the heart, so much the more sin is seen, felt and loathed, as the greatest of all evils. And this is an evidence of spiritual growth, namely, to hate sin as sin and to abhor it on account of its contrariety to the nature of God. The quick perception and insight which we have of inherent sin, and our feeling of it, so as to look on ourselves as most vile, to renounce ourselves and all we can do for ourselves, and look wholly and immediately to Christ for relief and strength, are growth in grace, and a most certain evidence of it.” How little is the natural man capable of understanding that! Having no experience of the same, it sounds to him like a doleful delusion. And how the believer needs to beg God to teach him the truth about the same. As we can know nothing whatever about the new birth save what God has revealed in His Word, so we can form no correct comprehension about spiritual growth except from the same source.

Our subject is not only mysterious but it is also a difficult one. This is due in part to Satan’s having confused the issue by inventing such plausible imitations that multitudes are deceived thereby, and knowing this the conscientious soul is troubled. Under certain influences and from various motives people are induced to suddenly and radically reform their lives, and their absence from the grosser forms of sin accompanied by a zealous performance of the common duties of religion, is often mistaken for genuine conversion and progress in the Christian life. These are the “tares” which so closely resemble the wheat they are often indistinguishable until the harvest. Moreover, there is a work of the Law, quite distinct from the saving effects wrought by the Gospel, which in its fruits both external and internal cannot be distinguished from a work of grace except by the light of Scripture and the teaching of the Spirit. The terrors of the Law have come in power to the conscience of many an one, producing poignant convictions of sin and horrors of the wrath to come, issuing in much activity in the works of righteousness; but resulting in no faith in Christ, and no love for Him.

Again: spiritual progress is difficult to discern because growth in grace is often not nearly so apparent as first conversion. In many cases conversion is a radical experience of which we are personally conscious at the time and of which a vivid memory remains with us. It marked a revolutionary change in our life. It was when we were relieved of the intolerable burden of guilt and the peace of God which passeth all understanding possessed our souls. It was a being brought out of the awful and total spiritual darkness of nature into God’s marvelous light, whereas spiritual growth is but the enjoying further degrees of that light. It was that tremendous change from having no grace at all to the beginnings of grace within us, whereas that which follows is the receiving of additions of grace. It was a spiritual resurrection, a being brought from death unto life, but the subsequent experience is only renewings of the life then received. For Joseph to be suddenly translated out of prison to sit upon the throne of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, would affect him far more powerfully than to have any new kingdoms added to him later, such as Alexander had. At first everything in the spiritual life is new to the Christian; later he learns more perfectly what was then discovered to him, yet the effect made is not so perceptible and entrancing.

Further: the spiritual life or nature communicated at regeneration is not the only thing in the Christian: the principle of sin still remains in the soul after the principle of grace has been imparted. Those two principles are at direct variance with each other, engaged in a ceaseless

warfare as long as the saint is left in this world. “For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17). That fearful conflict is apt to confuse the issue in the mind of its subject, yea, it is certain to lead the believer to draw a false inference from it unless he clearly apprehends the teaching of Scripture thereon. The discovery of so much opposition within, the thwarting of his aspirations and endeavors, his felt inability to wage the warfare successfully, makes him seriously to doubt whether holiness has been imparted to his heart. The ragings of indwelling sin, the discovery of unsuspected corruptions, the consciousness of unbelief, the defeats experienced, all appear to give the lie direct to any spiritual progress. *That* presents an acute problem to a conscientious soul.

Our subject is both a *complex and comprehensive* one. By which we mean that this is a tree with many branches, which bears a different manner of fruits according to the season. It is a subject into which various elements enter, one that needs to be viewed from many angles. Spiritual growth is both upward and downward, and it is both inward and outward. An increased knowledge of God leads to an increased knowledge of self, and as one results in higher adoration of its Object, the other brings deeper humiliation in its subject. These issue in more and more inward denials of self and abounding more and more outwardly in good works. Yet this spiritual growth needs to be most carefully stated, lest we repudiate the completeness of regeneration. In the strictest sense, spiritual growth consists of the Spirit’s drawing out what He wrought in the soul when He quickened it. When a babe is born into this world it is complete in parts though not in development: no new members can be added to its body nor any additional faculties to its mind.

There is a growth of the natural child, a development of its members, an expansion of its faculties, with a fuller expression and clearer manifestation of the latter, but nothing more. The analogy holds good with a babe in Christ. “Though there are innumerable circumstantial differences in the cases and experience of the called people of God, and though there is a growth suited to them, considered as ‘babes, young men and fathers,’ yet there is but *one common life* in the various stages and degrees of the *same* life carried on to its perfection by the Holy Spirit until it issues in glory eternal. The work of God the Spirit in regeneration is eternally complete. It admits of no increase nor decrease. It is one and the same in all believers. There will not be the least addition to it in Heaven: not one grace, holy affection, desire or disposition then, which is not in it now. The whole of the Spirit’s work therefore from the moment of regeneration to our glorification is to draw out those graces into act and exercise which He hath wrought within us. And though one believer may abound in the fruits of righteousness more than another, yet there is not one of them more regenerated than another.” (S. E. Pierce)

The complexity of our subject is due in part to both the Divine and the human elements entering into it, and who is competent to explain or set forth their meeting-point! Yet the analogy supplied from the physical realm again affords us some help. Absolutely considered, all growth is due to the Divine operations, yet relatively there are certain conditions which we must meet or there will be no growth—to name no other, the partaking of suitable food is an essential prerequisite; nevertheless that will not nourish unless God be pleased to bless the same. To insist that there are certain conditions we must meet, certain means we must use in order to our spiritual progress, is not to divide the honors with God, but is simply pointing out the *order* He has established and the connection He has appointed between one thing and another. In like manner there are certain hindrances which we must avoid, or growth will inevitably be arrested and

spiritual progress retarded. Nor does that imply that we are thwarting God, but only disregarding His warnings and paying the penalty of breaking those laws which He has instituted.

The very complexity of our subject increases the difficulty before the one attempting to expound the same, for as is the case with so many other problems presented to our limited intelligence, it involves the matter of seeking to preserve a due balance between the Divine and the human elements. The operations of Divine grace and the discharge of our responsibility must each be insisted upon, and the concurring of the latter with the former, as well as the superabounding of the former over the latter be proportionately set forth. In like manner our contemplation of spiritual growth upward must not be allowed to crowd out that of our growth downward, nor must our deeper loathing of self be suffered to hinder an increasing living upon Christ. The more sensible we are of our emptiness, the more we must draw upon His fullness. Nor is our task rendered easier when we remember these articles fall into the hands of very different types of readers, who sit under varied kinds of ministry—the one needing emphasis upon a different note from another.

That there *is* such a thing as spiritual growth is abundantly clear from the Scriptures. In addition to the passages alluded to in the opening paragraph we may quote the following. “They go from strength to strength” (Ps. 84:7). “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18). “Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord” (Hos. 6:3). “But unto you that fear the Lord shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings, and ye shall go forth and *grow up* as calves of the stall” (Mal. 4:2). “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). “Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from *glory to glory* as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). “Increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). “As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye abound more and more” (1 Thess. 4:1). “He giveth more grace (James 4:6).

The above list might be extended considerably, but sufficient references have been given to show that not only is such a thing as spiritual growth clearly revealed in the Scriptures, but that it is given a prominent place therein. Let the reader duly observe the *variety* of expressions which are employed by the Spirit to set forth this progress or development—thereby preserving us from too circumscribed a conception by showing us the many-sidedness of the same. Some of them relate to what is internal, others to what is external. Some of them describe the Divine operations, others the necessary acts and exercises of the Christian. Some of them make mention of increased light and knowledge, others of increased grace and strength, and yet others of increased conformity to Christ and fruitfulness. It is thus that the Holy Spirit has preserved the balance and it is by our carefully noting the same that we shall be kept from a narrow and one-sided idea of what spiritual growth consists of. If due attention be paid to this varied description we shall be kept from painful mistakes, and the better enabled to test or measure ourselves and discover what spiritual stature we have attained unto.

From what has been pointed out in the last few paragraphs it will be seen that this is an intensely *practical subject*. It is no small matter that we should be able to arrive at the clear apprehension of what spiritual growth actually consists of, and thereby be delivered from mistaking for it mere fantasy. If there be conditions which we have to comply with in order to the making of progress, it is most desirable that we should acquaint ourselves with the same and then translate such knowledge into prayer. If God has appointed certain means and aids, the sooner we learn what they are and make diligent use of them the better for us. And if there be other things

which act as deterrents and are inimical to our welfare, the more we are placed upon our guard the less likely we are to be hindered by them. And if Christian growth has many sides to it this should govern our thinking and acting thereon, that we may strive after a fitly-proportioned and well-rounded Christian character, and grow up into Christ not merely in one or two respects but “in *all* things” that our development may be uniform and symmetrical. —AWP

February

OUR RIGHTEOUS REDEEMER

Does such a title have somewhat of a strange sound to the ear of the reader? Is that adjective unfamiliar in such a connection? Probably the great majority of us are far more accustomed to such expressions as “our loving Redeemer” and “our gracious Redeemer,” or even “our mighty Redeemer.” We confess that to the best of our recollection we have never heard this particular expression used, nor do we remember ever coming across it in our reading. Our employment of it here is not because we are striving after originality, nor is it coined for the purpose of alliteration. No, rather is such an appellation required by the teaching of Scripture. In fact, if we carefully observe where the Holy Spirit has placed the emphasis it is incumbent upon us that we should conform our terminology thereto. Test your memory and see how many passages you can recall where either “loving” or “gracious” is used as an adjective in connection with Christ. If memory fails, consult a concordance, and then perhaps you will be surprised that neither of them occurs a single time! Now test your memory with the word “righteous” and see how many passages come to mind where the Lord Jesus is referred to as such.

In Isaiah 53:11 Christ is referred to as “My righteous Servant,” in Jeremiah 23:5 as “a righteous Branch,” and in the next verse as “the Lord our righteousness.” In Malachi 4:2 as “the Sun of righteousness,” in Luke 23:47 as a “righteous Man,” in 2 Timothy 4:8 as “the righteous Judge.” In Hebrews 7:2, 3 He is seen as the antitypical Melchizedek or “King of righteousness”; while in 1 John 2:1, as our Advocate with the Father, He is termed “Jesus Christ the righteous.” In addition, we find the same Greek word (*dikaio*s) rendered “just” in the following passages: in Matthew 27:19 Pilate’s wife sends a warning to her husband saying “Have thou nothing to do with this just [righteous] Man”; while in verse 24 of the same chapter Pilate himself declared “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.” In Acts 3:14 and James 5:6 He is denominated “the Just,” and in Acts 7:52 and 22:14 “the Just One”; while in 1 Peter 3:18 we have the well-known words “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust”—actually rendered “the righteous for the unrighteous” by the American R.V. When Zechariah predicted His entry into Jerusalem, riding on the back of an ass, he said, “Behold, thy King cometh to thee, He is just,” and in Revelation 19:11, where He is depicted on a white horse, it is said “in righteousness He doth judge and make war.”

It hardly requires to be pointed out that, in all of the above passages, the Father’s “Fellow” and Equal is viewed in His official character, as the God-man Mediator. It is equally evident that

those verses intimate that the Lord Jesus is righteous in His person, in the administration of His office, in the discharge of the great commission given to Him. Before His incarnation it was announced “righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins and faithfulness the girdle of His reins” (Isa. 11:5), and Christ Himself affirmed by the Spirit of prophecy “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation” (Psa. 40:9). There was no fault or failure in His performing of the honourous and momentous task committed to Him, as His own words to the Father prove: “I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). God’s owning of Christ as “My righteous Servant” signifies that He excellently executed the work entrusted to Him: as the Holy Spirit declares, He “was faithful to Him that appointed Him” (Heb. 3:2), and when the Father rewarded Him He said, “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness” (Psa. 45:7).

But further: Christ is the righteous Redeemer of his people because their righteousness is *in Him*. He wrought out a perfect righteousness for them, which, upon their believing in Him, is imputed or reckoned to their account, and therefore is He designated “the Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6). Christ was righteous not as a private Person, not for Himself alone, but for us sinners and our salvation. Throughout He acted as God’s righteous Servant and as His people’s righteous Sponsor. He lived and died that all the infinite merits of His obedience might be made over to them. In the justifying of His sinful people God neither disregarded nor dishonoured His Law: instead He has “established” it (Rom. 3:31). The Redeemer was “made under the Law” (Gal. 4:4) and its strictness was not relaxed nor was one iota of its requirements abated in connection with Him. Christ rendered to the Law a personal, perfect and perpetual obedience, and therefore did He “magnify the Law and make it honourable” (Isa. 42:21). Consequently God is not only gracious but “just” at the very moment He is “the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26), because Jesus satisfied every requirement of righteousness in the stead and behalf of all who trust in Him.

In the righteous Redeemer, then, we find the answer to the question, How can those who have no righteousness of their own and who are utterly unable to procure any, become righteous before God? How can I, who am a mass of corruption, draw nigh unto the ineffably Holy One and look up into His face in peace? By coming to God as unrighteous, acknowledging my inability to remove my unrighteousness, offering nothing to palliate or propitiate Him. By reaching forth the beggar’s hand and thankfully receiving the righteousness *He* has provided. Because we were unable to reach up to the holy requirements or righteousness of the Law, God has brought down His righteousness to us: “I bring near My righteousness” (Isa. 46:13). That righteousness was brought near to sinners when the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men. It is brought near to us now in the Gospel, “for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17), a righteousness which God imputes to all who believe and then deals with them according to its deserts, and which will constitute their beautiful array when they enter the celestial courts.

“For He [God] hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be—not put into a capacity of acquiring a righteousness of our own, but—made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Here we have the double imputation of our sins to Christ and of His righteousness to us. Observe that we are not here said to be made righteous, but “righteousness” itself, and not righteousness only, but “the righteousness *of God*,” which is the utmost that language can reach unto. And in the self-same manner that Christ was “made sin” we are made “righteousness.” Christ knew not actual sin, but upon His mediatorial interposition on our behalf, He was regarded and dealt with as a guilty person. We likewise are destitute of all legal

righteousness, yet upon our receiving Christ and believing on His name, we are viewed and treated by the Divine majesty as righteous creatures. Both were by imputation: amazing exchange! So as to utterly exclude the idea that any inherent righteousness is in view, it is expressly said “we are made the righteousness of God *in Him*”: as the sin imputed to Christ is inherent in us, so the righteousness by which we are justified is inherent in Him.

By the Divine plan of redemption the claims of the Law were fully satisfied. There was nothing in all its sacred injunctions which Christ did not perform, and nothing in its awful threatenings which He did not sustain. He fulfilled all its precepts by an unspotted purity of heart and the most perfect integrity of life. He exhausted the whole curse when He hung upon the cross, abandoned by God, a bleeding Victim, for the sins of His people. His obedience conferred higher honour upon the Law than it could possibly have received from an uninterrupted compliance by Adam and all his posterity. The perfections of God which were dishonoured by our rebellion, are glorified in our redemption. In redemption God appears inflexibly just in exacting vengeance, and inconceivably rich in showing mercy. “The sword of justice and the scepter of grace has each its due exercise, each its full expression” (James Hervey). The interests of holiness are also secured for where redemption is received by faith it kindles in the heart an intense hatred of sin and the deepest love and gratitude unto God. —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

2. Romans 1:8-12

We shall not take up Paul’s prayers in their chronological order but according as they are found in his epistles in our present-day Bible. The Thessalonian epistles were written before the Roman, but as Romans (because of its theme and importance) rightly comes first we shall begin with those of his prayers recorded therein. Opinion is divided as to whether the verses before us chronicle a particular prayer actually offered by Paul at that time, or whether he is here informing them how he was wont to remember them at the throne of grace. It appears to us the distinction is such a fine one that it makes little practical difference which view be adopted: personally we incline to the former concept. This epistle was taken down by an amanuensis (16:22), and as the apostle dictated the words “to all that be in Rome beloved of God” (v. 7) his heart was immediately drawn out in thanksgiving that some of His elect were to be found even in the capital of the Roman empire, yea, in “Caesar’s household” (Phil. 4:22).

The position of Paul was one of some delicacy, being a stranger to the saints at Rome. No doubt they had often heard of him—at first as a dangerous person. When assured of his conversion, and learning that he was the apostle to the Gentiles, probably they wondered why he had not visited them, especially when he had been so near to Rome as Corinth. So he now makes

known his deep personal interest in them. They were continually upon his heart and in his prayers. How his “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all” would draw out their affections unto the writer of this epistle! How it would move them to read with warmer interest what he now sent to them! Nothing more endears one Christian to another than to know he is remembered by him before the throne of grace. As one of our readers recently wrote: “I prize the prayers of God’s dear saints more than I would all the riches of the world. The latter would only prove a curse, while the former reaches to blessings in the highest heaven and lays me even lower before God’s holy throne.”

“First, I thank my God, through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (v. 8). There are five things here which claim our attention. First, *the manner*, or method, of Paul’s praying: the first note struck is one of praise. This is made very emphatic: “*First* I thank my God” takes precedence of the “make request” of verse 10. Thus we see how blessedly the apostle practiced what he preached: “In every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). Thanksgiving ought to have a prominent place in our prayers: to say the least, it is due unto God. As one of the Puritans expressed it, “It is rent due Him for the mercies received.” It is an effective means of strengthening faith, for it puts the heart into a more suitable frame to petition Him for further favors. It is conducive to joy in the Christian life: “I *thank* my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with *joy*” (Phil. 1:3,4). Nothing is more calculated to dispel a spirit of gloom from the soul than the cultivation of gratitude and praise. The same will encourage and cheer our fellow-Christians: piety is not commended by sadness and sourness.

The above example is so far from being exceptional that it rather indicates the usual custom of the apostle. It is blessed to observe how frequently Paul blended thanksgiving with petitions: let the reader compare 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; Philemon 4; and remember, this has been recorded for our learning. Does not failure at this very point go far to explain why so many of our prayers remain unanswered?—if we have not owned the goodness and grace of God for previous mercies can we expect Him to continue bestowing them upon the ungrateful. Praise and petitions, thanksgiving and requests, should ever be conjoined: Colossians 4:2. But it was much more than this, something nobler and more selfless which we see here in the apostle. His heart was continually drawn out in gratitude to God for the wondrous things *He* had done for His people, and this emboldened him to seek further blessings for them.

Second, *the One whom Paul invoked*: termed here “my God.” It is indeed blessed to observe how the apostle regards the Deity: not as an absolute, infinitely-removed, unrelated One. There is no formality, no sense of remoteness, no uncertainty: instead, God was a living and personal reality to him: “my God.” This was an avowal of *Covenant* relationship. The grand covenant promise is “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people” (Heb. 8:10), which looks back to Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33; and that in turn has its roots in Genesis 17:7 and Exodus 6:7. It was on that ground Moses and the children of Israel sang on the farther shores of the Red Sea, “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is *my God*” (Ex. 15:2). It was for that reason David exclaimed “O God, Thou art my God” (Ps. 63:1). In like manner we find that Caleb (Josh. 14:8), Ruth (1:16), Nehemiah (6:14), Daniel (9:4,19) and Jonah (2:6) owned Him as “my God” in avowal of the covenant relationship.

“My God”: this was expressive of a *personal* relationship. He was his God by eternal election, having loved him with an everlasting love. He was his God by redemption, having purchased him

with precious blood. He was his God by regenerating power, having communicated to him spiritual life and stamped the Divine image upon his heart, making him manifestly His own dear child. He was his God by personal choice, for when revealed to him and in him he had surrendered to His claims, saying, “What wilt thou have me to do?” By bestowing upon him His own nature and by the apostle’s own acceptance, God had become his everlasting Portion, his all-satisfying Inheritance. “My God”: the One who had shown such sovereign and signal mercy unto him. It was also an *assured* relationship, there was no doubting, hesitation or uncertainty. Paul could say with Job, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee” (42:5). And it was a *practical* relationship: “whom I serve” (v. 9).

Now put the two parts together: “I thank—my God.” What other collocation can there be! Is not such a God worthy of thanks? And if I know Him personally as *my* God, will not, must not, thanksgiving issue spontaneously from my heart and lips. This it is which both opens the meaning of and gives due force to the opening word: “First, I thank my God.” It is not the “first” of enumeration, but of emphasis, of spiritual order. If God Himself be mine, then everything that is pure, holy, lovely, satisfying, is mine. If that glorious fact, that infinitely grand truth, be the subject of constant meditation and adoration, then my heart will not be cold and dull, nor will my mouth be paralysed when I draw near to the throne of grace. It is not an absolute and unrelated Deity whom I approach, but “my God.” And that blessed and blissful relationship is to be duly acknowledged by the Christian when he bows the knee before Him. So far from being the language of presumption, it be wicked presumption, insulting unbelief, to deny it.

Third, *the ground of approach*: “through Jesus Christ.” How thankful is the writer (and the reader too, if regenerate) for this clause. Though God be “my God” yet He ever remains the ineffably Holy One and how can I, conscious of pollution and utter unworthiness, think of approaching Infinite Purity? Ah, there is the blessed answer, the all-sufficient provision to meet my need: I may obtain access to the thrice holy God “through Jesus Christ.” But suppose my assurance be dampened and through sad failure in my walk I no longer enjoy the conscious relationship of His being “my God,” how can I now give thanks to Him? And again, the answer is “through Jesus Christ.” As it is written, “By him [Jesus Christ] therefore, [because of the merit and efficacy of His sanctifying blood, see previous verse], let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God *continually*, that is, the fruit of our lips giving *thanks* to his name” (Heb. 13:15). Whatever my case may be, however burdened with a sense of guilt and defilement, it should not only keep me away from the throne of grace, but it must not deter me from giving thanks—for Jesus Christ and God’s provision of Him.

Grammatically the “through Jesus Christ” is connected with the giving of thanks, but theologically or doctrinally there is a double thought. God is “my God” through Jesus Christ: as He declared to His beloved disciples, “I ascend unto My Father, and your Father, and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17)—*your* God because *My* God. And I give thanks unto “My God” “through Jesus Christ,” for it is both the duty and the privilege of the regenerate, who are members of the holy priesthood, “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Not only is there no approach to God save “through Jesus Christ” the alone Mediator between God and men, but our worship is acceptable to God only through His merits (Col. 3:17). This too must be the subject of the believer’s constant meditation and adoration, for only thus will the blessed assurance of “my God” be maintained in the heart. Jesus Christ changes not: His mediation changes not: however deeply despondent I may be by my sense of unworthiness as I approach the Throne, let me turn to and believingly ponder the infinite worthiness of Jesus Christ, and I shall “*thank* my God.”

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ.” Upon these words the late Handley Moule most beautifully said, “My God”: it is the expression of an indescribable appropriation and reverent intimacy...it is the language of a personality wherein Christ has dethroned self in His own favor...And this holy intimacy, with its action in thanks and petition, is all the while ‘through Jesus Christ,’ the Mediator. The man knows God as my ‘God’ and deals with Him as such, never out of that Beloved Son who is equally one with the believer and with the Father, no alien medium, but the living point of unity.” Just in proportion as that is realised in the soul, just in proportion as faith be mixed with the declarations of the Word thereon, will there be liberty and freedom, holy “boldness,” as we draw near the Throne. Only thus will the Christian enjoy his birthright and live up to his blood-bought privilege; and only thus will God be honored by the praise and thanksgiving which must issue from such an one.

Fourth, *the subjects* of Paul’s thanksgiving: “for you all.” This will appear strange to the natural man, who is wrapped up so much in self. The carnal mind is quite incapable of appreciating the motives which actuate and the principles which regulate those who are spiritual. Here is the apostle thanking God for those whom he had never met! They were not the fruits of his own labors, yet he rejoices over them. How that condemns the narrow-minded bigotry and sectarian exclusiveness which has brought such a blight upon Christendom. Though these saints at Rome were not his own sons in the Gospel, though he had never met them in the flesh, and as far as we know received any communication from them, yet he praises God for them. It was because of what *He* had wrought in them, because they were trees of His planting, the products of His “husbandry” (1 Cor. 3:9). This too is for our instruction: do not expect the assurance of “my God” unless you have a love unto and pray for “all saints” (Eph. 6:18).

Fifth, *the occasion* of his thanksgiving: “that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” This good tidings was spread abroad by travelers from Rome, the capital, telling of the humble reliance of the saints there on the Lord Jesus and their loving allegiance to Him. Wherever the apostle went this blessed information was given him. It was not only that these people had believed the Gospel, but that their faith was of such a character as to be everywhere spoken of, and Paul’s thanksgiving for them was the recognition and acknowledgment that He was the Giver of their faith. His notification of the same was not to induce complacency, but to quicken them to answer to the testimony borne to them and the expectations awakened thereby. Again we would remark, how blessed to behold the apostle praising God for what His grace had wrought in others. What an insight it does give us into his character. What a spirit of love unto the brethren was here revealed. What gratitude and devotion unto his Master. What an example for the servant of Christ today when tidings are received of the fruits of the Spirit in distant places.

Ere passing on to the next verse let us seek to make application unto ourselves of what has been before us. It was not the doubting and unbelief of these Roman saints, but their faith which was noised abroad. Is *our* faith known to others and talked about? Does it evoke praise and thanksgiving unto God? Theirs was no formal and lifeless faith, but a vigorous and fruitful one, which compelled others to take notice of. It was a faith which transformed their character and conduct. Lest it be thought we have read into our verse more than is there, we refer the reader to 16:19—“your *obedience* is come abroad to all.” The two declarations are to be placed side by side, for the one explains and amplifies the other. If our faith be not productive of obedience, such as others will take note of, there is something seriously wrong with us. We regard, then, the word “faith” in verse 8 as a generic expression for the graces of the Spirit, but the employment of this specific term was probably a prophetic rebuke of Romanism, in which the chief thing lacking is saving faith!

“For God is my Witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” (v. 9). “For God is my Witness”: the opening “For” signifies, One above knows how much you are on my heart. This was an act of worship, a due acknowledgment of God’s omniscience. It was a reverent appeal to Him as the Searcher of hearts (cf. 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20). “Whom I serve”: am at His entire disposal, subject to His orders. “With my spirit”: not hypocritically, from greed or formally; but from the very depths of my being—willingly, heartily, joyously. “In the Gospel of His Son” is the counterpart of “a servant of Jesus Christ...separated unto the Gospel of God” (v. 1). “That without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” made known his constancy. His rejoicing over and praying for them was no evanescent spasm but an enduring thing. That his “without ceasing” was no exaggeration he had called upon God as his Witness. Though in a flourishing condition, they still needed praying for.

We cannot do the saints a greater kindness or exercise our love for them in a more practical and effective way than by praying for them. Yet we do not regard the verses before us as establishing a precedent for Christians or ministers to *proclaim abroad* their praying. To parade our piety is but a species of pharisaism. Praying is not a thing to advertise; as it is a secret exercise before God it should—as a rule—be kept secret from men. True, there are exceptions: as when believers are in trouble or isolated it is a comfort for them to know they are being remembered before the Throne. Paul’s mentioning of his praying was to inform the saints that his not having visited them (v. 13) was due to no indifference on his part, to assure them they had a constant place in his affections, and pave the way for his coming to them by acquainting them of his deep solicitude for them.

“Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you” (v. 10). His love for them made him desirous of meeting them, and he prays that God would make this possible. Let it be duly noted that he refused to take matters into his own hands and act upon an inward urge. Instead, he subordinates his own longings and impulses to the will of Him he served. This is very striking and blessed. Paul did not consider what many would regard as “the Spirit’s prompting” a sufficient warrant: he must first be assured—by His providences—that this journey was ordered by his Master. Accordingly he spread his case before God, committing the matter to His decision and pleasure. Observe that there was no “claiming,” still less demanding, but an humble and submissive “request”—“if possible” or “if it may be.” This was an acknowledgment that God is the Orderer of all events: Romans 11:36.

His “now at length” shows that he was exercised about the timing of this journey and visit. “To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). It is of great practical importance for us to heed that fact, for it means the difference between success or failure in our undertakings. Unless we “rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him” (Ps. 37:7) only confusion and trouble will ensue. We agree with Charles Hodge that the “prosperous journey” signified “that his circumstances should be so favorably ordered that he might be able to execute his long-cherished purpose of visiting Rome.” It is blessed to note that a little later, yea before this epistle was completed, he was given Divine assurance of his request being granted: Romans 15:28, 29. The “journey” itself is described in Acts 27 and 28: after a most trying and hazardous voyage, he arrived at Rome a prisoner in chains! Yet see Acts 28:30, 31 for the measure of liberty accorded him.

“For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (v. 11). This is not a part of his prayer, yet it is intimately connected with it, for it

makes known what prompted his “request” or the reason why he was so desirous of seeing them. His was the “longing” of spiritual affection, as a comparison with Philippians 2:26 and 2 Timothy 1:4 shows, where the same Greek word occurs. It tells how strong was his desire to visit them, and how real and commendable his subjection to the will of God. We see here the heart of an under-shepherd with his burning zeal, yet at the same time his blessed submission to the chief Shepherd. It was not a pleasure trip or to obtain variety in his labors, but to be made a blessing to these saints which Paul sought. Though their faith was well spoken of, yet he wished them to be established, strengthened, settled (1 Peter 5:10). To expound to them the Way more perfectly, to add to their spiritual light and joy, to open to them more fully the unsearchable riches of Christ was his object. Pastors, be not content with seeing sinners converted: seek their growth and establishment.

“That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (v. 12). This was to avoid giving offence, lest they should feel he was reflecting upon their immaturity. “Shall we call this a sentence of fine tact: beautifully conciliatory and endearing? Yes, but it is also perfectly sincere. True tact is not only the skill of sympathetic love, but not the less genuine in its thought because that thought seeks to please and to win. He is glad to show himself as his disciples’ brotherly friend: but then he first *is* such, and enjoys the character, and has continually found and felt his own soul made glad and strengthened by the witness for the Lord which far less gifted believers bore, as he and they talked together” (H. Moule). It is beautiful to see Paul employing the passive form: “that ye may be established” (v. 11)—not “that I may establish you;” he hides himself by expressing the result. Equally gracious is his “that I may be comforted together with you”—contact with kindred minds refreshes, and “he that watereth [others] shall be watered also himself” (Prov. 11:25). —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

14. The Tenth Miracle

The healing of Naaman is the best known one of all the wonders wrought through Elisha, for it has been made the subject of numerous sermons in the past, supplying as it does a very striking typical picture of salvation. Not in all its varied aspects—for salvation is many-sided—but as portraying the condition of him who is made its subject, his dire need because of the terrible malady of which he was the victim, the sovereign grace which met with him, the requirements he had to comply with, his self-will therein, and how his reluctance was overcome. Yet there is not a little in this incident which is offensive to our supercilious age, inclining present-day preachers to leave it alone, so that much that has been said about it in the past will be more or less new unto

the present generation. As it has pleased the Holy Spirit to enter into much more detail upon the attendant circumstances of this miracle, this will require us to give it a fuller consideration.

It is their *typical* import which renders the Old Testament Scriptures of such interest to us upon whom the ends of the ages are come: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning” (Rom. 15:4). That which is set before us more abstractly in the epistles is rendered simpler of understanding by means of the concrete and personal illustrations supplied under the previous dispensations, when figures and symbols were employed more freely. Noah and his family in the ark preserved from the flood which swept away the world of the ungodly, the Hebrews finding security under the blood of the Pascal lamb when the angel of death slew all the firstborn of the Egyptians, healing being conveyed by faith’s look at the brazen serpent on the pole, the cities of refuge affording asylum to the manslayer who fled thither for refuge from the avenger of blood, are so many examples of simple yet graphic prefigurations of different aspects of the redemption which is found in Christ Jesus. Another is before us here in 2 Kings 5.

Before taking up the spiritual meaning of what is recorded of Naaman, there is one thing mentioned about him deserves separate notice, and we will look at it now so that our main line of thought may not be broken into later on. In the opening verse of our chapter it is stated that Naaman was “a great man with his master and honorable because by him the Lord had given deliverance [‘victory’] unto Syria.” This teaches us that there can be no success in any sphere of life unless God gives it, for “the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23), still less to insure their outcome. “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it [as was made evident when God brought to nought the lofty ambitions of those erecting the tower of Babel!], except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps. 127:1)—as Belshazzar discovered, when the Medes surprised and overcame his sentinels and captured Babylon.

Not only can there be no success in any human undertaking unless the Lord is pleased to prosper the same, but He exercises His own sovereignty in the instruments or agents employed in the carrying out of His purposes, whether it be in the communicating of blessings or the execution of judgments. It is therefore to be duly observed that it was not because Naaman was a good man that the Lord caused his military efforts to thrive; so far from it, he was an idolator, a worshiper of Rimmon. Moreover, not only was he a stranger to God spiritually but he was a leper, and therefore ceremonially unclean, shut out by the Mosaic law. From which we may learn that when the Most High is pleased to do so, He makes use of the wicked as well as the righteous—a truth which needs pressing on the attention of the world today. Temporal success is far from being an evidence that the blessing of God rests upon either the person or the nation enjoying the same. All men are in God’s hands to employ as and where He pleases—as truly so in the political and military realms as in the churches.

First, *its subject*. Six things (the number of man) are here recorded about Naaman. 1. He was “captain of the host of the king of Syria.” In modern language this would be, Commander-in-chief of the king’s army. Whether or not he had risen from the ranks we cannot be sure, though the reference to his “valor” suggests that he had been promoted from a lower office. Whether that be so or no, he now occupied a position of prominence, being at the summit of his profession. 2. He was “a great man with his master.” It has been by no means always the case that the head of the military forces was greatly esteemed by his master. History records many instances where the reigning monarch has been jealous of the popularity enjoyed by the general, fearful in some cases that he would use his powerful influence against the interests of the throne. But it was quite otherwise in this case, for as the sequel goes on to show, the king of Syria was warmly devoted to

the person of his military chieftain. 3. “And honorable.” Far from the king’s slighting Naaman and keeping him in the background, he stood high in the royal favor. Naaman had furthered the interests of his kingdom, securing notable victories for his forces, and his master was not slow to show his appreciation and reward his valorous general. The brilliant exploits of many a brave officer have passed unnoticed by the powers that be: but not so here. 4. His military success is here directly ascribed to God, for our passage goes on to say “by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria.” The blessing of Heaven had attended him and crowned his efforts, and therein he was favored above many. Not that this intimated he personally enjoyed the approbation of God, but that Divine providence made use of him in accomplishing His will. 5. He was naturally endowed with qualities which are highly esteemed among men, being possessed of great bravery and fortitude, for we are told, “he was also a mighty man in valor”—daring and fearless—and thus well equipped for his calling.

It might well be asked, What more could any man desire more? Did he not possess everything which is most highly prized by the children of this world. Was he not what they would designate “the darling of fortune,” having all that the human heart could wish. He had, as the votaries of mammon express it, “made good in life.” He occupied a most enviable position. He was possessed of those traits which were admired by his fellows. He had served his country well and stood high in the king’s regard and favor. Even so there was a dark cloud on his horizon. There was something which not only thoroughly spoiled the present for him, but took away all hope for the future. For, 6. “he was a *leper*.” Here was the tragic exception. Here was that which cast its awful shadow over every thing else. He was the victim of a loathsome and incurable disease. He was a pitiful and repulsive object, with no prospect whatever of any improvement in his condition.

Yes, my reader, the highly-privileged and honored Naaman was a leper, and as such he portrayed what *you* are, and what *I* am by nature. God’s Word does not flatter man: it lays him in the dust—which is one reason why it is so unpalatable unto the great majority of people. It is the Word of truth, and therefore instead of painting flattering pictures of human nature, it represents things as they actually are. Instead of lauding man it abases him. Instead of speaking of the dignity and nobility of human nature, it declares it to be *leprous*—sinful, corrupt, depraved, defiled. Instead of eulogising human progress, it insists that “every man at his best estate is altogether vanity” (Ps. 39:5). And when the Holy Scriptures define man’s attitude toward and relationship with God, they insist that “there is none righteous, no not one, there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:10,11). They declare that we are His enemies by our wicked works (Col. 1:21), and that consequently we are under the condemnation and curse of God’s law, and that His holy wrath abideth on us (John 3:36).

The Word of Truth declares that by nature all of us are spiritual lepers, foul and filthy, unfit for the Divine presence: “being alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). Ah, my reader: you may occupy a good position in this world, even an eminent station in the affairs of this life; you may have “made good” in your avocation and wrought praiseworthy achievements judged by human standards: you may be “honorable” in the sight of your fellows, but how do you appear in the eyes of *God*—a leper, one whom His law pronounces unclean, one who is utterly unfit for His holy presence. *That* is the first outstanding thing; the dominant lesson taught by our present passage. As it was with Naaman, so it is with you: a vast difference between his circumstances and his condition. There, was the horrible and tragic exception: “a great man—but a *leper*”! There was a worm gnawing at his vitals: a deathbed at his feast, a ghastly thing which cast its baneful shadow over all his fair prospects.

We would not be faithful to our calling were we to glide over that in God's Word which is distasteful to proud flesh and blood. Nor would we be faithful to our readers if we glossed over their frightful and fatal natural condition. It is in their souls' interests they should face this humiliating and unpleasant fact: that in God's sight they are spiritual lepers. But we must individualise it. Hast thou, my reader, realised this fact in thine *own case*? Hast thou seen thyself in God's light? Art thou aware that thy soul is suffering from a disease that neither you nor any human being can cure? It *is* so, whether you realise it or not. The Scriptures declare that from the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head there is no soundness in thee, yea, that in the sight of the Holy One, thou art a mass of "wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa. 1:6). Only as you penitently accept that Divine verdict is there any hope for you.

All disease is both the fruit and the evidence of sin, as was plainly intimated unto Israel. Under the Levitical law God might well have required separate purifications for every form of disease. But He did not, and thereby He displayed His tenderness and mercy, for such a multiplicity of ceremonial observances to have been required would have constituted an intolerable burden. He therefore singled out one disease to be a standing object-lesson, and *that* such an one could not fail to be a fit representation and most effective symbol of sin. This disease was white leprosy, described with much minuteness of detail in Leviticus 13 and 14. Leprosy, then, was not only a real but a typical disease, adumbrating in a most solemn and striking manner that fearful malady sin, with which we are infected from the centre to the circumference of our beings. While it be true that the type is only intelligible in the light of its antitype, the shadow in the presence of its substance, yet the former is often an aid to the understanding of the latter.

That the disease of leprosy *was designed* to convey a representation of the malady of sin appears from these considerations. First, the ceremonial purification whereby the stain of leprosy was cleansed pointed to the Lord Jesus as making atonement for the cleansing of His people. Second, it was not a physician but the high priest who was the person specifically appointed to deal with the leper. Third, there was no prescribed remedy for it: it could only be cured by a direct miracle. Fourth, the leper was cut off from the dwelling place of God and the tabernacle of His congregation, being put "outside the camp." Thus it will be seen from these circumstances that leprosy was removed from the catalogue of ordinary diseases, and had stamped upon it a peculiar and typical character. It was a visible sign of how God regarded the sinner: as one unsuited to the presence of Himself and His people. How unspeakably blessed then, to discover that, though not the first He performed, yet the first individual miracle of Christ's recorded in the New Testament is His healing of the leper (Matt. 8:2-4).

For the particular benefit of young preachers and for the general instruction of all we will close this article with an outline. 1. Leprosy has an *insignificant beginning*. To the non-observant eye it is almost imperceptible. It starts as "a rising, a scab, or bright spot" (Lev. 13:2). It is so trivial that usually no attention is paid to it. Little or no warning is given of the fearful havoc it will work. Was it not thus with the entrance of sin into this world? To the natural man the eating of the forbidden fruit by our first parents appears a very small matter, altogether incommensurate with the awful effects it has produced. The unregenerate discern not that sin is deserving of and exposes them to eternal destruction. They regard it as a trifle, unduly magnified by preachers.

2. Leprosy is *inherited*. It is a communicable disease. It poisons the blood, and so is readily transmitted from parent to child. It is so with sin. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). None has escaped this dreadful entail. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5) is equally true of every member of Adam's race. None is born spiritually pure:

depravity is communicated in every instance from sire to son, from mother to maid. Human nature was corrupted at its fountain head and therefore all the streams issuing therefrom are polluted.

3. Leprosy *works insidiously* and almost imperceptibly, for it is a disease which is attended by little pain: only in its later stages, when its horrible effects discover themselves, is it unmistakably manifest. And thus it is with that most awful of all maladies. Sin is subtle and sly, so that for the most part its subjects are quite unconscious of its workings. Hence we read of “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). It is not until the Spirit convicts, that one is made aware of the awfulness and extent of sin, and begins to feel “the plague of his own heart” (1 Kings 8:38). Yes, it is not until a person is born again that he learns his very nature is depraved. Only as the sinner grows old in sin does he discover what a fearful hold his lusts have upon him.

4. Leprosy *spreads* with deadly rapidity. Though it begins with certain spots in the skin which are small at first, they gradually increase in size: slowly but surely the whole body is affected. The corruption extends inwardly while it spreads outwardly, vitiating even the bones and marrow. Like a locust on the twig of a tree, it continues eating its way through the flesh, till nothing but the skeleton is left. This is what sin has done in man—it has corrupted every part of his being, so that he is totally depraved. No faculty, no member of his complex constitution has escaped defilement. Heart, mind, will, conscience—spirit and soul and body—are equally poisoned. “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18).

5. Leprosy is *highly infectious*. Inherited inwardly, contagious outwardly. The leper communicates his horrible disease to others wherever he goes. That is why he was quarantined under the Mosaic Law, and when he saw anyone approaching he was required to give warning by crying, “Unclean, unclean.” The analogy continues to hold good. Sin is a malady which is not only inherited by nature, but it is developed by association with the wicked. “Evil communications *corrupt* good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33). That is why the righteous are bidden, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it [as a plague], pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Prov. 4:14-15)—such repetition bespeaks our danger and intimates how slow we are to be warned against it. “Shun profane and vain babblings...their word will *eat* as doth a *canker*” (2 Tim. 2:16,17).

6. Leprosy is *peculiarly loathsome*. There is nothing more repellent to the eye than to look upon one on whom this awful disease has obtained firm hold. Except with the most callous, despite one’s pity, he or she is obliged to turn away from such a nauseating sight with a shudder. Under Judaism there was no physician who ministered to the leper, and hence it is said of his putrefying sores that “they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa. 1:6). The leper may well appropriate to himself the language of Job, “All my inward [or ‘intimate’] friends abhorred me, and they whom I love are turned against me” (19:19). All of which is a figure of how infinitely more repellent is the sinner in the sight of Him who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13).

7. Leprosy is a *state of living death*. First the joints become relaxed, then dislocated, and then an eye falls out, or the fingers and toes are shed, and even limbs fall off, until the whole body becomes a horrible mess of dissolution and decay. It is a state of daily and progressive death. As one has said, “The leper is a walking sepulcher.” And this is precisely what sin is: a state of spiritual death—a living on the natural side of existence, but dead to all things spiritual. Thus we find an apostle declaring “she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1 Tim. 5:6). The natural man is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1): alive sinward and worldward but dead Godward.

8. Leprosy was *dealt with by banishment*. No leper was allowed to remain in the congregation of Israel. The terms of the Mosaic law were most explicit: “he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be” (Lev. 13:46). In the centre of the camp was Jehovah’s abode and around His tabernacle were grouped His covenant people. From them the leper was excluded. How rigidly that was enforced may be seen from the fact that even Miriam the sister of Moses (Num. 12:10-15), and Uzziah the king (2 Kings 15:5) were not treated as exceptions. The leper was deprived of all political and ecclesiastical privileges, dealt with as one dead, excluded from fellowship. It is a visible sign of how God regarded the sinner, for sin shuts out from His presence: see Isaiah 59:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

9. Leprosy makes its victim *an object of shame*. It could not be otherwise. Robbing its subject of the bloom of health, replacing it with that which is hideous. Excluding him from God and His people, placing him outside the pale of decency. Consequently the leper was required to carry about with him every mark of humiliation and distress. The law specified that “his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean” (Lev. 13:45). What a spectacle! What a picture of abject misery! What a solemn portrayal of the natural man! Sin has marred the features of God’s image, in whose likeness man was originally made, and stamped upon him the marks of the devil.

10. Leprosy is *incurable* so far as man is concerned. One really stricken with this disease was beyond all human aid. The outcome was inevitably fatal. Medical science was helpless before its advance. In like manner sin is beyond human cure; it can neither be eradicated nor ameliorated. No power of will or effort of mind can cope with it. Neither legislation nor reformation is of any avail. Education and culture are equally impotent. Sooner can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots than those do good who are accustomed to do evil (Jer. 13:23).

But what is beyond the power of man is possible with God. Where the science of the ages stands helpless the Savior manifests His sufficiency. “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Heb. 7:25). To the leper He said, “I will, be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (Matt. 8:3). Blessed, thrice blessed is that! In view of the ten points above, how profoundly thankful every Christian should be that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son *cleanseth* us from *all* sin” (1 John 1:7). —AWP

N.B. This magazine is still being sent to at least three families of those who heard the editor preach for four hours and three quarters on “The Healing of Naaman” in Philadelphia, USA December 31st, 1925.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS’ PERSEVERANCE

11. Conclusion

It now remains for us to gather up a few loose ends, to summarise what has been before us, make a practical application of the whole, and our present task is completed. Not that we have said anything like all that could be said thereon; yet we have sought to set before the reader the

principal aspects of this subject and to preserve a due balance between the Divine and human sides of it—God’s operations in connection therewith and the Christian’s concurrence therein. Much of the opposition which has been raised against what is termed “the dangerous tendency” of this truth arose from a defective view of the same, through failure to apprehend that the perseverance of the saints exhibited in the Scriptures is their *continuance in faith and holiness*: that the One who has made infallible promise they shall reach the desired goal has also decreed they shall tread the one path which leads to it, that the means as well as the end are ordained by Him, and that He moves them to make diligent use of those means and blesses and makes effectual their labor in the same.

That for which we have contended throughout these chapters is steadfastness in holiness, constancy in believing, and in bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Saving faith is something more than an isolated act: it is a spiritual dynamic, a principle of action, which continues to operate in those who are the favored subjects of it. This is brought out very clearly and decisively in the great Faith chapter. In Hebrews 11 the Holy Spirit sets before us the faith of Abel, of Enoch, of Noah, of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, and after describing various exercises and fruits of the same, declares “these all died in faith” (v. 13), not one of them apostatised from the same. The “faith” spoken of, as the context shows, was both a justifying and sanctifying one, and those who had received the same from God not only lived by it but died in it. Theirs was a faith which wore and lasted, which overcame obstacles and triumphed over difficulties, which endured to the end. True, the patriarchs had to wrestle against their natural unbelief, and, as the inspired records show, more than once they were tripped up by the same, yet they continued fighting and emerged conquerors.

The Christian is required to continue as he began. He is to daily own his sins to God and he is daily to renew the same acts of faith and trust in Christ and His blood which he exercised at the first. Instead of counting upon some past experience, he is to maintain a present living on Christ. If he continues to cast himself on the Redeemer, putting his salvation wholly in His hands, then He will not, cannot, fail him. But in order to cast myself upon Christ I must be *near* Him; I cannot do so while following Him “afar off.” And to be near Him, I must be in separation from all that is contrary to Him. Communion is based upon an obedient walk (John 15:10): the one cannot be without the other. And for the maintenance of this, I must continue to “show the *same* diligence” I did when first convicted of my lost estate, when I perceived that sin was my worst enemy, that I was a rebel against God and His wrath upon me, and when I fled to Christ for refuge, surrendering myself to His lordship and trusting entirely to the sufficiency of His sacrifice to save me from my sins — their dominion, their pollution, and their guilt.

“Show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb. 6:11). The selfsame earnestness and pains which actuated my heart and regulated my acts when I first sought Christ must be continued unto the end of my earthly course. This means persevering in a holy life, in the things which are appointed by and are pleasing to God, and unto this the servants of God are to be constantly urging the saints. “Ministerial exhortation unto duty is needful unto those who are sincere in the practice of it, that they may abide and continue therein” (J. Owen). In no other way can the “full assurance of hope” (a confident expectation of the issue or outcome) be Scripturally maintained. The Christian has to be constant in giving “the same diligence” to the things of God and the needs of his soul as he did at the outset. “He said, *to the end*, that they might know they had not reached the goal, and were therefore to think of further progress. He mentioned diligence that they might know they were not to sit down idly, but to strive in earnest.”

And who think you, my reader, was the author of that quotation? None other than John Calvin! How grievously has Calvinism been perverted and misrepresented.

“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12). The apostle here warns against the vice which is the antithesis of the virtue previously enjoined, for slothfulness is the opposite of diligence. The indolence deformed is in each of us by nature, for spiritual laxity is not something peculiar to those of a lazy disposition. The evil principle of the “flesh” remains in every Christian and that principle hates and therefore is opposed to the things of God. But the flesh must be resisted and the desires of the “spirit” or principle of grace heeded. When conscious of this indisposition unto practical holiness, this native enmity against the same, the believer must pray with renewed earnestness “draw me, we will run after Thee” (Song of Sol. 1:4), “Order my steps in Thy Word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps. 119: 133). It is this which distinguishes the true child of God from the empty professor: his wrestling with the Lord in secret to enable him to press forward in the race set before him.

“But followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” The immediate reference is to the patriarchs who, by continuing steadfast in the faith, persevering in hope amid all the trials to which they were subjected, had no entrance into the promised blessings. Their faith was far more than a notional one: it was influential and practical, causing them to live as “strangers and pilgrims” in this scene (see Heb. 11:13). The word for “patience” here is usually rendered “longsuffering.” It is a grace which makes its possessor refuse to be daunted by the difficulties of the way or be so discouraged by the trials and oppositions encountered as to desert the course or forsake the path of duty. It is just such faith and patience which are required of the saint in every age, for there never has been and never will be any journeying to Heaven on “flowery beds of ease.” If the continued exercise of such graces was required of the patriarchs—persons who were so high in the love and favor of God—then let not us imagine they may be dispensed with in *our* case. The things promised are not obtained “*for* faith and patience,” but they are entered into “*through*” them.

Assurance of final perseverance neither renders needless wariness and care (1 Cor. 10:12), nor the unwearied use of the appointed means of grace (Gal. 6:9). We must distinguish sharply between confidence in Christ and a weakening of the security of the flesh. The teaching that carnal security and presumption is no bar to eternal glory is a doctrine of the Devil. David prayed “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end” (Ps. 119:33). Upon it Spurgeon said, “The end of which David speaks is the end of life, or the fullness of obedience. He trusted in grace to make him faithful to the utmost, never drawing a line and saying to obedience ‘Hitherto shalt thou go but no further.’ The end of our keeping the Law will come only when we cease to breathe: no good man will think of marking a date and saying, ‘It is enough, I may now relax my watch, and live after the manner of men.’ As Christ loves us to the end so must we serve Him to the end. The end of Divine teaching is that we may serve to the end” (Treasury of David, Vol. 6). O for more of this well-balanced teaching.

When faith and the spirit of obedience are inoperative the features of the new birth are under a cloud, and when we have no evidence of regeneration we lack any warrant to entertain the assurance of eternal happiness. The man who gives free rein to the flesh and takes his fill of the world gives the lie to his profession that he is journeying to Heaven. It is the glory of the Gospel that while it announces mercy unto the chief of sinners, yet if any be encouraged by this to persist in a course of evil-doing it pronounces his doom. The Gospel encourages hope, but it also promotes holiness; it imparts peace, but it also inculcates godly piety; it cherishes confidence, yet

not by looking back to conversion but forward to the desired haven. It justifies the expectation of preservation, but only as we persevere in the path of duty. While it declares emphatically that the believer's continuance in and maintenance of his faith depend wholly on something extraneous to himself or his present case, yet with equal clearness it insists that the believer's perseverance is carried on and perfected by his use of all the appointed means.

It is freely granted that many of the objections which are made against this subject apply most pertinently to the Antinomian perversion of it, for hyper-Calvinists have been guilty of presenting this truth in such an unguarded and one-sided manner as to virtually set a premium on loose walking. They have dwelt to such an extent upon the Divine operations as to quite crowd out human responsibility, picturing the Christian as entirely passive. Others who were quite unqualified to write on such a theme have given much occasion to the enemies of the Truth by their crudities, representing the security of the believer as a mechanical thing, divorcing the end from the means, ignoring the safe-guards by which God Himself has hedged about this doctrine, and prating about "once saved, always saved" no matter what the daily walk may be. Nevertheless such abuses do not warrant anyone in repudiating the doctrine itself and opposing the teaching of Scripture thereon, for there is nothing in the Word of God which has the slightest tendency to make light of sin or countenances loose living, but rather everything to the contrary.

When expressing his hatred of the truth of the eternal security of Christ's sheep, John Wesley exclaimed "How pleasing is this to flesh and blood," which is the very thing it is *not*. Such a doctrine can never be agreeable to fallen human nature. Depraved man is essentially proud, and hence any scheme of perseverance accomplished by the strength of man's own will power is pleasing to the vanity of his mind; but a perseverance dependent upon the faithfulness and power of God, a perseverance which is not the result of any human sufficiency but rather of the merits and intercession of Christ, is most unpalatable unto the self-righteous Pharisee. Only the one who has been given to feel the prevailing power of indwelling sin, who has discovered that his own will and resolutions are wholly incompetent to cope with the corruptions of his heart, who has proved by painful experience that he is completely "without strength" and that apart from Christ he can do nothing, will truly rejoice that none can pluck him out of the Redeemer's hand. As only the consciously sick will welcome the Physician, so none but those who realise their own helplessness will really find the doctrine of Divine preservation acceptable to them.

Moreover, *the duties inculcated* by this doctrine are most repugnant to flesh and blood. Subjection to Christ's authority and the daily taking of His yoke upon us is a requirement very far from welcome to those who wish to please themselves and follow their own devices. The standard of piety, the spirituality of God's Law, the nature of holiness, the insistence that we must keep ourselves unspotted from this world, are directly contrary to the inclinations of the natural man. That we must discipline our affections, regulate our thoughts, mortify our carnal appetites, cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye, are certainly not good news to the unregenerate, especially when God insists that such mortification is never to be remitted but continued until mortality be swallowed up of life. No, it is impossible that fallen man will ever be pleased with a doctrine of perseverance in *denying self*, taking up his cross daily and following a holy Christ who is despised and rejected by this world. Thus it will abundantly appear from all that has been said, how baseless and pointless is the Arminian objection that the preaching of this doctrine encourages laxity and makes for licentiousness.

How can it be supposed that the proclamation of this blessed truth will lead to carelessness and carnality when we lay it down as a fundamental maxim that no one has any shadow of reason to consider himself interested in the blessing of perseverance except as he has and gives clear

evidence that he is inwardly conformed to God and outwardly obedient to His commands? Yet it must be allowed, no matter how carefully and proportionately the doctrine of Scripture be set forth by God's servant, there will always be those ready to wrest to their own destruction. If the Lord Jesus was falsely charged with "perverting the nation" (Luke 23:2), His ministers must not expect immunity from similar criminations. If the apostle Paul was slanderously reported of teaching "Let us do evil, that good may come" (Rom. 3:8), we must not be surprised if the enemies of God should falsify our assertions and draw erroneous inferences from them. Yet this must not deter us from proclaiming all the counsel of God or keeping back anything that would be profitable to His people (Acts 20:27,20).

And now to make practical application of all that has been before us. 1. How earnest should sinners be of becoming Christians. In Christ alone is salvation and safety to be found. Security of person and of estate is the principal concern of men in this world, but security of soul has little or no place in the thoughts of the majority. How fearful to be in imminent danger of death and eternal punishment, and how alarming the condition of those indifferent to their everlasting welfare. Where there is an underground shelter which is out of range of artillery and below the reach of falling bombs, how eagerly will the sane turn thither when the siren sounds. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe" (Prov. 18:10). O let every reader who has not yet done so make haste into his closet, fall upon his knees and rise not till he has committed himself wholly unto Christ for time and eternity. Halt no longer between two opinions. The wrath of God is upon thee, and there is but one way of escape: then flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel (Heb. 6:18). Christ stands ready to receive you if will throw down your weapons of warfare.

2. How diligently you should examine whether or no you are in Christ, the place of eternal security. You should *know* whether or not you have complied with the requirements of the Gospel, whether or not you have closed with Christ's gracious offer therein, whether spiritual life has come to your soul, whether you have been made a new creature in Christ. These things may be known with definite certainty. Put these questions to your soul. Had I sincere resolution to forsake my wicked way when I came to Christ? Did I relinquish all dependence upon my own works? Did I come to Him empty-handed, resting on His promise "him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out"? Then you may be assured on the infallible Word of God that Christ received you, and you are most grievously insulting Him if you doubt it. Do you value Christ above all the world? Do you desire to be conformed more and more to His holy image? Is it your earnest endeavor to please Him in all things, and is it your greatest grief and confession to Him when you have displeased Him? Then these are the sure marks of every one who is a member of His mystical Body.

3. How jealously we should watch over and seek to protect this tree of God's planting, from the winds of false doctrine and the pests which would fain destroy it. If we are to do so then we must give due attention to that injunction, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). We must make conscience of everything which is harmful to godliness. We must walk in separation from the world and have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." We must feed daily upon the Word of God, for otherwise growth is impossible. We must have regular recourse to the throne of grace, not only to obtain pardoning mercy for the sins committed but to find grace to help for present needs. We must make constant use of the shield of faith for there is no other defense against the fiery darts of Satan. A good beginning is not sufficient: we must press forward unto the things before. A small leak will

eventually sink a ship if it be not attended to: many a noble vessel now lies wrecked upon the rocks.

4. How we should beware of wresting this doctrine. Let none encourage themselves in carelessness and fleshly indulgence through presuming upon their security in Christ. It is those who “hear” (heed) His voice and that “follow” Him to whom He has made promise “they shall never perish” (John 10:27,28). The ones of whom the Lord has declared “They shall not depart from Me” are those to whom He said “I will put My fear in their hearts” (Jer. 32:40), but He gives no such assurance to those who trifle with Him. God has promised a victory to His people, but that very promise implies a warfare: victories are not gained by neglect and sloth. When Divine grace brings salvation to a soul it teaches him to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to “live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12), and if it is not so teaching me, then I am a stranger to saving grace. There is nothing which has so much forwarded the Arminian error of apostasy as the scandalous lives of professing Christians: see that your life gives the lie to it.

5. How we must ascribe all the glory unto God. If thou hast stood firm while others have been swept away, if thou hast held on thy way when many who accompanied thee at the beginning have forsaken the paths of righteousness, if thou hast thrived when others have withered, it is due entirely to the distinguishing mercy and power of God. “Who maketh thee to differ, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive” (1 Cor. 4:7): thou hast no cause whatever to boast. “But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil” (2 Thess. 3:3): if the Lord, then not myself. It is true we “will” and do, but it is God who worketh both in us (Phil. 2:13). Our sufficiency is of Him and not of ourselves, and due acknowledgment should be made of this; and it *will be* by real saints. “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for thy mercy, for Thy truth’s sake” (Ps. 115:1).

6. How we should magnify the grace of God. The mind is incompetent to perceive how much we are beholden to the Lord for His interest in and care of us. As His providence is virtually a continual creation, an upholding of all things by His ‘power, without which they would lapse back again into nonentity: so the Christian’s preservation is like a continual regeneration, a maintenance of the new creation by the operations of the Spirit and the bestowing fresh supplies of grace. It was the realisation of this fact that moved David to acknowledge of God, “Which holdeth our soul in life and suffereth not our feet to be moved” (Ps. 66:9). As Charnock well said, “It is a standing miracle in the world that all the floods of temptation shall not be able to quench this little heavenly spark in the heart, that it shall be preserved from being smothered by the streams of sin which arise in us, that a little smoking flax shall burn in spite of all the buckets of water which are poured upon it.” Thus God perfects His strength in our weakness. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for His goodness, for His mercy endureth forever” (Ps. 106:1).

7. How compassionate we should be unto weaker brethren. The more thou art mindful of the Lord’s upholding hand, the more compassionate wilt thou be unto those with feeble knees. “If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Call to mind how patiently the Lord hast borne with thee. Remember how ignorant thou wast but a short time ago, and expect not too much from babes in Christ. Has not the Lord often recovered thee when thou didst wander? Have not thy brethren still occasion to bear with many blemishes in thee? If so, wilt thou be hyper-critical and censorious toward them! Despise not small grace in any, but seek to encourage, to counsel, to help. Christ does not break the bruised reed, nor must we. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

2. Its Root

Before attempting to define and describe what the spiritual growth of a Christian consists of we should first show what it is that is capable of growth, for spiritual growth necessarily supposes the presence of spiritual life: only a regenerated person can grow. Progress in the Christian life is impossible unless I be a Christian. We must therefore begin by explaining what a Christian is. To many of our readers this may appear quite superfluous, but in such a day as this, wherein spiritual counterfeits and delusions abound on every side, when so many are deceived on the all-important matter, and because this magazine is read by such widely-different classes, we deem it necessary to follow this course. We dare not take for granted that all our readers are Christians in the Scriptural sense of that term, and may it please the Lord to use what we are about to write to give light to some who are yet in darkness. Moreover, it may be the means of enabling some real Christians, now confused, to see the way of the Lord more clearly. Nor will it be altogether profitless, we hope, even to those more fully established in the faith.

Broadly speaking there are three kinds of “Christians”: preacher-made, self-made, and God-made ones. In the former are included not only those who were “sprinkled” in infancy and thereby made members of a “church” (though not admitted to all its privileges), but those who have reached the age of accountability and are induced by some high-pressure “evangelist” to “make a profession.” This high-pressure business is in different forms and in varying degrees, from appeals to the emotions to mass hypnotism whereby crowds are induced to “come forward.” Under it countless thousands whose consciences were never searched and who had no sense of their lost condition before God were persuaded to “do the manly thing,” “enlist under the banner of Christ,” “unite with God’s people in their crusade against the devil.” Such converts are like mushrooms: they spring up in a night and survive but a short time, having no root. Similar too are the vast majority produced under what is called “Personal work,” which consists of a species of individual “button-holing,” and is conducted along the lines used by commercial travelers seeking to make a “forced sale.”

The “second” class is made up of those who have been warned against what has just been described above, and fearful of being deluded by such religious hucksters they determined to “settle the matter” directly with God in the privacy of their own room or some secluded spot. They had been given to understand that God loves everybody, that Christ died for the whole human race, and that nothing is required of them but faith in the Gospel. By saving faith they suppose that a mere intellectual assent to or acceptance of such statements as are found in John 3:16; Romans 10:13 is all that is intended. It matters not that John 2:23, 24 declares that “many *believed* in His name...but Jesus did not commit Himself unto them,” that “many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him lest they be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42,43)—which shows how much their “believing” was worth. Imagining that the natural man is capable of “receiving

Christ as a personal Saviour” they make the attempt, doubt not their success, go on their way rejoicing, and none can shake their assurance that they are now real Christians.

“No man can come unto Me except the Father which has sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). Here is a declaration of Christ’s which has not received even mental assent by the vast majority in Christendom. It is far too flesh-abasing to meet with acceptance from those who wish to think that the settling of a man’s eternal destiny lies entirely within his own power. That fallen man is wholly at the disposal of God is thoroughly unpalatable to an unhumbled heart. To come to Christ is a spiritual act and not a natural one, and since the unregenerate are dead in sins they are quite incapable of any spiritual exercises. Coming to Christ is the effect of the soul’s being made to feel its desperate need of Him, of the understanding’s being enlightened to perceive His suitability for a lost sinner, of the affections being drawn out so as to desire Him. But how can one whose natural mind is “enmity against God” have any desire for His Son?

God-made Christians are a miracle of grace, the products of Divine workmanship (Eph. 2:10). They are a Divine creation, brought into existence by supernatural operations. By the new birth we are capacitated for communion with the Triune Jehovah, for it is the spring of new sensibilities and activities. It is not our old nature made better and excited into spiritual acts, but instead, something is communicated which was not there before. That “something” partakes of the same nature as its Begetter: “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6), and as He is holy so that which He produces is holy. It is the God of all grace who brings us “from death unto life,” and therefore it is a principle of grace which He imparts to the soul, and it disposes unto fruits which are well pleasing unto Him. Regeneration is not a protracted process, but an instantaneous thing, to which nothing can be added nor from it anything taken away (Eccl. 3:14). It is the product of a Divine fiat: God speaks and it is done, and the subject of it becomes immediately a “new creature.”

Regeneration is not the outcome of any clerical magic nor does the individual experiencing it supply ought thereto: he is the passive and unconscious recipient of it. Said Truth incarnate: “Which were born not of blood [heredity makes no contribution thereto, for God has regenerated heathens whose ancestors have for centuries been gross idolators] nor of the will of the flesh [for prior to this Divine quickening the will of that person was inveterately opposed to God] nor of the will of [a] man [the preacher was incapable of regenerating himself, much less others] but of God” (John 1:13)—by His sovereign and all-mighty power. And again Christ declared, “The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof [its effects are quite manifest] but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth [its causation and operation are entirely above human ken, a mystery no finite intelligence can solve] so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8)—not in certain exceptional cases, but in *all* who experience the same. Such Divine declarations are as far removed from most of the religious teaching of the day as light is from darkness.

The word “Christian” means “an *anointed* one,” as the Lord Jesus is “The Anointed” or “The Christ.” That was one of the titles accorded Him in the Old Testament: “The kings of the earth have set themselves and the rulers taken counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed” or “Christ” (Ps. 2:2 and cf. Acts 2:26,27). He is thus designated because “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38), for induction into His office and enduement for the discharge thereof. That office has three branches, for He was to act as Prophet, Priest and Potentate. And in the Old Testament we find this foreshadowed in the anointing of Israel’s prophets (1 Kings 19:16), their priests (Lev. 8:30) and their kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 2 Sam. 2:4). Accordingly it was upon entrance into His public ministry the Lord Jesus was “anointed,” for at

His baptism “the heavens were opened unto Him” and there was seen “the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him,” and the Father’s voice was heard saying “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16,17). The Spirit of God had come upon others before that, but never as He now came upon the incarnate Son, “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him” (John 3:34), for being the Holy One there was nothing whatever in Him to oppose the Spirit or grieve Him, but everything to the contrary.

But it was not for Himself alone that Christ received the Spirit, but to share with and communicate unto His people. Hence in another of the Old Testament types we read that “The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron’s beard, that ran down to the skirts of his garments” (Ps. 133:2). Though all Israel’s priests were anointed, none but the high priest was so upon the *head* (Lev. 8:12). This foreshadowed the Saviour being anointed not only as our great High Priest but also as the Head of His church, and the running down of the sacred unguent to the skirts prefigured the communicating of the Spirit to all the members, even the lowliest, of His mystical Body. “Now He who...hath anointed us is God, who hath sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:22). “Of his [Christ’s] fulness have all we received” (John 1:16).

When the apostles “were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” on the day of Pentecost, and some mocked, Peter declared “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” and concluded by affirming that Jesus had been by the right hand of God exalted and “having received of the Father...*He* hath shed forth *this*” (Acts 2:33). A “Christian” then is an anointed one because he has received the Holy Spirit from Christ “the Anointed.” And hence it is written “But ye have an Unction [or “anointing”] from the Holy One,” that is, from Christ; and again, “the Anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you” (1 John 2:20,27), for just as we read of “the Spirit descending and *remaining* on Him” (John 1:33) so He abides with us “forever” (John 14:16).

This is the inseparable accompaniment of the new birth. The regenerated soul is not only made the recipient of a new life, but the Holy Spirit is communicated to him, and by the Spirit he is then vitally united to Christ, for “he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). The Spirit comes to indwell so that his body is made His temple. It is by this anointing or inhabitation the regenerate person is sanctified or set apart unto God, consecrated to Him, and given a place in that “holy priesthood” which is qualified “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Thereby the saint is sharply distinguished from the world, for “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit is the identifying mark or seal: as it was by the Spirit’s descent on Christ that John recognised Him (John 1:33) and “Him hath God the Father *sealed*” (John 6:27), so believers are “sealed with that Holy Spirit.” (Eph. 1:13)

But since the individual concerned in regeneration is entirely passive and at the moment unconscious of what is taking place, the question arises, how is a soul to ascertain whether or no he has been Divinely quickened? At first sight it might appear that no satisfactory answer can be forthcoming, yet a little reflection should show that this must be far from being the case. Such a miracle of grace wrought within a person cannot long be imperceptible to him. If spiritual life be imparted unto one dead in sins its presence must soon become manifest. This is indeed the case. The new birth becomes apparent by the effects it produces, namely, spiritual desires and spiritual exercises. As the natural infant clings instinctively to its mother, so the spiritual babe turns unto the One who gave it being. The authority of God is felt in the conscience, the holiness of God is perceived by the enlightened understanding, desires after Him stir within the soul. His wondrous

grace is now faintly perceived by the renewed heart. There is a poignant consciousness of that which is opposed to the glory of God, a sense of our sinnership such as was not experienced formerly.

The natural man [albeit he is as a fallen creature by the first birth] receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). By no efforts of his own, by no university education, by no course of religious instruction can he obtain any spiritual or vital knowledge of spiritual things. They are utterly beyond the range of his faculties. Self-love blinds him: self-pleasing chains him to the things of time and sense. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. He may obtain a notional knowledge of them, but until a miracle of grace takes place in his soul he cannot have any spiritual acquaintance with them. Fishes could sooner live on dry ground or birds exist beneath the waves than an unregenerate person enter into a vital and experimental acquaintance with the things of God.

The first effect of the spiritual life in the soul is that its recipient is convicted of its impurity and guilt. The conscience is quickened and there is a piercing realisation of both personal pollution and criminality. The illumined mind sees something of the awful malignity of sin, as being in its very nature contrary to the holiness of God, and in its essence nothing but high-handed rebellion against Him. From that arises an abhorrence of it as a most vile and loathsome thing. The demerit of sin is seen, so that the soul is made to feel it has grievously provoked the Most High, exposing him to Divine wrath. Made aware of the plague of his heart, knowing himself to be justly liable to the awful vengeance of the Almighty, his mouth is stopped, he has not a word to say in self-extenuation, he confesses himself to be guilty before Him; and henceforth that which most deeply concerns him is, What must I do to be saved? in what way may I escape the doom of the Law?

The second effect of the spiritual life in the soul is that its recipient becomes aware of the suitability of Christ unto such a vile wretch as he now discovers himself to be. The glorious Gospel now has an entirely new meaning for him. He requires no urging to listen to its message: it is heavenly music in his ears, "good news from a far Country (Prov. 25:25). Nay, he now searches the Scriptures for himself to make sure that such a Gospel is not too good to be true. As he reads therein of who the Saviour is and what He did, of the Divine incarnation and His death on the cross, he is awed as never before. As he learns that it was for sinners, for the ungodly, for enemies that Christ shed His blood, hope is awakened within his heart and he is kept from being overwhelmed by his burden of guilt and from sinking into abject despair. Desires of an interest in Christ spring up within his soul, and he is resolved to look for salvation in none other. He is convinced that pardon and security are to be found in Christ alone if so be that He will show him favor. He searches now to discover what Christ's requirements are.

A Christian is not only one "anointed" by the Spirit, but he is also one who is a *disciple* of Christ (see Matt. 28:19 margin and Acts 11:26), that is, a learner and follower of Christ. His terms of discipleship are made known in Luke 14:26-33. Those terms a regenerate soul is enabled to comply with. Convicted of his lost condition, having learned that Christ is the appointed and all-sufficient Saviour for sinners, he now throws down the weapons of his rebellion, repudiates his idols, relinquishes his love of and friendship with the world, surrenders himself to the Lordship of Christ, takes His yoke upon him, and thereby finds rest unto his soul; trusting in the efficacy of His atoning blood, the burden of guilt is removed, and henceforth his dominant desire and endeavor is to please and glorify his Saviour. Thus *regeneration* issues in and evidences itself by

conversion, and genuine conversion makes one a disciple of Christ, following the example He has left us. —AWP

March

WISDOM FOR THE WISE

“He giveth wisdom unto the wise” (Dan. 2:21). These words may seem almost puzzling to some: if already wise, why should wisdom be given to such? Others may be discouraged: if wisdom be given only to the wise, then I am cut off, for I am an ignoramus, a veritable dunce. If by that you mean (as the world does) uneducated and unsophisticated, that may be quite true—possibly due in part to slackness in failing to improve your opportunities when young. But if you signify, one who is conscious of spiritual dullness, having a felt lack of capacity to enter into Divine things, such a consciousness is a hopeful sign. The word “wise” is used in Scripture in connection with two very different characters: those who are “wise in their own conceits” (Prov. 26:12; Isa. 5:21) and those who are so in the estimation of God. The former are fools in *His* sight; the latter are dunces in their *own* valuation. It is much to be thankful for when we have been made aware of our spiritual ignorance and stupidity, if it induces us to cry with Job, “That which I see not teach Thou me.”

The setting and occasion of our opening text is as follows. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and though it had gone from him its effects deeply impressed him, and he longed to discover its meaning. Accordingly he summoned before him the magicians and astrologers, demanding that they not only tell him his dream but its interpretation also. The demand was unreasonable, preposterous, nevertheless death was to attend their failure—a sentence which extended also to Daniel and his fellows (Dan. 2:14). Whereupon Daniel went in and requested “that he would give him time,” assuring him that “he would show the king the interpretation” (v. 16). Then Daniel acquainted his companions with the situation, and asked them to join him in desiring “mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret” (v. 18). Prayer was their sole recourse; and it was enough. Their petition was answered: “then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision,” and he “blessed the God of heaven” (v. 19), saying “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His...He giveth wisdom unto the wise and knowledge to them that know understanding.”

Limiting ourselves first to the above, we learn *who* are the “wise” and *how* their wisdom is manifested. This incident is indeed a striking one. At the time of its occurrence Daniel was but a young man, and so far as Scripture informs us he had never previously received a prophetic “vision” from God! Yet such was his confidence in the Lord that he tells the king, without any hesitation or qualification, that if allowed time he *would* (not “might” or that he “hoped to”) tell

him both his dream and its signification. It should also be duly noted that Daniel and his fellows had no specific promise they could plead before God, no detail in His Word which exactly suited their present emergency, and therefore they fell back upon the general “desiring mercies” from Him. We may also point out that this happened at a time when Israel’s spirituality was at an exceedingly low ebb, when the Divine judgments were heavy upon that nation, when many of her sons were in captivity in a heathen land. Nevertheless, Daniel had no fear that God would suffer him to be confounded or put to confusion. In childlike assurance he bowed the knee before Him and obtained that which he sought.

No, my reader, He never puts to confusion those who fully trust Him—He would not be *God* if He did. He has pledged Himself to honour those who honour Him, and as nothing more honours Him than genuine faith in Himself, He always rewards it wherever it be found. The trouble to-day is that the majority of professing Christians are so occupied with natural “means” that direct dealings with God is crowded out. The wisdom of Daniel then appears, first, in his implicit confidence in the Lord’s sufficiency: that it was a simple matter for Him to do what had baffled all the “wise men” of Babylon. Second, in his counting upon God’s “mercies”: he laid hold of that fact that He is of tender compassion, and this encouraged him in the hour of dire need. Third, in spreading his case before Him, and expecting an answer, as is unmistakably clear from his confident language unto Nebuchadnezzar. It is the faith which *expects* from God that is not disappointed. Such was the faith of Abraham: “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and *come again* [notwithstanding Isaac’s being slain] to you” (Gen. 22:5 and cf. Heb. 11:19). Such was the faith of Elisha (2 Kings 4:3). Such was the faith of Paul (Acts 27:25).

And unto *that* “wise” man God gave more “wisdom” as He “giveth more grace” unto the humble (James 4:5). And this striking and blessed incident has been recorded for our learning: to show us what spiritual wisdom is, how it acts, and what it obtains. Natural knowledge puffs up its possessor, and the more he has the more self-sufficient he deems himself. But it is the very opposite with spiritual wisdom: the more God bestows of that upon His child, the more ignorant and stupid he feels himself to be, and the more dependent upon the Holy Spirit does he become. Then it is that he really values that precious promise “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it *shall be* given him” (James 1:5). The truly “wise” person will not only greatly prize such a promise, but he will daily *make use* of it, mixing faith therewith, pleading it before the throne of grace, and obtaining answers of peace. As it is “when I am weak [in myself], then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10), so it is when we (spiritually speaking) conduct ourselves as “babes” that God reveals unto us what is hidden from the worldly wise and prudent (Matt. 11:25).

Let us now widen our scope and take notice of some of the marks of the spiritually “wise.” “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end” (Deut. 32:29). The “wise,” then, are those who solemnly ponder their future, who are seriously concerned about where they will spend eternity; and therefore is it their prayer “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom” (Psa. 90:12). “Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee” (Prov. 9:8)—it is the self-important fool who fails to see that the rebuke was designed for his good. “Give instruction to a wise man and he will be yet wiser” (Prov. 9:9)—treasuring up the instruction and turning it to profit. “A wise man feareth and departeth from evil” (Prov. 14:16)—knowing that as it is dangerous to play with fire, so to dally with temptation. “The way of life is above to the wise” (Prov. 15:24)—his affections set upon things in Heaven is what marks his course.

“The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see Thy name” (Micah 6:9), which means that when God is speaking loudly in judgment (as He is to-day) the one endowed with spiritual wisdom will discern the intent of the Divine dispensations and set his own house in order—this is clear from the remainder of the verse: “hear ye the rod, and Who hath appointed it.” Another mark of the “wise” man is that he dug deep and “built his house upon a rock” (Matt. 7:24), which signifies that he is a *doer* of the Word and not a hearer only. The “wise” virgins were those who “took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (Matt. 25:4)—who had grace in their hearts as well as a Christian profession on their lips. “Let no man deceive himself: if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Cor. 3:18)—renounce proud reason and come before God as a little child to be taught by Him. The wise “redeem the time” (Eph. 5:16). “Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him *show* out of a good conversation [deportment] his works with meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

3. Romans 15:5-7

The verses we are about to consider supply another illustration of how the apostle was wont to mingle prayer with instruction. He had just issued some practical exhortations, and now he breathes a petition to God that He will make the same effectual. In order to enter into the spirit of this prayer it will be necessary to attend closely to its setting: the more so because not a few are very confused about the present-day bearing of the context. The section in which the passage before us is found begins at 14:1 and terminates at 15:13. In it the apostle gave directions relating to the maintenance of Christian fellowship and the mutual respect with which believers are to regard and treat one another, even where they are not entirely of one accord in matters pertaining to minor points of faith and practice. Those who see not eye to eye with each other on things where no doctrine or principle is involved, are to dwell together in unity, bearing and forbearing in a spirit of meekness and love.

In the Christian company at Rome, as in almost all the then churches of God beyond the bounds of Judea, there were two classes clearly distinguished from each other. The one was composed of Gentile converts and the more enlightened of their Jewish brethren, who (rightly) viewed the institutions of the Mosaic law as annulled by the new and better covenant. The other class comprised the great body of Jewish converts, who, whilst they believed in the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah and Savior, yet held that the Mosaic law was not and could not be repealed, and therefore continued zealous for it—not only observing its ceremonial requirements themselves but desirous of imposing the same on the Gentile Christians. The particular points

here raised were abstinence from those “meats” which were prohibited under the old covenant, and the observance of certain “holy” days connected with the feasts of Judaism. The epistle of Hebrews had not then been written, and little explicit teaching given on the subject. Until God overthrew Judaism in A.D. 70 He tolerated the slowness of understanding on the part of many Jewish Christians.

It can be easily understood, human nature being what it is, the evil tendencies which such a situation threatened, and how real was the need for the apostle to address suitable exhortations unto each party, for differences of opinion are liable to lead to alienation of affections. The first party mentioned above were in danger of despising the other, looking down upon them as narrow-minded bigots, as superstitious. On the other hand, the second party were in danger of judging harshly of the first, viewing them as latitudinarians, lax, or as making an unjust and unloving use of their Christian liberty. The apostle therefore made it clear that, where there is credible evidence of a genuine belief of saving Truth, where the grand fundamentals of the Faith are held, then such differences of opinion on minor matters should not in the slightest degree diminish brotherly love or mar their spiritual and social fellowship together. A spirit of bigotry, censoriousness, and intolerance is utterly foreign to Christianity.

The particular controversy which existed in the apostle’s time and the ill feelings it engendered have long since passed away, but the principles in human nature which gave rise to them are as powerful as ever. In companies of professing Christians there are diversities of endowment and acquirements (some have more light and grace than others), and there are differences of opinion and conduct, and therefore the things here recorded will, if rightly understood and legitimately applied, be found “written for our learning.” It is through *failure* to understand exactly what the apostle was dealing with that the most childish and unwarrantable applications have been made of the passage, many seeming to imagine that if their fellow-Christians refuse to walk by *their* rules, they are guilty of acting uncharitably and of putting a stumbling block in their way. We know of a sect who deems it sinful for a married woman to wear a wedding ring, and of another who considers it wrong for a Christian man to shave. We know of Christian organizations who exclude from their fellowship any who smoke; and all of these people *condemn* those who decline to conform to their ideas.

Now not only are the cases just mentioned entirely foreign to the scope of Romans 14 and 15, but they involve an evil which it is the bounden duty of God’s servants to resist and denounce. That such cases as the ones we have alluded to *are* in no wise analogous to what the apostle was dealing with should be clear to any one who attentively considers these simple facts. Under Judaism certain meats were Divinely prohibited and designated “unclean” (Lev. 11:4-8 etc.), but such a prohibition has been Divinely removed (Acts 10:15; 1 Tim. 4:4), hence there is no parallel in abstaining from things which *God* has *never* forbidden. If some people wish to do so, if they think well to deprive themselves of some of the things which God has given us richly to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17), that is their privilege; but when they demand that others should do likewise out of respect to their ideas, they exceed their rights and attack the God-given liberty of their brethren.

But there are not a few who go yet farther. They not only insist that others should walk by the rule *they* have set up (or accept the particular interpretation of certain scriptures which they give *and* the specific application of the term “meat” which they make) but stigmatise as “unclean,” “carnal,” and “sinful” the conduct of those differing from them. This is a very serious matter, for it is a manifest and flagrant commission of that which this particular portion of God’s Word expressly reprehends. “Let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth...who art thou that judgest another man’s servant...why dost thou judge thy brother?...let us not therefore judge one

another any more” (Rom. 14:3,4,10,13)! Thus the very ones who are so forward in judging their brethren are condemned by God! It is surely significant that there is no other portion of Holy Writ which so strongly and so repeatedly forbids passing judgment on others as this chapter to which appeal is so often (wrongly) made by those who condemn their fellows for things which Scripture has not prohibited.

One of the grand blessings won for us by the fierce battle of the Reformation was *the right of private judgment*. For a thousand years Romanism had filched this fundamental blessing from Christendom. Not only was the Word of God withheld, but no man was at liberty to form any ideas on spiritual things for himself: he must perforce receive his doctrines and have every department of his life ordered by the pope and his agents. If any one dared to shake off such shackles, he was anathematised, and if he remained firm in refusing such bondage, he was cruelly tortured and then murdered by those religious tyrants. But in the mercy of God, Luther and his fellows defied Rome, and by Divine providence the Holy Scriptures were restored to the common people, translated into their own language, and every man then had the right to pray directly to God for enlightenment and to form his own judgment of what His Word taught. Alas that such an inestimable privilege is now so little prized, and that the vast majority of non-Romanists (few of them are entitled to be called “Protestants”) are too indolent to search the Scriptures for themselves, preferring to accept their views from others.

It was because many of those who enjoyed this dearly-bought privilege had such little courage or wisdom to resist modern encroachments on personal spiritual liberty, that those who sought to lord it over their brethren have made so much headway during the last two or three generations. And once again the whirlwind has followed the “sowing of the wind” and that spirit which was allowed to domineer in the churches is now being more and more adumbrated in the world. Under the plea of “necessary War measures” liberties have been rudely sacrificed. Private homes forced to lodge strangers, and now the wives and mothers themselves threatened with being “directed” into factories, even though it means the break-up of their homes. We refrain from any comment on such a procedure, but merely call attention to what has become a prominent sign of the times; and we do so because of its pertinence to our present subject—the invading of the rights of conscience, the right each man has to interpret the Word according to the light God has given him.

Almost a century ago, when commenting on Romans 14 John Brown said, “It is to be hoped, notwithstanding much that still indicates, in some quarters, a disposition to exercise over the minds and consciences of men an authority and an influence which belongs only to God, that the reign of spiritual tyranny—the worst of all tyrannies—is drawing to a close. Let us determine neither to exercise such domination, nor to submit to it even for an hour. Let us ‘call no man master,’ and let us not seek to be called masters by others. One is our Master, who is Christ the Lord, and we are His fellow-servants. Let us help each other, but leave Him to judge us. He only has the capacity, as He only has the authority, for so doing.” Let us heed that apostolic injunction “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1), refusing to heed the “Touch not, taste not, handle not...after the commandments and doctrines *of men*” (Col. 2:21,22).

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” (Rom. 14:1). The reference is not to one of feeble faith, beset by doubts, but rather to one who is imperfectly instructed in the Faith, who has not yet grasped the real meaning of Christian liberty, who was still in bondage to the prohibitions of Judaism. Notwithstanding his lack of knowledge, receive him into your affections, treat him kindly: cf. Acts 28:2 and Philemon 15-17 for the force of

“receive.” He was neither to be excommunicated from Christian circles nor looked upon with contempt because he had less light than others. “But not to doubtful disputations” means, that he is not to be disturbed about his own conscientious views and practices, nor on the other hand is he to be allowed to pester his brethren by seeking to convert them to his views. There is to be mutual forbearance and amity between believers. “Each Christian has, and ought to have, the judgment of discretion, and should have his senses exercised to the discerning between good and evil, truth and error,” (Matthew Henry).

But does the above verse mean that no effort is to be made to enlighten one who has failed to lay hold of and enter into the benefits Christ secured for His people? Certainly not. Rome may believe that “Ignorance is the mother of devotion,” but not so those who are guided by the Word. As Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos unto them and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26), so it is both the duty and privilege to pass on to fellow-Christians the light God has given us. Yet that instruction must be given humbly and not censoriously, in a spirit of meekness and not contention. Patience must be exercised: “he that *winneth* [not ‘browbeateth’] souls is wise.” The aim should be to enlighten his mind rather than force his will, for unless the conscience be convicted, uniformity of action would be mere hypocrisy. A spirit of moderation must temper zeal and the right of private judgment must be fully respected: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” If we fail to win him it would be sinful to attribute it to his mulishness.

Space will allow us to single out only one other weighty consideration: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17). “The kingdom of God” or the Gospel dispensation does not consist of such comparative trivialities as using or abstaining from meat and drink (or jewelry and tobacco)—it gives no rule either one way or another. The Jewish religion consisted much in such things (Heb. 9:10), but Christianity of something infinitely more important and valuable. Let us not be guilty of the sin of the Pharisees who paid tithes of “mint and anise” but “omitted the weightier matters of the Law—judgment, mercy and faith” (Matt. 23:23). “You give a false and degrading view of Christianity by these contentions, leading men to think that freedom from ceremonial restrictions is its great privilege, while the truth is, justification, peace with God, and joy in God, produced by the Holy Spirit, are the characteristic privileges of the children of the kingdom” (John Brown).

But another principle is involved here, a most important and essential one, namely, *the exercise of brotherly love*. Suppose I fail to convince my weaker brother, and he claims to be stumbled by the allowing myself in things he cannot conscientiously use, then what is my duty? If he be unable to enter into the breadth of Christian liberty which I perceive and exercise, how far does the law of Christian charity require me to forgo my liberty and deny myself of that which I feel free before God to use? That is not an easy question to answer, for there are many things which have to be taken into consideration. If it were nothing but a matter of deciding between pleasing myself and *profiting* my brethren, there would be no difficulty, but if it is merely a matter of yielding to their whims, where is the line to be drawn? We have met some who consider it wrong to drink tea or coffee because it is injurious. The one who sets out to try and please everybody is likely to end by pleasing nobody.

A sharp distinction is to be drawn between moderation and abstinence. To be “temperate in all things” (1 Cor. 9:25) is a dictate of prudence—to put it on the lowest ground. “Let your moderation be known to all men” (Phil. 4:5) is a Divine injunction. It is not the use but the abuse of many things which mark the difference between innocence and sin. But because many abuse certain of God’s creatures, that is no sufficient reason why others should altogether shun them. As

Spurgeon once said, "Shall I cease to use knives because some men cut their throats with them?" Shall, then, my wife remove her wedding ring because certain people profess to be "stumbled" at the sight of one on her finger? Does love to them require her to become fanatical? Would it really make for their profit, their edification, by conforming to their scruples? or would it not be more likely to encourage a spirit of self-righteousness. We once lived for two years in a small place where there was a church of these people, but we saw little signs of humility in those who were constantly complaining of pride in others.

There are many thousands of professing Christians (by no means all of them Romanists) who would consider they grievously dishonored Christ if they partook of any animal meat on Friday: how far would the dictates of Christian love require me to join with them in such abstinence were I to reside in a community where these people preponderated! Answering for himself, the writer would say, it depends on their viewpoint. If it was nothing more than a sentiment, he would probably yield; though he would endeavor to show them there was nothing in Scripture requiring such abstinence. But if they regarded it as a virtuous thing, as being necessary to salvation, he would unhesitatingly disregard their wishes, otherwise he would be encouraging them in fatal error. Or, if they said he too was sinning by eating animal meat on Friday, then he would deem it an unwarrantable exercise of brotherly love to countenance their mistake, and an unlawful trespassing upon his Christian liberty.

It is written, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32), yet like many another precept that one cannot be taken absolutely without any qualification. For example, if I be invited to occupy an Arminian pulpit it would give great offence should I preach upon unconditional Election, yet would that warrant my keeping silent thereon? Hyper-Calvinists do not like to hear about man's responsibility, but should I therefore withhold what is needful to and profitable for them? Would brotherly love require this of me? None more pliable and adaptable than he who wrote "Unto the Jews I became a Jew, that I might gain the Jews... To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak" etc. (1 Cor. 9:20-22), yet when Peter was to be blamed because he toadied to those who condemned eating with the Gentiles, he "*withstood him to the face*" (Gal. 2:11,12), and when false brethren sought to bring them into bondage, he refused to have Titus circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5).

Another incident much to the point before us is found in connection with our Lord and His disciples. "The Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not" (Mark 7:3,4). First a "tradition," this had become a religious practice, a conscientious observance, among the Jews. Did then our Lord then bid His disciples respect their scruples and conform to their standard? No, indeed; for when the Pharisees "saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled [ceremonially defiled], that is to say, with unwashen hands, they found fault" (v. 2). On another occasion Christ Himself was invited by a certain Pharisee to dine with him, "and He went in and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had *not* first washed before dining" (Luke 11:37,38). Even though He knew it would give offence, Christ declined to be bound by *man-made* laws!

But we must draw to a close. The exercise of Christian charity is an essential duty, yet it is not to override everything else, any more than God has not exercised love at the expense of righteousness. The exercising of love does not mean that the Christian himself is to become a non-entity, a mere straw blown hither and thither by every current of wind he encounters. He is never to please his brethren at the expense of displeasing God. Love is not to oust liberty. The exercise of love does not require the Christian to yield principle, to wound his own conscience or

to become the slave of every fanatic he meets. It *does* enjoin the curbing of his own desires and seeking the good, the profit, the edification, of his brethren, but *not* the subscribing to their errors and depriving him of the right of personal judgment. There is a balance to be preserved here: a happy medium between the cultivation of unselfishness and becoming the victim of the selfishness of others. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

15. Tenth Miracle - part 2

In the preceding article our attention was confined to the *subject* of this miracle, namely Naaman the Syrian, who was stricken with the horrible disease of leprosy—a striking type of the natural man, corrupted by sin, unfit for the presence of a holy God. The most fearful thing of all was, that leprosy was incurable by the hand of man. Naaman was quite incapable of ridding himself of his terrible burden. No matter what plan he followed, what attempts he made, no help or relief was to be obtained from self-efforts. Have you realised the truth of this, in its typical imports, my reader: that there is no deliverance from sin, no salvation for your soul by anything that *you* can do? Nor was there any physician in Syria who could effect a cure: no matter what fee he offered, what quack he applied to, none was of any avail. And such is the case of each of us by nature. Our spiritual malady lies deeper than any human hand can reach unto: our condition is too desperate for any religious practitioner to cure. Man can no more deliver himself, or his fellows, from the guilt and defilement of sin than he can create a world.

Most solemnly was the fact shadowed forth under the system of Judaism. No remedy was provided for this fearful disease under the Mosaic Law: no directions were given to Israel's priesthood to make use of any application, either outward or inward. The leper was shut up entirely to God. All the high priest of the Hebrews could do was to examine closely the various symptoms of the complaint, have the leper excluded from his fellows, and leave him to the disposal of the Lord. Whether the sufferer was healed or not, whether he lived or died, was wholly to be decided by the Almighty. So it is in grace. There is no possible salvation for any sinner except at the hands of *God*. There is no other possible alternative, no other prospect before the sinner than to die a wretched death and enter a hopeless eternity unless distinguishing mercy intervenes, unless a sovereign God is pleased to work a miracle of grace within him. It is entirely a matter of *His* will and power. Again we ask, do you realise that fact my reader? God is your

Maker, and He is the Determiner of your destiny. You are clay in His hands to do with as He pleases.

Second, *its contributor*. “And the Syrians had gone out by companies and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid, and she waited on Naaman’s wife” (2 Kings 5:2). In one of the many seasons in which the name of Jehovah was blasphemed among the heathen, through the unfaithfulness of His ancient people, a little Jewish maid was taken captive by the Syrians. In the dividing of the spoils she fell into the hands of Naaman the commander of the Syrian forces. Observe the series of contrasts between them. He was a Gentile, she a hated Jewess. He was a “great man,” she but “a little maid.” He was “Naaman,” she was left unnamed. He was “captain of the host of Syria,” while she was captive in the enemy’s territory. But he was a leper; while strange to say, she was made a contributing instrument unto his healing. It has ever been God’s way to make use of the despised and feeble, and often in circumstances which seemed passing strange to human wisdom. Let us take note how this verse teaches us a most important lesson in connection with the mysteries of Divine providence.

“And had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid.” Visualize the scene. One fair morning the peace of Samaria was rudely broken. The tramp of a hostile army was heard in the land. A cruel foe was at hand. The Syrians had invaded the country, and Heaven was silent. No scourge from God smote the enemy: instead, he was suffered to carry away some of the covenant people. Among the captives was “a little maid.” Ah, that may mean little to us to-day, but it meant much to certain people at that day. A home was rendered desolate! Seek to enter into the feelings of her parents as their young daughter was ruthlessly snatched from them. Think of the anguish of her poor mother, wondering what would become of her. Think of her grief-stricken father in his helplessness, unable to rescue her. Endeavor to contemplate what would be the state of mind of the little girl herself as she was carried away by heathen to a strange country. Bring before your mind’s eye the whole painful incident until it lives before you.

Do you not suppose, dear friend, that both the maid and her parents were greatly perplexed? Must they not have been sorely tried by this mysterious providence? Why, O why? must have been asked by them a hundred times. Why had God allowed the joy of their home to be shattered? Passing strange, if the maiden reflected at all, must she have thought her lot. Why was she, a favored daughter of Abraham, now a servant in Naaman’s household? Why this enforced separation from her parents? Why this cruel captivity? Such questions she might have asked at first, and asked in vain. Ah, does the reader perceive the point we are leading up to? It is this: God had a good reason for this trial. He was shaping things in His own unfathomable way for the outworking of His good and wise purpose. There is nothing happens in this world by mere chance. A predestinating God has planned every detail in our lives. Our “times are in *His* hand” (Ps. 31:15). He “hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). What a resting place for our poor hearts does that grand truth supply!

It was God who directed that this “little maid” of Israel should become a member of Naaman’s household. And why? That she might be a link in the chain which ended not only in the healing of his leprosy, but also most probably in the salvation of his soul. Here then is the important lesson for us to take to heart from this incident. Here is the light which it casts upon the mysterious ways of God in providence: He has a wise and good reason behind each of the perplexing and heart-exercising trials which enter our lives. The particular reason for each trial is frequently concealed from us at the time it comes upon us—if it were not, there would be no room for the exercise of faith and patience in it. But just as surely as God had a good reason for allowing the happiness of this Hebrew household to be darkened, so He has in ordering whatever sorrow has entered your

life. It was *the sequel* which made manifest God's gracious design; and it is for the sequel you must quietly and trustfully wait. This incident is among the things recorded in the Old Testament "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy" (v. 3). This is surely most striking and blessed. It had been natural for this young girl to have yielded to a spirit of enmity against the man who had snatched her away from her own home, to have entertained hatred for him, and to have been maliciously pleased that he was so afflicted in his body. The Fall not only alienated man from God but it radically changed his attitude toward his fellows—evidenced at a very early date by Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Human depravity has poisoned every relationship: in their unregenerate state God's own people are described as "hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). But instead of cherishing ill feelings against her captor this little maid was concerned about his condition and solicitous about his welfare. Apparently she had been brought up in the nurture of the Lord, and the seeds planted by godly parents now sprang up and bore fruit in her young life. Beautiful is it to here behold grace triumphing over the flesh.

How this little maid puts us to shame! How sinfully have we conducted ourselves when the providence of God crossed our wills and brought us into situations for which we had no liking! What risings of rebellion within us, what complaining at our circumstances. So far from being a blessing to those we came into contact, we were a stumbling block unto them. Has not both writer and reader much cause to bow the head in shame at the recollection of such grievous failures! Was not this child placed in uncongenial circumstances and a most trying situation? Yet there was neither murmuring against God nor bitterness toward her captor. Instead, she bore faithful testimony to the God of Israel and was moved with compassion toward her leprous master. What a beautiful exemplification of the sufficiency of Divine grace! She remembered the Lord in the house of her bondage and spoke of His servant the prophet. How we need to turn this into earnest prayer, that we too may "glorify the Lord in the fires" (Isa. 24:15).

No position would seem more desolate than this defenceless maiden in the house of her proud captors, and no situation could promise fewer openings for usefulness. But though her opportunities were limited she made the most of them. She despised not the day of small things, but sought to turn it to advantage. She did not conclude it was useless for her to open her mouth, nor argue that an audience of only one person was not worth addressing. No, in a simple but earnest manner she proclaimed the good news that there was salvation for even the leper, for the very name "Elisha" meant "the salvation of God." These lines will be read by more than one who is now serving as a kitchen maid. Is there not here a word for them? Not that we suggest for a moment they should assume the office of preachers or speak frequently about spiritual things to their mistress. Nevertheless, if you have a compassionate regard for her good and look to the Lord for guidance, He may well be pleased to give you a "word in season" for her, and make the same fruitful.

"And one went in and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel" (v. 4). A very incidental and apparently trivial statement is this, yet being a part of God's eternal Truth it is not to be passed over lightly and hurriedly. We are ever the losers by such irreverent treatment of the Word. There is nothing meaningless in that Holy Volume: each single verse in it sparkles with beauty if we view it in the right light and attentively survey it. It is so here. First, this verse informs us that the little maid's words to her mistress did not pass unheeded. Well they might have done, humanly speaking, for it would be quite natural for those about

her—a mere child, a foreigner in their midst—to have paid no attention unto her remarks. Even had they done so, surely such a statement as she had made must have sounded like foolish boasting. If the best physicians in Syria were helpless in the presence of leprosy, who would credit that a man of another religion, in despised Samaria, should be able to heal him! But strange as it may seem, her words *were* heeded.

Second, in this we must see the hand of *God*. “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made both of them” (Prov. 20:12)—true alike both physically and spiritually. Yet how little is this realised today, when the self-sufficiency of man is proclaimed on every side and the operations of the Most High are so much ignored. The professing Christian is asked “who maketh thee to differ?” (1 Cor. 4:7). All around us are those who pay no heed to the declarations of Holy Writ and who perceive no beauty in Christ that they should desire Him. Who then has given to thee an ear that responds to the Truth and an eye that perceives its Divine origin? And every real Christian will answer, the God of all grace. As it was the Lord who opened the heart of Lydia that she “took unto her [Greek] the things which were spoken” (Acts 16:14), so He caused those about her to listen unto the words of this little maid. Ah, my reader, make no mistake upon this point: the most faithful sermon from the pulpit falls upon deaf ears unless the Holy Spirit operates, whereas the simplest utterance of a child becomes effectual when God is pleased to so apply the same.

Third, this made manifest the effect of the maid’s words upon her mistress. She communicated it to another, and this other went in and acquainted the king of the same. Thus verse 4 reveals to us one of the links in the chain that eventually drew Naaman to Elisha and resulted in his healing. It also shows how that our words are heard and often reported to others, thereby both warning and encouraging us of the power of the tongue. This will be made fully manifest in the Day to come. Nothing which has been done for God’s glory will be lost. When the history of this world is completed God will make known before an assembled universe what was spoken for Him (Mal. 3:16; Luke 12:3).

Finally, we are shown here how God is pleased to make use of “little” and despised things. A maid in captivity—who had supposed *her* to do service for the Lord? Who would be inclined to listen to her voice? Her age, her nationality, her position were all against her. Yet because she improved her opportunity and bore witness to her mistress, her simple message reached the ears of the king of Syria. The Lord grant us to be faithful wherever He has placed us.

“And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel” (v. 5). Here also we must see the hand of the Lord. Had He not wrought upon him too the message had produced no effect on his majesty. Why should that monarch pay any attention to the utterance of a kitchen maid? Ah, my reader, when God has a design of mercy He works at both ends of the line: He not only gives the message to the messenger, but He opens the heart of its recipient to heed it. He who bade Philip take a journey into the desert, also prepared the Ethiopian eunuch for his approach (Acts 8:26-31). He who overcame Peter’s scruples to go unto the Gentiles, also inclined Cornelius and his household to be “present before God, to hear all things that were commanded him of God (Acts 10:33). “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1): strikingly did that receive illustration here. Yet though God wrought, in the instance now before us it did not please Him to remove the king’s infirmities.

Third, *its misapprehension*. “Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel.” As will appear in the sequel, the Lord had a reason for suffering the king to act thus. Poor Naaman was now *misdirected* by the carnal wisdom of his master. The little maid had said nothing about “the

king of Israel,” but had specified “the prophet that is in Samaria.” It had been much better for the leper to have heeded more closely her directions, then had he been spared needless trouble. Yet how true to life is the typical picture here presented. How often is the sinner, who has been awakened to his desperate condition, wrongly counseled and turned aside to cisterns which hold no water! Rarely does an exercised soul find relief at once. More frequently his experience is like that of the old woman in Mark 5:26 who tried “many physicians” in vain, before she came to Christ; or like the prodigal son when he “began to be in want” and went and joined himself to a citizen of the far country and got nothing better than “the husks that the swine did eat” (Luke 15:14,15), ere he sought unto the Father.

“And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment” (v. 5). It has been computed that the value of these things would be at least seventy thousand dollars or fifteen thousand pounds. The Hebrew maid had said nothing of the need for silver and gold, but knowing nought of the *grace* of God Naaman was prepared to pay handsomely for his healing. Again we exclaim, how true to life is this typical picture. How many there are who think the “gift of God” may be purchased (Acts 8:20), if not literally with money, yet by works of righteousness and religious performances. And even where that delusion has been removed, another equally erroneous often takes its place: the idea that a heavily-burdened conscience, a deep sense of personal unworthiness, accompanied by sighs and tears and groans, is the required qualification for applying to Christ and the ground of peace before God. Fatal mistake: “without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1) excludes all frames, feelings and experiences, as truly as it does the paying of a papish priest to absolve me.

Fourth, *its foil*. “And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel read the letter that he rent his clothes and said, am I God to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me” (vv. 6,7). How this made manifest the apostate condition of Israel at that time and shows why God had moved the Syrians to oppress them! There was some excuse for the king of Syria acting as he did, for he was a heathen; but there was none for the king of Israel. Instead of getting down on his knees and spreading this letter before the Lord, as a later king of Israel did (Isa. 37:14), he acted like an infidel; instead of seeing in this appeal an opportunity for Jehovah to display His grace and glory, he thought only of himself.

What a contrast was there here between the witness of the little maid and the conduct of the king of Israel. Yet his meanness served as a foil to set off her noble qualities. She was in lowly and distressing circumstances, whereas he was a monarch upon the throne. Yet she was concerned about the welfare of her master, while he thought only of himself and kingdom. She had implicit confidence in God and spoke of His prophet, whereas neither God nor His servant had any place in the his mind. Some may think from a first reading of verse 7 that the king’s language sounds both humble and pious, but a pondering of it indicates it was but the utterance of pride and unbelief. Knowing not the Lord, he saw in this appeal of Benhadad’s nothing but a veiled threat to humiliate him and he was filled with fear. Had he sought unto God, his terror had soon been quieted and a way of relief shown him; but he was a stranger to Him, and evidenced no faith even in the idols he worshiped. Yet this made the more illustrious the marvel of the miracle which followed.

Perhaps the Christian reader is tempted to congratulate himself that there is nothing searching for him in verse 7. If so, such complacency may be premature. Are you quite sure, friend, that

there has been *no* parallel in your past conduct to that of Israel's king? Were you never guilty of the thing wherein he failed? When some heavy demand was made upon you, some real test or trial confronted you, did you never respond by saying, I am not sufficient for this: it is quite beyond my feeble powers? Possibly you imagined that was a pious acknowledgment of your weakness, when in reality it was a voicing of your unbelief. True, the Christian is impotent in himself; so too is the non-Christian. Is then the saint no better off than the ungodly? If the Christian continues impotent, the fault is his. God's grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Feeble knees and hands which hang down bring no glory to God. He has bidden us "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). Then cease imitating this defeatist attitude of Israel's king, and "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

1. Introduction

Three considerations have influenced us in the selection of this theme. First, a desire to preserve the balance of Truth. In order to do this it is desirable that there should be an alternation between and a proportionate emphasis upon both the objective and the subjective sides of the Truth. After we had completed our exposition of the doctrine of Justification we followed the same with a series on the doctrine of Sanctification: the former treats entirely of the righteousness which Christ has wrought or procured for His people, being something wholly outside of themselves and independent of their own efforts; whereas the latter speaks not only of the perfect purity which the believer has in Christ, but also of the holiness which the Spirit actually communicates to the soul and which is influential on his conduct. Then we took up the doctrine of Predestination which is concerned entirely with the sovereignty of God, and therefore we followed that with a series of man's Impotency and the Saints' Perseverance, where the principal emphasis was upon human responsibility. It will be well for us now to turn our attention back again to the Divine operations and the wondrous provisions of Divine grace for the recovery of rebels against God.

Second, because of a felt need of again bringing conspicuously before our readers "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is His sacrificial work which is prominent yea dominant in the reconciling of God to His people. It was by the shedding of Christ's precious blood that God was placated and His wrath averted. It was by Christ's being chastised that peace has been made for us. And it is by the preaching of the Cross that our awful enmity against God is slain and that we are moved to abandon our vile warfare against Him. As it is upwards of twelve years since we completed the rather lengthy series of articles we wrote upon the Atonement, under the title "The Satisfaction of Christ," it seems high time that we once more contemplated the greatest marvel and miracle of all history, namely, the Lamb of God being slain for the redemption of sinners. The doctrine of reconciliation has much to do with what took place at Calvary, yea apart from

that no reconciliation with God had been possible. It is therefore a subject which should warm the hearts of the saints and bow them in adoration at the feet of the Redeemer.

Third, because it treats of an aspect of the Gospel which receives scant attention in the modern pulpit. Nor has it ever, so far as we have been able to ascertain, been made very prominent. This doctrine has failed to command the notice which it merits even from God's own servants and people. Far less appears to have been preached on it than on either justification or sanctification: for one book written on this subject probably fifty have been published on either of the others. Why this should be is not easy to explain: it is not because it is more obscure or intricate—in our judgment, much to the contrary. Certainly it is of equal importance and value, for it treats of an aspect of our relationship and recovery to God as essential as either of the others. Our need of justification lies in our failure to keep the Law of God; of sanctification, because we are defiled and polluted by sin, and therefore unfit for the presence of the Holy One; our reconciliation, because we are alienated from God, rebels against Him, with no heart for fellowship with Him. Though the terms justify and sanctify occur more frequently in the New Testament than does “reconcile,” yet the correlative “God of peace” and other expressions must also be duly noted.

Not only has this doctrine been more or less neglected, but it has been seriously perverted by some and considerably misunderstood by many others. Both Socinians (who repudiate the Trinity of the Godhead and the Atonement of Christ) and Arminians deny the twofoldness of reconciliation, declaring it to be only on one side. They insist that it is man who is alienated from God, and so in need of reconciliation, that God never entertained enmity toward His fallen creatures, but has ever sought their recovery. They argue that since it was man who made the breach by departing from his Maker, he is the one who needs to be reconciled and restored to Him. They refuse to allow that sin has produced any change in God's relationship or attitude unto the guilty, yea so far from doing so that His own love moved Him to take the initiative and provide a Saviour for rebels, and that He now beseeches them to throw down the weapons of their opposition, assuring them of a Father's welcome when they return unto Him.

Such is the view of the Plymouth Brethren. In his work “The Ministry of Reconciliation” C. H. Macintosh (one of the most influential of their early men) declares: “We often hear it said that ‘the death of Christ was necessary in order to reconcile God to man.’ This is a pious mistake, arising from inattention to the language of the Holy Spirit and indeed to the plain meaning of the word ‘reconcile.’ God never changed, never stepped out of His normal and true position. He abides faithful. There was, and could be, no derangement, no confusion, no alienation, so far as He was concerned; and hence there could be no need of reconciling Him to us. In fact it was exactly the contrary. Man had gone astray; he was the enemy, and needed to be reconciled...Wherefore, then, as might be expected, Scripture never speaks of reconciling God to man. There is no such expression to be found within the covers of the New Testament.” This is something he calls a “point of immense importance,” and consequently all who have succeeded him in that strange system have echoed his teaching: how far it is removed from the Truth will be shown (D.V.) in the articles that follow.

Some hyper-Calvinists are also much confused on this doctrine. Through failing to see that God's being reconciled to sinners who believe concerns His *official* relationship and not His essential character, they have demurred at the expression “a reconciled God,” supposing it connotes some charge within Himself. They argue that since God has loved His elect with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3) and that since He changes not (Mal. 3:6), it is wrong for us to suppose that reconciliation is anything more on our side only. They insist that to speak of God's being reconciled unto us implies an alteration either in His affections or purpose, and that neither of

these can stand with His immutability. To speak of God's first loving His people, then hating them, and then again loving them, appears to them as imputing fickleness to Him. So it would be if these predictions of God were made of Him considered in the *same character* and relationship. But they are not. As their Father God has loved His people with an unalterable love, but as the Moral Governor of this world and the Judge of all the earth He has a legal enmity against those who trample His Law beneath their feet.

The following question was submitted to Mr. J. C. Philpot: "What is meant by 'a reconciled God,' an expression which some of the Lord's children, even great and good men, have made use of? I believe that the Lord Jehovah from all eternity foresaw the fall, and provided means to save those whom He had chosen in Christ, consistent with all His attributes, holiness, justice, etc. Now, as love was the moving cause, how can the word 'reconcile' be correctly used in respect of God? Does it not imply a change? If it does, how can it be correctly used in reference to God?" His answer thereto appears in the March 1856 issue of "The Gospel Standard," and though it will make a rather lengthy quotation, yet we might be doing him an injustice not to give it in full.

"We do not consider the expression 'A reconciled God' strictly correct. The language of the New Testament is not that God is reconciled to us, but that we are reconciled to God. 'And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' (2 Cor. 5:18-20). And again: 'And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight,' (Col. 1:20-22). See also Romans 5:10.

"The very nature of God, His very being and essence, is to be unchanging and unchangeable, as James beautifully speaks: 'With Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' But reconciliation on God's part to us, would seem to imply a change of mind, an alteration of purpose in Him, and is therefore, so far, inconsistent and incompatible with the unchangeableness of the Divine character. It is also, strictly speaking, inconsistent, as our correspondent observes, with the eternal love of God, and seems to represent the atonement as influencing His mind, and turning it from wrath to love, and from displeasure to mercy and grace. Now, the Scripture represents the gift of Christ, and consequently the sufferings and blood-shedding for which and unto which He was given, not, as the procuring *cause*, but as the gracious *effect* of the love of God. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10). See also John 3:16, Romans 8:32, 1 John 4:9.

"But though the Scripture speaks of reconciliation, not of God to man, but of man to God, and that through the blood of the cross alone (Col. 1:20); yet it holds forth, in the plainest, strongest language, a real and effective 'sacrifice,' 'atonement,' and 'propitiation,' offered to God by the Lord Jesus; all which terms express or imply an actual satisfaction rendered to God for sin, and such a satisfaction, as that without it there could be no pardon. It is especially needful to bear this in mind, because the Socinians and other heretics who deny or explain away the atonement, insist much on this point, that the Scripture does not speak of a reconciled God. Therefore, though we do not believe that the atonement produced a change in the mind of God, so as to turn Him from hatred to love, for He loved the elect with an everlasting love, (Jer. 31:3), or that it was a price

paid to procure His favor, still, there was a sacrifice offered, a propitiation made, whereby, and whereby alone, sin was pardoned, blotted out, and forever put away.

“By steadily bearing these two things in mind, we shall be the better prepared to understand in what reconciliation through the blood of the cross consists. Against the persons of the elect there was, in the mind of God, no vindictive wrath, no penal anger (Isa. 27:4); but there was a displeasure against their sins, and so far with them for their sins. So God was angry with Moses (Deut. 1:37), with Aaron (Deut. 9:20), with David (2 Sam. 11:27; 1 Chron. 21:7), with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9) for their personal sins, though all of them were in the covenant of grace, and loved by Him with an everlasting love. Thus the Scriptures speak of the anger and wrath of God, and of that wrath being turned away and pacified (Isa. 12:1; Ezek. 16:63), which it could only be by the blood of the Lamb.

“Again, sin is a violation of the justice of God, a breaking of His holy Law, an offence against His intrinsic purity and holiness, which He cannot pass by. Adequate satisfaction must, therefore, be made to His offended justice, or pardon cannot be granted. Now, here we see the necessity and nature of the sufferings and obedience, blood-shedding and death of the Lord Jesus, as also why reconciliation was needed, and what reconciliation effected. By the active and passive obedience of the Son of God in the flesh, by His meritorious life and death, by His offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin, a full and complete satisfaction was rendered to the violated justice of God, the Law was perfectly obeyed and everlasting righteousness brought in. Satisfaction being rendered to His infinite justice, now God can be ‘just and yet the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’ Now the jarring perfections of mercy and justice are harmonised and reconciled, so that mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other. Now God can not only be gracious, but ‘faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ There is, then, no such reconciliation of God as to make Him love those whom He did not love before, for He loved the elect from all eternity in Christ, their covenant-head; but a breach being made by the fall, and sin having, as it were, burst in to make a separation between God and them (Isa. 59:2), that love could not flow forth till satisfaction was made for sin, and that barrier removed, which it was in one day (Zech. 3:9). And not only so, but the persons of the elect were defiled with sin (Ezek. 16:5,6), and therefore needed washing, which they were in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5 etc.). In this way not only was the reconciliation of the Church effected, but she, the bride and spouse of Christ, was brought near unto God, from whom sin had separated her.

“But reconciliation has a further aspect. It comprehends our reconciliation to God not merely as a thing already effected by the blood-shedding of God’s dear Son, but as a present experience in the soul. The apostle says ‘By whom we have now received the atonement’ (margin, reconciliation: Rom. 5:11); and again, ‘we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God’ (2 Cor. 5:20), that is, by receiving into your hearts the reconciliation already made by His blood. It is with reference to this experience that much is spoken in the Scriptures which has led to the idea of ‘a reconciled God.’ Thus the Church complains of God’s being angry with her (Isa. 12:1), of being ‘consumed by His anger and troubled by His wrath’ (Ps. 90:7), of His ‘shutting up in anger His tender mercies’ (Ps. 77:9), and again of His ‘turning away from the fierceness of His anger and causing it to cease’ (Ps. 85:3,4), of His ‘not keeping anger forever’ (Ps. 103:9), of His being pacified (Ezek. 16:63) of His ‘anger being turned away’ (Ps. 78:38; Hosea 14:4). All these expressions are the utterance of the Church’s experience. When God’s anger is sensibly felt in the conscience He is viewed as angry, and His wrathful displeasure is dreaded and deprecated; when He manifests mercy this anger is felt to be removed, to be turned away; and it is now as if He were reconciled to the sinner.

“Putting all these things together we seem to arrive at the following conclusions: 1. That it is not God who is reconciled to the Church, but that it is the Church which is reconciled to God. 2. That this reconciliation was effected by the incarnation, obedience, sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus. 3. That till this reconciliation be made experimentally known the awakened conscience feels the anger of God on account of sin. 4. That when the atonement is received and the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience, then the soul is really and truly reconciled to God.” —J.C. Philpot

What satisfaction this reply gave to the original inquirer, or how lucid it appears to our readers (even after a second or third perusal), we know not, but to us it seems a strange medley, lacking in perspicuity and betraying confusion of thought in the mind of its composer. First, Mr. Philpot considered that the language of the New Testament does not warrant the expression “A reconciled God.” Second, he felt that to affirm a reconciliation on God’s part to us would imply an alteration of purpose in Him and as though the Atonement changed His mind “from displeasure to mercy and grace.” Then he evidently feared he was coming very close to the ground occupied by the Socinians; so, third, he allowed that the work of Christ was both a “sacrifice” and a “propitiation.” But “a propitiation” is the very thing which is needed to *conciliate* one who is offended! To aver there was “rendered to God for sin an actual satisfaction, and such a satisfaction as that without which there could be no pardon,” is only another way of saying that God was alienated and needed placating before He could be reconciled to His enemies.

In his next paragraph he virtually or in effect contradicts what he had advanced in the previous one, for he expressly declares “Against the persons of the elect there was in the mind of God no vindictive wrath, *no penal anger*.” Then wherein lay the need of a “propitiation”? “Penal” means “relating to punishment”: if there was no judicial anger on God’s part as Governor and Judge and if His elect were not exposed to the punishment of the Law because of their sins, then why the sacrifice of Christ for them? Clearly Mr. P. felt the shoe pinching him here, for in his next paragraph he brings in the violation of the justice of God and the “satisfaction” this required. Yet toward the end he wavers again by saying “sin having, as it were, burst in to make a separation between God and them.” Why such hesitating qualification? sin *did* cause a breach on both sides, and the one Party needed to be “propitiated,” and the other “converted” before the breach could be healed. Our purpose in quoting from C.H. Mackintosh and J.C. Philpot (whose writings served to mould the views of many thousands) is to demonstrate the need for a Scriptural exposition of this doctrine.

N. B. We are glad to say that in his last years Mr. Philpot was granted a clearer grasp of the truth, as appears from his helpful exposition of Ephesians 2. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

3a. Its Necessity

We commenced our last by pointing out that none can possibly make any progress in the Christian life unless he first be a Christian, and then devoted the remainder to defining and describing what a “Christian” is. It is indeed striking to note that this title is used by the Holy Spirit in a *twofold* way: primarily it signifies an “anointed one,” subordinately it denotes “a disciple of Christ.” Thereby we have brought together in a truly wonderful manner both the Divine and the human sides. Our “anointing” with the Spirit is God’s act, wherein we are entirely passive; but our becoming “disciples of Christ” is a voluntary and conscious act of ours, whereby we freely surrender to Christ’s lordship and submit to His sceptre. It is by the latter that we obtain evidence of the former. None will yield to the flesh-repellent terms of Christian “discipleship” save those in whom a Divine work of grace has been wrought; but when that miracle *has* occurred, conversion is as certain to follow as a cause will produce its effects. One made a new creature by the Divine miracle of the new birth desires and gladly endeavors to meet the holy requirements of Christ.

Here, then, is the root of spiritual growth: the communication to the soul of spiritual life. Here is what makes possible Christian progress: a person’s becoming a Christian—first by the Spirit’s anointing and then by his own choice. This twofold signification of the term “Christian” is the principal key which opens to us the subject of Christian progress or spiritual growth, for it ever needs to be contemplated from both the Divine and the human sides. It requires to be viewed both from the angle of God’s operations and from that of the discharge of our responsibilities. The twofold meaning of the title “Christian” must also be borne in mind under the present aspect of our subject, for on the one hand progress is neither necessary nor possible, while in another very real sense it is both desirable and requisite. God’s “anointing” is not susceptible of improvement, being perfect; but our “discipleship” is to become more intelligent and productive of good works. Much confusion has resulted from ignoring this distinction, and we shall devote the remainder of this article to the negative side, pointing out those respects in which progress or growth *does not* obtain.

1. Christian progress does not signify advancing in God’s favor. The believer’s growth in grace does not further him one iota in God’s esteem. How could it, since He is the Giver of his faith and the One who has “wrought all our works in us” (Isa. 26:12)! God’s favorable regard of His people originated not in anything whatever in them, either actual or foreseen. God’s grace is absolutely free, being the spontaneous exercise of His own mere good pleasure. The cause of its exercise lies wholly within Himself. The *purposing* grace of God is that good will which He had

unto His people from all eternity: “Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:9). And the *dispensing* grace of God is but the execution of His purpose, ministering to His people: thus we read “God *giveth* grace,” yea that “He giveth more grace” (James 4:6). It is entirely gratuitous, sovereignly bestowed, without any inducement being found in its object.

Furthermore, everything God does for and bestows on His people is *for Christ’s sake*. It is in nowise a question of their deserts, but of Christ’s deserts or what He merited for them. As Christ is the only Way by which we can approach the Father, so He is the sole Channel through which God’s grace flows unto us. Hence we read of “the grace of God, and the gift of grace [namely, justifying righteousness] by one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:15); and again, “the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:4). The love of God toward us is “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). He forgives us “for Christ’s sake” (Eph. 4:32). He supplies all our need “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). He brings us to Heaven in answer to Christ’s prayer (John 17:24). Yet though Christ merits everything for us, the original cause was the sovereign grace of God. “Although the merits of Christ are the (procuring) cause of our salvation, yet they are not the cause of our being ordained to salvation. They are the cause of purchasing all things decreed unto us, but they are not the cause which first moved God to decree those things unto us” (Thos. Goodwin, Puritan)

The Christian is not accepted because of his “graces,” for the very graces (as their name connotes) are bestowed upon him by Divine bounty, and are not attained by any efforts of his. And so far from these graces being the reason why God accepts him, they are the *fruits* of his being “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” and, decretively, “blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3,4). Settle it then in your own mind once for all, my reader, that growth in grace does not signify growing in the favor of God. This is essentially a Papish delusion, and though a creature-flattering it is a horribly Christ-dishonoring one. Since God’s elect are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6) it is impossible that any subsequent change wrought in or attained by them could render them more excellent in His esteem or advance them in His love. When the Father announced concerning the incarnate Word “this is My beloved Son [not “with whom” but] *in whom* I am well pleased,” He was expressing His delight in the whole election of grace, for He was speaking of Christ in His federal character, as the last Adam, as Head of His mystical body.

The Christian can neither increase nor decrease in the favor of God, nor can anything he does or fails to do alter or affect to the slightest degree his perfect standing in Christ. Yet let it not be inferred from this that his conduct is of little importance or that God’s dealings with him have no relation to his daily walk. While avoiding the Romish conceit of human merits, we must be on our guard against Antinomian licentiousness. As the moral Governor of this world God takes note of our conduct, and in a variety of ways makes manifest His approbation or disapprobation: “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11), yet to His own people God says “your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer. 5:25). So too as the Father He maintains discipline in His family, and when His children are refractory He uses the rod (Ps. 89:30-33). Special manifestations of Divine love are granted to the obedient (John 14:21,23), but are withheld from the disobedient and the careless.

2. Christian progress does not denote that the work of regeneration was incomplete. Great care needs to be taken in stating this truth of spiritual growth lest we repudiate the perfection of the new birth. We must repeat here in substance what was pointed out in the first article. When a

normal child is born into this world naturally the babe is an entire entity, complete in all its parts, possessing a full set of bodily members and mental faculties. As the child grows there is a strengthening of its body and mind, a development of its members and an expansion of its faculties, with a fuller use of the one and a clearer manifestation of the other; yet no new member or additional faculty is or can be added to him. It is precisely so spiritually. The spiritual life or nature received at the new birth contains within itself all the “senses” (Heb. 5:14) and graces, and though these may be nourished and strengthened, and increased by exercise yet not by addition, no, not in Heaven itself. “I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it” (Eccl. 3:14). The “babe” in Christ is just as truly and completely a child of God as the most matured “father” in Christ.

Regeneration is a more radical and revolutionizing change than glorification. The one is a passing from death unto life, the other an entrance into the fullness of life. The one is a bringing into existence of “the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24), the other is a reaching unto the full stature of the new man. The one is a translation into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col. 1:13), the other an induction into the higher privileges of that kingdom. The one is the begetting of us unto a living hope (1 Peter 1:3), the other is a realisation of that hope. At regeneration the soul is made “a new creature” in Christ, so that “old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The regenerate soul is a partaker of every grace of the Spirit, so that he is “complete in Christ” (Col. 2:10), and no growth on earth or glorification in Heaven can make him more than “complete”!

3. Christian progress does not procure a title for Heaven. The perfect and indefeasible title of every believer is in the merits of Christ. His vicarious fulfilling of the Law, whereby He magnified and made it honorable, secured for all in whose stead He acted the full reward of the Law. It is on the all-sufficient ground of Christ’s perfect obedience being reckoned to his account that the believer is justified by God and assured that he shall “reign in life” (Rom. 5:17). If he lived on earth another hundred years and served God perfectly it would add nothing to his title. Heaven is the “purchased possession” (Eph. 1:14), purchased for His people by the whole redemptive work of Christ. His precious blood gives every believing sinner the legal right to “enter the holiest” (Heb. 10:19). Our title to glory is found alone in Christ. Of the redeemed now in Heaven it is said, “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: *therefore* are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple” (Rev. 7:14,15).

It has not been sufficiently realised that God’s pronouncement of justification is very much more than a mere sense of acquittal or non-condemnation. It includes as well a positive imputation of righteousness. As James Hervey so beautifully illustrated it: “When yonder orb makes his first appearance in the east, what effects are produced? Not only are the shades of night dispersed, but the light of day is diffused. Thus it is when the Author of salvation is manifested to the soul: He brings at once pardon *and acceptance*.” Not only are our filthy rags removed, but “the best robe” is put upon us (Luke 15:22), and no efforts or attainments of ours can add anything to such a Divine adornment. Christ not only delivered from death, but purchased life for us; He not only put away our sins, but merited an Inheritance for us. The most mature and advanced Christian has nought to plead before God for his acceptance than the righteousness of Christ: *that*, nothing but that, and nothing added to it, as his perfect title to Glory.

4. Christian progress does not make us meet for Heaven. Many of those who are more or less clear on the three points considered above are far from being so upon this one, and therefore we must enter into it at greater length. Thousands have been taught to believe that when a person has

been justified by God and tasted the blessedness of “the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” that much still remains to be done for the soul before it is ready for the celestial courts. A widespread impression prevails that after his justification the believer must undergo the refining process of sanctification, and that for this he must be left for a time amid the trials and conflicts of a hostile world; yea so strongly held is this view that some are likely to take exception to what follows. Nevertheless, such a theory repudiates the fact that it is the new-creative work of the Spirit which not only capacitates the soul to take in and enjoy spiritual things now (John 3:3,5), but also fits it experimentally for the eternal fruition of God.

One had thought that those laboring under the mistake mentioned above would be corrected by their own experience and by what they observed in their fellow Christians. They frankly acknowledge that their own progress is most unsatisfactory to them, and they have no means of knowing when the process is to be successfully completed. They see their fellow Christians cut off apparently in very varied stages of this process. If it be said that this process is completed only at death, then we would point out that even on their death-beds the most eminent and mature saints have testified to being most humiliated over their attainments and thoroughly dissatisfied with themselves. Their final triumph was not what grace had made them to be in themselves, but what Christ was made to be unto them. If such a view as the above were true, how could any believer cherish a desire to depart and be with Christ (Phil. 1:23) while the very fact that he was still in the body would be proof (according to this idea) that the process was not yet complete to fit him for His presence!

But, it may be asked, is there not such a thing as “progressive sanctification”? We answer, it all depends upon what is signified by that expression. In our judgment it is one which needs to be carefully and precisely defined, otherwise God is likely to be grossly dishonored and His people seriously injured by being brought into bondage to a most inadequate and defective view of Sanctification as a whole. There are several essential and fundamental respects in which sanctification is *not* “progressive,” wherein it admits of no degrees and is incapable of augmentation, and those aspects of sanctification need to be plainly stated and clearly apprehended *before* the subordinate aspect be considered. First, every believer was decretively sanctified by God the Father before the foundation of the world (Jude 1). Second, he was meritoriously sanctified by God the Son in the redemptive work which He performed in the stead of and on the behalf of His people, so that it is written “by one offering He hath *perfected forever* them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). Third, he was vitally sanctified by God the Spirit when He quickened him into newness of life, united him to Christ, and made his body His temple.

If by “progressive sanctification” be meant a clearer understanding and fuller apprehension of what God has made Christ to be unto the believer and of his perfect standing and state in Him, if by it be meant the believer living more and more in the enjoyment and power of that, with the corresponding influence and effect it will have upon his character and conduct; if by it be meant a growth of faith and an increase of its fruits, manifested in a holy walk, then we have no objection to the term. But if by “progressive sanctification” be intended a rendering of the believer more acceptable unto God, or a making of him more fit for the heavenly Jerusalem, then we have no hesitation in rejecting it as a serious error. Not only can there be no increase in the purity and acceptableness of the believer’s sanctity before God, but there can be no addition to that holiness of which he became the possessor at the new birth, for the new nature he then received is essentially and impeccably holy. “The babe in Christ, dying as such, is as capable of as high communion with God as Paul in the state of glory” (S. E. Pierce).

Instead of striving after and praying that God would make us more fit for Heaven, how much better to join with the apostle in “Giving thanks unto the Father who *hath made us meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12), and then seek grace to walk suitably unto such a privilege and dignity! *That* is for the saints to “*possess their possessions*” (Obad. 17); the other is to be robbed of them by a thinly-disguised Romanism. Before pointing out in what the Christian’s meetness for Heaven consists, let us note that Heaven is here termed an “Inheritance.” Now an inheritance is not something that we acquire by self-denial and mortification (a papish concept), nor purchased by our own labors or good works; rather is it that to which we lawfully succeed in virtue of our relationship to another. Primarily, it is that to which a child succeeds in virtue of his relationship to his father, or as the son of a king inherits the crown. In this case, the Inheritance is ours in virtue of our being *sons of God*.

Peter declares that the Father hath “*begotten us* unto a living hope...to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 1:4). Paul also speaks of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God, and then points out: “and if *children*, then *heirs*; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16,17). If we inquire more distinctly, what is this “inheritance” of the children of God? the next verse (Col. 1:13) tells us: “it is the kingdom of God’s dear Son.” Those who are joint-heirs with Christ must share His kingdom. Already He has made us “kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6), and the inheritance of kings is a crown, a throne, a kingdom. The blessedness which lies before the redeemed is not merely to be subjects of the King of kings, but to sit with Him on His throne, to reign with Him forever (Rom. 5:17; Rev. 22:4). Such is the wondrous dignity of our inheritance: as to its *extent*, we are “joint-heirs with” Him whom God “hath appointed Heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). Our destiny is bound up with His. O that the faith of Christians would rise above their “feelings,” “conflicts,” and “experiences” and possess their possessions.

The Christian’s title to the Inheritance is the righteousness of Christ imputed to him: in what, then, consists his “meetness”? First, since it be meetness for the Inheritance, they must be *children* of God, and this they are made at the moment of regeneration. Second, since it is “the Inheritance of saints,” they must be *saints*, and this too they are the moment they believe in Christ, for they are then sanctified by that very blood in which they have forgiveness of sins (Heb. 13:12). Third, since it is an Inheritance “in light,” they must be made *children of light*, and this also they become when God called them “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Nor is that a characteristic only of certain specially favored saints; “ye are *all* the children of light” (1 Thess. 5:5). Fourth, since the Inheritance consists of an everlasting kingdom, in order to the enjoyment of it we must have *eternal life*, and that too every Christian possesses: “he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life” (John 3:36).

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3: 26): are they children in name, but not in nature? What a question! it might as well be supposed they have a title to the Inheritance and yet be without meetness for it, which would be saying that our sonship was a fiction and not a reality. Very different is the teaching of God’s Word: it declares we become His children by being born again (John 1:13). And regeneration does not consist in the gradual improvement or purification of the old nature, but the creation of a new one. Nor is becoming children of God a lengthy process at all, but an instantaneous thing. The all-mighty Agent of it is the Holy Spirit, and obviously that which is born of *Him* needs no improving or perfecting. The “new man” is itself “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24) and certainly *it* cannot stand in need of a “progressive” work to be wrought in him! True, the old nature opposes all the aspirations and activities of this new nature, and therefore as long as the believer remains

in the flesh he is called upon “through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body”; yet in spite of the painful and weary conflict, the new nature remains uncontaminated by the vileness in the midst of which it dwells.

That which qualifies the Christian or makes him meet for Heaven is the spiritual life which he received at regeneration, for that is the life or nature of God (John 3:5; 2 Peter 1:4). That new life or nature fits the Christian for communion with God, for the presence of God—the same day the dying thief received it, he was with Christ in Paradise! It is true that while we are left here its *manifestation* is obscured, like the sunbeam shining through opaque glass. Yet the sunbeam itself is not dim, though it appears so because of the unsuitable medium through which it passes; but let that opaque glass be removed, and it will at once appear in its beauty. So it is with the spiritual life of the Christian: there is no defect whatever in the life itself, but its manifestation is sadly obscured by a mortal body; all that is necessary for the appearing of its perfections is deliverance from the corrupt medium through which it now acts. The life of God in the soul renders a person meet for glory: no attainment of ours, no growth in grace we experience, can *fit* us for Heaven any more than it can *entitle* us to it. —AWP

April

IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE

“Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth” (Eccl. 11:2). These words enunciate a broad principle which is of general application, intimating our ignorance of future providences. But they also have a more specific meaning, as may be seen from their setting. The context contains an exhortation unto generosity, cultivating acts of benevolence. For the husbandman to cast bread-corn, which he could ill spare, upon a marshy soil, especially if covered by waters; might seem improvident and unwise, but assurance is given him that he shall find it again after many days: the autumn harvest will vindicate his springtide faith and labor. From this a practical application is made: “Give a portion to seven and also to eight.” Do not selfishly hoard up what God has so freely bestowed on you, but distribute a goodly proportion among those who are not so well provided for. Consider the poor and needy and minister to their wants: think not it will all be wasted upon them and come to nought.

But unbelief may object, The outlook is far from being propitious and therefore I should lay up more and more against my own “rainy day.” The miser says, I know not what the future has in store for me, so it is the part of prudence to accumulate whilst I may. No, says our passage, we should reason the very opposite: “*For* thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.” Since thou knowest not how calamitous the times may shortly be, then do all possible in the present and you will not be the loser in the future. The instability of human affairs and the possibility that our riches may soon take to themselves wings and fly away, furnishes a sound reason why we should do as much good with them as we can while we have them, and leave the outcome with God. He will not suffer the liberal soul to starve. He who has been wisely charitable to the indigent is likely to be the recipient of most kindness if an evil day should come upon him; but the miser makes no friends and is left alone when misfortune strikes.

The exhortations of Ecclesiastes 11:1, 2 are by no means to be restricted unto the disbursement of temporal charity: they have also a spiritual import, with a particular application unto the minister of the Gospel. As Faith is needed by the farmer in order to the discharge of his duties, so it is with the evangelical husbandman. He must not be discouraged by the lack of response he meets with and the absence of immediate fruitage to his labours. If he be faithful in casting the Bread of life upon the human “waters” (see Rev. 17:15), particularly “*thy* Bread”—those portions you have personally received from God and which have proved a blessing to your own soul—the sure promise is “thou shalt find it again after many days.” Therefore be not slack or exclusive but “give a portion to seven and also to eight,” for if you prayerfully seek

opportunities and carefully observe the openings Providence makes you will be brought into touch with hungry souls. There is many a starved sheep wandering about to-day who will deeply appreciate the ministrations of one of Christ's shepherds.

Not only so, but "for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" supplies a further incentive to fidelity. Things are indeed bad enough to-day, but the shrewdest is quite incapable of foreseeing how much worse they may become. When the restraining hand of God is removed, lawlessness abounds with increasing rapidity and intensity. When the sluice-gates are open wickedness floods the whole land, carrying everything before it. When God speaks in judgment to a nation and it refuses to heed His voice His judgments increase in severity, as did His plagues upon Egypt of old. Therefore it is the part of wisdom to redeem the time and make the most of the privileges which are ours to-day. Work while it is called day, for the night cometh when no man can work (John 9:4). Since we have no guarantee about the future "upon the earth" utilise to the full the present.

"Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." A generation ago there were men with spiritual discernment who seeing the trend of things then, gave warning that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse." Those with anointed eyes perceived the blight which had attacked the churches, the decay of vital godliness and family worship, the children growing up without any religious and little moral instructions. They knew that such an awful "falling away" must result in fearful consequences. Even statesmen and unregenerate leaders with natural acumen had dark forebodings of what lay ahead for the world: "Men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). But who among the most foreseeing, or even the most pessimistic, would have believed that things should come to the awful pass they now have!—the Spirit largely withdrawn, morality almost disappeared, the lower classes getting things more and more under their control, the whole world in a state of chaos, the vials of God's wrath being poured out on the earth. And the end is not yet, not has the worst by any means been reached. The next generation will reap a still more horrible harvest from what is now being sown.

Black indeed is the outlook for this poor world. But over against this "thou *knowest not* what evil shall be upon the earth," let us place "Yet surely *I know* that it shall be well with them that fear God" (Eccl. 8:12). Glorious contrast! Blessed assurance! No matter what may yet come "upon the earth" it shall not harm the saints. Though it may overturn their carnal plans and unpleasantly affect their circumstances, yet it shall not injure their souls. Rather will such temporal afflictions be sanctified unto them, to the drawing of their affections more and more unto things above, thereby causing them to regard more lightly and hold more loosely the things that perish. The plagues which God sent upon Egypt eventuated in the deliverance of His people from the house of bondage. The casting of the Hebrews into Babylon's furnace issued in the burning off of their bonds. However long protracted the Divine judgments upon an apostate Christendom, however much they may yet increase in their severity, yet "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

"Surely I know that *it shall be well* with them that fear God." This is the knowledge of faith and not of reason. It is the assurance that fills the soul of him who rests with implicit confidence on the Divine promises. God has said to His covenant people "I will not turn away from them to do them good" (Jer. 32:40). He has not, [even] in the darkest hours of history. When His wrath burst upon the antediluvians, shelter was provided for Noah and his family in the ark. When the long-protracted drought was upon Samaria with its attendant famine, the Lord provided for Elijah by the brook Kerith, and later in the home of the Zarephath widow. When Jezebel determined to

stamp out the worship of Jehovah and slew His prophets, one hundred of them were hid in caves and fed with bread and water (1 Kings 18:13). When the Dragon “persecuted the woman” which brought forth the Man child, “a place was provided for her in the wilderness.” And when the Serpent sought to destroy her with a flood of water, “the earth helped” her by opening its mouth and swallowing up the flood (Rev. 12:13-16).

But let due attention be paid to the description here given of those to whom this assurance belongs: “I know that it shall be well with them that *fear God*, which fear before Him.” The added clause renders it most emphatic, that there may be no mistaking their identification. It is not merely those who make a religious profession and associate themselves with His saints, but only the ones who genuinely fear God. To “fear God” is to have a reverential awe of His authority, a filial veneration of His majesty, a heart realization of His omniscience and omnipresence, a soul subjection to His scepter. Those who fear God are regulated by His revealed will, have respect to His commandments, are afraid of displeasing Him. Those who fear God will not trifle with Him or deliberately act the part of hypocrites. Concerning them, and them only may it be said, “*Surely I know it shall be well with them*”—well for time and for eternity. —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

4. Romans 15:5-7

Under the New Covenant there is no longer any distinction in the sight of God between different kinds of “meat” nor of the sacred “days” set apart for religious exercise that obtained under the Jewish economy. Some of the early Christians perceived this clearly, others either did not or would not acknowledge such liberty. This difference of opinion bred dissensions and disrupted fellowship. To remove this evil and to promote good the apostle laid down certain rules which may be summed up thus. First, “let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (14:5) and not blindly swayed by the opinions or customs of others. Second, be not censorious and condemn not those who differ from you (v. 13). Third, be not occupied with mere trifles, but concentrate on the essentials (v. 17). Fourth, follow after those things which make for peace and mutual edification (v. 19) and quibble not over matters which are to no profit. Fifth, make not an ostentatious display of your liberty, nor exercise the same to the injury of others (vv. 19-21).

There is great variety and diversity among the saints. This is true of their natural make-up, temperament, manner, and thus in their likeableness or unlikeableness. It also holds good spiritually: Christians have received varying degrees of light, measures of grace, and different gifts. One reason why God has ordered things thus is to try their patience, give opportunity for the exercise of love, and occasion to display meekness and forbearance. All have their blemishes and infirmities. Some are proud, others peevish; some are censorious and others backboneless, and in various ways difficult to get on with. Opinions differ and customs are by no means uniform. Much grace is needed if fellowship is to be maintained. If the rules mentioned above had been

rightly interpreted and genuinely acted upon through the centuries many dissensions had been prevented and much that has marred the Christian testimony in public avoided.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not please ourselves” (15:1). The “then” is argumentative, pointing a conclusion drawn from the principles laid down in the foregoing chapter—for some understanding of which the preceding article was necessary. Let it be duly noted that the pronouns are in the *plural* number: it was not so much individual differences of opinion and conduct, with the personal ill feelings they bred, which the apostle had been reprehending, but rather the development of the same collectively into party spirit and sectarian prejudice, so that the Christian company would be rent asunder—this too must be borne in mind when making a present-day application. The “weak” here signifies those who had a feeble grasp of that freedom which Christ has obtained for His people, as a reference to 14:1 makes clear; the “strong” those who have a better apprehension of the extent of their Christian privileges from the restrictions which had been imposed by the ceremonial law and the traditions of men—such as the austerities of the Essenes.

The Greek word here rendered “bear” signifies “to take up.” It was used of porters carrying luggage, assisting travelers. It is found again in Galatians 6:2, only the apostle there mentions “burdens” rather than infirmities: see also Luke 14:27, Romans 11:18. This term also helps to determine the interpretation of what is in view, and thus fixes the proper application. We are not here enjoined to bear *with* the petty whims or scruples of one another, but to render practical aid to those who lag behind the rest. A “burden” is something which is apt to cause its carrier to halt or faint by the way, incapacitating him in his pilgrimage. The strong are bidden to help these weak ones. As charity requires us to ascribe their weaknesses to lack of understanding, it becomes the duty of the better instructed to seek to *enlighten* them. No doubt it would be easier and nicer to leave them alone, but we are “not to please ourselves.” Apparently it was at this point the Gentile believers had failed, for while the Jewish Christians were aggressive in seeking to impose their view on others, the Gentiles seem to have adopted a negative attitude.

It is ever thus: fanatics and extremists are not content to deprive themselves of things which God has not prohibited, but are zealous in endeavoring to press their will upon all, whereas others who use them temperately are content to mind their own business and leave in peace those who differ from them. Christians who drink wine and smoke tobacco in moderation do not go about seeking to induce others to do the same, yet many of their brethren who are total abstainers take it upon them to pester these with their fads and say the most uncharitable things about those who refuse to adopt their whims. It is not the use of wine but the intemperate abuse of the same which Scripture forbids: see John 2:1-11; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 3:8. It was the ex-pharisees “which believed” who insisted that “it was necessary to circumcise” converted Gentiles and “to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5) and thereby bring them into bondage—a thing which the apostle Paul steadfastly resisted and condemned.

In the passage before us the Roman saints were exhorted to cease maintaining their negative attitude, however much easier and more congenial it might be to continue in the same. “And not to please ourselves” (v. 1) signifies not an abstention from something they liked, but the performing of a duty which they disliked—how men do turn the things of God upside down! This is quite evident from the preceding part of the verse, where the “strong” (or better instructed) were bidden to “bear the infirmities of the weak”: how would their abstaining from certain “meats” be a compliance with *such* an injunction? No, it was not something they were told to forgo out of respect for others’ scruples, but a *bearing* of their “infirmities,” a rendering assistance to their fellow-pilgrims (Gal. 6:2) which they were called upon to do. And how was

this to be done? Well, *what were* their “infirmities”? Why, self-imposed abstinences because of ignorance of the Truth. Thus it was the duty of the Gentile Christians to expound unto their Jewish brethren “the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).

Try and place yourself in *their* position, my reader. Imagine yourself to be Lydia or the Philippian jailor. All your past life had been in the darkness and idolatry of heathenism, when unsought by you the sovereign grace of God opened your heart to receive the Gospel. You are now a new creature in Christ Jesus, and have been enabled to perceive your standing and liberty in Him. Living next door to you, perhaps, is a family of converted Jews. All their past lives they have read the Scriptures and worshiped the true God, and though they have received Christ as the promised Messiah and as their personal Savior, yet they are still in bondage to the restrictions of the Mosaic Law. You marvel at their dullness, but consider it none of your concern to interfere. And now you receive a copy of this Epistle and ponder 15:1. You now see that you *have* a duty toward your Jewish sister and brother, that God bids you make the effort to pass on to her or him the light He has granted you. The task is distasteful: perhaps so, but we are “not to please ourselves”!

That what we have sought to set forth above brings out, or at least points to, the real meaning of verse 1 is unequivocally established by the next verse. “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification” (Rom. 15:2). This is obviously the amplification in positive form of the negative clause in the verse before. To “edify” a brother—here called “neighbor” according to Jewish terminology!—is to build him up in the Faith, and the appointed means for *that* is to instruct him by and enlighten him with the Truth. It should be carefully noted that this “pleasing of our neighbor” is no mere yielding to his whims, but an industrious effort to promote his knowledge of Divine things, particularly in the privileges which Christ has secured for him. It may prove a thankless task, but it “ought” to be undertaken, for concern for his good requires it. If he resents your efforts and insults you, *your* skirts are clear and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have honestly attempted to discharge your duty.

“For even Christ pleased not Himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me” (v. 3). This supplies further proof of the soundness of our interpretation of the previous verses. The meaning of “we...ought...not to please ourselves” is placed beyond all uncertainty by what is here said of our Lord. In His case it signified something vastly different than *abstaining* from things that He *liked*, and certainly the very opposite of attempting to ingratiate Himself in the esteem of men by flattering their prejudices. No, rather was Christ in all things regulated by the Divine Rule: not His own will, but the will of His Father was whatever governed Him. Not attempting to obtain the approval of His fellows, but rather seeking of their “good” and the “edification” of His brethren was what uniformly actuated Him. And in the exercise of such disinterested charity, so far from being appreciated for the same, He brought upon Himself “reproaches.” And if the disciple follows His example he must not expect to fare any better.

In his closing remarks on Romans 14, Charles Hodge pointed out: “It is often necessary to assert our Christian liberty at the expense of incurring censure and offending good men, in order that right principles of duty may be preserved. Our Savior consented to be regarded as a Sabbath-breaker and even a ‘wine-bibber’ and ‘friend of publicans and sinners’; but wisdom was justified of her children. Christ did not in those cases see fit to accommodate His conduct to the rules of duty set up and conscientiously regarded as correct by those around Him. He saw that more good would arise from a practical disregard of the false opinion of the Jews as to the manner in which the Sabbath was to be kept and as to the degrees of intercourse which was allowed with wicked

men, than from concession to their prejudices.” Better then to give offence or incur obloquy than sacrifice principle or disobey God.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” This statement seems to be made for a double reason. First, to inform the saints that though the Mosaic law was abrogated and the Old Testament treated of a past dispensation, yet they must not conclude therefrom that it was now out of date. The uniform use which the New Testament writers made of it, frequently appealing to it in proof of what they advanced, proves otherwise: all of it is intended for our instruction to-day, and the examples of piety contained therein will stimulate us—see James 5:10. Second, a prayerful pondering of the Old Testament will nourish that very grace which will most need to be exercised when complying with the foregoing exhortations—“patience,” in dealing with those who differ from us; it will minister “comfort” to us if we are reviled for performing our duty.

“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.” By his example the apostle here teaches us that if we are to discharge this duty acceptably unto God we must have recourse unto *prayer*. He alone can grant success in it, and unless His aid be definitely and earnestly sought, failure is almost certain to be the outcome. There are few things which the majority of people more resent than to have their religious beliefs and ways called into question. Something more is involved than an imperfectly-informed understanding: there is prejudice of heart to be overcome as well, for ‘convince a man against his will, and he is of the same opinion still.’ Moreover much grace is required on the part of the one who undertakes to deal with the mistaken scruples of another, lest, acting in the energy of the flesh, he gives place to the Devil, sowing seeds of discord and causing “a root of bitterness” to spring up, and thus makes matters worse rather than better. Such grace needs to be personally and fervently sought.

There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge. There is an ardor which is merely of nature and not prompted by the Holy Spirit. If then it should become my duty to pass on to a brother a measure of that light which God has granted me and which I have reason to believe he does not enjoy, I need to ask help from Him for the execution of such a task. I need to ask Him to impress my heart afresh with the fact that *I* have nothing but what I received from Him (1 Cor. 4:7) and to beg Him to subdue the workings of pride, that I may approach my brother in a humble spirit. I need to ask for wisdom, that I may be guided in what to say. I need to ask for love that I may truly seek the good of the other. I need to be shown when it is the right time to approach him. Above all, I need to ask that God’s glory may be my paramount concern. Furthermore, I need to pray that it may please God to go before me and prepare the soil for the seed, that He will graciously meeken the heart of my brother, remove the prejudice, and make him receptive to the Truth.

Observe the particular character in which the apostle addressed the Deity: as “the God of patience and consolation.” He eyed those attributes in God which were most suited to the petition he presented, namely, that He would grant “like-mindedness” where there was a difference in judgment and mutual forbearance was called for. It was the grace of patience that was needed among dissenting brethren: “consolation” too was required to bear the infirmities of the weak: as another has said, “If the heart be filled with the comforts of the Almighty it will be as oil to the wheels of Christian charity.” The Father is here contemplated as “the God of patience and consolation” because He is the Author of these graces, because He requires the exercise of the same in us (Eph. 5:1), and because we are to constantly seek from Him the quickening and strengthening of them. In the preceding verse we are shown that “patience and comfort” are

conveyed to believing souls through the Scriptures: they are, as it were, the conduit-pipe; but here we are taught that God Himself is the Fountain-head of the same.

Consider now *the mercy sought*: that the God of patience and consolation would “grant you to be like-minded one to another.” As Charles Hodge rightly pointed out, like-mindedness here “does not signify unanimity of opinion but harmony of feeling.” This should be apparent to those who possess no knowledge of the Greek: how can “babes” in Christ be expected to have the same measure of light on spiritual things as mature Christians! No, the apostle’s petition went deeper than that the saints might see eye to eye on every detail—which is neither to be expected nor desired in this life: it was that affection one toward another might obtain, even where difference of opinion upon minor matters persisted. The thing requested was, that quarreling should cease, all ill feelings be set aside, patience and forbearance be exercised, and mutual love prevail. It was that such a state of unity might obtain that notwithstanding difference of view, they might enjoy together the delights and advantages of Christian fellowship.

“According to Christ Jesus” (v. 5). The margin gives “after the example of”: this is certainly included, yet not to be restricted thereto. We regard this like-mindedness “according to Christ Jesus” as having a threefold force. First, according to the *precept*, command, or law of Christ: “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35); “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Second, according to His *example*. Remember how He bore with the dullness and bickering of His disciples. Remember how He stooped to wash their feet. Third, by making Him “the Centre” of their unity: “Agree in the Truth, not in any error. It was a cursed concord and harmony of those who were of one mind to give their power and strength to the Beast (Rev. 17:13): that was not a like-mindedness *according* to Christ, but *against* Christ” (Matthew Henry). Thus, “according to Christ Jesus” signifies in a Christian manner. Let the reader ponder carefully Philippians 2:2-5, for it furnishes an inspired comment on our present verse.

Yet there is such a fullness in the words of Scripture that the threefold meaning of “according to Christ Jesus” given above by no means exhausts their scope. They need also to be considered in the light of what immediately precedes and pondered as a part of this prayer. The apostle is making request that God would cause this Christian company (composed of such different elements as believing Jews and Gentiles) to be “like-minded,” which, of course, implies that they were not so—Titus 3:3 describes what we are by nature. Observe the blessing sought, however desirable, was not something to be claimed, but which it was prayed that God would “grant”: by adding “according to Christ Jesus” we may therefore understand those words as the ground of appeal—grant it according to the *merits* of Christ. Finally, we may also regard this clause as a plea: grant it for the *honor* of Christ—that unity and concord may obtain for the glory of His name.

“That ye may with one mind, one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 6). This is *the grand end* in view: that such brotherly love may be exercised, such mutual forbearance shown, such concord and unity maintained, that the spirit of worship be not quenched. The One who will not receive from me an offering while I be alienated from my brother (Matt. 5:23,24) will not accept the praise of a company of believers where there are divisions among them. Something more than coming together under the same roof and joining in the same ordinance is required (1 Cor. 11:18-20). There cannot truly be “one mouth” unless there first be “one mind.” Tongues which are used to backbite one another in private cannot blend together in singing God’s praises. The “Father” is mentioned here as an emphatic reminder of the *family* relationship: all Christians are His children, and therefore should dwell together in peace

and amity as brethren and sisters—”of *our* [not ‘the’!] Lord Jesus Christ” intensifies the same idea.

“They may be divided in their dietary views; this in itself is a small matter; but they must not be divided in their worship and praise of God. For the patient and comforted mind can join in praise with those from whom there is dissent of opinion. This is true Christian union” (James M. Stifler). “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (v. 7). This is not an exhortation to one class only, but to the “strong” and the “weak” alike. They are here bidden to ignore all minor differences, and inasmuch as Christ accepts all who genuinely believe His Gospel whether they be Jews or Gentiles, so are we to receive into fellowship and favor all whom He has received. “If He accepts men in all their weakness and without any regard to their views about secondary things, well may we” (Stifler). Thereby is God glorified, and for this we should pray and act. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

16. Tenth Miracle - part 3

In the previous chapter we emphasized the secret operations of God in inclining one and another to pay attention to the message of the little Hebrew maid: He it was who gave the hearing ear to both Naaman’s wife and the king of Syria. Perhaps some have remarked, But such was not the case with the king of Israel! No, it was not, for so far from sharing her confidence and cooperating with her effort, he was skeptical and antagonistic. Therein we may perceive God’s sovereignty. He does not work in all alike, being absolutely free to do as He pleases. He opens the eyes of some, but leaves others in their blindness. This is God’s high and awful prerogative: “Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18). This is what supplies the key to God’s dealings with men and which explains the course of evangelical history. Clearly is that solemn principle exemplified in the chapter before us, and we should be unfaithful as an expositor if we—as so many now do—deliberately ignored it.

“And it came to pass when the king of Israel had read the letter that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God to kill and to make alive; that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?” (2 Kings 5:7). So utterly sceptical was Jehoram that he deemed it not worth while to send for Elisha and confer with him. The prophet meant nothing to Israel’s unbelieving king, and therefore he slighted him. Perhaps this strikes the reader as strange, for the previous miracles Elisha had wrought must have been well known. One had thought his restoring of a dead child to life had thoroughly authenticated him as an extraordinary man of God. But did not the Lord Jesus publicly raise a dead man to life, and yet within a few days both the leaders of the nation and the

common people clamored for His crucifixion! And is it any different in our day? Have we not witnessed providential marvels, Divine interpositions both of mercy and judgment, and what effect have they had on our evil generation? Jehoram's conduct is easily accounted for: "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), and that enmity evidenced itself by slighting His accredited servant.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there *is* a prophet in Israel" (v. 8). The slighted Elisha pocketed his pride and communicated with the king, rightly concluding that his own feelings were not worth considering where the glory of God was concerned. "Naaman came into the land of Israel, expecting relief from a prophet of the God of Israel, and Elisha would by no means have him go back disappointed, lest he should conclude that Jehovah was like the gods of the nations, and as unable to do good or evil as they were. On the contrary he would have it known that God had 'a prophet in Israel' by whom He performed such cures as none of the heathen prophets, priests, or physicians could effect; and which were far beyond all the power of the mightiest monarchs" (Thomas Scott). The "counsel of the Lord it shall stand" whatever devices were in Jehoram's heart to the contrary (Prov. 19:21).

"The righteous are bold as a lion." Elisha not only rebuked the king for his unbelieving fears but summarily gave him instructions concerning Naaman. However unwelcome might be his interference, that deterred him not. The real servant of God does not seek to please men, but rather to execute the commission he has received from on high. It is true that the prophets, like the apostles, were endowed with extraordinary powers, and therefore they are not in all things models for us to-day; nevertheless the Gospel minister is not to cringe before any one, still less is he to take orders from human authorities. It is his duty to denounce unbelief and to proclaim that the living God is ever ready to honor Him and work wonders in response to genuine faith. As God overruled the king of Syria's misdirecting of Naaman, so He now overcame the skepticism of the king of Israel by moving him to respond to Elisha's demand—thereby demonstrating that the words of the little maid were no idle boast and her confidence in God no misplaced one.

"So Naaman came with his forces and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of Elisha" (v. 9). Naaman before the prophet's abode may be regarded as a picture of the natural man in his sins, not yet stripped of his self-righteousness, nor aware that he is entirely dependent on Divine mercy, having no title or claim to receive any favor at God's hand. The fact that he was seated in a chariot mitigated his terrible condition not one iota. No matter how rich the apparel that covered his body, though it might hide from human view his loathsome disease, it availed nothing for the removal of it. And as the valuables he had brought with him could not procure his healing, neither can the cultivation of the most noble character nor the performance of the most praiseworthy conduct in human esteem merit the approbation of God. Salvation is wholly of Divine grace and cannot be earned by the creature: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5,6).

However much it might be in accord with the principles and sentiments which regulate fallen human nature, there was surely something most incongruous in the scene now before us. Here was a poor creature stricken with a most horrible disease, and yet we behold him seated in a chariot. Here was one smitten by a malady no physician could heal, surrounded by official pomp. Here was one entirely dependent upon the Divine bounty, yet whose horses were laden with silver

and gold. Do we not behold in him, then, a representative not only of the natural man in his sins, but as filled with a sense of his own importance and bloated with pride! Such is precisely the case with each of us by nature. Totally depraved though we be, alienated from God, criminals condemned by His holy Law, our minds at enmity against Him, dead in trespasses and sins, yet until a miracle of grace is wrought within and the tumor of our pride is lanced, we are puffed up with self-righteousness, refuse to acknowledge we deserve naught but eternal punishment, and imagine we are entitled to God's favorable regard.

Not only does Naaman here fitly portray the self-importance of the natural man while unregenerate, but as hinted above he also adumbrates the fact that the sinner imagines he can gain God's approbation and purchase his salvation. The costly things which the Syrian had brought with him were obviously designed to ingratiate himself in the eyes of the prophet and pay for his cure. The following such a policy was of course quite natural, and therefore it types out what is the native thought of every man. He supposes that a dutiful regard of religious performances will obtain for him the favorable notice of God, that his fastings and prayers, church-attendance and contributing to its upkeep, will more than counterbalance his demerits. Such an insane idea is by no means confined to Buddhists and Romanists but is common to the whole human family. It is for this reason we have to be assured, "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). Spiritually speaking, every man is bankrupt, a pauper, and salvation is entirely gratis, a matter of charity.

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). This is true alike of the most cultured and the thoroughly illiterate. No amount of education or erudition fits one for the apprehension of spiritual things. Man is blind, and his eyes must be opened, before he can perceive either the glory of God and His righteous claims or his own wretchedness and deep needs. Not until a miracle of grace humbles his heart will he betake himself unto the Throne of Grace in his true character, not until the Holy Spirit works effectually within him will he come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar. It is recorded that a famous artist met with a poor tramp and was so impressed with his woe-begone appearance and condition that he felt he would make an apt subject for a drawing. He gave the tramp a little money and his card and promised him a sovereign if he would call at his house on the following day and sit while he drew his picture. The next morning the tramp arrived, but the artist's intention was defeated: the tramp had washed and shaved and so spruced himself that he was scarcely recognisable!

Similarly does the natural man act when he first attempts to respond to the Gospel call. Instead of coming to the Lord just as he is in all his want and woe, as one who is lost and undone, he supposes he must first make himself more presentable by a process of reformation. Thus he busies himself in amending his ways, improving his conduct, and performing pious exercises, unaware that Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"—to take their place in the dust before Him. What we have just been dwelling upon receives striking illustration in the chapter before us. Instead of sending Naaman direct to Elisha, Benhadad gave him a letter of introduction unto the king of Israel; and instead of casting himself on the mercy of the prophet, he sent a costly fee to pay for the healing of his commander-in-chief. We have seen the futility of his letter—the effect it had upon its recipient; now we are to behold how his lavish outlay of wealth produced no more favorable response from Elisha, for Naaman had to learn the humiliating truth that where Divine grace is concerned the millionaire stands on precisely the same level as the pauper.

Fifth, *its requirement*. “And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (v. 10). As the representative of Him who deigned to wash the feet of His disciples, the minister of the Gospel must not decline the meanest service nor despise the poorest person. Elisha has set us an example of both, for he scorned not to minister to the physical needs of Elijah by washing his hands (3:11), and refused not to help the impoverished widow (4:2). On the other hand, the servant of Christ is to be no sycophant, toadying to those of affluence, nor is he to feed the pride of the self-important. From the sequel it is evident Naaman considered that he, as a “great man,” was entitled to deference, and probably felt that the prophet ought to consider a favor or honor was now being shown him. But, officially, Elisha was an ambassador of the King of kings, and with becoming dignity he let Naaman know that he was at no man’s beck and call, though he failed not to inform him of the way in which healing was to be obtained.

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” Here we see no servile obeisance nor owning of the mightiness of Naaman. The prophet did not even greet him, nor so much as go out of his house to meet him in person. Instead, he sent him a message by a servant. Ah, my reader, God is no respecter of persons, nor should His ministers be. Incalculable harm has been wrought in churches by pastors pandering to those in high places, for not only are the haughty injured thereby, but the lowly are stumbled, and in consequence the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched. God will not tolerate any parading of fleshly distinctions before Him: “that *no* flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:29) is the unrepealable decision. The most eminent and gifted of this world are due no more consideration from the Most High than the street-sweeper, for “there is no difference: all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22). All alike have broken the Law, all alike are guilty before the supreme Judge, all alike must be saved by sovereign grace if they be saved at all.

But there is another way in which we may regard the prophet’s conduct on this occasion: not only did he maintain his official dignity, but he evidenced personal humiliation and prudence, having his eye fixed on the glory of God. It is not that he was indifferent to Naaman’s welfare: no, the fact that he sent his servant out to him with the needful directions evidenced the contrary. But Elisha knew full well that the all-important thing was not the messenger, but the message. It mattered nothing who delivered the message—himself or his servant, but it mattered everything that the God-given word should be faithfully communicated. Elisha knew full well that Naaman’s expectation lay *in himself*, so like a true “man of God” he directed attention away from himself. What a needed lesson for us in this creature-exalting day. How much better would preachers serve souls and honor their Master if, thus hidden, they occupied them with the Gospel instead of with themselves. It was in this self-effacing spirit that Paul rebuked the creature-worshipping Corinthians when he said “who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?” (1 Cor. 3:5). So too our Lord’s forerunner who styled himself “the voice [heard but not seen!] of one crying in the wilderness” (John 1:23).

What was the force of “Go wash in Jordan seven times”? Let us give first a general answer in the words of another. “When Naaman stood with his pompous retinue, and with all his silver and gold at the door of Elisha, he appears before us as a marked illustration of a sinner building on his own efforts after righteousness. He seemed furnished with all that the heart could desire, but in reality all his preparations were but a useless encumbrance, and the prophet soon gave him to understand this. ‘Go wash’ swept away all confidence in gold, silver, raiment, retinue, the king’s letter, everything. It stripped Naaman of everything, and reduced him to his true condition as a

poor defiled leper needing to be washed. It put no difference between the illustrious commander-in-chief of the hosts of Syria, and the poorest and meanest leper in all the coasts of Israel. The former could do nothing less; the latter needed nothing more. Wealth cannot remedy man's ruin, and poverty cannot interfere with God's remedy. Nothing that a man has done need keep him out of heaven; nothing that he can do will ever get him in. 'Go wash' is the word in every case."

But let us consider this "Go wash" more closely and ponder it in the light of its connections. As one stricken with leprosy, Naaman pictures the natural man in his fallen estate. And what is his outstanding and distinguishing characteristic of such? Why, that he is a depraved creature, a sinner, a rebel against God. And what is sin? From the negative side, it is failure to submit to God's authority and be subject to His Law; positively, it is the exercise of self-will, a determination to please myself; "we have turned every one to *his own way*" (Isa. 53:6). If then a sinner inquires of God's servant the way of recovery, what is the first and fundamental thing which needs to be told him? Why this: that self-will and self-pleasing must cease, that he must submit himself to the will of God. And that is only another way of saying that he must be *converted*, for "conversion" is a turning round, a right-about-face. And in order to conversion, *repentance* is the essential requisite (Acts 3:19), and in its final analysis "repentance" is taking sides with God against myself, judging myself, condemning myself, bowing my will to His.

Again, sin is not only a revolt against God, but a deification of self: it is a determination to gratify my own inclinations; it is saying, "I will be lord over myself." That was the bait which the Serpent dangled before our first parents when he tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit: "Ye shall be as *gods*" (Gen. 3:5). Casting off allegiance to God, man assumed an attitude of independency and self-sufficiency. Sin taking possession of his heart, he became proud, haughty, self-righteous. If, then, such a creature is to be recovered and restored to God, it must necessarily be by a process of *humbling him*. The first design of the Gospel is to put down human pride, to lay man low before God. It was predicted by Isaiah when speaking of Gospel times "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down" (2:11). And again, "every mountain shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight" (40:4); and therefore did our Lord begin His sermon on the mount by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). That was the basic truth which the prophet pressed upon Naaman: that he must abase himself before the God of Israel.

"Go wash in Jordan seven times" was but another way of saying to the conceited Syrian, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God...Cleanse your hands ye sinners and purify your hearts ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to bitterness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up" (James 4:6-10). Naaman must come down from off his high horse and take his proper place before the Most High. Naaman must descend from his "chariot" and evidence a lowly spirit. Naaman must "wash" or "bathe" as the word is often translated, in the waters of the Jordan; not once or twice but no less than seven times, and thus completely renounce self. And the requirement which God made of Naaman, my reader, is precisely the same as His demand upon you, upon me: pride has to be mortified, self-will relinquished, self-righteousness repudiated. Have we complied therewith? Have we renounced self-pleasing and surrendered to the Divine scepter? Have we given ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5) to be ruled by Him? If not, we have never been savingly converted.

In its ultimate significance, the "Go wash in Jordan seven times" had a typical import, and in the light of the New Testament there is no difficulty whatever in perceiving what that was. There is one provision, and one only, which the amazing grace of God and the wondrous love of His

Son has made for the healing of spiritual lepers. It is that blessed “Fountain” which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). That holy “Fountain” had its rise at Calvary, when from the pierced side of Christ “forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34). That wondrous “Fountain” which can cleanse the foulest was provided at the incalculable cost of the crucifixion of Immanuel, and hence the washing in “Jordan” which ever speaks of death. Here, then, dear friend, is the evangelical significance of what has been before us. If you have been made conscious of your depravity, ready to deny self, willing to humble yourself into the dust before God, here is the Divine provision: a bath into which by faith you may plunge, and thereby obtain proof that “the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). If by grace you have already done so, then join the writer in exclaiming, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood...to Him be glory and dominion forever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5,6). —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

2. Its Distinctions

Before taking up our subject in a positive and constructive manner it seems advisable that we should endeavor to remove a misapprehension under which a number of our readers are laboring, and which requires to be cleared up before they will be in a fit condition to weigh without bias and thus be enabled to receive what we hope to present in later articles. It is for their special benefit this one is composed, and we trust that other friends will kindly bear with us if they find it rather wearisome to follow a labored discussion of that which presents no difficulty to *them*. To enter into a consideration of this particular point at such an early stage in the series will oblige us to somewhat infringe upon other aspects of our subject which will be taken up later (D.V.), but this appears necessary if we are to “clear the decks for action,” or to change the figure, if we are to rid the ground of superfluous encumbrances and fit it for a sowing of the seed.

That which presents a difficulty to those who have been brought up in some Calvinistic circles is, how can God be said to be *reconciled* to His elect, seeing that He has loved them with an everlasting and unchanging love? Much of our opening article was devoted to a particular answer to such an inquiry, but as we deem that answer far from being a satisfactory one, we shall here confine ourselves to its elucidation. To us it appears that the explanation furnished by Mr. Philpot was confused and faulty, and that it was so through failure to distinguish between things that differ—hence the title we have accorded this article. If we are to avoid becoming hopelessly muddled on this point we must discriminate sharply between what the elect are as viewed only in the eternal purpose of God, and what they are *in themselves by nature*. And further, we must carefully differentiate between God considered as their Father and God considered as the Moral Governor and *Judge* of all mankind.

That it may appear we do not advance anything in the remainder of this article which clashes with or deviates from the teaching of sound theologians in the past, we will make brief quotations

from four of the best-known Puritans. “We are actually justified, pardoned and reconciled when we repent and believe. Whatever thoughts and purposes of grace God may have towards us from eternity, we are under the fruits of sin till we become penitent believers” (T. Manton). In his treatise on “The Work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation” Thomas Goodwin (book 2, beginning of chapter 1) points out: “There are two different states or conditions which the elect of God, who are saved, pass through, between which regeneration is the passage. The one is their first state in which they are born: a state of bondage to sin, and obnoxious to instant damnation whilst they remain in it...The other of grace and salvation, therefore oppositely to the former state.”

“God does hate His elect in some sense before their actual reconciliation. God was placable before Christ, appeased by Christ. But until there be such conditions which God hath appointed in the creature, he hath no interest in this reconciliation of God, and whatsoever person he be in whom the condition is not found, he remains under the wrath of God, and therefore in some sense under God’s hatred” (Stephen Charnock, vol. 3, p. 345). When writing on “The Satisfaction of Christ” John Owen said: “This then is what we ascribe to the death of Christ, when we say that as a sacrifice we were reconciled to God or that He made reconciliation for us. Having made God our Enemy by sin, Christ by His death turned away His anger, appeased His wrath, and brought us into favor again with God.” How far Mr. Philpot digressed from the teaching of these men we must leave his friends to judge for themselves. But we appeal now to an infinitely higher authority, namely, the Word of God.

Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that all men without exception are before actual regeneration in a like state and condition, and occupy *the same* standing or status before the Divine Law. Whatever distinguishing design God has purposed in Himself to afterward effect as a change in His own elect by the operations of His free grace, until those operations take place they are in precisely the same case as the non-elect. “We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin”—guilty, beneath sentence of condemnation. “There is none righteous, no not one”—not one who has met the requirements of the Divine Law. “That every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God”—that is, obnoxious to the Divine judgment. “There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:9,10,19,22,23). The condition and position of every one relative to the Law is one and the same before his regeneration and justification, and the decree of God concerning any difference that is yet to be made in some in nowise modifies that solemn fact. This is one chief reason why the Gospel is to be preached to every creature.

The Scriptures are equally explicit in describing the effects and consequences of lying under God’s wrath. Before conversion the elect equally with the non-elect are in a state of alienation from God (Eph. 4:18), and therefore none of their services or performances can be acceptable to Him. He will receive naught at their hands: “he who turneth away his ear from hearing the Law [an in the case with every unregenerate soul], even his prayer shall be abomination” (Prov. 28:9). They are all under the power of the Devil (Col. 1:13), who rules at his pleasure in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). They are “without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). They are under the curse or condemning power of the Law (Gal. 3:13). They are “children in whom is no faith” (Deut. 32:20) and therefore utterly unable to do a single thing which can meet with God’s approval, for “without *faith* it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). They are therefore “ready to perish” (Deut. 26:5).

“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). What could be plainer than that? Is not an elect soul an *unbeliever* until the moment God is pleased to give faith unto him? Assuredly: then equally sure is it that he is also under the wrath of

God so long as he remains an unbeliever. Not only so, but the Word of God solemnly declares that the elect are “by nature the children of wrath even as others” (Eph. 2:3), and no Papish priest can make them otherwise by sprinkling a few drops of “holy water” upon them. But “children of wrath” they could not be had they come into this world in a justified and reconciled state. No person can be in two contrary states at the same time: obnoxious to wrath, and yet God at peace with him; under the guilt of sin, and yet justified. Wrath is upon them from the womb (because of their sinning in Adam), and that wrath remains on them so long as they continue unbelievers. Though they were (in God’s purpose) in Christ from eternity, that did not prevent them being in Adam in time, and suffering the penal effects of his fall.

There is an appointed hour in their earthly history when the elect pass from under the penal wrath of God and are justified by Him and reconciled to Him. Justification is an act of God, an act *in time*, an external act. It is an act of God in a way of judicial process—His declaration as supreme Judge. It is opposed to condemnation, the granting a full discharge therefrom (Rom. 8:33-35). It is not an internal decision in God, which always remains in Him, and effects no change in the *status* of the person justified; but is a temporal act of His power which makes a relative change in the person’s standing before Him. It is upon the person’s believing in Christ that God justifies him and that he passes from a state of guilt and alienation to one of righteousness and reconciliation: he that believeth on Him is not condemned (that is, he is justified), but he that believes not is condemned already (John 3:18). “He that believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life [by regeneration], and shall not come into condemnation, but is *passed from death unto life*”—i.e. the life of justification (John 5:24).

If persons are justified in a proper sense by faith, then they are not justified from eternity, for we believe in time, not eternity. That we *are* justified by faith, is the doctrine of the Gospel, as is apparent from the whole current of God’s Word. To cite but one verse: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ [that is, by the faith of which He is the Object], even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). That the apostle is there speaking of being justified in the sight of God, and not merely in the court of conscience, is beyond all doubt to any that will duly and fairly consider the scope of the Holy Spirit in that passage. Being justified by faith in Jesus Christ is there placed in opposition to being “justified by the works of the Law,” which shows that something more fundamental than our own assurance is in view. “By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight” (Rom. 3:19) makes it clear that none can obtain sentence of acquittal in the court of Divine adjudication by their own deeds. It is before God and not in the believer’s consciousness that justification takes place.

“And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [Gentiles] through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). It is to be noted that there are two words here which lie directly against justification before believing: that God *would* justify the heathen—which must needs respect time to come; and “*shall* all nations be blessed” or justified—a “shall be” cannot be put for a thing already done. To this agrees “in the Lord *shall* all the seed of Israel be justified” (Isa. 45:25): by union with Christ through faith shall they be pronounced righteous. Again; “For as by one man’s disobedience many *were* made sinners, so by the obedience of One *shall* many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). Upon which the Puritan William Bridge said, “It is remarkable that when the Holy Spirit speaks of Adam’s sin condemning his posterity, He speaks of it as already past; but when He speaks of Christ’s righteousness for the justification of sinners He changes to the future tense—as if He purposely designed to prevent our thoughts running after justification before believing.”

What has been said above about the justification of God's elect upon their believing, holds equally good concerning His reconciliation to them when they throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him. Not only was their reconciliation decreed from everlasting but peace was actually made by Christ when He shed His blood (Col. 1:20); nevertheless, reconciliation itself is not effected until the Holy Spirit has so wrought within them as to bring about their conversion. This is conclusively established by the following passages: "For if, when we were enemies we were [judicially] reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being [actually] reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have *now* received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10,11)—that "now" would be meaningless if we were reconciled only in the eternal decree of God: what God decreed *for* us is here "received" *by* us! So again, "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet NOW hath He reconciled" (Col. 1:21).

It would obviate considerable misunderstanding if it were clearly perceived that the everlasting love of God toward His elect is mainly an act of His will, the exercise of His good pleasure, the purpose of His grace, whereby He determined to do certain things for them and instate them in glory in His own good time and way. But that purpose *effects nothing* for them nor puts anything into them—for *these* there must be external acts of God's power making good His purpose. From all eternity God determined to make this earth, yet six thousand years ago it existed not! He had ordained a final Day of Judgment but it has not yet actually arrived. God has purposed that in and through Christ He will justify and save certain persons, but they are not thereby justified because God has purposed it. It is true they *will be* in due time, but not before they have been enabled to believingly appropriate the atoning work of Christ in their behalf. We must therefore draw a line between the absolute certainty of the fruition of anything God has eternally purposed, and its actual accomplishment or bringing it to pass in His appointed time.

What has been pointed out in the last paragraph should make it easier for the reader to grasp that God's eternal love unto His own (which is an imminent act of His will or good pleasure, entirely within Himself) does not exempt them from coming beneath His anger (which is not any passion in God, but the outward visitation of His displeasure) because of sin; nor does it prevent their lying beneath the dispensations of His judicial wrath, until by some interpositions of His grace in time, when He actually changes their personal state (by regeneration) and legal status (by justification), freeing them from condemnation and instating them into His favor. In other words, much may occur in the interval between God's eternal purpose and the actual working out of the same—though nothing which can in anywise jeopardise His purpose, and nothing that was not foreseen when He framed it.

But it is objected by hyper-Calvinists, If the elect were not justified in Christ from all eternity, then when God pronounces them just there is an alteration in His will and love toward them. Not so. God is no more mutable because He justifies His people in time, than He is because He regenerates them in time. God is no more chargeable with change of purpose when He produces a change in a person's standing upon his believing, than He is when He produces a change in a person's condition by the miracle of the new birth. All the change is in the creature. Though God absolutely decrees, and that from everlasting, to regenerate, to justify and to reconcile all His chosen, with the alteration of His *governmental attitude* toward them which that involves, yet this argues not the least shadow of change in God Himself when at the predestinated hour that great change is effected. Do but distinguish between the grace decreeing and the power of God executing, and all is plain. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He

called, them He also justified” (Rom. 8:30) —the calling and justifying are the *fruits* of His electing love.

But again it is objected, The elect are designated “sheep” before they believe (John 10:16), and in God’s esteem they are then in a justified state. Answer: they are called “sheep” according to the immutability of the Divine decree, which cannot be frustrated, and on that account God calls “things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17), nevertheless, that verse affirms they “be not”—that is, they have no actual existence. They are “sheep” in the purpose of God, but not so as touching *the accomplishment* of the same until they be regenerated. Paul was a sheep in the decree of God even when he was wolf-like in preying upon the flock of Christ. Surely none will say he was actually a sheep whilst he was “breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). From the decree of God we may safely conclude the certainty of its accomplishment, but to argue that a thing is *actually* accomplished because Divinely foreordained is a most foolish and dangerous way of reasoning.

The love of God’s purpose and good pleasure has not the least inconsistency with those hindrances to the peace and friendship of God which sin has interposed, for though the holiness of His Law, the righteousness of His government and the veracity of His Word, stood in the way of His taking a *sinner* into friendship and fellowship with Himself, until full satisfaction has been made to His broken Law and insulted Majesty; nevertheless His love determined and His wisdom devised a way whereby His sovereign good will should recover His people, and that, without sullyng the Divine character to the slightest degree, yea, in magnifying those attributes which sin had affronted. God’s love has proven efficacious by the means He devised “that His banished be not expelled from Him” (2 Sam. 14:14).

From all that has been pointed out above it should be quite evident that this doctrine of reconciliation does not teach that God loved and hated His elect at the same time and in the same respect. He loved them in respect of the free purpose of His sovereign will; but His wrath was upon them in respect of His violated Law and provoked justice by their sin. But His love gave Christ to satisfy for their sins and to redeem them from the curse of the Law, and in due time He sends His Spirit to regenerate them, which lays the foundation for their conversion and restoration to Him.

The following distinctions must, then, be kept steadily in mind: 1. Between God’s looking upon His elect in the purpose of His grace and as under the sentence of His Law: though the elect are born under the dispensation of His wrath, yet it is not executed upon them personally. 2. Between there being no change in God and a change in His outward dealings with us. 3. Between God’s purpose concerning His elect in eternity and the accomplishment of that purpose in a time state. 4. Between God’s viewing the elect in Christ their Covenant-Head and as the depraved descendents of fallen Adam: in the one cause, as “His dear children” in the other; as being “by nature the children of wrath.” 5. Between God’s unchanging love for us as our Father, and His official displeasure as our moral Governor and Judge. This distinction is illustrated in the case of Christ: He was the Beloved of the Father and never ceased to be so, yet Divine wrath was visited upon Him at the cross. He was dealt with not as the Son (as such) but as the Surety of His guilty people, by the Father, not as such, but as the supreme Judge. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

3b. Its Necessity

In reply to what was said in our last it may be asked, if the regeneration of Christians be complete, if their essential sanctification be effected, if they are already fitted for Heaven, then why does God still leave them here on earth? why not take them to His own immediate presence as soon as they be born again? Our first answer is, there is no “if” about it. Scripture distinctly and expressly affirms that even now believers are “complete in Christ” (Col. 2:10), that He has “perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14), that they are “made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12), and more than “complete,” “perfect” and “meet” none will ever be. As to why God—generally, though not always!—leaves the babe in Christ in this world for a longer or shorter period: even if no satisfactory reason could be suggested that would not invalidate to the slightest degree what has been demonstrated, for when any truth is clearly established a hundred objections cannot set it aside. However, while we do not pretend to fathom the mind of God, the following consequences are more or less obvious.

By leaving His people here for a season, opportunity is given for: 1. God to manifest His keeping power: not only in a hostile world, but sin still indwelling believers. 2. To demonstrate the sufficiency of His grace: supporting them in their weakness. 3. To maintain a witness for Himself in a scene which lieth in the Wicked One. 4. To exhibit His faithfulness in supplying all their need in the wilderness before they reach Canaan. 5. To display His manifold wisdom unto angels: 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10. 6. To act as “salt” in preserving the race from moral suicide: by the purifying and restraining influence they exert. 7. To make evident the reality of their faith: trusting Him in sharpest trials and darkest dispensations. 8. To give them an occasion to glorify Him in the place where they dishonored Him. 9. To preach the Gospel to those of His elect yet in unbelief. 10. To afford proof they will serve Him amid the most disadvantageous circumstances. 11. To deepen their appreciation of what He has prepared for them. 12. To have fellowship with Christ, who endured the cross before He was crowned with glory and honor.

Before showing why Christian progress is necessary, let us remind the reader once more of the double signification of the term “Christian,” namely, “an anointed one” and “a disciple of Christ,” and how this supplies the principal key to the subject before us, intimating its *twofoldness*. His “anointing” with the Holy Spirit is an act of God, wherein he is entirely passive, but his becoming a “disciple of Christ” is a voluntary act of his own, wherein he surrenders to Christ’s Lordship and resolves to be ruled by His scepter. Only as this is duly borne in mind shall we be preserved from error on either side, as we pass from one aspect of our theme to another. As the double meaning of the name “Christian” points to both the Divine operations and human activity, so in the Christian’s progress we must keep before us the exercise of God’s sovereignty and the discharge of our responsibility. Thus from one angle growth is neither necessary nor possible, from another it is both desirable and requisite. It is from this second angle we are now going to view the Christian, setting forth his obligations therein.

Let us illustrate what has been said above on the twofoldness of this truth by a few simple comments on a well-known verse: “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). First, this implies that in our fallen condition we are wayward at heart, prone to follow a course of folly; and such is our present state by nature. Second, it implies the Lord’s people have had a discovery made to them of their woeful case, and are conscious of their sinful inability to correct the same; which is the experience of all the regenerate. Third, it signifies an owning of this humiliating truth, a crying to God for enablement. They beg to be “taught,” which means far more than to be shown how, namely, to be “*so taught*” as to be actually empowered. In other words, it is a prayer for enabling grace. Fourth, it expresses the end in view: “that *we* may apply our hearts unto Wisdom”—perform our duty, discharge our obligations, conduct ourselves as “Wisdom’s children.” Grace is to be improved, turned to good account, traded with.

We all know what is meant by a person’s “applying his *mind*” to his studies, namely, that he gathers in his wandering thoughts, focuses his attention on the subject before him, concentrates thereon. Equally evident is a person’s “applying his *hand*” to a piece of manual labor, namely, that he get down to business, set himself to the work before him, earnestly endeavor to make a good job of it. In either case there is an implication: in the former that he has been given a sound mind, in the latter that he possesses a healthy body. And in connection with both cases it is universally acknowledged that the one *ought* to so employ his mind and the other his bodily strength. Equally obvious should be the meaning of and the obligation to “apply our *hearts* unto Wisdom”: that is, diligently, fervently, earnestly make Wisdom our quest and walk in her ways. Since God has given a “new heart” at regeneration, it is to be thus employed. If He has quickened us into newness of life then we ought to grow in grace. If He has made us new creatures in Christ we are to progress as Christians.

Because this article will be read by such widely-different classes of readers and we are anxious to help all, we must consider here the objection which will be made by hyper-Calvinists, for the removal of which we quote the renowned John Owen. “It will be said that if not only the beginning of grace, sanctification, and holiness be *from God*, but the carrying of it on and the increase of it also be from Him, and not only so in general, but that all the actings of grace, and every act of it, be an immediate effect of the Holy Spirit, then what need is there that *we* should take any pains in this thing ourselves, or use our own endeavors to grow in grace and holiness as we are commanded. If God worketh all Himself in us, and without His effectual operation in us we can do nothing, there is no place left for our diligence, duty, or obedience.

“Answer. 1. This objection we must expect to meet withal at every turn. Men will not believe there is a consistency between God’s effectual grace and our diligent obedience; that is, they will not *believe* what is plainly, clearly, distinctly, revealed in the Scripture, and which is suited unto the experience of all that truly believe, because they cannot, it may be, comprehend it within the compass of carnal reason. 2. Let the apostle answer this objection for this once: ‘His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust’ (2 Peter 1:3,4). If all things that pertain unto life and godliness, among which doubtless is the preservation and increase of grace, be given unto us by the power of God; if from Him we receive that Divine nature, by virtue whereof our corruptions are subdued, then I pray what need is there of any endeavors of our own? The whole work of sanctification is wrought in us, it seems and that by the power of God: we therefore, may let it

alone and leave it unto Him whose it is, whilst we are negligent, secure and at ease. Nay says the apostle, this is not *the use* which the grace of God is to be put unto. The consideration of it is, or ought to be, the principal motive and encouragement unto all diligence for the increase of holiness in us. For so he adds immediately: ‘But also for this cause’ [Greek] or because of the gracious operations of the Divine power in us; ‘giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,’ etc. (v. 5).

“These objectors and this apostle were very diversely minded in these matters: what they make an insuperable discouragement unto diligence in obedience, that he makes the greatest motive and encouragement thereunto. 3. I say, from this consideration it will unavoidably follow, that we ought continually to wait and depend on God for supplies of His Spirit and grace without which we can do nothing: that God is more the Author by His grace of the good we do than we are ourselves (not I, but the grace of God that was with me): that we ought to be careful that by our negligences and sins we provoke not the Holy Spirit to withhold His aids and assistances, and so to leave us to ourselves, in which condition we can do nothing that is spiritually good: these things, I say, will unavoidably follow on the doctrine before declared; and if any one be offended at them it is not in our power to render them relief.”

Coming now more directly to the *needs-be* for spiritual growth or Christian progress. This is not optional but obligatory, for we are expressly bidden to “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18)—grow from infancy to the vigor of youth, and from the zeal of youth to the wisdom of maturity. And again, to be “building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 20). It is not sufficient to be grounded and established in the faith, for we must grow more and more therein. At conversion we take upon us the yoke of Christ, and then His word is “learn of Me,” which is to be a lifelong experience. In becoming Christ’s disciples we do but enter His school: not remain in the kindergarten but to progress under His tuition. “A wise man will hear and increase learning” (Prov. 1:5), and seek to make good use of that learning. The believer has not yet reached Heaven: he is on the way, journeying thither, fleeing from the city of destruction. That is why the Christian life is so often likened unto a *race*, and the believer unto a runner: “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize” (Phil. 3:13,14).

1. Only thus is the Triune God glorified. This is so obvious that it really needs no arguing. It brings no glory to God that His children should be dwarfs. As sunshine and rain are sent for the nourishment and fructification of vegetation, so the means of grace are provided that we may increase in our spiritual stature. “As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2)—not only in the intellectual knowledge of it, but in a practical conformity thereunto. This should be our chief concern and be made our principal business: to become better acquainted with God, to have the heart more occupied with and affected by His perfections, to seek after a fuller knowledge of His will, to regulate our conduct thereby, and thus “show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). The more we evidence our sonship, the more we conduct ourselves as becometh the children of God before a perverse generation, the more do we honor Him who has set His love upon us.

That our spiritual growth and progress *is* glorifying unto God appears plainly from the prayers of the apostles, for none were more concerned about His glory than they were, and nothing occupied so prominent a place in their intercession as this. As we hope to allude to this again in later articles, one or two quotations must here suffice. For the Ephesians Paul prayed, “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (3:19). For the Philippians “that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment...being filled with the fruits of

righteousness” (1:9-11). For the Colossians, “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10,11). From which we learn that it is our privilege and duty to obtain more spiritual views of the Divine perfections, begetting in us an increasing holy delight in Him, making our walk more acceptable. There should be a growing acquaintance with the excellency of Christ, advancing in our love of Him, and the more lively exercises of our graces.

2. Only thus do we give proof of our regeneration. “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: *so* shall ye be My disciples” (John 15:8). That does not mean we become the disciples of Christ as a result of our fruitfulness, but that we make manifest we *are* His by our fruitbearing. They who bear no fruit have no vital union with Christ, and like the barren fig tree, are under His curse. Very solemn is this, and by such a criterion each of us should measure himself. That which is brought forth by the Christian is not to be restricted unto what, in many circles, is called “service” or “personal work,” but has reference to that which issues from the exercise of all the spiritual graces. Thus: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44, 45), that is, that you may *make it evident* to yourself and fellows that you have been made partaker of the Divine nature.

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these etc. ...But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:19,22,23). The reference is not directly to what the Holy Spirit produces, but rather to that which is borne of the “spirit” or new nature of which He is the Author (John 15:16). This is evident from its being set over against the “works of the flesh” or old nature. It is by means of this “fruit,” these lovely graces, that the regenerate make manifest the presence of a super-natural principle within them. The more such “fruit” abounds, the clearer our evidence that we have been born again. The total absence of such fruit would prove our profession to be an empty one. It has often been pointed out by others that what issues from the flesh are designated “works,” for a machine can produce such; but that which the “spirit” yields is *living* “fruit” in contrast from “dead works” (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Thus, fruit-bearing is necessary in order to evidence the new birth.

3. Only thus do we certify that we have been made partakers of an effectual call and are among the chosen of God. “Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10) is the Divine exhortation—one which has puzzled many. Yet it should not: it is not to secure it Godward (which is impossible), but make it more certain to yourselves and your brethren. And how is this to be accomplished? Why, by acquiring clearer and fuller evidence of the same: by spiritual growth, for growth is the proof that life is present. This interpretation is definitely established by the context. After enumerating the bestowments of Divine grace (vv. 3,4), the apostle says, now here is your responsibility: “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith [by bringing it into exercise] virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love” (vv. 5-7). Faith itself is ever to be operative, but according to different occasions and in their seasons let each of your graces be exercised, and in proportion as they are, the life of holiness is furthered in the soul and there is a proportionate spiritual growth—cf. Colossians 3:12, 13.

4. Only thus do we adorn the doctrine we profess (Titus 2:10). The Truth we claim to have received into our hearts is “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3), and therefore the more our daily lives be conformed thereto, the clearer proof do we give that our character and conduct is regulated by *Heavenly* principles. It is by our fruits we are known (Matt.

7:16), for “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit.” Thus, it is only by our being “fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10) that we make it manifest that we are the “trees of the Lord” (Ps. 104:16). “Now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). It is not the character of our walk which qualifies us to become the children of light, but which demonstrates that we are such. Because we are the children of Him who is light (1 John 1:5) we must shun the darkness. If we have been “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:2) then only that should proceed from us which “becometh saints” (Eph. 5:3). The more we progress in godliness, the more we adorn our profession.

5. Only thus do we experience more genuine assurance. Peace becomes more stable and joy abounds in proportion as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and become more conformed practically to His holy image. It is because so many become slack in using the means of grace and are so little exercised about growing up into Christ “in all things” (Eph. 4:15) that doubts and fears possess their hearts. If they do not “give all diligence to add to their faith” (2 Peter 1:5) by cultivating their several graces, they must not be surprised if they are far from being “sure” of their Divine calling and election. It is “the diligent soul” and not the dilatory, who “shall be made fat” (Prov. 13:4). It is the one who makes conscience of obedience and keeps Christ’s commandments who is favored with love-tokens from Him (John 14:21). There is an inseparable connection between our being “led [forward] by the Spirit of God”—which intimates our voluntary occurrence—and His “bearing witness with our spirit” (Rom. 8:14,16).

6. Only thus are we preserved from grievous backsliding. In view of much that has been said above this should be quite obvious. The very term “backsliding” denotes failure to make progress and go forward. Peter’s denial of Christ in the high priest’s palace was preceded by his following Him “afar off” (Matt. 26:58), and that has been recorded for our learning and warning. The same principle is illustrated again in connection with the awful fall of David. Though it was “at the time when kings go forth to battle,” he was selfishly and lazily taking his ease, and while so lax succumbed to temptation (2 Sam. 11:1,2). Unless we “follow on to know the Lord” and learn to make use of the armor which He has provided, we shall easily be overcome by the Enemy. Only as our hearts are kept healthy and our affection set upon things above shall we be impervious to the attractions of this world. We cannot be stationary: if we do not grow, we shall decline.

7. Only thus shall we preserve the Cause of Christ from reproach. The backsliding of His people makes His enemies to blaspheme—how many have taken occasion to do so from the sad case of David! When the world sees us halting, it is gratified, being bolstered up in their idea that godliness is but a pose, a sham. Because of this, among other reasons, Christians are bidden to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). If we go backward instead of forward—and we *must* do one or the other—then we greatly dishonor the name of Christ and fill His foes with unholy glee. Rather is it “the will of God that with well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15). The longer they remain in this world, the more apparent should be the contrast between the children of light and those who are the subjects of the Prince of darkness. Very necessary then, from many considerations, is our growth in grace. —AWP

May

THE PATH OF DUTY

Part A

Occasionally we receive a letter from one of our readers who is confronted with what he regards as a perplexing situation, involving perhaps the stirring of his nest and a change of circumstances, expressing himself as very concerned to know what is “God’s will” for him. Our first reaction is to wonder how far the inquirer has been *accustomed* to make conscience of pleasing God. If the inquirer (or the reader) is only exercised about the Divine will when some pressing situation or emergency faces him, it is a bad sign, betraying a sad state of soul and making it doubtful whether such an one has been truly converted. Just as being very religious on the Sabbath but thoroughly worldly through the week is to have “a form of godliness” but “denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5), so for me to be very solicitous about ascertaining and performing the will of God when some crises arises but to have little regard what He has appointed during the general course of my life, is to place a big question-mark against the genuineness of my Christian profession.

The Most High is not at our beck and call, to be made use of only when we are in difficulty. Those who are indifferent to His honour and glory while things are going smoothly and pleasantly for them, are not likely to receive light and help from Him when they feel disposed to make an accommodation of Him in the evil day. Scripture is too plain upon this matter to be misunderstood: “he that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Prov. 28:9). Of the hypocrite it is said “will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him” (Job 27:9). No, He certainly will not. “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel...I also will laugh at your calamity...then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer...For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord...Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of [having] their own way” (Prov. 1:24-31). Compare Micah 3:4; Zechariah 7:13.

But in sharp contrast from the class mentioned above there are those who *have sought* to walk with God and avoid those things which are displeasing to Him, and when some difficulty arises, a parting of the ways suddenly confronts them, an important decision has to be made, they are anxious to know “what is God’s will” for them. It appears to us that frequently these souls

needlessly perplex themselves by the way in which they frame their question. It has long seemed to us that confusion of thought is betrayed by those who inquire “How am I to ascertain God’s mind for me when I have to choose between two alternatives?” Yea, that something more than faulty terminology is involved, is evident from the sequel which immediately follows. So far as our own observation goes the questioner fails to arrive at any clear and decisive answer, being left in a state of doubt and distress, which is neither honouring to God nor comforting for His bewildered child.

Much confusion would be avoided and much uncertainty prevented by asking “Is this, or would that be, *according to the Scriptures?*” for God’s “will” or “mind” is made known in His Word. *That* is the Rule, the sure and sufficient Rule we are to walk by, and not inward impressions of His secret will. Perhaps the reader replies, “Yes, I know the will of God is revealed in His Word on all spiritual and eternal matters, but it is about temporal things, the affairs of this life, which I am exercised about and over which I often find myself at an uncertainty.” But that should not be, dear friend. God’s Word is given to us for the express purpose of being “a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path” (Psa. 119:105), that is, our path in and through this world, which, because of its separation and alienation from God, is “a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). It is wrong, quite unwarrantable, for us to mentally draw a line between spiritual and temporal matters as though they belonged to separate departments of our life.

The present spiritual life of the Christian is lived out in this world, and it is to actuate and regulate him in all his varied concerns: “whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). A spiritual life is very much more than elevated contemplations, ecstatic feelings, or being engaged only in distinctly devotional exercises—that is the erroneous view taken of it by those who shut themselves up in monasteries and convents. A spiritual life is not a nebulous and mystical thing, but something intensely practical. A spiritual life is to be maintained and exercised by the Christian in the schoolroom, the home, the workshop, as well as in the House of prayer. It is to dominate him in all his relations, in every association with his fellows, setting before them an example of piety, honesty, unselfishness, helpfulness. In other words, the whole of his conduct is to be ordered by the precepts of Holy Writ, and not by the dictates of self-pleasing, nor by the customs of the world or the whims of “public opinion.”

In His Word God has given us rules which are pertinent to every aspect of our sojourn down here, which are to control every detail of our complex lives, so that there is no need for us to wonder “Is this right?” or “Is that wrong?” We are not left to our own erring judgment nor that of our fellows, for the Lord has supplied us with an unfailing chart and compass to direct us in our voyage to the better Land. The Scriptures not only announce explicit precepts enjoining obedience in detail but they also enunciate broad principles applicable to every sphere or situation in which Divine providence may place us. Therefore the one question for the saint to be constantly occupied about is, What does Holy Writ require of me? am I acting in accord with *its* teachings? Is my motive in harmony with what it demands? Would I be acting contrary to the Divine Rule if I entered upon such and such a course, adopted this or that fashion or followed a certain policy because my competitors do so or because my employer insists I must. Thereby a multitude of considerations are reduced to a simple and single issue.

What has been pointed out above may be summed up thus: God’s “mind” or “will” for me ever lies in my treading *the path of duty*. And that there may be no misunderstanding, let us here define our terms. What is *duty*? The word means “due to,” that which I am required to render unto another. The performance of duty is to discharge my obligations Godwards and manwards: loving

Him with all my heart and strength and my neighbour as myself. It is to render that service which I am naturally or morally bound to perform unto others. More particularly, it is the execution of my responsibilities in the place which I occupy, whether in the home, the church, or the world. The *ground* of our duty is the Divine command, which is the sole determiner of human responsibility. The *end* of our duty is the glory of God, the pleasing of Him in the task He has allotted. The *present reward* of duty is a good conscience, the peace and satisfaction of mind in knowing I have done what is right. The *path* of duty is the course which Divine providence brings me into and which the Divine precepts have marked out for me.

It is by the providence of God each of us is black or white, male or female, a man of one or of five talents. Yet it is our responsibility to trade with those talents, and if they be put to a good use, more will be entrusted to us. Yet while the providence of God is often an *index*, it is *not the rule* to walk by—for *that* we must turn to the Word. It is in the Scriptures, and there alone, the path of duty is defined for us. Therein it is termed “the path of Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:35), which we need to pray that God will “make us go in,” for by nature we are not disposed thereto, being born “like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12). Thus the path of duty is that of full obedience to God. It is “The way of holiness” (Isa. 35:8) in contrast from “the course of this world” (Eph. 2:2), which is one of *expediency* or choosing what seems easiest and pleasantest. It is “the way of wisdom” (Prov. 4:11) in distinction for the by-ways of folly. May Divine grace cause us to persevere therein. —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

5. Romans 15:13

In his preceding prayer the apostle had made request that the God of patience and consolation would grant the saints at Rome to be “like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus” (v. 5) so that amity and concord might prevail among them. He had followed this by reminding them that the Redeemer’s mission embraced not only the Jews but also the Gentiles: that the eternal purpose of God respected an elect portion from both parts of the human race (vv. 8-9). In support of which statement he made quotation of no less than four Old Testament passages, taken respectively from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets (which were the principal sections into which the Divine oracles were divided, see Luke 24:44), each of which foretold that the Gentiles would take their place alongside of the Jews in worshiping the Lord. Thus the Hebrew Christians need have no hesitation in welcoming believing Gentiles into their midst. The apostle then concluded this section of his epistle, by again supplicating the Throne of grace on their behalf, thereby evidencing his deep solicitude for them, and intimating that God alone could impart the grace necessary for obedience to the injunctions given them.

Vital instruction is to be obtained by attending closely to the connection between the verse which is to be before us and those which immediately precede. In the context Paul had cited a number of Old Testament passages which announced the salvation of the Gentiles and their union

with believing Jews. Now the prophecies of Scripture are to be viewed in a threefold manner. First, as proofs of their Divine inspiration, demonstrating as they do the omniscience of their Author in unerringly forecasting things to come. Second, as so many revelations of the will of God, announcements of what He has eternally decreed, and which must therefore come to pass. Third, as possessing a moral and practical bearing upon us: where they are predictions of judgment, they are so many *threatenings* and therefore warnings of the objects to be avoided and the evils to be shunned—as the fore-announced destruction of the Papacy bids us have nought to do with that detestable system; but where they consist of predictions of Divine blessing, they are so many *promises* for faith to lay hold of and for hope to anticipate before their actual fulfillment. It is in this third respect Paul is viewing them.

Here the apostle shows us what *use* we are to make of the Divine promises, namely, turn them into believing prayer, requesting God to make them good. As God draws near to us in promise, it is our privilege to draw near unto Him in petition. Those prophecies were so many infallible assurances that God intended to show mercy unto the Gentiles; no sooner had Paul quoted them than he bowed his knees before their Giver, thereby teaching the Roman saints, and us, how to turn the promises to practical account, instructing them *what* to ask for. In like manner when he would have the Ephesian saints beg God to enlighten their understandings, that they might know the great things of the Gospel, he set them an example by praying for that very thing (1:17,18). So here; it was as though he said “Thou hast promised that the Gentiles should hope in Thee [v. 12]. Thou art ‘the God of hope,’ then graciously work in these saints so that they ‘may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit,’ and that they too may from my example be constrained to supplicate Thee and plead this promise to the same end for the attainment of this very blessing.”

That the reader may have a more definite view of the connection we will now quote the verse before our prayer: “And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a Root of Jesse and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles: in Him shall the Gentiles trust.” That is taken from one of the great Messianic prophecies, recorded in Isaiah 11. Whatever may or may not be its ultimate accomplishment Paul was moved to make known unto us that that prediction was even then receiving fulfillment. Literally the Greek reads, “in Him shall the Gentiles *hope*,” and it is thus rendered correctly in the Revised Version. Though intimately connected, as Hebrews 11:1 shows, there is a real difference between faith and hope. Faith is more comprehensive in its range, for it believes all that God has said concerning the past, present, and future—the threatenings as well as the promises; but hope looks solely to a *future good*. Faith has to do with the *Word* promising, hope is engaged with the *thing* promised. Faith is a believing that God will do as He has said, hope is a confident looking forward to the fulfillment of the promise.

Having sought to point out the instructive connection between the apostle’s prayer and the verses immediately preceding, a word now on its *remoter context*. This prayer concludes that section of the epistle begun at 14:1, in which the apostle had labored to remove what threatened to produce an unhappy division in the company of the Roman saints. Without taking sides and expressly declaring which was in the wrong, he had laid down broad and simple principles for each to act upon, so that if their conduct was regulated thereby, Christian love and Christian liberty would alike be conserved. He set before them the example of their Master, and then showed that both Jews and Gentiles were given equal place in the Word of Prophecy. Now, to borrow the lovely language of Moule, “He clasps them impartially to his own heart in this precious and pregnant benediction, beseeching for both sides, and for all their individuals, a wonderful fullness of those blessings, in which most speedily and most surely, the spirit of their

strife would expire.” The closer a company of Christians are drawn to their Lord, the closer they are drawn to one another.

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.” The “God of hope” is both the Object and the Author of hope. He is the One who has prepared the blessings which are to be the objects of our hope, who has set them before us in the Gospel, and who by the power of the Spirit enables us to understand and believe the Gospel, which awakens motives and sets in action principles that ensure hope. The burden of Paul’s prayer was that the saints might abound in this spiritual grace, and therefore he addressed the Deity accordingly. As Matthew Henry points out, “It is good in prayer to fasten upon those names, titles and attributes of God which are most suitable to the errand we come upon and will best serve to encouragement concerning it.” A further reason why the apostle thus addressed the Deity appears from the preceding verse, where it was announced of the Lord, “in Him shall the Gentiles hope.” More literally our verse reads, “Now the God of that [or ‘the’] hope”—the One who is the Inspirer of all expectations of blessing.

This expression “the God of [that] hope” had special pertinency and peculiar suitability unto the *Gentiles*—who are mentioned by name no less than four times in the verses immediately preceding. Its force is the more apparent if we consider it in the light of Ephesians 2:11,12, where Gentile believers are reminded that in time past they “were without Christ [devoid of any claim upon Him], being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having *no hope* and without God in the world”—without any knowledge of Him, without a written revelation from Him. But the incarnation of Christ had radically altered this. The grand design of His mission was not restricted to Palestine but was worldwide, for He shed His atoning blood for sinners out of all peoples and tribes; and upon the triumphant conclusion of His mission commissioned His servants to preach the Gospel to all nations. Hence the apostle had reminded the Roman saints that God said, “rejoice ye Gentiles with His people.” He had now become *to them* “the God of hope.”

Unless God had revealed Himself in the Word of Truth we should be without any foundation of hope, but the Scriptures are windows of hope to us. This is evident from the 4th verse of our chapter: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have *hope*.” Thus the God of hope is revealed in His living oracles with the design of inspiring hope. If we would be filled with faith, joy, and peace, it must be by believing what is presented to us in Holy Writ. Before we have any true inward grounds of hope, God Himself as revealed in the Bible must be our confidence. It was by searching it that the apostle discovered there was hope for the Gentiles, and so may the most burdened heart find solid consolation therein if he will search and believe its contents. Every Divine promise is calculated to inspire the believer with hope. Therein is to be found a sure foundation to rest upon.

Let us now consider the petition the apostle here presented unto the God of hope: it was that He would “fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” This is to be considered first in its local bearing. The phrase “in believing” looks back to those blessed portions of the Old Testament which had just been quoted: it was a prayer that God would graciously enable those saints to lay hold of such promises and conduct themselves in harmony therewith. “In the fulfillment of that promise [v. 12] Christ came, and preached salvation to those who were near and to those who were afar off (Eph. 2:17). As both classes had been thus kindly received by the condescending Savior and united into one community, they should receive and love each other as brethren,

laying aside all censoriousness and contempt, neither judging nor despising one another” (C. Hodge). In other words, the apostle longed that both alike should be occupied with Christ.

Let faith and hope be duly operative, and joy and peace would displace discord and strife. “Let that prayer be granted, in its pure depth and height, and how could the ‘weak brother’ look with quite his old anxiety on the problems suggested by the dishes at a meal and by the dates of the Rabbinic calendar? And could ‘the strong’ bear any longer to lose his joy in God by an assertion, full of self, of his own insight and liberty? Profoundly happy and at rest in the Lord, whom they embrace by faith as their Righteousness and Life, and whom they anticipated in hope as their coming Glory; filled through their whole consciousness by the indwelling Spirit with a new insight into Christ, they would fall into each other’s embrace, in Him. They would be much more ready when they met to speak ‘concerning the King,’ than to begin a new stage of their not very elevating discussion. How many a church controversy now as then, would die of inanition, leaving room for living truth, if the disputants could only gravitate, as to their always most beloved theme, to the praises and glories of their redeeming Lord Himself!” (H. Moule).

As our Lord’s prayer in John 17 was not confined to His then disciples but reached forward to “them also which should believe” (v. 20), so this prayer of Paul’s is suited to all the children of God. “The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” Let it be duly noted that Paul did not hesitate *to ask for* these particular blessings. We make that remark because we very much fear that some of our readers are well-nigh afraid to cry unto God for such things: but they need not be. Fullness of spiritual joy does not unfit its possessor to live his life in this world, nor does fullness of peace produce presumption and carnal security. If such experiences were “dangerous,” as Satan would fain have us conclude, the apostle would not have sought them on behalf of his fellow Christians. From his making request for these very blessings we learn they are eminently *desirable* and furnished warrant for us to supplicate for the same, both for ourselves and our brethren.

The example which the apostle has here set before us evidences that it is not only desirable for Christians to be filled with joy and peace, but that such a delightful experience is *attainable*. “We *may* be filled with joy and peace in believing, and may abound in hope. There is no reason why we should hang our heads and live in perpetual doubt. We may not only be somewhat comforted, but we may be full of joy; we may not only have occasional quiet, but we may dwell in peace, and delight ourselves in the abundance of it. These great privileges are attainable or the apostle would not have made them the subject of prayer...The sweetest delights are still grown in Zion’s gardens, and are to be enjoyed by us; and shall they be within our reach and not be grasped? Shall a life of joy and peace be attainable, and shall we miss it through unbelief? God forbid. Let us as believers resolve that whatsoever of privilege is to be enjoyed we *will* enjoy it” (C. H. Spurgeon).

Once again we appeal to the context, for clear proof is found there that it *is* God’s revealed will for His saints to be a *rejoicing* people. In verse 10 the apostle cites a verse from the Old Testament which says, “Rejoice ye Gentiles with His people.” Israel had been given no monopoly of joy: those whom God had purposed to call from out the Nations would also share therein. If there was joy for Israel when redeemed from the house of bondage and led through the Red Sea, much more so is there for those delivered from the power of Satan and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Observe that the passage quoted is not in the form of a promise, but is a specific precept: regenerated Gentiles are expressly bidden *to* “rejoice.” Nor did the apostle stop there. As though anticipating our slowness to enter into our privileges, he added, “And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles” (v. 11)—not merely the most eminent among them but all alike. Where there is praise there is joy, for joy is a component part of it. Thus one who professes to be

a Christian and at the same time complains that he is devoid of joy and peace, acknowledges that he is failing to obey these precepts.

“The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace” intimates three things. First, that there are degrees of these blessings. A few Christians there are who enjoy them fully, but the great majority (to their shame) experience but a taste thereof. Each of us should look to God for the fullest communication of these privileges. Second, the breadth of the apostle’s words, as also his “that ye may *abound* in hope,” manifest how his heart was enlarged toward the saints and what comprehensive supplies of grace he sought for them. Third, that it is thus we honor God in prayer: by counting on the freeness of His grace. There is no straitness in Him, and there should be none in us. Since we are coming to Heaven’s King, let us “large petitions with us bring.” Has He not given us encouragement to do so? Having given His beloved Son for us and to us “how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things”! Has He not invited us to “drink, yea, drink *abundantly*” (Song of Sol. 5:1): then let our requests be in accord with His invitation and not approach Him as though He were circumscribed like unto ourselves.

That the apostle prayed for these blessings indicated they are not only desirable and attainable, but also that it is *incumbent upon us* to enter into possession of them. We cannot now attempt proof, but will here state the fact that, the things we may ask God for or to give us are, at the same time, obligations upon ourselves. Privileges and duties cannot be separated. It is the bounden *duty* of the Christian *to be joyous* and peaceful. If any should question that statement we would ask him to consider the opposite: surely none would affirm that it is a spiritual duty to be miserable and full of doubts! We do not at all deny that there is another side to the Christian’s life, that there is much both within and without the believer to make him mourn. Nor is that at all inconsistent. The apostle avowed himself to be “sorrowful,” yet in the very same breath he added “yet alway rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). Most assuredly those who claim to be accepted in the Beloved and journeying unto everlasting bliss, bring reproach upon Him whose name they bear and cause His Gospel to be evil spoken of, if they are doleful and dejected and spend most of their time in the slough of despond.

But to proceed one step further. The apostle here made known *how* these most desirable and requisite blessings may be *obtained*. First, they are to be sought in prayer, as is evident from Paul’s example. Second, they can only be attained as the heart is occupied with “the God of hope,” that is, a promising God, for the things we are to hope for are revealed in His promises. Third, these blessings come to us “*in believing*,” in faith’s laying hold of the things promised. “Fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” Many seek, though vainly, to reverse that order. They will not believe God till they feel they have joy and peace, which is like requiring flowers before the bulb has been set in the ground. But how can I have joy and peace while engaged in such a conflict—mostly a losing one—with indwelling sin? Answer: you cannot successfully oppose indwelling sin if you are joyless and full of doubts, for “the joy of the Lord is your *strength*” (Neh. 8:10)! There is no genuine joy and peace except “in believing,” and in exact proportion to our faith will be our joy and peace.

“That ye may abound in hope.” This clause informed the Roman saints, and us, the reason why the apostle made the above request, or the design he had in view for them. Established as to the past, joyous in the present, he would have them to be confident as to the future. The best is yet to be, for as yet the Christian has received but an “earnest” of his inheritance, and the more he is occupied with the Inheritance itself the better equipped he will be to press forward to it, through all difficulties and obstacles, for “*hope*” is one of the most powerful motives or springs of action: Hebrews 6:11, 12. In our day some of the Lord’s people need to be informed that the word “hope”

has quite a different meaning in Scripture from what it is accorded in human speech. On the lips of most people “hope” signifies little more than a bare wish, and often with considerable fear it will *not* be realised, being nothing better than a timid and hesitant desire that such may be obtained. But in Scripture (see e.g. Rom. 8: 25; Heb. 6:18,19) “hope” signifies a firm expectation and confident anticipation of the things God has promised. As joy and peace increase “in believing” so too does hope.

“Through the power of the Holy Spirit”: the Father is the Giver, but the Spirit is the Communicator of our graces. Though it is the Christian’s duty to be filled with joy and peace in believing and to abound in hope, yet it is only by the Spirit’s enablement such can be realised. Here, as everywhere in the Word, we find the kindred truths of our accountableness and dependency intimately connected. The joy, peace, and hope here are not carnal emotions or natural acquirements but spiritual graces, and therefore they must be Divinely imparted. Even the promises of God will not produce these graces unless they be Divinely *applied* to us. Note that it is not merely “through the operation” but “the *power* of the Holy Spirit,” for there is much in us which opposes! Nor can they be increased or even maintained by us in our own strength—though they *can* be decreased by us, through grieving the Spirit. They are to be sought by prayer, by eyeing the promises, and by looking for the enablement of the Holy Spirit. That “hope” is but a vain fancy which is not fixed upon God and inwrought by Him: “remember the word unto Thy servant upon which *Thou* hast caused me to hope” (Ps. 119:49). —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

17. Tenth Miracle - part 4

In our last chapter we dwelt mainly upon *the requirement* which was made upon Naaman when he reached the prophet’s abode: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times,” seeking to supply answers to—why was he so enjoined? what was the implication in his case? what beating has such a demand upon men generally today? what is its deeper significance? We saw that it was a requirement which revealed the uselessness and worthlessness of Naaman’s attempt to purchase his healing. We showed that it was a requirement which demanded the setting aside of his own will and submitting himself to the will of Israel’s God. We pointed out that it was a requirement which insisted that he must get down off his high horse (descend from his chariot), humbling and abasing himself. We intimated that it was a requirement which, typically, pointed to that amazing provision of the grace of God for spiritual lepers, namely, the “Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1), and by which alone defilement can be cleansed and iniquities blotted out.

“But Naaman was wroth and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper” (2 Kings 5:11). In his own country he was a person of consequence, a “great man,” commander-in-chief of the army, standing high in the favor of the king. Here in Israel the prophet had treated him as a mere nobody, paying no deference to him, employing a servant to convey his instructions. Naaman was chagrined: his pride was wounded, and because his self-importance had not been ministered to, he turned away in a huff. Elisha’s “Go and wash in Jordan seven times” was not intended to signify the means of cure, but was designed as a *test* of his heart, and strikingly did it serve its purpose. It was a call to humble himself before Jehovah: it required the repudiation of his own wisdom and the renunciation of self-pleasing; and that is at direct variance with the inclinations of fallen human nature, so much so that no one ever truly complied with this just demand of God’s until He performed a miracle of grace in the soul.

Even the most humiliating providences are not sufficient in themselves to humble the proud heart of man and render him submissive to the Divine will. One had thought that a person so desperately afflicted as this poor leper, would have been meekened and ready to comply with the prophet’s injunction. Ah, my reader, the seat of our moral disease lies too deep for external things to reach it. So fearful is the blinding power of sin that it causes its subjects to be puffed up with self-complacency and self-righteousness and to imagine they are entitled to favorable treatment even at the hands of the Most High. Aye, does not that very spirit lurk in the hearts of the regenerate! and not only lurk there, but at times moves them to act like Naaman! Has not the writer and the Christian reader never come before the Lord with some pressing need and sought relief at His hands, and then been angry because He responded to us in quite a different way from what we expected and desired? Have we not had to bow our heads for very shame as He gently reproved us with His “doest thou well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4). Yes, there is much of this Naaman spirit in each of us that needs to be mortified.

“Behold, *I thought*” said Naaman. Herein he supplies a true representation of the natural man. The sinner has his own idea of how salvation is to be obtained. It is true that opinions vary when it comes to the working out of detail, yet in all the world over, fallen man has his own opinion of what is suitable and needful. One man thinks he must perform some meritorious deeds in order to obtain forgiveness. Another thinks the past can be atoned for by turning over a new leaf and living right for the future. Yet another, who has obtained a smattering of the Gospel, thinks that by believing in Christ he secures a passport to Heaven, even though he continues to indulge the flesh and retain his beloved idols. However much they may differ in their self-concocted schemes, this one thing is common to them all: “*I thought*,” and that “*I thought*” is put over against the Word and way of God. They prefer the way that “seemeth right” to them: they insist on following out their own theorisings: they pit their prejudices and presuppositions against a “thus saith the Lord.” Reader, you perceive here the folly of Naaman, but have you seen the madness of setting *your* thoughts against the authority of the living God!

And what was it that this foolish and haughty Syrian “thought”? Why this: “he will surely come out *to me*, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.” He was willing to be restored to health, but it must be in his own way—a way in which his self-respect might be retained and his importance acknowledged. He desired to be healed provided he should also be duly honored. He had come all the way from Syria to be rid of his leprosy, but he was not prepared to receive cleansing in the manner of God’s prescribing. What madness! What a demonstration that the carnal mind is enmity against God! What proof of the fearful hold which Satan has over his victims until a stronger One delivers

them from his enthralling power! Naaman had now received what the king of Israel had failed to give him—full directions for his cure. There was no uncertainty about the prescription nor of its efficacy, would he but submit to the same: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times and thou *shalt* be clean.” But he felt slighted: such instructions suited not his inclinations; the Divine requirement accorded not with the conceits of his unhumbled heart.

What right had Naaman, a leper, to either argue or prescribe? He was a petitioner and not a legislator: he was suing for a favor, and therefore was in no position to advance any demands of his own. If such was the case and situation of Naaman, how infinitely less has any depraved and guilty sinner the right to make any terms with God! He is a criminal, justly pronounced guilty by the Divine Law. Mercy is his only hope, and it is therefore for God to say in what way mercy is to be shown him and how salvation is to be obtained. For this reason the Lord says not only “Let the wicked *forsake his way*,” but also adds “and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*” (Isa. 55:7). Man must repudiate his own ideas, abandon his own prejudices, turn away from his own schemes and reject his own preferences. If we are to enter the kingdom of Heaven we must “become as little children” (Matt. 18:3). Alas, of the vast majority of our fellows it has to be said, that they, “going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). They “*will not* come to Christ that they might have life” (John 5:40).

“In Naaman’s mind all was arranged. He pictured the scene to himself, and made himself the foremost figure in the group—the Gentile idolator waited on by the prophet of God. The incongruity of this he did not then see. We see it. God would visit him in grace, but as one who had no ground of his own to stand on. As a sinner He could meet him. As a leper He could heal him. As the captain of the hosts of the king of Syria He would not receive him. What place has a sinner before God save that of one to whom *mercy* can be shown? What place is suited to the leper save that *outside* the camp? Naaman has to learn his place. He may be wroth with the prophet, but he cannot move him. Before him he is only a leper, whatever he may appear before others. Learning his place, he has to learn his vileness. He imagined Elisha would have struck his hand over the place. A sign, a scene, he expected—not a mere word. He did not know what a defiling object he was. The priest looked on the leper to judge whether he was leprous or not. He touched him only when he was clean (Lev. 14). Of Naaman’s leprosy there was no doubt, for he had come to be healed of it. To touch him ere he was clean would only have defiled the prophet! But further, if he had been able to touch him, and so have healed him, would not man have thought there was virtue in the prophet? By sending him to the Jordan to wash, it would be clearly seen the cure was direct from God. Man has no virtue in himself—he can only be the channel of God’s grace to others. *God* must have *all* the glory of the cure, and Naaman must be taught his own condition and vileness” (C. E. Stuart).

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage” (v. 12). Naaman was incensed not only because he thought that insufficient respect had been shown to his own person, but also because he felt his country had been slighted. If it was merely a matter of bathing in some river, why could not those of his own land have sufficed? This was tantamount to dictating unto Jehovah, for it was the word of His prophet he now challenged. Shall the beggar insist on his right to choose what form the supply of his need must take! Shall the patient inform the physician what remedy will be acceptable to him! Is the guilty culprit to have the effrontery to dictate to the judge what shall be done to him! Yet a worm of the earth deems himself competent to pit his wits against the wisdom of the Ancient of Days. A Hell-deserving sinner is impudent enough to draw

up terms on which he considers Heaven is due him. But if we are to be cleansed, it can only be by the way of God's appointing and not by any of our own devising.

"He thinks this too cheap, too plain, too common, a thing for so great a man to be cured by; or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, or, if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider (1) That Jordan belonged to Israel's God, from whom he was to expect the cure, and not from the gods of Damascus; it watered the Lord's land, the holy land, and in a miraculous cure, relation to God was much more considerable than the depth of the channel or the beauty of the stream. (2) That Jordan had more than once before this obeyed the commands of Omnipotence: it had of old yielded a passage to Israel, and of late to Elijah and Elisha, and therefore was fitter for such a purpose than those rivers which had only observed the common law of their creation, and had never been thus distinguished; but above all, Jordan was the river *appointed*, and if he expected a cure from the Divine power he ought to acquiesce in the Divine will, without asking why or wherefore. It is common for those that are wise in their own conceits to look with contempt on the dictates and prescriptions of Divine wisdom, and to prefer their own fancies before them" (Matthew Henry).

"So he turned and went away in a rage." How true to life: how accurate the picture! The flesh resents the humbling truth of God and hates to be abased. And let us say here for the benefit of young preachers who are likely to read these lines: you must expect some of *your* hearers to turn from you in anger if you faithfully minister the Word of God in its undiluted purity. It has ever been thus. If the prophets of the Lord incensed their hearers, can you expect your message will be palatable to the unregenerate? If the incarnate Son of God had to say, "Because I tell you the Truth, you believe Me not" (John 8:45), can you expect the Truth to meet with a better welcome from your lips? If the chief of the apostles declared "for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10), do you expect to be popular with them? There is but one way to avoid displeasing your hearers, and that is by unfaithfulness to your trust, by carnal compromise, by blunting the sharp edge of the Sword of the Spirit, by keeping back what you know will prove unacceptable. In such an event, God will require their blood at your hand and you will forfeit the approbation of your Master.

"So he turned and went away in a rage." In this we may see the final effort of Satan to retain his victim ere Divine grace delivered him. The rage of Naaman was but the reflection of his whom he had hitherto served and who was now furious at the prospect of losing him. It reminds us of the case recorded in Luke 9. A father of a demon-possessed child had sought for help from the apostles, which they had been unable to render. As the Savior came down from the mount the poor father approached Him and He gave orders "bring thy son to Me," and we are told "and as he was yet *a coming*, the devil threw him down, and tear him" (v. 42). But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. It is frequently thus: the conflict which is waged in the soul is usually sorest just before peace is found. Lusts rage, unbelief seeks to wax supreme, the truth of sovereign grace when first apprehended is obnoxious, to be told our righteousnesses are as filthy rags stirs up enmity. Satan fills the soul with rage against God, against His truth, against His servant. Often that is a hopeful sign, for it at least shows that the sinner has been aroused from the fatal sleep of indifference.

"And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean"? (v. 13). Let us consider first the surface teaching of this verse. This gentle remonstrance was "a word spoken in season." Had Naaman remained calm and reasonable he should have perceived that what was required of him was simple and safe, and neither difficult

nor dangerous. Had the prophet prescribed some laborious and lengthy task, or ordered a drastic operation or painful remedy, probably Naaman had complied without a murmur, so why not do so when no other sacrifice was demanded of him but the humbling of his pride? “When sinners are under serious impressions, and as yet prejudiced against the Lord’s method of salvation, they should be reasoned with in meekness and love, and persuaded to make trial of its simplicity” (T. Scott). If it is necessary to rebuke their petulance and point out to them the foolishness of their proud reasoning, we should make it evident that our rebuke proceeds from a desire for their eternal welfare.

“It is a great mercy to have those about us that will be free with us, and faithfully tell us our faults and follies, though they be our inferiors. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their inferiors: Job 31:13, 14. As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly though given by the greatest and most venerable names, so we should have our ears open to good advice, though brought to us by those who are much below us: no matter who speaks, if it be well said. The reproof was modest and respectful: they call him ‘father’—for servants must honor and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection” (Matthew Henry). Alas, how far has our socialistic and Bolshevistic generation departed from the sound teaching of our Puritan forebears! How few ministers of the Gospel now proclaim the Divine injunction “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1).

It may be those servants had heard quite a lot from the Hebrew maid of the wondrous miracles that had been wrought by Elisha, and hence they were very desirous that Naaman should try out his directions. Or, perhaps it was because they were deeply devoted to their master, holding him in high esteem, and felt he was forsaking his own mercies by permitting his wounded vanity to now blind his better judgment. At any rate, they saw no sense in coming all the way from Syria and now leaving Samaria without at least making a trial of the prophet’s prescription. Such are the suggestions made by the commentators to explain the ground and spring of this action of Naaman’s attendants. Personally, we prefer to look higher and see the power of the Most High in operation, working in them both to will and to do if His good pleasure, employing them as one more link in the chain which brought about the accomplishment of His purpose; for “of Him and through Him and to Him, are *all* things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

What has been before us here is in full accord with the other things already contemplated. It seemed quite unlikely that any serious attention should be paid to the simple statement of the captive Hebrew maid, but God saw to it that her words did not fall to the ground. It appeared very much as though Naaman’s mission was blocked when the sceptical king of Israel failed to co-operate therein, but God moved Elisha to intervene and caused his royal master to carry out his order. And now that Naaman himself turned away from the prophet in a rage, it certainly looked as though the quest would prove unsuccessful. But that could not be. The Almighty had decreed that the Syrian *should* be healed of his leprosy and brought to acknowledge that the God of Israel was the true and living God; and all the powers of evil could not prevent the fulfillment of His decree. Yet accordingly as He is generally pleased to work, so here, He used human instruments in the accomplishing of His purpose. It may be concluded that, naturally and normally, those attendants had kept their place and distance, and would not have dared to remonstrate with their master while he was in such a rage. Behold the secret power of God working within them, subduing their fears, and moving them to appeal unto Naaman.

The “little maid” was not present to speak to her august master and plead with him to further his best interests. The prophet of the Lord had issued his instructions, only for them to be

despised. What, then, shall Naaman return home unhealed? No, such a thing was not possible. He was to learn there was a God in Israel and that He had thoughts of mercy toward him. But he must first be abased. Mark, then, how God acted. He moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform—oftentimes unperceived and unappreciated by us. He inclines his own followers to admonish Naaman and show him the folly of his proud reasoning. Remarkable and significant is it to observe the particular instruments the Lord here employed. It was first the *servant* maid whom He used to inform Naaman that there was a prophet in Israel by whom he could obtain healing. Then it was through his “servant” that Elisha gave the Syrian the needed instructions. And now it was his own *servants* who prevailed upon him to heed those instructions. All of this was intended for the humbling of the mighty Naaman. And, we may add, for *our* instruction: we must take the servant’s place and have the servant spirit if we would hope for God to employ us.

See here too the amazing patience and longsuffering of the Lord. Here was one who was wrothful against His faithful prophet: what wonder then had He struck him down in his tracks. Here was a haughty creature who refused to humble himself and, in effect, impudently dictated to God how he should receive healing. Had he been on his knees supplicating the Divine favor, his attitude had been a becoming one; instead, he turns his back upon God’s servant and moved away in a rage. Yet it was *then* that God acted: not against him, but *for* him, so that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And why? Because sovereign mercy had ordained him a vessel unto honor from all eternity. Let the Christian reader join with the writer in looking back to the past, recalling when we too kicked against the pricks. How infinite was the forbearance of God toward us! Though we had no regard for Him, He had set His heart upon us, and perhaps at the very time when our awful enmity against Him was most high-handedly operative He moved some one of comparative obscurity to reason with us and point out to us the folly of our ways and urge us to submit to God’s holy requirements. —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

3. Its Need

The word reconciliation means to unite two parties who are estranged. It denotes that one has given offence and the other has taken umbrage or is displeased thereby, in consequence of which there is a breach between them. Instead of friendship there is a state of hostility existing, instead of amity there is enmity, which results in separation and alienation between them. This it is which makes manifest the need for peace to be made between the estranged parties, that the wrong may be righted, the cause of the displeasure be removed, the ill-feeling cease, the breach be healed and reconciliation accomplished. The parties at variance are man and God. Man has grievously offended the Most High. He has cast off allegiance to Him, revolted from Him, despised His authority, trampled upon His commandments. The enormity of such an offence it is impossible for us to fully conceive. The heinousness of it can only be measured by the exalted dignity of the One against whom it is committed. It has been committed against the Almighty, against One who

is infinite in majesty, infinite in excellency, infinite in His sovereign rights over the creature of His own hands; and therefore it is an offence of *infinite* magnitude and turpitude.

The original offence was committed by Adam in Eden, but that fearful transgression can only be rightly understood as we recognize that Adam acted there not as a private individual but as a public person. He was Divinely constituted to be not only the father but also the federal head of the human race. He stood as the legal representative of all mankind, so that in the sight of the Divine Law what *he* did *they* did, the one transacting on the behalf of the many. The whole human race were placed on probation in the person of the first man. His trial was their trial. While he stood they stood. While he retained the approbation of God and remained in fellowship with Him, they did the same. Had he survived the trial, had he fitly discharged his responsibility, had he continued in obedience to God, his obedience had been reckoned to their account, and they had entered into the reward which had been bestowed upon him. Contrariwise, if he failed and fell, they failed and fell in him. If he disobeyed God his disobedience is imputed unto all those whom he represented, and the just but fearful curse pronounced upon him falls likewise on all for whom he transacted.

What has just been pointed out by us above, was amplified at some length in our articles on the Adamic Covenant, which appeared in this magazine some ten years ago, but as many of our present readers have never seen them it will be necessary for us now to give a brief summary of what was then said. The legal relation between Adam and his posterity may be illustrated thus. God did not deal with mankind as with a field of corn, where each stalk stands upon its own individual root; but He dealt with it as a tree, all the branches of which have one common root and trunk. If you strike with an axe at the root of a tree, the whole tree falls—not only the trunk, but also the branches and even the twigs on the branches: all wither and die. So it was with Adam in Eden. God permitted Satan to lay the axe at the root of humanity and when he fell all his posterity fell with him. At one fatal stroke Adam was severed from communion with his Maker, and as the consequence “death passed upon all men.” This is not a theory of human speculation but a fact of Divine revelation.

That Adam *was* the federal head of the human race, that he *did* act and transact in a representative character, and that the judicial consequences of his act was imputed to all those for whom he stood, is clearly taught in Romans 5. “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed [as a capital sentence] upon all men, in whom all sinned” (v. 12). “Through the offence of one many be dead” (v. 15). “The judgment was by one to condemnation” (v.16). “By one man’s offence death reigned” (v.17). “By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (v. 18). “By one man’s offence many were made [legally constituted] sinners” (v. 19). Such repetition and emphasis intimates the basic importance of the truth here revealed, and also hints at our slowness or rather reluctance to receive the same. The meaning of these declarations is too plain for any unprejudiced mind to misunderstand: it pleased God to deal with the human race as *represented* in and by Adam: “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). There is the plainly-revealed fact, and they who deny it make God a liar.

Here, then, we learn what is the formal ground of man’s judicial condemnation before God. The popular idea of what it is which renders man a sinner in the sight of Heaven is altogether inadequate and erroneous. The prevailing conception is that a sinner is one who commits and practices sin. It is true that this is the *character* of the sinner, but it certainly is not that which primarily *constitutes* him such before the Divine Law. The truth is that every member of our race enters into this world a guilty sinner, alienated from God, before ever he commits a single transgression. It is not only that he possesses a depraved nature but that he is directly “under

condemnation,” the curse of the broken Law resting upon him, and from God he is “estranged from the womb” (Ps. 58:3). We are legally constituted sinners neither by what we are nor by what we are doing, but by the disobedience of our federal head, Adam. Adam acted not for himself alone, but for all who were to spring from him, so that his act, was forensically, our act.

Here also is the only key which satisfactorily opens to us the meaning of human history and explains the universal prevalence of sin. The human race is suffering for the sin of Adam, or it is suffering for nothing at all: there is no escape from that alternative. This earth is the scene of a grim and awful tragedy. In it we behold misery and wretchedness, strife and hatred, pain and poverty, disease and death on every side. None escape the fearful entail. That “man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” is an indisputable fact. But what is the *explanation* of it? Every effect must have a previous cause. If we are not being punished for Adam’s sin, then, coming into this world we are “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), beneath the Divine judgment, corrupt and defiled, on the broad road which leadeth to destruction, *for nothing at all!* Who would contend that this was better, more satisfactory, more illuminative, than the Scriptural explanation of our ruin? Genesis 3 alone explains why human history is written in the ink of blood and tears.

The objection that such an arrangement is unjust is invalid. The principle of *representation* is a fundamental one in human society. The father is the legal head of his children during their minority: what he does binds the family. A business house is held responsible for the transactions of its agents. Every popular election illustrates the fact that a constituency will act through its representative and be bound by his acts. The heads of a state are vested with such authority that the treaties they make are binding upon the whole nation. This principle is so basic it cannot be set aside. Human affairs could not continue nor society exist without it. This is the method by which God has acted all through. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children: the posterity of Canaan were cursed for the single transgression of their parent (Gen. 9), the whole of his family stoned for Achan’s sin (Josh. 7). Israel’s high priest acted on behalf of the whole nation. One acting for others is a basic principle both of human and Divine government.

Finally, let it be pointed out that the sinner’s *salvation* is made to depend upon this very same method. Beware, then, my reader, of quarrelling with the justice of this principle of representation—the one standing for the many. On this principle we were wrecked, and by this principle only can we be rescued. If on the one hand, the disobedience of the first Adam was the judicial ground of our condemnation, on the other hand the obedience of the last Adam is the legal basis on which God justifies sinners. The substitution of Christ in the place of His people, the imputation of their sins to Him and of His righteousness to them, is the central fact of the Gospel. But the principle of being saved by what Another has done is only possible on the ground that we were lost through what another did. The two stand or fall together. If there had been no Covenant of Works there would have been no Covenant of Grace: if there had been no death in Adam there had been no life in Christ. The Christian knows that such an arrangement is just because it is part of the revealed ways of Him who is infinitely holy and righteous.

Here, then, is the Divinely revealed fact: “by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom. 5:19). Here is cause of humiliation which few think about. We are members of an accursed race, the fallen children of a fallen parent, and as such we enter this world “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18), exposed to His judicial displeasure. In the day that Adam fell the frown of the Most High came upon His children. The holy nature of God abhorred the apostate race. The curse of His broken Law descended upon all of Adam’s posterity. It is only thus we can account for the universality of human depravity and suffering. The corruption of human nature which we inherit from our first parents is a great evil, for it is the

source of all our personal sins. For God to allow this transmission of depravity is to inflict a *punishment*. But how can God punish all, unless all were guilty? The fact that all *do* share in this common punishment is proof that all sinned in Adam. Our depravity and misery are not, as such, the infliction of the Creator, but are the retribution of the Judge.

If we now repeat some of the statements made above it is that the reader may not form a wrong conception or draw a false conclusion. We are very far from teaching here that the human race is suffering for an offence in which they had no part, that innocent creatures are being condemned for the action of another which could not fairly be laid to their account. Let it be clearly understood that God punishes none for Adam's sin (if considering him as a private person), but only for *his own* sin *in* Adam. The whole human race had a federal standing in Adam. Not only was each of us seminally in his loins when God created him, but each of us was legally represented by him when God made with him the Covenant of Works. Adam acted and transacted in that Covenant as a public person, not simply as a private individual, but as the surety and sponsor of his race. The very fact that we continue breaking the Covenant of Works and disobeying the Law of God demonstrates our oneness with Adam under that Covenant. Our complicity with Adam in his rebellion is evidenced every time that we personally sin against God.

It is nothing short of downright hypocrisy for us to murmur against the justice of this arrangement or constitution while we follow in the steps of Adam. If we have nothing to do with him and are not in bondage through him, why do we not repudiate him—refuse to sin, break the chain, stand out in opposition to him, and be holy? This brings us to the second chief count in the fearful indictment against us. We take sides with Adam: we perpetuate his evil course: we make him an exemplar. The life of the unregenerate is one unbroken curse of rebellion against God. There is no genuine submission to Him, no concern for His glory, no disinterested love for Him. Self-will is our governing principle and self-pleasing our goal. Whatever religious deference may apparently be shown God, it is rendered out of self-interest—either to curry favor with Him, or to appease His anger. The things of time and sense are preferred before Him, the lies of Satan are heeded rather than the Word of Truth, and instead of humbling ourselves before Him because of our original offence in Eden, we multiply transgressions against Him.

However unpalatable it may be to proud flesh and blood, the fact is that the natural man is engaged in a warfare against God. He hates the things God loves, and loves the things He hates. He scorns the things God enjoins and pursues the things He has forbidden. He is a rebel against the Divine government, refusing to be in subjection to the Divine will. The moment his own will is crossed by the dispensations of Providence he murmurs. He is unthankful for the mercies of which he is the daily recipient, and less mindful of the Hand that so freely ministers to him than the horse or the mule to the one who feeds him. He continually growls at his lot, constantly grumbles at the weather, and is a stranger to contentment. In short “the carnal mind is enmity against God and is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him” (1 Cor. 2:14)—contrary to his corrupted mind, at variance with his vitiated desires. “There is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11).

There is then a breach—a real, a broad, a fearful breach—between God and man. In the very nature of the case it cannot be otherwise. That breach has been made by sin. God is holy, so holy that He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13). Sin has given infinite offence unto God, for it is that “abominable thing” which He hates (Jer. 44:4). Sin is a species of spiritual anarchy, a defiance of the triune Jehovah: it is a saying in actions “Let us break Their bands, and cast away Their cords from us” (Ps. 2:3)—let us disregard the Divine laws

and be lords of ourselves. Not only is sin highly obnoxious to the infinitely-pure nature of God, but it is flagrant affront to His government, being rebellion against it, and therefore as the moral Rector of the universe He declares His displeasure against the same. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18)—an open display of which was made of old when the flood swept the earth clean of His enemies.

Here then is the black background which discovers to us the *need for* reconciliation: “your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you” (Isa. 59:2). He is displeased with us and His justice cries out for our destruction. “They rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their *Enemy*” (Isa. 63:10). Unspeakably solemn is that, the terrible import of which is utterly beyond our powers to conceive. That the great I Am, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe has become man’s “Enemy,” so that His anger burns against him. This was evidenced at the beginning, for right after God had arraigned the guilty culprits in Eden, we are told that “He *drove out* the man, and He placed cherubims at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). Man was now cut off from access to the One whom he had so grievously offended and turned to be his Enemy. And man is also at enmity with Him.

How little is it realised that there is an immeasurable gulf between God and the sinner. And little wonder that so few have even the vaguest idea of the same. All human religion is an attempt to gloss over this fearful fact. And with exceedingly rare exceptions the religion of present-day Christendom is but a studied effort to hide the awful truth that man has forfeited the favor of God and is barred from His holy presence, yea that “the Lord is *far from* the wicked” (Prov. 15:29). The religion of the day proceeds on the assumption that God is favorably disposed even unto those who spend most of their time trampling His commandments beneath their feet: that providing they will assume an outwardly devout demeanor, they have but to petition Him and their supplications are acceptable unto Him. Priests and parsons who encourage such a delusion are but throwing dust in the eyes of the people: “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord” (Prov. 15:8).

The religion of our day deliberately ignores the fact of *sin*, with its terrible implications and consequences. It leaves out of sight that sin has radically changed the original relationship which existed between God and His creatures. It conceals the truth that man is outlawed by God and is “far off” (Eph. 2:12,13) from Him. It tacitly denies that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8), that He “heareth not sinners” (John 9:31). Yea it insists that they *can* please Him with their hypocritical piety and sanctimonious playacting. But the Holy One cannot be deceived by their pretences nor bribed by their offerings. Nor can they so much as draw nigh unto Him while they despise and reject the One who is the only Way of approach to Him. Make no mistake upon this point, my reader: until that awful breach which sin has made be healed, you can have no fellowship with God; until He be reconciled to you and you to Him, He will accept nought at your hands nor can you obtain audience with Him. Unless reconciliation be effected you will be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”(2 Thess. 1:9).

The need for reconciliation is unmistakable. A fearful breach exists, brought about by the entrance of sin, and continued by the perpetuation of sin. That breach radically altered the relationship of God to man and of man to God. Not only had man now forfeited His favor, but he had incurred His wrath. God could no longer view him with approbation, but instead regarded him with detestation. While man ceased to be a loyal and loving subject, becoming a rebellious outlaw. And “what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” None: they are opposites, the one antagonistic to the other. That breach

between God and man, between righteousness and unrighteousness, will be demonstrated in the distance between Heaven and Hell. Therefore did Christ represent Abraham as saying to Dives in the place of torment, “Between us and you there is a *great gulf* fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us” (Luke 16:26). It is only by God’s reconciliation to us and of our reconciliation to God the fearful breach can be healed. How that is effected we hope to show in future articles. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4. Its Nature

We have now arrived at what is really the most important part of our subject, but which is far from being the easiest to handle. If we are to be preserved or delivered from erroneous views at this point it is very necessary that we should form a right concept of what spiritual growth is *not* and what it actually *is*. Mistaken ideas thereon are widely prevalent and many of God’s own people have been brought into bondage thereby. There are those who have made little or no advancement in the school of Christ that fondly imagine they have progressed considerably, and are very hurt if others do not share their opinion; nor is it any simple task to disillusion them. On the other hand, some who have grown considerably know it not, and even conclude they have gone backward; nor is it any easy matter to assure them they have been needlessly disparaging themselves. In either case the mistake is due to measuring themselves by the wrong standard, or in other words, through ignorance of what spiritual growth really consists of.

If the reader met a half dozen people out of as many different sections of Christendom whom he is warranted in regarding as children of God, and asked them to define for him their ideas of spiritual growth, he would probably be surprised at the diversity and contrariety of the answers given. As the reception of one part of the Truth prepares us to take in another, so the admittance of error paves the way for the coming in of more. Moreover, the particular denomination to which we belong and the distinctive form of *its* “line of things” (2 Cor. 10:16) has a powerful effect in determining the type of Christians reared under its influences—just as the nature of the soil affects the plants growing in it. Not only are his theological views cast into a certain mold and his concept of the practical side of Christianity largely determined thereby, but his devotional life and even his personal demeanor are also considerably affected by the same. Consequently there is much similarity in the “experience” of the great majority belonging to that particular company. This is largely the case with all the principal evangelical denominations, as it is also with those who profess to be “outside all systems.”

Just as a trained ear can readily detect variations of inflection in the human voice and locate by a person’s speech and accent which part of the country he hails from, so one with wide

interdenominational associations has little difficulty in determining, even from a brief talk on spiritual things, which sect his companion belongs to: no label is necessary, his affiliation is plainly stamped upon him. And if in the course of the conversation he should ask his acquaintance to describe what he considered to be a mature Christian, his portrayal would naturally and necessarily be shaped by the particular ecclesiastical type he was best acquainted with. If he belonged to one particular group, he would picture a sombre and gloomy Christian; but if to a group at the opposite pole, a confident and joyous one. The kind most admired in some circles is a deep theologian; in others, the one who decries “dry doctrine” and is occupied chiefly with his subjective life. Yet another would value neither theology nor experience, considering that the soul’s contemplation of Christ was the beginning and end of the Christian life; while still others would regard as eminent Christians those who were most zealous and active in seeking to save sinners.

In attempting to describe the character of Christian progress, or as it is more frequently termed, growth in grace, we shall therefore seek to avoid a mistake often made thereon by many denominational writers—a mistake which has had most injurious effects on a large number of their readers. Instead of bringing out what the Scriptures teach thereon, only too often they related their own experiences; instead of treating the essentials of spiritual growth, they dwelt upon circumstantialia; instead of delineating those general features which are common to all who are the subjects of gracious operations, they depicted those exceptional things which are peculiar only to certain types—the neurotic or melancholy. This is much the same as though artists and sculptors took for their models only those with unusual deformities, instead of selecting an average specimen of humanity. True, it would be a human being that was imaged, yet it could convey only a misrepresentation of the common species. Alas that, in the religious as well as the physical realm, a freak attracts more attention than a normal person.

We shall not then relate our own spiritual history. First, because we are not now writing to satisfy the unhealthy curiosity of a certain class of readers who delight in perusing such things. Second, because we regard the private experience of the Christian as being too sacred to expose to the public view. It has long seemed to us that there is such a thing as spiritual unchastity: the inner workings of the soul are not a fit subject to be laid bare before others—”The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy” (Prov. 14:10). Third, because we are not so conceited as to imagine that our own particular conversion and the ups and downs of our Christian life are of sufficient importance to narrate. Fourth, because there are probably some features about our conversion and some things in our subsequent spiritual history which have been duplicated in very few other cases, and therefore they would only be calculated to mislead others if they should look for a parallel in themselves. Finally, because as intimated above, we deem it more honoring to God and far more helpful to souls to confine ourselves to the teaching of His Word on this subject.

But before proceeding we must anticipate an objection which is almost certain to be brought against what has been said in the last paragraph. Did not the apostle Paul describe *his* conversion! And may not, should not, we do so too? Answer: first, Paul is the only New Testament writer who gave us any account of his conversion or related anything of his subsequent experiences. It would be a reversal of all sound reasoning to make an exception into a rule or conclude that an isolated case established a precedent. The very fact that Paul’s case stands alone, indicates it is *not* to be made an example of. Second, his experience was not only exceptional but unique: the means used was a supernatural appearance to him of the ascended Christ, so that he had a physical sight of Him and heard His voice with his natural ears—a thing which none has done since. Third, the

account of his conversion was not made to intimate Christian friends, nor before a local church when applying for membership: but instead before his enemies (Acts 22), and Agrippa—virtually his judge—when making defence for his life. Thus the circumstances were extraordinary and afford no criterion for ordinary cases. Finally, his experience on the Damascus road was necessary to qualify him for the apostolic office: Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 15:8, 9 and cf. 2 Corinthians 12:11).

Once more it seems advisable to take up first the negative side of our subject ere turning to the positive. So many mistaken notions now hold the field that they need uprooting if the ground is to be prepared: or to drop the figure, if the minds of many are to be fitted to take in the Truth. Our readers differ so much in the type of ministry they have sat under, and some of them have formed such fallacious views of what spiritual growth consists of, that if we now described the principal elements of Christian progress, one and another would probably consider, according to what they have imbibed, that we had omitted the most important features. We shall therefore devote the remainder of this article to pointing out as many as possible of those things which, though often regarded as such, are *not* essential parts of spiritual growth, in fact no part thereof at all. Though this may prove rather wearisome to some, we would ask them to bear with us and offer up a prayer that it may please God to use the paragraphs which follow to the enlightenment of those who are befogged.

1. *Weight of years.* It is often considered that spiritual growth is to be measured by the calendar, that the length of time one has been a Christian will determine the amount of progress he has made. Certainly it ought to do so, yet in fact it is frequently no index at all. God often pours contempt on the distinctions made by men: out of the mouths of “babes and sucklings” has He perfected praise (Matt. 21:16)! It is generally supposed that those with snowy locks are much more spiritual than young believers, yet if we examine what is recorded of the closing years of Abraham, Isaac, David, Hezekiah and others of Israel’s kings, we find reason to revise or qualify such a conclusion. True, some of the choicest saints we have ever met were “patriarchs” and “mothers in Israel,” yet they have been exceptions rather than the rule. Many Christians make more real progress in piety the first year than in the next ten that follow.

2. *Increasing knowledge.* We must distinguish between things that differ, namely, a knowledge of spiritual things and actual spiritual knowledge. The former can be acquired by the unregenerate: the latter is peculiar to the children of God. The one is merely intellectual and theoretical; the other is vital and effectual. One may take up “Bible study” in the same way as another would the study of philosophy or political economy. He may pursue it diligently and enthusiastically. He may obtain a familiarity of the letter of Scripture and a proficiency in understanding its terms, far in advance of the hard-working Christian who has less leisure and less natural ability; yet what is such knowledge worth if it affects not the heart, fails to transform the character and make the daily walk pleasing to God! “Though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge...and have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). Unless our “Bible study” is conforming us, both inwardly and outwardly, to the image of Christ, it profits us not.

3. *Development of gifts.* An unregenerate person taking up the study of the Bible may also be one who is endowed with considerable natural talents, such as the power of concentration, a retentive memory, a persevering spirit. As he prosecutes his study his talents are called into play, his wits are sharpened and he becomes able to converse fluently upon the things he has read, and he is likely to be sought after as a speaker and preacher; and yet there may not be a spark of Divine life in his soul. The Corinthians grew fast in gifts (1 Cor. 1:4,7), yet they were but “babes” and “carnal” (3:2,3), and needed to be reminded of the “more excellent way” of love to God and

their brethren. Ah, my reader, you may not have the showy gifts of some, nor be able to pray in public as others, but if you have a tender conscience, an honest heart, a forbearing and forgiving spirit, you have that which is far better.

4. *More time spent in prayer.* Here again, to avoid misunderstanding, we must distinguish between things that differ: natural prayer and spiritual. Some are constitutionally devotional and are attracted by religious exercises, as others are by music and painting; and yet they may be total strangers to the breathings of God's Spirit in their souls. They may set aside certain parts of the day for "a quiet time with God" and have "a prayer list" as long as their arm, and yet be utterly devoid of the spirit of grace and supplications. The Pharisees were renowned for their "long prayers." The Mohammedan with his "praying mat," the Buddhist with his "praying wheel," and the Papist with his "beads," all illustrate the same principle. It is quite true that growth in grace is ever accompanied by an increased dependence upon God and a delighting of the soul in Him, yet that does not mean that we can measure our spirituality by the clock—by the amount of time we spend on our knees.

5. *Activity in service.* In not a few circles this has been and still is made the test of one's spirituality. As soon as a young person makes a Christian profession he is set to work, either in the Sunday school, the Christian endeavor society, or taking part in open-air meetings. It matters not how ill-qualified he is, lacking as yet (in many instances) even a rudimentary knowledge of the fundamentals of the faith, nevertheless he is required or at least expected to engage forthwith in some form of what is plausibly termed "service for Christ." But the Epistles will be searched in vain for a warrant for such things: they contain not so much as a single injunction for young believers to engage in "personal work." On the contrary they are enjoined to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1) and the young women are to be "keepers at home" (Titus 2:5). Many have reason to lament "*they* [not God!] made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard [spiritual graces] have I not kept" (Song of Sol. 1:6).

6. *Happy feelings.* Considerable allowance needs to be made for both temperament and health. Some are naturally more vivacious and emotional than others, of a more lively and cheerful spirit, and consequently they engage in singing rather than sighing, laughter than weeping. When such people are converted they are apt to be more demonstrative than others, both in expressing gratitude to the Lord and in telling people what a precious Saviour is theirs. Yet it would be a great mistake to suppose that they had received a larger measure of the Spirit than their more sober and equable brethren and sisters. A shallow brook babbles noisily but "still waters run deep"—yet there are exceptions here, as the Niagara Falls illustrate. Increasing holiness is not to be gauged by our inward comforts and joy, but rather by the more substantial qualities of faith, obedience, humility and love. When a fire is first kindled there is more smoke and crackling, but after, though the flame has a narrower compass, it has more heat.

7. *Becoming more miserable.* Yet, strange as it may sound to some of our readers, there are not a few professing Christians who regard *that* as one of the principal elements of spiritual growth. They have been taught to regard assurance as presumption and Christian joy as lightness, if not levity. Should they experience a brief season of peace "in believing," they are fearful that the Devil is deceiving them. They are occupied mostly with indwelling sin, rather than with Christ. They hug their fears and idolize their doubts. They consider that the slough of despond is the only place of safety, and are happiest when most wretched. That is by no means an exaggerated picture, but sadly true to a certain type of religious life, where long-facedness and speaking in whispers are regarded as evidences of a "deep experience" and marks of piety. True,

the more light God gives us the more we perceive our sinfulness, yet, though humbled thereby, the more thankful should we be for the cleansing blood.

8. *Added usefulness.* But God is sovereign and orders His providences accordingly. Unto one He opens doors, unto another He closes them, and to His good pleasure we are called upon to submit. Some streams He replenishes, but others are suffered to dry up: thus it is in His dealings with His people—by providing or withholding favorable openings for them to be of spiritual help to their fellows. It is therefore a great mistake to measure our growth in grace and our bringing forth of good fruit by the largeness or smallness of our opportunities of doing good. Some have larger opportunities when young than when they become older, yet if the hearts of the latter are right, God accepts the will for the deed. Some that have the most grace are stationed in isolated places and are largely unknown to their fellow Christians, yet the eye of God sees them. Shall we say that the flowers on the mountain side are wasted because no human eye admires them or that the songs of birds in the forests are lost on the air because they regale not the ears of men!

9. *Temporal prosperity.* Though it is shared by few of our fellow ministers, yet it is the firm conviction of this writer that, as a general rule, temporal adversity and straitened circumstances in the present life of a Christian is a mark of God's displeasure; an evidence that he has choked the channel of blessing: see Psalm 84:11; Jeremiah 5:25; Matthew 6:33, and compare the January cover-page article. On the other hand we should certainly be drawing an erroneous conclusion if we regard the flourishing affairs of an unregenerate professor as a proof that the smile of Heaven rested upon him; rather would it be the case of one who was being fattened for the "day of slaughter" (James 5:5). Many such an one receives his good things in this world, but in the world to come is tormented in the flame (Luke 16:24,25). Even among God's own people there may be those who yield to a spirit of covetousness, and in some cases the Lord gratifies their carnal desires, but "sends leanness into their souls" as He did with Israel of old.

10. *Liberality in giving.* We do not believe any heart can remain selfish and miserly where the love of God has been shed abroad in it, but rather that such an one will esteem it a privilege as well as duty to support the cause of Christ and minister to any brother in need, according as God has prospered him, yet it is a very misleading standard to judge a person's spirituality by his generosity: 1 Corinthians 13:3. For some years we lived in districts where the principal denominations taught insistently that the church's spirituality was manifested by the amount it contributed to missions; yet while numbers of them raised very considerable sums, vital godliness was mostly conspicuous by its absence. Millions of pounds have recently been given to the "Red Cross society" by those making no Christian profession at all! Never were the coffers of the churches so full as they are to-day, and never were the churches so devoid of the Spirit's unction and blessing! —AWP

June

THE PATH OF DUTY

Part B

In our last we pointed out (1) that God's will for us is revealed in His Word; (2) that His Word is to regulate all our ways and control all our conduct; (3) that no matter what situation we be in or what emergency may arise, God's Word is all-sufficient as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path; (4) that it therefore follows, the path of duty is defined for us in the Divine commandments. Yet there are some who say that they find it more difficult to *discern* their duty than to actually *perform* it once their duty is clearly perceived. But this should not be. That is tantamount to saying they have no light on their path, that they are in darkness, and surely that is a sad acknowledgement from anyone who professes to be a "child of light" (Eph. 5:8). Did not the Savior declare "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). If then I find myself in darkness, must not the fault be entirely mine? Then should I not examine myself and seek to discover the reason of it?—"is there not a cause"! Was it because I yielded to the pleasing of self and ceased to "follow" Him who is the Light? If so, my duty is plain I must humbly and penitently confess my failure to God and have the wrong put right, or my darkness will deepen.

Perhaps some reader replies, What you have said above hardly covers my case. The perplexity which confronts me is this: I find myself at the parting of the ways, and I am not clear whether I should turn to the right hand or to the left. My situation has drastically changed: the death of a loved one, the calling-up of my employer, or some other war emergency, has suddenly altered my circumstances. I have to make a decision, and what is for the best I am at a loss to discover. What am I to do? "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5,6). Confer not with flesh and blood, for if you consult your Christian friends the probability is that no two will offer the same counsel, and you will be more perplexed than ever. Go to the Lord Himself, acknowledge His Proprietorship over you, mix faith with this promise of His, turn it into definite and earnest prayer and *expect* an answer of peace from Him, trusting Him for the same.

Consider the case of Eliezer in Genesis 24. His master bade him journey from Canaan to Mesopotamia in search for a wife for his son Isaac. If ever a man was assigned a difficult task it

was this one. But his duty was clear, for obedience to his master required him to enter upon this quest. Accordingly we find him setting out on his mission. But observe how he acted. When he arrived at the outskirts of the city of Nahor, he made his camels to kneel down by the well, and then he said “O Lord God of my master Abraham, I beseech Thee send me good speed this day” (v. 12). It was the hour when the maidens came to draw water from the well, so Eliezer asked the Lord to give him a sign whereby he might “know” which of them was the appointed wife for Isaac (v. 14). And the Lord did not fail him, but honored his faith. In the sequel we find Eliezer bowed in worship and saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being *in the way* [of duty] the Lord *led* me” (v. 27). And that is recorded for our instruction and encouragement.

Do not act hastily or impulsively, for God says “He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa. 28:16). But some reader may reply “I am obliged to make a prompt decision in the matter before me.” Even so, if you have been living as becometh a child of God, there ought to be no difficulty: “the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matt. 6:22). That is a figurative way of saying, if you have an undivided heart, if your dominant aim be the pleasing of God, then your mind will be illumined and able to perceive clearly the path of duty. Perplexity is occasioned by conflicting interests swaying me, when opposing motives seek to actuate me, when the pleasing of self comes into competition with the glorifying of God. Keep steadily in view that the thing you have to decide is not which is the easier or most congenial path—the right hand or the left—but which is my *duty*?

Perhaps you reply, but that is my difficulty: how am I to decide *what is* my duty? Well, ponder the *negative* side: it is never right to do wrong, and therefore it can never be the Christian’s duty to do anything which God’s Word forbids, nor can it ever be his duty to enter into any position which would prevent him doing what Scripture enjoins. For example, if one alternative be going into debt my duty is plain, for Scripture says “Owe no man anything” (Rom. 13:8); or if it be to enter into a partnership or any other union with an unbeliever, God’s Word forbids it: “Be ye not unequally yoked together” (2 Cor. 6:14); or if a worldly employer requires me to do work on the Sabbath day, then he is asking me *to sin* by breaking the fourth commandment; or if a Christian mother be ordered to enter a position wherein she could no longer care for her little ones, her duty would be clear, for “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6) is a privilege and responsibility which she cannot delegate unto others.

But suppose the *Government* should demand from me what is against my conscience, as the performing of manual labor on the Sabbath, does not Scripture itself bid me “be subject unto the higher powers?” God’s people most certainly ought to be models of law-abiding citizens: righteous and merciful in all dealings with their fellows, doing unto others as they would be done by. They are Divinely enjoined to “render tribute to whom tribute is due,” and thus to pay their taxes promptly and unmurmuringly. Nevertheless they must ever remember *God’s* claims upon them, and never allow the fear of man to prevent their meeting His claims. We are to submit unto the Government so long as its requirements do not clash with the demands of God, but no further. When the king of Babylon issued a decree that all in his dominions should fall down and worship the golden image he had set up, the three Hebrews rightly refused to do so; and when a later king issued an idolatrous edict, Daniel disregarded it; and in each case God vindicated their fidelity to Him. It is never right to do wrong, no matter who commands it, or what may be the emergency.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (Rom. 13:1,2). Is

that an exhortation which requires *unqualified* submission to the governing power of a country? Does it signify that it is not permissible for the Christian to make any resistance unto magistrates, no matter what may be the nature of the laws they enact? Some have insisted this inspired injunction is to be taken without any modification. They point out it was given to Christians in the days of Nero, requiring them to be fully obedient unto the Roman emperors even though their edicts were destructive of Christianity itself. But such an understanding of these verses is quite untenable, failing as it does to leave any place for the superior claims of *God*. Children are commanded “obey your parents in *all* things” (Col. 3:20), yet if they ordered to *steal* it would be the child’s duty to disobey them!

The duty of obedience to those in authority is enforced by Holy Writ: see 1 Peter 2:13, 14. The civil government (whatever its form) is a Divine institution, and therefore to resist magistrates in the exercise of their lawful authority is disobedience to God. Yet since their authority is only a delegated one, delegated by God Himself, then they *transcend* their rights if they require anything which is inconsistent with our obedience to God; and when such a case arises it becomes the Christian’s duty to disobey them. The “power” to which Christians are bidden to be subject is a righteous and benevolent one, and not an iniquitous and malevolent one: “he is the minister of God to thee *for good*” (Rom. 13:4), but he ceases to be “the minister of God to thee” if he demands what is evil. Wives are Divinely ordered to be “subject to their own husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:24), yet if they forbade their wives to read the Scriptures it would be their duty to disobey them. Wherever human law conflicts with the Divine “we must obey *God* rather than men” clearly defines our duty. (*D. V. to be continued*). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

6. Romans 15:33

“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” The “God of peace”: contrary to the general run of the commentators, we regard this Divine title as expressing, first of all, what God is *in Himself*, that is, as abstracted from relationship with His creatures and apart from His operations and bestowments. He is Himself the Fountain of peace. Perfect tranquility reigns in His whole Being. He is never ruffled in the smallest measure, never perturbed by anything, either within or without Himself. How could He be? Nothing can possibly take Him by surprise, for “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). Nothing can ever disappoint Him, for “of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things” (Rom. 11:36). Nothing can to the slightest degree disturb His perfect equanimity, for He is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Consequently perfect security ever fills Him: that is one component element of His essential glory. Ineffable peace is one of the jewels in the diadem of Deity.

Living as we now are in a war-torn and war-weary world, let us for a season gird up the loins of our minds and endeavor to contemplate something vastly different, something infinitely more

excellent, namely, the One who is a total Stranger to unrest and disquietude, One who enjoys undisturbed calm, “the God of *peace*.” It seems strange that this glorious excellency of the Divine character is so little dwelt upon by Christian writers. The sovereignty of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, the immutability of God, have frequently been made the theme of devout pens; but the peace of God Himself has received scarcely any attention. Numerous sermons have been preached upon “the God of Love” and “the God of all grace,” but where shall we find any on “the God of *peace*,” except it be as the reconciled God? Yet only once in all the Scriptures is He specifically designated “the God of love,” and only once “the God of all grace,” yet five times over is He addressed or referred to as “the God of peace.” As such a perpetual calm characterises His whole Being: He is infinitely blessed in Himself.

The names and titles of God make known to us His Being and character, and it is by meditating upon each one of them in turn, by mixing faith therewith, by giving all of them a place in our hearts and minds, that we are enabled to form a better and fuller concept of who He is and what He is in Himself, His relationship unto and His attitude toward us. God is the Fountain of all good, the Sum of all excellency. Every grace and virtue we perceive in the saints are but so many scattered rays which have emanated from Him who is Light. We not only do Him a great injustice but we are largely the losers ourselves if we habitually think and speak of God according to *only one* of His titles, be it “the Most High” on the one hand, or “our Father” on the other. Just as we need to read and ponder *every* part of the Word if we are to become acquainted with God’s revealed will and be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” so we need to meditate upon and make use of *all* the Divine titles if we are to form a well-rounded and duly-balanced concept of His perfections and realise what a God is ours—His absolute sufficiency for us.

“The God of peace.” According to the usage of this expression in the New Testament and in view of the teaching of Scripture as a whole concerning the Triune Jehovah and peace, we believe it will be best opened up to the reader if we make use of the following outline. This title “the God of peace” tells us, first of all, what He is essentially, namely, the Fountain of peace. Second, it announces what He is economically or dispensationally, namely, the Ordainer or Covenantor of peace. Third, it reveals what He is judicially, namely, the Provider of peace—a reconciled God. Fourth, it declares what He is paternally, namely, the Giver of peace to His children. Fifth, it proclaims what He is governmentally, namely, the Orderer of peace in the churches, and in the world. The meaning of these terms will become plainer and simpler, we trust, as we fill in our outline.

First, “the God of peace” tells us what He is *essentially*, that is, what God is in Himself. As pointed out above, peace is one of grand perfections of the Divine nature and character. We regard this title as referring not so much to what God is absolutely, nor only to the Father, but to the *Triune* Jehovah. First, because there is nothing in the context or in the remainder of the verse which requires us to limit this prayer to any particular person in the Godhead. Second, because we should ever take the terms of Scripture in their widest latitude and most comprehensive meaning when there is nothing obliging us to restrict their scope. Third, because it is a fact, a Divinely-revealed truth, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are alike “the God of peace.” Nor could there be any force to the objection that since *prayer* is here made unto “the God of peace” we are obliged to regard the reference as being to the Father, for in Scripture prayer is also made to the Son and to the Spirit. True, the reference in Hebrews 13:20 is to the Father, for He is there distinguished from “our Lord Jesus,” but since no such distinction is made here, we decline to make any.

That this title belongs to the Father scarcely needs any arguing, for the opening words of the salutation found at the beginning of most of the New Testament epistles will readily occur to the reader: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3 etc.)—“grace” from Him as He is “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10), “peace” from Him as “the God of peace.” The added words of that salutation “and the Lord Jesus Christ” establishes the same fact concerning the Son, for grace and peace could not proceed from Him unless He were also the Fountain of both. It will be remembered that in Isaiah 9:6 He is expressly denominated “the Prince of peace,” which coming immediately after His other titles there,—“The mighty God, The everlasting Father”—shows that He is “the Prince of peace” in His essential Person. In 2 Thessalonians 3:16 Christ is designated “the Lord of peace,” Hebrews 7:2 tells us He is the “King of peace,” typed out as such by Melchizedek the priest-king. In Romans 16:20 the apostle announced, “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” and in the light of Genesis 3:15 there can be no doubt that the reference is immediately unto the incarnate Son.

Less is explicitly revealed in Scripture concerning the Person of the Holy Spirit, because He is not presented to us objectively, like the Father and the Son, inasmuch as He works within and indwells the saints. Nevertheless, clear and full proof is given in the Sacred Oracles that He is *God*, co-essential, coequal, and co-glorious with the Father and the Son. It is a most serious mistake to conclude from theologians referring to Him as “the third Person” of the Godhead that He is in any wise inferior to the other Two, as a careful examination of Scripture and a comparison of one passage with another will demonstrate. If in Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 He is mentioned after the Father and Son, in Revelation 1:4, 5 He is named (as “the seven Spirits,”—the Spirit in His fullness) before Jesus Christ, while in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 and Ephesians 4:4-6 He is named *before* both the Son and the Father—such variation of order manifesting Their co-equality. Thus, as co-equal with the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit must also be “the God of peace,” which is evidenced by His communicating Divine peace to the hearts of the redeemed. When He descended from heaven on our baptized Savior, it was in the form of a “dove” (Matt. 3:16)—the bird of peace.

Second, “the God of peace” announces what He is *dispensationally*, in the economy of redemption, namely, the Ordainer or Covenantor of peace. This is clear from Hebrews 13:20, 21 where the apostle prays, “Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will.” It was specifically as “the God of peace” that the Father delivered our Surety from the tomb, “through the blood of the everlasting covenant,” that is, on the ground of that blood which ratified and sealed the great Compact which had been made between Them before the foundation of the world. Reference is made to that Compact in Psalm 89:3, where the allusion is to the antitypical David or “Beloved,” as verses 27, 28 conclusively prove. In His foreviews of the entrance of sin into the world, with the fall of His elect in Adam, and the breach that made between Him and them, alienating the One from the other, God graciously purposed to effect a reconciliation and secure a permanent peace on a righteous basis, a basis which paid homage to His authority and honored His Law.

A “covenant” is a mutual agreement between two parties, wherein a certain work is proposed and a suitable reward promised in return. In the Everlasting Covenant the two parties were the Father and the Son. The task assigned the Son was that He should become incarnate, render unto the Law a perfect obedience in thought and word and deed, and then endure its penalty on behalf of His guilty people, thereby offering unto the offended God (considered as Governor and Judge) an adequate atonement, satisfying His justice, magnifying His holiness, and bringing in an

everlasting righteousness. The reward promised was that God would raise from the dead the Surety and Shepherd of His people, exalting Him to His own right hand high above all creatures, conforming them unto the image of His Son, and having them with Himself in glory forever and ever. The Son's voluntary compliance with the proposal appears in His "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God," and all that He did and suffered was in fulfillment of His covenant agreement. The Father's fulfillment of His part of the contract, in bestowing the promised reward, is fully revealed in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit was the Witness and Recorder of that Covenant.

Now that everlasting Compact is expressly designated "the Covenant of peace" in Isaiah 54:10, Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26. In that Covenant Christ stood as the Representative of His people, transacting in their name and on their behalf, holding all their interests dear to His heart. In that Covenant, in compliance with the Father's will and from His wondrous love for them, Christ agreed to enter upon the most exacting engagement and to undergo the most fearful suffering, in order that they might be delivered from the judicial wrath of God and have peace with Him, that there might be perfect amity and concord between God and them. That engagement was faithfully discharged by Christ and the peace which God eternally ordained has been effected, and in due course the Father brings each of His elect into the good of it. It is to that same Eternal compact that Zechariah 6:12, 13 alludes: "the counsel of peace shall be between them Both" (v. 13). That "counsel of peace" or mutual good-will was this "Covenant of peace," and the "between Them Both," between "The Man whose name is the Branch" and Jehovah "the Lord of hosts" (v. 12); and the "counsel" concerned Christ's building of the Church (Eph. 2:21) and His exaltation to the throne of glory.

Third, "The God of peace" reveals what He is *judicially*, namely, the Provider of peace, a reconciled God. That which is to here engage our attention is the actual outworking and accomplishment of what has been before us in the last division. Of old God said concerning His people "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord: thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11). Yes, despite their apostasy from Him in the Adam Fall, despite the guilt that rested upon them for their legal participation therein, and despite their own multiplied transgressions against Him, there had been no change in His everlasting love for them. A real and fearful breach had been made, and as the Moral Governor of the universe God would not ignore it; nay, as the Judge of all the earth His condemnation and curse rested upon them. Nevertheless His heart was toward them and His wisdom found a way whereby the horrible breach might be healed and His banished people restored to Himself, and that not only without compromising His holiness and justice but by glorifying the one and satisfying the other. God determined to put away their sins and secure reconciliation.

"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law" (Gal. 4:4,5). It was in order to carry out what had been agreed upon in the Everlasting Covenant that God sent forth His Son. It was in order to provide an adequate compensation to His Law that God's Son was made of a woman, that in our nature He should satisfy the requirements of the Law, put away our sins and bring in everlasting righteousness. It was in order to redeem His people from the curse of the Law that the Son lived and died and rose again. It was in order to make peace with God, to placate His wrath, to secure an equitable and stable peace that Christ obeyed and suffered. In the redemptive work of His Son, God provided peace. At His birth, the heavenly hosts, by anticipation, praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). And at His death, Christ "made peace [between God and His people] through the blood of His

cross” (Col. 1:20), reconciling God (as the Judge) to them, establishing perfect and abiding amity and concord between them.

Fourth, “the God of peace” declares what He is *paternally*, namely, the Giver of peace unto His children. This goes beyond what has been pointed out above. Before the foundation of the world God ordained there should be mutual peace between Himself and His people. As the immediate result of Christ’s mediatorial work, peace was made with God and *provided* for His people. Now we are to consider how the God of peace makes them the actual participants of this inestimable blessing. By nature they are utter strangers to it, for “there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 57:21). How could there be when they are engaged continually in active hostility against God? They are without peace, in their conscience, in their minds, or in their hearts. As God has indissolubly united holiness and happiness, so sin and wretchedness are inseparably connected. Just so long as men are found fighting against God, breaking His Law, and being lords unto themselves, it has to be said “The way of peace have they not known” (Rom. 3:17).

Before the sinner can be reconciled to God and enter into participation of the peace which Christ has made with Him, he must cease his rebellion, throw down the weapons of his warfare, and yield to His rightful authority. But for that a miracle of grace must be wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. As the Father ordained peace, as the incarnate Son made peace, so the Holy Spirit brings us into the same. He convicts us of our awful sins, and makes us willing to forsake them. He communicates faith to the heart whereby we savingly believe in Christ: then “being justified by faith we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1) objectively—we are brought into His favor. But more: we enjoy peace subjectively. The intolerable burden of guilt is removed from the conscience and we “find rest unto our souls.” Then it is we know the meaning of that word “The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). By His Spirit, through Christ, the Father has now actually bestowed peace upon His believing child, and in proportion as his mind is stayed on Him, by trusting in Him, he will be kept in perfect peace (Isa. 26:3).

Fifth, “The God of peace” proclaims what He is *governmentally*, namely, the Orderer of peace in the churches and in the world. Though each Christian has peace with God, yet he is left in a world which lieth in the Wicked one. Though the Christian has the peace of God in his heart, yet the flesh remains, causing a continual conflict within, and, unless restrained, breaking forth into strife with his brethren. Therefore unless God was pleased to put forth His restraining power upon that which seeks to disturb and disrupt the believer’s calm, he would enjoy little or no tranquillity within or rest from without. Our responsibility is “as much as lieth in” us to “live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18); God’s gracious interventions—so far as He deems it to be for His own glory and our good—is to make all men live peaceably with us. For illustrations of this aspect of the Divine administration see Genesis 35:5; Exodus 34:24; Leviticus 26:6; 1 Chronicles 22:9; 2 Chronicles 17:10; Psalm 147:14; Proverbs 16:7; 1 Corinthians 14:33.

“Now the God of peace *be with you all*. Amen.” By that petition we understand the apostle made request that God would, in this particular character or excellency make Himself *manifest* among them, that His felt presence should thus be known in their midst. Were it not for the overruling providence of the Lord, His people would have no rest at any time in this world. But He rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2) and gives them a considerable measure of peace from their foes. This shows us that we ought to be constantly looking to God for His peace. If we seek it not, but grow self-confident and secure, trials and assaults are likely to arise from every quarter. Our only security is in God, and our duty is constantly to ask peace of Him in the midst

of a world of trouble. Peace is a blessing which the churches greatly need, for without it there can be neither spiritual prosperity nor happiness. Thus we ought to regularly beseech God to maintain peace not only in the Christian circle with which we may be connected, but with companies of the redeemed all over the world. We ought to “pray for the peace of [the spiritual] Jerusalem” as our chief joy (condensed from R. Haldane).

By clear implication this prayer “Now the God of peace *be with you all*” implies that the saints must conduct themselves in harmony therewith, that amity and concord must prevail among them, so that there be no such grievous failure on their part as would offend God and cause Him to withdraw such a beneficent manifestation of His presence from them. Philippians 4:9 makes known the conditions of our enjoying the manifested presence of the God of peace: “these things which ye have both learned and received, and heard, and seen in me, DO, *and* the God of peace shall be with you.” That is, the leading of a holy life and the faithful performance of duty are the necessary prerequisites. As the individual believer experimentally enjoys the peace of God in proportion as he casts every care upon Him and maintains a spirit of thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6,7), so a corporate company of believers must be in subjection to Divine authority and maintain a Scriptural discipline if they would enjoy the God of peace in their midst.

A parallel passage is, “Be perfect [sincere and upright], be of good comfort, be of one mind, *live in peace*, and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11). Upon which C. Hodge well said, “The existence of love and peace is the condition of the presence of the God of love and peace. He withdraws the manifestations of His presence from the soul disturbed by angry passion, and from a community torn by dissension. We have here the familiar Christian paradox. God’s presence produces love and peace, and we must have love and peace in order to have His presence. God gives what He commands. God gives, but we must cherish His gifts. His agency does not supersede ours, but mingles with it, and becomes one in our consciousness. We work out our own salvation, while God works in us. Our duty is to yield ourselves to the operation of God. ...It is vain for us to pray for the presence of the God of love and peace unless we strive to free our hearts from all evil passions.” AWP

We thank our friends who responded to the request at the foot of page 4 of the February issue: God has graciously answered and raised up many new readers. But our circulation is still much below what it was a few years ago.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

18. Tenth Miracle - part 5

That to which we devoted much of our attention in previous meditations was *the requirement* made upon Naaman, because that demand and his compliance therewith is the hinge on which this

miracle turns, as the response made by the sinner to the call of the Gospel settles whether or not he is to be cleansed from his sin. This does not denote that the success or failure of the Gospel is left contingent upon the will of men, but rather announces that *order of things* which God has instituted: an order in which He acts as Moral Governor and in which man is dealt with as a moral agent. In consequence of the fall, man is filled with enmity against God and is blind to his eternal interests. His will is opposed to God's and the depravity of his heart causes him to forsake his own mercies. Nevertheless, he is still a responsible creature, and God treats him as such. As His Moral Governor, God requires obedience from him, and in the case of His elect He obtains it, not by physical compulsion but by moral persuasion, not by mere force but by inclining them to free concurrence. He does not overwhelm by Divine might, but declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4).

What has just been pointed out above receives striking illustration in the incident before us. When God's requirement was made to Naaman, it pleased him not: he was angry at the prophet and rebellious against the instructions given him. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" was a definite test of obedience, calling for the surrender of his will unto the Lord. Everything was narrowed down to that one thing: would he bow before and submit to the authoritative Word of God? In like manner every person who hears it is tested by the Gospel to-day. The Gospel is no mere "invitation" to be heeded or not as men please, and grossly dishonoring to God is it if we consider it only as such. The Gospel is a Divine proclamation, demanding the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against Heaven. God "now *commandeth* all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). And again we are told, "And this is His *commandment*: that ye believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23). The Gospel is "for faith obedience" (Rom. 1:5) and Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9). To those "that *obey not* the Gospel" the Lord Jesus will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance (2 Thess. 1:7-8). If men will not bow to Christ's scepter, they shall be made His footstool.

It was this very obedience that Naaman was reluctant to render: so much so that he was on the point of returning to Syria unhealed. Yet that could not be. In the Divine decree he was marked out to be the recipient of God's sovereign grace. As yet Naaman might be averse from receiving grace in the way of God's appointing, and the Devil might put forth a supreme effort to retain his victim; but whatever be the devices of the human heart or the malice of his Enemy, the counsel of the Lord must stand. When God has designs of mercy toward a soul, He sets in operation certain agencies which issue in the accomplishment of His purpose. The flesh may resist and Satan may oppose, but it stands written "Thy people *shall* be willing in the day of Thy power" (Ps. 110:3). That "day" had now arrived for Naaman, and speedily was this made manifest. It pleased God to exercise His "power" by moving the Syrian's servants to remonstrate with him and by making effectual their expostulation. "My father" they said, "if the prophet had bade thee do some great thing, wouldst not thou have done it? how much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean. *Then* went he down" and did as Elisha ordered.

"Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God" (2 Kings 5:14). "Then went he *down*": that was something which *he* had to do, and until he did it there was no cleansing for him. The sinner is not passive in connection with God's blotting out his iniquities, but active. He has to repent (Acts 3:19), and believe in Christ (Acts 10:43) in order to obtain forgiveness of his sins. It was a *voluntary* act on the part of Naaman. Previously he had been unwilling to comply with the Divine demand, but the secret power of God had wrought in him—by means of the pleading of his attendants—overcoming his reluctance. It was an act of *self-abasement*. "He went down and dipped" signifies three things: he descended

from his chariot, he waded into the waters, he was submerged beneath them, and thus did he own his vileness before God. No less than “seven times” must he plunge into that dark stream, thereby acknowledging his *total* uncleanness. A person only slightly soiled may be cleansed by a single washing, but Naaman must dip seven times to make evident how great was his defilement. The “seven times” also intimated that God required *complete* submission to His will: nothing short of full surrender to Him is of any avail.

“Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God.” It is of deep importance that we grasp the exact purport of this second clause, otherwise we shall miss one of the principal lines in this Gospel picture. Note well then that it was *not* “according to the pleading of his attendants”—the last thing mentioned in the context. Had Naaman acted simply to please *them*, he might have dipped himself in Jordan seventy times and been no better off for it. Nor does it read “according to the saying of *Elisha*,” for it looks infinitely higher than that. “According to the saying of the man of God” signifies, according to the declaration of God Himself through His prophet. Naaman heeded the Word of God and rendered “faith obedience” (Rom. 1:5) to it. Repentance is not sufficient to procure cleansing: the sinner must also believe. And this is what Naaman now did: his heart laid hold of the Divine promise, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh *shall* come again to thee and thou *shalt* be clean.” He believed that “shalt” and acted upon it. Have you done similarly, my reader? Has your faith definitely appropriated the Gospel promise “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”? If not, you will never be saved until it has. Faith is the indispensable requirement, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (v. 14). Of course it did: it could not be otherwise, for “He is *faithful* that promised” (Heb. 10:23). None has ever laid hold of a Divine promise and found it to fail him, and none ever will. That which has been spoken through the prophets and apostles is the Word of Him “that cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). He cannot falsify His Word. He cannot depart from it, alter it, or break it. “Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89). Forever, too, is it settled on earth: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of My lips” (Ps. 89:34). God has *promised* to receive, welcome, own, justify, preserve, and bring to Heaven, all who will take Him at His simple Word: who will rely upon it unconditionally and without reservation, setting to their seal that He is true. The warrant for us to believe lies in the promise itself, as it did for Naaman. The promise says, “you *may*,” the promise says, “you *must*,” the promise says, “you are shut up to me” (Gal. 3:23). And I—I say, “Lord, I believe.” Faith is a taking God at His Word—His undeceiving and infallible Word—and trusting in Jesus Christ as my Savior. If you have not already done so, delay no longer, but trust Him now, and wash in that “Fountain” which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child and he was clean.” Let it be duly noted that there was no lengthy interval between the faith-obedience of Naaman and his healing, in fact no interval at all. There was no placing of him upon probation before his disease was removed: his cleansing was instantaneous. Nor was his cleansing partial and effected only by degrees: he was fully and perfectly healed there and then, so that not a single spot of his leprosy remained. And that is exactly what the glorious gospel of God announces and promises: “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from *all* sin” (1 John 1:7). The moment a sinner claims Christ as His own, His perfect righteousness is placed to his account. The moment any sinner really takes God at His Word and appropriates the Gospel promise, he is—without having to wait for anything further to be done for him or in him—entitled to and fit for Heaven, just as was the

dying thief. If he be left here another hundred years he may indeed enter into a fuller understanding of the riches of Divine grace, but he will not become one iota fitter for Glory. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath* made us meet [not is now doing so] to be partakers of the Inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him—and he said, Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant” (v. 15). When a work of grace is wrought upon a person it is soon made evident by him. Mark the radical and blessed transformation which had been produced in Naaman’s heart as well as in his body. He might have hastened back at once to Syria, but he did not. Previously he had turned his back upon Elisha in a rage, but now he sought his face in gratitude. Formerly he had despised the “waters of Israel” (v. 12), now he acknowledged the God of Israel. All was completely changed. The proud and haughty Syrian was humbled, terming himself the prophet’s “servant.” The bitterness of his legalistic heart which had resented a way of deliverance that placed him on the same level as paupers had received its death wound. The enmity of his carnal mind against God and his hatred of His prophet, together with his leprosy, were all left beneath Jordan’s flood, and he emerged a new creature—cleansed and lowly in heart. No longer does he expect the prophet to seek him out and pay deference to him: instead he at once betook himself to Elisha and honored him as God’s servant—a lovely figure of a saved sinner desiring fellowship with the people of God.

Sixth, *its sequel*. Let us look more closely at the actions of the cleansed Naaman. First, he “returned to the man of God.” Nor did he seek him in vain: this time he came forth in person, there being no longer any occasion to communicate through his servant. Second, Naaman was the first to speak, and he bore testimony to the true and living God: “Behold, now *I know* there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.” He had listened to no lectures on evidences of the Divine existence, nor did he need to; effectively is a soul taught when it is made partaker of saving grace. Naaman was as sure now as Elisha himself that Jehovah is God, and He alone. Third, this testimony of Naaman’s was not given in private to the prophet, but openly before “all his company.” Have you, my reader, made public profession of your faith? “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16): does a like witness issue from your lips, or are you attempting to be a “secret disciple” of His? Fourth, Naaman now wished to bestow a present on Elisha as an expression of his gratitude: are you ministering to the temporal needs of God’s servants?

Yes, my reader, where a work of Divine grace has been wrought its subject soon makes the same evident to those around him. One who has fully surrendered to God cannot hide the fact from his fellows; nor will he wish to. A new life within cannot but be made manifest in a new life without. When Zaccheus was made a partaker of God’s so-great salvation he gave half his goods to the poor and made fourfold restitution to those he had robbed (Luke 19:8). When Saul of Tarsus was converted he at once said, “Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?” and henceforth a walk of loving obedience unto Him marked the grand transformation. No sooner was the Philippian jailor made savingly acquainted with Christ than he who had made fast in the stocks the feet of the sorely-beaten apostles “washed their stripes” and, after being baptised “brought them into his house and set meat before them” (Acts 16). Is it thus with you? Does your everyday conduct testify what Christ has done for you? or is your profession only like unto a leafy tree without any fruit on it?

“But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused” (v. 16). Naaman was now taught the *freeness* of God’s grace—just as Joseph (type of Christ as the Bread of Life) gave orders for the sacks of his brethren to be filled

with corn and their money to be returned and placed in their sacks (Gen. 42:25). When God gives to sinners, He gives freely. It was for a truly noble reason then that Elisha declined the blessing from Naaman's hand: he would not sully or compromise the blessed truth of Divine grace. "He would have Naaman return to Syria with this testimony, that the God of Israel had taken nothing from him but his leprosy! He would have him go back and declare that his gold and silver were useless in dealing with One who gave all for nothing" (Things New and Old). God delights in being the Giver: if you wish to please Him, continue coming before Him as a receiver. Listen to David, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits? I will *take* the cup of salvation and *call* upon His name" (Ps. 116:12,13)—in other words, he would "render" to Him by receiving more!

By his response Elisha showed Naaman that the servant of God looks upon the wealth of this world with holy contempt. "Gratitude to the Lord will dictate liberality to the instruments of His mercies. But different circumstances will render it necessary for them to adopt different measures. The 'man of God' will never allow himself to covet any one's gold or silver, or apparel; but be content with daily bread, and learn to trust for tomorrow. Yet sometimes he will understand that the proffered kindness is the Lord's method of supplying his necessities, that it will be fruit abounding to the benefit of the donor, and that there is a propriety in accepting it as a token of love; but as others, the gift will be looked on as a temptation, and he will perceive that the acceptance of it would degrade his character and office, dishonor God, and tend exceeding to the injury of the giver. In this case he will decidedly refuse it. This is particularly to be adverted to in the case of the great, when they first turn their thoughts to religious subjects. From knowledge of the world, they are apt to suspect all their inferiors of mercenary designs, and naturally suppose that ministers are only carrying on a trade like other men; while the conduct of too many so-called confirms them in the sentiment. There is but one way of counteracting this prejudice, and that is by evidencing a disinterested spirit, and not asking anything, and in some cases refusing to accept favors from them, until they have attained a further establishment in the faith; and by always persevering in an indifference to every personal interest" (T. Scott).

"And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord" (v. 17). Once the true God is known (v. 15) all false ones are repudiated. Observe carefully his "be given" and "thy servant." He does not offer to purchase this soil, nor does he as "captain of the hosts" of Syria's victorious army demand it as a right. Grace had now taught him to be a *recipient* and conduct himself as a *servant*. Beautiful is it to see the purpose for which he wanted this earth: it was not from a superstitious veneration of the soil, but that he might honor God. This exhibits, once more, the great and grand change which had been wrought in Naaman. His chief concern now was to be a worshiper of the God of all grace, the God of Israel, and to this end he requests permission to take home with him sufficient soil of the land of Israel to build an altar. And is not the application of this unto ourselves quite apparent. When a soul has tasted that the Lord is gracious, the spirit of worship possesses him, and he will reverently pour out his heart's adoration unto Him.

The order of Truth we have been considering is deeply instructive. First, we have a cleansed leper, a sinner saved by grace, (v. 14). Then an assured saint: "I know" (v. 15), and now a voluntary worshiper (v. 17). That is the unchanging order of Scripture. No one that ignores the cleansing blood of Christ or "the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26) can obtain any access to the thrice holy God. And none who doubts his acceptance in the Beloved can offer unto the Father that praise and thanksgiving which are His due, and therefore believers are bidden to

“draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). As we have passed from one detail to another we have sought to make definite application unto ourselves. Let us do so here. Naaman was determined to erect an altar unto the Lord in his own land. Reader, are you the head of a household? and do you claim to be a Christian? Then suffer this question: Have you erected an “altar” in your home? Do you gather the family around you each day and conduct worship? If not, you have good reason to call into question the genuineness of your profession. If God has His due place in your *heart*, He will have it in your *home*.

“In this the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon the Lord forgive thy servant in this thing” (v. 18). This presents a real difficulty, for as the verse reads it quite mars the typical picture and seems utterly foreign to all that precedes. It is true that Naaman was a converted heathen, yet he had himself acknowledged that “there is no God in all the earth but in Israel,” so however great his previous ignorance, he was now enlightened. His desire to erect an altar unto Jehovah would appear to quite preclude the idea that he should in the next breath suggest that he play the part of a temporiser and compromiser and then presumptuously count on the Lord’s forgiveness. One who is fully surrendered to the Lord makes no reservation: he cannot, for His requirement is “thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and *Him only* shalt thou serve”; and again, “touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.” And still more difficult is it for us to understand Elisha’s “Go in peace” (v. 19) if he had just been asked to grant a dispensation for what Naaman himself evidently felt to be wrong.

Is there then any legitimate method of removing this difficulty? Though he does not adopt it himself, Thomas Scott states that many learned men have sought to establish an alternative translation: “In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant: that when my master *went* into the house of Rimmon to bow down himself there, that I bowed down myself there—the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.” We do not possess sufficient scholarship to be able to pass judgment on this rendition, but from what little we do know of the Hebrew verb (which has no present tense) it strikes us as likely. In this case, Naaman’s words look backward, evidencing a quickened conscience, confessing a past offense; rather than forward and seeking a dispensation for a future sin. But if that translation be a cutting of the knot rather than an untying of it, then we must suppose that Elisha perceived that Naaman was convinced that the thing he anticipated was not right, and so instead of rebuking him, left that conviction to produce its proper effect, assured that in due course when his faith and judgment matured he would take a more decided stand against idolatry.

Space prevents our taking up, seventh, the *meaning* of this miracle, so we must postpone it for the next. —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

3b. Its Need

In our last, we dwelt chiefly upon the fearful breach which the entrance of sin made between the thrice Holy One and His fallen and rebellious creatures. In this we must point out some of the consequences and evidences of that breach, thereby showing in more detail the urgency of the sinner's case. By his act of disobedience in Eden, man invaded God's right of sovereignty, spurning as he did His authority, throwing off the yoke of submission, determining to be his own lord. The outcome of such revolt we are not left to guess at: it is plainly made known in the Scriptures: by his fearful offence man lost the favor and friendship of God and incurred His holy displeasure and righteous indignation. The Creator became the punishing Judge. Our first parents were promptly arraigned and sentence was passed upon the guilty culprits. Man had fallen into sin and the Divine wrath now fell upon him. God drove man out of Paradise and unsheathed the flaming sword (Gen. 3:24), thereby making it manifest that Heaven and earth were at variance. As the result of the fall sin became man's delight and henceforth he was an enemy to all holiness and consequently of the Holy One.

1. Fallen man became separated from God. It is easy to write or read those words, but who is competent to fathom their fearful import! Separated from God, the Fountain and Giver of all blessedness! Cast out of His favor. Severed from communion with Him. Cut off from the enjoyment of Him. Devoid of His life, of His holiness, of His love. Such is the terrible and inevitable consequence of sin. Sin snapped the golden cord which had united man to his Maker. Sin broke the happy relationship which originally existed between man and his rightful Lord. Sin made a breach between its committer and the Holy One. Not only did sin conduct man to a guilty distance from God, but sin necessarily placed God at a holy distance from man. God will not suffer those who are hostile to Him and offensive to His absolute purity to dwell in His presence. Therefore do we read that "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). They were banished from Heaven, excluded from the company of the Most High, imprisoned in the place of unutterable woe.

God had plainly made known unto our federal head the penalty of his disobedience: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Thus at the very beginning of human history the Lawgiver announced that "the wages of sin is death"—death spiritual, death judicial, death eternal if pardon be not obtained. And death is not annihilation but separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, expulsion from this earth. So spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, expulsion from His favor. In that tragic yet hope-inspiring parable of the prodigal son our Lord represented the sinner as being in "the far country," a "great way off" from the Father's house (Luke 15:13,20), and when he returned in penitence the Father said, "this My son was dead [separated from Me] and is alive again [restored to Me]; he was lost and is found." When Christ as the Substitute and Surety of His people bore their sins in His own

body on the Tree (1 Peter 2:24) He received the wages of sin, crying to God “why hast Thou forsaken Me!”

But the death inflicted upon Adam and all whom he represented was also judicial. Fallen man is a malefactor, dead in Law, lying under its sentence, a criminal in chains of guilt, held fast in fetters until the day of execution, unless he obtains a pardon from God. If no pardon be obtained, then he shall be cast into “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone,” and that is expressly denominated “the second death” (Rev. 21:8), because it is a being “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9). Man then, every man while unregenerate, is living “without God in the world,” “far off” from Him (Eph. 2:12,13). Being “dead in trespasses and sins” he is cut off from God, having no access to Him. He is a “castaway” from the Divine presence. God will have no commerce with him, nor receive any offering at his hands. He is outside the kingdom of God, and cannot enter it save by the new birth (John 3:5). He is born into the world “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). When the Lord came down upon Sinai Israel was not suffered to draw near Him (Ex. 19): sin had imposed an effectual barrier.

2. Fallen man became an object of abhorrence to God. Once more we use language the meaning of which no mortal is capable of fully entering into. It is not that we have employed terms which the case does not warrant, for we have but paraphrased the words of Holy Writ. Nor can it be otherwise if God be what Scripture affirms and if man has become what he is represented therein. God is light (1 John 1:5) and man is “darkness” (Eph. 5:8). God is holy, man totally depraved. God is our rightful Lord and King, man is an insurrectionist, a defiant rebel. God is immaculately pure, man a loathsome leper. If man saw himself as he appears to the Divine eye or even as he is portrayed by the Divine pencil, it would be evident that he *must be* an object of repugnance unto Him who sits enthroned on high. “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil” (Isa. 1:6). What a repulsive object! yet that is precisely what you and I (by nature) look like unto the eye of God.

“Thou hatest all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:5). In this Psalm God’s alienation from and detestation of the wicked is set forth in six steps. First, He has no delight in them: “Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness” (v. 4). Second, they cannot reside in His presence “neither shall evil dwell with Thee” (v. 4). Third, they have no status before Him: “the foolish shall not stand in Thy sight” (v. 5). Fourth, they are obnoxious to Him: “Thou hatest all workers of iniquity” (v. 5). Fifth, He will pour upon them the fury of His indignation: “Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing” or “lies” (v. 6). Sixth, they will for all eternity be abhorred by Him: “The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man” (v. 6). None would be shocked at such frightful declarations as these if he had anything like an adequate conception of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of the infinite holiness of God. Though they are scarcely ever heard from any pulpit to-day, whether we believe them or not, they are the words of Him who cannot lie and throughout eternity their verity will be borne amply witness to.

“Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.” Not merely their evil works, but the workers themselves; not some of the most notorious of the workers but *all* of them. My reader, if you are out of Christ, still unregenerate, whether you be a Britisher, an American, or an Australian, you are an object of God’s hatred. Rightly did C. H. Spurgeon point out from these words, “It is not a little dislike, but thorough hatred which God bears to workers of iniquity. To be hated of God is an awful thing. O let us be very faithful in warning the wicked around us, for it will be a terrible thing for them to fall into the hands of an angry God...How forcible is the word ‘abhor’ (in the

next verse). Does it not show us how powerful and deep-seated is the hatred of the Lord against the workers of iniquity!" It is the very nature of righteousness to hate unrighteousness. Those who are so corrupt and abominable *must* be loathed by One who is ineffably holy. It is the very perfection of the Divine character to hate the totally depraved.

3. Fallen man came under the condemnation and curse of the Divine Law. "It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Those words are a quotation from Deuteronomy 17:26—a verse which contains the conclusion of the maledictions pronounced upon the disobedient of the context, being really the sum and substance of them all. It is the solemn declaration that those who have despised God's authority and trampled His commandments beneath their feet are exposed to the Divine displeasure and to condign punishment as the expression of that displeasure. The "curse of the Law" is that sentence and penalty which is due unto sin. Sin and the curse are inseparable; wherever the one is, the other must be. Hence the unrestricted "every one" and that not only for multiplied transgressions but for a single offence. The Divine Law is perfect, and demands perfect and perpetual conformity to it. A single transgression brings down upon its perpetrator the Divine curse, as was evidenced in Eden, and in consequence of our representative participation therein, all of us entered this world under the maledictions of God's Law.

"Cursed is every one..." Those solemn words, so little known, so faintly apprehended even by those who are acquainted with them, reveal the fearful situation of every soul out of Christ: they are under sentence of execution. Their position is identical with the convicted murderer in the condemned cell, awaiting the dread summons of vindictive justice. If you be unregenerate, my reader, at this very moment you are under sentence of death: "condemned already." Since the curse of the Law falls upon men for a single sin, then what must be the punishment that will be meted out upon those with multiplied transgressions to their account! "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked" (Prov. 3:33). That unspeakable malediction rests upon all that he has and all that he does. "Cursed shalt thou be in the city and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shalt be thy basket and thy store," (Deut. 28:17). Nay, God has said "I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already" (Mal. 2:2). To those out of Christ He will yet say "Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire" (Matt. 25:41).

4. Fallen man came under the wrath of God. This follows inevitably from what has already been pointed out. Since a rebel against the Divine government is necessarily an object of abhorrence unto his holy Lord, since he has come beneath the curse and condemnation of the Divine Law, justice cries aloud for vengeance. The Maker of heaven and earth is no indifferent Spectator of the conduct of His creatures. He was not of Adam's. The father and head of the race was summoned before His judgment bar, fairly tried, justly condemned, and made to experience the beginnings of God's wrath, for the full measure thereof is reserved for the transgressor in the next life. As the consequence of their sin and fall in the person of their representative all of Adam's posterity are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3)—not only defiled and corrupt, but the objects of God's judicial indignation. "The children of wrath": those words should be to the ungodly reader as the handwriting on Belshazzar's wall (Dan. 5:5, 6)—they should blanch his countenance, trouble his thoughts, and make his knees smite together.

This fearful expression "the children of wrath" is more forceful than many conclude. In the previous verse we read of "children of disobedience," which means more than disobedient children, for such may the regenerate be. It means such as are addicted to disobedience, who make a trade of it. So "children of wrath" signifies more than to be liable to wrath: it connotes the objects of God's wrath, wholly devoted thereto, born to it as their portion and heritage—the

corruptions of their nature being its fuel. When the angels sinned the wrath of God was visited upon them (2 Peter 2:4), thereby evidencing that no natural excellence in the creature can exempt it from the judgment of God. Further demonstrations of His wrath were given when the flood was sent to drown the antediluvian world, when fire and brimstone destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and when Pharaoh and his hosts were overwhelmed at the Red Sea. And the execution of God's wrath upon you, my unsaved reader, is hourly drawn nearer. Ignorance cannot shield you from it. Outward privileges will not save you from it. Nor will a mere profession of religion. The only way of deliverance is for you to "*flee from the wrath to come*" by betaking yourself to Christ for refuge.

"God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11), on which Spurgeon remarked: "He not only detests sin, but is angry with those who continue to indulge in it. We have no insensible and stolid God to deal with. He can be angry, nay, He is angry to-day and every day with you, ye ungodly and impenitent sinners. The best day that ever dawned on a sinner brings a curse with it. Sinners may have many feast days, but not safe days. From the beginning of the year even to its ending, there is not an hour in which God's oven is not hot and burning in readiness for the wicked, who shall be as stubble." And on the words of the verse which immediately follows—"If He turn not, He will whet His sword"—that faithful preacher declared: "What blows are those which will be dealt by that long uplifted arm! God's sword has been sharpening upon the revolving stone of our daily wickedness, and if we will not repent, it will speedily cut us to pieces. Turn or burn is the sinner's alternative."

5. Fallen man is the subject and slave of Satan, under a more terrible bondage than ever the Hebrews were to Pharaoh, for it is a bondage of the soul. Yet this is justly inflicted. At the beginning our first parents preferred Satan's lie to God's truth, and therefore did He allow Satan to obtain dominion over them. Yet with each of his descendants it is a willing bondage therein: as the Jews desired Barabbas rather than Christ, so we entered this world with a nature that is in harmony with Satan's. Yes, without a single exception, every member of our race is born so depraved that he voluntarily serves and obeys the arch-enemy of God. There are but two spiritual kingdoms in this world: that of Christ's (Col. 1:13) and that of Satan's (Matt. 12:26), and every human being is a subject of the one or the other. Those who have not come to Christ and surrendered to His sceptre are ruled by Satan and are fighting under his banner against God. Therefore when Paul was sent forth to preach the Gospel it was in order to open the eyes of men "to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18).

The Devil is the sinner's master, as he was the Christian's before Divine grace regenerated him: "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1,2). He not only tempts from without but dominates them from within. As God worketh in His people "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13) so the devil operates in the hearts of his subjects to perform his fiendish pleasure. He "put into the heart" of Judas to betray Christ (John 13:2). He made Pilate and Herod condemn Him to death, for it was "their hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). He "filled the heart" of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Yet each of them acted freely and according to the inclinations of his own evil nature. Satan's subjects render him a voluntary and cordial obedience: "ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts [desires] of your father ye will [determine to] do" (John 8:44).

6. Fallen man is under the reigning power of sin. This "abominable thing" which God hates has entered the human constitution like a deadly poison that has completely corrupted our whole

being. Sin has full dominion and undisputed sway over the human soul. The mind makes no opposition to it, for it is sin's "servant" (John 8:34) and not "captive." It exerts a determining power on the will. Sin so reigns in the heart of the unregenerate that it directs their affections and controls all the motives and springs of their actions, causing them to walk after their own evil imaginations and devisings. As the air is the native element of the birds, so sin is the natural element of fallen man. "Abominable and filthy is man, who drinketh in iniquity like water" (Job 15:16). Like a parched traveler in the desert who craves water, seeks after it, and greedily swallows it when found, so is iniquity unto the sinner.

The course of the natural man is described as "serving divers lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:3), as "bringing forth evil fruits" (Matt. 7:17), as yielding his members "servants to uncleanness and to iniquity" (Rom. 6:19). The service rendered by the unregenerate to sin is a whole-hearted one, voluntary, and cordial. Man is in love with sin, preferring darkness to light, this world to Heaven. His lusts are his idols. Therefore does he persist in sin despite all pleadings, warnings, threatenings, chastisements. While he is unregenerate he does nothing but sin in thought and word and deed. Solemn it is to think that every one is in continual remembrance with God, set in the light of His countenance, recorded in that book which will be opened in the day of judgment. Not one of them is pardoned, or can be, while he is out of Christ. So much guilt lies upon his soul as is sufficient to sink it into the lowest Hell, and *will* do so unless blotted out by atoning blood.

7. Fallen man hates God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the Law of God"—and so inveterate is that "enmity" it is at once added—"neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). We may not believe it, or be conscious of it, but there is the Divinely-revealed fact. God is an Object of aversion unto the natural man. The language of the hearts of sinners unto the Almighty is, "Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job 21:14). They do not hate Him as their Provider and Preserver, but as a Being who is infinitely holy and who therefore hates sin and is "angry with the wicked every day." They detest Him as a sovereign Being, who dispenses His favors according to His absolute pleasure. They abominate Him as the Moral Governor of the world, demanding obedience to His Law, and pronouncing cursed all who break it. They abhor Him as the Judge, who shall yet cast all His enemies into the Lake of Fire. Proof of this was furnished when God became incarnate and was manifested unto men: they *crucified* Him!

"Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Obviously not; then how much less could rebels dwell together with a holy God for all eternity! For *that* reconciliation must be effected. But how is peace possible? How are alienated sinners to be restored to friendship with God without Him denying His own perfections? Some grand provision must be made whereby the wrath of God is appeased, whereby His Law is magnified, His honor vindicated, His justice satisfied. Some wondrous redemption is imperative if sinners are to be delivered from that dreadful state of enmity, darkness, and slavery into which the Fall conducted them. Some marvel of wisdom and miracle of grace is necessary if those so "far off" are to be "made nigh," if the unholy are to be made holy, if those dead in sin are to be quickened into newness of life. Some unique Mediator is indispensable if the breach between an offended God and offended creatures is to be healed: a Mediator who is capable of conserving the interests and promoting the glory of God, and who also can win the hearts of those in revolt. The *needs-be* for reconciliation is crystal clear; the *effectuation of it* is the grand subject of the Gospel, the wonder of angels, and will be the theme of the song of the redeemed throughout the unending ages of the future. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4b. Its Nature

All sound teaching, like the safest method of reasoning, proceeds from the general to the particular, and therefore we shall attempt to show the principles from which spiritual growth issues and the main lines along which Christian progress advances, before we enter into a detailed analysis of the same. God first gave Israel His Law, and then because “His commandment is exceeding broad” (Ps. 119:96)—supplied amplification through the Prophets and a still more specific explication of its contents through Christ and His apostles. Spiritual growth is the development of spiritual life, and spiritual life is communicated to a sinner at the new birth, so the more clearly we are enabled to understand the nature of regeneration, the better prepared shall we be to perceive the character of spiritual growth. Admittedly regeneration is profoundly mysterious, but there are at least two things which afford help thereon: the fact that it is a “renewing” (Titus 3:5), and that it is a real and radical (though not complete or final) reversal of what happened to us at the fall. The old creation gives us some idea of the new creation, and the order in which the former was wrecked prepares us to grasp the order in which the latter is effected.

The natural man is a composite being, made up of spirit and soul and body. The “spirit” seems to be the highest part of his nature, being that which capacitates for God-consciousness or the knowledge of God—He being “spirit”: John 4:24. The “soul” or ego appears to be that which, expressing itself through the body, constitutes what is termed our “personality,” and is the seat of self-consciousness, and by it man has communion with his fellows. The body or physical organism is that which provides the soul with a habitation in this world, and it is the seat of sense-consciousness, being that through which man has contact with material things. The order of Scripture is “spirit and soul and body” (1 Thess. 5:23), but man with his customary perversity invariably reverses it and speaks of “body, and soul and spirit.” How that reveals what fallen man has degenerated into: the body, which he can see and feel, and which occupies most of his concern, comes first in his consideration and estimation! His “soul” receives little thought and still less care, and as to his “spirit” he is unaware that he has any.

“And God said, Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, after *Our* likeness” (Gen. 1:26). God is tri-une, there being three persons in one and indivisible Divine essence. And it was in the image of the Triune God that man was made, as the plural pronouns plainly connote. Thus man was made a tri-une creature. His “spirit” which is the intellectual principle and highest part, was capacitated for communion with God and was designed to regulate (by its wisdom) the soul, in which resides the emotional nature or the “affections.” The soul in turn was to regulate the body, as it received through the physical senses information of the external world. But at the fall man reversed the order of his creation: making a “god” of his belly, he henceforth became enslaved to the lower world, and the soul instead of directing the physical mechanism became to a large extent the lackey of its senses and demands. Communion with God being severed, the spirit no longer

functioned according to its distinctive nature, and though not extinguished, was dragged down to the level of the soul.

What has just been pointed out should be clearer to the reader by pondering it in the light of Genesis 3. In assailing Eve, Satan made his attack upon her *spirit*—the principle which receives from God—for he first called into question the Divine prohibition (v. 2) and then, replying to her objection, assured her “ye shall not surely die,” and added as an inducement “in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (vv. 4,5)—thereby seeking to weaken her faith, and flatter her ambition by promising greater wisdom. Harkening to his lies, the woman was “deceived” (1 Tim. 2:14). Her judgment became beclouded through doubting God’s threat, and once the light of God in her spirit was lost, all was lost. Her affections became corrupted, so that she now “desired” or lusted after the forbidden fruit—not by the prompting of her spirit, but by the solicitation of her physical senses: and her will became depraved, so that she “took” thereof.

Now, from the experimental side of things, regeneration is the initial work of God in reversing the effects of the fall, for its favored subject is then “renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him” (Col. 3:10): that is to say, spiritual perception is restored to him, so that he now has again what he lost in Adam—a vital, powerful, direct knowledge of God. In consequence of this he is brought back again into communion with God, restored to a conscious fellowship with Him. One aspect of this mysterious but blessed work is brought before us in Hebrews 4:12, where we are told “the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” We understand that last clause to signify that the regenerated person’s “spirit” is now freed from its immersion into the soul and is raised to its own superior level, being placed *en rapport* (brought into harmony with) God Himself. Thus Paul declares “I serve [God] with my *spirit*” (Rom. 1:9)—not “soul”; and “my spirit prayeth” (1 Cor. 14:14). In distinction therefrom “purified your *souls* [affections] in obeying the Truth” (1 Peter 1:22).

Though the above may sound recondite and, being new to our readers, somewhat difficult to grasp, yet it should we think be more or less clear that in order for us to answer to what God has wrought in us, in order to live as becometh Christians, the body should take second place to the soul, and be ruled thereby: and the soul in turn be subordinated to the spirit, which is to be enlightened and controlled by God. Unless the body be made subservient to the soul, man lives his life on the same level as the animals; and unless the Christian’s “affections” and emotions be regulated by wisdom from the spirit, he lives on the same plane as the unregenerate. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). That means, make the things of the spirit your paramount concern, and your lower interests will be automatically subserved. If the mind or spirit be “stayed on God,” the soul will enjoy perfect peace, and the soul at rest will act beneficently on the body. Thus, in proportion as our lives accord with what took place in us at the new birth will be our spiritual growth and prosperity.

Nothing but a knowledge of God can satisfy the spirit of man, as nought but His love can content the soul. Man’s supreme happiness consists in the exercise of his noblest parts and faculties on their proper objects, and the more excellent those objects be, the more real and lasting pleasure do they give us in the knowledge and love of them. Thus it is that, when God has designs of mercy toward an individual, He begins by shining upon his understanding and attracting his heart unto Himself. As that work of grace proceeds, that individual is enabled to perceive something of “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13), how it has deluded him into vainly imagining

that the things of time and sense could afford him satisfaction, until he discovers that (to use the figurative language of the prophet) he has “spent his money for that which is not bread” and labored for that which satisfieth not (Isa. 55:2). Therefore does God say unto him, “hearken unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” Until God becomes our “Portion” the soul is left with an aching void.

Here, then, is what occurs at regeneration: God “hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true” (1 John 5:20)—and this He does by quickening the “spirit” in us. And again we read “For God who [in connection with the first creation: Gen. 1:3] commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath [in His work of the new creation] shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Thus, Christian progress must consist in our advancing in a personal and experimental knowledge of God, and consequently when the apostle prayed for the spiritual growth of the Colossians he made request that they might be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10). Simultaneously with this communication of a supernatural knowledge of Himself, the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5) and therefore spiritual growth consists of a deeper apprehension and fuller enjoyment of that love with a more complete response thereto; and hence, when making request for the same on behalf of the Ephesians, Paul prayed that they might “know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (3:19).

It is not our immediate design to give as full a description as our present light affords of the precise nature of regeneration, but only to point out those of its principal elements which the better enables us to grasp what spiritual growth consists of. We will therefore mention but one other feature of the new birth, or that which is at least an inseparable adjunct of it, namely, the impartation of *faith*. Nor shall we now attempt to define what faith is: sufficient for the moment to acknowledge it is a blessed “gift of God” (Eph. 2:8), in nowise originating in the exercise of the human will, but communicated by “the operation of God” (Col. 2:12), and therefore it is a supernatural principle, active in its favored recipient, bringing forth fruit after its own kind, and thereby evidencing its Divine source. It is “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) the Christian walks: as said the apostle “the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God [He being its Object], who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). This it is which distinguishes all the regenerate from the unregenerate, for the latter are “children in whom is no faith” (Deut. 32: 20 and cf. 2 Thess. 3:2,3).

The Christian life begins by the exercise of a God-given faith, namely, an act whereby we receive Christ as our own personal Saviour (John 1:12). We are “justified by faith,” and by Christ “have access by faith into this grace [i.e. accepted into God’s favor] wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:1,2). We are “sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18), that is, made actual participants of the ineffable purity of Christ. Through the Spirit we “wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal. 5:5 and cf. 2 Tim. 4:8). It is by “the shield of faith,” and that alone, we are “able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph. 6:16). It is “through faith and patience” that we “inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12). It was by faith that the Old Testament saints “obtained a good report” (Heb. 11:2) and wrought such wonders, as the remainder of that chapter demonstrates. It is by faith we successfully resist the Devil (1 Peter 5:9) and overcome the world (1 John 5:4). From all of which it is very evident that the measure of our Christian progress will be very largely determined by the extent to which this principle be kept healthy and remains operating in us.

To sum up what has been pointed out above: regeneration is both a “renewing” and a “new creation.” As a “renewing” it is a continual process, as 2 Corinthians 4:16 clearly shows. This aspect of it is a partial reversal of and recovery from what happened to us at the fall. It is a Divine

quickening, which necessarily presupposes an entity or faculty already existing, though in need of being made alive or revived. This “renewing” is of the inner man, which includes both spirit and soul or “the mind” and “heart.” It is an initial and radical act, followed by a repeated but imperceptible process whereby the nobler or immaterial parts of our beings are elevated or refined. This does not mean that “the flesh” or evil principle in us undergoes any improvement, but that our faculties are spiritualised; and thus spiritual growth will consist of the mind being more and more engaged with Divine objects, the affections being increasingly set upon things above, the conscience becoming more tender, and the human will made more amenable to the Divine, and thereby the inner man more and more conformed to the holy image of Christ.

But regeneration is something more than a “renewing” or quickening of parts and faculties already in existence: it is also a “new creation,” the bringing into existence of something which did not exist before, the actual bestowment of something to the sinner in addition to all that he had as a natural man. That “something” is variously designated in Scripture (and by theologians) according to its different relations and aspects. It is termed “life” (1 John 5:12), yea life “more abundantly” (John 10:10) than unfallen Adam enjoyed. It is named “spirit” because “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6) and therefore is to be distinguished from our natural spirit; and “the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). It is called “the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor. 1:22), being a token or firstfruits of what will be ours when glorified; and “grace” (Eph. 4:7) as an inward principle. Theologians designate it “the new nature,” and many allude to it under the composite term of “the Christian’s graces,” which is warranted by John 1:16, and is probably the easiest for us to comprehend. Considered thus, spiritual growth may be said to be the development of our graces: the strengthening of faith, the enlarging of hope, the increasing of love, the abounding of peace and joy: see 2 Peter 1:3 and carefully note verses 5-8.

Thus far we have been dwelling almost entirely upon the internal aspect of our theme, so we will now quote one verse which directs attention to the external side. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Here is the response which we are required to make unto the new birth. God’s purpose in our new creation or regeneration is that we should “walk in good works,” that we may make manifest the spiritual root which He then implanted by bearing spiritual fruit. Such was the design of Christ in dying for us: to “purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). From which it plainly follows that, the more zealous we are of good works and the more steadfastly we walk in them, the more do we rightly answer to what God has wrought in us. Now the performance of our daily duties are so many “good works,” if they be done from faith’s obedience to God’s requirements and with an eye to His approbation and glory. Hence the more faithfully and conscientiously we discharge our obligations toward God and toward our fellows, the more true Christian progress are we making.

All that has been before us above receives simplification when it is viewed in the light of *conversion* and its proper sequel. Regeneration is entirely the work of God, wherein we are passive, but conversion is an act of ours; the one being the effect and consequence of the other. The word “conversion” means to turn around, it is a right-about-face. It is a turning from the world unto God, from Satan unto Christ, from sin unto holiness, from being absorbed with the things of time unto devotion to our eternal interests. At regeneration we received a super-natural knowledge of God, and as the consequence, in His light we see ourselves as depraved, lost and undone. At regeneration we received a nature which is “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24), and as a consequence we now hate all unrighteousness and sin. At regeneration we were given an understanding that we might know Him that is true (1 John 5:20)

and our response is to yield ourselves unto His dominion and trust in His atoning blood. At regeneration we received Divine “grace” as an indwelling principle, and the effect is to make us willing to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Christ. The proper sequel to such a conversion is that we steadfastly adhere to the surrender we then made of ourselves unto the Lord Jesus, and the more we do so, such will be our spiritual progress. —AWP

July

THE PATH OF DUTY

Part C

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8). This is a most blessed though little-understood prophecy and promise. The figure used in the first part of the verse is simple and should occasion no difficulty. It is that of a specially-made road through a wild country or trackless desert, provided for the use of pilgrims and travelers. The making known of the will of God unto us is here likened to the casting up of a clearly defined highway through a strange land. The reference is to the state of the Gentile world at the time the Israelitish seer made this prediction. During the days of the Jewish theocracy, the heathen nations were in spiritual darkness and ignorance, being without any written revelation from God. But the incarnation of Christ would entirely alter that awful state of affairs. The people which sat in darkness would see “great light” (Isa 42:6, 7; Mat 4:15, 16). The glorious Gospel would be preached to all nations and the Highway of salvation—the Way which leadeth unto Life, the “way of peace have they not known” (Rom 3:17)—would be clearly revealed unto them.

This Divinely-provided highway through the world is here denominated “the way of holiness.” It is so designated because it is appointed by a holy God and brings us to a holy Heaven. It is so designated because it stands out in sharp contrast and separation from all the by-ways of sin. It is expressly said, “the unclean shall not pass over it” (Isa 35:8): the unconverted, the impenitent, the unbelieving have no access to it. Only those who have been cleansed by the atoning blood of Christ have any title to walk in this way, as they are the only ones with any desire to tread the same. Those who traverse this “way of holiness” are termed the “wayfaring men.” The Hebrew for this compound “wayfaring” is literally “to go on in the way,” which is more informative than the English rendition. It tells us that only those persons who are possessed with a true desire and firm determination will walk therein. The grand requirement for its treader, and that which ensures success therein, is a *heart* for this “way”—that is, the possession of a love of holiness.

The “wayfaring man” is here termed a “fool.” It is generally considered that two things are connoted thereby. First, what he is in himself naturally considered. We are expressly told that among those called of God, there are “not many wise men after the flesh,” and if it be inquired why this is so, the inspired answer is, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to

confound the wise;" and His reason for that is, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1Co 1:26, 27, 29). In order to magnify the riches of His sovereign grace, God has singled out from among men the weak, the base, mere "nonentities" or "nobodies" (as is the force of the Greek rendered "things which are not" in 1 Corinthians 1:28) to be the recipients of His highest favours. The great majority of His people are "the poor of this world" (Jam 2:5): poor in its material riches, poor in mental equipment, poor in what the world terms, "natural advantages." Second, the term "fool" describes the wayfaring man as he appears unto the unregenerate, because of his spirituality: the one who seeks to please God rather than self, to live for eternity, rather than time, is a madman in their eyes.

"The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa 35:8). The two significations given above of the term, "fool," do not in our judgment exhaust or reach its principal meaning here. There is many a natural dolt who deems himself very wise, many a man of one talent who considers himself fully qualified to hold a position which calls for a person of five talents. Ignorance by no means excludes egotism. The "fool" in the verse before us is not necessarily one whose mentality is of poor quality, nor one who is crazy in the esteem of his fellows; rather, is it a person who has been made a fool in his *own eyes*. When a miracle of grace is wrought in the soul, that person is humbled into the dust, his self-complacency and self-sufficiency receives its death wound, he is stripped of his peacock feathers. Not only does he perceive that his righteousness or best performances are "filthy rags" in the sight of God, not only does he feel himself to be "without strength" when it comes to doing what God requires of him, but his wisdom appears folly, and all his education and erudition worthless—so far as obtaining a knowledge of Divine things is concerned.

While it be true that "not many wise men after the flesh" (1Co 1:26) are called by God out of darkness into His marvelous light, yet it does not say "not *any*." There are a few of great natural abilities, of eminent mental endowments, of keen intellectual acumen, who are snatched as brands from the burning. And the change produced in them by regeneration is as radical and marked as it is in the conversion of the most dissolute character. Such an one was Saul of Tarsus, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and blessed with most remarkable intellectuality. Yet, he became as "a little child," acknowledging he was not sufficient of himself "to think any thing as of himself" (2Co 3:5). In other words, he became a "fool" in his own estimation (1Co 3:18), and therefore, one who deeply realised his need of being taught of God. And that is true in every case where regeneration takes place. Its subjects are made conscious of their ignorance. Concerning spiritual things, they feel themselves to be utter dunces, and therefore, their earnest cry to the Lord is, "That which I see not teach Thou me" (Job 34:32).

Here, then, is the Divinely-defined character of the man who treads "The way of holiness" (Isa 35:8). He is a "wayfaring man," one who has been given a *heart* for this way, who *desires* to tread it. And second, he is a "fool" in his own estimation and valuation: who feels himself totally insufficient to make any progress in this way. Consequently, he is the one who instinctively and sincerely turns constantly to his Guidebook for instruction. He dare not move a pace until he has received directions therefrom. His daily prayer is, "Order my steps in Thy Word" and "make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa 119:133, 35). So stupid does he feel himself to be, yes, even though he has a M.A. or D.D. degree—that he cries, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes" (Psa 119:33). It is not light *on* the Word he needs, for God's Word is itself light (Psa 119:105), but light *from* the Word, and therefore, does he beg God, "Give me understanding" (Psa 119:73) and illuminate my sin-darkened heart. Thus and thus only does he perceive and walk in the path of duty.

“The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*” (Isa 35:8). Note well, it is something else and something better than “*need not* err therein” as so frequently misquoted: namely, “shall not.” Just so long as he remains a “fool” in his own esteem, and no longer, will he be kept from making mistakes or wandering off into the by-paths of folly. So long as he is conscious that he “lacks wisdom,” he will “ask of God” (Jam 1:5). So long as he is conscious of his ignorance, will he value his Guidebook and seek counsel therefrom. So long as he is kept aware of his stupidity, will he pray for enlightenment. And so long as *that* be the case, he *will* progress in the way of holiness. But as soon as pride is allowed to work, a spirit of independency and self-sufficiency will take possession of his heart, and though he may still “read the Bible” perfunctorily or as a duty, he will no longer consult it anxious for light on his path, and soon he *will* “err therein,” for “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (Jam 4:6). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

7. Romans 16:25-27

Perhaps by this time, some of our readers are feeling rather disappointed at the method we have followed in the previous articles, considering it had been more profitable had we made it our principal concern to show in more detail how these breathings of the apostles’ souls bear upon, or should bear upon, the prayer life of believers today. Yet judging from letters so far to hand, others are grateful that we are endeavouring—in keeping with the title of this magazine—to give an interpretation, as well as an application, of these precious portions of Holy Writ: we shall try to pay attention to both. The more closely we examine the wide range of the recorded prayers of the apostles, the more are we impressed by their deep importance—doctrinally, as well as experimentally—their great variety, their extensive scope: and the more do we feel convinced that they need to be approached and dealt with *expositionally*, as well as devotionally and practically. There has been far too much lazy generalizing of the Truth, and far too little painstaking and detailed instruction.

The passage before us is a case in point, though we admit it is rather an exceptional one, occurring as it does in what many regard as the profoundest epistle in the New Testament. We wonder how many of our readers will obtain, even after a careful reading and re-reading of our present passage, any clear-cut and intelligent conception of the contents of this prayer: its scope or its subject. We wonder how many of them could supply satisfactory answers to the following questions: 1. Why is the Deity here addressed as, “Him that is *of power* to stablish you”? 2. What is the force of “according to *my Gospel*”? 3. What is signified by “the *preaching* of Jesus Christ”? 4. What is this “mystery” which “was kept secret since the world began”? 5. How harmonise “kept secret” with “but now is made manifest by the Scriptures of the *prophets*”? 6. Why “according to the commandment of the *everlasting God*”? 7. What is the special force of “to God *only wise*”? Is there not a real need here for the *teacher*!

One has but to honestly face and carefully ponder those questions to at once be conscious of his dire need of wisdom from Above. At any rate, that is the feeling of this writer. That the central subject of these verses is something especially profound seems very obvious. That they contain Truth of the deepest importance which reader and writer alike should be sensible of. But if their meaning be not apparent from a cursory perusal, neither can it be conveyed to others through a hurriedly prepared article. Prayer and study, study and prayer, are called for, and *they* demand the exercise of faith and patience—graces in which the present generation of Christians are sadly deficient. While we believe it has pleased God to grant us some insight into the contents of this portion of His Word (of which the reader must be the judge), yet we are far from concluding we shall ever plumb such depths in this life. May it please the gracious Spirit to now shine upon our benighted understandings, that in His light, we may see light.

In his repeated studyings of our passage, this writer has long felt that before he was ready to work out its details, he must first ascertain what is its principal subject. Before he is prepared to weigh or even consider what is the burden of this prayer, he must seek to discover what is its leading theme. In setting about that task, full consideration has to be given unto the particular Epistle in which it is found and the distinctive subject of that Epistle. Each separation detail has to be pondered in its relation to the whole; after which parallel passages have to be sought and their aid made use of. That calls for impartial investigation, focused attention, laborious and persevering effort, and above all, humbly seeking wisdom from God. The task of the expositor is no light one, which is why there are so few such, for probably never a generation more detested hard work and mental toil than ours.

In his commentary upon this epistle, John Brown summarised his remarks on these verses by saying, they are “one of the most magnificent doxologies in the New Testament—a worthy devotional peroration to such a doctrinal discussion.” This is not only a sublime prayer, but it is also one of the greatest doctrinal passages contained in Holy Writ. If on the one hand it rises to unsurpassed heights of devotion, on the other, it conducts us to the profoundest subject of Divine revelation. This is more or less evident from the terms used in our passage. It speaks not only of a “mystery,” but of “the mystery”—that which includes and is the sum of all others. The principal theme of the epistle is here epitomised as affording the special ground for the praise not offered to God. In Romans, the Gospel is expounded (see Rom 1:1, 9, 16) in a more formal and systematic form than elsewhere in the Word: in the body of the epistle, we are shown the blessings it conveys to those who believe it; in this doxology, we are taught how the Gospel originated.

“Now to Him that is of power to stablish you” (Rom 16:25). This is not a petitionary prayer, but an adoration of Deity. No request is made for the saints, but God is exalted before them. The apostle begins reminding us of the excellency and sufficiency of the Divine power. He had concluded his introduction to this epistle by affirming “the Gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16), and now he points out that the believer is equally dependent upon God’s power for his establishment. Christians cannot establish themselves, nor can their ministers establish them. The one and the other may use the appointed means, but they cannot ensure success—God alone can make them effectual unto any of us. But blessed be His name, HE *can* do so, for “God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in *all* things, may abound to every good work” (2Co 9:8). It is to be duly noted that the word “able” includes disposition, as well as capacity: He *can*, He *will*—cf. Rom 4:21; Eph 3:20, etc.

The Greek word translated “stablish” (*sterizo*) is rendered, “set steadfastly” in Luke 9:51 and “strengthen” in Luke 22:32 and Revelation 3:2. It means to thoroughly establish, to make us

rooted, grounded, and settled in the faith (Col 1:23; 2:7), both in our hearts (1Th 3:12) and walk (2Th 2:17). This is a duty incumbent upon us, for we are expressly bidden “stablish your hearts” (Jam 5:8). But because we are not sufficient for the performance of such a task, God has most graciously made promise: “But the Lord is faithful (though we are unfaithful), who shall stablish you and keep *you* from evil” (2Th 3:3). Though it be our privilege and obligation to study the Word, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, yet so strongly are our hearts influenced by sin, so dull our understanding, and feeble our love, it requires the working of God’s power to preserve us. Not only were we unable to bring ourselves into the Faith, we cannot continue in it without Divine strength. Because of our proneness to apostatise, the subtlety and strength of our spiritual enemies, the world in which we live, God’s power alone can keep us—cf. Jud 24.

“According to my Gospel” (Rom 16:25). Here we are shown *what it is* in which Christians are “stablished” or “established,” namely the Gospel. Romanists are established in human tradition; thousands of so-called Protestants are established in errors equally fatal; but God’s own people are established in the Truth—an inestimable favour, especially in such a day as this, when God has given up the vast majority in Christendom to “believe a lie” (2Th 2:11). But more: this clause not only makes known unto us the spiritual sphere in which Christians are established, but also the *means* which the Holy Spirit employs in this gracious work. Only as our hearts are Divinely enabled to cleave unto the grand substance of the Gospel are we kept from being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14). Third, this clause signifies: established according to this Divine rule—brought into accord with it both inwardly and outwardly, so that there is no swerving from it in belief or practice: cf. Rom 6:17 margin.

“According to my Gospel” (Rom 16:25). First, this is to be regarded as a discriminative expression: the Gospel I have proclaimed in contradistinction from the false gospel of the Judaisers. None of the other apostles makes any reference to a spurious gospel, but Paul particularly warned the Corinthians against “another gospel” (2Co 11:4) and to the Galatians he wrote, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8)—my Gospel, then, in opposition to all counterfeits, for none other can avail for the salvation of the soul. Second, because Paul was the pre-eminent expounder of it, his first epistle being devoted to an unfolding of its grand contents. The term “Gospel” occurs scores of times in his writings, yet excepting 1st Peter, it is found nowhere else in the Epistles. Third, because a special dispensation of the Gospel was committed unto him for the Gentiles (Gal 2:7; Eph 3:2). Finally, it accords with the special fervour which marked him: “*my* God shall” (Phi 4:19), “Christ Jesus *my* Lord” (Phi 3:8).

“And the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:25). As Robert Haldane pointed out, “This phrase is not the mere repetition of the same thing—as the former. It is indeed the same truth, but from a different point of view. In the one it is considered as good news, in the other as the publication of the truth about Jesus Christ: we are to be established according to what the apostle taught concerning *Him*.” Perhaps it would be more to the point to say, this clause is subjoined to the former in order to inform us what is the substance and contents of the Gospel. Jesus Christ is the grand Object and theme of all true evangelical ministry. The “*preaching* of Jesus Christ” is very much more than making a frequent use of His name in our discourses, or even telling of His wondrous love and work for sinners. It is first and foremost the magnifying of His unique Person, the making known of who He is—the God-man. Second, it is the opening up of His mediatorial office, in which He serves as Prophet, Priest and Potentate. Third, it is a proclamation of His

wondrous redemption. Fourth, it is the enforcing of His claims and the holding up of the perfect example He has left us.

“According to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom 16:25). This is both an explanation and amplification of the foregoing. The glorious Gospel of Christ is no invention of human wit, but is the wondrous product of the consummate wisdom of God. As J. Evans (Matthew Henry’s commentary) well said of the Gospel: “It has in it an inconceivable height and such an unfathomable depth as passes knowledge. It is a mystery, which the angels desire to look into and cannot find the bottom of. And yet, blessed be God, there is as much of this mystery made plain as will suffice to bring us to heaven, if we do not wilfully neglect so great salvation.” The Gospel not only infinitely surpasses man’s skill to originate, but he could have no knowledge whatever of it, until God was pleased to publish the same. Nor was it any provision of His, devised in time, to meet some unforeseen calamity, no mere improvised remedy for sin, but that which engaged the Divine mind before heaven and earth was created.

Mention is made in the N. T. of “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 13:11) and of “the mysteries of God” (1Co 4:1). It refers to the yet future restoration and salvation of Israel as a “mystery” (Rom 11:25) and of the resurrection and bodily transformation of the saints as a “mystery” (1Co 15:51). We read also of “the mystery of iniquity” (2Th 2:7), which is in horrible contrast from “the mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3:16). There is also “the mystery of the seven stars” in the right hand of Christ and “the seven golden candlesticks” among which He walks (Rev 1:20 and 2:1), by which we understand His local churches; “the mystery of God” (Rev 10:7), which many regard as His ways in Providence, particularly His governance of this world; and “mystery Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, etc.” (Rev 17:5), which the Puritans viewed as Romanism. That which is before us in Romans 16:25 is, we believe, elsewhere termed “the mystery of His will” (Eph 1:9), the “great mystery” of Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32), “the mystery of the Gospel” (Eph 6:19), “the mystery of God (the Spirit), and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col 2:2).

According to the usage of this word in the New Testament, a “mystery” is a concealed truth over which a veil was cast. It concerns something which transcended the powers of man to conceive, and therefore beyond his ability to invent. It related to something, which was undiscoverable by the human mind, beyond human knowledge until Divinely revealed. In recent years, those known as dispensationalists have substituted the term “secret,” but we deem it a faulty alternative. It is true these “mysteries” were “secrets” impenetrable by finite sagacity till brought to light by God, but they are still designated “mysteries” after their revelation! Even now they are made known to us there remains a *mysterious* element, which is beyond our ken. “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep” (1Co 15:51 and cf. 1Th 4:17)—before the Holy Spirit made such disclosures, who ever imagined a whole generation of God’s people would enter Heaven without passing through the portals of death! “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in flesh” (1Ti 3:16)—yet now the miracle of the virgin birth has been recorded, there remains about the Divine incarnation that which is beyond our understanding. The Divine mysteries, therefore, are addressed to *faith* and not to reason.

In seeking to frame a definition of the grand “mystery” of our passage, we will first appropriate the help supplied by the clauses, which have already been before us. It is something “according to” which the God of power is to stablish His people. Contributory thereto, or as the means He employs in connection therewith, is what Paul styles “my Gospel”—i.e. that which he had expounded at length in this very epistle, the heart or central object of which is, “the preaching of Jesus Christ.” Next, we observe, this mystery “was kept secret since the world began,” by

which we understand that it was: hidden from all the wise men of this world (1Co 2:8), that the O.T. saints had not such light upon it as Christians are now favoured with (1Pe 1:10; Col 1:26), and that even the holy angels were not permitted to enter into its wondrous contents until the same was actualised historically (1Pe 1:11; Eph 3:10). Further, we are told that this mystery is now “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26)—for Jew and Gentile alike to give up themselves to Christ to be accepted (by God) through Him, to be ruled by Him.

Turning now to parallel passages, we find that this mystery has to do with that which “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God *hath revealed them* unto us (especially in the N.T.) by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things (proof of His omniscience), yea, the deep things of God” (1Co 2:7-10). This intimates the transcendent sublimity of its contents. “The mystery of His will” (Eph 1:9) declares its origin and hints at its selective nature. “The mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4) signifies Christ *mystical*, for it is His Body in which believing Jews and Gentiles are made “fellowheirs” (Eph 3:6), which tells of its international scope. Colossians 1:26,27 speaks of “the riches of the glory of this mystery,” which announces the plenitude of its bestowments. 1 Timothy 3:16 shows us the outworking of it centered around the incarnation, justification, and exaltation of God the Son.

This grand mystery was, we believe, what is designated in other passages “the Everlasting Covenant” (Heb 13:20), which concerned the Divine plan of redemption or the amazing scheme, whereby lost and depraved sinners might be everlastingly saved to the glory of God. This seems clear not only from the other passages referred to above, but more especially from the whole of 1 Corinthians 2. There, Paul affirmed that his paramount concern was to preach “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Cor 2:2), disdaining the devices of rhetoric in so doing, yet “speak[ing] the wisdom of God in a mystery” (1Cor 2:7): a message so unworldly, so incredible, so exacting that none but the Holy Spirit could open human hearts to savingly receive it. And here, for the moment, we must pause. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

19. Eleventh Miracle

The eleventh miracle of Elisha is so closely connected, and so intimately bound up with the tenth, that it will scarcely be out of place for us to bring forward the final division of the foregoing and use it as the introduction to this one. Though we dwelt at more than customary length on the healing of Naaman, and pointed out much as we went along that was typical in connection with the same, yet there still remains several details of interest which deserve separate notice, and unto them we now turn. First, the cleansing of Naaman supplied a striking display of

the sovereignty of God. This was emphasised by the Lord Jesus in His first public discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth, when He reminded His hearers, “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus (Elisha) the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luk 4:27). It is ever thus with Him whose thoughts are so different from and whose ways are so high above ours that, when acting in the freeness of His grace, He passes by others and singles out the most unlikely to be the recipients of His high favours (1Co 1:26-29).

Second, the cleansing of Naaman afforded a blessed foreshadowment of the Divine mercy reaching out unto *the Gentiles*, for Naaman was not an Israelite, but a Syrian; nevertheless, he was made to learn the humbling lesson that if Divine grace was to be extended to him, such grace proceeds from the God of Abraham. That was why he must wash in the Jordan: the waters of “Abana and Pharpar” (2Ki 5:12) were of no avail—he must wash in one of *Israel’s* streams! This truth is written large across the pages of Holy Writ. The harlot of Jericho was to be spared when her city was destroyed, but it could only be by her heeding the instructions of the two Hebrew spies. The widow of Zarephath was preserved through the famine, but it was by receiving Elijah into her home. The Ninevites were delivered from impending wrath, but at the preaching of Jonah. The king of Babylon received a dream from God, but for its interpretation, he must turn to Daniel. To the Samaritan adulteress, Christ declared “salvation is of the Jews” (Joh 4:22). Then let us heed the warning of Romans 11:18, 25.

Third, the cleansing of Naaman provided a full adumbration of “the way of salvation” or what is *required of the sinner* in order to his cleansing. First, we have a picture of how fallen man appears in the eyes of the thrice holy God—a leper, one condemned by His Law, a loathsome object, unfit for the Divine presence, a menace to his fellows. Then we behold his self-righteousness and self-importance, as he came expecting to purchase his healing, and was angry at the prophet’s refusal to show him deference. Next, we learn of the demand made upon him: he must descend from his chariot, and go and wash seven times in the Jordan. There must be the setting aside of his own thoughts and desires, the humbling of proud self, the acknowledgement of his total depravity, full surrender to God’s authority and faith’s laying hold of the promise “and the flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean” (2Ki 5:10). Finally, we behold the immediate and complete transformation: “and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child” (2Ki 5:14) with a corresponding change of heart and conduct toward Elisha and his God.

Ere passing from this most fascinating incident, one further word on the particular waters into which Naaman was required to dip. It was not in the river Kishon, nor the pool of Bethesda, but the Jordan. Why? The answer to that question reveals the striking accuracy of our type. As leprosy (emblem of sin) was in question, the *curse* must be witnessed to. Sin has called down the curse of the One against whom it has raised its defiant head (Gen 3). The curse is God’s judgment upon sin, and that judgment is *death*. It is this, of which the Jordan ever speaks. It was not because its waters possessed any magical properties or healing virtue: the very name Jordan means “judgment.” Those who heeded our Lord’s forerunner “were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their SINS” (Mar 1:5)—immersion beneath its waters was the acknowledgement that death was their due. Therefore did the Saviour allude to His death as a “baptism” (Luk 12:50), for at the cross, He was overwhelmed by the judgments of God (Psa 42:7; 88:7), and when a sinner believes the Gospel and appropriates Christ as his Substitute, God regards him as having passed through His judgment of sin, so that he can now say, “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20), and in his baptism as a believer, there is a symbolical showing forth of that fact.

The miracle which is to now to engage our attention is of quite another order, the differences between them being most striking. We will, therefore consider, first, its *contrasts*. The subject of the foregoing miracle was a heathen idolater, now it is the prophet's own servant. The one sought unto the prophet for relief; the other pursued the relieved one and virtually demanded tribute from him. There we behold Elisha teaching Naaman the grand truth of the freeness of Divine grace, here we see Gehazi casting a dark cloud over the same. In the one, Naaman is represented as expressing deep gratitude for his recovery and urging the man of God to receive a present at his hands; in the other, the avaricious Gehazi is portrayed as coveting that which his master so nobly refused. There it was a poor creature healed of his leprosy; here it is one being smitten with that dread disease. There we behold the goodness of God acting in a way of mercy; here we see His severity acting in holy justice. The former closes with the recipient of Divine grace returning home as a devout worshipper; the latter ends with a pronouncement of God's cure on the transgressor and on his seed forever.

Second, its *subject*. The one on whom this solemn miracle was wrought is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. He has come before us several times previously, and nowhere was he seen to advantage. First, when the woman of Shunem sought unto the man of God on behalf of her dead son and cast herself at his feet, "Gehazi came near to thrust her away" (2Ki 4:27) and his master bade him, "Let her alone." Then the prophet instructed his servant to go before him and lay his staff upon the face of the child (2Ki 4:29). Elisha could successfully smite the waters of Jordan with Elijah's mantle because "the spirit of Elijah" rested upon him (2Ki 2:15), but being devoid of the Spirit, the prophet's staff was of no avail in the prayerless hands of Gehazi (2Ki 4:31). In 2 Kings 4:43, we behold his selfishness and unbelief: "What, should I set this before an hundred men?" when Elisha was counting upon God to multiply the loaves. Thus, his character and conduct is all of a piece and in keeping with his name, which significantly enough means, "Denier."

Third, its *occasion*. "But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him" (2Ki 5:20). It will be remembered that before Naaman left Syria for the land of Samaria that he provided himself with a costly treasure, consisting of "ten talents of silver and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (2Ki 5:5). No doubt, a part of this was designed for travelling expenses for the retinue of servants who accompanied him, but the major portion of it, he evidently intended to bestow upon his benefactor. But Elisha had firmly refused to receive anything (2Ki 5:15, 16), and so he was now returning home with his horses still laden with the treasure. This was more than the covetous heart of Gehazi could endure, and he determined to secure a portion of it for himself. The honour of Jehovah and the glory of His grace counted nothing with him.

Every word in the above verse repays careful attention. It opens not with the usual "And," but the ominous "But," intimating the solemn contrast between the two miracles. Gehazi is here termed not only "the servant of Elisha," but "of Elisha the man of God"—the added words bring out the enormity of his sin. First, they call attention to the greatness of the privilege he had enjoyed being in close attendance on so pious a master. This rendered the more excuseless his wicked conduct, for it was not the act of an ignorant person, but of one well instructed in the ways of righteousness. Second, it emphasises the enormity of his offence, for it reflected seriously on the official character of the one who employed him. The sins of those in the sacred office, or of those associated with them therein are far graver than those of others. But Gehazi had no concern for the glory of God, so he cared nothing for the reputation of Elisha.

What has just been pointed out above definitely refutes one of the widespread delusions of our day, namely, that it is their unfavourable surrounding which is responsible for the degenerate conduct of so many of the present generation: social improvement can only be effected by improving the wage and homes of the poor. And is the behaviour of the rich any better? Is there less immorality in the west-end of London than in the east? It is drunken and thriftless people who makes the slums, and not the slums which ruin the people. God's Word teaches it is "out of the heart" of fallen man (Mar 7:21-23), and not from his faulty environment that proceeds all which defiles human nature. Nor it is any more warrantable for any person to attempt throwing the blame for his downfall on being obliged to mingle with evil characters. Gehazi was isolated from all bad companions placed in the most favourable circumstances, dwelling with a "man of God," but his soul was depraved! While "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc 8:11), the Gospel and not better "social amenities" is their only remedy.

Neither his close association with the man of God nor the witnessing of the miracles performed by him effected any change within Gehazi. The state of his heart is revealed by each expression recorded in 2 Kings 5:20, "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman." Incapable of appreciating the motives, which had actuated Elisha, he felt that he had foolishly missed a golden opportunity. Gehazi regarded Naaman as legitimate prey, as a bird to be plucked. Contemptuously, he refers to him as "*this* Syrian." There was no pity for the one who had been such a sufferer, and no thankfulness that God had healed him. He was determined to make capital out of the situation: "I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." His awful sin was deliberately premeditated. What was worse, he made use of an impious oath: "*as* the LORD liveth, I will run after him." There was no fear of God before his eyes: instead, he defiantly took His holy name in vain.

"So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw *him* running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is all well?*" (2Ki 5:21). It is solemn to observe that God put no hindrance in the ways of him who had devised evil. He could have moved Naaman to quicken his pace and so out-distance Gehazi. But He did not: an indication that He had given him up to his heart's lusts. It is ever a signal mark of Divine mercy when the Lord deigns to interfere with our plans and thwart our carnal designs. When we purpose doing anything wrong and a providential obstacle blocks us, it is a sign that God has not yet abandoned us to our madness. The graciousness of Naaman in alighting from his chariot and the question he asked gave further evidence of the change, which had been wrought in him.

Fourth, its *aggravation*. "And he said, All *is* well. My master hath sent me saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments" (2Ki 5:22). Here we see the wicked Gehazi adding sin to sin, thereby treasuring up to himself "wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom 2:5). First, his greedy heart cherished a covetous desire, then he deliberately and eagerly (as his "running" shows) proceeded to realise the same, and now he resorts to falsehoods. Liars can tell a plausible tale, especially when asking for charity. The thievish knave pretended it was not for himself, but for others in need that he was seeking relief—ever a favourite device employed by the unscrupulous when seeking to take advantage of unwary victims. Worse still, he compromised his master by saying *he* had sent him. To what fearful lengths will a covetous heart carry its subjects!

"And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid *them* upon two of his servants; and they bare *them* before him" (2Ki 5:23). Naaman was quite unsuspecting. He not only complied

with Gehazi's request, but gave him more than he asked for. After the prophet's firm and repeated refusals to accept ought at his hands, he should have been more on his guard. There is a warning here for us to beware of crediting every beggar we encounter, even though he be a religious one. There have ever been religious leeches who consider the righteous are legitimate prey for them to fatten upon. Whilst it is a Christian duty to relieve the genuinely poor, and there are few such today, yet we are not to encourage idleness, nor suffer ourselves to be deceived by those with a smooth tongue: *investigate* their case.

"And when he came to the tower he took *them* from their hand and bestowed *them* in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed" (2Ki 5:24). He took pains to carefully conceal his ill-gotten gains in a "secret place" (margin), no doubt congratulating himself of his shrewdness—reminding us of the hiding themselves of our first parents (Gen 3:8) and of Achan (Jos 7:21). "But he went in, and stood before his master" (2Ki 5:25). Pretending to be a faithful and dutiful servant, he now appeared before Elisha to await his orders—the most untruthful and dishonest often assume a pious pose in the company of the saints! "And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" An opportunity was thus given him to confess his sins, but instead of so doing, he added lie to lie: "And he said, Thy servant went no whither." There was no repentance, but a daring brazening of it out.

Fifth, its *justice*. "And he said unto him, Went not mine heart *with thee* when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it* a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white as snow*" (2Ki 5:26, 27). Though Christians are not endowed with the extraordinary powers of the prophets, yet if they be truly walking with God, they will discern a liar when he confronts them (1Co 2:15). Elisha put his finger on the worst feature of the offence, "*Is it* a time to receive money"! and thus, sully God's free grace. From the words that follow, Elisha indicated that he knew how Gehazi designed to use the money—intending to leave his service and set up as a farmer. His punishment was a condign one: he had coveted something of Naaman's—he should have that which would henceforth symbolically portray the polluted state of his soul.

Sixth, its *significance*. Space obliges us to abbreviate. That Gehazi fully deserved the frightful punishment which was visited upon him, and that the form it took was a case of what is termed 'poetic justice' will be evident to every spiritual mind: nevertheless, there was a severity of dealing with him which is more noticeable than in other cases. Nor is the reason far to seek. God was incensed at his having so grievously compromised the display of His free grace. The Lord is very jealous of His types. Observe how He moved Joseph to restore the money to the sacks of his brethren when they came to obtain food from Egypt (Gen 42:25): because he was there foreshadowing Christ as the Bread of life—given to us "without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). The failure of Moses was far more than a losing of his temper: it was a marring of a blessed type. Note "smite the rock" in Exodus 17:6, but only "*speak*" to it in Numbers 20:8—Christ was to be "smitten" (Isa 53:4) but once! As Moses suffered premature death for his fault, so Gehazi was smitten with leprosy for his.

Seventh, its *lessons*. We can but mention three. First, there is a sharply-pointed example here of the bitter fruits borne by the nourishing of a covetous spirit, and a fearful exemplification of that word, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1Tim 6:10). How we need to pray, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity (Psa 119:37). Second, there is a

most solemn warning against putting a stumbling block in the way of a babe in Christ. Naaman had only recently come to know Jehovah as “the God of all grace” and that was another reason why He dealt so severely with Gehazi, *see* Matthew 18.6! Third, there is a searching test for those of us who are engaged exclusively in God’s service, though delivered from the love of money, we may *seek* the good opinion and praise of men.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

4. Its Author

This doctrine of Reconciliation presents to our view that which is both indescribably horrible, and also, that which is inexpressibly blessed. The background of it is formed by the fearful calamity of Eden, when the entrance of sin into the world involved the ruination of our race and its alienation from God. The sin of Adam (and of ours in him) was a revolt against God’s authority, a contempt of His government, a declaration of war against Him. Man is a rebel, an outlaw, an enemy of God, cut off from access to Him. This has already been before us in previous articles. Now we turn to contemplate the blessed contrast wherein God determined to deliver a part of Adam’s descendants from the effects of the fall, and this in such a way that His absolute sovereignty, His free grace, His inexorable justice, unsearchable wisdom, ineffable holiness, all-mighty power, infinite goodness and rich mercy, might be equally honoured. This is actually accomplished in the saving of His elect by Jesus Christ.

The Author of reconciliation is God. More distinctly, it is God the Father, for there is an *order* of the Divine Persons in this work, as in all others. “But to us there is but one God, the Father, *of* whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ [the alone Mediator] *by* whom are all things, and we by him” (1Co 8:6). “God [the Father], who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:9): as that was the order of their operation in connection with the old creation, so it is with regard to the new creation—the Father has effected reconciliation by the death of His Son (Rom 5:10). Distinct offices are ascribed to each of the Eternal Three. The Father is the Deviser, the Son transacts the part of Mediator, being the One by whom the work of reconciliation is performed; the Holy Spirit is the Recorder of the Father’s plan, and of the satisfaction offered by the Son and of the peace He has made, and is also the One who sheds abroad Their love in the hearts of the redeemed.

The order pointed out above is still more observable in connection with our approach to God: it is *through* Christ and *by* the Holy Spirit that we have access *unto* the Father (Eph 2:18). All the spiritual blessings we have in Christ are expressly attributed unto the Father (Eph 1:3), by no means the least of which is reconciliation. Our election is ascribed particularly unto the Father (Eph 1:3, 4) and so is our regeneration (Jam 1:17, 18). It is the Father who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, having delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13). In accord with this Divine order, we find the opening salutation in the Epistles is, “Grace unto you and peace from God the Father,

and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Hence the Father is due the same honour and love from us for the sending of His Son, as the Son is for His willingness in being sent. Scripture represents the Father as the One directly wronged by sin, for we are told that Jesus Christ is “an Advocate with the Father” (1Jo 2:1).

1. *His will.* When accountable creatures rebel against their Maker and King, they cut themselves off from all right to claim any blessing or benefit at His hands, for they deserve nothing from Him but wrath and punishment. If they be recovered from the ruin which they have brought upon themselves, and are made partakers of Divine salvation, it is solely from the good pleasure of His will, and must be in a way that does not injure any of His perfections; but if they be left to suffer the direful consequences of their apostasy, God is in no wise unjust, for He inflicts no more upon them than they deserve. When a large company of the angels and their chiefs, under Satan’s lead, conspired against the Most High, proudly aspiring to a higher position than had been allotted them, God promptly cast them down from their exalted estate, banished them from His presence, and doomed them to suffer everlasting woe (2Pe 2:4). He had not a thought of mercy toward those celestial creatures when they revolted against Him.

In view of that unspeakably solemn example, it ought to be unmistakeably clear to each of us that God might, without the slightest stain upon His own honour, without any unbecoming severity, have left the whole of Adam’s guilty race to suffer eternal destruction, for certainly they had no more clarity upon His favour than had the fallen angels. That He did not immediately consign the entire family of fallen mankind to irremediable woe, was due alone to His imperial will: that He was pleased to appoint a remnant of them to obtain salvation and eternal glory, is to be attributed solely to His sovereign and amazing grace. That such a concept is no invention of harsh theologians: but is plainly taught in the Word of God, is clear from His own declarations, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph 1:5, 6); “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace.” (2Ti 1:9).

“Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself” (Eph 1:9). The “mystery” refers to “the everlasting covenant” in which God arranged and provided for the recovery and salvation of His people who fell in Adam. In proof of which assertion, we cite 1 Corinthians 2:7: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory,” amplified in 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10. Now that which is germane to our present design is, that God “purposed in Himself” or resolved to reconcile some of the sons of men to Himself, even though they had become guilty rebels against Him, and this purpose He purposed “before the world began” (2Ti 1:9). One portion or aspect of that purpose is expressly stated in what immediately follows: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times [this Christian era] He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, *even* in Him” (Eph 1:10). Sin alienates and separates, but the putting away of sin by Christ healed the breach between God and man, between believing Jews and Gentiles, and between them and the holy angels. *Now* “the whole family in heaven and in earth (Eph 3:15) is one—see Revelation 5:11, 12.

The restoration and reconciliation of His guilty and alienated people is attributed to God’s “good pleasure,” whereof no reason is given save that He “purposed [it] in Himself”—which means that the idea was suggested by none other, and that no external motive influenced Him. There was necessity put upon Him for this resolution: without the least dishonour to Himself, He

might have destroyed the entire apostate race, yea, and have been glorified in their destruction. He who was able out of stones “to raise up children unto Abraham” (Mat 3:9), could have consigned Adam and Eve to eternal woe before they produced any children, and have made a new pair from the dust of the ground. There was nothing whatever in the creature that moved God to show mercy unto him. But there is another concept conveyed by this expression—namely, the certainty and powerful efficacy of what He has decided upon, God cannot possibly be disappointed in the accomplishment of His purpose, for none can overthrow it; nor will He ever alter it. “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10); “For I am the Lord, I change not (Mal 3:6).

Here is sure and solid comfort for the spiritually-awakened sinner. That simple fact that God is merciful in His nature is not sufficient: Satan knows *that*, but such knowledge affords him no peace! But the Divine assurance *will* “shew mercy” (Exo 33:19) opens a real door of hope. Suppose that Christ had died, and there had been no Gospel revelation and proclamation of the Divine purpose of His death? The mere knowledge of His crucifixion avails me nothing, unless I am assured that it was the will of God to accept Christ’s death in lieu of the death of believing sinners: “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Heb 10:10). The “will” of God is not only the foundation of the “mystery” or plan of redemption, but it is also its *blessedness*. This is the very pith and preciousness of the Gospel: that it is the revealed will of God to save and accept every sinner who puts his or her trust in the atoning blood of Christ. “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from [the corruption and doom of] this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4).

2. *His love*. A few may be surprised that we should distinguish between the will and love of God, but probably a far greater number will wonder why any explanation should be required from us for so doing. Yet John Owen in his “Arguments against Universal Redemption” (chapter 8, paragraph 5) said, “The eternal love of God towards His elect is nothing but His purpose and good pleasure—a pure act of His will, whereby He determines to do such and such things for them in His own time and way.” And again, in his “Vindiciae Evangelicae” (chapter 29), after referring to John 3:16 and other passages, “Now the love of God is an eternal free act of His will, His purpose.” Such a cold and bare definition may suit philosophers and metaphysicians, but it will scarcely appeal to the hearts of the regenerate. When Scripture affirms that Christ is the “Son of His love” (Col 1:13, see margin), we are surely to understand something more than that the Son is merely the Object on which the Divine will is set. Rather do we believe, with many others, that the Son is the Darling of the Father’s heart. How, too, are we to understand the Saviour’s representation of the Father in His welcome of the returning prodigal: He “ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luk 15:20)!

While we are far from believing that God’s unfathomable love in anywise resembles ours, as an emotion or passion, subject to fluctuation, yet we refuse to regard it as a mere principle. When the voice of the Father audibly declared, “this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” He gave expression to the language of deep and warm affection. When the Lord Jesus affirmed, “The only-begotten Son (a term of endearment) which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (Joh 1:18), we grant that He employed an anthropomorphism (ascribing to God what pertains properly to man); nevertheless, we cannot allow that it was a mere figure of speech devoid of real meaning. “God *is* love” (1Jo 4:8), and no refinements of the most eminent theologians must be suffered to rob us of the blessedness and preciousness of that fundamental truth. All things issue from the will of God (Eph 1:11), but Scripture nowhere tells us that all

things proceed from God's love. The non-elect are the subjects of His will, but they are not the objects of His love. Thus there is a clear distinction between the two things.

We greatly prefer the statement of Thomas Goodwin. Near the beginning of his massive work on "Christ the Mediator," he shows what was done by God the Father from all eternity in connection with our salvation. First, He points out His eternal purpose and grace, and then enquires, "If you would further know, What should be the reason of this strange *affection* in our God (i.e. exercised unto those who had rebelled against Him): why the Scripture gives it: our God being *love*, even love itself." Love is an essential perfection in God's very nature, and as it has pleased Him, to exercise the same unto His elect. It is an act of His will, yet not of His will absolutely considered, but of "the good pleasure of His will" toward them. All the acts of God unto His people in Christ, all the blessings which He has bestowed upon them in Christ, all His thoughts concerning them, all the operations of His grace in them, and the workings of His providence for them, all the manifestations of His kindness and mercy unto them, proceed from His *love* for them. Love is the fountain from which flows every stream of His goodness unto them.

The wondrous love of God for His people can only be known by its blessed manifestations toward them. As the effects which it produces discovers to us the nature of the cause which produces them, so the love which God bears unto His elect is revealed by His acts unto them and bestowments upon them. God's love for us does not commence when we first respond to His gracious overtures unto us through the Gospel, nor even when He capacitates us to respond by first quickening us into newness of life, for His very calling of us out of darkness into His own marvellous light proceeds from His love for us. Nor did God's love for the Church begin when Christ died for her and put away her sins, for it was because God so loved her that He gave up His beloved Son to die in her room and stead. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3) is God's own ringing declaration. Therefore it was in love that He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself" (Eph 1: 4, 5), which is the foundation of all our blessings. Nor did our fall in Adam produce the slightest change of God's love unto His elect.

Though our sin in Eden did not quench God's love for His people, nor even chill it to the slightest degree, yet that horrible disobedience of theirs raised such formidable obstacles from the holiness of His nature and the righteousness of His government, yea opposed such a barrier against us as appeared to all finite intelligences an insuperable one to prevent the exercise of God's compassion unto His guilty and corrupted people. In a word, the Law of God with its inexorable demand for satisfaction, seemed to effectually prevent the operation and manifestation of His love toward its transgressors. Consider carefully an example on the human plane. Darius was induced to sign a decree that if any person asked a petition during the next thirty days from any save himself, he should forfeit his life (Dan 6). Daniel himself defied that decree, making supplication of his God as aforetime. His watchful enemies promptly reported this to the king and demanded that Daniel should be cast into the den of lions. Darius was displeased with himself "and *set* his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him" (Dan 6:14). But in vain: the honour of his law barred the outflow of his love; justice triumphed over mercy.

Consider still another case. Absalom committed a grievous offence against his father, for he sought to rob him of his sceptre and wrest the kingdom from his hands, and furthermore, murdered another of his sons. His attempt to gain the kingdom failed, and he fled the country, and remained an exile for three years. David mourned for his son every day and "longed to go forth unto Absalom" (2Sa 13:39), but the honour of his throne clearly prohibited such an action. When

Joab perceived “that the king’s heart *was* toward Absalom” (2Sa 14:1) and that he knew not how to make an advance toward him without disgracing his character and government, he decided to further his own plans. Accordingly, the unscrupulous Joab resorted to guile and employed a woman to speak to David, pleading that Absalom’s crime might be pardoned, his attainder reversed, and be released from banishment. Strangely enough, she reminded the king that God “doth He *devise means*, that His banished be not expelled from Him” (2Sa 14:14). But such a task of restoring his son without sully his own honour was quite beyond David. The best he could devise was, “Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face” (2Sa 14:24).

3. *His wisdom.* Where the wit of Darius completely failed before the requirements of human law, the wisdom of God gloriously triumphed over the obstacles interposed by the Divine Law. Where the wit of David could contrive nothing better than a wretched compromise, for which he later paid dearly, the omniscience of Deity found a way whereby His banished sons are restored and which redounds unto His everlasting honour. In pursuance of His gracious design to recover and reconcile His elect from their fall and alienation, the love of God set His consummate wisdom to work in contriving the fittest means for accomplishing the same. Hence, it is that we read in connection with God’s grand purpose concerning our salvation, that He “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). “He works all by counsel to effect and bring to pass what His will is pitched upon, and the stronger His will is in a thing, the deeper are His counsels as to it” (Thomas Goodwin). —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4c. Its Nature

In our last we sought to show the principles from which spiritual growth issues and the main lines along which Christian progress advances, pointing out that spiritual growth is the development of the spiritual life communicated at regeneration. In this, we shall proceed from the general to the particular, seeking to set out in some detail what that development actually consists of.

1. Spiritual growth consists of an increase in spiritual knowledge.

God works in us as rational creatures, according to our intelligent nature, so that nothing is wrought in us unless knowledge paves the way. We cannot speak a language, unless we have some understanding of the same. We cannot do work with an implement or machine, nor play on a musical instrument, until we have a knowledge of them. The same obtains in connection with spiritual things. We cannot worship intelligently or acceptably an unknown God. He must first reveal Himself and be known by us, for we could not love or trust One with whom we had no acquaintance. Therefore, does God’s Word declare, “They that know Thy Name will put their

trust in Thee” (Psa 9:10). It cannot be otherwise: once God is revealed to us as living reality, the heart at once confides itself to Him, as being infinitely worthy of its fullest reliance and dependence. It is spiritual ignorance of God, which lies at the foundation of all our distrust of Him, and therefore, of all our doubts and fears: “Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace” (Job 22:21).

The Christian life begins in knowledge, for “the new *man* is renewed in knowledge” (Col 3:10). “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). There has been much difference of opinion among commentators as to the scope of those words. When we wrote thereon some twenty years ago, we adopted the view of the majority of Christian writers, namely, a declaration of the way and means by which eternal life is obtained: just as the words that follow “this is the condemnation” in John 3:19 do not define the character of that condemnation, but rather tell us the *cause* of it. While we still believe in the legitimacy and soundness of the interpretation we gave formerly, yet mature reflection would not restrict the meaning of John 17:3 to that explanation, but would also understand it to signify that “eternal life” (of which we now have, but the promise and earnest) or everlasting bliss and glory will consist of an ever-increasing knowledge of the Triune God, as revealed in the person of the Mediator.

This knowledge does not consist in theological thoughts or metaphysical speculations about the Godhead, but in such a spiritual understanding of Him as causes us to believe in the Lord God, to cast our souls upon Him, and be centered in Him as our everlasting Portion. “The renewed understanding is raised up and enlightened with a supernatural life, so that what we know of the Lord is by intuitive knowledge, which the Holy Spirit is most graciously pleased to give. Hence, believers are said to be called out of darkness into marvellous light, and Paul says, ‘ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.’ As the knowledge of the Father, Son and Spirit, is reflected upon the renewed mind in the person of Christ, so it is received into the heart” (S. E. Pierce). This spiritual apprehension of God is such as no outward means can of themselves convey: no not even the reading of the Word or hearing it preached. In addition thereto, God by His own light and power conveys to the human spirit such an effectual discovery of Himself as radically affects the understanding, conscience, affections and will, reforming the life.

As the Christian life begins in spiritual knowledge, so it is increased thereby: “But grow in grace and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18), upon which we quote again from the excellent Pierce, “I conceive that by *grace* here all those faculties, graces, habits and dispositions, which are wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, are to be understood. And to have our spiritual faculties, graces, habits and dispositions exercised distinctively and supernaturally on their proper objects and subjects *is* to ‘grow in grace.’ What follows in the text is explanatory: ‘and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ He is the Object on which all our graces are to be exercised. He is the life of all our graces. Therefore, growing into a greater knowledge of Him, and the Father’s love in Him, is to ‘grow in grace,’ for hereby all our graces are quickened, strengthened, exercised and drawn forth to the praise of God.” While we do not think that exhausts the meaning of 2 Peter 3:18, yet such an interpretation is borne out by the second verse of the epistle: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you *through* the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord”—not by the knowledge of God alone, nor of the Lord Jesus alone, but of God in Christ the Mediator, which is also the force of John 17:3.

One of the ways by which we may ascertain what spiritual growth consist of is by attending to the recorded prayers of the apostles, and noting what it was they made request for. Being very

eminent themselves in grace and holiness, it was their earnest desire that the churches and particular individuals to whom their epistles were addressed, might increase and greatly flourish in those Divine bestowments. Accordingly, in his prayer for the Ephesians, we find Paul petitioning that the Father of glory would give unto them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,” that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened that they might know what is the hope of His calling (Eph 1:17, 18). It should be obvious that in asking for successful favours for those saints, there was no implication that they were entirely devoid of them, or that he sought the initial bestowment of them—any more than John 20:31 signifies the Fourth Gospel was addressed to unbelievers (Eph 1:16 proves otherwise), or that his first Epistle was sent to Christians lacking in assurance: rather does 1 John 5:13 connote “that ye may have a clearer and fuller knowledge that eternal life is yours.”

No, in making those petitions on behalf of the Ephesian saints, Paul requested that a larger degree of heavenly light might be furnished unto their minds, that they might have a more spiritual apprehension of the One with whom they had to do, of His wondrous perfections according to the revelation He has made of Himself in the Word, and of his varied relationships to them. It was that they might discern the wonders of His grace and power toward, in, and for them. It was that they might have an enlarged conception and perception of their vivification when they were in a state of death in sin. In like manner, he prayed that the love of the Philippian saints might “abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment” (Phi 1:9). So for the Colossians, that they might be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10), which is to be taken in its fullest sense: increasing in the knowledge of God in the manifestation He has made of Himself in creation, in providence, in grace; the knowledge of God in His three Persons, in His Christ the Mediator, in His Law, in His Gospel; in the knowledge of His holy will.

This knowledge of God, which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate, which the apostle solicited on behalf of his converts, and which is the basic element in all real Christian progress, is something vastly different from and superior to the mere possession of a correct opinion about God or any speculative view concerning Him. It is a supernatural and saving knowledge. A merely theoretical knowledge of God is inoperative and ineffectual, but an experimental acquaintance with Him is dynamical and transforming. It is a knowledge, which deeply affects the heart, producing reverential awe, for “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Pro 9:10). It is such a knowledge as strengthens the Christian’s graces and calls them forth into lively exercise. Since that Divine light and power is communicated to the saint by the Spirit through the Scriptures, it causes him to search and ponder them as he never did previously, and to mix faith with what he reads and takes in. It is such a knowledge as promotes holiness in the heart and piety in the life. It is a knowledge which produces obedience to the Divine commandments, as 1 John 2:3, 4 plainly teaches. Yet there can be no such knowledge of God except as He is apprehended through Christ (2Co 4:6).

Such a knowledge of God lies at the foundation of every thing else in the spiritual life, being both essential and introductory. Without such a knowledge of God, we cannot know ourselves, how to order our lives in this world, nor what awaits us in the world to come: until made acquainted with Him who is light (1Jo 1:5), we are in complete darkness. Calvin evinced the profundity of his spiritual insight by commencing his renowned “Institutes” in saying, “True and substantial wisdom primarily consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.” Without a spiritual and personal knowledge of God, we cannot perceive the infinite evil of sin and the fearful havoc it has wrought in us: it is only in His light that we “see light” (Psa 36:9) and discover the horribleness and totality of our depravity. Then it is that we both behold

and feel ourselves to be just as God has described us in His Word. Equally so it is only by such a knowledge of God that we can appreciate the Divinely-provided remedy: either in discovering wherein it consists or realising our dire need of the same. “The way of the wicked *is* as darkness” (Pro 4:19).

From all that has been pointed out above, we may see how completely dependent the Christian is upon God: no spiritual progress is possible, except as He continues to shine upon us. Neither a powerful intellect, the artificial aids of philosophy, nor a thorough training in logic, can contribute one iota unto a spiritual apprehension of Divine things. True, they are of use in enabling the teacher to discourse thereon, to express himself more readily and fluently than the illiterate, but as to discovering to him Divine truth, they are of no value whatever. The reason of this is evident: celestial things are high above the reach of carnal reason, and therefore, it can never attain unto an acquaintance with their true nature. Heavenly grace is required for an entrance into heavenly things, and the meanest capacity is as susceptible to heavenly grace as the most capacious mind. Moreover, the things of God are addressed to *faith*, and that is a grace of which the unregenerate, be he the most accomplished savant, is utterly devoid. Divine mysteries are hidden from the naturally wise and prudent, but they are supernaturally revealed to spiritual babes (Mat 11:25)—revealed by the Holy Spirit through a Divinely-imparted faith.

An uneducated Christian may not be able to enter into the subtle niceties of theological metaphysics, he may not be competent to debate the Truth with ingenious objectors, but he is capable of understanding the character and perfections of God, the person and work of Christ, the mysteries and wonders of redemption, so as to obtain such a gracious view thereof as to excite in his mind a holy adoration of the Father and a love for and joy in the Redeemer. And such a knowledge, and that alone, will stand us in stead in a time of trial, the hour of temptation, or the article of death. Yet it is only as the Holy Spirit is pleased to give fresh light and life to the believer’s mind by bringing home anew by His own unction and efficacy, what is already known, that he can increase in the spiritual knowledge thereof. What God has revealed in His Word must be applied again and again by the Spirit if it is to be operative in us and bear fruit through us. The believer is as much dependent upon God for an increase of spiritual knowledge as he was for the first reception of it, and constantly does he need to bear in mind that humbling word, “without Me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5).

If we added nothing to the last paragraph, we should present a most unbalanced view of this point, conveying the impression that we had no responsibility in the matter. As there is a radical difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, so there is between our first spiritual knowledge of God and our increase in the same. “But grow in grace and *in* the knowledge of Our Lord” (2Pe 3:18) is a Divine exhortation, intimating both our privilege and our duty. We are required to make a diligent use of the means God has provided, for He places no premium on slothfulness. Though we are dependent upon the Spirit to apply the Truth to us, yet that does not signify it will make no difference whether or not we keep the things of God fresh in our minds by daily meditation upon them. Only God can bring His Word home to our hearts in living power, nevertheless we must pray, “quicken Thou me according to Thy Word” (Psa 119:25). Moreover, it is our obligation to abstain from whatever would grieve the Spirit and thereby weaken the assurance, which enables us to say “*my* Father” and “*my* Redeemer.” If we increase not in the knowledge of God, the fault is ours.

2. Spiritual growth consists of a deeper delight in spiritual things and objects.

This is ever the accompaniment and effect of spiritual knowledge—affording us another criterion by which we may test the kind of knowledge we have. A merely speculative knowledge

of Divine things is cold and lifeless, but a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with them affects the heart and moves the affections. One may accept much of God's Word (through early training) in a traditional way, and even be prepared to contend for the same against those who oppose it, yet it will avail nothing when the Devil assails him. Hence, we are told that when the Wicked one is revealed, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and living wonders, God permits him to work "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish," and His reason for this is stated to be: "because they received not *the love of the Truth* that they might be saved" (2Th 2:10). At best, they had only a letter acquaintance with the Truth: it was never enshrined in their affections. But different far is it with the regenerate: each of them can say with the Psalmist, "O how love I Thy Law! *it is* my meditation all the day" (Psa 119:97).

Spiritual delight necessarily follows spiritual knowledge, for an object cannot be appreciated any further than it is apprehended and known. Spiritual knowledge of spiritual things imparts not only a conviction of their verity and a certainty of their reality, but it also produces the soul's adherence to them, the cleaving of the affections unto them, a holy joy in them, so that they appear inexpressibly blessed and glorious unto those granted a discovery of the same. But not having been admitted into the secret thereof, the unregenerate can form no true concept or estimate of the Christian's experience, and when he hears him exclaiming of the things of God, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psa 19:10), he can but regard such language as wild enthusiasm or fanaticism. The natural man lacks both the power to discern the beauty of spiritual things and a palate to taste their sweetness. Nor is the believer's relish for God's Word confined unto the promises and comforting portions: he also declares, "I will delight myself in Thy *commandments*, which I have loved" (Psa 119:47).

The more the believer advances in a spiritual acquaintance with the excellency and beauty of heavenly things, the more solid satisfaction do they afford his mind. The more the Christian enters into the importance and value of God's eternal Truth, the more his heart is drawn out unto the glorious objects revealed therein. The more he actually tastes that the Lord is gracious (1Pe 2:3), the more will he delight himself in Him. The more light he is granted upon the sublime mysteries of the Faith, the more will he admire the wondrous wisdom which devised them, the power which executed them, the grace which conveyed them. The more he realises the Scriptures are the very Word of God Himself, the more he is awed by their solemnity and impressed with their weightiness. The more the ineffable perfections of Deity are revealed to his spirit, the more will he exclaim, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods [or "mighty ones"]? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exo 15:11). And the more his heart is occupied with the person, the office, and the work of the Redeemer, the more will he enter into the experience of him who said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phi 3:7, 8).

It is true that, through slackness and folly, the believer may to a considerable extent lose his relish for spiritual things, so that his reading of the Word affords him little satisfaction and delight. One who eats and drinks unwise upsets his stomach, and then the palate no longer finds the choicest food agreeable to him. It is thus spiritually. If the believer be out of communion with God and turns to the world for satisfaction, he loses his appetite for the heavenly manna. Wherefore we are bidden to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word" (Jam 1:21), there must be this "laying apart" before there can be an appreciative reception of the Word. So again, 1 Peter 2:1 shows us there are certain lusts

which have to be mortified if we are to “as newborn babes, *desire* the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). If such exhortations be duly heeded, and the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, then shall we be found “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col 3:16) with an ever-deepening joy in Him. —AWP

WELCOME TIDINGS

The time has again come round when, according to our custom for many years past, we seek to give some account of our stewardship unto those who send us gifts to be used in this written ministry, and to encourage our prayer helpers to continue their support at the Throne of Grace. Their supplication have not been in vain, and as we survey the pile of appreciative letters before us, we can but exclaim, “What hath God wrought!” (Num 23:23), for certain none but *He* could multiply our poor loaves and fishes in such a day as this. It is good to recognise His hand as it works in providence; it is still better when our hearts are duly affected thereby, and we are brought to bow before Him in wonderment and worship. More words of cheer have been received than formerly, and we can but make a brief selection here and there.

“I read with trembling heart your treatment of Matthew 7:21-23. I do not at all think that you are too exacting or severe: you could not be faithful were you less so. I feel so much the hypocrisy of my soul that I need continual such warnings” (*Victoria*).

“Thank you for the valuable Biblical expositions in your paper, which have been very helpful to me personally and to the members of the ‘Bible Study Class’” (*New South Wales*).

“We have received great help and blessing from the Studies, and I give the Lord all the glory and thank and pray daily for you both that He will bless and keep you” (*South Australia*).

“I am again grateful for the Studies which have come to hand satisfactorily. They are particularly searching and for that reason most profitable” (*New Zealand*).

“I look upon it as a special favour shown me from the Most High that ever the Studies came into my hands, and that I am still receiving them. I hope you will long be able to send forth the good Seed, and that it may bring forth fruit to the glory of God, and that in ministering to others, you may be blessed” (*New Zealand*).

“Only eternity will reveal what Studies have meant to me. They have strengthened my faith and been a real spiritual blessing during the past years of fellowship with you in the deep things of God. So many times I find I am savourless salt and a cumberer of the ground, and then sitting with you at the feet of our Lord, my heart is encouraged as you lead me on to know Him and to rejoice in God my Saviour” (*Canada*).

“I always look forward for the Studies to arrive: they are a source of great comfort and consolation to me in this barren wilderness. How sad that so few in this day appreciate anything of this nature” (*Canada*).

“It is a very precious magazine to me, and has been so helpful in many ways. In a day of such confusion it is good to hear a voice proclaiming what *the Lord* says” (*Canada*).

“I wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks to God for the blessings received through your written ministry. It has not only helped me in my preaching, but especially so in my own personal life. How thankful I am that you have been led to deal with the practical side of the Scriptures. In no one else’s works that I have ever read am I so exercised and probed by the Word as by yours” (*U.S. Pastor*).

“We are grateful to Almighty God for sparing you thus far to carry on the work of the Studies” (*Canadian Pastor*).

“The Lord bless your witness. It is greatly needed: but it cannot fail of His blessing” (*English Pastor*).

“Again I write to thank you for your Studies, which are most valuable as expositions of God’s Word, and most helpful spiritually. They are strong meat, which is a vital need in these days” (*English Rector*).

“Your Studies in the Scriptures have been blessed greatly to my soul, and through my dark days have been a great comfort to me. So do not think it amiss for you, as God’s servant, to know that many a refreshing drink has been received through the furtherance of God’s Word by your labours” (*Helpless shut-in*).

“Your Studies come to me regular. I receive much help in reading them. I used to think old age was a time of rest and freedom from temptations and trials. I now find my mistake: I am in the furnace of afflictions as much as I ever was. God shows me where I am, and I am so glad He does. I have no fault to find: His goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life” (*Very aged Pilgrim*).

“We have enjoyed every article and especially those on the Sermon on the Mount, which have been very instructive as well as searching, and they must be if we are to get any real benefit from them. In these trying times, one needs messages that *lead* to heart searching and deeper piety” (*California*).

“We are indeed thankful to Him that by His enabling grace, you were able to complete, and to read, yet another year of the Studies. They have provided, as always, most of the spiritual food and drink outside of the Word itself. Not only do we ourselves owe much to the Studies, but delight in seeing others to whom we have introduced it grow in the knowledge of Him” (*Pennsylvania*).

“I can’t tell you how much some of the articles, I think I might say, most of them, have meant to me. They have been a source of strengthening, refreshing and reviving in the midst of these distressing times. What a mercy to have our minds directed to One above and beyond it all, and our affections centered upon Him who controls all. Surely He is worthy of our highest praise” (*North Carolina*).

“The ever blessed things set forth in the Studies are the choicest things I get. Your comments on ‘Dagon Destroyed’ speak my mind exactly. May God’s good blessings continue with you and direct you in the fullness of His will” (*Montana*).

“The Studies have again been of great benefit to my soul. The series on the Sermon on the Mount have been especially illuminating, very searching; and I hope that after I have applied them to my own heart and mastered them in some degree, to be able to give them to the believers here” (*San Salvador*).

“I want to thank you for sending me ‘Studies in the Scriptures,’ which I have received at irregular intervals during the past year. They have been very helpful to me. I was particularly edified by the balance of truth in the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. I had the privilege

of introducing my friend—to the magazine and I know he, too, rejoiced in the sound teaching contained therein” (*One in the Middle East Forces*).

“Long may you both be spared to carry on with the publication of the Studies: they bring comfort to many a starved heart” (*Scotland*).

“I feel the Studies humble me and trust they will prove a blessing. They always give a sense of the greatness and holiness of God” (*Scotland*).

“Thanks for the magazines. I never but feel refreshed reading them. How very thankful we should be in the midst of a dark generation that such is written and studied in our day” (*Scotland*).

“I find the articles as profitable as at any time during the last sixteen years, and take it as an outstanding mercy of God that such help is afforded to His people in such dark days as these. I thank you personally for your ‘labour of love,’ and may God’s blessing rest upon you and the magazine” (*Itinerant preacher*).

“You are enabled to go deep into the subjects, and they search me very much; in fact, I have to leave off sometimes to pray. I feel that I come very short of being what I should be. But what a blessing to have a Throne of Grace to go to!” (*England*).

“Your magazines come like a breath from another world” (*New reader*).

“I thank our God that both you and your dear wife have been enabled to carry on this great work for another year: may you be spared, strengthened and guided to continue this ministry for many years. I say this sincerely my dear Christian friend: your writings are most stimulating, your solemn warnings and frequent spurs are also just the kind of spiritual medicine one needs to continually take lest we neglect and come short” (*England*).

August

THE PATH OF DUTY

Part D

In our last we sought to show that in order to tread the path of duty or “way of holiness” there must be, first, a desire for it: one must be a “wayfaring man”—that is, a man with a heart for that way, a love of holiness. Second, there must be a sense of our insufficiency: one must be a “fool” in his own estimation—that is, a person possessed of an humble spirit, conscious of his own stupidity. Third, there must be a turning to God’s Word for light on our path, for instruction therein, for that Word is the sole Rule of conduct, our Guidebook from earth to heaven. Obviously, the measure in which the first two things mentioned operate and are really dominant in me will determine the success I shall have in obtaining from the Scriptures the directions I so sorely need, and without which I am certain to “err” in the path of duty. If my desire for light from God wanes, or if I cherish confidence in my own wisdom or “common sense” then, though I may still read the Bible in a formal manner, yet I shall no longer “search the Scriptures daily” (Act 17:11) in a spirit of earnest and prayerful inquiry.

“My son, if thou wilt receive My words, and hide My commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom [which you profess to feel the need of], *and* apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge [of God’s will], *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding [of thy duty]: If thou seekest her as silver and searchest [the Scriptures] for her as *for* hid treasures [sparing no pains]; *Then* shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord [which is ‘the beginning of knowledge’: Pro 1:7] and find the knowledge of God” (Pro 2:1-5). It is not to the careless and halfhearted that the promise is made. It is not to the one who is content to please the Lord in merely a general way that “the secret of the Lord” is revealed. It is not to the prayerless that wisdom and spiritual discernment are vouchsafed. He who is largely indifferent to the holy claims of God upon him in times of prosperity, must not expect Him to show the way out of difficulty when a day of adversity overtakes him. It is those who are out and out for God and who walk by the precepts of His Word who have light on their path.

Let us call attention to one other spiritual grace, which is essential if we are to recognise the path of duty and then walk therein: “The *meek* will He guide in Judgment: and the *meek* will He teach His way” (Psa 25:9). Meekness is not to be confounded with humility, for they are quite distinct qualities. This is clear from the words of the Saviour who said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” (Mat 11:29)—the Greek word here rendered

“lowly” is translated “humble” in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5. There should be no difficulty in discovering the force of this word. To go no further than the verse quoted (Psa 25:9): the fact that “meekness” is required in order to our being “guided” and “taught” suggests that it signifies a pliant and receptive heart. As humility is the opposite of pride and self-sufficiency, so meekness is the opposite of self-will and stubbornness. It is not the natural virtue which we are here treating of, for *that* very often approximates closely to weakness, but the spiritual grace of meekness, which is bold as a lion before an enemy, is submissive and obedient before God.

This lovely grace, like all others, appears in its full perfection in the Lord Jesus. Seen in His readiness to be the Covenant-head of His people, in His willingness to assume our nature, in His being subject to His parents during the days of His childhood, in His submitting to the ordinance of baptism, in His entire subjection to the Father’s will, in the whole course of His obedience. Seen when He was “led [not ‘dragged’ ‘or driven,’ but ‘led’ unresistingly] as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isa 53:7). Thus, it should be evident that there is a real difference between true humility and meekness. Not only are they distinct, but they are not always operative in the same person. One may be humble and yet far from being meek. One may have a real sense of his own ignorance and stupidity, pray to God for light and wisdom, search His Word for the needed direction, and then when those directions are received *disregard* them because unacceptable. Unless our wills be truly yielded to God’s, when His will crosses ours, then we shall decline to heed the same.

It appears to the writer that what has just been pointed out serves to expose the sophistry of those who imagine that it is a more difficult matter to ascertain their duty, than to perform the same once it is perceived. Both experience and observation reveal the contrary. God’s Word is not ambiguous, but written in simple language for simple souls. True, it treats of the profoundest mysteries, which transcend the grasp of every finite intelligence; nevertheless, where it describes the way of holiness and defines what God requires from us, it uses terms so plain that misunderstanding is excuseless. Nor is it because our Guidebook is inadequate: it furnishes full directions and presents a sufficient solution to every practical problem, which may occasion us difficulty. It is the *obedience* which is difficult to flesh and blood, because our Rule so often demands that which is contrary to our natural inclinations. It is because so many fear that to follow the right course would involve them in unpleasant consequences, that they so often turn from it. That is why the Saviour said, “If ye *know* these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them” (Joh 13:17). We all know various things, which should be done, but are slow to perform, because the flesh in us finds them distasteful.

“The way of the righteous *is made plain*” (Pro 15:19). The “righteous” man is he whose heart is right with God and whose conduct is regulated by the “Word of Righteousness.” And since his heart be right toward God, he heeds those rules given him for the ordering of his steps: see Proverbs 4:23, 27. Do not expect God to reveal to you the whole path of duty in a moment: rather does He make known one step at a time. As the first step is taken in obedience to His will, He indicates the next one, and the more we yield ourselves to His governance, the clearer light shall we have both within and without. “A good understanding have all they that *do His commandments*” (Psa 111:10) because obedience to God delivers from the deceptions of the flesh and the delusions of Satan. That “good understanding” enables us to apply the general rules of Scripture to the varied details of our complex lives. That “good understanding” preserves us from making foolish mistakes. Because that “good understanding” is formed by obedience to the Divine commandments, it keeps us from acting according to selfish, worldly and carnal motives. And thus, it is that He “*leads [us]* in the way of righteousness” (Pro 8:20).

One question and we must conclude. Suppose I *failed* at a certain point to render obedience unto the clearly-revealed will of God, and instead in pursuing the path of duty, turned aside into the way of self-pleasing, and now I am eating the fruit of my own folly. Suppose I find that my way has become “hedge[d] up...with thorns” (Hos 2:6), so that I know not how to extricate myself. What am I to do? What steps must the backslider take in order to recovery? Why, humbly *confess* the sin to God and go back to the very point where you forsook the path of obedience. Abraham was called to sojourn in the land of Canaan, but when a famine arose, he forsook it and “went down into Egypt to sojourn there” (Gen 12:10)—where he got into serious trouble. But later, he went “unto the place where his tent had been at the *beginning*. . . Unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first” (Gen 13:3, 4). Do thou likewise: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the *first* works” (Rev 2:5). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

8. Romans 16: 25-27

The parallels between Romans 16:5-27 and 1 Corinthians 2 are more or less obvious. In the one the apostle adores “Him that is of power to stablish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” In the other, he averred that he had “determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Co 2:2) and affirmed his preaching had been “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1Co 2:4). In the former, he declares that his preaching had been “according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom 16:25). And in the latter, he affirms, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1Co 2:7). There, he announces the mystery “now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets” (Rom 16:26). Here, he quotes one of the Prophets and adds, “But God hath revealed *them* [the inconceivable things of the previous verse] unto us by His Spirit” (1Co 2:10). In the doxology, he ascribes glory unto “God only wise;” in the doctrinal passage, he expressly mentions “the wisdom of God” (1Co 2:7). Thus, one passage serves to interpret the other.

“And now is made manifest.” What is? Why, the grand “mystery” mentioned in the previous verse. And how is it “made manifest”? Why by his “gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” With this declaration of the apostle’s should be closely compared his earlier one: “But now the righteousness of God without the Law is *manifested*” (Rom 3:21); and that in turn takes us back to the thesis of this epistle: “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God *revealed* from faith to faith” (Rom 1:16, 17). In the N.T. era (the “now” of our text and of Rom 3:21), there has been a fuller and more glorious manifestation of God than there was in all the preceding eras. And that in a twofold sense: both in the degree of light given and those who received it. God was wondrously made known to Israel, yet nothing

like He was when He became incarnate and tabernacled among men. God's perfections were exhibited in His Law, yet how much clearer are they irradiated by His Gospel!

Perhaps nothing more strikingly portrays the contrast between the two dispensations in connection with the manifestation of the Divine excellency than placing side by side what is recorded in Exodus 32 and a statement made in 2 Corinthians 4. In the former, we find Moses making request of Jehovah: "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory" (Exo 33:18). Let the reader look up verses 19 to 22 and then ponder the Lord's response: "thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen" (Exo 33:23)—how well may a person be known by a passing glance of his "back parts"! That was characteristic and emblematic of the O.T.¹ economy. Now set over against that this most precious passage: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in *the face* of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6)! "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared *Him*" (John 1:18)—revealed Him, made Him known, fully told Him forth.

But there is another sense in which the "mystery" is "now made manifest," as it was not previously, namely, in the more extensive promulgation of it. Under the former economy, the Psalmist declared, "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and *as for his judgments, they* have not known them. Praise ye the LORD." (Psa 147:19, 20). For more than half the present span of human history, the heathen world was left in darkness—for from the tower of Babel (Gen 11) onwards, God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Act 14:16), so that they were deprived of even the outward means of grace. But after His resurrection, the Saviour bade His ambassadors, "Go ye therefore and teach *all* nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Mat 28:19), in accord with which He gave a special commission unto Saul of Tarsus to bear His name "before the Gentiles" (Act 9:15), and by and through the Gospel—which he proclaimed the contents of the grand mystery—were heralded abroad far and wide.

That to which reference has been made receives express mention in all of the leading passages where this Mystery is in view. In our present one, it is specifically declared that it is "made known to all nations" (Rom 16:26). In 1 Corinthians 2:8, we learn that in the past, it was that which "none of the princes of this world knew," but which God had revealed unto the Corinthian saints (1Co 2:10). In Ephesians 3:8, the apostle averred it had been given him to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ," which in the light of verses 2 to 5, signifies that therein was contained the very substance of the mystery. In Colossians 1:25-27, he alludes again to the special dispensation God had given him unto *the Gentiles* in connection with the mystery, which he there speaks of as "Christ in you [or 'among you'], the hope of glory." While in what may perhaps be termed the classic passage of 1 Timothy 3:16, one of the items comprising the mystery is that it should be "preached unto the Gentiles."

The prominent place accorded "the Gentiles" in these passages has led some of the more extreme dispensationalists to draw an erroneous conclusion, arguing that the mystical Body of Christ is pre-eminently Gentilish, that the O.T. saints have no place in it, and that it not only had no begun-historical existence before the call of the apostle Paul, but that no other reference to it is to be found outside of his epistles. We shall not turn aside to refute this error, but would simply call attention to the fact that O.T. Prophecy clearly foretold that Christ should be "a light of the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6,7; 49:6), while the Saviour Himself announced "other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. . . and there shall be one fold, *and* one Shepherd" (Joh 10:16), and Caiaphas

¹ O.T. – Old Testament.

prophesied that He should “gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (Joh 11:52). It is not the simple purpose to call Gentiles into the Church, nor to make them “joint-heirs” with the Jews, but rather the whole plan of redemption, which made that possible, that the “mystery” is concerned with.

“...And by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:” (Rom 16:26). We will consider the subordinate clause first. This “commandment” respects the three things mentioned in the previous verse: it was by Divine appointment that this Gospel, this preaching of Jesus Christ, this revealed mystery, should be made known. The word rendered, “commandment” may mean “decree,” and then the reference is to Psalm 2:7 and those passages where the decree is declared, such as, “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.” (Psa 98:3); it may mean law or “statute,” in which case the reference is to the words of our Lord, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations”—that was indeed the commandment of the everlasting God, both as the Father spake in Him and as He “is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom 9:5). The reason for and the special propriety of, here styling Deity “the *everlasting* God,” lies in the dominant subject of this passage—namely, “the mystery” or “the everlasting covenant,” in which was centralised His “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11), which respected the salvation of His elect (2Ti 1:9), concerning which God “promised [to Christ] before the world began” (Tit 1:2).

We regard the clause “and by the Scriptures of the prophets” (Rom 16:26) as looking back first to the “mystery” of the previous verse; second, as being linked to this, the “but now is made manifest;” and third, as connected with the final clause of this verse. The mystery or *everlasting covenant* was the subject of O.T. revelation (2Sa 23:5; Psa 89:34; Isa 55:3), yet for the most part its wondrous contents were couched in obscure figures and mysterious prophecies. It is by means of the antitypes of those figures, and the fulfilment of those prophecies, that such light has been cast upon what was so heavily veiled throughout the old economy, that the parable they contained has been explained and their symbols interpreted, so, that what was for many generations dark is “now made manifest.” Israel’s prophets announced the grace that should come unto us and “searched diligently” (1Pe 1:10) in connection therewith, yet Peter himself needed a special vision (Act 10) to convince him that salvation was designed for the Gentiles. Thus, the O.T. credits the New, and the N.T. illuminates the Old: what was latent in the one is now patent in the other.

“Made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.” This is the immediate design of the Gospel, the preaching of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the mystery, the commandment of the everlasting God: it is that all who read and hear the same should both believe and obey it, receive and be governed by it. Though saving faith and evangelical obedience may be distinguished, yet they are inseparable, the one never existing without the other. As we said in the foregoing article, the Gospel commands us to give up ourselves to Christ, to be accepted through Him, and to be ruled by Him, for He is “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9). Unspeakably solemn is it to know that He will yet come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel” (2Th 1:8). Only that faith is of any value, which produces sincere and loving obedience, and only that obedience is acceptable to God, which issues from faith in His incarnate Son. The design of the Gospel is to bring us to both. Faith is the vital principle, obedience its necessary product; faith is the root, obedience is the fruit.

“To God *only wise be glory*” (Rom 16:27). The reason why the apostle here adores the Deity thus leads unto a wide and wondrous subject, which we trust will grip the reader, as much as it has the writer. Though we propose to devote the balance of this article to a consideration of the

same, we shall not now attempt a complete outline of it, for in the perfect timing of His providence (it is quite without design on our part), this glorious attribute of God's and the exercise thereof will come before us in our current articles on the doctrine of Reconciliation—to which we suggest the reader should turn after completing this one. It is in the grand mystery to which the apostle had alluded in the previous verses, in the constitution and outworking of the everlasting covenant, that the consummate *wisdom of God* is so illustriously and pre-eminently displayed, and which drew out the apostle's heart to give praise for this Divine excellency. O that wisdom may be given us to hold up to view this perfection of Him whose "understanding is infinite" (Psa 147:5).

"To God only wise." He is the only wise Being essentially, superlatively, eternally: cf. 1Ti 1:17, Jude 25. God is wise not by communication from another, but originally and independently; whereas the wisdom of the creature is but a ray from "the Father of lights." The wisdom of God is seen in all His ways and works, yet in some, it appears more conspicuously than in others. "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (Psa 104:24)—the reference being to His works in creation. The same adoring exclamation may be made of His works *in providence*, wherein He regulates all the complicated affairs of the universe and governs this world so that all things are made to redound unto His glory and work together for good to His people. But it is the marvelous plan of redemption, which may well be called the masterpiece at His wisdom. That is indeed "the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:" (1Co 2:7), containing as it does "the deep things of God" (1Co 2:10). So many were the problems to be solved (humanly speaking), so many the ways and means required, so great the variety of its exercise, that it is designated "the *manifold* wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10).

The consummate wisdom of God appears in devising a salvation for sinners, which otherwise had baffled forever the understanding of all finite intelligences. He contrived a way where they could have found none. Both the design of the Everlasting Covenant and the means ordained to be used are most worthy of God. "The mystery of His *will*" (Eph 1:9) is the foundation of it. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom 9:15). "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). As one of the Puritans expressed it, "His will set His wisdom to work." During recent years, Christian writers when treating of God's so-great salvation, have thrown most of their emphasis upon the *grace* which provided it and the *power* which effectuates it, and comparatively little attention has been given to *the wisdom* which planned it. God determined to work in a most glorious manner, and the end and the means were equally admirable. So grand and marvellous is the work of redemption, that when the angels were sent as ambassadors extraordinary to bring tidings of peace unto the world, they burst forth in that moving adoration, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luk 2:14).

The supreme end which God had in view was His own glory; the subordinate end, the recovery of His lapsed and ruined people. By the "Glory of God," it is meant the manifestation of Himself in the exercise of His attributes, the display of His perfections. In all the works of God, His excellencies are evidenced; but as some stars shine more brightly than others, so His perfections are more manifest in certain of His works; and as there is one heavenly body—which far surpasses all the planets—so the work of redemption greatly exceeds in wonder all the marvels of creation. It is here that wisdom and goodness, righteousness and mercy, holiness and grace, truth and peace, love and power, are united in their highest degree and beauty. Upon that account the apostle uses the expression, "the *glorious* Gospel of the blessed God" (1Ti 1:11), it

being (as one has expressed it), “the unspotted mirror wherein the great and wonderful effects of Deity are set forth.” It is the glorious work of redemption, which evokes the praise and thanksgiving of all the inhabitants of Heaven: Rev 5:12, 13.

In contemplating the possibility of redemption, the very attributes of God seem to be divided, and so, *against it*. Mercy was inclined to save; whereas, justice demanded the death of the transgressor. The majesty of God seemed to render it unworthy of His exalted greatness that He should treat with defiled dust. The veracity of God required the infliction of the penalty, which He had denounced against disobedience: the honour of His truth must be preserved. The holiness of God appeared to utterly preclude any advance toward depraved creatures. Yet the love of God was set upon them. But how could it flow forth without compromising His other perfections? What finite intelligence could have found a solution to such a problem! Suppose that the problem had been submitted to the angels, and after due deliberation, they had recognised that a *mediator* was necessary to heal the breach which sin had made, to reconcile God to sinners and sinners to God. Suppose such a thing we say, and *where* was a suitable mediator to be found? Consider the qualifications he must possess.

In order to be eligible for such an undertaking, a mediator must be able to touch equally both extremes: he must be capable of the sentiments and affections at both the parties he would reconcile; he must be a just esteemer of the rights and injuries of the one and the other. But for that, he must possess the *nature* of both, so that he has in himself a common interest in both. Moreover, he must have sufficient merit as to secure the reward for many. But such an one was not to be found, either in heaven or in earth. Yet this absence did not defeat Omniscience: God determined to provide one, and that none other than His own Son. But how could that be! seeing He was possessed of the Divine nature only? Suppose *that* question had been submitted to the celestial spirits: had they not been forever at a loss to unravel the difficulty? Suppose further that God had made known to them that His Son should become incarnate, taking unto Himself human nature, the Word becoming flesh. Would they not still have been completely baffled, asking, How can such a prodigy be?

Admire then and adore the amazing *wisdom* of God in ordaining a Mediator fully qualified to reconcile God to men, and men to God. Marvel at such an exercise of omniscience that devised the virgin birth, whereby the Son became partaker of our nature without contracting the least iota of its defilement, whereby He was Immanuel both by nature and by office, whereby He was a fit Daysman (Job 9:33) to lay His hand on each of the estranged parties, whereby He had both zeal for God and compassion for men, and whereby He might serve as a Substitute on behalf of the guilty and make full satisfaction to the Divine justice in their stead. Moreover, Divine wisdom resolved this difficulty in such a way that so far from the glory of the Son being tarnished by the incarnation, it has been enhanced thereby—for He receives throughout the endless ages of eternity such a revenue of praise from His redeemed that the holy angels are incapable of rendering Him, while they themselves have been afforded additional grounds for adoring Him.

Consider also the *compass* of the Divine wisdom in taking occasion from the sin and fall of man to bring more glory to God and to raise man to a more excellent state. Sin, in its own nature, hath no tendency to good; it is not an apt medium, it hath no proper efficacy to promote the glory of God: so far is it from a direct contributing to it that, on the contrary, it is the most real dishonour to Him. But as a black background in a picture, which in itself only defiles, when placed by art, sets off the lighter colours and heightens their beauty, so the evil of sin, considered absolutely, obscures the glory of God, yet by the overruling disposition of His providence, serves to illustrate His name and to make it more glorious in the esteem of reasonable creatures. Without

the sin of man, there had been no place *for* the most perfect exercise of God's goodness. Happy fault, not in itself, but by the wisdom and marvellous counsel of God, to be repaired in a way so advantageous that the salvation of the earth is the wonder of heaven.

"The wisdom of God appears in ordaining such contemptible and, in appearance, opposite means, to accomplish such glorious effects. The way is as wonderful as the work. That Christ dying on the cross, a reputed malefactor, should be made our everlasting righteousness; that descending to the grave, He should bring up a lost world to life and immortality, is so incredible to our narrow understandings that He saves us and astonishes us at once. In nothing is it more visible that the thoughts of God are far above our thoughts and His ways above our ways as heaven is above the earth (Isa 55:8). It is a secret in physic to compound the most noble remedies of things destructive to nature, and thereby, make one death victorious over another: but that eternal life should spring from death, glory from ignominy, blessedness from a curse, is so repugnant to human sense that to render the belief of it easy, it was foretold by many prophets, that when it came to pass, it might be looked on as the effect of God's eternal counsels" (W. Bates, *The Harmony of the Divine Attributes*, 1680).

"To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen" (Rom 16:27). The Greek is somewhat complex and the R.V.² gives, more literally, "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Amen." As each translation is equally legitimate,³ we adopt them both, for each is in perfect harmony with other passages. The thought conveyed by the A.V. is: our adoration of God is possible only through the *mediation* of Jesus Christ. The concept expressed by the R.V. is: it is in and through Jesus Christ that God is superlatively *manifested* as both infinite in might and omniscient in knowledge. "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1Co 1:24): in and by the person and work of Christ are these Divine perfections supremely displayed—He is "The Image of the invisible God" (Co1 1:19), "the Brightness [or 'outshining'] of His glory" (Heb 1:3). The *Object* of this doxology is the omnipotent and omniscient God; the *subject* which gives rise to it is the "mystery" or "Everlasting Covenant;" the *substance* of it is "be glory forever;" the *medium* of it, "Jesus Christ." —AWP

² **R.V.** – Revised Version, or Revised Standard Version.

³ *Chapel Library* specifically does not agree with this. The RSV and most modern translations do not use the *Textus Receptus* Greek text, instead depending upon what we and many scholars deem to be inferior though older manuscripts. Translations which do use the *Textus Receptus* are the KJV (also referred to as the Authorized Version, A.V.) and the NKJV. Chapel Library uses the KJV in its publications.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

20. Twelfth Miracle

We have entitled this series of articles, “The Mission and Miracles of Elisha,” and as we pointed out in our Introductory paper, much the larger part of what is recorded of the life of this prophet is devoted to a description of the miracles performed by him and the circumstances or occasions which gave rise to them. Excepting that which occupied our attention in the first two or three articles, when we contemplated the preparing and enduing of him for his work, very little indeed has been said about Elisha’s mission or ministry up to the point we have now reached in his history. Yet here and there, brief hints have been given us of that which engaged most of his energies. Those hints centre around the several brief mentions made of “the sons of the prophets” and the relation which Elisha sustained to them, a further reference to whom is found in the passage, which is now to be before us. As we pointed out under the previous series on Elijah, Israel had fallen on bad times and their spirituality was at a low ebb. Idolatry was rampant and God’s judgments fell frequently upon them—in the form of suffering the surrounding nations to invade their land (1Ki 20:1, 26; 22:1; 2Ki 1:1; 5:2).

From the brief allusion made to them, it would seem that Elisha devoted much of his time and attention to the training of young preachers, who were formed into schools and designated “the sons of the prophets”—which in the Hebrew language would emphasise the nature of their calling and contain no reference to their ancestry. There was one group of them at Bethel and another at Jericho (2Ki 2:3, 5) and yet another at Gilgal (2Ki 4:38). It is from the last reference we learn that Elisha was wont to sojourn with them for a season and preach or lecture to them, as their “sitting before him” signifies (Deu 33:3; Luk 2:46; 10:39); and from the repeated mention of “the people” in this connection (2Ki 4:41, 42) we gather that these seminaries also served as more general places of assembly whither the pious in Israel gathered together for the worship of Jehovah and to receive edification through His servant. That Elisha acted as rector or superintendent of these schools is evident from the young prophets owning him as “*thou* man of God” (2Ki 4:40) and “master” (2Ki 6:5).

First, *its connection*. “And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us” (2Ki 6:1). By means of the opening “And” the Holy Spirit has linked together the miracle recorded at the end of chapter 5 and the one we are now to consider. As in previous instances, it points both comparisons and contrasts. Each miracle concerned those who were intimately connected with Elisha—in the one case, his personal attendant; in the other, his students. Each occurred at the same place—in the immediate vicinity of the Jordan. Each was occasioned by dissatisfaction with the position its subjects occupied—the one reprehensible, the other commendable. But there, it was the unfaithful Gehazi; while here, it was the devoted sons of the prophets. In the one, Gehazi took matters into his own hands; in the other, they deferentially asked permission of their master. In the former, an act of theft was

committed; in the latter, a borrowed article was recovered. In that, a curse descended upon the guilty one; in this, an article was retrieved from the place of judgment.

Second, *its occasion*. “And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us” (2Ki 6:1). There does not appear to us to be anything in this verse, which justifies the conclusion that some have drawn from it, namely, that these young men were discontented with their quarters and lusted after something more congenial. Charity always requires us to place the best construction on the projects and actions of our fellows. The motives which prompt them lie beyond our purview, and therefore, are outside of our province; and actions are to be condemned only when it is unmistakably clear that they are evil in their nature or tendency. Had these students given expression to a covetous desire, surely Elisha had reproved them; certainly, he would not have encouraged their plan, as the sequel shows he did.

We are not told which particular school of the prophets this one was, but from its proximity to the Jordan, there can be little doubt that it was the one situated either at Jericho or Gilgal—most probably the latter, because the reference in 2 Kings 4:38 seems to indicate that it was there that Elisha made his principal headquarters. This appears to be confirmed by the language used by the students, “where we *dwell* with thee” (2Ki 6:1)—they had said, “sojourn” had he been merely on a temporary visit to them. From their statement, we gather that under the superintendency of Elisha, their school had flourished, that there had been such an increase of their numbers, the accommodation had become too cramped for them. Accordingly, they respectfully called the attention of their master to what seemed a real need. It is to be observed that they did not impudently take matters into their own hands and attempt to ‘spring a surprise’ upon Elisha, but becomingly pointed out to him the exigency of the situation.

“Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell” (2Ki 6:2). Had their desire for more spacious quarters proceeded from carnal ambition, they had aspired to something more imposing than a wooden building; nor is it at all likely that in such a case, they had volunteered to do the work themselves—rather had they suggested going around with collecting cards, soliciting gifts from the people, so that they might have the money to hire others to erect a more commodious seminary for them. “They were humble men who did not affect that which was gay or great. They did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for the great in the *other* world to be content with mean things in *this*” (Matthew Henry). Alas, that Protestants have so often aped the Romanists in making a show before the world.

“And he answered, Go ye” (2Ki 6:2), which he surely had not done if they had become discontented with their humble quarters and were lusting after some thing more agreeable to the flesh. That reply of Elisha’s was something more than a bare assent to their proposal or permission for them to execute the same; it was also a real testing of their hearts. Those who are accustomed to judge harshly of others might infer that these young men had grown tired of the strict discipline which Elisha must have enforced, and had found irksome the pious and devotional type of life he required from them, and that this idea of making for the Jordan was but a cover for their determination to get away from the man of God. In such a case, they had promptly availed themselves of his grant, bidden him farewell, and promptly taken their departure.

But we may learn something more from this answer, “Go ye”: it gives us a sidelight on the prophet’s own character, manifesting as it does his *humility*. He at once perceived the reasonableness of their request and concurred with them therein, whereas a proud and haughty man had quickly resented any suggestion coming from those under his charge or care. Thus, an important practical lesson is here inculcated: superiors ought not to deem themselves above receiving and weighing ideas from their inferiors, and when discerning the wisdom of the same and recognising they could be carried out to advantage, should not hesitate to adopt them. It is the mark of a little mind, and not of a great one, which considers it has a monopoly of intelligence and is independent of help from others. Many a man has paid dearly for disdaining the counsel of his wife or employees.

“And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants” (2Ki 6:3). Very blessed is this, revealing as it does the happy relations, which existed between them and of the veneration and love these students had for their master. Such meekness and graciousness on the part of superiors, as we have alluded to above, is not unappreciated by their inferiors. Right nobly did they respond to the test contained in Elisha’s “Go ye,” by begging him to accompany them on their expedition. And how such a request on their part refutes the evil inference which some might draw from their original proposal—jumping to the conclusion that they were tired of Elisha’s company and merely devised this plan as a pretext to get away from him. A warning to us not to surmise evil of our fellows, giving point to Christ’s admonition, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (Joh 7:24).

Third, *its location*: the Jordan. “And he answered, I will go. So he went with them” (2Ki 6:3,4). And a good thing it was that he did so, as the sequel shows. “And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood” (2Ki 6:4). Very commendable was this. But how unlike the pampered and spoiled young people of our generation who have been encouraged to expect that some one else will do everything for them, that they should be waited on hand and foot by their seniors. These young men were willing and ready to put their own shoulder to the work. They did not seek to shelter behind a false conception of their sacred calling and indulge a foolish pride or papish-like exaltation of their office by concluding that such a thing was beneath their dignity, considering themselves far too superior to engage in manual labour. No, instead of hiring others to do it, they performed the task themselves.

“But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed” (2Ki 6:5). An accident now happened. In one sense, it is perfectly true that there are no accidents in a world that is presided over by the living God; but in another sense, it is equally true that accidents *do* occur in the human realm. This calls for a defining of our term: what is an accident? It is when some effect is produced or some consequence issues from an action *undesigned* by its performer. From the Divine side of things, nothing occurs in this world, but what God has ordained; but from the human side, many things result from our action, which were not intended by us. It was no design of this man that he should lose the head of his axe: that he did so was accidental on his part.

Fourth, *its purpose*: To recover a borrowed article. “And he cried and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” How strange that such a thing should happen while in the performance of duty! Yet the Lord had a wise and good reason for permitting the same, and mercifully prevented the death of another (Deu 19:5). It is to be duly noted that he did not regard Elisha as being too great a man to be troubled about such a trifling matter, but as an honest person deeply concerned over the loss, and assured of his master’s sympathy, he at once informed him. His “alas” seems to denote that he regarded his loss as final and had no expectation it would be retrieved by a miracle.

The lesson for us is plain: even though (to our shame) we have no faith, of His showing Himself strong on our behalf, it is ever our duty and privilege to spread before our Master everything that troubles us.

*“Not one concern of ours is small
If we belong to Him,
To teach us this, the Lord of all
Once made the iron to swim.”
— John Newton.*

Fifth, *its means*. “And the man of God said” (2Ki 6:6)—observe the change from verse 1: not simply “Elisha” here, because he was about to act officially and work a miracle. “Where fell it?”: this was designed to awaken hope in him. “And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim” (2Ki 6:6). There was no proportion between the means and the end—to demonstrate the power was of God! The Hebrew word for “stick” is a generic one. It is rendered “tree” 162 times, being the same word as in Exodus 15:25; Deuteronomy 21:22—quoted in Galatians 3:13! It is also translated “wood” 103 times, as in Genesis 6:14, the shittim “wood” used in connection with the frame and furniture of the Tabernacle, and in verse 4 of our passage. Evidently, it was a small tree or sapling Elisha cut down, and the above references make clear its typical import.

Sixth, *its meaning*. The incident which has been before us may, we consider, be justly regarded as broadly illustrating what is portrayed by the Law and the Gospel. It serves to give us a typical picture of the sinner’s ruin and redemption. As the result of being dissatisfied with the position God originally assigned us—subjection to His authority—we (in Adam) appropriated what was not ours, and in consequence suffered a fearful fall. The inanimate iron falling into the Jordan—the place of “judgment”—is an apt figure of the elect in their natural state: dead in trespasses and sins, incapable of doing ought for their deliverance. The way and means which God took for our recovery was for Christ to come right down to where we were, and to be “cut off” (Dan 9:26), yea, “cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa 53:8), enduring Judgment on our behalf, thereby recovering us to God (1Pe 3:18).

This incident may also be taken as informing the believer *how lost blessing* may be restored to him. Are there not among our readers some who no longer enjoy the liberty they once had in prayer or the satisfaction they formerly experienced in reading the Scriptures? Are there not some who have lost their peace and assurance, and are deeply concerned of being so deprived? If so, the Devil will say the loss is irrecoverable and you must go mourning the rest of your days. But that is one of his many lies. This passage reveals how your situation may be retrieved. 1. Acquaint your Master with your grief (2Ki 6:5): unbosom yourself freely and frankly unto Him. 2. Let His “Where fell it?” (2Ki 6:6) search you. Examine yourself, review the past, ascertain the place or point in your life where the blessing ceased, discover the personal *cause* of your spiritual loss, judge yourself for the failure and confess it, acknowledging the blame to be entirely yours. 3. Avail yourself and make use of the means for recovery: cast in the “stick” or “tree” (2Ki 6:6): that is, plead the merits of Christ’s cross (1Pe 2:24). 4. Stretch forth the hand of faith (2Ki 6:7), that is, count upon your Master’s infinite goodness and grace, *expect* His effectual intervention, and the lost blessing shall be restored to you.

This incident may also be viewed as making known to us how we may *grow in grace*. 1. There must be the desire and prayer for spiritual expansion (2Ki 6:1)—a longing to enter into and possess the “large place” (Psa 118:5) God has provided for us. 2. The recognition that to enter

therein involves effort from us (2Ki 6:2), labour on our part. 3. Seek the oversight of a servant of God in this (2Ki 6:3) if he be available. 4. Observe very carefully the particular place to which we must betake ourselves if such spiritual enlargement is to be ours. It is “the Jordan” and that speaks of *death*: we can only enter into an enriched spiritual experience by dying more and more unto the flesh, that is, by denying self, and mortifying our lusts (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). 5. Expect to encounter difficulties (2Ki 6:5). 6. Use the appointed means (2Ki 6:6) for overcoming the obstacle of the flesh (Gal 6:14). 7. Stretch forth the hand of faith (2Ki 6:7) and appropriate what God has given us in Christ.

Seventh, *its lessons*. 1. See the value of requesting our Master’s presence even when about to engage in manual labour. 2. Be conscientious about borrowed articles—*books* for example! We should be more careful about things loaned us than those which are our own. 3. Despise not those engaged in manual labour: Elisha did not. 4. Let not the servant of God disdain what may seem trifling opportunities to do good. 5. Remember your Father cares for His people in their minutest concerns. 6. Is anything too hard for Him who made the iron to swim? 7. What encouragement is here for us to heed, Philippians 4:6! —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4d. Its Nature

3. Spiritual growth consists of a greater love for God.

When pointing out the various aspects of regeneration (in the June article) we quoted Romans 5:5: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Contrary to the commentators, we do not regard the reference there as being to God’s love for His people, but rather one of the blessed effects or consequents of the same. First, because the scope and unity of the whole context requires such an interpretation. In Romans 5:1-11, the apostle enumerates a sevenfold result of our being justified by faith: we have peace with God (v. 1), we are established in His favour (v. 2), we rejoice in hope (v. 2), we are enabled to benefit from trials (vv. 3, 4), we have a hope that fails not (v. 5), our hearts are drawn out to God (v. 5), we are assured of final preservation (vv. 6-10). Second, the relation of the second half of verse 5 (“because”) to the first leads to the same conclusion: it is *our* love to God which furnishes evidence that our hope is a valid one. Third, God’s love for us is in Himself, and though manifested unto us could scarcely be said to be “shed abroad in our hearts.” Verse 8 clearly distinguishes His love toward us.

By nature, the elect have not one particle of love for God: nay, their very minds are enmity against Him. But He does not leave them forever in that fearful state. No, having from eternity set His heart upon them, He has determined to win their hearts unto Himself. And how is that

accomplished? By shedding abroad His love in their hearts, which we understand to denote by communicating from Himself a spiritual principle of love, which qualifies and enables them to love Him. Faith is His gift to them (Eph 2:8), and the evidence of that principle being in them is that they now believe and trust in Him. Hope is also His gift to them (2Th 2:16), for prior to regeneration, we had “no hope” (Eph 2:12), and the evidence of that principle being in us is that we have a confident expectation of the future. In like manner, love is also a Divine gift, and the evidence of that principle being in an individual is that he now loves God, loves His Christ, loves His image in His people. Note how in Romans 5, we have the Christian’s faith (v. 1), hope (vv. 4, 5) and love (v. 5)—which are the three great dynamics and regulators of the Christian life.

This Divine virtue which is communicated to the hearts of all Christians is that which moves their affections to cleave unto God in Christ as their supreme Good. It is designated “the love of God” because *He* is the Bestower of it, because He is the Object of it, and because He is the Increaser and Perfecter of it. It is first stirred unto action or drawn out to God when the soul apprehends His love for him, for “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1Jo 4:19), for so long as we feared His wrath we hated Him. This particular grace is the one which most affects the others: if the heart be kept right, the head will not go far wrong; but when love cools, every grace languishes. Hence, we find the apostle praying for the Ephesian saints, that they might be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). As the Christian grows, he learns to love God not only for what He has done for him, but chiefly for what He is in Himself—the infinitely glorious One, the Sum of all perfection. Yet our love for Him is easily chilled—through the heart’s being turned unto other objects. In fact, of all our graces, this one is the most sensitive and delicate and needs the most cherishing and guarding: Mat 24:12; Rev 2:5.

The force of what has just been pointed out appears in that exhortation, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jud 1:21). Negatively, that means, avoid everything which would chill and dampen it: careless living soon dulls our sense of God’s love. Eschew whatever would grieve the Spirit or thereby give Him occasion to convict us of our sins and occupy us with our waywardness, instead of taking the things of Christ and showing them unto us (Joh 16:14). Shun the embraces of the world, keeping yourselves from idols (1Jo 5:21). Positively, it signifies: use the appointed means for keeping your affections warm and lively, set on things above. Familiarise yourself with God’s holy Word, regarding it as a series of letters from your heavenly Father. Cultivate communion with Him by prayer and frequent meditations on His perfections. Keep up a fresh sense of His love for you, sunning your soul in the enjoyment of it. Above all, adhere strictly to the path of obedience. When the Lord Jesus bade us “continue ye in My love”, He at once went on to explain how we may do so: “If ye *keep* My commandments ye *shall* abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (Joh 15: 9, 10, cf. 1Jo 5:3).

A deeper and increasing love for God is not to be ascertained so much by our consciousness of the same as by the evidences it produces. There are many who sing and talk about how much they love Christ, but their walk gives the lie to their avowals. On the other hand, there are some who bemoan the feebleness of their love and the coldness of their affections, whose lives make it manifest that their hearts beat true to Him. Feelings are no safe criterion in this matter: it is conduct which is the surest index to it. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the holiest saint who ever walked this earth, who enjoyed the most intimate fellowship with the Lord, would be the first to acknowledge and bewail the inadequacy of his affection for Him whose love passeth knowledge. Nevertheless, there *is* such a thing as a growing love for God in Christ, and the same is demonstrated by a stronger bent of soul toward Him, the mind being more stayed upon Him,

the heart enjoying more communion with Him and greater delight in Him, and the conscience increasingly exercised in our care to please Him. The more we are spiritually engaged with God's love for us, the more will our affections to Him be inflamed.

4. Spiritual growth consists of the strengthening and enlarging of our faith.

Faith is the gift of God (Eph 2:8), by which is signified that it is a spiritual principle, grace or virtue which He communicates to the hearts of His elect at their regeneration. And as His "talents" are bestowed upon us to trade with, to profit by and increase, so the principle of faith is given us to *use* and employ to the glory of God. Its first act is to believe Christ, to trust in Him, and as Colossians 2:6 bids us, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in Him." That is a most comprehensive and summarised exhortation, and would require many details in order to furnish a full explanation of it. For example, it might be pointed out that the Christian is called upon to walk humbly, dependently, submissively or obediently; yet all of these are included in faith itself. Faith is a humbling and self-emptying grace, for it is the stretching forth of the beggar's hand to receive God's bounty. Faith is an acknowledgement of my own insufficiency and need, a leaning upon One who is mighty to save. Faith is also an act of the will, whereby it surrenders to the authority of Christ and receives Him as King to reign over our hearts and lives. Thus, though there is much more in it than this, yet the prime and essential force of Colossians 2:6 is: as ye became Christians at the first by an act of faith in Christ Jesus the Lord, *continue* trusting in Him and let your life be regulated by faith—"walk" denotes progress or going forward.

In Hebrews 10:38, we are told "now the just shall live by faith." A very elementary statement is that, yet one which is turned into a serious error the moment we tamper with or change its pronoun. We are not justified *because of* our faith, but because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, but that righteousness is not actually reckoned to our account until we believe—instrumentally we are "justified by faith" (Rom 5:1). Nor are the justified bidden to "live *upon* their faith," though many vainly attempt to do so. No, the believer is to live upon Christ, yet it is only by *faith* he can do so. Let us be as simple as possible: I break my fast with food, yet I partake of that food by means of a spoon. I feed myself, yet it is the food and not the spoon I eat. It was said of Esau "*by* thy sword shalt thou live" (Gen 27:40), not *on* thy sword—he could not eat *it*. Esau would live on what his sword brought in. The Christian makes a serious blunder when he attempts to live upon the faith he fancies he can find or feel within himself; rather is he to feed upon the Word, and this he does only so far as faith is operative—as faith lays hold of and appropriates its holy and blessed contents.

"Now the just shall live by faith" (Heb 10:38) may well be regarded as the text of the sermon which follows immediately in the next chapter, for in Hebrews 11, we are shown at great length and in considerable variety of detail how the O.T. saints exercised that God-given principle, how they lived by faith, and wrought great wonders by it. Nothing is there said of their courage, zeal, patience, but all their works and triumphs are attributed to *faith*: the reason for this being that their courage, zeal and patience were the fruits of faith. As it was with them, so it is with us: we are called to "walk by faith" (2Co 5:7), and the extent to which we do so will determine the measure of success or failure we have in our Christian lives. As the Lord Jesus declared unto the two blind beggars who besought His mercy, "According to your *faith* be it unto you" (Mat 9:29) and to the father of the demon-possessed child, "all things *are* possible to him that believeth" (Mar 9:23). If we are straitened it is not in God but in ourselves, for He ever responds to reliance in and counting upon His intervention. He has expressly promised to honour those who honour Him, and nothing honours Him more than a firm and childlike faith in Him.

“The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Such a testimony from the chief of the apostles shows us the place which faith has in the Christian life. This expression “the faith of the Son of God” signifies that He is the grand *Object* of faith, the One on whom it is to be exercised—which should help the reader to the better understanding of “the love of God” in Romans 5:5 and our remarks thereon. The Christian’s is essentially a life of faith, and in proportion as his faith is not operative does he fail to live the Christian life. A life of faith consists of faith being engaged with Christ, drawing on Him, receiving from Him the supply of every need. The life of faith begins by looking to Christ, trusting in Him, relying wholly upon Him as our righteousness before God, and it is continued by looking to and trusting in Him for everything else. Faith is to look to Christ for *wisdom*, that we may be able to understand all that He has revealed concerning God, ourselves, salvation, our various duties. Faith is to lay hold of His precepts and appropriate His promises. But more especially, faith is to look to Christ for *strength* to perform His precepts acceptably. As we have no righteousness of our own, so no strength; we are as dependent upon Him for the one as for the other, and each is obtained from Him *by faith*.

But at this most vital point, many of the Lord’s people have been grievously misled. Under the guise of debasing the creature and exalting Divine grace, they have been made to believe that they are quite helpless in this matter: that as God alone is the Imparter of faith, so He alone is the Increaser of it, and that they have to meekly submit to His Will, as to the measure of faith He bestow, or as to what He withholds from them. The consequence is that so far from their faith increasing, they are for the most part, left to spend their remaining days on earth in a state full of doubtings and fears. And what is still worse, many of them feel *no blame* or reproach for the feebleness of their faith, but instead, blatantly attribute it to the sovereignty of God. If such people rebuked a godless drunkard for his intemperance, they would be justly shocked were he to reply, “God has not given me grace to overcome my thirst;” and yet, when they are reprov’d for their unbelief, they virtually charge God with it, by saying that He has not granted them a larger measure of faith. What wicked slander! What a horrible misuse of the truth of God’s sovereign grace. The blame is theirs, and they should honestly acknowledge it and penitently confess it before Him.

It is perfectly true that God is the Increaser, as well as the Giver of faith, but it certainly does not follow from this that *we* have no responsibility in the matter. The littleness and weakness of my faith is entirely my own fault: due not to God’s unwillingness to give me more, but to my sinful failure to *want* what He has already given me! to my not crying earnestly unto Him, “Lord, Increase our faith” (Luk 17:5), and to my woeful neglect in making a proper use of the means He has appointed for my obtaining an increase of it. When the disciples were filled with terror of the tempest and awoke their Master, saying “carest Thou not that we perish” (Mar 4:38), He reprov’d them for their unbelief, saying “Why are ye fearful? O ye of little faith?” (Mat 8:26): *that* was far from inculcating the deadly delusion that they had no responsibility concerning the measure and strength of their faith! On another occasion, He said to His disciples, “O fools, and slow of heart, to believe” (Luk 24:25), which plainly signified that they were to blame for their lack of faith and were to be admonished for their unbelief.

If I have surrendered myself to the Lordship of Christ and trusted in Him as an all-sufficient Saviour, then Christ is *mine*, and I may *know* He is mine upon the infallible authority of God’s Word. Since Christ *is* mine, then it is both my privilege and duty to obtain an increasing knowledge of and acquaintance with Him, through the Scriptures. It is my privilege and duty to “trust in Him at *all* times” (Psa 62:8), to make known to Him my every need and to count upon

Him to graciously supply the same. It is my privilege and duty to make full use of Christ, to live upon Him, to draw from His fulness (Joh 1:16), to freely avail myself of His sufficiency to meet my every want. It is my privilege and duty to store up His precepts and promises in my memory, that the one may direct my conduct and the other support my soul. It is the office of faith to obtain from Him strength for the former and comfort from the latter, *expecting* Him to make good His word, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:” (Mat 7:7). It is my privilege and duty to “mix with faith” (Heb 4:2) every recorded sentence that fell from His sacred lips, and according as I do so shall I be “nourished up” (1Ti 4:6)—my faith will be fed, thrive, and become stronger.

But if on the other hand, I walk by sight, if I constantly take my eyes off their proper Object, and am all the time looking within at my corruptions, I shall go backward and not forward. If I am more concerned about my inward comforts than I am about my outward walk in the pleasing of Christ, in earnestly seeking to follow the example He has left me, then the Holy Spirit will be grieved and will cease taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto me. If I form the habit of attempting to view the promises of God through the darkened and thick lens of my difficulties, instead of looking at my difficulties in the light of God’s promises, then defeat—rather than victory—will inevitably follow. If I turn my eyes from my all-sufficient Saviour and am occupied with the winds and waves of my circumstances, then like Peter of old, I shall begin to sink. If I do not make it my daily and diligent business to resist the workings of unbelief in my heart and cry out to Christ for strength to enable me so to do, then faith will surely suffer an eclipse, and the fault will be entirely my own. If I neglect feeding upon “the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1Ti 4:6), then my faith will necessarily be weak and languishing.

We say again that the Christian life is a life of *faith*, and just so far as the believer is not actuated by this spiritual principle, does he fail at the most vital point. But let it be said very emphatically that a life of faith is not the mystical and nebulous thing which far too many imagine, but an intensely practical one. Nor is it the monopoly of men like George Muller and those who go forth to preach the Gospel in foreign lands without any guaranteed salary or belonging to any human organisation, trusting God alone for the supply of their every need; rather is it the birthright and privilege of *every* child of God. Nor is it a life made up of ecstasies and rapturous experiences, lived up in the clouds: no, it is to be worked out on the common level of everyday life. The man or the woman whose conduct is regulated by the Divine precepts and whose heart is sustained by the Divine promises, who performs his or her ordinary duties as unto the Lord, looking to Him for wisdom, strength and patience for the discharge thereof, and who counts upon His blessing on the same, is living a life of faith as truly as is the most zealous and self-sacrificing preacher.

It is true we must be on our guard against unwarrantably exalting the means and making them a substitute for the Lord Himself. The doctrine, the precepts and the promises of Scripture are so many windows through which we are to behold *God*. It is our privilege and duty to look to Him for His blessing upon the means, and since He has appointed the same to count upon His sanctifying them to us, expecting Him to make them effectual. But we must conclude our remarks upon this point by mentioning some of the *evidences* of a deepening and increasing faith. It is a proof of a stronger and larger faith when the soul is more established in the Truth, when there is a steadier confidence in God, and when we make a greater use of His promises. When we are less influenced and affected by what other professing Christians believe, resting our souls alone on a “thus saith the LORD” (1Co 2:5). When we live more out of ourselves and more upon Christ. When many of His unregenerate disciples are turning away from Christ and He says, “Will ye

also go away”? and we can answer, “to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life” (Joh 6:66-69). When we have become conscientious and diligent in the performing of our duties, for faith is shown by its works (Jam 2:17, 18).

5. *Spiritual growth consists of advancing in personal piety.*

Our space is nearly exhausted, but this article would be sadly incomplete if we omitted all reference to progress in practical godliness. As various aspects of this will come before us (D.V.)⁴ under the next branch of our subject, there is the less need now to enter into much detail. As the Christian obtains an enlarged spiritual apprehension of God’s perfections, not only is his heart increasingly affected by His wondrous goodness and grace, but he is more and more awed by His high sovereignty and ineffable holiness, so that he has a deeper reverence for Him and His fear a larger place in his heart, ever exerting a more potent influence in his approaches to Him and on his deportment and conduct. In like manner, as the Christian becomes better acquainted with the personal offices and work of Christ, he obtains not only a fuller realisation of how much he owes to Him and what he has in Him, but he is made more and more conscious of what is due unto Him and what becomes one who is a follower of the Lord till glory. The better he realises that he is “not his own, but bought with a price,” the more will he resolve and endeavour to glorify God in Christ “in (his) body, and in (his) spirit, which are God’s” (1Co 6:19, 20), longing more ardently for the time when he will be able to do so without let or hindrance. —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

4b. Its Author

In our last we were only able to barely mention that the *wisdom* of God was engaged in the salvation of His people. Before we attempt to illustrate this particular aspect, let us point out that it was in His character of *Judge* that the Father then acted. It is most important that this should be recognised, yea, essential if we are to view our subject from the correct angle, for reconciliation was entirely a judicial procedure. In Hebrews 12:23, God the Father is expressly spoken of as “the Judge of all,” which is an official title. He it was who passed sentence upon sinning Adam and all whom he represented as a federal head. None but “the Judge of all” could have “made Christ to be sin” for His people, or them to be “the righteousness of God in Him” (2Co 5:21). “*It is God that justifieth*” (Rom 8:33): that is, it is the Father as “the Judge of all” who actually and formally pronounces righteous in His sight the sinner who believes on Christ. It is on this two-fold ground that the apostle there argues the irreversibility of our justification: that the sentence of justification is pronounced by the Supreme Judge, and that, on the basis of the full satisfaction which has been made to Him by Christ.

We closed our last by calling attention to the fact that the determination of the Father to recover His lapsed people is described as “the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the

⁴ D.V. – *Deo volente*, “as God wills” or “if the Lord wills.”

counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11), which signifies there was an exercise of His infinite understanding in devising how that resolve should be made good to His own glory. To speak after the manner of men, the Father consulted with Himself, called His omniscience into play, and drew up a plan in which His “*manifold* wisdom” (Eph 3:10) is exemplified. That many-sided plan is termed “the mystery” because it has to do with “the deep things of God” (1Co 2:7, 10). “There is variety in the mystery and mystery in every part of the variety. It was not one single act, but a variety at ‘counsels’ met in it: a conjunction of excellent ends and means” (Charnock). What those excellent ends and means were, we shall now try to set forth, yet knowing full well that our utmost efforts can convey only a most inadequate and fragmentary idea of what will be our wonderment and admiration for all eternity. God’s consummate and manifold wisdom is seen.

1. In Love’s triumph over the Law. We begin here because it the better links up with the closing paragraphs of our last and the opening one of this. Continuing that line of thought, be it said, the solution to the problems raised by sin and the harmonization of Love and Law is termed a “mystery,” because it transcends human reason and can only be known by Divine revelation. It is called “the hidden wisdom” of God, because it remained an impenetrable secret until He was pleased to disclose it. No discovery of it was made in creation. Though “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork,” yet they gave no indication it is His will to show mercy unto rebels: rather does the universe exhibit an inexorable reign of law. If a devoted mother gives her child medicine from the wrong bottle, the result will be the same as if an enemy poured poison down its throat. Break one of Nature’s laws, even in ignorance, and no matter how deep our regret, there is no escaping the penalty. Divine Love has triumphed over the Law not by trampling upon it, but by fully meeting its demands and rendering it honourable. Divine wisdom contrived a way in which there was no compromise between Love and Law, but each was given fullest expression.

The way in which God has dealt with what to human wit appears insoluble, both manifests His perfect wisdom and greatly redounds to His glory. He has dealt with the problem raised by sin by taking it into the court of His Law and settling it on a righteous basis. The needs-be for that is evident. Sin is far too great an evil for man to meddle with and every attempt he assays in that direction only makes bad matters worse—as appears in both the social and international spheres. Still more is this the case when man attempts to treat with God: his very efforts to remove sin do but aggravate it, and any attempt to approach God in spite of it only serves to increase his guilt. None but God is capable of dealing with sin, either as a crime or as pollution, as that which is a dishonour to Him, or as it is, a barrier to our access to Him. Moreover, as sin is too great an evil for us to deal with, so righteousness is too high for the fallen creature to reach unto, yea too high for holy creatures to bring down to us. Only God Himself can bring near His righteousness (Isa 46:13).

Yes, God has dealt with the momentous issue raised by sin by taking it into the court of His Law. For fallen man to have taken it there would have inevitably meant the losing of his case, for he is a transgressor of the Divine statute and a moral bankrupt, utterly unable to make any reparation for his offence. But His consummate wisdom enabled the Judge of all to deal with it in such a manner that the honour of His Law has been maintained unimpeached, and yet, the case has been settled on a basis equally favourable to God and that sinner! Settled in such a way that the wondrous love of God is free to flow forth unto His elect, children of disobedience though they be in themselves, without ignoring or condoning their disobedience, and so that His love remains a *holy* love. It is on that judicial settlement that an all sufficient and final answer has been furnished to man’s anguished and age-long questions, “How then can man be justified with God?

or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4); “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD?” (Mic 6:6).

2. In exercising two Contrary principles in Redemption. This is an achievement worthy of Omniscience. God is love, nevertheless, He is “light” (1Jo 1:5) as well: not only is He full of kindness and benevolence, but He is immaculately pure and holy. God is abundant in mercy, but He is also just and “will by no means clear *the guilty*” (Exo 34:7). Here then are two of the Divine perfections moving in opposite directions: how can such contraries be reconciled? Love goes out unto the prodigal, but Light cannot look upon iniquity (Hab 1:13). Mercy would fain spare the offender, but justice demands his punishment. Grace is ready to bestow a gratuitous salvation, but righteousness insists that the defaulter cannot be released till he has “paid the uttermost farthing” (Mat 5:26). Shall then the tenderness of the Father yield to the severity of the Judge? or shall the rights of the Judge give place to the desire of the Father? Each must be satisfied. But how? Admire and adore that wondrous wisdom which devised a means whereby, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” (Psa 85:10).

It is said God loves the sinner, but hates his sin. Yet that provides no solution to the problem, for the question still returns, Will God sink His love to the sinner in His hatred of his sin? or allow His love for the sinner to override His hatred of his sin? God has sworn, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:4); but He has also sworn, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Eze 33:11). The oath of justice and the oath of pity appear irreconcilable: must then one yield to the other? No, both must stand. But how? In redemption, God has manifested two opposite perfections at the same time, and in one action, in which there is shown supreme hatred of sin and superlative love of the sinner. Justice and mercy has alike maintained its ground without compromise, yea, has issued from the conflict honourable and glorious. Divine wisdom contrived plan whereby God has punished transgression without scourging the transgressors, and has repaired the ruin of the sinner without condoning his sin.

3. In appointing a suitable Mediator. Clearly, this was the first step necessary in order to a solution of the intricate problems to which we have alluded. The fall of man placed him at an immeasurable *distance* from God—“your iniquities have separated between you and your God” (Isa 59:2). Not only so, but the fall produced an infinite moral *difference*, man becoming polluted and a hater of God, God Himself ineffably holy and at legal enmity with man. Such a breach appeared unbridgeable. For on the one hand, it became not the glory of His nature, nor the honour of His government, for God to make any direct advance towards rebellious subjects; and on the other hand, man had no desire to be restored to His image or favour, and even if he had, was barred from any access to Him. Thus, all intercourse between God and men was at an end; an *impasse* was created; an utterly hopeless situation seemed to exist. “For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29), and who was there that could interpose himself between Him and us? But Divine wisdom provided a means and remedy, decreeing there should be a Mediator who would bridge the distance and heal the difference between them, affecting a mutual reconciliation.

But where was such an one to be found? that was capable of laying his hand upon both (Job 9:33)? He must be entirely clear of any participation in the offence. He must, on account of his personal excellence, stand high in the esteem of the injured One. He must be a person of exalted dignity if the weight of his mediation was to bear any proportion to the magnitude of the crime and the value of the favour he would confer. He must be able to fully maintain the interests and subserve the honour of God. He must also possess a tender compassion towards the wretched offenders or he would not cordially interest himself on their behalf. And to give greater fitness to

such a procedure, it would be eminently proper that he should be intimately related to each of the parties. But where was one with so many and so necessary qualifications to be found? There was no creature worthy of so high office and so honourable an undertaking, no, not “in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth” (Rev 5:3). None but Omniscience had ever thought of appointing God’s own beloved and co-equal Son to take upon Him our nature.

4. In the union of such diverse natures in the person of Christ. It was necessary that the Mediator should be a *Divine* person in order that He might be independent and not the mere creature of either party; in order that He might reveal the Father (Joh 1:18; 14:9), in order to render unto the Law an obedience He did not owe for Himself (as all creatures do) and be one of infinite value; and in order that He might be capacitated to administer the realms of providence and grace, which are committed to Him as Mediatorial Prince (Mat 28:18; Joh 17:2). None other than God can forgive sins, impart eternal life, restore the fallen creature to true liberty, or bestow the Holy Spirit. Yet it was equally necessary that the Mediator should be *Man*: in order that He might truly represent men as “the last Adam” (1Co 15:45), in order that He might be “made under the law” (Gal 4:4) to obey it, in order that He could suffer its death-penalty, and in order that, in His glorified humanity, He might be Head of the Church. He was to be “the Apostle and High Priest” (Heb 3:1): God’s Apostle unto us, our “High Priest” with God, for He must both pacify God’s wrath and remove our enmity.

But how furnish the Son for His office? How become partaker of human nature without contracting its corruption? How unite Godhood and manhood, the Infinite with the finite, Immortality with mortality, Almighty with weakness? How produce such a union that the two natures were perfectly wedded in one Person and yet preserve their distinctness, conjoined yet not confounded? so that the Deity was not changed into flesh, nor flesh transformed into God? Before the Word’s becoming flesh, must we not exclaim, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! (Rom 11:33). By that unique and wondrous union, Christ was fitted to be “the Mediator of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6). There was nothing that belonged to Deity, which He did not possess, and nothing that pertained to humanity but He was clothed with (Rev 1:5-8). He had the nature of Him that was offended by sin, and of him that offended. “As sin was our invention (Ecc 7:29), so Christ alone is God’s, and therefore is He called ‘The Wisdom of God’ (1Co 1:24), which is not spoken of Him essentially as Second Person, but as Mediator, because in Him, God’s wisdom to the utmost is made manifest” (Thomas Goodwin).

5. In constituting Christ the federal Head of His people. “When God in wisdom had found a suitable Person, yet since this must be His only Son, here was a greater difficulty to be overcome: how to give Him for us” (Thomas Goodwin). 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 than if it was thereby more honoured than if it has never been broken, or the whole race damned. In order thereto, He appointed that Christ should serve as the Surety and Substitute of His people. He must stand as their Representative and both 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. By transferring their guilt to the Surety, God both punishes sin and pardons the sinner. In the same stupendous Sacrifice, God has upheld the claims of His Law and lavished His kindness on His people. “The depths of God’s *love* are seen here, as of His wisdom before, in not sparing His own Son, but exposing Him to all the rigours of justice, which would not make the least abatement” (Thomas Goodwin).

Christ then was made the “Surety of a better testament” (Heb 7:22). There could be no thought of reconciliation between a holy God and polluted rebels until sin had been put away and

everlasting righteousness brought in; and as our Surety, the Lord Jesus accomplished both. But O my reader, marvel at and stand in awe before what that involved. It involved that He who was in the form of God should take upon Him the form of a Servant. The Lord of angels should be laid in a manger. That the Maker of the universe should not have where to lay His head. That He should be constantly engaged in doing good and injuring none, yet be cast out by the world and deserted by His own followers. That the Lord of glory should be condemned as a malefactor, His holy face fouled by the vile spittle of men and His back scourged by them. That the King of kings should be nailed hand and foot to a convict's gibbet. That the Beloved of the Father should be smitten and forsaken by Him. Such contraries transcend the wit of man and could never have been invented by him. Must we not exclaim, "O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep." (Psa 92:5)!

6. In overruling sin to our gain. What a marvel of Divine wisdom is this: that God has not only removed the reproach, which the entrance of it brought upon His government, but that He made sin to be the foil for a greatest and grandest display of His perfections; and that He has not only devised a plan whereby His people are completely recovered from all the dire consequences and effects of the fall, but that they obtain a vastly superior inheritance than was the portion of unfallen Adam. God would have His people not only saved from Hell, but also brought to Heaven, yet in such a way should be most to the honour of Himself and of His Son. The apostle speaks of "the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *with eternal glory*" (2Ti 2:10)—not only salvation, but a glorious one: one that is to the glory of Him who contrived it, of Him who purchased it, of Him who applies it, and of them who enjoy it. What a truly amazing thing is this that shame should be the path to glory, that fallen sinners are enriched by the Redeemer's poverty, that those grovelling in the mire of sin should be advanced to the highest dignities by Christ's making Himself "of no reputation" (Phi 2:7)!

What honour it brings to God's wisdom not only to restore fallen men, but to make the fall issue in their superior excellence. If they had only been restored to their forfeited estate and the enjoyment of that happiness which they had lost, it had been a remarkable triumph of grace, but to make them "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17) and partakers of His glory (Joh 17:24) leaves us lost in amazement. It is a mystery of nature that the corruption of one thing is made to minister to the generation of another (as the bones of animals fertilize vegetation), but it is a grander mystery of grace that our fall in Adam should occasion a nobler restitution. Innocence was not our last end: a superior felicity awaits us on High. Human nature is raised to a far higher degree of honour than had man retained his innocence, for through redemption and regeneration, the elect are vitally united to the God-man Mediator and made members of His Body. The devil's empire is overthrown by the very same nature as he overthrew (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20)!

7. In winning rebels unto Himself. Having contemplated something of the wisdom and love of the Father, the willingness and work of the Son, here we are to behold (more distinctively) the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. When He first draws near to the elect in their unregenerate state, He finds them in a most deplorable condition: their understandings darkened by sin, their hearts filled with enmity toward God, their wills steeled against Him. Not only have they no regard for His glory, but they are without any desire for His so-great salvation, yea, positively and strongly averse to it. Here too are obstacles which need removing, obstacles so formidable that nothing short of omniscience and omnipotence could overcome the same. How shall captives be delivered who are thoroughly satisfied with their prison? How shall slaves be freed who are in love with their bonds? Particularly, how shall that be effected while treating them as rational and responsible beings, without offering violence to their wills and reducing them to mere machines?

Some may regard the above as a very exaggerated statement of the case, supposing that a complete solution is found by presenting the Gospel to them. But Scripture teaches, and experience and observation verifies it, that the natural man has no eyes capable of beholding the beauty of the Gospel, and that his heart is so desperately wicked he will not receive the Saviour that it offers him. How then are such creatures to be saved from themselves? How shall those who detest holiness be brought to desire it? the dead in sins made to walk in newness of life? That such a miracle *is* performed we know, but *how* it is wrought, we know not. Christ Himself declares it is a mystery as inscrutable to man as the workings of the wind (Joh 3:8). All we know is that life, light, love are supernaturally communicated, by which the unwilling are made willing—not by compelling them to do what they abhor, but by sweetly overcoming their aversion. “With *lovingkindness* [not by mere physical power] have I *drawn* thee” (Jer 31:3).

8. In making our holiness and happiness conserve each other. This is yet another of the marvels of God’s wisdom: that He has contrived that the same Gospel, which secures our everlasting felicity, shall also promote our present purity. The sanctity of God is not compromised by His clemency of sinners, for the Redeemer is Himself both the principle and pattern of holiness unto all who are saved by Him. Moreover, the same grace to send His Son to die for us gives the Holy Spirit to renew us according to the Divine image; and thereby, make us meet for communion with Him. What a wonder of Divine wisdom to so highly exalt those who are so utterly unworthy in themselves and yet, at the same time, effectually humble them that they cry, “Not unto us O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, *and* for Thy truth’s sake” (Psa 115:1)! God’s lovingkindness unto His people neither loosens the bonds of duty, nor breaks that relation in which they stand to Him as their sovereign Lord and Governor. The Gospel does not permit its beneficiaries to return hatred for love, nor contempt for benefit, but lays them unto deeper obligations of gratitude to obedience. Those chosen to salvation are also “predestinate[d] to be conformed to the image of His [God’s] Son” (Rom 8:29). The law of faith requires us to submit to Christ’s scepter, as well as depend upon His sacrifice. —AWP

September

TO THE UNSAVED

As one who has been called to declare “all the counsel of God,” it is our bounden duty to keep back nothing which may prove profitable. We dare not assume that all of our readers have actually passed from death unto life; and therefore, we are required to address ourselves, occasionally at least, to those who are yet under the condemnation and wrath of a sin-hating God, especially unto such as mistakenly suppose they have been reconciled to Him. Though our chief design and effort is to provide spiritual nourishment for those who are in Christ; yet, we cannot altogether ignore the ones who are yet strangers to Him. The more so that, in this generation, there are so few who are seriously attempting to expose empty professors unto themselves, and make it plain that many of those who fondly believe they are journeying Heavenwards are entertaining a false hope—that instead of their hope being fixed upon the Rock, it rests upon nothing but a foundation of sand. Is that the case with *you*, dear friend?

“Ye cannot serve the LORD: for HE is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will *not forgive* your transgressions nor your sins” (Jos 24:19). Those words bring before us an essential and fundamental aspect of the Truth, which is rarely proclaimed today, and which multitudes who sit under modern “evangelism” (?) are quite unacquainted with. The view which now so widely obtains is, that nothing is easier and simpler than the obtaining of the forgiveness of our sins. Millions of people have been assured by the blind leaders of the blind, that all which is required from them is that they believe the Gospel and receive Christ as their personal Saviour. It matters nothing what be the state of their hearts, what be their concept of God’s character, what be their attitude to His Law. It matters not that they regard sin as trifle, are thoroughly carnal and in love with the world, and have no realisation of their deep need: so long as they “accept Christ” all is well with them. Nor does it matter how unchanged are their future lives—all is now well with them forever. So Satan would have them think.

“Ye cannot serve the LORD.” What is signified by *serving* the Lord? It means that I recognise His claims upon me, that I own His authority, that I unreservedly submit myself to His will. It means that I take the place and discharge the obligations of a servant, and a servant is one who is at the disposal of his master, who does as he tells him, who seeks to please him and promote his interests. Perhaps the reader is saying in his heart, “But I have no desire to be a ‘servant’ of the Lord in that sense, all I want is to be assured that my sins are pardoned and that I am secured from Hell.” If so, you are wanting something you will never obtain, for serving the Lord and obtaining His forgiveness of transgressions are inseparably connected. But do you realise what is implied

by your assertion that you have no desire to serve the Lord? It signifies you are quite satisfied with your present master and decline to leave his service. Your present master is Satan and *his* servant you are. There are but two Masters over the sons of men: the Lord and the Devil—and if we are not serving the former, we are the latter.

“Ye *cannot* serve the LORD.” Why? “For He is an *holy* God; He is a jealous God” (Jos 24:19). That presents a view of the Divine character, which only too many pulpits guiltily conceal. God is not only good and ready to pardon, but He is ineffably pure and cannot look on sin without displeasure. He is not only merciful and gracious, but He will tolerate no rivals, and requires that we love *Him* with all our heart and strength. Nor is that aspect of the Divine character restricted to the revelation, which He made of Himself at Sinai: the earth quaked at Calvary, thick darkness overshadowed the Cross, and the holiness of God was evidenced as He “spared not His own Son” (Rom 8:32). In the N.T.,⁵ the call goes forth, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28, 29). Ah, my reader, the glib manner and easy complacency with which so many talk of pardon and their assurance of it, proceeds from dullness of conscience rather than from strength of faith. They have never felt in their souls the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the holiness of Him with whom they have to do. Had they done so, their cry would be, “Behold, I am vile;” (Job 40:4) “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isa 6:5).

“Ye cannot serve the LORD: for He is an holy God.” Serving God is a very different matter from what the world thinks. The natural man imagines that he may devote the greater part of his time to the pleasing of himself, and then that he may appease God by assuming a pious air on the Sabbath. But He will not be imposed upon by any such mockery. To all such He says, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4)—spiritual adultery is illicit intercourse, setting our affections upon the creature rather than the Creator, devoting to them what belongs only to Him: our lusts, inveigling the soul from God. God will not accept the homage of a *divided heart*. That was made crystal clear by the Lord Jesus: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Mat 6:24). There we learn that service must proceed from *love*. God will not accept a legal service, which is rendered from dread, nor from a mercenary spirit, which seeks gain therefrom. He must be served freely and gladly.

The Devil deceives many into being satisfied with a superficial change and half reformation. They make a religious profession, persuading themselves they are trusting in the finished work of Christ, and yet continue in love with the world and to indulge the flesh. It is a fatal mistake to think we can divide our hearts between God and the world, to serve Him and our lusts. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat 6:24; Luk 16:13). No one has any difficulty in understanding what it signifies to “*serve* mammon.” It is to make material riches my dominant quest, to make the acquirement of them my supreme aim, to devote all my powers to the securing of them. Equally plain is what is included in the “*serving* of God.” It means putting Him first in our hearts and lives. It means for all our faculties and energies to be devoted to an ascertaining and then a *doing* of whatever He requires. It means the rendering to Him of an unqualified and loving obedience. And that necessarily involves the renunciation of all objects which are opposed

⁵ N.T. — New Testament.

to Him and abstaining from whatever He has forbidden. To allow any lust to reign in us is to depose God from the heart.

“He will *not forgive* your transgressions nor your sins.” Solemn, unspeakably solemn words. How faintly any of us realise what it means for one to pass out of time into eternity with his transgressions *unforgiven*. “Ye shall die in your sins” (Joh 8:24) said Christ—not to avowed infidels—but the religious professors of His day. And why? Because they refused to take His “yoke” upon them, because they declared, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14). Nor does death purge away sins, for after death, “the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Yes, eternal, inexorable, unbearable judgment—suffering the wrath of a holy and jealous God. Then “Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will *not pardon* your transgressions” (Exo 23:21). Something more than believing is necessary: Christ is “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* Him” (Heb 5:9). And how and where is the obedience of a sinner to begin? Just here: “Let the wicked forsake his way [of self-pleasing] and the unrighteous man his thoughts [of being saved in any other manner]: and let him return unto the LORD [from whom he revolted in Adam], and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isa 55:7).

What we have set forth above is not the Gospel, but it *is* the necessary background of it. The Divine Law reveals my duty and condemns me for my utter failure in discharging it. The Law makes known the just demands of God upon me and my woeful falling short of meeting the same. Not until I am personally convicted of my sinful failure, not until my heart sincerely repents for that failure, am I experimentally fit for the Gospel. But more so, there must be wrought in me a genuine desire to serve God, to give up myself wholly to His righteous requirements, and accompanying this must be the realisation of my own insufficiency, that I “cannot.” Then, and only then, will the Gospel be music to my soul, for it tells first of how my awful guilt may be blotted out, and second, of how strength may be obtained for the discharge of duty. The Gospel exempts not the believer from the service of God, but binds him to it, for when we savingly believe the Gospel, we not only receive from God, but we “give ourselves” to Him (2Co 8:11, 12). Have *you* done so, my reader? Have you *really*, or is Satan deceiving you into thinking you have? —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

9. 1 Corinthians 1: 4-7

The original Corinth was the chief city of ancient Greece, not only in authority, but in wealth and grandeur, and, we may add, in luxury and licentiousness—the temple of Venus being situated there. It was entirely destroyed by the Roman consul Mummius, 120 B.C., and as one writer expresses it, “its inhabitants were dispersed, and the conqueror carried with him to Rome the richest spoils that ever graced the triumphs of a Roman general.” For a century after that, it lay desolate in ruins. But Julius Caesar perceiving the military importance and commercial possibilities of its

location determined to rebuild it, and for that purpose sent thither a colony, consisting chiefly of freed men. Justus (Act 18:7), Crispus and Gaius (1Co 1:14), Fortunatus and Achaicus (1Co 16:17) are all names of Roman origin. That colony, however, was little more than the nucleus of the new city. Merchants flocked thither from all parts, and many Jews were drawn to it by the lure of commerce. Art, literature, and luxury revived. The Isthmian games were again celebrated there.

The new Corinth was made the capital of Achaia. Under the fostering care of Augustus Caesar, Corinth regained much of its ancient splendour, and by A.D. 50 had reached a pre-eminence, which made it the glory of Greece. But it was a material and carnal glory, for it was a centre of voluptuousness. Yet, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, for God had ordained that this place of gross wickedness should witness some of the grandest triumphs of the cross of Christ. From that viewpoint, it is easy to perceive how well situated Corinth was to be a centre from which the Gospel might be diffused. Not only was it the political capital of Greece, the seat of its commercial and intellectual life, a place of concourse of many citizens and nations, but it was a place from which influences of many kinds emanated in all directions. To the city, Paul was sent. Though an ambassador of the King of kings, he was attended by no retinue, and his approach was entirely unheralded and unaccompanied.

A complete stranger to the place, Paul sought out two of his own countrymen who were employed in the same craft in which he was proficient—Aquila and his wife Priscilla—lodging and working with them in tent making (Act 18:1-3). On the Sabbaths, he went to the synagogue, where he reasoned with and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. A little later, his hands were strengthened by Silas and Timothy joining him, and he testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But they opposed and blasphemed. Nothing daunted Paul, as he shook his raiment and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Act 18:6). The Lord honoured his decision, first saving Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue and all his house, and the “many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized” (Act 18:8). But they were only the firstfruits: a larger harvest was to be gathered. “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for *I have* much people in this city.” (Act 18:9, 10).

They were the Lord’s people, be it noted, even though yet in a state of nature, dead in trespasses and sins—His, by sovereign and eternal election. “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them.” (Act 18:11). Richly were his labours blest, and the many monuments of Divine grace that were raised up constituted the foundation—members of the Church of God at Corinth. After the apostle’s departure, trouble arose in the assembly and various evils broke out. It must be remembered that the membership of this church was a heterogeneous one, that many of them had been reared in heathendom, that they were surrounded by all the incentives to see indulgence, plied on every hand by vain philosophers, and that at this time, part of the N.T. was in circulation. Judaisers had propagated error and sowed the seeds of dissension and a strong party spirit was at work, threatening breach in their ranks. Not only was a schismatic spirit at work, but considerable carnality prevailed and serious moral disorders were marring their Christian testimony.

Among the evils which obtained in the Corinthian church were cliques and factions, the violation of the seventh commandment in various forms and the remissness of the assembly to exercise discipline in such matters; a disorderly and unbrotherly spirit in their meetings—women being allowed to enter the congregation with uncovered heads and to speak in public; exercising the gifts of prophesy and speaking in tongues without regard to order and edification; the

debasement of the Lord's Supper into a common meal; brother going to law against brother before heathen magistrates, and some of them having become disaffected unto himself. Tidings of these things had reached the apostle's ears, and though this epistle was written in answer to certain more specific inquiries, he had received from them (1Co 7:1), he improved the opportunity in reply to take up all those things which needed correction. Though there were some things in this epistle, which concerned local, evanescent and special matters, yet fundamental doctrine and much that is of lasting importance was as interwoven.

It is most blessed to see how the apostle commenced his letter to them. He had much more to say of blame than of praise, yet after the opening address and salutation, he tells them, "I thank my God always on your behalf" (1Co 1:4). Before directly charging them with their disorderly conduct, he first assured them of the place which they had in his affections. Though now absent from them, yet they held a warm place in his heart, being constantly remembered before the throne of grace—a lesson here for those engaged in the pastoral office, that when called of God to occupy another place in His vineyard, they are not to forget those they left in their former field of service. The "thank my God *always* on your behalf" tells us that Paul did not regard prayer as a spiritual luxury, to be enjoyed only on rare and special occasions, but rather that it was a regular practice with him, a duty which he constantly discharged; and that, not only in seeking fresh supplies of grace for himself, but on the behalf of others also. Prayer has rightly been termed, "the pulse of the Christian's life," intimating as it does his health or sickness.

Once more, we find the apostle referring to the One unto whom he returned thanks as "my God." Though we sought to bring out the force of that expression on a former occasion, yet it may be well for us to summarise the same here. Paul did not regard Deity as absolute and infinitely removed, but as a living and personal reality, to Whom he was intimately related. "My God" was an avowal of His *covenant* relationship, for the grand Covenant promise was, "I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people." "My God" was expressive of *personal* relationship: He was his God by eternal election, by redemption and by regenerating power, when He communicated life to him and stamped the Divine image upon his heart, thereby making him manifestatively His own dear child. "My God" was an acknowledgement of his own personal *choice*, for he had consciously and voluntarily taken God to be his absolute Lord, supreme Good, and everlasting Portion. "My God" was a confession of *practical* relationship; "whose I am and whom I serve"—the One who has shown me such abundant mercy, who will keep that which I have committed unto Him, who will supply all my need, to whose glory all my talents and energies are devoted.

Such a God was an Object of fervent adoration. His goodness must be acknowledged, and Paul was continuously engaged in that holy exercise: "I thank my God always *on your behalf* for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1Co 1:4). In this, the apostle has set all of us an example: "Be ye followers of me" (1Co 11:1). If we do not emulate him in this blessed practice, then most certainly we shall suffer loss. Yea, is not their failure at this particular point one reason why some of the Lord's people find it so difficult to obtain assurance that "the grace of God" has been given *them* by Jesus Christ? Is it not because they were not, and are not, truly thankful when they have reason to believe He has bestowed His grace *others*? Is there no tendency to be too much occupied with our own spiritual interests? God will not prosper self-centeredness. It is not without reason that the Lord has bidden His people "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phi 2:4). There is such a thing as spiritual selfishness, as well as natural. Then let us seek to heed that exhortation, "rejoice with them that do rejoice..." (Rom 12:15).

“I thank my God always on your behalf.” That word “always” is very blessed when we call to mind the attendant circumstances: it points an important practical lesson for us. There had been various changes in the Corinthian assembly during the apostle’s absence, and none of those changes had been for the better, but there had been no alteration or lessening of Paul’s affections *for them*. There had been that among them which must have dampened his joy, but he had not allowed it to chill his love. He gave thanks for them now as frequently as he had done formerly: yes, even though some of these had become disaffected unto him. And does not the writer and the reader need to keep close watch over his heart that he suffers not any change in the condition of his brethren to diminish his love for them? True, it may call for a variation of the expression (as in Paul’s case: see 1Co 4:21), for love must ever be faithful and the form taken by its outward manifestation is to be regulated by what the good of its object requires, yet there is to be no lessening of its fervour.

Though Paul could not assure the Corinthians, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8), yet he did adore Him for having effectually called them, “I thank my God always on your behalf *for the grace* of God, which is given you by Jesus Christ” (1Co 1:4). And does not that inculcate another important lesson for us, namely, that we are not to despise the bruised reed, nor the smoking flax. True, we shall thank God most ardently for those who most evidently resemble His Son, yet we must not fail to thank Him *also* for those in whom (as yet) we can but faintly discern Him. If the name of Christ be fragrant to us, we shall rejoice wherever it is poured forth, and if His image be precious to us, we should own it in whomsoever we behold it—just as if His Gospel be prized by us, we shall be glad by whomsoever it be preached. Though as yet Christ’s image can only be faintly detected in His babes, yet if we see it at all, we have infallible assurance that He who has begun a good work in them will assuredly complete the same (Phi 1:6).

It was that particular truth which sustained the apostle’s heart at this very time (1Co 1:8). At least three years had passed since he had left Corinth, during which time he had laboured hard in other fields, but he recalls with gratitude and joy how graciously and wondrously God had wrought in their notoriously wicked city. That was what upheld him when he learned of the sad disorderly among them. “I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God, which is given you by Jesus Christ”—his memory went back to the “day of the espousals.” Instead of being wholly absorbed with and weighted down of their sad failures, Paul held fast to the fact and kept foremost in his mind the truth that they had been both the objects and recipients of the sovereign and invincible grace of God. Since that grace had not been earned by them, but “given by Jesus Christ,” he knew it could not be forfeited; yea, that they would “grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour,” and careful reading of the second epistle which he, later, sent to this same church shows how blessedly his confidence was justified and his hope realised.

The apostle then did not begin this epistle by rebuking the Corinthians for their waywardness, but instead, by enumerating certain things, which evidenced them to be the special objects of Divine favour. We are to see in this not only a lovely exemplification of the apostle’s own magnanimity and graciousness, but also important instruction as to how any servant of God is to proceed in his dealings with those—particularly his own children in the Gospel who have wandered out of the way. He must first seek to reach and melt their hearts with a renewed sense of God’s goodness to them, for only then will they be capable of perceiving the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the dishonour done Him by a disorderly walk on the part of those who bear His name. By calling to remembrance the “day of their espousals,” Paul not only sought to recall them to the marvel of Divine mercy in bringing them out of darkness into the marvellous light,

but also to remind them that *he* had been the favoured instrument used by God to their conversion. And therefore, as he was their spiritual “father” (1Co 4:15), they should the more readily attend to the message he was about to give them.

The “grace of God” has reference first to His free and sovereign favour, and then to the blessings which issue therefrom—as we speak of “receiving favours” from a person. It was in this second sense the apostle used the term when he thanked God for the grace which had been given to the Corinthians. Observe how careful he was to honour the Saviour by according Him His due place as Mediator: “the grace of God which is given you *by Jesus Christ*.” God’s grace was first given to His elect *in Christ* before the foundation of the world (2Ti 1:9), and then it is given them *by Christ* at their regeneration and throughout their Christian course (Joh 1:14-16)—all the grace of God flows to us through the Redeemer. It was, first, for the grace of God by Jesus Christ that had been bestowed on the Corinthians at their conversion, then “That in every thing ye are enriched *by Him*, in all utterance and in all knowledge” (1Co 1:5). The same truth is emphasised here, gifts and attainments being expressly ascribed to Christ. Thus, all ground for self-gratulation and boasting was removed, and the honour was placed where it rightfully belonged. There was no pandering to the creature here, but an humbling of him.

“Enriched by Him in all utterance, and in all knowledge.” The order of those two things may strike us strange: if so, it is through failure to understand the particular kind of utterance and knowledge to which the apostle alluded. The reference was not to what is ordinary, but extraordinary, not to the graces which the Spirit imparts, but to His gifts. At the beginning of this dispensation, there were not only officers extraordinary (apostles and prophets), but there were gifts extraordinary, and as successors were not appointed for the former, so a continuance of the latter was never intended. In the early days of this era, the Holy Spirit made His presence evident by sensible signs: Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-46; extraordinary gifts and signs being given in fulfillment of Christ’s promise (Mar 16:17, 18) for the establishing of Christianity and the infantile state of the Church, certifying the truth of the Gospel (Heb 2:4), Divinely attesting the doctrine taught by the apostles and evidencing God’s approval of the same. We term these miraculous works of the Spirit extraordinary so as to distinguish them from His ordinary ones or those gifts and graces, which He has communicated to Christians all through this age.

Those supernatural gifts were designed to arrest the attention of outsiders (1Co 14:22), to command a hearing for the apostles, to authenticate the Gospel in heathen countries. Of all the churches of God that we read of in the N.T., that at Corinth seems to have abounded most in these gifts, and to have abused them most—despising those of their number who had not their particular gift, and those without envying those who had them. The gift of “utterance” included “prophesying” or speaking by Divine afflatus, but more especially referred to a miraculous endowment, which enabled its possessor to speak in divers languages (1Co 12:10; 14:4, 5). The gift of “knowledge” was a supernatural endowment for interpreting the prophecies and strange tongues (1Co 12:10; 14:26). In the body of the epistle, Paul acquainted them with the excellency of those gifts and how they were to be used. They were from the Spirit (1Co 12:4, 8), they were given for mutual profit (1Co 12:7), they were to be exercised in an orderly manner for edification (1Co 14:26-33); while he also pointed out to them something still more desirable and excellent—the “way” to exercise *love* (1Co 13).

Though these gifts were to render them more serviceable, they were not sanctifying ones (1Co 13:2). Though the Corinthians had been plenteously endowed therewith, yet spiritually, they were only babes (1Co 3:1). Though through their pride and forwardness, those gifts had been much abused, yet the apostle adores God for the communicating of them. They were the purchase of

Christ (Eph 4:8) and the fruit of His ascension (Act 2:33). Though the apostle could not (as yet) rejoice at the fruits of the Spirit being borne by them, yet he lets them know he returned thanks for the extraordinary gifts bestowed on them. That too was calculated to have a conciliatory effect on the Corinthians and dispose them to heed what followed. So far from depreciating those gifts as valueless, because they had not made a better use of them, Paul traces them to God as their Source, and Jesus Christ as their Bestower. Thus, there was no flattering of them, because they were in possession of the same, but a magnifying of Him to whom they were indebted—compare 1 Corinthians 4:7!

Though these extraordinary gifts no longer obtain, yet there are others distinguishable from spiritual graces—natural endowments, intellectual capacity, readiness of speech, etc. While those special gifts and the natural talents we have mentioned are far inferior to spiritual graces, yet from the example of the apostle here with reference to the former, we may learn valuable lessons concerning the latter. First, the one as much as the other, is the gift of God and is to be thankfully acknowledged as such. Grace is the most excellent thing of all, yet add gifts thereto, and it becomes more excellent. I was the temple, which sanctified the gold, nevertheless, the gold beautified the temple. It is grace which sanctifies gifts, yet gifts adorn and render its possessors more useful. Second, the possessors of them have no reason to be puffed up thereby, nor to look down upon those who have them not, for it is God who maketh one to differ from another. Third, we should not disparagingly contrast gifts with graces: Paul did not. If there be a danger on the one hand, there is no less so on the other: one may be as proud of his faith or love, as another with his utterance or knowledge.

After all that has been brought out above on 1 Corinthians 1:4 and 5, there is the less need for us to say much on what follows. “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in (or “among”) you” (1Co 1:5). The “Testimony” of Christ signifies the Gospel; in 1 Corinthians 2:1, it is termed “the Testimony of God”—the former referring to its grand Object; the latter, to its gracious Author. Mention is made of this Testimony being “confirmed,” as a proof it did not come to them in the letter only, but also in Divine power. In other words, it was an evidence they had savingly received the Gospel (compare Col 1:6). The Gospel had been accepted by a God-given faith and was firmly established in their conviction and affections. If we translate “confirmed *among* you,” then the allusion is to the miraculous gifts, which had been imparted to them (compare Heb 2:4). The opening “even as” looks back to both verses 4 and 5: as your conversion and as your endowment with these gifts proceeded from the grace of God by Jesus Christ, equally so did this “confirmation.”

“So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Co 1:7). This confirms the *double* meaning we have given to the previous verse. The Gospel had been so confirmed “among” them that no church was more plenteously endued with gifts. It had been so confirmed “in” them that it produced this blessed fruit—they were eagerly awaiting the Redeemer’s return. The reference is to the expectation they cherished of Christ’s second advent, the promise of which was connected with the resurrection, His people, and the consummation of His kingdom. So generally was Christ’s return the “blessed hope” of all the early Christians, they were characterised as those “who loved His appearing” (2Ti 4:8)—how much more so should *we*, now that this glorious event is two thousand years nearer! The gifts and graces of the Spirit are but the “firstfruits” (Rom 8:23), and they should make us yearn for the coming of Christ when we shall enter fully into the inheritance He purchased for us. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

21. Thirteenth Miracle

In the incident which is to be before us, we behold Elisha discharging a different line of duty. No longer do we see him engaged in ministering to the young prophets, but instead, we find him faithfully rendering valuable assistance to his sovereign. Once more the lust of blood or booty moved the king of Syria to war against Israel. Following the advice of his military counsellors, he decided to encamp in a certain place through which the king of Israel was wont to pass, expecting to catch him and his retainers. God acquainted Elisha with his master's peril, and accordingly the prophet went and warned him thereof; and heeding the same, the king was preserved from the snare set for him. It is required of us that, as we have opportunity, we "do good unto all men" (Gal 6:10). True, the Christian is not endowed with the extraordinary gifts of an Elisha; nevertheless, he has a responsibility toward his king or ruler. Not only is he Divinely commanded to "Honour the King" (1Pe 2:17), but "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1Ti 2:1, 2). Coming now to our miracle.

First, its *connection*. "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp" (2Ki 6:8). Clearly, the opening "Then" bids us pay attention to the connection. From a literary viewpoint, we regard our present incident as the sequel to what is mentioned in 2 Kings chapter 5, taking chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 as a parenthesis, thereby emphasising the base ingratitude of the Syrian monarch for the miraculous healing of his commander-in-chief in the land of Israel. There he had written a personal letter to Israel's king (2Ki 5:5, 6) to recover Naaman from his leprosy; but here he has evil designs upon him. That he should invade the land of Samaria so soon after such a signal favour had been rendered to him, aggravated his offence and made the more manifest his wicked character. It is wrong for us to return evil for evil, for vengeance belongeth alone unto the Lord; but to return evil for good is a sin of double-dyed enormity—yet how often have we treated God thus!

But there is another way in which this opening "Then" may be regarded; namely, by linking it unto the typical significance of what is recorded in 2 Kings 6:1-7. We suggested a threefold application of that miracle. First, as supplying a picture of the sinner's redemption. Viewing it thus, what is the next thing we should expect to meet with? Why, the rage of the Enemy, and this is adumbrated by the attack of the king of Syria. Second, that miracle may also be regarded as showing the Christian how a lost blessing is to be retrieved. And when the believer has peace, joy, assurance restored to him, what is sure to follow? This, "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel." Nothing so maddens Satan as the sight of a happy saint—blessed is it to see in what follows how his evil designs were thwarted. Third, that miracle can also be viewed as portraying how the Christian may grow in grace—by mortifying his members which are upon the earth. And if he does, and enters into an enlarged spiritual experience, then he may expect to be an object of the Enemy's renewed assaults; yet he shall not be overcome by him.

“Then the king of Syria warred against Israel.” Yes my reader, there were *wars* in those days: human nature has been the same in each generation and in all countries. So far from war being a new thing, the history of nations—both ancient and modern, civilized and uncivilized—is little more than a record of animosities, intrigues, and fightings. “Their feet are swift to shed blood” (Rom 3:15), is one of the solemn indictments which God has made against the whole human family. There is no hint anywhere that Benhadad had received any provocation from Israel: it was just his own wicked greed and bloodthirstiness which moved him. And this, in spite of a serious defeat he had suffered on a previous occasion (1Ki 20:1, 26-30). “The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11) and nothing can stop them from executing their desires and devices, but the restraining hand of God. Neither solemn warnings nor kindly favours—as this man had recently received—will soften their hearts, unless the Lord is pleased to sanctify the same unto them.

“Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants”—not asked counsel of the Lord, for he was a stranger to Him. We are glad to see no mention is made here of Naaman: it was with his “servants” rather than “the captain of the host” (2Ki 5:1) he now conferred. Fain would we hope that it was *against* the remonstrance of Naaman, rather than with his approval the king now acted. Yet what daring impiety to attack a people whose God wrought such marvels! If he was impressed by the healing of the general, the impression speedily faded. “Saying, in such and such a place shall be my camp.” From the sequel, it would appear that this particular “place” was one through which the king of Israel had occasion to frequently pass; thus, he evidently laid a careful ambush for him there. Thus, it is with the great Enemy of our souls: he knows both our ways and our weaknesses always, and where he is most likely to gain an advantage over us. But carefully as he made his plans, this king reckoned without the Most High.

Second, its *occasion*. “And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down” (2Ki 6:9). Yes, the king of Syria had left the living God out of his calculations: He is fully acquainted with the thoughts and intention of His enemies and, with the utmost ease, can bring them to naught. The methods which He employs in providence are as varied as His works in creation. On this occasion, He did not employ the forces of nature, as He did at the Red Sea when He overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts. Nor did He bid the king of Israel engage his enemy in battle and enable him to vanquish him. Instead, He prompted His servant to give his royal master warning and made the same effectual unto him. The lesson for us is important. God does not always use the same method in His interpositions on our behalf. The fact that He came to my relief for deliverance in a certain manner in the past is no guarantee that He will follow the same course or use the same means now—this is to lift our eyes above all secondary causes to the Lord Himself.

Observe that it was “the man of God”—not merely “Elisha”—who were with this warning: “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amo 3:7). Thus it was in his official character that he went to the king with this Divine message. Just previously, he had used his extraordinary powers to help one of his students; here, he befriended his sovereign. Whatever gift God has bestowed on His servants, it is to be used for the good of others—one of their principal duties is to employ the spiritual knowledge they have received in *warning* those in peril. How merciful God is in warning both sinners and saints of the place of danger! How thankful we should be when a man of God puts *us* on our guard against an evil which we suspected not! How many disastrous experiences shall we be spared if we heed the cautions given us by the faithful messengers of Christ. It is at our peril and to our certain loss if—

in our pride and self-will—we disregard their timely, “*Beware that thou pass not such a place*” (2Ki 6:9).

The course which the Lord took in delivering the king of Israel from the ambush set for him may not have flattered his self-esteem, any more than Timothy’s was when Paul bade him “*flee youthful lusts*,” yet, we may perceive the wisdom of it. God was enforcing the king’s responsibility: He gave him fair warning of his danger; if he disregarded it, then his blood was on his own head. So it is with us. The particular locality of peril is not named. The Syrian had said, “In such and such a place shall be my camp,” and “*Beware that thou pass not such a place*” was the prophet’s warning. That the king would identify it in his mind is clear from the sequel; yet, as there is nothing meaningless in Scripture, there must be a lesson for us in its *not* being specifically named. We are plainly informed in the Word that our arch-foe lies in wait to ensnare us (1Pe 5:8). Sometimes a particular danger is definitely described, at others it is (as here) more generally mentioned—that we may ever be on our guard, pondering “the path of *our* feet” (Pro 4:26).

Though Satan may propose, God will both oppose and dispose. Ere passing on to the sequel, let us link up what has just been before us with the typical teaching of the previous miracle—as the opening “Then” of 2 Kings 6:8 and the connecting “And” of verse 9 require—and complete the line of thought set out in our third paragraph above. When a sinner has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, he at once becomes the object of the Devil’s enmity; but God has graciously made provision for his security and prevents the Enemy from ever completely vanquishing him. Likewise, when a believer has been enabled to regain his peace and joy, Satan will renew his efforts to encompass his downfall; but his attempts will be foiled, for since the believer is now in communion with God, he has light on his path and clearly perceives the place to be avoided. So also when by means of mortification, the Christian enjoys an enlarged spiritual experience, Satan will lay a fresh snare for him; but it will be in vain, for such an one will receive and *heed* Divine warning.

“And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God (not “Elisha”!) told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice” (2Ki 6:10). Here we see the king’s skepticism (compare 2Ki 5:7): he had some respect for the prophet’s message or he had disregarded it; yet, he had not full confidence therein or he had not “sent” to investigate. It was well for him that he went to that trouble, for thereby, he obtained definite corroboration and found the caution he had received was no groundless one. Ah, my reader, the warnings of God’s servants are not idle ones, and it is our wisdom to pay the most serious heed to them. But alas, while most of our fellows will pay attention to warnings against physical and temporal dangers, they are deaf concerning their spiritual and eternal perils. There is a real sense in which *we* are required to emulate Israel’s king here: we are to follow no preacher blindly, but *test* his warnings, investigating them in the light of Scriptures, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1Th 5:21) and thereby we shall obtain Divine corroboration.

“Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?” (2Ki 6:11). It never crossed his mind that it was the Lord who was thwarting him. Being a stranger to Him, God had no place in his thoughts, and therefore, he sought a natural explanation. Instead of recognising that God was on the side of Israel, and blaming himself, he was chagrined at the failure of his plan, suspected there was a traitor in his camp, and sought a scapegoat.

“And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha the prophet that is in Israel telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (2Ki 6:12). Even the

heathen are not in entire ignorance of God: they have sufficient light and knowledge of Him to render them “without excuse” (Rom 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15)—much more so is this the case with unbelievers in Christendom. This verse also shows how the spirituality and power of a true servant of God is recognised even by his enemies. The spokesman here may have been one of those who formed the retinue of Naaman when he came to Elisha and was healed of his leprosy. Yet observe there was no recognition and owning of *God* here. There was no acknowledgement that He was the One who revealed such secrets unto His servants, no terming of Elisha “the man of God,” but simply “the prophet that is in Israel”—he was regarded merely as a “*seer*” possessing magical powers. Neither God nor His servant is accorded His rightful place by any, save His own people.

Third, its *location*, namely, Dothan, which was to the west of Jordan, in the north-east portion of Samaria. Significantly enough, Dothan means “double feast” and from Genesis 37:16 and 17, we learn it was the place where the flocks were fed. “And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold he is in Dothan” (2Ki 6:13). Even now the Syrian monarch was unwilling to recognise that he was fighting against Jehovah, but determined to remove this obstacle in the way of a successful carrying out of his campaign—even though that obstacle was a “prophet.” God allowed him to have his own way up to this point, that he might discover he was vainly flinging himself against the bosses of His buckler and made him feel his own impotency. Typically, this verse illustrates the persistency of our great Adversary, who will not readily accept defeat. As the Syrian now sought to secure the one who had come between him and his desired victim, the Devil makes special efforts to silence those who successfully warn the one he would fain take captive.

“Therefore sent he thither horses and chariots, and a great host [of infantry]: and they came by night, and compassed the city about” (2Ki 6:14). That he had some realisation of the power Elisha wielded is evident by the strength and silence of the force, he now sent forth to take him prisoner; yet, that he did not deem him to be invincible is shown by the plan he put into operation. Though the wicked are rendered uneasy by the stirrings of conscience and their conviction that they are doing wrong and following a course of madness; yet, they silence the one and treat the other as vain superstitions, and continue in their sin career. The surrounding of Dothan “by night” illustrates the truth that the natural man prefers the darkness to the light, and typically signifies that our Adversary follows a policy of stealth and secrecy, ever seeking to take us unawares—especially when we are *asleep*.

Fourth, its *subject*. “And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?” (2Ki 6:15). Notice its subject is termed a servant—not of “Elisha,” but “of the man of God.” It is in such small, but perfect details that the devout student loves to see the handiwork of the Holy Spirit, evidencing as it does the *verbal* inspiration of the Scriptures—God guiding each penman in the selection of every word He employed. This man, the successor of Gehazi, was new in the prophet’s service, and therefore, was he now tested and taught. When a young believer throws in his lot with the people of God, he will soon discover they are hated by the world; but he is called upon to share their reproach. Let not his older brethren expect too much from him while he is young and inexperienced: not until he has learned to walk by faith will he be undaunted by the difficulties and perils of the way.

“Alas my master! how shall we do?” See here a picture of a young, weak, timid, distracted believer. Is not the picture true to life? Cannot all of us recall its exact replica in our own past experience? How often have we been nonplussed by the trials of the way and the opposition we

have encountered. Quite likely, this “young man” (see 2Ki 6:17) thought he would have a smooth path in the company of the man of God, and yet here was a situation that affrighted him. And did we never entertain a similar hope? and when our hope was not realised, did we never give utterance to an unbelieving “Alas! how shall we do?”—shutting God completely out of our view, with no hope of deliverance, no expectation of His showing Himself strong on our behalf? If memory enables us to see here a past representation of our self, then let compassion cause us to deal leniently and gently with others who are similarly weak and fearful.

It should be borne in mind that the young believer has become, constitutionally, more fearful than unbelievers. Why so? Because his self-confidence and self-sufficiency has been shattered. He has become as “a little child,” conscious of his own weakness. So far so good: the great thing now is for him to learn *where* his strength lies. It should also be pointed out that Christians are menaced by more numerous and more formidable foes than was Elisha’s servant, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph 6:12). Well might we tremble and be more distrustful of ourselves were we more conscious of the supernatural beings opposing us. “And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2Ki 6:16). A realisation of *that* will dispel our doubts and quieten our fears. “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1Jo 4:4).

Fifth, its *means*. “And Elisha *prayed*, and said, LORD, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see” (2Ki 6:17). How blessed is this! “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa 26:3). There was no trepidation on the part of Elisha: perfect peace was his, and therefore could he say, “Fear not” to his trembling companion. Note there is no scolding of his affrighted servant, but instead, a turning to the Lord on his behalf. At first, the writer was puzzled at the “*Elisha prayed*” rather than the “man of God;” but pondering the same brought out a precious lesson. It was not in his official character that he prayed, but simply as a personal believer—to show *us* that God is ready to grant the petition of a child of His who asks in simple faith and unselfish concern for another.

Sixth, its *marvel*. “And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” (2Ki 6:17). Proof was this of his “they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2Ki 6:16): the invisible guard was now made visible in the eyes of his servant. Blessed illustration is this, that “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them (Psa 34:7) and of “Are they [the “angels” of the previous verse] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:14)! Doubtless, the angels took the form of “horses and chariots” on that occasion because of the Syrian horses and chariots which “encompassed Dothan” (2Ki 6:14)—what could horses of flesh and material chariots do against celestial ones of fire! That they were personal beings is clear from the “they” of verse 14; that they were angels may also be gathered from a comparison with Hebrews 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8.

Seventh, its *meaning*. Here we are shown how to deal with a young and fearing Christian. “The strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak” (Rom 15:1). Many of God’s little ones are living far below their privileges, failing to apprehend the wondrous provisions which God has made for them. They are walking far too much by sight, occupied with the difficulties of the world and those opposing them. First, such are not to be browbeaten or upbraided; that will do no good, for unbelief is not removed by such a method. Second, their alarm is to be quieted with a calm and confident “Fear not,” backed with “for they that be with us are more than they that be

with them” and “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31)!—showing their fears are needless. Third, definite prayer is to be made for the shrinking one, that the Lord will operate on and in him—for God alone can open his spiritual eyes to see the sufficiency of His provision for him. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

5. Its Analogy

An “analogy” is an agreement or correspondence in certain respects between things which otherwise differ. And just as it is often an aid to obtaining the force of a word by considering its synonyms, so it frequently helps us to a better understanding of a subject or object to compare it with another, and ascertain the analogy between them. This method was frequently used by our Lord in His public teaching, when He likened the “Kingdom of heaven” to considerable variety of things. The same principle is illustrated by the figurative names which Scripture gives to the people of God. For example, they are called “sheep”—and that not only because of the relation which they sustain to Christ as their Shepherd, but also because there are many resemblances between the one and the other—God having designed that in different respects this animal more than any other should shadow forth the nature and character of a Christian. Much valuable instruction is obtained by tracing out those resemblances. The same Divine wisdom which designated our Saviour both “the Lamb” and “the Lion” was exercised in selecting the various objects and creatures after which His children are figuratively named, and it behoves us to follow out the analogy between them and learn the lessons they are intended to impart.

“That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified” (Isa 61:3). Both in the O.T.⁶ and in the New, this similitude is used of the saints. The Psalmist declared, “I [*am*] like a green olive tree in the house of God” (Psa 52:8) and affirmed “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.” (Psa 92:12, 13). Our Saviour employed the same figure when He said, “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit” (Mat 7:17) and again, “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit” (Mat 12:33)—thus, every passage where “fruit” is mentioned is also an extension of the same emblem. In Romans 11, the apostle Paul likened the nation of Israel unto “a good olive tree” and Christendom unto “a wild olive tree” (verses 24, 17) in connection with their testimony before the world. The Saviour Himself was termed “the Branch of the Lord” and as One who should grow before Him “as a tender plant,

⁶ O.T. – Old Testament.

and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isa 4:2; 53:2), while He resembled Himself and His people in communion with Him unto “the true Vine” (Joh 15:1).

Now it should be obvious from the frequency with which this similitude is used in the Scriptures that it must be a peculiarly instructive one. Some of the more prominent resemblances are quickly apparent. For example, their *attractiveness*. How the countryside and the mountain slopes are beautified by the trees! And what so lovely in the human realm as those who bear the image of Christ and show forth His praises! They may be despised by the unregenerate, but to an anointed eye, God’s children are “the excellent” of all the earth (Isa 4:2), and how they be regarded by Him whose workmanship they are is revealed in those words, “his *beauty* shall be as the olive tree” (Hos 14:6). So too their *usefulness*. Trees provide a habitation for the birds, shade for the earth, nourishment for the creature, material for building, fuel for the relief of man against the cold. Many too are the uses, which God makes of His people in this world. Among other things predicated of them, they are “the salt of the earth” (Mat 5:13)—preserving the body politic from going to utter putrefaction.

Before turning to that which bears most closely upon our present theme, it should be particularly noted that it is not wild, but cultivated trees, which is the similitude used. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD...For he shall be as a tree *planted* by the waters” (Jer 17:7,8). Observe how frequently this word “planted” occurs: “which the LORD hath planted” (Num 24:6), and compare Psalm 92:13, 14; 104:16; Isaiah 61:3. They are the property of the Heavenly Husbandman (Joh 15:1; 1Co 3:7-9) and the objects of His care. This it is which gives such solemn force to our Lord’s words, “Every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Mat 15:13). This figure of the saints being “planted” by God—transferred from one soil or position to another—has at least a threefold reference. First, to God’s eternal decree, when He took them out of the creature mass and chose them in Christ (Eph 1:3-5). Second, to their regeneration, when He lifts them out of the realm of death and makes them “new creatures in Christ” (2Co 5:17). Third, to their translation, when they are removed from earth and planted in His celestial Paradise. But it is the *growth* of “trees” we must now consider.

1. They have the principle of growth *within themselves*. Trees do not grow spontaneously and immediately from external furtherances, but from their own seminal virtue and radical sap. And it is thus with the spiritual growth of the Christian. At regeneration, a Divine “seed” is planted in his heart (1Pe 1:23; 1Jo 3:9), and that “seed” contains within itself a living principle of growth. We cannot define that “seed” more closely than to say that the new life or spiritual nature which has been communicated to the one born again, is that which distinguishes the living children of God from the lifeless profession all around them. The latter may from external influences—such as the appeals and exhortations of preachers, the example of Christians, the natural convictions produced from reading the Word—be induced to perform all the outward duties of Christianity, but since their works issue not from a principle of spiritual life in the soul, they are not the fruits of holiness. That spiritual principle or Divine grace imparted is described by Christ as “the water” which He gives and which becomes within its possessor “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). Thus it is the nature of Christians to grow, as it is trees with the seminal principle within them to do likewise. “The tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself” (Gen 1:12)—first reference to “trees”!

2. They must be *watered from above*. Though trees have within themselves a vital principle, yet they are not independent of provision from the Creator, being far from self-sustaining. Their growth is not something inevitable by virtue of their own seminal power—for in a protracted drought, they wither and decay. Hence, when Scripture speaks of the growth of trees, it is careful

to ascribe it unto God's watering of them. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground," which is interpreted by: "I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses" (Isa 44:3, 4); "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon" (Hos 14:5). Only as God waters vegetation will it thrive or even survive. It is so, spiritually. The Christian is not self-sufficient and independent of God. Though he has a nature capable of growth, if left to itself that nature would die, for it is only a *creature* even though a "new creature." Hence the believer needs to be "renewed in the inner man day by day" (2Co 4:16).

3. They grow *silently and imperceptibly*. The development of the small sapling into the towering tree is a process veiled in secrecy. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how (Mar 4:26, 27). The growing of the tree cannot be discerned by the keen eye, except by the consequences and effects of it. It is equally thus with spiritual growth: it is unrecognisable to either ourselves or others. No matter how closely we observe the workings of our hearts, or how introspective becomes our viewpoint, we cannot perceive the actual process. It is seen only by Him of whom it is wrought. Nevertheless, it is made manifest by its effects and fruits—in the case of some, more clearly than others. But though the process be secret, the *means* are plain: in the case of trees—nourishment from the soil, moisture from the clouds, light and heat from the sun. So with the Christian: "Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting *may appear* to all" (1Ti 4:15)—that thy spiritual growth may be evident to those about thee.

4. They grow *gradually*. In the case of some trees, it is a very sad experience; with others, maturity is reached more quickly. Hence, in the passage, the growth of believers is likened unto that of "a cedar" (Psa 92:12); whereas in another—where a recovered backslider is in view—it is said, "he shall grow as the lily" (Hos 14:5). But in the majority of cases, the development of spiritual life in the saints is a protracted process, being carried on by degrees, or as the prophet expressed it, "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isa 28:10). Our spiritual growth is produced and promoted by the gracious, wise, patient, and faithful operations of the Holy Spirit. No real Christian is ever satisfied with his growth: far from it, for he is painfully conscious of what little progress he has made and how far short of God's standard he comes. Nevertheless, if he uses the appointed means and avoids the hindrances, he *will* grow. But let us now endeavour to present the analogy more closely.

First, the growth of a tree is *upward*. The vital principle within it is drawn out unto the sun above, attracted by its rays. Though rooted in the earth, its nature is to move toward heaven, slowly but surely lifting its head higher and higher. Thus, the growth of a tree is ascertained first and may be measured by its *upward progress*. And does not the analogy hold good in the spiritual realm? Is it not thus with the saint? It is the very nature of that new life which he received at regeneration to turn unto its Giver. The first evidence of that life being imparted to the soul is his seeking unto God in Christ. The need of Him is now felt; His suitability is now perceived, and the heart is drawn out unto Him. As yet, he may not be able to intelligently articulate the newborn desire in his heart, yet if that desire were put into Scriptural language, it would be expressed thus: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (Psa 42:1), for none else can now satisfy the newly-created thirst within him. In view of our last two articles, there is the less need for us to develop this point at length.

The higher the top of the tree reaches toward heaven, the further from the earth does it move. Ponder that, my reader, for it is a parable in action. Before regeneration, thy heart was wholly set upon this world and what it provides for its devotees. But when your heart was supernaturally illumined, and you beheld “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6), the spell was broken, and you could no longer be content with the perishing baubles which hitherto enthralled you. True, the “flesh” may still lust after them, and if you yield to their solicitations, your peace and joy will be dampened; and for a season, disappointment and sorrow will be your portion. Yet there is that within you now that is no longer contented with childish toys and that seeks after the One who bestowed that new nature. It is the normal thing for that spiritual life to grow, and if it does not, you are living far below your privileges. Such upward growth will consist of stronger yearnings after God, more constant and frequent seekings unto Him, a closer acquaintance of Him, a warmer love for Him, more intimate communion with Him, fuller conformity to Him, and a deeper joy in Him.

As the believer grows Godward, His glory becomes more and more his concern, and the pleasing of Him in all his ways the main business of his life—so that he performs even common duties with an eye increasingly upon Him. Our personal experimental knowledge of God increases by our “following on” to know Him (Hos 6:3), for the more we seek to *do* His will, the better we come to understand (Joh 7:17), and admire the same. Truth is then sealed on the mind, the understanding is more quickened in the fear of the Lord, and our relish of God’s ways is intensified. Holy acts become holy habits, and what at first was difficult and irksome, becomes easy and pleasant. The more we “exercise ourselves unto godliness” (1Ti 4:7), the more are we admitted into its secrets. From a dim perception of spiritual mysteries, we gradually attain unto “all riches of full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2) of them. The more we are weaned from the world, the keener relish do we have for spiritual things and the sweeter do they become to our taste. As God is better known, our love for Him increases, and we set a higher esteem on Him, a greater delight in Him is experienced, and more and more the heart pants after a full fruition of Him in glory.

Not that the believer ever reaches a point where he is satisfied with his knowledge of God or pleased with his love for Him. There could be no more lamentable proof of spiritual deadness and fatal self-deception than a set complacent view of our love for God. On the other hand, equally unwarrantable is it to conclude we are not children of God at all, because our love for Him is so feeble and faulty. It is not the love of a natural son for his father which constitutes him his child—though filial love is the proper effect of that relationship. An exalted conception of the character of a parent and of the sacredness of the relationship will render an affectionate child dissatisfied with himself and cause him to declare, “I reproach myself daily that I love my father so little, and I can never repay him as I ought.” That would be the language of filial relation. Yet he would not be warranted in arguing, “Because I do not love him as I ought, I cannot be his child; or because I love him so little, I question it very much if he loves me at all.” Then why reason thus in connection with a heavenly Father! Summing up this aspect, we may say that the upward growth of a believer is expressed in his heavenly-mindedness and the measure in which his affections are set upon things above.

Second, the growth of a tree is *downward*. It takes a firmer hold of soil. More particularly is that the case in hot countries—for there, the taproot of a tree has to penetrate deeper and deeper into the earth in order to find needed moisture. An allusion to this aspect of our analogy is found in Hosea 14:5 where the Lord promises Israel that He shall “cast forth (or, better, “strike”—see margin) his roots as Lebanon”—that is, as the cedars of Lebanon struck their roots deeper into the

mountain slopes—compare “his smell as Lebanon” in the next verse, where the obvious reference is to the fragrant aroma of cedars. The spiritual counterpart of this is found in such expressions as, “being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17), and “continue in the faith, grounded and settled” (Col 1:23), the two things being brought together in “rooted and built up in him and stablished in the faith” (Col 2:7)—which all speak in language of our present similitude.

As the believer grows spiritually, he takes a firmer grip upon Christ: “*Lays hold* on eternal life” (1Ti 6:12), no longer touching merely “the hem of His garment” (Mat 14:36). He becomes more settled in his knowledge and enjoyment of the Saviour’s love and is established more securely in the Faith, so that he is less liable to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:21). The young sapling has but a shallow and feeble grip on the ground and, therefore, is in greater danger of being uprooted by storms and gales; the older tree, which has survived the hostile winds, has taken deep root and is more secure. So it is spiritually: the young Christian is susceptible to erroneous teachings, but those who are mature and established in the Truth discern and refuse human fables. The more we are rooted in the love of Christ, governed by the fear of God, and have His Word dwell richly in us, the less shall we be swayed by the fear of man, the customs of the world, or the assaults of Satan.

But more specifically: the downward growth of a Christian consists of increasing *humility*, or becoming more and more out of love with himself. And this of necessity, for in exact ratio to his real growth Godward, will be his growth downward. The more we grow upward—that is, the more we take into our renewed minds spiritual apprehensions of the perfections of God, the excellency of the Mediator and the merits of His work—the more are we made conscious of what is due the One and the Other, and the more deeply do we feel what a poor return we have made unto Them. If it be something deeper and more influential than a merely speculative or theoretical knowledge of the Father and the Son, if instead we be granted an experimental, vital and affecting knowledge of Them, then shall we be made thoroughly ashamed of ourselves, wholly dissatisfied with our love, our devotion, our conformity to Their image. Such knowledge will humble us into the dust, making us painfully sensible of the coldness of our hearts, the feebleness of our graces, the leanness of our souls, and the corruptions which still indwell us.

The more a tree grows downward, the deeper its roots become embedded in the earth; the more firmly is it fixed and the stronger it becomes, having a greater power to resist the force of the tempest. It is neither the height nor the girth of the tree, but the depth of its roots and its clinging to the ground which gives it stability and security. So it is, spiritually. For the believer to grow downward is for him to have less and less confidence in and dependence upon himself: “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2Co 12:10); for a consciousness of my weakness causes me to turn more and more unto God and cling to Him. “O our God wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee” (2Ch 20:12)—that was the language of one who had grown downward! —AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5. Its Arrangement

In our last, we dwelt upon God's decision to redeem and reconcile fallen rebels: His love originating, His will determining, and His wisdom planning the outworking of the same. In illustrating how the Divine wisdom found a solution to all the formidable problems which stood in the way, we unavoidably anticipated somewhat the ground which we hoped to cover in future articles. That Divine decision and scheme was "eternally purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11)—for God's purpose to reconcile and His provision for the same are inseparable. That purpose respected not simply the exercise of mercy unto His lapsed people, but also the exercise of it in such a way that His Law was honoured. Yet it must not be supposed that God was under any moral necessity of saving His people, or that redemption was an expedient to deliver the Divine character from reproach on account of the strictness of the Law in condemning *all* transgressors—no atonement was provided for the fallen angels! Rather has redemption vindicated the Law, and that in such a way that *no* transgressor is exempted from suffering its curse—either in himself or in a Substitute.

Reconciliation has been procured by the incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the grand and all-sufficient Provision of God for the accomplishing of His purpose. But it was effected by the Lord Jesus in fulfilment of *a Covenant agreement*: unless *that* be clearly perceived, we are without the principal knowledge to the understanding of this stupendous undertaking. There was a time when Christians generally were well instructed in Covenant truth; but alas, a generation has grown up the great majority of which have heard nothing or next to nothing thereon. It will therefore be necessary for us to proceed slowly in connection with this fundamental aspect of our subject and enter into considerable detail—for we do not ask the reader to receive ought from our pen, until clearly convinced it is in full accord with, and has the definite backing of, God's Word. A few of our readers are more or less familiar with what we shall advance, yet it will do them no harm to have brought before them again the foundation on which faith should rest, and to ponder the proofs which we now bring forward.

The great majority of our readers know that "it is the blood [and that alone, plussed by nothing from us] that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev 17:11), but we wonder how many of them have pondered and grasped the purport of that blessed and remarkable statement, "The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through *the blood of the everlasting covenant*" (Heb 13:20). That implies first, that there was a covenant-agreement between God and our Lord Jesus; second, that it was a covenant made with Him as the Head of His people, "that great Shepherd of the sheep;" third, that Christ performed the condition of the covenant; fourth, that it was as the One propitiated and reconciled to God that Christ here acted; fifth, that it was in fulfilment of covenant promise that God raised Christ; sixth, that Christ's blood was the meritorious ground on which He (and all the saints in Him) was delivered from the prison of the grave; seventh, that hereby the Church has Divine assurance of its complete redemption and salvation. We cannot dwell upon these points, but would request careful weighing of them as introductory to what follows.

Three things are necessary in order to make a “covenant”: the parties, the terms, the agreement. A “covenant” is a solemn pact or contract in which there are certain “articles” or conditions to be performed, in return for which performance an agreed reward is promised and assured. It is a mutual agreement in which one party guarantees a stipulated return for the other’s fulfillment of the work he has pledged himself to undertake; it is an agreement entered into voluntarily by both parties (see Mat 26:15). The two parties in “the everlasting covenant” were the Father and the Son—the Holy Spirit concurring therein, being the Witness thereto, and agreeing to co-operate the same. In Scripture, the Father is represented as taking the initiative in this matter, proposing to His Son the terms of the covenant. The Father posed a federal transaction, in which the Son should take upon Him the Mediatorial office and serve as the Head of His people, thereby assuming and charging their liabilities and bringing in an everlasting righteousness for them. The Son is represented as freely and gladly consenting thereto.

It needs to be pointed out and emphatically insisted upon that there was not so circumstanced and antecedently to His susception of the Mediatorial office that He could not have avoided the humiliation and sufferings which He endured. We shall explain later the precise meaning of His words, “My Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28); “Neither came I of myself, but He sent me (Joh 8:42); “This commandment [to lay down His life] have I received of my Father” (Joh 10:18)—sufficient now to point out they have no reference, ever to His condition and position prior to the Covenant, for He then enjoyed absolute equality with the Father in every way. The Son might have resigned the whole human race to the dire consequences of their apostasy and have remained Himself everlastingly blessed and glorious. It was by His own voluntary consent that He entered into covenant engagement with the Father: in that free consent lay the excellency of it. It was His willing obedience and personal merits, which gave infinite value to His oblation. Behind that willingness lay His love for the Father and His love for the Church.

On the other hand, it is equally true that though the Son had pitied, yea so loved the elect (foreviewed as fallen), that He was willing to become their Surety and Substitute, yet He could not have redeemed them without the Father’s acceptance of His sacrifice: the Father, too, must consent to such an undertaking. Thus, there must be a mutual agreement between them. The relation which Christ assumed to His people and the work He did for them presupposes the Father’s willingness therein. Ere passing on it must also be pointed out that in consenting to become Mediator and Servant—and as such, in subjection to the Father—the Son did not surrender any of His perfections, nor relinquish any of His Divine rights; but He agreed to assume an inferior office, and for a season, to be subordinate to the Father’s will—and this, for the glory of the whole Godhead and the salvation of His people. After He became incarnate, He was still in possession of His essential glory, though He was pleased to veil it in large measure from men and make Himself of “no reputation” in the world.

Before adducing proof-texts of the covenant made between the Father and the Son, let us call attention to a number of passages, which clearly *imply it* and which otherwise are not fully intelligible. Take Christ’s very first recorded utterance after He became incarnate: “wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luk 2:49)—did not that intimate He had entered this world with a clearly defined and Divinely designed task before Him? “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (Joh 6:38) is even more explicit: such subordination of one Divine person to another argues a mutual agreement between Them—and that, for some unique end. “Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” (Joh 10:36): observe carefully the *order* of the two verbs: Christ was “sanctified” by the Father—that is, set apart and

consecrated to His Mediatorial office—*before* He was “sent” into the world! “Other sheep I have...them also I *must* bring” (Joh 10:16)—why “must” unless He was under definite engagement so to do?

That Christ went to the cross in fulfillment of a covenant-agreement may be gathered from His own words: “truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined” (Luk 22:22), with which should be linked, “Of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel *determined before* to be done” (Act 4:27,28). When you stand before the cross and gaze by faith upon its august sufferer, recognise that He was there fulfilling the compact into which He entered with the Father before the world was. His blood shedding was necessary—“ought not Christ to have suffered these things”? (Luk 24:26). He asked—because of the relation He sustained to His people and their Surety. He was pledged to secure their salvation in such a way as glorified God and magnified His Law, for that had been Divinely “determined” and mutually agreed upon in the everlasting Covenant. Had not Christ died, there had been no atonement, no reconciliation to God; equally true is it that, had there been no covenant, Christ had never died!

Every passage where Christ owns the Father as *His* “God” witnesses to the same truth. When Jehovah established His covenant with Abraham, He promised “I will...be a *God* unto thee, and to thy seed” (Gen 17:7); and therefore, when He “remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” (Exo 2:24) and revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush preparatory to delivering His people from Egypt, He declared Himself to be, “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial to all generations” (Exo 3:15)—this is My covenant title and the guarantee of My covenant faithfulness. So too, the grand promise of the new covenant is, “I...will be their God” (Jer 31:33 and compare Heb 8:10). If then the Father had entered into covenant with His Son, we should expect to find Him owning Him as *His God* during the days of His flesh. And this is exactly what we *do* find, “My *God*, My *God*, why hast Thou forsaken Me” (Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34) was not only a cry of agony, but an acknowledgement of covenant relationship. “I ascend to My Father, and your Father, and to My God, and your God” (Joh 20:17). So also after His ascension, He declared, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the Temple of *my God*...and I will write upon Him the Name of my God, and the name of the city of my God” (Rev 3:12).

Turning to the Epistles, we find many passages which presuppose the Father’s covenant with Christ before creation on behalf of His people. “Who hath saved us...according to His own purpose and grace, which was *given us in Christ Jesus* before the world began” (2Ti 1:9). Even at that time, if time it may be called, there was a federal relationship subsisting between Christ and the Church—though it was not made fully manifest until He became incarnate. That subsisting relationship formed the basis of the whole economy of Divine grace toward them after the Fall, as it was the ground on which God pardoned the O.T. saints and bestowed spiritual blessings upon them. “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit 1:2). Does not that “promised” imply an agreement? that God made promise to Christ as the Covenant Head and to His people in Him! Christ was “*faithful* to Him that appointed Him” (Heb 3:2): as “obedience” implies a precept, so “faithfulness” connotes *a trust*, and a trust wherein only has engaged himself to perform that trust according to directions given him.

Passing now from indirect allusions to what is more specific, we begin with Psalm 89:3. “I have made a covenant with My Chosen, I have sworn unto David My Servant.” The immediate allusion is to the historical David, but the spiritual reference is to David’s Son and Lord. This is

clear from many considerations. First, the striking and lofty manner in which this Psalm opens, intimates that its leading theme must be one of great weight and value. “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever: with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens (Psa 89:1,2). Such language denotes that no ordinary or common “mercies” are in view, but those which, when apprehended, fill the hearts of the redeemed with holy songs and cause them to magnify the fidelity of Jehovah as nothing ever does. Thus, such an introduction should prepare us to expect a Divine revelation of extreme importance and blessedness.

Second, “I have made a covenant with my chosen” [same word as ‘mine elect’ in Isa 42:1], I have sworn unto David (which means ‘beloved’) my servant” (Psa 89:3). In the following passages, it may be seen that Christ is expressly referred to as “David” by the prophets: Jeremiah 30:9; Ezeziel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:5—and let it be duly borne in mind that all those predictions were made long after the historical David had passed away from this scene. “Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidest, I have laid help upon One that is mighty, I have exalted One chosen out of the people [compare Deu 18:15]. I have found David my Servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him” (Psa 89:19,20). Who can doubt that a greater than the son of Jesse is here before us? But more: God goes on to say, “I will make him my first born, higher than the kings of the earth...My covenant shall stand fast with him” (Psa 89:27,28)—does not that establish beyond a doubt the identity of the One with whom Jehovah made the covenant! Such declarations pertain to no merely human being.

Third, the covenant *promises* here made establish the same fact. “His seed will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven” (Psa 89:29)—the throne of the historical David perished over two thousand years ago! That this promise was to be fulfilled in Christ is clear from Luke 1:31-33, where it was said to Mary, thou “shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the [spiritual] house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom, there shall be no end.” Another proof that it is not the typical David who is viewed in this Psalm appears in, “If his children forsake my Law...then will I visit their transgression with the rod” (Psa 89:30, 32). Had it been the successor of Saul who was the subject of this Psalm, it had said “If *he* shall break my Law...I will visit *his* transgression with the rod”—as he *was* sorely chastised for so grievously wronging Uriah. No, it is Christ and His spiritual children who are referred to, and it is because of God’s covenant with Him that He casts them not off (see Psalm 89:33-36).

Fourth, in Acts 13:34, Paul proved the resurrection of Christ thus: “As concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.” But wherein did that quotation from Isaiah 55:3 provide proof? By the resurrection of Christ, the “sure mercies of David” are confirmed unto His children: if they are in possession of them, then Christ must have risen! That word of Paul’s looks back beyond Isaiah 55 to Psalm 89, which, as we have seen, begins thus: “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever.” The principal mercies are, “I have made a covenant with my Chosen...Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations” (Psa 89:3,4). Here then are “the sure mercies of David”: that God has covenanted to raise up Christ and set Him at His own right hand from whence, on His Mediatorial throne, He communicates those mercies to His seed. All doubt on this point is removed by Peter’s avowal that through David, God had sworn that “Of the fruit of his loins...He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne” (Act 2:30 and see verse 33).

On Psalm 89:3, 4, the immortal Toplady said, “Do you suppose that this was spoken to David in his own person only? No, indeed; but to David as the type, figure, and forerunner of Jesus Christ. ‘I have sworn unto David my servant’— unto the Messiah, who was typified by David, unto My co-equal Son, who stipulated to take upon Himself ‘the form of a servant.’ ‘Thy seed’— all those that I have given unto Thee in the decree of election; all those whom Thou shalt live and die to redeem. Those ‘will I establish forever,’ so as to render their salvation irreversible and not inadmissible. And build up Thy Throne’—Thy Mediatorial throne, as King of saints and covenant Head of the elect. ‘To all generations’—there shall always be a succession of favoured sinners to be called and sanctified, in consequence of Thy federal ‘obedience unto death,’ and every period of time shall recompense Thy covenant sufferings with an increasing revenue of converted souls, until as many as were ordained to eternal life shall be gathered in.” (Author of that precious hymn, “Rock of Ages”.) —AWP

October

SERVANTS OF GOD

The Christian bears a twofold fundamental relationship to God: he is a “son” and he is a “servant”—the one speaks of privilege, the other expresses his duty. The one complements the other, and we should preserve a balance in our thinking upon them. The Christian was made a son; he made himself a servant. He was a son from all eternity in the purpose of God, he became so actually at his regeneration. He was an enemy by nature and practice, but at conversion, he renounced the service of sin and Satan and took upon him the yoke of Christ, to henceforth own Him as his alone Lord and Master. Thus, we become God’s servants by free contract, by a voluntary act of our own, by “giving ourselves” unto the Lord (2Co 8:11, 12), to be controlled and directed by Him, to live now so as to honour and please Him in all things. Such unreserved dedication of ourselves unto God is our “reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). It is due God as His creatures, for He made us. It is due Him as our Preserver and Provider, for we are dependent on Him for every breath that we draw. It is due Him by right of redemption, for the Christian is not his own—free to please himself—but has been bought with a price (1Co 6:19, 20): he is the purchased property of Christ.

God’s rights over us are unmistakable and absolute, but He will have them acknowledged by our own consent; and therefore, we only become His servants professedly and truly when we yield ourselves “unto God, as those that are alive from the dead,” and our members (of both soul and body) “as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13), which was done at conversion, when we disowned sin, recognised the high claims of Christ, and received Him as our Lord and Master. Henceforth, we carry ourselves as His “servants” just in proportion as we live under a sense of our surrender to and dedication of ourselves to Him; or in other words, just so far as we now make the performing of His revealed will and the giving of pleasure to Him the chief business of our lives, for a “servant” is one at the command of his master. The motive-springs of such service is gratitude unto Him for as He died and suffered for us, with a realisation of the obligations this imposed upon us—for He will only be served out of *love*. “What doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deu 10:12).

God has joined these two things inseparably together: “Them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exo 20:6). The Lord Jesus enforced the same truth: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Joh 14:15). “Ye are my friends [all others are His enemies], if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). But Christ did more: He *exemplified* this truth in His

own blessed person and perfect life: He voluntarily “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phi 2:7) and manifested His entire subjection to God by becoming “obedient” to Him: an obedience without any reserve or limit, for He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:8). Thus, a “servant” is known chiefly by his *obedience*: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are” (Rom 6:16). Of Christ the Father declared, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1). And why did the Father find such “delight” in Him? Because He loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Psa 45:7), because He could say “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29). And it is only as the Christian conducts himself as an *obedient* “servant” that he has fellowship with Christ, follows the example He has left him, and gives his Redeemer “delight.”

“For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:55). Mark it well, my reader: it was not only Moses and Aaron, or even the priests and Levites who were His “servants,” but *all* the Israelites who had been redeemed from the house of bondage; and they were “servants” because He was the Lord their God. “Lord” and “servant” are correlative terms, as are husband and wife, parent and child. This holds good in the N.T. era as truly and fully as it did in the Old: all who have been genuinely converted and brought to receive Christ as their Lord are His servants. This was foretold of old: “Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, *to serve him*, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants” (Isa 56:6). “Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph 6:6). “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). “Not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1Pe 2:16). Even in Heaven, the saints shall still sustain this relationship and character: “His servants shall serve him” (Rev 22:3).

We have designedly added passage to passage in the last paragraph, because in some religious circles a “servant of Christ” is limited unto a minister of the Gospel, while in other sections of Christendom, “Christian service” is restricted to certain special activities which only a small number engage in—such as a Sunday School Class, tract distributing, speaking in the open air, engaging in “personal work.” Thus, it is implied and actually believed by many that one may be a real Christian, and yet, not a “servant” of Christ at all. That is indeed a serious misconception, yea, a fatal delusion. It is indeed true that one may be a real Christian without engaging in any of the forms of “service” just mentioned, for they were quite unknown two centuries ago! But in the sense we have pointed out in the preceding paragraphs, unless I am consciously and conscientiously serving the Lord, then I am not a Christian at all. Lip patronage will not satisfy Christ, nor will the performing of tasks to which He has never called us. We must do the things *He* has commanded, render obedience to Him out of love, make it our constant concern to glorify Him, or we are not His servants, but rather the servants of our lusts and the bond slaves of Satan.

What an inestimable privilege, what a high honour to be the servants of the Lord of glory! “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee and that hear thy wisdom” (1Ki 10:8) exclaimed the queen of Sheba as she beheld those who waited upon Solomon. But one infinitely greater than Solomon is our Master, even Immanuel. He is no hard taskmaster (like the Egyptians) demanding that we make bricks without providing us with straw. No, His yoke is easy and His burden light (Mat 11:30). It is a blessed thing to serve Him, and His service is freedom—the only genuine freedom there is. The service of Satan is captivity (2Ti 2:26), for though he and his emissaries may declare it is and promise us “liberty,” yet all who heed his lies are “brought in bondage” (2Pe 2:19)—for the service of sin is drudgery, slavery, tyranny. Not only is Christ’s service honourable and blessed, but it is richly recompensed both

now and hereafter: “If any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (Joh 12:26) with peace of conscience, contentment of mind, joy of heart. And in the day of rewards, He shall say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat 25:21).

A few words now upon the spirit and character of our service: 1) *It must be in “newness of spirit”* (Rom 7:6), for that which proceeds from the flesh is “dead works” (Rom 7:5). Our serving God is to express the new relation into which His wondrous grace has brought us and issue from the enablement of the new power He has communicated to us—the indwelling Holy Spirit. 2) *It must be rendered from love*. It was so with the Lord of glory: “That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (Joh 14:31). In like manner, according to their much lower stature, it is said of His servants, “the love of Christ constraineth us” (2Co 5:14). 3) *It must be with cheerfulness*: “Serve the LORD with gladness” (Psa 100:2), whether it be in the kitchen or in the workshop. As Spurgeon says, “He is our Lord, and therefore He is to be served: He is our gracious Lord, and therefore to be served with joy.” 4) *It must be in a spirit of filial fear*, owning the Lord’s authority over us, venerating His majesty. Nehemiah prayed that the ear of the Lord might be attentive to the “prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name” (Neh 1:11) and David could say, “Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear” (Psa 119:38), while of the perfect Servant, it is recorded that He “was heard in that he feared” (Heb 5:7). 5) *With serenity of mind*, and not in a slavish spirit of dread, either of God or man. “That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear [of His despising our poor efforts if they be sincere, or of the consequences from our fellows], In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:74, 75). 6) *Without partiality*: no license is given us to pick and choose—“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (Joh 2:5, compare Mat 28:20). 7) *Dependently*: Definitely, earnestly, daily waiting upon Him for enabling wisdom and strength: see Hebrews 12:28 and 4:16. —A.W.P.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

10. 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5

The communication of news in ancient times was a much slower business than it is today. How long an interval elapsed between Paul’s sending of his first epistle to the Corinthian church and his obtaining tidings from them we cannot be sure, but probably at least a year passed before he learned how they had received his communication and what effects, under God, it had produced in them. During that suspense, he appears to have been in a state of unusual depression and anxiety. The fierce opposition he encountered in Asia, where he was “pressed out of measure” (2Co 1:8) and the deep concern which he had for them, affected his peace of mind (2Co 7:5). His first epistle had been sent from Ephesus, where he had expected to remain until the following Pentecost (1Co 16:8), evidently hoping by then to hear from them. From Ephesus, he proposed to pass unto Macedonia and from thence to Corinth (1Co 16:5-7). But desiring to learn what had been their reactions to his letter, before he came to them, he sent Timothy (1Co 4:17;

16:10), commissioning him to set things in order and bidding them to respond peacefully to his counsels.

A little later on, the apostle sent Titus to Corinth in order to ascertain how matters were progressing, with instruction to return and make a report unto himself, for the manner and measure in which they had responded to his exhortations would regulate to a considerable extent his future movements. A momentous issue was at stake: the interests of the Gospel in an important city, the prosperity of a church which he had planted, and the honour of his Master's name were involved. Deeply exercised, he had left Ephesus and come unto Troas on his way to Macedonia, where it seems he had arranged for Titus to meet him and make his report. But in this he was disappointed (2Co 2:13), and having no rest in his spirit, he pressed forward to Macedonia. There too, peace was denied him, for "he had no rest," being troubled on every side—"without were fightings, within were fears" (2Co 7:5). Then it was that God relieved his suspense by the arrival of the eagerly-awaited Titus, who brought him a most favourable report, assuring him that his epistle had accomplished most of what he desired (2Co 7:6-16); and thereby, the heart of the apostle was greatly comforted.

Learning that the Corinthians had received his admonitions in Christian meekness, that they had been brought to repentance and had dis-fellowshipped the incestuous person (2Cor 7:9; 2:6), and that the major portion of the assembly had expressed the warmest affection for him (2Co 1:14; 7:7), he at once sent this second epistle to them. The news brought by Titus not only greatly relieved his mind, but also filled him with gratitude to God. On the other hand, the boldness and influence of the false teachers there had increased, as had their charges against himself, and their determined efforts to undermine his apostolic authority (2Co 10:2; 11:2-6, 12-15), moved him to indignation. This it is which explains the sudden change from one subject to another and the noticeable variation of tone in this second epistle. To the obedient section of the church, Paul wrote in the tenderest affection, commending their penitence, assuring them he had forgiven and forgotten. But when he turns to the corrupters of the Truth among them, he strikes a note of severity which is not heard elsewhere in his epistles.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [for the Greek is the same as in Ephesians 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:3, and the three passages are uniformly so translated in the Revised Version], the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2Co 1:3). This is an ascription of praise, for "Blessed be" signifies "Adored be." The Father is here adored under a threefold appellation, each of which views Him as related to us in Christ—that is, to Christ as the covenant Head and His elect in Him. As the first will come before us again in Ephesians 1:3, we reserve our remarks upon it until we come (D.V.⁷) to that verse. The three titles are most intimately related, the one depending upon the other. He "the Father of mercies" unto His people, because He is the God and Father of their Head; and because He is "the Father of mercies" unto them, He is also their "God of all comfort." This threefold designation is worthy of our devoutest and closest meditation. "I do not know of anything more conducive to a wholesome spiritual edification than an acquaintance with God in the titles by which He has been pleased to reveal Himself to His people in His blessed Book. It is thus He delights to communicate His comforts and consolations to their exercised hearts" (T. Bradbury, 1830).

"The Father of mercies." Though it be blessedly true that God is "plenteous in mercy" (Psa 86:5), yet this title conveys more than the idea that He is our most merciful Father: it also connotes that these mercies issue from His very nature and that they are therefore both His

⁷ D.V.: Deo Volenti, Latin, "as God wills."

offspring and His delight. The Hebrews used the word “father” for the author or first cause of anything, as Jabal is termed “the father of such as dwell in tents” and Jubal as “the father of all such as handle the harp and organ” (Gen 4:20, 21)—that is, the originator or founder of such. For the same reason God is called “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). because He is the Begetter of them. In James 1:17, He is designated “the Father of lights,” as He is the Author of all gifts coming down to us from above. There is a manifest allusion there to the sun which is the author and giver of light unto all the planets, and may therefore be termed the “father” or first original of light unto the earth. God is appropriately termed, “the Father of mercies”—for but for Him none of our mercies would have any existence. He sustains the same relation to His “mercies” as a father does to his dear children.

There is thus at least a threefold reason why God is here styled, “the Father of mercies.” First, it is as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” that He is such unto us: thus, it is *covenant* mercies which are here in view. Second, to signify that He is so far from begrudging these unto us that “mercies” are regarded as the Father’s offspring, as proceeding from His nature; and therefore, are His *delights* (Mic 7:18). Third, because of its pertinency to the case of the Corinthians. It was His mercy which had moved the apostle to deal so faithfully with them in his first letter, for little as we may realise it, and still less as we may prize it, it is a great mercy when we are rebuked for our faults—instead of being abandoned by God. It was a further signal mercy, which caused the Corinthians to be convicted by Paul’s rebukes, for the most faithful admonitions are ignored by us, unless God is pleased to sanctify them unto us: only in His light can we see ourselves. It was an additional mercy which wrought in them a godly sorrow, which caused them to mourn for their sins and put right what was wrong, for it is the goodness of God which leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4).

“And the God of all comfort.” This is an excellency peculiar to the true and living God. None of the false gods of heathendom have such a quality ascribed to them; rather are they represented as being cruel and ferocious, and consequently, they are regarded—even by their worshippers—as objects of dread. But how different is the Lord God: “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” (Isa 66:13) He declared. What a revelation of the Divine character is that! Though inconceivable in majesty, all-mighty in power, inflexible in justice, yet he is also infinite in tenderness. How this should draw out our love for Him. How freely should we seek unto Him for relief in times of stress and sorrow. But alas, how slow most of us are in turning to God for consolation; how readily and eagerly do we seek unto the creature for the assuaging of our grief. Many believers seem to be as reluctant to go out of themselves to God alone for comfort, as unbelievers are to go out of themselves to Christ alone for righteousness. Yea, are there not some who, in a petulant and rebellious mood, say by their actions, “my soul refused to be comforted” (Psa 77:2)—despising their own mercies.

“The God of all *comfort*.” That term has come to have a narrower meaning than its derivatives, connoting little more today than consolation or soothing. Our English word is formed from the Latin *can fortis*, “with strength.” Divine comfort is the effect produced by His “mercies.” Every genuine comfort is here traced back to its source: He is “the God of *all* comfort” (2Co 1:3). In its lower sense, “comfort” is the natural refreshment that we obtain, under God, from the creature: we say “under God”—for apart from *His* blessing of them to us, we can derive no enjoyment and no benefit even from temporal mercies. In its higher signification, “comfort” has reference to support under trials. It is a Divine strengthening of the mind when there is a danger of our being overwhelmed by fear or sorrow. “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath *quicken*ed me” (Psa 119:50). Blessed is it to remember how often the Holy Spirit is

termed, in relation to God's people, "The Comforter." Sometimes He makes use of our fellow-Christians to administer a spiritual cordial to our fainting hearts, as Paul was comforted by the coming of Titus to him (2Co 7:6).

It is inexpressibly solemn to consider that it was in precisely these characters of "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" that Christ was *deserted by Him*. It was as our Surety and not as His beloved Son (regarded such) that the Judge of all the earth dealt with Him in holy severity and exorable justice, crying, "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). This is why that, amid all the indignities and inhumanities inflicted upon Him by *men*, He "opened not His mouth" (Isa 53:7); but when the Father of mercy withdrew from Him the light of His countenance and His comforts were withheld, He broke forth into that mournful lamentation, "My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?" And it is just because God sustained not the characters to the Saviour on the cross, that He bears these relations to us. If it ever be remembered by us that our cup is sweet because His was bitter, then God communes with us, because He forsook Christ—that we are enlightened, because He passed through those fearful hours of darkness.

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2Co 1:4). The immediate reference is to the experiences through which the apostle had recently passed. He had occasion to personally adore God as "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2Co 1:3), since he had been proving Him as such, for He had comforted *him* in all his trouble. Yet, he graciously and tenderly associates the Corinthians with himself, for they too had sorrowed and been comforted (2Co 7:9, 13). How striking is the difference between these verses and those which occupied us on the last occasion. Then the apostle could only thank God for their endowments (1Co 1:4-7), for he could not rejoice in their condition; but now he adores Him for the grace which makes all things work together for good unto His own and causes their very troubles to issue in their profit. There he had termed the One addressed "not God," but here it is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" who he adored. Only as we pass through the fires, do we obtain a fuller experimental knowledge of God and become more intimately acquainted with Him.

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation." The soul is more capable receiving Divine comfort at such a season, for the things of time and sense that cease to charm it. Moreover, the Lord manifests more tenderness to His people on such occasions: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (1Pe 4:14). God has various designs in bringing His people into trouble and sustaining them under it: for their growth, for a fuller discovery of Himself to them, for them to learn the sufficiency of His grace.

But another reason is here alluded to: "That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2Co 1:4). The favours which He bestows upon us are intended to be made useful unto others. If I have found the Lord "a very present help in trouble" (Psa 46:1), it is both my privilege and duty to witness unto my troubled brethren as to *how* I was enabled to overcome temptations, found the Divine promises in support, and obtained peace in Christ while in the midst of tribulation. The best place of training for the pastor is not a seminary, but the school of adversity; spiritual lessons can only be learned in the furnace of affliction.

This principle receives its highest exemplification in the person of a blessed Redeemer. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of

the people” (Heb 2:17). It is clear from those words that in order to the perfecting of character to serve in that office, He must know first hand what actual trial and sorrow are. The “merciful” here signifies to lay to heart the miseries of His people, and to care for them so as to sustain and relieve their distresses. Yet it is not His mercifulness in general which is in view (for He possessed that both as God and man), but rather that which is drawn forth by the memory of the temptations and sufferings through which He passed. It is the exercise of mercifulness and faithfulness in His priestly work on high as excited and called into exercise by a sense of the afflictions He experienced on earth to which the apostle refers. Not only “merciful,” but “faithful” also, in His constant care and attention to the needs of His weak and weeping people here below. Filled with compassion toward them, He is ever ready to support and sustain, strengthen and cheer them.

“For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). Having trod the same path as His suffering people, He is qualified to enter into their afflictions. He is not like the holy angels who never experienced poverty or pain. No, during the season of His humiliation, He knew what weakness and exhaustion were (Joh 4:6), what the hatred and persecution of enemies entailed, what it was to be misunderstood and then deserted by those nearest to Him. Then how well fitted is He *to* sympathise with His suffering Church! Ponder such a passage as Psalm 69:1-4 and then ask yourself, Is not the One who passed through such trials capacitated to enter into the exercises of His tried people? “The remembrance of *His own* sorrows and temptations makes Him mindful of the trials of His people, and ready to help them” (M. Henry). The same heart beats within the Lord Jesus today as when He shared the grief of Mary and Martha by the grave of Lazarus, for His sympathies have not been impaired by His exaltation to heaven (Heb 13:8). O what a Saviour is ours: the all-mighty God, the all-tender Man!

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). Christ’s being “tempted” must not be restricted to the evil solicitations of Satan. It includes the whole of His condition, circumstances, and course during the days of His flesh, when He suffered the pangs of hunger, had not where to lay His head, encountered reproach and shame, endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Thereby, He was prepared for the further discharge of His priestly office, fitted to be affected with a sense of our weakness, and to suffer with us. Though so high above us, He is yet one with us in everything except our sins, and concerning them also, He is our Advocate with the Father. We too are tempted (tried) in many ways, but there is One who consoles with us, yea, who is afflicted in all our afflictions and who helpeth our infirmities. But in remembering this, forget not that *He* had to cry, “I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found *none*” (Psa 69:20).

“Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2Co 1:4). One can enter more fully and closely into the grief of another if he has passed through identical circumstances. The Israelites were reminded of this when the Lord said, “Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye *know the heart of* a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exo 23:9). Thus it was with the apostle Paul. God’s design in so afflicting him was that he might be the better qualified to minister unto other afflicted souls. For an outline of his afflictions, see 2 Corinthians 11:24-30; yet so wondrous had God sustained him, he said, “I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation” (2Co 7:4). God comforts by stilling the tumult of our mind, by assuaging the grief of our heart, and by filling the soul with

peace and joy believing; and this, that we may be the comforters of others. Are some of us experiencing *less* of His consolations now, because in the past, we failed to seek out the sorrowing and cheer them?

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ” (2Co 1:5). The Christian must expect sufferings in the world, and such sufferings as non-Christians are free from. Faithfulness in Christ instead of exempting him from the same will rather intensify them. This is not always pointed out by preachers. It is true there is peace and joy to those who take Christ’s yoke upon them, and such peace and joy as the worldling knows nothing of; yet it is also true that each one who enlists under His banner will be called upon to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2Ti 2:3), and that they “must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22). Therefore, it is but honest and right that the recruiting-sergeants of the Gospel should bid those who are contemplating taking upon them a Christian profession to “sitteth...down first, and counteth the cost” (Luk 14:28, 31) and faithfully warn them that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Ti 3:12). To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and those properly forearmed will *not* think it “strange” when the “fiery trial” comes upon them (1Pe 4:12).

Verse 5 supplies a confirmation of the preceding one, its force being: we *are* able to comfort others *for* our consolation is equal to our sufferings. In particular afflictions to which the apostle here alluded, are termed “the sufferings of Christ,” because they are the same in kind (though rarely if ever so in degree) as He experienced at the hands of men, and because of our union with Him and in order to be conformed to His image, we are required (in our measure) to have “fellowship” (Phi 3:10) therein. They are also termed, “the sufferings of Christ,” because they are what His followers willingly endure for his sake” (Phi 1:29): since He is despised and rejected of the world, if we go forth unto Him without the camp, it must inevitably entail “bearing reproach” (Heb 13:13). It may be well to point out that some Christians through their folly, fanaticism, haughtiness, and other things—bring upon themselves needless suffering, but Christ gets not glory from them. But it is more necessary in this day to warn His people against a temporizing and compromising spirit, which seeks to *escape* “the sufferings of Christ “at the price of unfaithfulness to Him.

“So our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Here is rich compensation. As union with Christ is the source and cause of the “sufferings,” so it is of “consolation” (Joh 16:33)—as it will be of our glorification (Rom 8:17, 30; 2Ti 2:12. This it is which makes and marks the great difference between believers and unbelievers. Alienation from Christ does not exempt from suffering, but it cuts off from the only source of real consolation; and there, “the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2Co 7:10). There is a due proportion between the sufferings and the consolation, and if we would experience more of the latter, we must have more of the former, and for that, we must respond more faithfully to the light He has given us. God regulates the supply according to the trial and suits His dispensations unto our needs. The more the world frowns on us, the more His smile is enjoyed by us. If material effects be taken away, He supplies spiritual ones. If our bodies be cast into prison, our souls will enjoy more of Heaven. He graciously provides a sweetening tree for every Marah (Exo 15:23). —A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

22. Fourteenth Miracle

First, *its connection*. That which engaged our attention on the last occasion grew out of the determination of Benhadad to again wage war on Israel. After taking counsel with his servants, the Syrian laid an ambush for the king of Israel, but they had reckoned without Jehovah. He revealed to His servant the prophet the danger menacing his royal master, and accordingly, he went and acquainted him with the same, who, attending to the warning, was delivered from the trap set for him. The heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled at this thwarting of his design, and suspecting a traitor in his own camp made inquiry. Whereupon one of his attendants informed him that nothing could be concealed from the prophet that was in Israel, and that *he* had put the intended victim on his guard. After sending out spies to discover the whereabouts of Elisha and learning that he was in Dothan, the king of Syria sent a formidable force, consisting of “horses and chariots” and a “great host” of footmen to take him captive, determining to remove this obstacle from his path.

The miracle we are about to consider is a *double* one, and strictly speaking, comprises the fourteenth and fifteenth of the series connected with our prophet. But the record is so brief and the two miracles are so closely related that they scarcely admit of separate treatment, and therefore, instead of taking them singly we propose to consider them conjointly, viewing the second as the counterpart or complement of the former. It is a miracle which stands out from the last one which occupied our notice. That concerned the opening of eyes; this, the closing of them. There but a single person was involved; here, a great host of men were concerned. In the one, it was the prophet’s own servant who was the subject of it; here, it was the soldiers who have been sent to take him captive. In the former, he wrought in response to an urgent appeal from his attendant; in the other, he acted without any solicitation. They both occurred at the same place. They were both wrought in answer to Elisha’s prayer. They are both recorded for our learning and comfort.

In connection with the preceding miracle, Elisha had prayed to his Master for Him to open the eyes of his servant, and we are told, “And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2Ki 6:17). That the prophet himself already saw this celestial convoy is clear: it was his own vision of them which moved him to ask that his servitor might also behold them. We may deduce the same from the immediate sequel. So far from being in a panic at the great host of Syrians, which had come to take him captive, Elisha calmly stood his ground. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1), for since God be for them, who can be against them? There was no need for him to cry unto the Lord for deliverance, for Divine

protection was present to his view. Therefore, he quietly waited till the enemy actually reached him before he acted.

Ere passing on, let us offer a further remark upon this celestial guard which was round about Elisha. That it was composed of personal beings is clear from the pronoun, “*they* that be with us are more than *they* that be with them” (2Ki 6:16). That they were angelic beings is evident from several passages: “Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire” (Psa 104:4). At His second advent, we are told “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2Th 1:7, 8). The ministry of angels is admittedly a mysterious subject, one about which we know nothing, save what it hath pleased God to reveal to us. Yet it is a subject which holds by no means an inconspicuous place in Holy Writ. It would be outside our present scope to explore it at large; rather, must we confine ours to that aspect of it which is here presented unto us.

Angels are not only God’s messengers sent on missions of mercy, but they are also His soldiers, commissioned both to guard His people, and execute judgment on His enemies. They are designated, “the heavenly *host*” (1Ki 22:19; Luk 2:13)—the Greek word meaning “soldiers”—or as we would term them, “men of war,” the militia of Heaven. In full accord with that conclusion, we find the Saviour reminding His disciples that “more than twelve legions of angels” (Mat 26:53) were at His disposal, should He but ask the Father for protection against the armed rabble that had come to arrest Him. It was a host of them, in the form of fiery horses and chariots (compare Psalm 68:17) who here encamped around Elisha, ready to fight for him. How mighty the angels are, we know: one, called “the destroyer” (Exo 12:23, compare 2Sa 24:16) slew all the firstborn of the Egyptians, while another slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in a night (2Ki 19:35). That their operations continue in this Christian era is plain from such passages as Act 12:7; Heb 1:14; Rev 7:1, 15:1; Mat 24:31, etc.

“And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness” (2Ki 6:18). The “they” looks back to the armed host mentioned in verse 14. Formidable as was the force sent to slay him, or at least take him captive, yet the prophet stood ground and calmly waited their approach. And well he might. Could he say, “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about” (Psa 3:6), and again, “Though an host should encompass about me, my heart shall not fear” (Psa 27:3)! And should not this confidence and courage be the Christian’s? “The clearer sight we have of sovereignty and power of heaven, the less shall we fear the calamities of earth” (M. Henry). Perhaps the reader says, If I were favoured with an accurate view of protecting angels round about me, I would not fear physical danger in human enemies. Ah my friend, is not that tantamount to a confession that you are walking by sight? and may we not apply to you those words, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have *believed*” (Joh 20:29).

Why, think you my reader, has God chronicled here that which assures the heart of His servant of old? Is this nothing more than a registering of a remarkable incident in ancient history? Is *that* how you read and understand the sacred Scriptures? May we not adopt the language used by the apostle in connection with a yet earlier incident and say, “Now it was not written for his sake alone...But for us also” (Rom 4:23, 24)? Most certainly we also, for later on in that very epistle, we are expressly informed, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have *hope*” (Rom 15:4). God recorded that sight of those protecting angels for our faith to lay hold of and remember that if faith is to stand us in good stead in the hour of emergency, it must be regularly nourished by the

Word; if it be not, then the terrors of earth will be real to us and the comforts of heaven unreal. Unless faith appropriates that grand truth, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” we shall neither have peace ourselves, nor be qualified to quieten the fears of others.

Second, *its means*. “And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD” (2Ki 6:18). That needs to be pondered and interpreted in the light of the previous verse, or we are likely to miss its beauty and draw a false inference. Very lovely was the prophet’s conduct on this occasion. The presence of those horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha was virtually a sign that God had delivered these Syrians into his hands: he had only to speak the word and the angels had destroyed them. But he bore his enemies no ill will. Had our present verse stood by itself, we might have concluded that the prophet was asking in self-defence, begging the Lord to protect him from his foes, but it opens with the word, “And” and in the light of the one preceding, we are obliged to revise our thought. It is quite clear that Elisha was in no personal danger, so it could not have been out of any concern for his own personal safety that he now sought unto God. Yet, though he calmly awaited their approach, he did not meet his enemies in his own strength, for prayer is an acknowledgement of insufficiency.

“Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness” (2Ki 6:18). At first glance, it seems strange that he is referred to here by his personal name, rather than as “the man of God,” which the Holy Spirit generally uses when he was about to work a miracle; yet the variation in this place is neither fortuitous nor meaningless. It points a blessed lesson for *us*, showing as it does the readiness of the Lord to hearken to the requests of His people. Though we do not possess the extraordinary powers of a prophet, yet it is our privilege to ask God to confuse and confound those of our natural enemies who seek our harm, and to subdue our spiritual ones. This incident has been recorded for our instruction and comfort, and one of the things we are to learn therefrom is that prayer avails to render our enemies impotent. Another lesson we should draw from it will be evident if we link up this verse with the preceding one, wherein we see another of Elisha’s requests granted: success in prayer should encourage and embolden us to ask further favours from God.

Going back again for a moment to Elisha’s situation. This petition of his was neither because he felt he was in any personal danger, nor did it proceed from any spirit of malice which he bore his enemies: then *what* was it that prompted the same? Does not the miraculous healing of Naaman supply the answer to our question! When the king of Israel had rent his clothes in dismay, the man of God assured him that the king of Syria “shall know there is a prophet in Israel” (2Ki 5:7, 8), and when Naaman was recovered of his leprosy, he sought unto the man of God, and before all his own retinue, testified “now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2Ki 5:15). And now this heathen monarch had sent his forces to take the prophet prisoner! Very well, then, if he was not yet convinced that it was the true and living God whom Elisha served, he should receive further proof. It was *Jehovah’s glory* which prompted Elisha’s request. Weigh that well my reader, for everything depends upon the motive which inspires our petitions, determining whether or no we shall receive an answer. True and acceptable prayer rises above a sense of personal need, having in view the honour of God’s name—keep before you 1 Corinthians 10:31.

“And he smote them with blindness, according to the word of Elisha” (2Ki 6:18). That was an exact reversal of what took place under the foregoing miracle: there the prophet’s servant was enabled to see what was invisible to others (2Ki 6:17); but here, the Syrian soldiers were rendered incapable of seeing what was visible to others. But let us behold in this miracle the willingness of our God to respond to the cries of His own, that He is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering

God. If we self-distrustfully refuse to encounter foes in our own strength, if we confidently ask God to render their efforts impotent, and if we do so with His glory in view, we may be assured of His gracious intervention. No matter what may be our need, how drastic the situation, how urgent our case, how formidable our adversary, while simple faith is exercised, and the honour of God be our aim, we may count upon His showing Himself strong on our behalf. “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal 3:6): He is the same now as He was in Elisha’s day.

Third, *its mercy*. “And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria” (2Ki 6:19). He did not abandon them to their blindness and leave them to themselves: contrast Genesis 19:11, when God was dealing in wrath. Had they not been blinded, probably they would have identified the prophet by his attire; but being strangers to him, they would be unable to recognise him by his voice. Spiritually that illustrates the fundamental difference between the goats and the sheep: the former are incapable of distinguishing between teachers of Truth and of error; not so the latter, for they “know not the voice of strangers” but “will flee from him” (Joh 10:5). But exactly what did Elisha signify by those statements? It is lamentable to find one commentator, in whose notes there is generally that which is sound and good, saying, “The prophet intended to deceive the Syrians, and this might lawfully be done, even if he had meant to treat them as enemies, in order to his own preservation; but he designed them no harm by such deception.”

Apart from such a view giving the worst possible interpretation to the prophet’s language, such an observation as the above is most reprehensible. It is never right to do wrong, and no matter what may be our circumstances, for us to deliberately lie is to sin both against God and our fellows. Such an explanation as the above is also absurd on the face of it. Elisha was in no personal danger at all, and now these Syrians were blinded, he could have walked away unmolested by them had he so pleased. “This is not the way”—whitherto. He could not mean to “Dothan,” for they were already there and must have known it. “I will bring you to the man whom ye seek”: and who was that? Why, ultimately and absolutely, the king of Israel, for whom their master has laid an ambush (note verse 11!)—Elisha being merely an obstacle who had hindered him. One who had just obtained from God such an answer to prayer, and who was now showing mercy to his enemies, would scarce lie to them!

Fourth, *its counterpart*. “And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria” (2Ki 6:20). Here was still further proof that Elisha harboured no malice against these Syrians and that he intended them no harm. Though they had hostile designs against him, yet he now uses his interest with the Lord on their behalf. Most gracious was that. What an example for every servant of God: “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2Ti 2:25). Instead of cherishing ill will against those who are unfriendly to us, we should seek their good and pray to the Lord on their behalf. How this incident reminds us of a yet more blessed example: when the Lord of glory in the midst of His sufferings made intercession for His crucifiers (Isa 53:12; Luk 23:34). A further miracle was now wrought in answer to Elisha’s intercession, showing us once more the mighty power of God and His willingness to employ the same in answer to the petitions of His people. Note how Elisha made good his promise: he led them to the man they really sought, for the next person mentioned is “the king of Israel”!

Fifth, *its accompaniment*. “And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?” (2Ki 6:21). Very solemn is this and in full accord with his character: the Lord did not open *his* eyes—consequently, he was blind to the working of

His goodness and incapable of appreciating the magnanimous spirit, which had been displayed by the prophet. Here we see what man is by nature: fierce, cruel, vindictive. Such are we and all of our fellows as the result of the fall: “Living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Tit 3:3). It is nought, but the restraining hand of God which prevents our fellows from falling upon us. Were that Hand completely withdrawn, we should be no safer in a ‘civilized country’ than if we were surrounded by savages or cast into a den of wild beasts. It is not sufficiently realised by us that God’s restraining power is upon those who hate us: “For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee” (Act 18:10).

“And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master” (2Ki 6:22). Observe how Elisha kept full control of the situation, even though now in the royal quarters—something which every servant of God needs to heed, exercising the authority which Christ has given him. Note too how this verse teaches that mercy is to be shown unto prisoners of war—or taking it in its wider application, how that kindness is to be extended unto our enemies. And this, mark it well, occurred under the O.T. economy! The Divine Law commanded its subjects, “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink” (Pro 25:21 and see also Exo 23:4, 5), much more so under the dispensation of grace are we required to “overcome evil with good.” (Rom 12:21).

Sixth, *its sequel*. Elisha had his way and the king, “And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master” (2Ki 6:23a), that he might learn anew that our times, the success or failure of our plans, our health and our lives, are in the hand of the living God, and that He is not only infinite in power, but plenteous in mercy. The sequel was, “So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel” (2Ki 6:23b). God honoured the magnanimity of His prophet and rewarded the obedience of his royal master by exempting the land from any further depredations from these savage bands.

Seventh, *its meaning*. May we not see in the above incident another lovely Gospel picture, viewing the graciousness of Elisha unto those who had gone to take him captive as a shadowing forth of God’s mercy unto elect sinners? First, we are shown what they are by nature: at enmity with His servant. Second, we behold them as the subjects of His servant’s prayers—that they may be granted a sense of their wretched condition. Third, in answer thereto they are duly brought to realise their impotency—who so consciously helpless as the blind! Fourth, they were moved to follow the instructions and guidance of God’s servant. Fifth, in due course, their eyes were opened. Sixth, they were feasted with “great provision” at the King’s own table. Seventh, the picture is completed by our being given to behold them as *changed* creatures—coming no more on an evil errand into Israel’s land.

But is there not also an important spiritual meaning and lesson here for Christians?—one which has been pointed out in the course of our remarks; namely, How we are to deal with those who seek to injure us. Negatively, we are to harbour no malice against such, nor to take vengeance upon them even should Providence deliver them into our hands. Positively, we are to ask the Lord to nullify their efforts and render them powerless to injure us. But more, we are also to pray that God will open their eyes, and treat them kindly and generously: see Matthew 5:44. —A.W.P.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

5b. Its Analogy

Near the close of our last, we stated that increasing *humility* is that in a Christian which corresponds to the downward growth of a tree. As the upward growth of a tree is accompanied by its becoming more deeply rooted in the ground, so the Christian's acquaintance with, love for, and delight in God issues in a deeper self-depreciation and self-detestation. If the knowledge we have acquired of the Truth, or if what we term our "Christian experience" has made us think more highly of ourselves and better pleased with our attainment and performances, then that is a sure proof we are completely deceived, imagining we have made any real growth upward. The grand design of the Scriptures is to exalt God and humble man, and the more we experimentally or spiritually know God, the less we shall think of ourselves and the lower place shall we take before Him. The knowledge which "puffeth up" is merely an intellectual or speculative one, but that which the Spirit imparts causes its recipient to feelingly own that I "knoweth nothing yet" as I "ought to know" (1Co 8:2).

The more the soul converses with God and the more it perceives His Sovereignty and majesty, the more will he exclaim with Abraham, "which am but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). The more the believer is granted a spiritual view of the Divine perfections, the more will he acknowledge with Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). The more the saint apprehends the ineffable holiness of the Lord, the more will he declare with Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). The more he is occupied with the perfections of Christ, the more will he find with Daniel, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (Dan 10:8). The more he discerns that exalted spirituality of God's Law and how little his inner man is conformed thereto, the more will he groan in concert with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24). In God's light, we see ourselves, discover the horrible corruptions of our very nature, mourn over the plague of our own heart (1Ki 8:38), and marvel at the continued long sufferance of God unto us.

The truly humble person is not the one who *talks most* of his own unworthiness, and is frequently telling of how such and such an experience abased him into the dust. "There are many that are full of expressions of their own *vileness*, who yet expect to be looked upon as eminent saints by others as their duty, and it is dangerous for any so much as to hint the contrary or to carry it toward them any otherwise than as if we looked upon them as some of the chief of Christians. There are many that are much in crying out their wicked hearts and their great shortcomings and unprofitableness, and speaking of themselves as though they looked on themselves as the meanest of the saints; who yet, if a minister should seriously tell them the same things in private, and should signify that he feared they were very low and weak Christians and that they had reason solemnly to consider of their great barrenness and unprofitableness and falling so much short of many others, it would be more than they could digest. They would think

themselves highly injured and there would be danger of a rooted prejudice in them against such a minister” (J. Edwards).

The same writer defined evangelical humility as the “sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart.” That answerable frame of heart consists of being “poor in spirit” (Mat 5:3), a sense of deep need, a realisation of sinfulness and helplessness. The natural man compares himself with his fellows and prides himself that he is at least as good as his neighbours. But the regenerate person measures himself by the exalted standard which *God* has set before him and which is perfectly exemplified in the example Christ has left him that he should “follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21), and as he discovers how lamentably he falls short of that standard and how “far off” he follows Christ, he is filled with shame and contrition. This empties him of self-righteousness and causes him to depend wholly on the finished work of Christ. It makes him conscious of his weakness and fearful that he will suffer a sad fall, and therefore, he looks above for help and cries, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa 119:117). Thus, the truly humble person is the one who lives most outside of himself on Christ.

This brings us to those oft-quoted, but we fear, little-understood words: “Grow in grace” (2Pe 3:18). Growth in grace is only too frequently confused with the development of the Christian’s *graces*. That is why we selected a different title for these articles than the one commonly accorded the subject. Growth in grace is but one aspect or part of spiritual growth and Christian progress. When a minister asked a simple countryside woman what was her concept of “growing in grace,” she replied, “A Christian’s growth in grace is like the growth of a cow’s tail.” Puzzled at her reply, he asked for an explanation. Whereupon she said, “The more a cow’s tail grows, the nearer it comes to the ground; and the more a Christian grows in grace, the more does he take his place in the dust before God.” Ah, she had been taught from above what many an eminent theologian and commentator is unacquainted with. Growth in grace is a growth *downward*: it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves, it is a deepening realisation of our nothingness, it is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God’s mercies.

What is it to enter into a personal experience of saving grace? Is it not a feeling my deep *need* of Christ and the consequent perception of His perfect suitability to my desperate case?—to be acutely conscious that I am “sick” in soul and the betaking of myself to the great “Physician.” If so, then must not any advancement in grace consist of an intensification of the same experience, a clearer and fuller realisation of my need of Christ? And such growth in grace results from a closer acquaintance and fellowship with Him: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2Pe 1:2)—that is, a vital, practical, effectual knowledge of Him. In His light we see light: we become better acquainted with ourselves, more aware of our total depravity, more conscious of the workings of our corruptions. Grace is favour shown unto the undeserving, and the more we grow in grace, the more we perceive our undeservingness, the more we feel our need of grace, the more sensible we are of our indebtedness to the God of all grace. Thereby are we taught to walk with God and to make more and more use of Christ.

Every Christian reader will agree that if ever there was one child of God who more than others “grew in grace,” it was the apostle Paul, and yet observe how he said, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to *think any thing* as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (2Co 3:5); and again, “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10). What breathings of humility were those! But we can appeal to an infinitely higher and more perfect example. Of the Lord Jesus, it is said that He was “*full* of grace and truth” (Joh 1:14), and yet He declared, “Take my yoke upon

you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Mat 11:29). Does the reader detect a slip of the pen in the last sentence? Since Christ was “full of grace and truth,” we should have said, “*therefore* (and not ‘yet’). He declared, ‘Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart’”—the latter was the evidence of the former! Yes, so “meek and lowly in heart” was He that, though the Lord of glory, He declined not to perform the menial task of washing the feet of His disciples! And in proportion, as we learn of Him, shall *we* become meek and lowly in heart. Hence, “and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” is explanatory of “grow in grace” in 2 Peter 3:18.

True humility dwells only in a heart which has been supernaturally enlightened of God and which has experimentally learned of Christ, and the more the soul learns of Christ, the more lowly will it become. Even in natural things, it is the novice, and not the servant, who is the most conceited. A smattering of the arts and sciences fills its youthful possessor with an exalted estimate of his wisdom, but the further he prosecutes his studies, the more conscious will he become of his ignorance. Much more so is this the case with spiritual things. An unregenerate person who becomes familiar with the letter of the Truth imagines he has made great progress in religion; but a regenerate person—even after fifty years in the school of Christ—deems himself a very babe in spirituality. The more a soul grows in grace, the more does he grow out love with himself. In one of his early epistles, Paul said, “I am the least of the apostles” (1Co 15:9); in a later, “who am less than the least of all saints (Eph 3:8); in one of his last, “sinners, of whom I am chief” (1Ti 1:15)!

Third, trees grow *inwardly*, which brings us to what is admittedly the hardest part of our subject. We have never made a study of botany, and even though we had, it is doubtful if it would stand us in much stead on this point. That there must be an inward growth of the tree is obvious, though, exactly what it consists of is another matter. Yet that need not surprise us, for the analogy holds good here, too, is not this uncertainty just what we should expect? Is not the inward growth of a Christian that aspect of his progress which is the most difficult to define, describe, and still more so, to put into practice? Unless the tree grows inwardly, it would not grow in any other direction, for its outward growth is but the development and manifestation of its vital or seminal principle. We must fall back then on general principle and exercise a little common sense, and say: the inward growth of a tree consists of an increase of its sap, a resisting of that which would injure, and the toughening of its tissues.

The sap is the vital juice of all plants, and its free circulation, the determined of its health and growth. The analogy of this in the Christian is the grace of God communicated to his soul, and his spiritual progress is fundamentally determined by his receiving fresh supplies of grace. At regeneration, God does not impart to us a supply of grace sufficient for the remainder of our lives: instead, He has made Christ to be the grand Fountain of all grace, and we are required to continue betaking ourselves to Him for fresh supplies. The Lord Jesus has issued a free invitation: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (Joh 7:37), which must not be restricted to our first approach. As long as the Christian remains on earth, he is as needy as when he drew his first spiritual breath, and his need is supplied in no other way than by his coming to Christ daily for fresh supplies of His grace. Christ is “full of grace” and that fulness is *available* for His people to draw from (Heb 4:16). “He giveth more grace...unto the humble” (Jam 4:6)—that is, to those who “thirst,” who are conscious of their need and who present themselves as empty vessels to be replenished.

But there is another principle which operates and regulates our obtaining further supplies of grace: “For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance” (Mat 25:29,

compare Luk 8:18). The context shows that the one who “hath” is he who has traded with what had been bestowed upon him—in other words, the way to obtain more grace, is to make a right and good *use* of what we *already* have—why should Christ give more if we have not improved what He previously communicated? Faith becomes stronger by exercising it. And *how* does the Christian make a good use of grace? By heeding that all-important injunction, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Pro 4:23). *This* is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. The “heart” signifies the whole inner man—the “hidden man of the heart” (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we become and do. The man is what his heart is, for “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7). To guard and garrison the heart is the grand work God has appointed us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours.

Negatively, the keeping of the heart with all diligence signifies, excluding from it all that is opposed to God. It means the keeping of the imagination free from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear from all guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the inner man from being dominated by sin and Satan. In a word, it means, to *mortify* the “flesh” within us, with all its affections and lusts: to resist evil imaginations, nipping them in the bud, to strive against the swellings of pride, the workings of unbelief, to swim against the tide of the world, to reject the solicitations of the Devil. This is to be our constant concern and ceaseless endeavour. It means to keep the conscience tender unto sin in its first approach. It means looking diligently after its cleansing when it has been defiled. For all of this, much prayer is required, earnest seeking of God’s assistance. His supernatural aid, and if it be sought trustfully, it will not be sought in vain, for it is the grace of God which teaches us to *deny* “ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Tit 2:11, 12).

Positively, the keeping of our hearts with all diligence signifies the cultivation of our spiritual graces—called “the fruit of the spirit” (Gal 5:22, 23). For the health, vigour, exercise, and manifestation of those graces, we are accountable. They are like so many tender plants which will not thrive, unless they are given much attention. They are like so many tendrils on a vine which must be lifted from trailing on the ground, pruned and sprayed, if they are to be fruitful. They are like so many saplings in the nursery which need rich soil, regular watering, and the warmth of the sun, if they are to thrive. Go carefully over the ninefold list given in Galatians 5:22, 23, and then honestly ask the question, What sincere effort am I really making to cultivate, to foster, to develop those graces? Compare, too, the sevenfold list of 2 Peter 1:5-7 and put to yourself a similar inquiry. When your graces are lively and flourishing and Christ draws near, you will be able to say, “My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies” (Son 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear—compare 1 Peter 3:4 and 1 Timothy 1:5.

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1Sa 16:7). Is that sufficiently realised by us? If it is, then we are making it our chief concern to keep our hearts with all diligence. “My son, give me thine *heart*” (Pro 23:26): until *that* be done, God will accept nothing from you. The prayers and praises of our lips, the offerings and labours of our hands, yea, a correct outward walk, are things of no value in His sight—unless the heart beats true to Him. Nor will He accept a divided heart. And if I *have* really given Him my heart, then it is to be *kept* for Him, it must be devoted to Him, it must be suited to Him. Ah, my reader, there is much head religion, much hand religion—busily engaged in what is termed, “Christian service,” and much feet religion—rushing around from one meeting, “Bible Conference,” “Communion,” to another, but where are those who make conscience of keeping their *hearts*! The heart of the empty

professor is like “the vineyard of the man void of [spiritual] understanding,” namely, “all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof” (Pro 24:30, 31).

A very few words must suffice upon the third aspect of inward growth. In the case of a tree, this consists in the toughening of its tissues or strengthening of its fibres—apparent from the harder wood obtained from an older one than from a sapling. The spiritual counterpart of that is found in the Christian attaining unto more firmness and fixedness of character, so that he is no longer swayed by the opinions of others. He becomes more stable, so that he is less emotional and more rational, acting not from sudden impulse, but from settled principle. He becomes wiser in spiritual things, because his mind is increasingly engaged with the Word of God and his eternal concerns; and therefore, more serious and sober in his demeanour. He becomes confirmed in doctrine; and therefore, more discerning and discriminating in whom he hears and what he reads. Nothing can move him from allegiance to Christ, and having bought the Truth, he refuses to sell it (Pro 23:23). He is not afraid of being called a bigot, for he has discovered that “liberality” is emblazoned prominently as the Devil’s banner.

Fourth, the growth of a tree is *outward*, seen in the spreading of its bough, and the multiplication of its branches. We have purposely devoted a great space unto those aspects of our subject, on which we felt the reader most needs help. This one almost explains itself: it is the *daily walk* of the believer, his external conduct, which is in view. If the Christian has grown upward—that is, if he has obtained an increased vital and practical knowledge of God in Christ; if he has grown downward—that is, if he has become thoroughly aware of his total depravity by nature and learned to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phi 3:3) to effect any improvement in himself; if he has grown inwardly, obtained fresh supplies of grace from Christ and has diligently used the same striving against indwelling sin, and by resolutely resisting his carnal and worldly lusts, and if he has improved that grace by diligently cultivating his spiritual graces in the garden of his heart; then that upward, downward and inward growth will be (not simply “ought to be”), *must be*, clearly and unmistakably shown in his outward life.

And how will that upward, downward and inward growth be manifested by the Christian outwardly? Why, by a life of *obedience* to his Lord and Saviour. Out of love and gratitude unto the One who suffered and did so much for him, he will sincerely endeavour to please Him in all his ways. Realising that he is not his own, but bought with a price, he will make it his highest aim and earnest endeavour to glorify God in his body and in his spirit (1Co 6:19, 20). The genuineness of his desire to please God, and the intensity of his purpose to glorify Him, will be evidenced by the diligence and constancy with which he reads, meditates upon, and studies His Word. In searching the Scriptures, his main quest will not be to occupy his mind with its mysteries, but rather, to obtain a fuller knowledge of God’s *will for him*; and instead of hankering after an insight into its typology or its prophecies, he will be far more concerned in how to become *more proficient* in performing God’s will. It is in the light of His Word he longs to walk; and therefore, it is His precepts and promises, His warnings and admonitions, His exhortations and aids, he will most lay to heart.

One of the N.T. exhortations is, “We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would *abound more and more*” (1Th 4:1). One of its prayers is, “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord *unto all pleasing*, being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:9, 10). One of its promises is, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, *may abound* to every good work” (2Co 9:8). And one of its examples is, “And they [the parents of

John the Baptist] were both righteous before God, walking in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord *blameless*” (Luk 1:6). In the light of those verses—each of which treats with outward growth—our duty and privilege is clear: what God requires from us and the sufficiency of His enablement for the same. —A. W. P.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5b. Its Arrangement

A solemn covenant was entered into between the Father and the Son before ever the world was. A compact was made wherein the Father assigned the Son to be the Head and Saviour of His elect, and wherein the Son consented to act as the Surety and Sponsor of His people. There was a mutual agreement between them, of which the Holy Spirit was both the Witness and Recorder. It was therein that the Son was appointed unto the Mediatorial office, when He was “set up” (or “anointed” as the Hebrew signifies), when He was “brought forth” from the eternal decree (Pro 8:23, 24) and given a covenant subsistence as the God-man. It was then that Christ as a lamb, without blemish and without spot, “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1Pe 1:18-20). It was then that every thing was arranged between the Father and the Son, concerning the redemption of the Church. It is this which throws such a flood of light upon many passages in the N.T.—which otherwise are shrouded in mystery.

As the One more especially offended (1Jo 2:1), the Father is represented as taking the initiative in this matter: “I have made a covenant with my chosen” (Psa 89:3), yet the very fact that it was a “covenant” necessarily implied the willing concurrence of the Son therein. Before the covenant was settled, there was a conference between them. As there was a conferring together of the Divine Persons concerning our creation (Gen 1:26), so there was a consultation together over our reconciliation, as to how peace could be righteously made between God and His enemies, and as to how their enmity against Him might be slain; and thus, we are told, “and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zec 6:13). The terms which the Father proposed unto the Son may be gathered from the office He assumed and the work He performed—for the relation into which He entered and the task He discharged were but the actual fulfilling of the conditions of the covenant. The Son’s acceptance of those terms, His willingness in entering its office and discharging its duties, is clearly revealed in both Testaments.

This covenant was made by the Father with Christ on behalf of His people. “Thy seed will I establish for ever” follows immediately after Psalm 89:3. So again, “My covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever” (Psa 89:28, 29). In the next verses, His seed are termed, “his children;” and should they be unruly, God says, “Then will I visit *their* transgression with the rod. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from *him*” (Psa 89:32, 33)—showing their covenant oneness with Him. The elect were committed to Christ as a charge or trust, so that He is held accountable for their eternal felicity. “Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.” (Joh 18:9)! Since the covenant was made with Christ as the Head of

the elect, it was virtually made with them in Him, they having a representative concurrence therein.

The terms of the covenant may be summed up thus. First, it was required that Christ should take upon Him the form of a Servant, be made in the likeness of men, and act as the Surety of His people. Second, it was required of Him that He should render a full and perfect obedience to the Law; and thereby, provide the meritorious means of their justification. Third, it was required of Him that He should make full satisfaction for their sins, by serving as their Substitute and having visited upon Him the entire curse of the Law. In consideration of His acceptance of those terms, the Father promised Him adequate supports; and on fulfillment of the task prescribed, specified reward were promised Him. Let us briefly amplify these points. Little needs to be said on the first—for it should be clear to the reader that in order for the Son to render obedience to the Law, He must become a subject of it and be under its authority. Equally evident is it that to be the Substitute of His people and suffer the penalty of their sins, He must become partaker of their nature—yet without sharing its defilement.

It was required from our Surety that He should comply in every respect with the precepts of the Divine Law. Such obedience was required of man originally under the Adamic covenant, and since the nature of God and His relation to the creature changes not, that requirement holds good for ever. If then a Surety engages to discharge all the obligations of God's elect, then He must necessarily meet that requirement on their behalf—which is only another way of saying that He would thereby provide or bring in an everlasting righteousness for them. "There was no possibility that man could obtain happiness, unless this obedience was performed by him, or by another whom the Law should admit to act in his name. 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments' (Mat 19:17) is the answer which the Law returns to the sinner who asks what he shall do to inherit eternal life. It is evident the same obedience was required from our Saviour when acting as our federal Head" (J. Dick).

The Father required from our Surety full satisfaction for the sins of His people. Since they had broken the Divine Law, its penalty must be inflicted—either on them or on One who was prepared to suffer in their room. But before the penalty could be inflicted, the guilt of the transgressors must be transferred to Him: that is to say, their sins must be judicially imputed to Him. To that arrangement, the Holy One willingly consented, so that He who "knew no sin" was legally "made sin" for His people. God laid on Him the iniquities of them all; and therefore, the sword of Divine justice smote Him and exacted satisfaction. Without the shedding of blood, there was no remission of sins: the blotting out of transgression, procuring for us the favour of God, and the purchase of the heavenly inheritance, required the death of Christ.

The Son's free acceptance of those terms is revealed in Psalm 40. All the best of the commentators from Calvin to Spurgeon have expounded this Psalm throughout of Christ as the Head of His Church. Its opening verses contain His personal thanksgiving for deliverance from death and the grave, but in His new song, He makes mention of "*our* God" (Psa 40:3)—His people sharing His glorious triumph. In Psalm 40:5, Christ owns Jehovah as "*my* God" and speaks of His thoughts to "*us-ward*"—that is, to the elect as one with Himself. But it is in Psalm 40:6-10 we have that which is most germane to our present subject—a passage quoted in Hebrews 10, and which looks back to the far distant past. The force of "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire" (Psa 40:6) is given us in, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). "Mine ears hast thou opened" (Psa 40:6) speaks in the type of Exodus 21:5, 6 and tells of our Lord's readiness to serve and His love to His Father

and His children. “A body hast thou prepared me” (Heb 10:5) announces the Son’s coming into this world, equipped for His arduous undertaking.

“Then said I”: when alternatives had been discussed and it was agreed that animal sacrifices were altogether inadequate for satisfying Divine justice, “Lo, I come”: willingly of Mine own volition—from the ivory palaces to the abodes of misery. Those words signified His cheerful acceptance of the terms of the covenant. “In the volume [or ‘head’] of the book, it is written of me” (Psa 40:7; Heb 10:7): thus, it was recorded at the very beginning of the Divine decrees—of which the Scriptures are a faithful transcript—that I should make My advent to earth. Thus, it was registered by the Holy Spirit who witnessed My solemn engagement with the Father so to do. Thus, it was formally and officially inscribed that in the fulness of time, I should become incarnate and accomplish a purpose which lay beyond the capacity of all the holy angels. “I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa 40:8) tells us first of the object for which He came—to make good the Father’s counsels; second, His freeness and joy therein; third, the character in which He acted—as covenant Head: “My God.”

“I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa 40:8). Herein consists the very essence of obedience: the soul’s cheerful and loving devotion to God. Christ’s obedience, which is the righteousness of His people, was pre-eminent in this quality. Notwithstanding unparalleled sorrows and measureless griefs, our Lord found delight in His work: “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2). “Yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psa 40:8), He declared. No mere outward and formal subjection to the Divine will was His. That Law which is “holy, and just, and *good*” (Rom 7:12) was enshrined in His affections. “O how love I thy law!” (Psa 119:97), He averred. The Law did not have to be “written” on *His* heart, as it has on ours (Heb 8:10), for it was one with the holiness of His nature. Then what a horrible crime for any to speak disparagingly of or want to be delivered from that Law which Christ loved!

The two things—the Father’s proposing the terms of the covenant and the Son’s free acceptance of them—are brought together in a striking, yet rarely considered passage: “And their nobles [the Hebrew is in the singular number] shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD” (Jer 30:21). That is one of the great Messianic prophecies, and it is closely parallel with Psalm 89:19, 20, 27. In it, we see the Father taking the initiative, and equally so the Son’s cheerful compliance. The Son is to become incarnate, for He was to “proceed from the midst of” the people of Israel. He was to be the “Governor,” and in order thereto is seen “approaching” the Father, or voluntarily presenting Himself to serve in that capacity. His free consent and heartiness so to act appears in His, “that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD” (Jer 30:21).

We cannot now enter into the connections of the above verse, but if the reader compares verse 9 of the same chapter and ponders what follows, he will find confirmation of our interpretation. There, the Father announced, “But they shall *serve* the LORD their God, *and* David their king, whom I will raise up [not from the grave, but exalt to office, as in Deu 18:15, Luk 1:69, etc.] unto them.” That can be meant of none other than Christ, the antitypical David, for “serve” includes rendering Divine homage (Mat 4:10), and worship will never be performed to the resurrected son of Jesse. Now it is the antitypical David—the Father’s “Beloved”—who is the King and Governor of the spiritual Israel and to whom Divine honours are paid. And He is the One who before earth’s foundation was laid, “engaged his heart” (Jer 30:21)—or as the Hebrew signifies, “became a *surety* in his heart” (for so the word is rendered in Gen 44:32, Pro 6:1, etc.), and *that* is the

ground of the covenant which follows: “And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Jer 30:22).

Before looking at some of the assurances made by the Father of adequate assistance to His incarnate Son in the discharge of His covenant engagement, we must consider more closely *the office* in which He served. In previous articles, we pointed out the needs for a Mediator—if God and His people were to be reconciled in a way that honoured His Law—as we also intimated His consummate wisdom in such an arrangement, and showed the perfect fitness of Christ for such an office. As the Mediator, He was to serve as our Surety and also fulfill the functions of Prophet, Priest, and King. As the Mediator, He was “set up” or “anointed” from the beginning (Pro 8:23)—that is, when given a covenant subsistence as such before God, in which He acted all through the O.T. era. The prophets (equally with the apostles) were *His* ministers; and therefore, the Spirit who spoke in them is termed, “the Spirit of Christ” (1Pe 1:11). In Zechariah 1:11, 12 and 3:2, we find Him interceding: and in anticipation of the incarnation, He appeared as “man” (Jos 5:13, 14; Dan 12:6, 7).

Christ is Mediator in respect of His person, as well as office. Only then could He be the Representative of God unto us, the Image of the invisible God, the One in whom He is seen (Joh 14:9), the light of whose glory shines in His face (2Co 4:6). It must ever be remembered that it was a Divine person who became flesh, and it is equally necessary to insist that the whole of His mediatory work is inseparably founded on the exercise of *both* of His natures. It is quite unwarrantable to predicate certain things of His Divine nature, and others of His human—for though not confounded, there is perfect oneness between them. It was the God-man who was tempted, suffered and died—“the *Lord’s* death” (1Co 11:26). This is indeed a subject beyond human comprehension; nevertheless, though “great is the mystery of godliness,” yet it is “without controversy” (1Ti 3:16) unto all those who bow to the all-sufficient authority of Divine revelation and receive the same as “little children” (Mat 18:3).

As the Mediator Christ became the Father’s “servant” (Isa 42:1; Phi 2:7). Yet in so doing, He ceased not to be a Divine person, but rather the God-man in whom “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” (Co1 2:9). As our Surety, Christ became subordinate to the Father’s will; nevertheless, He still retained all His Divine perfections and prerogatives. When the Holy Spirit announced that unto us a Child should be born and a Son given, He was careful to declare that such an One was none other than “The mighty God” (Isa 9:6). When the Father brought His First begotten into the world, He gave orders, “Let all the angels of God *worship* him.” (Heb 1:6). Yet as our Surety and the Father’s Servant, He was “sent” into the world, received “commandment” from His Father and became “obedient” unto death. Retaining as He did His Divine perfections, He could rightly say, “I and my Father are one” (Joh 10:30), co-equal and co-glorious—yet, as the Servant, “My Father is greater than I” (Joh 14:28)—not essentially so, but officially; not by nature, but by virtue of the place which He had taken. This distinction throws a flood of light upon many passages.

To be Himself “the true God” (1Jo 5:20) and yet subject to God—owning Him as “My God;” to be the Law-Giver, and yet “under the law” (Gal 4:4), to be One with the Father and yet inferior to Him, to be “The Lord of glory” (1Co 2:8) and yet “*made*...both Lord and Christ” (Act 2:36) are—according to all human reason and logic—inconsistent properties; nevertheless, Scripture itself expressly predicates these very things of one and the same Person—yet looked at in *different relationships*! In the days of His flesh, Christ was “over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5), yet as our Surety, “the head of Christ is God” (1Co 11:3). While walking this earth as the Man of sorrows, the disciples beheld His glory “as of the only begotten of the Father” (Joh

1:14)—yet as our Substitute, He was “crucified through weakness” (2Co 13:4). As God manifest in flesh, He both laid down His life and took it again (John 10:18); but as our Shepherd, God “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus” (Heb 13:20). There is perfect harmony amid wondrous variety.

Christ’s entrance into covenant engagement was entirely voluntary on His part: there existed no prior obligation, nor was there any authority by which He could be compelled to it. As the Father’s “Fellow,” He was subject to no law and acknowledged no superior, supreme dominion was His, and He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:6). But having freely entered into the covenant and agreed to fulfill its terms, the Son became officially subordinate to the Father, and as our Surety, He sent Him “into the world” (Joh 3:17), and as our Surety, He was “anointed...with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Act 10:38), was “delivered...up for us all” (Rom 8:32), was raised from the dead (Act 2:24), was given “all power...in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18), was elevated to the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3), was exalted “to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to [the spiritual] Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31), and was “ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Act 10:42). Thus, the very passages over which “Unitarians” have stumbled and broken their necks, speak of Christ not in His essential Person, but in His mediatorial office: the former giving value to the latter—the latter endearing the former to our hearts. —A.W.P.



November

THE HIDDEN MANNA

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” (Rev 2:17). This is one of the seven promises in Revelation 2 and 3 made to the overcomers, which is one of the many designations accorded the children of God in the Word of Truth, though probably one of those which most of these are least familiar with. The first time the word occurs in the N.T., it is used of the Lord Jesus (Luk 11:22), where He is portrayed as the One stronger than Satan, overcoming him and dividing his spoils—a representation of what He does for His elect at their conversion, when He delivered them from the power of Satan. The next time this word is found in the N.T. it is again in connection with Christ: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Joh 16:33)—we are to take courage and consolation from that fact, for since He overcame the world for His people, and since they are both legally and vitally one with Him, God has ordained they shall participate in His victory. The word occurs again in connection with Christ as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” where we are told He “hath prevailed [overcome] to open the book” (Rev 5:5)—perhaps the title-deeds to that Inheritance.

“To him that overcometh”—the enemies of his salvation. The Christian is a warrior, engaged in a life and death fight, and though he receives many wounds in the conflict and is often thrown down by his adversaries, yet he gets up again, renews the struggle, and in the end, comes out victorious. “Him that overcometh” is in contrast from those who are overcome—like the unbelieving Israelites who were overthrown in the wilderness, like the many of John 6:66 who were offended at Christ’s doctrine and who “went back and walked no more with Him,” like Demas who made a promising start and accompanied Paul for a while, but of whom he had to say, he “hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2Ti 4:10). It is not enough to engage in warfare against sin and Satan, the flesh and the world; we must persevere therein unto the end. The overcomer is the one who cleaves to Christ and adheres to the Truth, who refuses to be deterred by the difficulties of the way, the assaults of his enemies, the allurements of false teachers.

Four things are necessary in order for anyone to be an overcomer. First, he must be supernaturally regenerated, for the task involved is much too arduous for mere nature to succeed in: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4). It is the new nature, energised by the Holy Spirit, which qualifies for victory. Second, he must be endowed with a supernatural principle, otherwise his native unbelief would make defeat inevitable and certain: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1Jo 5:4)—God’s gift, but our use

of it. It is by the exercise of this grace that we obtain strength for the conflict and incentives to persevere. Third, he must have recourse to that which will heal his wounds and prevail before God as his plea: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:11). That blood gives the believer the right to claim enablement for his repelling of every attack of Satan’s. Fourth, he must “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6).

For the encouragement of the Christian engaged in this fierce conflict the Lord has graciously made known the reward awaiting him, and the more his faith lays hold of the same and his hope anticipatively enjoys it, the more incentive will he have to continue fighting, or (changing the figure) to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). It was thus our great Exemplar nerved Himself: “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Heb 12:2). In our judgment, these promises to the overcomer supply an intimation of wherein the blessedness of the heavenly state consists, such as is to be found nowhere else in the Scriptures. As they draw nearer the end of their pilgrimage the Lord’s people should project their thoughts more and more unto what awaits them on High. The worn-out *worldling* seeks satisfaction in living over again in his mind those “pleasures of sin” (Heb 11:25) which engaged him in the past, but the veteran saint will rather contemplate those “pleasures for evermore” which are at God’s right hand (Psa 16:11). A part of what those “pleasures” consist of is intimated in Revelation 2:17.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” (Rev 2:17). Here is a part of the spiritual entertainment which Christ has provided for His friends in glory. It seems to denote three things. First, as the manna was the food which God supplied from Heaven for His people of old, nourishing and sustaining them throughout their wilderness journey, it must be regarded as a figure of the written word which is the Christian’s spiritual staff of life. And since the Word of God “liveth and abideth for ever” (1Pe 1:23), does not the “*hidden manna*” (Rev 2:17) point to the inexhaustible riches of Divine wisdom, which are stored up in it, and of which we have at present, but a fragmentary knowledge. We cannot think that any of that treasure will be lost to us—rather, do we conclude it will be made known and afford part of our delectation on High. Now we know the marvels of Divine inspiration and revelation “in part,” but then shall we know them in full. 2 Corinthians 12:7 shows that Heaven is the place of “the abundance of the revelations.” As the risen Christ expounded the Scriptures to His disciples and opened their understandings to understand them (Luk 24:27, 45), will not the glorified Saviour do the same for us (Heb 13:8)!

Second, the “manna” which God gave to Israel in the wilderness was also a manifest type of the incarnate Son, the “bread of life”—which is given to us, because broken for us (Joh 6:35, 48). Therefore, the “hidden manna” (Rev 2:17) refers, we conclude, to “In whom are *hid* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3) in Him, of which I now have but the faintest conception, and to the “many things which Jesus did” that have not been recorded on any earthly scroll (Joh 21:25), and also to much that was precious about Him—which was never cognised even by His apostles. Nothing of this can be lost—all of it, we believe, will be feasted upon at the marriage supper of the Lamb, when He shall say “eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Son 5:1). “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” (Rev 2:17). We shall hear from Christ’s own lips the secrets of His life as He sojourned for thirty-three years in this world of sin, making known to us more fully the depths of humiliation into which He descended for us and the perfections He exercised—hidden from the eyes of men—as He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself.

Third, the historical reference (Exo 16:33, 34 and compare Heb 9:4) shows that the literal “hidden manna” consisted of a “pot” of manna which was laid “up before the LORD” to be “kept for your generations.” It was designed as a testimony and memorial of God’s grace unto His people. In its anti-typical fulfilment, this points, we believe, to the unfolding of His secret providences—which the Lord will make to us in Heaven, when we shall be able to *understand* (with amazement, awe, and adoration) what now we only *believe*—namely, that all His dealings with us were ordered by perfect love and unerring wisdom; and also to the blessed workings of His grace in and through us. “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him *for them* that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Mal 3:16), and the next verse seems to more than hint that the contents of that book will be made known and enjoyed “in that day” when the Lord of hosts makes up His jewels.

We conceive that each one of the redeemed will be given the holy privilege of making his or her personal contribution to this unfolding of God’s wondrous ways with us in providence and in grace—there will be no Divine restriction, “let your women keep silence in heaven,” for all the consequences of the Fall will be obliterated and the sisters as well as the brethren will then be “as the angels of God in heaven” (Mat 22:30). This writer believes that each one of the blood-bought company will say, in turn, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for *my* soul” (Psa 66:16)—not only in regeneration, but in all that followed. O what a testimony each of them will then bear to God’s amazing grace and patience! What a witness each will give to God’s unfailing faithfulness and goodness in supplying every need as he crossed the Wilderness of Sin! How blessed it will be to hear one and another relate God’s wondrous answers to prayer—then there will be none of the scepticism which we fear there would be now were we to relate some of the miracles God has wrought in response to our feeble petitions. Everything which redounds to the glory of God will then be made known to the whole of His family. —A.W.P.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

11. 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

So many aspects of the Truth are brought before us and so many lines of thought are suggested by these verses that we must dispense with an introduction and consider, first, the *occasion* of this prayer. This is discovered to us in the immediate context. As we have pointed out in a previous article, false teachers had appeared at Corinth and had succeeded in sowing the seeds of dissension in the assembly there. The saints were in danger of being turned away from Christ by having their confidence in Paul undermined by the misrepresentations of his enemies. This had obliged him to engage in the distasteful task of vindicating himself—presenting the grounds which he had for claiming spiritual authority over them and for asserting his apostolic powers. So repugnant was this to his feelings, that he apologized for thus speaking of himself and

begged them to bear with him (2Co 11:1), pointing out it was solely for their good that he now appeared to indulge in self-laudation.

Paul's enemies had insisted that he was greatly inferior to the Eleven, yea, that he was not an apostle at all, since he lacked the all-essential qualifications stated in Acts 1:21, 22—he had neither been one of the favoured band who were most closely associated with Christ during His public ministry, nor had he been a witness with them of His resurrection. That was an exceedingly grave charge, for if Paul was not a Divinely-called apostle, he had no authority to take the oversight of the churches and regulate their concerns. This obliged him to indulge in what seemed like boasting and to affirm, “I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2Co 11:5). Previously, he had openly acknowledged his personal unworthiness to be numbered of their company (1Co 15:9), but now he was compelled to point out that in authority, knowledge, and effective grace, none of them excelled him, and then spread before them his credentials (2Co 11:22-33).

It is very blessed and touching to see the nature of the proofs Paul advanced to show he was a *true* minister of the Gospel. He boasts not of the success of his labours, the souls that had been saved under his preaching, or the number of churches he had planted, but mentions rather the opposition he had met with, the persecutions encountered, the sufferings he had gone through. He shows to them as it were the *scars* he had received “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2Ti 2:3). He demonstrated he was a real servant of His by calling attention to the reproaches, the ignominy, the cruel treatment he had received. It was his sufferings, and his patient endurance of them, that made manifest that he was a genuine minister of Christ (compare Gal 1:10). Though great indeed was that honour attached to his office, yet the faithful discharge of it entailed that which no impostor, no self-seeker, no hireling would continue to meekly bear.

In chapter 11, the apostle had first met his opponents on their own ground and by comparing himself with them, had answered the fool according to his folly (Pro 26:5). Then he had demonstrated that he was a genuine officer of Him who is “despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3). But now he comes to that which was peculiar to himself and relates an experience which far excelled any that the other apostles had been favoured with. He continues his apology, but in an altered tone: “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord” (2Co 12:1). To have “seen” the Lord was one of the requisites of valid apostleship (1Co 9:1), and Paul *had* done so by a heavenly vision (Act 26:19). Moreover these Corinthians were probably aware that he had been the subject of a vision which especially concerned *them* (Act 18:9, 10). But over and above these, he now went on to relate an experience which afforded superlative evidence of the favour of God to him as an apostle.

“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven...How that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2Co 12:2, 4). This was an experience unparalleled in the recorded history of men—an honour and privilege which far exceeded that bestowed upon any other mortal. It is impossible for us to adequately conceive of the extraordinary favour that was here granted the beloved apostle. He was personally transported to Paradise, translated to the Father's House, permitted an entrance into the Palace of the Sovereign of the universe. For a brief season, he was taken to be with “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). There was the glorified Lamb upon the Throne, and he would hear the seraphim exclaiming before Him, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). It is useless to indulge in speculation and impious to give rein to our imagination—we can but wonder and worship.

“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he *seeth* me to be, or that he heareth of [not ‘from’!] me” (2Co 12:5, 6). That is exquisitely lovely. Paul had indeed a just ground for insisting upon the higher favour which God had shown him above all others, but inasmuch as it was gratuitous, implying no personal worthiness, he forbore. Had he glorified it had not been as a “fool” or empty boaster, but according to truth, to fact; but he restrained himself because he desired others not to think too highly of him! He preferred that men should judge him by what they saw and heard, and not esteem him by the special revelations God had given him! It was his “infirmities” he would glory in, for weakness, sustained by grace, is all that any saint may boast of in himself.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2Co 12:7). Having stated in the preceding verse that he did not wish others to think of him more highly than they should, he now tells us what means God used to prevent *himself* from so doing. The apostle was in danger of being unduly elated by the extraordinary manifestation of the Divine favour he had received. This is quite understandable—for one who had visited Paradise itself and then to be suddenly returned to this world of woe, required a heavy ballast to keep his ship on an even keel. The “third heaven” was too dizzy a remembrance to be safely borne by one who had to walk again on earth—and that, in a body of sin and death. The Lord knew this and graciously dealt accordingly, bestowing upon him that which kept him humble.

By nature, Paul was just as proud and foolish as all other men, and if his heart was kept lowly, it was not by his own unaided fidelity to the Truth, but because of the faithfulness of his Master who dealt so wisely with him. We must distinguish between the *cause* and the *occasion* of pride—the former is the evil nature or principle from which it proceeds; the latter, the object on which it fastens and which it perverts to its use. The “pride of life” (1Jo 2:16) can feed on anything, turning temporal mercies and even spiritual gifts and graces into poison. Pride was the main ingredient in the sin of our first parents—aspiring to be as God. There is pride in every sin, since it is a lifting up of the creature against the Creator. We are shown how God regards and abominates pride in Proverbs 6:16-19, where seven things are mentioned which the Lord hates, and the list is headed with “a proud look” (Pro 6:17)! The great work of grace is the subduing of our pride.

The celestial revelations which Paul had received had no tendency whatever in themselves to produce or promote pride, but like all other things, they were capable of being abused by indwelling sin. Therefore, lest he should be spiritually proud, become vain and self-confident regarding himself as a special favourite of Christ, there was given to Paul “a thorn in the flesh” (2Co 12:7). That it is termed a “thorn” intimates it was something that was painful; that it was a bodily affliction is signified by the words, “in the flesh”; that it remained within him is seen from his prayer that it might “depart”; and that Satan aggravated it appears from the next clause of the verse. So far from proposing to join the numerous company of the curious who have indulged in all manner of speculations as to precisely what this “thorn” consisted of, we are frank to say we have no idea of its nature, nor have we the least desire to be wise above what God has revealed.

Personally, we admire the Divine wisdom in restraining the apostle from being more explicit, for the general statement is better suited to a far wider application. Human nature being what it now is—had the Holy Spirit made known the specific character of this particular “thorn in the flesh”—certain afflicted and querulous souls would be most apt to say: Paul might “glory” in *his*,

but if he had the painful distress which is *mine*, he would have sung another tune. Suppose the apostle had mentioned any certain physical disorder—say, inflamed eyes—those free from it, but having another (say, the gout) would consider that *their* “thorn” was much harder to endure. But since God has wisely left it undefined, each afflicted saint may take comfort from the possibility that his affliction is identical with Paul’s. Whatever in our persons or our circumstances serves to *mortify* our pride may be regarded as our “thorn in the flesh.”

Instead of vainly conjecturing exactly what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” consisted of, let us draw comfort from the blessed fact that it was (not “sent” but) “*given*” him—that is, by God, as a Divine favour! It is thus that we should regard each painful trial as a merciful bestowal from God, the design of which is to hide pride from us. But this word “given” also connotes Paul’s *acceptance* of the same, that he meekly and thankfully regarded it as from the Lord. This “thorn” he also speaks of as “the messenger of Satan to buffet me” (2Co 12:7), the cases of Job and his boils, the woman of Luke 13:16, and the demon possessed, show that the Devil is given the power to cause bodily affliction. In Paul’s case, Satan desired to disqualify him from his work, but the Lord overruled him and made him render the apostle a good service. This should teach us to look above Satan and seek from God the reason why He has permitted him to afflict us.

“Lest I should be exalted above measure.” Paul not only accepted the painful affliction as a gift from the Lord, but he also perceived *why* it was given him. And so should each Christian in like circumstances, and until he does so, he should humbly continue waiting on the Lord saying, “show me *wherefore* Thou contendest with me” (Job 10:3 and compare 2Sa 21:1, Job 6:24). If the reader has a “thorn in the flesh” and seeks enlightenment from above, he too may discover the needs-be for it. In Paul’s case, it was to humble him to hide pride from him; and is not *that* usually God’s chief design in His disciplinary dealings with *us*! In the apostle’s case, it was not for correction, but for prevention. Such may have been God’s merciful design towards you—perhaps He turned a wealthy relative against you to will his money elsewhere, or has withheld business prosperity from you—lest you be “puffed-up.” How effective Paul’s “thorn” was appears from the fact that for fourteen years, he never mentioned his rapture into Paradise, and would not have done so now but for exceptional circumstances.

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me” (2Co 12:8). The “thorn” did not make him fret and fume, but caused him to pray. This brings us, second, to *the Object* of his prayer—namely, the Lord Jesus, as the next verse plainly shows. A decisive proof is this of the Godhead of Christ and also a clear intimation that petitions may be addressed to Him, as well as to the Father. Prayer was made to *Him* in Acts 1:24 and 4:24. As Stephen was being stoned, he cried, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” and begged Him not to lay this sin to the charge of his slayers (Act 7:59, 60). When he was the persecuting Saul of Tarsus, Ananias told the Lord that he had authority from the chief priests “to bind all that call on thy name” (Act 9:10-14). That it was the common practice of the primitive saints to invoke the Saviour’s name is very evident from 1 Corinthians 1:2. There was a special propriety in Paul, here addressing Christ, for *He* is the One who admits into Paradise (Act 7:59, Rev 1:18).

But let us consider next, *his petition*: “I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me.” We, regard this request as being made before he had any perception of why the Lord had afflicted him, and also of manifesting his native kinship with us. Thorns are far from pleasant, and we desire their prompt removal. Nor is it wrong for us to do so—we should not be rational and sentient creatures if we did not shrink from suffering. For us to ask for deliverance from pain and trouble is not sinful, neither is it spiritual. Then *what is it?* Why, *natural*, the exercise of that instinct of self-preservation with which the Creator has endowed us. But it becomes sinful when

we insist on deliverance, insubordinate to the Divine will. In Paul's case, and in many others, we see how grace triumphed over nature, the heart gladly acquiescing in the Lord's design.

Some have argued from the example of Christ in Gethsemane and Paul's case here that we ought never to ask God more than thrice for any particular thing, and that if it be not then granted, we must desist. But such an idea is contrary to the many Scriptures where *importunity* in asking is inculcated—for example, in Isaiah 62:7, Luke 11:8; 18:7. God is often pleased to test our faith and patience, for “the LORD wait, that he may be gracious” (Isa 30:18). The repeated request for deliverance shows how heavily the burden pressed upon Paul, as well as indicating how human he was—a man of “like passions as we are” (Jam 5:17). But as God's dear Son learned obedience by the things which He suffered—so also, on the behalf of Christ, it was given His most eminent servant to tread a similar path and be perfected by a special process of affliction.

Fourth, *the answer he received*: “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2Co 12:9). God's answer is not always in kind, and a mercy for us that it is not. How little are we able to perceive what would be for our good: “We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26). Often we ask for temporal things, and God gives us spiritual; we ask for deliverance, and He grants patience—He answers not according to our will, but our wealth or profit. Hence, we must not be disheartened if our requests be not literally answered—sometimes God answers by reconciling our minds to humiliating trials. “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9)—to support under the severest and most protracted affliction, to enable the soul to lie submissively as clay in the hands of the Potter, to trust His wisdom and love, to be assured that He knows what is best for us.

“My grace”: It is Mediatorial grace, the grace given to Christ as the covenant Head of His people (Joh 1:16). It is the Head speaking to a member of His Body. It is not inherent grace or the new nature, but freshly imparted, quickening grace. “My grace *is* sufficient”—not simply “will prove to be.” What he knew theoretically, he was now to learn experimentally. A grace that can save a hell-deserving sinner must be sufficient for the petty trials of this life! He who gives the “thorn” also gives grace to bear it. Grace is given not only to resist temptations and strengthen graces, but also endure trials—yet it must be definitely and diligently sought (Heb 4:16). “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3). “For my strength is made perfect in weakness,” in supporting earthen vessels under the buffetings of Satan—*His* strength was demonstrated when frail women voluntarily went to the stake!

Fifth, Paul's *improvement thereof*: “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2Co 12:9). That was more than a sullen submission or even a meek acquiescence. The “rather” points a contrast from the removal of the thorn: To glory on account of infirmities went far beyond resignation in suffering—namely, a *rejoicing*—and to this, *we* should aspire and pray. “Souls that are rich in grace can bear burdens without a burden,” said a Puritan. Here is a test by which we may ascertain the measure or degree of grace we have—not by our speculative knowledge, but by the ease with which we bear afflictions, the cheerfulness of our spirits under persecution. When the apostles had been beaten, they departed “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Act 5:40, 41).

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2Co 12:10). This goes further than the foregoing verse—it was because I “took pleasure” in His infirmities that he gloried in them; and it was because they were the occasion of manifesting the power of Christ to uphold and

work through one so frail, that he was glad of them. What nature recoils from an enlightened faith accepts and delights in, for the sake of the ulterior blessing—another example of where God can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, and also where He can make both the wrath of man and the enmity of the Serpent to praise Him! In the same way, though on a lower plane, David said, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes” (Psa 119:71). By “the power of Christ,” Paul triumphed over all obstacles.

What is meant by “when I am weak, then am I strong”? This needs to be correctly defined, for there is a weakness which does not result in strength, yea, a Christian’s consciousness of weakness. There are those who are constantly talking about their inability and bemoaning their helplessness, and their ends! But he who has a true and spiritual sense of his insufficiency to do anything as he ought, is the one who is most earnest in crying to the strong for strength and, other things being equal, the one who is most active in appropriating His strength. To be “weak” is to be emptied of self—but to be at the time occupied with our inability, is to be absorbed with self. To be spiritually “weak” is to be conscious that I “lack wisdom,” and that makes me “ask of God” (Jam 1:5); to feel my unbelief, and beg for an increase of faith.

Some *say* they are “*weak*” and then contradict their words by the way they act. Others are *happy* over the very realisation of their impotency—which is like one smitten with a stroke rejoicing in his paralysis as such. It needs to be steadily borne in mind that “hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb 12:12; Isa 35:3) bring no glory to God. 2 Kings 5:7 illustrates—that was not the language of humility and piety, but of unbelief and pride! My insufficiency is but a privative negative thing and is nothing to boast about—a consciousness thereof is only of value when it moves me to turn unto and lay hold of the Lord’s sufficiency—2 Corinthians 3:5 gives *both* sides! The complement to, “for without me ye can do nothing.” (Joh 15:5) is “I *can* do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13 and compare Eph 6:10, 2Ti 2:1). —A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

23. Fifteenth Miracle

The passage which is now to engage our attention is much longer than usual, beginning as it does at 2 Kings 6:24 and running to the end of chapter 7. The whole of it needs to be read at a sitting, so as to perceive its connection, its unity, and its wonders. In it, there is a striking mingling of light and shade: The dark background of human depravity and the bright display of the prophet’s faith, the exercise of God’s justice in His sore judgments upon rebellious and wayward people, and the manifestation of His amazing mercy and grace. In it, we are shown how the wrath of man was made to praise the Lord, how the oath of a wicked king was made to recoil

on his own head, how scepticism of his courtier was given the lie, and how the confidence of Elisha, his Master's word was vindicated. In it, we behold how the wicked was taken in his own craftiness, or to use the language of Samson's parable, how the eater was made to yield meat and how poor outcast lepers became the heralds of good news.

Truth is indeed stranger than fiction. Were one to invent a story after the order of the incident narrated in our present portion, critical readers would scorn it as being too far-fetched. But those who believe in the living and omnipotent God that presides over the affairs of this world, so far from finding anything here which taxes their faith, bow in adoration before Him who has only to speak and it is done, to will a thing and it is accomplished. In this case, Samaria was besieged by a powerful enemy, so that its inhabitants were completely invested. The situation became drastic and desperate, for there was a famine so acute that cannibalism was resorted unto. Yet under these extreme circumstances, Elisha announced that within twenty-four hours, there would be an abundance of food for everyone. His message was received with incredulity and scorn. Yet it came to pass, just as he had said, without a penny being spent, a gift being made, or a blow being struck—the investing Syrians fleeing in panic and leaving their vast stores of food to relieve the famished city.

We begin our examination of this miracle by considering, first, *its reality*. After our remarks above, it may strike the reader that it is quite an unnecessary waste of effort to labour a point which is obvious, and offer proof that a miracle *was* wrought on this occasion. The writer had thought so, too, had he not after completing his own meditations thereon, consulted several volumes on the O.T., only to find that this wonder is not listed among the miracles associated with Elisha. Even such a work as “The Companion Bible”—which supplies what is supposed to be a complete catalogue of the miracles of Elijah and Elisha—*omits* this one. We offer no solution to this strange oversight, but since other writers have failed to see in 2 Kings 7 one of the marvels of our prophet, we feel that we should present some of the evidence—which, in our judgment, furnishes clear proof that a supernatural event *was* wrought on this occasion, and that we are fully warranted in connecting it with him on whom Elijah's mantle fell.

The first thing that we would take note of is that when the people were in such desperate straits, and the king was so beside himself that he rent his clothes and swore that the prophet should be slain that very day, we are told, “But [contrastively] Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him” (2Ki 6:32), which suggests to us that they had waited upon the Lord and had received assurance from Him of His intervention in mercy. Second, that the prophet *was* in communion with and in possession of the secret of the Lord, is borne out by the remaining words of the verse, where he tells his companions of Jehoram's evil intention and announces the approach of his agent before he arrived. Next, we find the prophet plainly declaring that an abundant supply of food would be provided on the morrow (2Ki 7:1), and he did so in his official character as “the man of God” (2Ki 7:2 and repeated in 2Ki 7:17, 19!)—which, as we have seen in previous articles, is the title that is always accorded him when God was about to work mightily through him or for him in answer to his prayers.

Consider, too, the circumstances. “And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they [the Syrians] besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.” (2Ki 6:25). Nevertheless, the prophet declared that there should suddenly be provided sufficient food for all; and the sequel shows it came to pass just as he had predicted. Nothing short of a miracle could have furnished such an abundant supply. The manner in which that food was furnished clearly evidenced the supernatural, as an impartial reading of 2 Kings 7:6, 7 will make clear—for it was their *enemies*

who were made to supply their tables! Finally, if ye give due weight to the “according to the word of the LORD” and “as the man of God had said” in 2 Kings 7:16, 17 and link with 2 Kings 4:43, 44—where another of his miracle is in view and so referred to—the demonstration is complete.

Second, *its occurrence*. This was the terrible shortage of food in the city of Samaria, due to its being invested by an enemy, so that none of its inhabitants could go forth and obtain fresh supplies. “And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria” (2Ki 6:24). Strange as it may at first seem and sound to the reader, we see here one of the many internal evidences of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. This will appear if we quote the last clause of the very immediately preceding: “So the bands of Syria came *no more* into the land Israel” (2Ki 6:23). Had an impostor written this chapter, attempting to palm off upon us a pious forgery, he surely would not have been so careless as to place in immediate juxtaposition two statements, which a casual reader can only regard as flat contradiction. No; one who was inventing a story had certainly made it read consistently and plausibly. Hence, we arrive at the conclusion that this is no fictitious narrative from the pen of a pretender to inspiration.

“So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel [of which ‘Samaria’ was a part; as verse 20 shows]. And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria” (2Ki 6:23, 24). Now the placing of those two statements side by side is clear intimation to us that the Scriptures need to be read closely and carefully—that their terms require to be properly weighed, and that failure so to do will inevitably lead unto serious misunderstanding of their purport. It is because infidels only skim passages here and there, and are so poorly acquainted with the Word, that they charge it with being “full of contradictions.” But there is contradiction here, and if it presents any “difficulty” to us, it is entirely of our own making. The first statement has reference to the freebooting and irregular “bands”—which had, from time to time, preyed on the Samaritans (compare “companies” of 2 Kings 5:2), what we would term today, “commando raids”; where 2 Kings 6:24 speaks of organized war, a “mass invasion,” Benhadad gathering together “*all* his hosts.”

“And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria” (2Ki 6:24). The opening clauses far more than a historical time-mark—properly understood, it serves to bring out the character of this man. The introductory—“And”—bids us link his action here with what is recorded in the context. In the remote context (chapter 5), we saw how that God graciously healed Naaman of his leprosy. Naaman was a commander-in-chief of this man’s army and had been sent by him into Samaria to be cured of his dread disease. But so little did the Syrian monarch appreciate that signal favour, shortly after he assembled an increased force of his band and “warred against Israel” (2Ki 6:8). His plan was to capture Jehoram, by being foiled by Elisha, he sent his men to capture the prophet. In that too, it failed, for in answer to Elisha’s prayer, they were smitten with blindness—though instead of taking advantage of their helplessness, he later prayed for their eyes to be opened, and after having them feasted, sent them home to the master, who had returned to Syria.

“And it came to pass after *this*”—not that Benhadad repented of his former actings, nor that he was grateful for the mercy and kindness which had been shown his soldiers; but that he “gathered all his hosts and went and besieged Samaria.” Not only was this base ingratitude against his human benefactors, but it was blatant defiance against Jehovah Himself. Twice the Lord had manifested His miracle-working power, and that in grace, on his behalf; and here was his response. Yet we must look further if we are to perceive the deeper meaning of “it came to

pass after this,” for we need to answer the question, Why did the Lord suffer this heathen to invade Israel’s territory? The reply is also furnished by the context. Benhadad was not the only one who had profited by God’s mercies in the immediate past—the king of Israel had also been Divinely delivered from those who sought his life. And how did *he* express his appreciation? Did he promptly institute a religious reformation in his dominions and tear down the altars which his wicked parents had set up? No, so far as we are informed, he was quite unmoved and continued in his idolatry.

It is written, “the curse causeless shall not come” (Pro 26:2). When God afflicts a people, be it a church or a nation, it is because He has a controversy with them—if they refuse to put right what is wrong. He chastises them. God, then, was acting in judgment on Samaria when He commissioned the Syrians to now enter their land in full force. “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is *mine* indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation” (Isa 10:5, 6). So again, at a later date, the Lord said of Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou art *my* battle axe and weapons of war: for with (or “by”) thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms” (Jer 51:20). It is in the light of such passages as these that we should view the activities of Hitler and Mussolini! Though God’s time to completely cast off Israel had not come in the days of Jehoram, yet He employed Benhadad to grievously afflict his kingdom.

“And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver” (2Ki 6:25). Troubles seldom come singly, for God means to leave us without excuse if we fail to recognise *whose* hand it is which is dealing with us. Benhadad chose his hour to attack when Israel was in sore tribulation, which serves also to illustrate Satan’s favourite method of assaulting the saints—like the fiend that he is—he strikes when they are at their lowest ebb, coming as the roaring lion when their nerves are already stretched to the utmost, seeking to render them both praiseless and prayerless while lying on a bed of sickness, or to instill into their minds doubts of God’s goodness in the hour of bereavement, or to question His promises when the meal has run low in their barrel. But since “we are not ignorant of his devices” (2Co 2:11), we should be on our guard against such tactics.

“And there was a great famine in Samaria” (2Ki 6:25). It needs to be pointed out in these days of skepticism and practical atheism that the inhabitants of earth are under the government of something infinitely better than “fickle fortune”—namely, in a world which is ruled over by the living God. Goodly harvests, or the *absence* of them, are not the result of chance nor the effect of a blind fate. In Psalm 105:16, we read that God “called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread.” And, my reader, when *He* calls for a “famine,” neither farmers nor scientists (so-called) can prevent or avert it. We have read in the past of “famines” in China and in India, but how faintly can we conceive of the awful horrors of one! As intimated above, the Lord called for this famine on Samaria, because the king and his subjects had not taken to heart His previous chastisements of the land for their idolatry—when a people refuse to heed the rod, then He smites more heavily.

“And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold they besieged it.” (2Ki 6:25). Their design was not to storm but to starve the city, by throwing a powerful military cordon around it, so that none could either go out or come in. “And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, [probably taking stock of his defences and seeking to encourage the garrison] there cried a woman unto him saying, Help, my lord, O king” (2Ki 6:26). And well she might, for these were now deprived of the bare necessities of life, with a slow but painful death by starvation staring

them in the face. Ah, my reader, how little we really value the common mercies of this life until they are taken from us! Poor was man; she turned to lean upon a broken reed, seeking relief from the apostate king, rather than making known her need unto the Lord. There is no hint anywhere in the narrative that the people betook themselves unto the Throne of grace.

“And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?” (2Ki 6:27). That was not the language of submission and piety, but, as the sequel shows, of derision and blasphemy. His language was that of anger and despair—the Lord will not help, I cannot, so we must perish. Out of the abundance of his evil heart his mouth spake. Calming down a little, “And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman [pointing to a companion] said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.” (2Ki 6:28, 29)—which shows the desperate conditions which then prevailed and the awful pass to which things had come. Natural affection yielded to the pangs of hunger. This too must also be regarded as a most solemn example of the Divine justice, and vengeance on idolatrous Israel.

It must be steadily borne in mind that the people of Samaria had cast off their allegiance to Jehovah and were worshipping false gods, and therefore, according to His threatenings, the Lord visited them with severe judgments. They were so blockaded by the enemy that all ordinary food supplies failed them, so that in their desperation, they were driven to devour the most abominable offals and even human flesh. Of old, the Lord had announced unto Israel, “And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh *of your sons*” (Lev 26:28, 29). And again, “The LORD shall bring a nation against thee...and he shall besiege thee...and thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness” (Deu 28:49-53)—more completely fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. No words of God’s shall fall to the ground: His *threatenings*—equally with His promises—are infallibly certain of fulfilment!

How few there are in Great Britain today who realise that but for the infinite mercy of God, the people in these Isles had, but three years ago, been reduced to sore straits. We too were besieged—both by sea and air—and only sovereign God prevented our merciless enemies from totally succeeding in cutting off our principal food supplies. We are not unmindful of the kindness and help of the U.S.A., and the still nobler generosity of Canada, but all their loans and gifts had been useless if they failed to cross the ocean—in that case, long before now the spectre of famine had stalked our cities. Nor are we unmindful of our intrepid Royal Navy, nor the brave men who manned our merchant ships. But *Who* was it that imparted such courage to them that—again and again after their ships had been torpedoed and themselves left to spend awful days in an open boat—as soon as they were rescued, volunteered to man other ships and went forth afresh to bring in vital supplies? There is a human side to it, and we greatly admire the same; but there is also a Divine side to it, and we have reminded ourselves of it.

Though they recognise not the hand of the Lord in deliverance, the people of Britain now breathe easier since they believe that the submarine menace has been mastered, and we now have full control of the air. But multiplied weapons, both of defence and of offence, are no security against the displeasure of Him whom we continue to defy, with our Sabbath ploughing, harvesting, pleasuring, and many other things. Agriculture may be organized here on a scale it never has been before, yet that guarantees neither crops nor weather to gather them. Of old, God

said unto Israel, “*I have smitten* you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your figtrees, and your olive trees *increased*, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto Me. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword...yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord” (Amo 4:9, 10). The Almighty has a thousand weapons in His armoury by which He can slay us, Will our nation remain deaf to His continued warnings until His patience is exhausted? It looks very much like it.

“And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh” (2Ki 6:30). According to the customs of those days and the ways of Oriental people, this was the assumption of the external garb of a penitent; but what was it worth while he renounced not his idols? Not a particle in the eyes of Him who cannot be imposed upon by any outward shows. It was a pose which the king adopted for the benefit of his subjects, to signify that he felt deeply for their miseries; yet he lamented not for his *own* iniquities, which were the procuring cause of the calamity. Instead of so doing, the very next verse tells us that he took an awful oath that Elisha should be promptly slain. “Rend your *heart* and not your garments” (Joe 2:13) is ever the Divine call to those under chastisement, for God desireth truth (reality) in “the inward parts” (Psa 51:6).

As it is useless to wear sackcloth when we mourn not for our sins, so it is in vain to flock to church on a “day of prayer” and then return at once to our vanities and idols. In the past, Israel complained, “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.” And God made them answer by saying, “Behold, in the day of your fasting, ye find *pleasure* and things wherewith ye grieve others...ye fast not as this day to make your voice heard on High” (Isa 58:3, 4). Thus, there is such a thing as not only praying, but fasting; and yet, for God to pay no attention to it. At a later date, He said to them, “When ye fasted and mourned...did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? Should ye not *hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets”! (Zec 7:5, 7). While a nation tramples upon the Divine commandments, neither prayer and fasting, nor any other religious performances, are of any avail with Him who says, “Behold *to obey* is better than sacrifice” (1Sa 15:22). There must be a turning away from sin before there can be any real turning unto God. —A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5c. Its Arrangement

Upon the Son’s cheerful acceptance of the terms proposed to Him concerning the federal undertaking He was to engage in, the Father in turn bound Himself to do certain things for and unto the Son. This it was which constituted the very essence of that compact which was made by Them, for a covenant is an agreement between two parties who come under mutual engagements.

Something is to be done by one party, in consequence of which the other party binds himself to do another thing in return. As there must be two parties to covenant, so there must be two parts in a covenant—a condition and a promise. It is the performing of the condition or terms of the covenant—the work of service specified—which gives the first party the right to the promised reward. Having already shown what Christ consented to do, we turn now to consider what the Father promised to bestow. First, He agreed to make all needful preparation for the incarnation of His Son. Second, to give Him all requisite assistance in the performing of His work. Third, to bestow upon Him a meet reward.

The promise to make all needful preparation for the incarnation of His Son comprehended the whole of the Father's providences or governance of this world from the creation of man until Christ began His public ministry: "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto [now], and I work" (Joh 5:17). The Father's "work" included the ordering of human history, and particularly, His dealings with Abraham and his descendants, and the separation of Israel from the rest of the nations—for it was from Israel that Christ, according to the flesh, would issue. The Father's "work" included the giving of a written revelation, in which the covenant was made known and the advent of His Son promised, so that an expectation of His appearing was created and a foundation was laid for His mission. The Father's "work" also involved the "preparation of a body for His Son, which was accomplished by the miracle of the virgin birth. When "the fulness of the time was come [when all the necessary preparations were completed], God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Gal 4:4).

The Father promised to give His Son all requisite help for the performing of His work. First, in order for the discharge of His mediatorial office, there was that which *fitted Him* thereto. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:1, 2). Upon which the Puritan Charnock said, "All the gifts of the Spirit should reside in Him as in a proper habitation, perpetually. The human nature being a creature could not beautify and enrich itself with needful gifts; this promise of the Spirit was therefore necessary, His humanity could not else have performed the work it was designed for. So that the habitual holiness residing in the humanity of Christ was a fruit of this eternal covenant. Though the Divine nature of Christ, by virtue of its union, might sanctify the human nature, yet the Spirit was promised Him, because it is His proper office to continue those gifts, which are necessary for any undertaking in the world; and the personal operations of the Trinity do not interfere. It might also be because every person in the Trinity should plainly have a distinct hand in our redemption."

The Father, then, furnished and equipped Christ for His arduous work by a plentiful effusion of the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, He declared, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him" (Isa 42:1). Those promises were fulfilled at His baptism, when the Spirit descended upon Him (Mat 3:16), for it was then that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Act 10:38). This was freely owned by the Saviour Himself, for in the synagogue, He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," and then declared, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luk 4:18, 21). So too we find Him acknowledging, "I cast out devils by the Spirit of God..." (Mat 12:28).

Second, the Father promised to invest His Son with a threefold office. In order to the saving of His people, it was most requisite that whatever Christ did, He should act by the authority of the Father, by a commission under the broad seal of Heaven. Accordingly, He said, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren” (Deu 18:15, 18 and see Act 3:22). Christ did not run without being sent: It was God who anointed Him to preach. Again, “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest [He did not intrude Himself into that office]; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee (Heb 5:5)—Christ was “*made* an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 6:20). So also God the Father invested Him with the royal office: “Yet have I set [‘anointed’] my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Psa 2:6), “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper” (Jer 23:5), for “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (Joh 3:35); and therefore, hath He made Him “higher than the kings of the earth.” (Psa 89:27).

Third, the Father promised Christ strength, support and protection to execute the great work of redemption. His undertaking would be attended with such difficulties that creature power, though unimpaired by sin, would have been quite inadequate for it. It was to be performed in human nature, and *that* had failed in a much easier task, even when possessed of untainted innocence. Therefore did the Father assure Him of help and succour, to carry Him through all the obstacles and dangers, trials and opposition He would meet with. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold...I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will *keep thee*, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:1, 6). “The work of redemption was so high and so hard that it would have broken the hearts and the backs of all the glorious angels and mighty men on earth, had they entered on it; therefore, the Father engaged Himself to stand close to Jesus Christ and mightily assist and strengthen Him in all His mediatorial administrations” (T. Brooks, Puritan).

Christ is said to be “the son of man whom thou [God the Father] madest strong for thyself” (Psa 80:17), for He had sworn, “mine arm also shall *strengthen* him” (Psa 89:21). It is blessed to see how that the Redeemer, in the days of His flesh, acknowledged these promises. “I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly” (Psa 22:10). “Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother [see Mat 1:21, 22] hath he made mention of my name. And *he* hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me” (Isa 49:1, 2). “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned... For the Lord GOD *will help* me...and I know that I shall not be ashamed” (Isa 50:4, 7). In unshaken confidence, when His enemies were conspiring against Him, and His friends were on the point of forsaking Him, He declared, “yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (Joh 16:32).

Those promises of the Father were the support of His soul in the hour of His supreme crisis: His heart laid hold of them, acted faith on them, and received comfort and strength therefrom. “Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust” (Psa 16:1), was His petition and plea. “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. *For* the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” (Isa 50:6, 7). When He was denounced by the Jews and condemned by Pilate, He consoled Himself with the assurance, “He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me” (Isa 50:8). “I have set the LORD always before me:

because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:8-11). In the prospect of death, He rejoiced in the sure knowledge of resurrection.

Fourth, the Father promised Him a glorious reward. First, a glory for Himself *personally*, as the God-man Mediator. As He was to endure the cross, so He was also to receive the crown. The enduring of the cross was a covenant engagement on His part, and the bestowing of the crown was a covenant engagement on the Father’s part. That was plainly borne witness to by His prophets, for the Spirit in them “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, *and* the glory that should follow” (1Pe 1:11). That glory consisted in His being fully invested with His priestly and royal offices. As it was with that type, so with the Antitype. David was anointed incipiently and privately before he slew Goliath (1Sa 16:13), but formally and publicly after his victories (2Sa 5:12). The antitypical David was indeed “anointed with the Holy Spirit” at the Jordan, but not until after He had triumphed over sin, Satan, and the grave, did God anoint Him “with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Heb 1:9) and publicly make Him to be “both Lord and Christ” (Act 2:36).

“The solemn inauguration into all His offices was after His making reconciliation: making an end of sin, bringing in everlasting righteousness and thereby shutting up all prophecy and vision, because all the prophecies tended to Him and were accomplished in Him; and then as manifesting Himself the most holy, He was to be anointed—i.e. fully invested in all the office of Prophet, Priest and King (Dan 9:24). The compact ran thus: Do this, suffer death for the vindication of the honour of My Law, and Thou shalt be Priest and King forever. He could not, therefore, be solemnly installed until He had performed the condition on His part (for the promise was made to Him, considered as Mediator or God-man); then it was that He was advanced, for the ground of His exaltation is pitched wholly upon His sufferings. Therefore, God hath given Him a glory as a just debt due to the price paid, the sufferings undergone, and the obedience yielded to the mediatory Law” (S. Charnock). Hence, it is that the general assembly of Heaven say, with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Rev 5:12).

Subsidiary to that glorious investiture was the Father’s promise to *raise* Christ from the dead. “He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever” (Psa 21:4). Beautifully does that link up with Psalm 102:23-27—quoted by the apostle in Hebrews 1:12 as the words of the Father to the Son. In Psalm 102:23, 24, we hear the incarnate Son saying, “He shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days”—to which the Father made answer, “Thy years are throughout all generations...But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end” (verse 27). So again, He received assurance, “He shall prolong his days!” (Isa 53:10). The Father made promise that the One who had been bruised by Him and whose soul He had made “an offering for sin” should have a glorious deliverance and should reign in life. It was in fulfilment of such promises as these that “The God of peace [the reconciled One], that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20).

In like manner, subsidiary to Christ’s glorious investiture of His full priestly and kingly offices was His *ascension*, for though He was born King and acted as Priest at the cross when He “offered Himself to God” and “made intercession for the transgressors,” yet not until He had completely performed His part of the covenant could He enter into His rightful reward.

Accordingly, we find promise of ascension made unto Him. It was clearly implied in “I will make Him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Psa 89:27). It was revealed in, “Who shall ascend into the Hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His Holy Place?” answered by, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Psa 24:3, 7). It was plainly announced in “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive” (Psa 68:18). It was such promises as these the Saviour had in mind when He said “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luk 24:26).

“Behold, my servant shall deal prudently [consequently], he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high” (Isa 52:13). The 53rd of Isaiah—that wondrous chapter in which we have so solemnly, so strikingly, and so evangelically depicted, the vicarious sufferings of Christ—closes with that blessed promise of the Father: “*Therefore* will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death” (Isa 53:12). The similitude used there is taken from the honouring of military conquerors who, having in fight defeated and rooted their enemies, gained a great victory; and in consequence, are suitably rewarded by their princes—being exalted by them and given a share of the spoils or fruits of war. It was as though God the Father said: This My incarnate and successful Son shall receive such honour, glory, renown, and riches after His toils and conflicts as are meet for His triumphs. He shall have a glorious recompense for all His humiliation and sufferings at the hands of men, for His opposition from Satan and for His enduring of My wrath—for nothing less is due Him. The fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12 is seen in Ephesians 4:8, Colossians 2:15, etc.

“The obedience of Christ bears to these blessings not only the relation of antecedent to consequent, but of merit to reward; so that His obedience is the cause: and the condition being fulfilled by virtue of obedience, He has a right to the reward” (H. Witsius, the Dutch Puritan). That is the precise force of the “*Therefore*” in the above verse, as it is also in “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness [a summary of His work of obedience]: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Psa 45:7). It was not only that justice required it, but the covenant fidelity of the Father was involved therein—hence His assurance, “But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted” (Psa 89:24). Thus also the N.T.: Christ “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Phi 2:8, 9). It was Christ’s meriting the reward for *Himself* which was the ground of His meriting life and glory for *us*.

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Act 2:36). That was the whole burden or theme of Peter’s pentecostal sermon, the grand truth proclaimed therein and enforced by Scripture, that He—whom the Jews had vilified—God had glorified. Having faithfully fulfilled the terms of the everlasting covenant, the Saviour was elevated to dominion and empire over the world. God’s exaltation of Him in His human nature to His own right hand (Isaiah 33), was a full confirmation and demonstration of what He had acquired by His death. He made Him “both Lord and Christ,” seating “Messiah the Prince” (Dan 9:25) upon the throne of the universe. This is an economical Lordship, a dispensation committed to Him as God-man by the Father—just as He has “given him authority to execute judgment also” (Joh 5:27). The One whom His enemies crowned with thorns, God has “crowned with glory and honour” (Heb 2:9). He must be received by us as “Lord” before we can have Him for our “Christ”: He must have the throne of our hearts, if we are to receive His benefits.

It was promised Christ that “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth...Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper” (Psa 72:8, 11, 12). As of this in consequence of, “The LORD [the Father] said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool...The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psa 110:1, 4); that is, a *royal* Priest—“he shall be a priest upon his throne” (Zec 6:13). A regal inheritance was assured Him. Not only has He acquired the mundane inheritance forfeited by the first Adam, but as the risen Redeemer declared, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18), for the Father “hath appointed [Him] heir of all things” so that now He is “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:2, 3), wielding the sceptre of universal dominion. The “government” is upon “*His* shoulder” (Isa 9:6).

It was promised that a blessed harvest should crown His undertaking, that He should reap the fruit of His sufferings. “The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand” (Isa 53:10). What that signifies is intimated in such passages as the following: “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth” (Isa 49:8, 9). “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (Isa 55:5). “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa 60:3). To the One who came forth from Bethlehem, it was promised, “now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth” (Mic 5:2, 4). How fully these promises have yet been fulfilled or how much longer human history must yet continue we do not profess to know, but even now, “angels and authorities and powers” are “subject unto him” (1Pe 3:22). —A.W.P.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

6. Its Seasonableness

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...He hath made every thing beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:1, 11). If the whole of these eleven verses be read consecutively, it will be seen that they furnish a full outline of the many and different experiences of human life in this world—each aspect of man’s varied career and his reactions thereto being stated. That which is emphasised in connection with all the mutations and vicissitudes of life, is that they are all ordained and regulated by God, according to His unerring wisdom. Not only has He appointed a time to every purpose under heaven, but has made “every thing beautiful *in* his time.” Nothing is too early, nothing too late; everything is perfectly coordinated, and, as we learn

from the N.T., made to “work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

There is a predestined time when each creature and each event shall come forth, how long it shall continue, and in what circumstances it shall be—all being determined by the Lord. This is true of the world as a whole, for God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). This earth has not always existed. God was the One who decided when it should spring into being, and He created it by a mere fiat: “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa 33:9). Nor will it last forever, for the hour is coming when its very elements “shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pe 3:10). How far distant, or how near, that solemn hour is, no creature has any means of knowing; yet the precise day for it is unchangeably fixed in the Divine decree.

The same grand truth which pertains to the whole of creation applies with equal force to all the workings of Divine Providence. The beginning and the end, and the whole intervening career, of each person has been determined by his Maker. So too the rise, the progress, the height attained, and the entire history of each nation has been foreordained of God. “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). A nation is but the aggregate of individuals comprising it, and though its corporate life be much longer than of any one generation of its members, yet it is subject to the same Divine laws. Each kingdom, each empire, has its birth and development, its maturity and zenith, its decline and death. The Egyptian had; so had the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman.

What is stated in Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11 holds good of things in the spiritual realm; equally so with those in the material sphere—though we are more apt to forget this in connection with the former than with the latter. It is a fact that in the Christian life, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecc 3:1). How can it be otherwise, seeing that the God of creation, the God of providence, and the God of all grace is one. It is true there is much in the Divine operations, both in Providence and in Grace—which is profoundly mysterious, for “great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend” (Job 37:5). Yet not a little light is cast upon those higher mysteries, if we seek to observe the ways and workings of God *in Nature*. How often the Lord Jesus made us of that principle, directing the attention of His hearers unto the most familiar objects in the physical realm.

Again and again, we find the Divine Teacher using the things growing in the field to illustrate and adumbrate the things which are invisible and to inculcate lessons of spiritual value. “*Consider the lilies*” (Mat 6:28; Luk 12:27). Not only look upon and admire them, but receive instruction therefrom. “*Learn a parable of the fig tree*” (Mat 24:32; Mar 13:28). Yes, *learn* from it—ponder it, let it inform you about spiritual matters. When Christ insisted on the inseparable connection there is between character and conduct, He employed the similitude of a tree being known by its fruit. When He urged the necessity of new hearts in ordering for the reception of new covenant blessings, He spoke of new bottles for new wine. When He revealed the essential conditions of spiritual fruitfulness, He mentioned the vine and its branches. Yes, there is much in the material world from which we may learn valuable lessons on the spiritual life.

Take the seasons which God has appointed for the year and how each brings forth accordingly. The coldness and barrenness of the winter gives place to the warmth and fertility of the spring, while the vegetables and fruit which sprout in the spring and grow through the summer are matured in the autumn. Each season has its own peculiar features and characteristic products. The same principle is seen operating in a human being. The life of man is divided into distinct seasons or stages: Childhood, youth, maturity and old age. And each of those stages is marked by

characteristic features: The innocence and shyness of (normal) children, the zeal and vigour of youth, the stability and endurance of maturity, the experience and wisdom of old age—and each of these distinctive features is “beautiful in [its] time.”

Not only has God appointed the particular seasons when each of His creatures shall come forth and flourish, but we are obliged to *wait* His set time for the same. If we sow seeds in the winter, they will not germinate. Plants which sprout in the spring cannot be forced, but have to wait for the Summer’s sun. So it is in the human realm. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” We cannot put old heads on young shoulders, and though our moderns are attempting to do so, their efforts will not only prove unsuccessful but issue in disastrous consequences. As everything is “beautiful in his time,” they are incongruous and unseemly *out* of season. “When I was a child, I spake as a child...I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1Co 13:11).

In the light of what has been said, it is both interesting and instructive to ponder the ways of God with His people during the O.T. and N.T. eras. Much of that which obtained under the Mosaic dispensation was suited to that infantile period and was “beautiful in his time,” but now that “the fulness of time” has come, such things would be quite out of place. During that kindergarten stage, God instituted an elaborate ritual which appealed to the senses, and instructed by means of pictures and symbols. There was the colourful tabernacle, the priestly vestments, the burning of incense, the playing of instruments. They were all invested with a typical significance, but when the Substance appeared, there was no further need of them. They had become obsolete, and to bring forward such things into Christian worship—as Rome does—is an unseasonable lapsing back to the nursery stage.

All that has been pointed out above is most pertinent to the spiritual growth of the individual Christian—and particularly to the several *stages* of his development or progress, and if duly attended to, should preserve from many mistaken notions and erroneous conclusions. As the year is divided into different seasons, so the Christian life has different stages, and as there are certain features which more or less characterise the year’s seasons, so there are certain experiences, more or less peculiar to each stage in the Christian life, and a search of the year’s seasons is marked by a decided *change* in what the garden and the orchard then brings forth, so there is a variation and alteration in the graces manifested and the fruits borne by the Christian during the several stages through which he passes; but “everything is beautiful in his time”—as it would be incongruous out of its season.

Now though, the earth’s seasons are four in number, yet only three of them are concerned with fertility or production. The analogy pertains spiritually: In the Christian life, there is a spring, a summer, and an autumn—the “winter” is when his body has been committed to the grave in sure and certain hope of resurrection, awaiting the eternal Spring. Thus, we should expect to find that the more explicit teaching of the N.T. divides the spiritual life of the saint on earth into three stages; and such is indeed the case. In one of his parables of the kingdom of God, Christ used the similitude of a man casting seed into the ground (a figure of preaching the Gospel), saying “For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mar 4:28): *There* are the three stages of growth. In like manner, we find the apostle grading those to whom he wrote into three classes—namely, “fathers,” “young men,” and “little children” (1Jo 2:13).

Nothing which lives is brought to maturity immediately in this lower world. Instead, everything advances by gradual growth and orderly progress. God indeed created Adam and Eve in their full perfection, but He does not regenerate us into our complete stature in Christ. All the

parts and faculties of the new man come into being at the new birth, but time is needed for their development and manifestation. Moreover, as natural talents are not bestowed uniformly—to some being given five, to others two, and to yet others only one (Mat 25:15), so God bestows a greater measure of grace to one of His people than to another. There is therefore a great difference among Christians—all are not of one stature, strength, and growth in godliness. Some are “sheep” and others, but “lambs” (Joh 21:15, 16). Some are “strong”; others are “weak” (Rom 15:1). Some are but “babes”; others are of “full age” (Heb 5:13, 14). Nevertheless, each brings forth fruit “in his season” (Psa 1:3).

If more attention were paid unto the principles, which we have sought to enunciate and illustrate above, some of us would be preserved from forming harsh judgments of our younger brethren and sisters and from criticizing them, because they do not exercise those graces and bear those fruits which pertain more to the stage of Christian maturity. One would instantly perceive the folly of a farmer who complained, because his field of grain bore no golden ears during the early months of spring. Equally senseless and sinful is it to blame a babe in Christ, because he has neither the mature judgment nor the patience of an experienced and long-tried believer. To that statement, every spiritual reader will readily assent; yet, we very much fear that some of these very persons are guilty of the same thing in another direction: *Self-ward*—reproaching themselves in later life, because they lack the glow and ardour, and the zeal and zest which formerly characterised them.

Some older Christians look back and compare themselves with the days of their spiritual youth, and then utter hard things against themselves, concluding that so far from having advanced, they have retrograded. In certain cases, their lamentations are justifiable, as with Solomon. But in many instances, they are not warrantable—being occasioned by a wrong standard of measurement and through failing to bear in mind the seasonableness or unseasonableness of certain fruits at particular times. They complain now because they lack the liveliness of earlier days, when they had warmer affections for Christ and His people, more joy in reading the Word and prayer, more zeal in seeking to promote the good of others, more fruit for their labours. They complain that though they now spend more time in using the means of grace, others who are but spiritual babes appear to derive far greater benefit, though less diligent in duties than they are.

In some cases where conversion has been more radical and clearly marked, growth is more easily perceived, but where conversion itself was a quiet and gradual experience, it is much more difficult to trace out the subsequent progress that is made. As the Christian obtains more light from God, he becomes increasingly aware of his filth, and by apprehensions of his decrease, he will increase in humility. As spiritual wisdom increases, he measures himself by *higher* standard—and thus, becomes more conscious of his comings short thereof. Formerly, he was more occupied with his outward walk, but now he is more diligent in seeking to discipline his heart. In earlier years, there may have been more fervour in his prayers; but now, his petitions should be more spiritual. As the Christian grows spiritually, his desires enlarge, and because his attainments do not keep pace, he is apt to err in his judgment of himself: “There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Pro 13:7)!

Young Christians are generally more enthusiastic and active, yet the zeal is not always according to knowledge, and at times, it is unseasonable through neglecting temporal affairs for spiritual. A young Christian is ready to respond to almost any plausible appeal for money, but a mature one is more cautious before he acts, lest he should be supporting enemies of the Truth. The older Christian may not perform some duties with the same zest as formerly, yet with more

conscience—quality rather than quantity is what now more concerns him. As we grow older, greater and more difficulties are encountered, and the overcoming of them evidences that we have a larger measure of grace. Particular graces may not be as conspicuous as previously, and yet the exercise of new ones be more evident (2Pe 1:5-7). Measure not your growth by any one part of your life, nor by any single aspect of it, but by your Christian career as a whole.

It is by no means a simple matter to accurately classify believers as to which particular form they belong to in the school of Christ, either concerning ourselves or others, for spiritual growth is rarely *uniform*—though it ought to be so. Some Christians are weak and strong at one and the same time, in different respects, as both experience and observation show. Some have better heads than hearts, while others have sounder hearts than heads. So they are weak in knowledge, ignorant and unsettled in the Faith, who nevertheless put to shame their better-instructed brethren by their love and zeal, and their walk and fruitfulness. Others have a good understanding of the Truth, but are veritable babes when it comes to putting it into practice. Solomon was endued with great wisdom, but ruined his testimony through yielding to fleshly lusts. “A Christian should labour for a good heart well-headed, and a head well-hearted” (T. Manton, 1620-1677).

Again, it needs to be borne in mind that there are great differences in the same Christian at sundry times, yea, within a single season, so that the three stages of spiritual growth may coincide in a single saint. The maturest “father” in some respects may be as weak as a new born “babe” in other regards, and tempted as violently as the “young men.” The case of the godliest man is not always uniform. One day, he may be rapt into the holy mount to behold Christ in His glory, and the same evening, be tossed with winds and waves, and in his feelings like a ship on the point of sinking. Now he may, like Paul, be caught up into Paradise and favoured with revelations, which he cannot express to others, and anon be afflicted with a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. Calms and storms, peace and troubles, combats and conquests, weakness and strength, alternate in the lives of God’s people—yet in each, they may bring forth fruit which is “beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:11).

All that has been dwelt upon above may appear unto some of our readers as being so elementary and obvious that there was really no need to point out the same. Though that be the case, there are others who at least require to be reminded thereof. It is not so much our knowledge, but the *use* we make of it that counts the most, and often our worst failures issue not from ignorance, but from acting contrary to the light we have. A due recognition of the seasonableness or unreasonableness of particular spiritual fruits in the Christian life will preserve from many wrong conclusions. On the one hand, it should keep him from expecting to find in a spiritual babe those fruits and developed graces which pertain unto a state of maturity; and on the other hand, he who regards himself as a “father” in Christ must vindicate that estimation by banding forth far more than do young Christians. —A.W.P.

TO AMERICAN READERS

In order to give a double opportunity for at least one of each issue of the “Studies” to reach those of our U.S.A. and Canadian friends, who kindly take two or more copies, we have, for the last four years, sent the same with a two weeks’ interval between mailings, so that the second lot could go by a different convoy. But now that conditions on the Atlantic are reported to be much improved, we shall cease so doing, and during 1945 D.V., post two of each issue in the same envelope—no doubt that will be more acceptable. Yet *prayer* will still be needed that it may please God to protect your copies as they cross the ocean.



December

A WORD TO PARENTS

One of the most terrible tragedies of this war is that hundreds of thousands of our sailors, soldiers and airmen are going forth into active service without any saving acquaintance with God in Christ, and the great majority of them without even an intellectual knowledge of Him. Many of them grew up without attending the “churches,” and the few who went there heard, for the most part, nothing of God’s just claims upon them, nothing about the exceeding sinfulness and infinite guilt of sin—little about how Divine forgiveness of sins may be obtained, and nothing about the everlasting punishment in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14, 15) which awaits all who die with their sins unpardoned. What is still more pathetic (in the judgment of the writer) is that the great majority of these young men received no Scriptural and spiritual instruction in the *homes* where they were reared. As children, they listened to the jazz of the radio, rather than the songs of Zion; they saw their parents reading the Sunday newspapers rather than the Word of God; and never was the voice of prayer heard in the family circle. How far is any country entitled to be called “Christian” where the vast majority of its homes are Pagan.

But let us turn now to a very much smaller and more favourable circle. Let us contemplate the homes of “church members.” The fathers and mothers “belong to” some denomination, and occasionally, perhaps on each Lord’s Day, attend “Divine service”—mostly because their parents before them were accustomed so to do. Yet apart from for this single exception, there is nothing to distinguish them from “respectable” neighbours who make no formal profession at all. No family worship is conducted in these homes, and even on the Sabbath Day, the conversation is of the work from morn to night. The parents—while very solicitous about the bodily welfare of their children—act toward them as though they had *no soul*. True, some of them sent their little ones to the “Sunday school” where they were amused and entertained, and knew little more of Holy Writ at the finish than they did at the beginning; but that was a shelving of their responsibility and not a discharging of it.

Narrow the circle still further—and it is indeed a tiny one—and take the homes of those which charity requires us to regard as Christian ones. Here there is indeed a noticeable difference, but in only too many cases, it is merely a negative one. Here, there are no “Sunday” newspapers or world literature to grieve the eye. Here, the radio is silent during the Sabbath. Here, the whole family attend Divine service, perhaps morning and evening; and in the interval, there is a discussing of the sermon and the general conversation is on spiritual lines. In some of these

homes, God is honoured with family worship and an attempt is made to familiarize the children with the letter of Scripture. So far so good. But suppose the oldest boy is called to the colours, will he leave home knowing in theory at least what he must do to be saved? Will he, at camp, and later, perhaps lying wounded in a hospital thousands of miles from home, have the memory of father and mother kneeling with him ere he parted from them, as they earnestly committed him into the hands of the Lord? If not, then his parents failed him at the most crucial point.

Some who read this magazine are likely to have sons and daughters who have not yet quite reached the “calling up” age. Perhaps only a year or two is now left before they too will be required to leave home, joining the forces or one of the services. If so, it is high time you seriously took stock of the situation, and diligently sought help from above to redeem the time. You have not fulfilled the whole of your duty toward your offspring by sheltering them from the grosser elements of the world, by providing them with wholesome food, by sending them to a good school. Those things concern time: What about *eternity*? Are you setting before the children an example of piety, which will give them to feel it is real and not a pose? Is your Christian character winsome or depressing and chilling? Do they take knowledge of you that you have “been with Jesus” (Act 4:13)? Can they perceive that your affections are set upon things above and that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10)? Does your general demeanor in the home commend Christ to them?

Have you had a heart-to-heart talk with your son or daughter? Do they know that their eternal welfare is your deepest concern? Have you encouraged them to read the Word of God for themselves in private, and told them of the need for asking God to give them an understanding of it? Have you explained to them the Gospel of the grace of God, so that they are quite clear Christ is the sinner’s only Saviour? You may have prayed much *for* them in secret, have you ever prayed *with* them singly? These are duties you cannot legitimately transfer to a minister of the Gospel, nor should you desire to do so. They are duties and privileges which devolve upon *you* toward the fruit of your bodies. You may be deeply conscious of your weakness and unworthiness, but it is just *such* instruments that God is pleased to use—that the glory may be His. A broken prayer that is watered with tears is often more effectual than the most orthodox sermon.

Do you say, But the salvation of my children is not in *my* hands: God alone can save them. If that be an attempt to evade your responsibility by hiding behind the truth of Predestination, then such a rejoinder (pious as you may deem it) is of the Devil. Predestination is none of *your* concern. The *physical* well-being of the children was not in *your* hands, yet the knowledge of that did not hinder you from using all appointed means, and asking God’s blessing on the same. If you be a hyper-Calvinist, bear with us for a moment, dear friend. It was no cold and fatalistic Christ who, when He, behind the city of Jerusalem, “wept over it” (Luk 19:41). It was no hard and dry doctrinaire who declared, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1Co 9:22). If *your* belief of Election is hindering you from doing everything in your power to direct your offspring to Christ, you have an erroneous concept of that blessed truth. None ever believed more firmly in the sovereignty of Divine grace than did the apostle Paul, yet his belief therein did not hinder him from saying, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Rom 10:1). And we have but to read through the book of Acts to see how such a desire and prayer was expressed in constant and earnest efforts after this Salvation.

If the “Articles of Faith” subscribed to by the reader have bred in his heart a spirit of apathy, so that he or she assumes a more or less fatalistic attitude toward the eternal interests of those nearest and dearest unto them, then that is proof positive there is something radically defective

about those “Articles,” for the teaching of the Scriptures inculcates the very opposite spirit. Concerning their children, Christian parents are expressly bidden to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4), and that involves considerably more than “taking them to church” with them on the Sabbath, or even having them join in family worship each day. It signifies to give them such instruction that they shall become acquainted with the Lord, to train them *for Him*, to make known His claims upon them, to explain to them His Law and to preach to them His Gospel; and to relinquish not their efforts until each of them shall voluntarily avow with Ruth, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Rut 1:16).

It is indeed true that *you* cannot save your offspring, but it is both your privilege and duty to seek to be an *instrument* therein. The minister of the Gospel cannot save any in his congregation, but his knowledge of that does not deter him from seeking of God an appropriate message, putting forth his best endeavours in preparing that message for the pulpit, supplicating the blessing of Heaven thereon, and then delivering that message earnestly and expectantly. It has pleased God “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1Co 1:21), and there requires not to be a congregation before there can be “preaching,” nor a “consecrated building” for it to be done in. As Philip rode in the chariot with the eunuch, he “preached unto him Jesus” (Act 8:35). Thus, one may “preach” to a single individual! Let it be noted that Philip preached the Saviour to that Ethiopian out of Isaiah 53, and there is no more suitable passage in the whole Word of God for *you*, Christian father, to “preach” Christ from to your son or daughter. Once they leave your home, they may never again hear “the Gospel of Christ,” so make the most of your present opportunity.

A personal testimony and we conclude. The father of the writer was an exceptionally busy business man—so busy that for over thirty years, he never had more than three consecutive days’ holiday. He was a corn merchant, and after returning from market, attended to much of the clerical work in person, so that for years, he did not cease till 11:50 Saturday night. Yet he did not lie in bed Sabbath mornings, but took his children to hear God’s Word preached. He did not send us to “Sunday school” while he took a nap in the afternoon, but gathered us around him and spent a couple of hours in reading to us from the Scriptures, from *Fox’s Book of Martyrs*, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim Progress*, etc. Every day, he conducted family worship, and when we were too little to sit up for the evening, our godly mother took us around her knees and prayed with us. Those are sacred memories. “Them that honour me I will honour” (1Sa 2:30)—my parents honoured Him, and He honoured them by calling their firstborn into the ministry. —A.W.P.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

12. 2 Corinthians 13:14

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” (2Co 13:14). This threefold invocation is familiarly known as the Christian Benediction. The O.T. formula of blessing was authorised to be used in the assemblies

of Israel: “Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall [thus] put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.” (Num 6:22-27). But there is nothing to indicate that God required the Benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 to be employed in the Christian churches; yet there is certainly nothing to show that it is incongruous to do so. As a fact, it has been made wide use of; and that, because of its deep importance doctrinally and because of its appropriateness—for those words are both a confession of the Christian faith and a declaration of Christian privilege.

The Benediction contains a brief summary of *the Christian doctrine of God*. We say the *Christian* doctrine of God, in contradistinction from not only the horrible delusions of the idolatrous heathen, but also from the inadequate conception of Deity which obtained in Judaism. By the Christian doctrine of God, we mean the revelation which is given of Him in the N.T. more particularly. And that brings us to ground where we need to tread very carefully, lest we disparage or underestimate what was revealed of Him in the O.T. If on the one hand, we must guard against the fearful error that the God of the O.T. is a very different character from the God of the New; on the other hand, we need to be careful that we do not too fully read the clearer teaching of the New into the Old—or at any rate, conclude that those under the legal dispensation perceived the same significance in some of those things in their Scriptures, which we now interpret in the brighter light of the evangelical economy. Such statement as “the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth” (1Jo 2:8) needs to be remembered in this connection.

It has been erroneously and blasphemously asserted by German neologians and their Anglo-Saxon echoers, who deny the real inspiration of the Scriptures that Jehovah was but a tribal God, and that what is said of Him in the O.T. is but the views which the Hebrews entertained of Him. But it is greatly to be feared that many who reject such a Satanic crudity as that, and who regard the O.T. as being equally the Word of God with the New, nevertheless hold the idea (with varying degrees of consciousness) that the revelation which we have of the Divine character in the latter, is much to be preferred above the delineation given thereto in the former. But such is a serious misconception. The severity of God appears as plainly in the book of Revelation as it does in Joshua; in fact, the vials of His wrath are more fearful in their nature than the plagues which He inflicted upon Egypt and Canaan. On the other hand, the goodness of God, as made known in the Epistles, in no wise surpasses His benevolence as depicted in the Psalms. The God of Sinai and of Calvary are one and the same, as He is also the Author of both the Law and the Gospel.

In saying that we need to be careful not to read too fully into the O.T. Scriptures the clearer teaching of the New, we mean that while we who ever have the completed Word of God in our hands, and are thereby enabled, recognise more plainly that the substance of the truth of the Trinity of God is found in the earlier Books. Yet it has to be granted that there is no statement in them, which is quite as explicit as say, Matthew 28:19, and certainly, it is much to be doubted if the Jewish *nation* as such recognised that there were three distinct Persons in the Godhead. The grand truth made known under the old economy was rather the *unity* of God: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deu 6:4) in sharp contrast from the polytheism of the idolatries of the heathen. On the other hand, we have no doubt that individual saints in these times had a saving knowledge of the Triune God, yet not so fully perhaps as we have. “As God afforded a clearer manifestation of Himself at the advent Christ, the three Persons became better known” (John Calvin)—especially in the covenant offices and distinct operations.

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Pro 4:18). It is to be remarked that those words have a corporeate fulfilment as well as a personal: they apply to the Church collectively, as well as individually. The light of Divine revelation brought forth “here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:10, 13) and shone not in meridian splendour until Immanuel Himself tabernacled among men. The degree in which the doctrine of the Trinity was made known in the O.T. Scriptures no doubt bore a proportion to the discovery of other mysteries of the Faith. It was definitely revealed from the beginning, yet hardly with the same explicitness and perspicuity as now. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb 1:1, 2). This is the first contrast given in that epistle, the theme of which is the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Until the former era God’s revelation of Himself was fragmentary and incomplete, but in this final dispensation, His mind and heart have been fully told—only there, it was through such instruments as “the prophets”; now it is by the Person of His Own Son.

The Christian revelation comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. God is manifested in and by the incarnate Son, for as He can only be approached through the Mediator, so He can only be vitally and savingly known in Him. It was the grand mission of Christ as the Prophet of His Church to make known the character and perfections of God. That is signified by His title, “The Word.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (Joh 1:1, 14). A “word” is a medium of manifestation. I have in my mind a thought, yet others know it not. But the moment I clothe that thought in words, it becomes cognisable. Words then make objective unseen thoughts. This is precisely what the Lord Jesus has done: He has made manifest the invisible God. A “word” is also a means of communication. It is by my words that I transmit information to others. By words I express myself, make known my will, and impart knowledge. So Christ, as the Word, is the Divine Transmitter, expressing to us God’s full mind and will, communicating to us His life and love.

A “word” is also a means of revelation. By his words, a speaker or writer exhibits both his intellectual caliber and his moral character. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34), and our very language betrays what we are within. By our words, we shall be justified or condemned in the Day to come, for they will reveal and attest what we were and are. And Christ, as the Word, reveals the attributes and perfections of God. How fully Christ has revealed God! He displayed His power and illustrated His patience, He manifested His wisdom and exhibited His holiness, He showed forth His faithfulness and demonstrated His righteousness, He made known His grace and unveiled His heart. In Christ, and nowhere else, is God fully and finally told out. That is why He is designated, “Who is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), for He has set before our eyes and hearts a visible, tangible and cognisable representation of Him. Though “no man hath seen God at any time,” yet “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Joh 1:18)—that is, He has faithfully and fully told Him out—the word for “declared” is rendered “told” in Luke 24:35.

There was an infinite suitability that He who was in the bosom of the Father, even when He walked this earth, should declare Him, for only One who was His “fellow,” His co-equal, was capacitated to tell Him forth. So perfectly did Christ reveal Him that at the close of His ministry, He said unto Philip, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Joh 14:9), and to Him He affirmed, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world... And I have declared unto them thy name” (Joh 17:6, 26). By the “name” of God is meant all that He is

in a manifestative and communicative way. For what God is essentially in His absoluteness, in His ineffable majesty, in His incomprehensible boundlessness, in His self-existing essence, as three in one and one in three, the infinite Jehovah, cannot be made fully known to any finite intelligence, however spiritual, no, not unto eternity. It is in His love to His Church, in His covenant relationship to His people in Christ, in His everlasting delight to them in His Beloved, as the Medium and Mediator of all union and communion with them, that He has been graciously pleased to reveal and make Himself known.

That in and by and through the Lord Jesus Christ, *God is revealed* unto us is the testimony of the chief of the apostles when he declared Him to be “the brightness of his [the Triune God’s] glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb 1:3), where he was certainly speaking of Christ as the God-man—that is, of the Son as incarnate—as the same verse goes on to show: “when he had by himself purged our sins” (Heb 1:3). By that blessed statement, we understand that through Christ, a clear and full exhibition has been made of the Father’s personality, and that in the Mediator, all the glory of the Godhead is realised and manifested—so as for it to be reflected on the Church and hereby to be known and enjoyed, and so as for God to be glorified. A manifestation consists in revealing, so our Lord revealed and made known the “name” of God. He did so by His incarnation, by His holy life, by His magnifying of the Law, by His preaching, by His miracles, by His sufferings and death, by His triumphant resurrection, by His ascension. He did so by His Spirit, for it was more than an external manifestation of God which Christ made unto His own—namely, an internal, by supernatural revelation, just as He “opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luk 24:45).

That which we have dwelt upon at such length above is, that if the Benediction sets before us, in summarised form, the Christian doctrine of God, it is to the Lord Jesus we are especially indebted for that revelation; not exclusively in the letter of it, but supremely so in the spirit thereof. It is because this is not sufficiently realised, even by many of God’s dear people, and also because we find the subject so fascinating, that instead of entering at once into a detailed exposition of 2 Corinthians 13:14 or even of offering some more definite remarks upon the Holy Trinity, we deemed it best to make clear what we owe to our Redeemer in making known to us the character of God Himself and the relations which He sustains to us. As He averred, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will *reveal him*” (Mat 11:27). As none can approach unto the Father except by Christ’s mediation, so none can have any vital and spiritual knowledge of Him except by Christ’s supernatural revelation of Him to the soul.

When our Lord declared, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Joh 14:9), He uttered words with a far deeper significance than appears on their surface. Locally they were spoken more by way of reproof, for Philip had said unto Him, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (Joh 14:8). To which the Saviour replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?” My life, My teaching, My works, reveal plainly enough who I am. And then He added, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (Joh 14:9). But it is to be remembered that the Spirit was not then given as He now is, and that the hearts of these apostles were sore troubled (verse 1) at the prospect of His death and His subsequent departure from them. But in its deeper meaning, “he that hath seen me” refers not to any physical sight of Him, but he that has been granted a spiritual view of Him with the eyes of a Divinely-enlightened understanding—such an one is enabled to recognise His *oneness* with the Father, and to exclaim, “my Lord and my God” (Joh 20:28).

The two things we have mentioned above are brought together in that familiar statement, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). First, the clearest revelation of that God is and what He is, is made in the person of Christ, so that those who refuse to see God in the Redeemer lose all true knowledge of Him. Second, as the glory of God is spiritual, it can only be spiritually discerned. Only in God’s light can we see Him who is light, and therefore God must shine in our hearts to give us a real and experimental knowledge of Himself—for such knowledge of Him is not by mental apprehension, nor that which one man can communicate to another. Our reception of that light is not the result of our will or any effort put forth by us, but is the immediate effect of a Divine fiat, as when at the beginning of this world God said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen 1:3). God created light, and He awakens the dead souls of His elect, thereby calling them out of darkness into His own marvellous light, whereby they behold Himself shining in the perfection of grace and truth in the face or person of Jesus Christ. Nothing but the exercise of Omnipotence can produce a miracle so wondrous and so blessed. God shines in our hearts by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit.

Here then is found the answer to that all-important question, How may I obtain a better, deeper, fuller and more influential knowledge of God? By the heart’s occupation with the Lord Jesus. By studying and meditating upon all that is revealed in Holy Writ concerning His wondrous person and work. By realizing my complete dependency upon the Holy Spirit and begging Him to take of the things of Christ and show them unto me (Joh 16:14); and therefore, by abstaining from everything which grieves the Spirit and would (morally) hinder Him from performing this office work of His. Nothing can make up for or take the place of personal intercourse with the Redeemer. It is only as we behold, with the eyes of faith and love, the glory of the Lord in the mirror of the Lord that we are “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). Then let us emulate the apostle and make it our chief ambition and endeavour “that I may know him” (Phi 3:10)—for in knowing Him, we arrive at the knowledge of the triune God.

The Christian Benediction stands closely linked with both the baptism of Christ and the baptismal formula which He gave to His disciples. The former presents to us a most remarkable scene—for it was there that the three Persons of the Godhead were openly manifested together, in connection with that which gave a symbolical showing forth of the work of redemption. John the Baptist had come preaching repentance toward God and faith in His Lamb who should take away the sin of the world, while he also made definite mention of the Holy Spirit (Mat 3:11). When the Saviour presented Himself for baptism at the hands of His forerunner in the Jordan, He came as our Surety acknowledging that death was His due, and it was there He entered upon that path which was to terminate at the cross. As He rose from that symbolical grave, the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God in form as a dove descended and alighted upon Him, thereby anointing Him for His priestly work (Act 10:38). At the same time, the Father’s voice was audibly heard saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17). “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (Joh 10:17)—and here, while emblematically pledging Himself so to do, the Father attested His pleasure in Him and the acceptance of His offering.

Christ’s reception of the Spirit at the Jordan was the equipment for His messianic ministry. And as He was sent, and anointed by the Spirit, so He commissions and endows His ambassadors: “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:” (Joh 20:21, 22). After which He gave them the

great commission: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them [after they had been taught and become disciples or Christians] in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:” (Mat 28:18-20). Baptism into “the name” means baptism unto God, and the name of God in the new covenant is “the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”—the Triune God being now fully revealed. That was the culmination and consummation of Christ’s teaching concerning God. He ordained that rite for all time to be the initiating avowal of faith for all who would enter His kingdom. It is the inspired formula with which all believers are to be received into Christian fellowship, for it sets forth the fundamental doctrine of the Christian Church. It is both the basis of all Christian doctrine and the general confession of the Christian Faith. —A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

24. Fifteenth Miracle – Part 2

“Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day” (2Ki 6:31). This was the language of hatred and fury. Refusing to own that it was his own impenitency and obduracy which was the procuring cause of the terrible straits to which his kingdom was now reduced, Jehoram turned an evil eye on the prophet and determined to make a scapegoat of him. As though the man of God was responsible for “the famine,” Israel’s apostate king took a horrible oath that he should be promptly slain. He was well acquainted with what had happened in the reign of his parents, when in answer to the words of Elijah, there had been no rain on Samaria (1Ki 17:1), and he probably considered that his own desperate situation was due to Elisha’s prayers. Though just as Ahab declined to recognise that the protracted drought was a Divine judgment upon his own idolatry, so his son now ignored the fact that it was his personal sins that had called down the present expression of Divine wrath.

This solemn and awful incident should be viewed in the light of that Divine indictment, “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7)—and that, my reader, is true of *your* mind and of *my* mind by nature. You may not believe it, but He before whose omniscient eye your heart is open, declares it to be so. You may be quite unconscious of your awful condition, but that does not alter the fact. If you were better acquainted with the true God, made sensible of His ineffable holiness and inexorable justice, and realised that it was *His* hand that smites you when your body suffers acute pain or when your circumstances are most distressing, you might find it easier to discover how your heart really beats toward Him and the ill-will you bear Him. True, that fearful “enmity” does not always manifest itself in the same way or to the same degree—for in His mercy, God often places His restraining hand upon that wicked and prevents the full outbursts of their hostility and madness. But when that restraining hand is removed, their case is like that

described in Revelation 16:10, 11: “They gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”

And why do we say that Jehoram’s conduct on this occasion made manifest “the enmity of the carnal mind against God”? Because, while he was unable to do Jehovah any injury directly, he determined to visit his spite upon Him indirectly, by maltreating His servant. Ah my reader, there is important—if solemn—instruction for us in that. Few people realise the *source* from which proceeds the bitterness, the opposition made against, the cruel treatment meted out to many of the ministers of the Gospel. As true representatives of the Holy One, they are a thorn in the side of the ungodly. Though they do them no harm, but instead desire and seek their highest good, yet are they detested by those who want to be left alone in their sins. Nothing recorded in human history more plainly and fearfully displays the depravity of fallen man and his alienation from God than his behaviour toward the most faithful of His servants—supremely manifested when the Lord of glory took upon Him the form of a servant and tabernacled among men. It was just because He made known and revealed the character of God as none else ever did, that man’s hatred of and enmity against Him was so inveterately and fiercely exhibited.

“But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him” (2Ki 6:32). This verse also needs to be pondered in the light of other Scriptures. For example: “Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (Pro 1:33). The one who truly fears the Lord, fears not man, and his heart is preserved from those trepidations which so much disturb the rest and so often torment the wicked. No, “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings”—he shall neither have alarming anticipations of such, nor be dismayed when they actually arrive. And why not? “His heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD” (Psa 112:7). Rumours do not shake him, nor does he quake when they are authenticated. For he is assured that his “times” are in the hand of the Lord (Psa 31:15). And therefore, is he kept in peace. In the light of all that is recorded of him, who can doubt that Elisha and his companions had been on their knees before the Throne of grace, and now calmly awaited events. That is the holy privilege of the saints in seasons of acutest stress and distress: To “rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him” (Psa 37:7).

“And the king sent a man from before him” (2Ki 6:32). This man was dispatched post-haste ahead of Jehoram, either to announce his awful decision or to put it into actual execution. Had the king paused to reflect, he should have realized that it was one thing to form such a determination, but quite another to carry it out. Had not Benhadad, only a short time previously, sent a “great host” not only of footmen, but of “horses and chariots” against this servant of the Lord (2Ki 6:14)—only for them to discover their impotency against him! But when a soul (or a people) is abandoned of the Lord, he is given up to a spirit of madness, so that not only does God have no place in his thoughts, but he is no longer capable of acting rationally—rationality and spirituality are closely connected. “But ere the messenger came to him, he [Elisha] said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?” (2Ki 6:32).

“And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?” (2Ki 6:33). We confess we do not find it easy to ascertain the precise force of this verse, not even its grammatical meaning. The first sentence is clear, for the “while he yet talked” evidently refers to what Elisha was saying to the elders. The difficulty is to discover the antecedent of the “And *he* said”: the nearest is the “him” or Elisha; yet, certainly *he* would not say the proposed murder of himself (“this evil”) was “of the Lord” ordered by Him. The next is “the messenger”—but the prophet had

given definite orders that *he* was not to be admitted, nor would this agree with what follows in 2 Kings 7:1, 2. We, therefore, regard the second sentence as recording the words of the king himself, who had followed immediately on the heels of his messenger—thus the more remote, but *principal*, antecedent of verses 30, 31: just as we understood “the man whom ye seek” as meaning Jehoram, rather than Elisha (2Ki 6:19).

But what did the king signify by “*this* evil is of the LORD”? (2Ki 6:33). We certainly do not concur with M. Henry and Scott that he referred to the siege and famine—for not only is the grammar of the passage against such a view, but it is in direct opposition to everything else which is recorded of this son of Jezebel. He did not believe in Jehovah at all, and therefore, his language must be regarded as that of derision and blasphemy. The context shows he was in a towering rage, that he regarded Elisha as being in some way responsible for the present calamity, and that he was determined to put a sudden end to his life. Fully intending to execute his murderous design, he now burst in on the prophet and said, “This evil is of the LORD.” Those were the words of contemptuous mockery: you profess to be a servant of an all-powerful Jehovah, let’s see what He can do for you now—behold me as His executioner if you please. “What should I wait for the LORD any longer?” (2Ki 6:33). Jehovah has no place in *my* thoughts or plan: the situation is hopeless, so I shall waste no more time, but slay you and surrender to Benhadad and take my chance.

“Then Elisha said” (2Ki 7:1). “Then” looks back to all that has been before us in the last ten verses of 2 Kings 6. “Then”: when “all the hosts of Syria” were besieging Samaria; “then”: when there was a great famine and things had come to such an extreme pass that the people were paying immense prices for the vilest of offals, and mothers were consuming their own infants. “Then”: when the king of Israel had sworn that the prophet should be beheaded this very day; “then”: when the king in a white heat of passion entered Elisha’s abode to carry out his murderous intention. “Then”—*what?* The prophet gave way to abject despair and broke forth in bitter lamentations of murmuring rebellion? No indeed. Then what? Elisha flung himself at the king’s feet and pleaded with him to spare his life? Very far from it: such is not the way the ambassadors of the King of kings conduct themselves in a crisis. Instead, “Then Elisha said, [calmly and quietly] Hear ye the word of the LORD” (2Ki 7:1). To what import?—that His patience is exhausted, that He will now pour out His wrath and utterly consume you? No, the very reverse; the last thing they could have expected him to say.

“Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for [as little as] a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.” (2Ki 7:1). This brings us, third, to *the announcement* of the amazing miracle which was about to be wrought. In view of the next verse, it is quite clear that the prophet addressed himself to the king and those who had accompanied him. It was as though he said, I have listened to the derisive and insulting words which you have spoken of my Master; now hear ye that *He* has to say! And what was His message on this occasion? This: He is about to have mercy upon your kingdom. He is on the point of working a miracle within the next twenty-four hours—which will entirely reverse the present situation, so that not only will the Syrians depart, but there shall be provided an abundant supply of food, which will fully meet the needs of your people; and that, without a blow being struck or your royal coffers being any the poorer.

Admire here the remarkable *faith* of Elisha. “Then”: when things were at their lowest possible ebb, when the situation was desperate beyond words, when the outlook appeared to be utterly hopeless. Mark the implicit confidence of the prophet in that dark hour. He had received a

message of good tidings from his Master, and he hesitated not to announce it. Ah, but put yourself in his place, my reader, and remember that he was a man “of like passions” with us; and therefore, liable to be cast down by an evil heart of unbelief. It is a great mistake for us to look upon the prophets as super-human characters. In this case—as in all parallel ones—God was pleased to place His treasure in an “earthen vessel,” that the glory might be *His*. Elisha was just as liable to the attacks of Satan as we are. For all we know to the contrary and reasoning from the law of analogy, it is quite likely that the Enemy of souls came to him at that time with his evil suggestions and said, May you not be mistaken in concluding that you have received such a word as this from the Lord? Nay, you *are* mistaken—your own wish is father to the thought: you are deluded into imagining that such a thing can be.

Those who are experimentally acquainted with the conflict between faith and unbelief, who are frequently made to cry out, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mar 9:24) will have little difficulty in following us in what has just been said. They who know something from first-hand acquaintance of the tactics of the Devil, and the methods of his assaults, will not deem our remarks above as far-fetched. Rather, will they concur that it is more than likely Elisha was hotly assailed by the Adversary at this very time. Would he not pose too as an angel of light, and preach a little sermon to the prophet, saying. A holy God is now acting in judgment righteously scourging the idolatrous Jehoram; and therefore, you must certainly be mistaken in supposing He is about to act in a way of mercy. At any rate, exercise prudence, wait a while longer lest you make a fool of yourself: it would be cruel to raise false hopes in the starving people! But if so, Elisha heeded him not, but being strong in faith, he gave glory to God. It was just such cases as this that the apostle had in mind when he mentioned the faith of “the prophets” in Hebrews 11:32.

Ah, my reader, Elisha was assured that what he had received was “the Word” of Him “that cannot lie” (Tit 1:2), and no matter how much opposed it was to common sense and to all outward appearances, he firmly took his stand upon it. The “faith of God’s elect” (Tit 1:1) is no fiction but a glorious reality. It is something more than a beautiful ideal to talk about and sing of. It is a Divine gift, a supernatural principle, which not only overcomes the world, but survives the “fiery trial” (1Pe 4:12)—yea, issues therefrom refined. Elisha was not to put to confusion. That Divine “word”—though perhaps quite unexpected and contrary to his own anticipation—was faithfully and literally fulfilled; and remember that this is recorded for *our* learning and consolation. We, too, have in our hands the Word of Truth, but do we have it in our hearts? Are we really relying upon its promises, no matter how unlikely their accomplishment may seem to carnal reason? If so, we are resting upon a sure foundation, and we too shall have our faith vindicated and God will be glorified through and by us.

But let us look higher now than Elisha’s faith in that Divine word to the One who gave it him. It was the Lord manifesting Himself as “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10) to those who were utterly unworthy. In their dire extremity, the Lord had mercy upon them and remembered they were the seed of Abraham; and therefore, He would not entirely destroy them. He turned an eye of pity on the starving city and promised them speedy relief from the awful famine. How truly wonderful is His mercy! He was saying, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together” (Hos 11:8). But that mercy rested on a righteous basis, there was a handful of salt in Samaria which preserved it from destruction—the prophet and “the elders.” Rightly was Elisha styled by a later king, “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof” (2Ki 13:14), for his presence in their midst was a better defence than a

multitude of infantry and cavalry—a queen feared the prayers of Knox far more than any arm of flesh.

And may not what has just been pointed out provide a ray of hope for us in this, spiritually speaking, dark night? Of old Israel was reminded, “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?” (Deu 4:7). Has not *that* been true of Britain the past four centuries as of no other people? God has shown us favours, granted us privileges—such as no other nation in the world has enjoyed. And we, like Israel of old, have evilly requitted Him and abused His great benefits. For years past, His judgments have been upon us; and like Israel again, we have sadly failed to bow to His rod and turn from our sins. And now we are passing through the greatest crisis of our history, and our people after still impenitent. But thank God we have a king and queen who are radically different from Jehoram and his mother Jezebel. If God was so reluctant to abandon Israel, may He not continue to show us mercy, and for the sake of the little “salt” still left in our midst, spare us from destruction? Time will tell, but we are not left without hope.

“Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” (2Ki 7:2). Here was the response that was made to Jehovah’s word through His prophet: instead of being received with thanksgiving and tears of gratitude, it met with a contemptuous sneer. The courtier’s language expressed the scepticism of carnal reason. Unbelief dared to question the Divine’s promise—illustrative of the unregenerate’s rejection of the Gospel. This man argued from what he could *see*: as no possible relief was visible, he scorned its probability, or rather certainty. “And he [Elisha] said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof” (2Ki 7:2). Let it be noted that the prophet wasted no breath in reasoning with this sceptic. It is not only useless, but most unbecoming for a servant of the Lord to descend to the level of such objectors. Instead, he simply affirmed that this man *should* witness the miracle but be unable to share in its benefits. God Himself will yet answer that sceptics of this age, as He did that one, with condign judgment. Such will be the doom of unbeliever: they shall *see* the redeemed feasted at the marriage supper of the Lamb, yet not partake thereof (Mat 8:11, 12). —A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5d. Its Arrangement

Consider now Christ’s relation to the covenant. 1. He is the very *substance* of it: “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people” (Isa 49:8): as His our “propitiation” (1Jo 2:1, 2) and “peace” (Eph 2:14), so He is our covenant. 2. He is the *Witness* of the covenant (Isa 55:3, 4) for He saw, heard and testified it all; and therefore, He is termed, “the faithful and true witness” (Rev 3:14). 3. He is “the *prince* of the covenant” (Dan 11:22 and compare 8:11, 25), called “Messiah the Prince” (Dan 9:25), because He is given the royal right to administer it. 4. He is “the *messenger* of the covenant” (Mal 3:1), acting as God’s “Apostle” to us (Heb 3:1) and our

Redeemer Representative before God. 5. He is the “*surety*” of the covenant—“testament” is the same Greek word (Heb 7:22, 26)—because He engaged Himself to discharge the obligations of His people, its covenantees. 6. He is “the *mediator* of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6), because He stands between and serves both parties—God and His people. 7. He is the *Testator* of the covenant (Heb 9:16, 17), because He has sealed it with His blood.

Consider its various and descriptive designations. 1. It is an “everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20), because it was entered into before all worlds, and because its blessings shall be administered and enjoyed in perpetuity. 2. It is a “covenant of salt” (Num 18:19; 2Ch 13:5), because it is incorruptible, inviolable, perpetual; because its provisions seasoneth us and makes all our services savoury to God (compare Col 4:6). 3. It is a “covenant of...peace” (Isa 54:10)—for therein, Christ engaged to pacify the Divine Judge, remove the infirmity of His people, and effect a mutual reconciliation. 4. It is a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31)—for it secures for His people a new standing before God, makes them new creatures in Christ, and puts a new song in their mouths. 5. It is a “covenant...of life” (Mal 2:5)—for by its terms, life is promised, restored, and given more abundantly. 6. It is a “holy covenant” (Luk 1:72), manifesting the ineffable purity of God in all its arrangements. 7. It is a covenant “of promise” (Eph 2:12), both to Christ and His seed.

In view of what has just been pointed out, well may we adopt the language of Octavius Winslow and say, “This covenant must be *rich* in its provisions of mercy, seeing it is made by Jehovah Himself, the Fountain of all holiness, goodness, mercy and truth, whose very essence is ‘Love.’ It must be *glorious*, because the second Person in the blessed Trinity became its Surety. It must be *stable*, because it is eternal. It must meet all the circumstances of a necessitous Church, because it is ‘ordered in all things.’ It must be *sure*, seeing its administration is in the hands of an infinitely glorious Mediator, who died to secure it, rose again to confirm it, and ever liveth to dispense its blessings as the circumstances of the saints require.” To which might be added, it must be *inviolable*, since the eternal God is its Author, and the precious blood of Christ has sealed it. And therefore, it should be “all my salvation, and all my desire” (2Sa 23:5), for what more could I ask or wish!

Returning now to the covenant *promises* which the Father made unto the Mediator. In addition to those considered in our last, Christ was assured of a “*seed*.” “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed” (Isa 53:10). In the previous verses, we are shown what was required from Christ in the discharge of His covenant engagements. Here, we have revealed the reward which the Father bestowed upon Him because of His fidelity. In the last three verses of this wonderful chapter, we also behold the prophet replying to the Jews, who regarded the cross as the “*stumblingblock*,” being scandalized at the idea of their Messiah suffering such an ignominious death. But it is here pointed out that Christ’s crucifixion is not to be accounted an infamy to Him, because it was the very means ordained by God, whereby He propagated unto Himself a spiritual seed. He had Himself pointed out, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Joh 12:24).

Observe well that in Isaiah 53:10, it was promised Him, “He shall see his seed” which, coming immediately after, “when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” clearly implied His resurrection. Accordingly, this is more explicitly stated in what at once follows: “He shall prolong His days.” The figure is used again in the next verse: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:11). “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world” (Joh 16:21), considering her sufferings to be more than

recompensed by the happy issue of them. So the Redeemer deems Himself richly rewarded for all His pains by the children which are His, as the result of His dying travail: He is “satisfied” (Isa 53:11) and “rejoiceth” (Luk 15:7; Mat 18:13) as each one of them is brought forth.

“This seed” which was promised Christ, occupies a prominent place in the great Covenant Psalm—the 89th. There we hear the Father saying, “I have made a covenant with my chosen [or “elect”—Isa 42:1], I have sworn unto David my servant, *Thy seed* will I establish for ever” (Psa 89:3, 4). And again, “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever” (Psa 89:27-29). In the verses that follow, His “seed” are termed His “children,” and assurance is given that though they be wayward and the rod be visited upon their transgressions, yet God’s covenant faithfulness shall be seen in their preservation (Psa 89:31-36). In the Cross Psalm, it was declared, “A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation” (Psa 22:30). It was to be a perpetual seed: “His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun” (Psa 72:17).

Christ then was assured by the Father from the beginning of the success of His undertaking and promised a seed which should bear His image, serve Him, and show forth His praises. “I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth” (Isa 43:5, 6). Though they be born into this world in a state of unregeneracy, God promised they should be born again and savingly drawn to embrace Christ as their Lord and Saviour: “Thy people [said the Father to the Mediator—see verse 1] shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth” (Psa 110:3). Yet again, Christ is represented as saying, “Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me [quoted by the apostle of Christ in Hebrews 2:13] are for signs and for wonders in Israel, for the Lord of hosts which dwelleth in mount Zion” (Isa 8:18).

As there are two parts of the covenant, so the elect were given to Christ in a twofold manner. As He was to fulfill the terms of the covenant, they were entrusted to Him as a *charge*; but in fulfilment thereof, the Father promised to Christ to bestow them upon Him as a *reward*. The elect are to be regarded first, as those who were beloved of the Father before time began. They are designated God’s “own elect” (Greek of Luke 18:7), which signifies both His delight with and singular propriety in them. He chose them before all others, He preferred them above all others, and set His heart upon them. As such, the Father gave them to Christ as God-man Mediator—“set up” in the Divine councils; and therefore, having a real subsistence—as a choice expression of His love for Him. Second, they are to be regarded as God foreviewed them under their defection in Adam, and as such, God gave them as a charge to Christ to be raised up from all the ruins of the fall, and also as a reward for His work on their behalf. The twofoldness of Truth needs ever to be borne in mind.

Viewed as *fallen*, the elect were given to Christ as a *charge* for whose salvation He was held responsible. They were committed to Him as “prisoners” (Isa 49:9), whose lawful discharge He must obtain. They were committed to Him as desperate patients, whom He must bind up and heal (Isa 61:1). They were committed to Him as strayed and *lost sheep* (Isa 53:6), whom He must seek out and bring into the fold (Joh 10:16). God placed His elect in the hands of the Mediator and made them His care. How graciously and tenderly He discharged His trust appears in that touching word, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isa 40:11). It appears again in that wonderful word, “And when he hath found it [the lost sheep], he layeth it on

his shoulders, rejoicing” (Luk 15:5). Finally, it was evidenced at the moment of His arrest: “If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none” (Joh 18:8, 9).

On the fulfilment of His covenant engagement that people were given to Christ as His *reward*—as the fruit of His travail, as the trophies of His glorious victory over sin, Satan and death, as His crown of rejoicing in the day when all the inhabitants of the universe shall be assembled together, as His beloved and glorious Bride when the marriage of the Lamb is come. In contemplation of this, God made certain promises to the Surety concerning them. He promised to bestow upon them the gift of eternal life. “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, *promised* before the world began” (Tit 1:1, 2). As the elect then had no actual existence, that promise must have been made in their name to the Surety. That particular promise virtually included *all* the benefits which Christ procured for His people, for as “eternal death” contains the essence of all evils, so “eternal life” contains the essence of all blessings.

“The LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa 133:3); “This is *the* promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1Jo 2:25)—how perfect is the harmony between the two Testaments! If we break up that promise into its component parts we may say that, first, God promised to *regenerate* His people or bestow upon them a spiritual nature which delights in His Law: “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10). Second, He promised to *justify* them, the negative part of which is to remit their transgressions: “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:12). Third, He promised to *sanctify* them: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Eze 36:25). Fourth, He promised to *preserve* them: “I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:40). Fifth, He promised to *glorify* them: “they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa 35:10).

Finally, God made promise of *the Holy Spirit* to Christ. What we are now to contemplate is admittedly one of the deep things of God; and therefore, requires to be handled with prayerful concern and godly caution. But if on the one hand, we are certain to err should we deviate one iota from the Scriptures; on the other hand, it is to the glory of God and His Christ and to the needful instruction of our souls that faith humbly receives *all* that is revealed to us in Holy Writ. Now Scripture teaches not only that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon Christ (Isa 11:1, 2) during the days of His earthly ministry, that God put His Spirit upon Him to furnish Him for His great work (Isa 42:1), that He was anointed with the Spirit in order to preach the Gospel (Isa 61:1) and work miracles (Act 10:38; Mat 12:28), but the oracles of Truth make it very clear that Christ received the Spirit in another manner and for a different purpose after His ascension to heaven—namely, that to the God-man Mediator has been given the *administration* of the Spirit’s activities and operations; and this, both in the sphere of grace Churchward, and in the sphere of providence world-ward.

In John 7:39, we read that “Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified,” but He was both promised to Christ (Psa 45:7) and by Christ. Let us seek to attentively consider some of His statements concerning the Holy Spirit’s relation unto Himself. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send *in my name*” (Joh 14:26), the force of which is intimated in “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it

you” (Joh 16:23). Again, “But when the Comforter is come, whom *I will send* unto you from the Father” (Joh 15:26)—which is parallel with Christ’s being “sent” by Him (Joh 3:17). And again, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (Joh 16:7). Such repetition argues both the importance of this truth and our slowness to receive it.

To the writer, three things are clear concerning the above passages. First, each was spoken by the God-man Mediator—for they were the utterances of the Word made flesh. Second, from John 7:39 and 16:7, it is apparent that the advent of the Spirit was dependent upon the ascension of Christ. Third, from His repeated “whom I will send unto you” (Joh 15:26), we learn that in this present era, the activities of the Spirit are regulated by the will of the Lord Christ. That the Spirit is at the economical disposal of the Redeemer was evidenced after His resurrection and before His ascension—for to the apostles He said, “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (Joh 20:21); and then we are told, “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (Joh 20:22 and compare Gen 2:7). And as He was on the point of leaving them, the Saviour said, “Behold, I *send* the promise of my Father upon you” (Luk 24:49)—which was duly accomplished ten days later.

In Acts 2, when Peter explained the supernatural phenomena of the day of Pentecost, he said, “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having *received* of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, *he* hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Act 2:32, 33)—the glorified Saviour hath poured forth this effusion of the Spirit’s gifts. On which the Puritan Thomas Goodwin—after quoting Psalm 45:7 and explaining it by Acts 2:36—said on verse 33, “which ‘receiving’ is not to be only understood of His bare and single receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit for us, by having power given Him to shed Him down upon them, as God had promised, though this *is* a true meaning of it; but further, that He had received Him first as poured forth on Himself, and so shed Him forth on them, according to that rule that whatever God doth unto us by Christ, He first doth it unto Christ” (Vol. 4, page 121). It was the Saviour’s outpouring of the Spirit’s gifts which demonstrated He had been “made both Lord and Christ” (verse 36).

From the passages quoted above, it seems plain that upon the completion of His covenant work, the Father bestowed the Spirit on Christ to administer from His mediatorial throne. In full accord with that, we hear the Lord Jesus saying from heaven, “These things saith he that *hath* the seven Spirits of God” (Rev 3:1)—that is, “hath” to administer the Holy Spirit in the plentitude of His power and the diversity of His manifestations—compare the seven-branched candlestick in Exodus 25:30, 31 and the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit to Christ in the days of His flesh (Isa 11:1, 2). On the words, “He that hath the seven Spirits of God” (Rev 3:1), Thomas Scott says, “that is, the Divine Saviour, through whom the Holy Spirit, in the variety and abundance of His precious gifts and graces *was communicated* to all the churches.” So again, in Revelation 5:6, we read, “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst...stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns [compare Matthew 28:18] and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth”—here it is Christ exercising His governmental power and administering the Spirit toward the world—as in Revelation 3:1, it was toward the Church. Thus, if on the one hand, none other ever suffered such ignominy as did the Mediator; on the other hand, none other ever has received or ever will such marks of honour as He has. —A.W.P.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

6b. Its Seasonableness

The leading principle which we sought to enunciate and illustrate in our last—namely, fruit suitable to the season—receives exemplification in that statement, “A word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Pro 15:23): A word of sympathy to one in trouble, of encouragement to the despondent, of warning to the careless. Hence, we find the minister of Christ exhorted, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2Ti 4:2)—by the “in season, out of season,” we understand, at stated times and as opportunity occurs. The same principle was exemplified by the Baptist when he said, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Mat 3:8)—praising God for His mercies at that time would have been unseasonable; rather was godly sorrow for the abuse of them called for. There is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Ecc 3:4).

Fruitfulness is an essential quality of a godly person, but his fruit should be *seasonable*. A time of suffering calls for self-examination, confession, and the exercise of patience. A season of testing and trial requires the exercise of faith and courage. When blest with revivings and spiritual prosperity, holy joy and praise are becoming. It is written, “Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious...blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isa 30:18)—wait for the time He has appointed for the development and manifestation of particular graces. Unseasonable graces are like untimely figs, which are never full flavoured. Most of us are too impatient. “No chastening for the *present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous... nevertheless *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are *exercised* thereby” (Heb 12:11)—exercised in conscience as to what has given occasion for the chastisement, exercising faith for the fulfilling of this promise, and patience while awaiting the same.

As we turn now to look at the characteristics which mark the three stages of the Christian life, it must be borne in mind, (1) We are not to understand that what is predicated of the “fathers” in nowise pertains to the “babes,” but rather that the particular grace ascribed abounds in the former more eminently. (2) That what is said of each of the three may, in different respects, belong to a single Christian, so that “young men” who are “strong” may in another way, be as weak as the “babes.” (3) We must not lose sight of God’s liberty in apportioning His grace as and when He pleases: He works not uniformly, and causes some of His people to make much more rapid progress than others during the earlier years of their Christian lives, while others who seem slow at the start overtake and pass them at a later stage.

“I write unto you, little children [“teknia”], because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake” (1Jo 2:12). “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children [“paidia”], because ye have known the Father” (1Jo 2:13). This is the classical passage on the present aspect of our theme, though its force is somewhat obscured through the translators making no distinction between the two different Greek words they have rendered

“little children.” The passage of 1 John 2:12 pertains to the whole of the “called” family of God—irrespective of growth attainment, for every believer has had his sins forgiven him for Christ’s sake. The word used there for “little children” is a term of *endearment*, and was employed by Christ in John 13:33 when addressing the apostles, and occurs again in this epistle in 1 John 2:28; 3:7, etc.

Only in 1 John 2:13 are believers graded into three distinct classes according to the degrees of their spiritual progress: “fathers,” “young men,” and “little children”—or preferably, “babes,” to mark the distinction from the word used in verse 12. That is the order of dignity and responsibility: had it been the order of *grace*, it had been “babes, young men and fathers.” As someone has said, “If Christ were to enter a Christian gathering for the purpose of showing forth His favour, He would commence with the youngest and feeblest one present; but if to judge the works of His servants, He would begin with the maturest saint.” For example, Christ appeared many times after His resurrection: He ended by manifesting Himself to the apostle Paul, but with whom did He begin?—with Mary Magdalene out of whom He had cast seven demons! The same principle is illustrated in the parable of the “pence” (grace)—beginning with the eleventh-hour labourer; but reversed in the parable of the “talents,” where *responsibility* is in view.

As we are writing on the subject of spiritual progress—or as most writers designate it, “growth in grace”—we propose to inverse the order of 1 John 2:13 and consider first the spiritual *babes*. If anyone should consider we are taking an unwarrantable liberty with the Word in so doing, we would appeal to Mark 4:28, where our Lord spoke of, “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” And now as we seek to grapple more closely with our present task, we have to acknowledge we experience considerable difficulty in attempting to set forth with any measure of definiteness what it is which specially marks the spiritual “babe” in contrast from the “young men” and “fathers”; or if others prefer, that which distinguishes the “blade” from the “ear,” and “the full corn in the ear.” But if we cannot satisfy our readers, we trust that we may be kept from confusing any of them.

In view of the vastly superior conditions which obtained in the days of the apostles—illustrated by such passages as Acts 2:44, 45; 11:19-21; 1 Corinthians 12:8-11—it is not to be supposed that many of the features which marked that glorious period will be reproduced in a “day of small things” (Zec 4:10), such as we are now living in. The line of demarcation between the Church and the world was much more plainly drawn then than it is now; the contrast between lifeless and living professors more easily perceived, and so on. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the distinct stages of the Christian life and the different forms which believers occupied in the school of Christ, were then more plainly marked; and though the difference be one of degree rather than of kind, yet that very difference renders it the more difficult for us to describe or identify the several grades.

In his most excellent “Letters on Religious Subjects,” John Newton has three pieces entitled, “Grace in the Blade,” “Grace in the Ear,” “Grace in the Full Corn.” He began his second piece by saying, “The manner of the Lord’s work in the hearts of His people is not easily traced, though the fact is certain and the evidence demonstrable from Scripture. In attempting to explain it, we can only speak in *general*, and are at a loss to form such a description as shall take in the immense variety of cases which occur in the experience of believers.” It is just because so many preachers have failed to take into their account that “immense variety of cases,” and instead, have pictured the experience of conversion as though it were cast in a *uniform* mould, that numbers of their hearers and readers have been much stumbled, fearing they were never truly converted because their experience differed widely from that described by the preacher.

George Whitefield (1714-1770) states, “I have heard of a person who was in a company with fourteen ministers of the Gospel, some of whom were eminent servants of Christ, and yet not one of them could tell the time when God first manifested Himself to their soul.” Then he went on to say to his hearers and readers, “We do not love the pope, because we love to be popes ourselves, and set up our own experience as a standard to others. Those that had such a conversion as the Philippian jailor or the Jews on the day of Pentecost may say, You are not Christians at all because you had not the like terrible experience. You may as well say to your neighbour, You have not had a child, for you were not in labour all night. The question is, whether a real child is born: not how long was the preceding pain, but whether it was productive of the new birth and whether Christ has been formed in your hearts”!

Some are likely to object to what is said above and say, Though the circumstantial of conversion may vary in different cases, yet the essentials are the same in all: the Law must do its work before the soul is prepared for the Gospel, the heart must be made sensible of its sickness before it will betake itself unto the great Physician. Even though that should be the experience of many of the saints, yet the Holy Spirit is by no means tied down to that order of things, nor do the Scriptures warrant any such restricted view. Take the cases of Peter and Andrew his brother and the two sons of Zebedee (Mat 4:18-22), and there is nothing in the sacred narrative to show that *they* went through a season of conviction of sin before they followed Christ! Nor was there in the case of Matthew 9:9. Zaccheus was apparently attracted by mere curiosity to obtain a sight of the Lord Jesus, and a work of grace was wrought in his heart immediately, and he “received him *joyfully*” (Luk 19:6)!

Let us not be misunderstood at this point. We are neither casting any reflection upon those ministers who preach the Law by which a knowledge of sin is obtained (Rom 3:20), nor disparaging the importance and necessity of conviction of sin. Rather, are we insisting that God is perfectly free to work as He pleases, and that I have no Scriptural reason to doubt the reality of my conversion, simply because my heart was then melted by a sense of God’s wondrous *love*, rather than awed by a discovery of His holiness or terrified by a realization of His wrath; and that I have no warrant to call into question the genuineness of another’s conversion, merely because it was not cast in a certain mould. The all-important thing is whether the subsequent walk evidences that I have passed from death unto life. In Zechariah 12:10, “mourning” *follows*—and not precedes—a saving looking upon Christ! There are some who taste the bitterness of sin more sharply after conversion than they did before.

Now as the Holy Spirit is pleased to use different means in connection with the converting of souls, so also there is real variety in the experiences of those newly brought to a saving knowledge of the Truth. On the other hand, as there are certain essentials found in every genuine conversion—the turning from sin, self, the world unto God in Christ, receiving Him as our personal Lord and Saviour and then following Him in the path of obedience—so there are certain characteristics in babes in Christ which distinguish them from the “young men” and “fathers.” And the very name by which they are designated more largely defines those characteristics. As infants or little children, they are largely creatures of impulse, swayed by their emotions more than regulated by judgment. Feelings play large part in their lives. They are very impressionable, easily influenced, and largely unsuspecting, believing readily whatever is told them by those who have their confidence.

“I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father” (1Jo 2:13). *That* is the distinguishing mark which none other than that Holy Spirit has given of the spiritual infant. It is a statement which needs to be particularly taken to heart and pondered by some of our readers, for

it plainly signifies that unless we “know the Father,” we are not entitled to regard ourselves as being His children. In the natural life, the very first thing which babes and young children discover is an acknowledgement—in their infantile way—of their parents, aiming to call them by their names (“papa” and “mamma”) in distinguishing them from others. And thus, it is also spiritually the distinguishing act of babes in Christ to acknowledge God to be their *Father*, and this they do by expressing, in their way, their attachment to Him, their delight in Him, and their dependence on Him, lisping out His name in their praises and petitions before the throne of grace.

What we have just pointed out is agreeable to such passages as these: “Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me” (Jer 3:19) “I am a father to [the spiritual] Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn...Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?...I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD” (Jer 31:9, 20). In the first formal instruction which the Lord Jesus gave to His young disciples, He bade them, “After this manner therefore pray ye: *Our Father* which art in heaven” (Mat 6:9). How can we approach Him with any confidence or freedom unless we view Him in this blessed relation? If we have been reconciled to Him by Jesus Christ, then God *is* our Father, and “because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father”! (Gal 4:6)—and that spirit causes its possessor to come in a holy familiarity and childlike manner to God, and evidences itself in desire to honour and please Him.

Not only would it be misleading to our minds for the young convert (even though old in years) to be likened unto a “little child” (Mat 18:2-5) unless there was a *real resemblance*, and thus, a propriety in employing this figure, but it would also be a strange departure from one of the well-established “ways” of God, namely, His having so wrought in the first creation as to strikingly foreshadow His works in the new creation, the natural having been made to adumbrate the spiritual. We see that principle and fact illustrated in every direction. As in the natural, so in the spiritual: there is a begetting (Jam 1:18), a conception or Christ being formed in the soul (Gal 4:19), a birth (1Pe 1:23), and that birth evidenced by a “cry” (Rom 8:15), and the newborn babe desiring “the sincere milk of the word” (1Pe 2:2)—so there are many features in common between the natural and the spiritual infant.

Little children are far more regulated by their affections than by their understanding, and the young Christian is much taken with the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the comforts of the Holy Spirit. He delights greatly in his own experience, and to hear the experience of others. As the natural child is timorous and easily scared, so the young Christian is quickly alarmed, as was evidenced by the fearing disciples on the storm-swept sea, to whom the Saviour said, “O ye of *little* faith.” As the digestive system of a youngster is feeble, so the babe in Christ needs to be fed on “milk” rather than “strong meat” (Heb 5:12-14). “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (Joh 16:12). Owing to an undeveloped understanding, babes in Christ are not “established” in the Faith: “Be no more *children*, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).

“A young convert is much taken with his own importunity in prayer with his own enlargements and affections (they being very warm and lively), with the multitude of means and the much time he spends in the use of and observance of them; whereas, a believer of longer standing and greater measure of spiritual growth values those discoveries which the Holy Spirit gives him in prayer and inward converse with the Lord, of the Father’s free love, and the Son’s personal, particular, and prevalent intercession on his behalf: and he is more taken with those, than with his own fervour and supplications...The ‘babes’ in Christ are particularly affected with a sense and enjoyment of pardoning mercy and calling God ‘Father.’ Hence, the blessings of

pardon of sin, peace with God, the spirit of adoption, and an advancement in and an increased spiritual perception of these precious realities, must be a growth in grace such as is quite suited to their spiritual stature and circumstances” (S. E. Pierce). —A.W.P.

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1Pe 4:11). Those words define the principal duty of Christ’s servant: the Rule by which he must work, the enablement by which he is furnished, and the grand end he must ever keep in view—the glory of God. He is to speak not according to any human system, nor after his own fancies, but in undeviating harmony with the Word of God. If God is to be glorified, it must be by enforcing and opening up the teaching of Holy Writ, for God has magnified His Word above all His name (Psa 138:2)—that is, above any other revelation He has made of Himself. During our first pastorate, we wrote on the inside-page of our Bible, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it” (Deu 4:2). To which we then added Exodus 4:12; Isaiah 51:16; 55:11, and for many years, it was our practice to read them immediately before entering the pulpit.

But for the past ten years, we have been denied the holy privilege of preaching orally; and therefore, we are very thankful to find a place is given us in the above verse. As we seek to “minister” to God’s people by means of our pen, we can only do so “as of the ability which God giveth” (1Pe 4:11), and that it is our privilege and duty to seek. Not to lean unto our own understanding, but to ask wisdom from Above: wisdom to discern “the present truth” (2Pe 1:12)—what is most seasonable today; wisdom to preserve the balance, to minister appropriately to such widely different classes of readers. Yet our aim must be the same now as when our voice was employed: “That God in all things may be glorified” (1Pe 4:11); that our writings may extol the Triune Jehovah, and be of such a tendency as to promote holiness in the lives of our readers; that self may be mortified and Christ exalted.

It is only by heeding the rules laid down in 1 Peter 4:11 that Christ’s servant will be preserved from being either a self-seeker or a man-pleaser—two of the principal snares which beset him. If his message be according to the Divine Oracles, temptations to speculation or to adopt novelties will be nipped in the bud. If he labours according to “the ability which God giveth,” he will, on the one hand, be kept in the place of humble dependence, ever seeking fresh supplies of grace; and on the other hand, he will do with his “might,” whatsoever his “hand findeth to do” (Ecc 9:10). If he be regulated by this paramount motive, “that *God* in all things may be glorified” (1Pe 4:11), he will neither seek the smiles of men, nor fear their frowns. Instead of being in bondage to “what will people think and say of me,” his only concern will be the approbation of the One he serves.

“That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1Pe 4:11). If that be kept conscientiously and constantly before the mind and heart of the minister of the Gospel, it will not

only preserve him from self-seeking and men-pleasing, but it will also exert a disciplinary effect on his character and conduct. It will be a means of delivering him from slackness and slovenliness, from laziness and lethargy. He will not go into the pulpit unprepared, to preach a sermon which cost him no hard labour. And if his pen be employed, it will not scribble down the first things which enter his mind. Instead, he will “study to show himself approved unto God, a *workman* that needeth not to be ashamed.” While others are sleeping, he will be pouring over the Word or pouring out his heart unto God. He will preach or write to the very best of his “ability.” There is an old adage, “If a thing be worth doing, it is worth doing *well*,” and surely, anything done unto the Lord and in His Name is entitled to our utmost endeavours.

“That God in all things may be glorified.” Unless *that* be the editor’s grand aim in the publishing of this magazine, then far better that it should now cease and he fade out into silence. The years are passing swiftly by and most of our life on earth is already behind us. The days in which we are living are much too solemn for trifling. Not only is there everything in the profane world which makes against holy living, but there is little now left in the professing world that fosters it. Judging from the many letters we receive, an increasing number of God’s people are becoming more and more dependent upon the printed page for spiritual food. It comforts us to know that God’s glory is bound up in the good of His people; and therefore, the most effectual way to minister unto *them* is to be governed by 1 Peter 4:11. As the private Christian can only glorify God as his motives and actions are regulated by the teaching of Holy Writ, so the public servant of God can only glorify Him as his ministry is devoted to an explaining and enforcing of the Divine Oracles. Thus our course is plain.

If the editor of this little magazine be governed by 1 Peter 4:11, then his course is not only plain, but his task is greatly simplified. If he had to ‘think up’ subjects as secular writers, then he might often be at a loss for a suitable and profitable theme for his pen; but with the inexhaustible Word of God to turn to, with its endless variety of spiritual riches available, with the Holy Spirit to instruct him, there is no need or excuse why he should ever ‘run out’ of material. Had any other textbook been ours, after penning so many thousands of pages on its contexts, we should indeed be worried over how to find something new for our readers. To the praise of God’s grace, we can say that, so far from feeling it a wearisomeness or strain, we have had more joy in preparing this year’s issues than ever before. God *does* hear the prayers of His people on our behalf!

As many of our readers have never seen the earlier volumes, we repeat here what has been said in the past, and ask the friends to kindly *refrain* from addressing us as “Rev.” Though an ordained minister of the Gospel for upwards of thirty years, we have never felt we could accept any such title. The word occurs but once in the Scriptures: “Holy and reverend is HIS Name” (Psa 111:9); and in view of that verse, it seems to us most impious, a relic of popery, to so address any worm of the earth. We condemn not our brethren who feel otherwise, but simply ask friends to please respect our scruple of conscience.

During the earlier years of publishing this magazine, when we were also active in oral ministry, preaching five or six times a week for years, we often inserted several articles in an issue from the pens of God’s servants of the past; and hence, it was necessary to append the name of each author. But since all doors have been closed against us—through our refusal to join any particular denomination and limit our activities thereto, instead of remaining “the Lord’s free man”—our energies have been undivided and more time became available for writing; until this year, every article in the “Studies” has been from our own pen. If we are spared, this will likely be the case, more or less in the future, so we shall no longer obtrude our initials at the close of each article. Will readers therefore please note that, henceforth, all unsigned articles are by the editor.

Throughout another year, the Lord has favoured us both with health and strength and freely supplied our every need. Though there is much lost ground to be recovered, we are thankful to say our 1944 circulation has shown a welcome increase. Once again, we close with a credit balance. Our principal trial now is, and will likely be, the difficulty of getting the magazine printed. Printers are short staffed, handicapped by the absenteeism of workmen, and tempted to do temporary work for the Government at high rates. We are always prompt in forwarding manuscript. We thank our readers for being patient, especially those abroad, and ask them to make *this* a definite matter of prayer. We hope to continue the present series of articles in 1945, and that the 1944 bound volume will be available by the end of January—at 5/6 post paid (\$1.25). Commending you all to God and the Word of His grace, Yours by Divine mercy. —*A.W. and Vera E. Pink*



APPENDICES

About Studies in the Scriptures

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote and published his monthly 28 page expository digest, *Studies in the Scriptures*, from 1922 to 1953. He mailed it worldwide by paid subscription to whomever desired the deeper truths of God. Each issue contained continuing serialized articles on six to eight subjects. When one subject was “completed” to the author’s satisfaction, another subject series began in its place in the next issue. In total, the 380 issues comprise a treasure of immense proportions.

By God’s grace, Chapel Library republishes the *Studies* beginning with the year 1934, available for download worldwide, and mailing three issues each quarter by free subscription in North America. We also print many books and booklets gleaned from articles in the *Studies*. These may be ordered in print in North America, or downloaded from our website worldwide without charge:

Studies: www.chapellibrary.org/studies

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Today the various subjects are being gathered together by topic, and republished in paperbacks by several sources. *Chapel Library* offers the following at the time of this printing:

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| - The Sovereignty of God | 176 pages |
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| - The Attributes of God | 105 pages |
| - The Doctrine of Human Depravity | 241 pages |
| - The Doctrine of Revelation | 214 pages |

- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 1 190 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 2 173 pages
- The Holy Spirit 196 pages

Biography of A.W. Pink

by Erroll Hulse

Concerning Calvinism⁸ and Arminianism⁹ during the first half of the Twentieth Century, a most interesting case study is the experience of Arthur W. Pink. He was a preacher and writer of outstanding talent who ministered in Britain, America, and Australia. When he died in 1952 in isolation on the Island of Lewis in north eastern Scotland, he was hardly known outside a small list of subscribers to his magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. Yet, by the 1970s, his books were in wide demand and his name was widely known among publishers and ministers. In fact, for that period it would be difficult to find a reformed author whose books were more widely read.

The preaching ministry of A. W. Pink had been remarkably blessed in the USA, but it was in Australia that he seemed to reach the apex of his public ministry, and there in particular that his preaching ministry reached great heights. He was then faced with accreditation by the Baptist Union and was rejected on account of his Calvinistic views. He then ministered in a Baptist church of Strict Baptist pedigree. There he came unstuck since they esteemed him an Arminian! A considerable group, however, appreciated Pink, recognised his worth, and seceded from that Strict Baptist Church to form a new church of 27 members. Then suddenly, in 1934, Pink resigned and returned to Britain. It is widely held that one rejection is enough to cripple a minister for life, but two in quick succession can destroy a pastor completely. So it proved for Arthur Pink. He never again found meaningful entrance into the ministry, though he tried his utmost. He sought openings in both the UK and the USA without success. He became increasingly isolated. He ended his days as an evangelical recluse in the Island of Stornoway off the coast of Scotland. It was rumoured that not more than ten souls attended his funeral.

There is much that we can learn from the life of A. W. Pink. Firstly, we will trace out his early life in broad outline. Secondly, we will describe his experience in Australia, and trace out the adverse effects of this on his life. Thirdly, we will the impact of his writing ministry.

1. Early Life

Arthur Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886. His parents were godly. They lived by the Bible and kept the Lord's Day holy. Arthur was the first of three children brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. To the grief of their parents, all three children drifted into lives of unbelief. Worse was to come: Arthur embraced *Theosophy*, an esoteric cult that claimed powers of the occult! "Lucifer" was the name of the leading theosophy magazine. A natural feature of Arthur's character was wholeheartedness, and he entered theosophy with zeal. A leadership role was offered him, which meant that he would visit India. At the same time a friend

⁸ **Calvinism** – the doctrinal system developed from the teachings of the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), holding that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the "doctrines of grace"; these doctrines were the response of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) to the Arminians' remonstrance (protest) and are commonly known by the acronym TULIP.

⁹ **Arminianism** – (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) the doctrinal system that rejects the Reformers' understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

who was an opera singer, noted that Arthur possessed a fine baritone voice; he urged him to study for a career in opera. Then suddenly on a night during 1908, Arthur was converted. His first action was to preach the Gospel to the theosophist group.

Simultaneous with Pink's conversion was a call to the Christian ministry. But the colleges were in the hands of liberals bent on the destruction of the Scriptures. Arthur, however, heard of the Moody Bible Institute, which had been founded by D. L. Moody¹⁰ in 1889. In 1910, aged 24, Pink left for Chicago to begin a two-year course. His time at Moody lasted only six weeks, however. He decided that he was wasting his time, and that he should enter directly into a pastorate—and his professors agreed! He was not disgruntled, but rather frustrated, that the teaching was pitched at such a primary level that it did nothing for him.

During 1910, he began in his first pastorate in Silverton, Colorado, a mining camp in the San Juan Mountains. We possess little detail of this period, but we know that from Silverton, Pink moved to Los Angeles. He was always a hard worker, and this is illustrated by the fact that at one point in Oakland he was engaged in tent evangelism six nights a week for eighteen weeks!

From Los Angeles, he moved to Kentucky. It was here that he met and married Vera E. Russell. There could not have been a better gift from heaven. Vera was entirely committed to the Lord. She was hard working, gifted, intelligent, and persevering. She died just ten years after Arthur's decease on the island of Stornoway.

The next move was to Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1917 to 1920. This church building consisted of a small and frail wooden structure, while he and Vera lived in a small wooden house standing on wooden columns. Heating was inadequate, and in the freezing winter it was like an ice box.

It was during this time Pink began writing books. There were two of significance: one with the title *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, and the second *The Sovereignty of God*, the foreword of which is dated June 1918. It was this book that was later taken up by The Banner of Truth publishers. The first edition, according to I. C. Herendeen, his first publisher at that time, was only 500 copies, and it was a struggle to sell that number. When the book came to Banner, it was edited by Iain Murray and vastly improved. It became one of the most popular of The Banner of Truth paperbacks. By 1980, 92,000 copies had sold.

After about a year at Spartanburg, Pink almost came to grief. He felt a strong conviction to give up the ministry and devote himself to writing only, and at one point was disconsolate. Vera wrote to a friend saying that her husband was even thinking of leaving the ministry and going into business, to make money for the Kingdom as a better way of serving God. In 1920, Arthur resigned the pastorate at Spartanburg. He and Vera moved and settled at Swengel, Pennsylvania, in order to be near the publisher I. C. Herendeen.

In the middle of July, 1920, he left to take a series of meetings in California. Large crowds gathered and numbers were saved. At one point 1,200 gathered to hear the Gospel. Other crusades and conferences followed; it was evident that Pink was eminently suited to this kind of ministry. Looking back over his life, it is apparent that he experienced more blessing in the itinerant ministry than he did in a total of twelve years in pastoring churches. This had to do with his temperament; he preferred being in his study to visiting.

¹⁰ **D. L. Moody** (1837-1899) – American evangelist and publisher who founded the Moody Church, Northfield School and Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts (now the Northfield Mount Hermon School), the Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Publishers.

In 1921, Arthur and Vera were back in Pennsylvania. The monthly digest, the *Studies in the Scriptures*, first appeared in 1922. It ran continuously without interruption for 32 years, until Arthur's death in 1952. Initially, this was a 24 page magazine, with four to six articles as instalments in a series. To write expository material at a high standard at this rate every month is a tremendous testimony to his insight into the Scriptures, and to the Lord's blessing and enabling. All his articles had to be written by hand and finished for the printer at least two months before the date of publication. *Studies in the Scriptures* had about 1,000 circulation at the beginning, but for most of its existence the subscription level hovered at about 500. The financial side was always precarious, with only just enough to cover printing costs from one month to the next. Pink corresponded with some of his subscribers; eventually this formed his pastoral work. Throughout he was assisted by his very hard working wife, who acted as secretary. They never had a family, always lived very humbly, and managed always to make ends meet. This was made possible through a modest inheritance left to him by his parents and through gifts that he received from his readers.

During 1923, Arthur fell into a deep depression, which turned out to be a nervous breakdown. At this juncture a young couple that had been greatly blessed by Pink's ministry came to the rescue, and Arthur was nursed through a period of several months enforced rest, which brought him back to normal health.

In 1924, a major new direction came by way of letters of invitation from a publisher in Sydney, Australia. Before departing for Australia, no less than four months preparation had to be made for the *Studies*. On his way to Australia, Pink engaged in more Bible conference preaching in Colorado, then in Oakland, California, and also San Francisco—from where he and Vera took ship across the Pacific to Sydney.

2. *Pink's Experience in Australia*

The Pinks spent a total of three and half years in Australia. These times were for them the best, but also turned out to be the worst. Upon arrival Arthur had more invitations than he possibly fill. Initially his ministry in Australia was a great success. Crowds gathered; churches were filled; believers were revived; and souls were brought to the Saviour.

Attendance swelled in every place he preached. In the first year in Australia Arthur preached 250 times. He would often work until 2:00 in the morning to keep *Studies in the Scriptures* going. The Pinks truly must have felt that at last they had found the place of permanent fulfilment. There was an evident power in his ministry. One mature believer declared that he drew people "like a magnet," and that he preached the "whole counsel of God's Word," and was capable of preaching a sermon "from every word of the text."

This period proved to be one of great joy. Pink was now 40 years old. He was preaching almost daily for well over an hour. He would get home at 10:00 PM and then work until 2:00 AM. He wrote, "never before during our 16 years in the ministry, have we experienced such blessing and joy in our souls, such liberty of utterance, and such an encouraging response as we have done in this highly favoured portion of Christ's vineyard."¹¹

We can be sure that a thrilling and powerful soul-saving ministry will arouse the fury of Satan. And so it proved to be in this case when that old serpent, the devil, mounted a cunning counterattack. The Baptist Union leaders were fundamentally opposed to Calvinism. These leaders invited Arthur Pink to read a paper on "Human Responsibility." Sadly, Pink did not

¹¹ *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, by Iain H. Murray, The Banner of Truth Trust, p 49

realise that this was a plot to demote him in the eyes of the public—and in his sincere earnestness he fell into the trap. Instead of declining this invitation, he presented the paper and then answered questions for over an hour. The result of this was that the BU of New South Wales published a statement that they agreed unanimously *not* to endorse his ministry. What they really meant (for they did not themselves clarify any doctrine) is that they did not agree with Pink's Reformed doctrine. They were fundamentally Arminian. The effect of all this was that invitations dried up, and Pink's wider effective ministry in Australia was drastically reduced.

It was at this juncture that one of three Strict and Particular Baptist Churches invited Pink to become its pastor. This church was known as the Belvoir Street Church. Here Pink was as busy as he had ever been in his life. He had preached 300 times in the year ending 1926. In addition to preaching three times a week at Belvoir Street, he preached in three different places in Sydney each week to an average of 200 at each meeting. He still managed to maintain *Studies in the Scriptures* by burning midnight oil.

Trouble however was in store. The early part of the Twentieth Century was a time of lack of clarity in doctrine. One of the evidences of this was confusion over Calvinism, Arminianism, and hyper-Calvinism.¹² Many churches polarized. The Baptist Union was Arminian, and the Strict and Particular Baptists tended to be hyper-Calvinist. This proved to be the case at Belvoir Street. Until about May 1927, the Pinks believed that they had found a permanent church home.

3. *Impact of Pink's Writing Ministry*

If history had progressed normally, Arthur Pink would have been forgotten. There are several leaders in each generation who are well known, but it is unlikely that their names will be remembered for very long. When Arthur Pink died, he was known to a small circle of readers—about 500—who read his monthly periodical *Studies in the Scriptures*, which he had faithfully produced with the help of his wife Vera for 31 years. Yet, after his decease, as his writings were collected and published as books, his name became very well known in the English-speaking evangelical world. During the 1960s and '70s, there was a dearth of reliable expository writing; Pink's writings filled an important need. His expositions are God-centred, theologically compelling, and reliable—as well as practical and experimental. That was precisely what was needed during a period of spiritual drought. Publishers discovered the value of his writings. The outcome was dramatic.

For instance, Baker Book House published twenty-two different titles by Pink, with a combined total sales by 1980 of 350,000. By the same date just three books (*Sovereignty of God*, *Life of Elijah*, and *Profiting from the Word*) totaled 211,000. Yet as contemporary reformed authors have multiplied, so the demand for Pink's books has lessened.

We must remember that with the dawning of the twentieth century, the mainline denominations had already suffered extensive losses to higher criticism and modernism. Such was the advance of modernism in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, most Bible colleges and seminaries were lost to an agenda of unbelief and anti-Christianity. Instead of producing preacher/pastors for the churches, men were sent out who emptied the churches. The most striking example is Methodism. The aggregate membership in

¹² **hyper-Calvinism** – the doctrinal error that holds men need not evangelize, since God will save His elect children with or without the means of preaching the Word. This represents only one side of biblical truth; the other is that God is pleased to use human instruments as means to His work, and the preaching of the Word is uniquely marked out for this purpose (2Ti 4:2; 2Ti 3:16; Mat 28:19).

Methodism grew to be the highest of the non-conformist churches. Yet this denomination has been virtually annihilated by modernism.

The writings of Pink provided not only food for the spiritually hungry, but as Iain Murray asserts, “Pink has been immensely important in reviving and stimulating doctrinal reading at the popular level. The same can be said of few other authors of the twentieth century.”¹³

***Erroll Hulse** serves as Associate Pastor at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church in Leeds, England. Since 1970, he has edited and written extensively for Reformation Today, a bi-monthly international digest. He has authored numerous books and articles. Pastor Hulse studied theology at the London Bible College and benefited from the ministry of Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.*

¹³ *ibid.*

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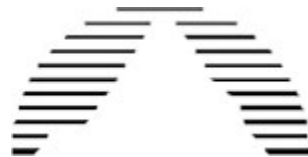
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