

**October, 1936**  
**STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES**  
**The Spirit Interceding.**

God's Word is designed to have a twofold effect upon the Christian: a distressing and a comforting. As we appropriate the Scriptures to ourselves, pride will be abased and the old man cast down; on the other hand faith will be strengthened and the new man built up. Our poor hearts first need humbling, and then exalting; we must be made to mourn over our sins, and then be filled with praise at the realisation of God's amazing grace. Now in Romans 8:26, 27 there is that which should produce *both* these effects upon us. First, we are reminded of "our *infirmities*" or weaknesses: not the plural number, for we are full of them—how our apprehension of this should "hide pride from us!" Yet, second, here is also real ground for comfort and hope: "The Spirit also *helpeth* our infirmities." The frail and erring believer is not left to himself: a gracious, all-powerful, ever-present Helper is given to support and assist him. How this blessed fact should rejoice our hearts!

The tones of Scripture, then, fall upon the ear of God's children in ever alternating keys: the minor and the major. So it is in the passage before us, for next we read "*we know not* what we should pray for as we ought." What a pride-withering word is that! One which is in direct variance with what is commonly supposed. The general belief is that men *do know* well enough what they should pray for, but they are so careless and wicked they do not discharge this duty; but God says, they "*know not*." Nor can the godliest saint or wisest minister help the unregenerate at this point, by drawing up for them a form of words, which suitably expresses their needs, for it is one thing to have Scriptural words upon our lips, but it is quite another for the soul to *feel* his dire need of what he asks for; it is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh in prayer, or God will not hear.

But the words of our text are yet more searching and solemn: they refer not to the unregenerate (though of course it *is* of them), but to the regenerate: "*we* (Christians) know not what we should pray for as we ought." And again we say what a heart-humbling word is this. Now that we are partakers of the Divine nature, now that a way has been opened for us into the presence of God, now that we access to the Throne of Grace itself, now that we are invited to "make known our requests"; yet so fearfully has sin darkened our judgment, so deceitful and wicked are our hearts, so blind are we as to what would truly promote the manifestative glory of God and what would really be for our highest good, that "*we know not* what we should pray for as we ought." Do you actually *believe this*, my reader? If you *do*, it must bring you into the dust before the One with whom we have to do.

"We know not what we should pray for as we ought." No, we "know not" even with the Bible in our hands, in which are full instructions to direct praying souls; in which are so many inspired prayers for our guidance. No, we "know not" even after the Lord Himself has graciously supplied us with a pattern prayer, after which ours should be modeled. Sin has so perverted our judgments, self-love has so filmed our eyes, worldliness has so corrupted our affections, that even with a Divine manual of prayer in our hands, we are quite incapable (of ourselves) of discerning *what* we should ask for—supplies of Divine grace to minister to our *spiritual* needs; and are unable to present our suit in a spiritual manner, acceptable to God. How the recognition of this fact should empty our hearts of

conceit! How the realisation of it should fill us with shame! What need have we to cry, "Lord, teach us *to pray!*"

But now on the other side: lest we should be utterly cast down by a sense of our excuseless and guilty ignorance, we are Divinely informed "the Spirit itself *maketh intercession for us.*" Wondrous indeed, unspeakably blessed, is this. Instead of turning away from us in disgust because of our culpable ignorance, God has not only provided us with an Intercessor at *His* right hand (Heb. 7:25); but what is to the writer even more remarkable, God has given His needy people a Divine Intercessor at *their* right hand, even the Holy Spirit. How this glorious fact should raise our drooping souls, revolutionize our ideas of prayer, and fill our hearts with thanksgiving and praise for this unspeakable Gift. If it be asked, Why has God provided *two* Intercessors for His people, the answer is: *to bridge the entire gulf between Him and us.* One to represent *God* to us, the Other to represent us before God. The One to *prompt* our prayers, the Other to *present* them to the Father. The One to ask blessings *for* us, the Other to convey blessings *unto us!*

It is indeed striking to observe this alternation between the minor and major keys running all through our passage, for next we are told, "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with *groanings* which cannot be uttered." This, as we have seen, refers to the inward anguish which the Spirit produces in the believer. Here, then, is further ground for self-abasement: even when a sense of need has been communicated to us, so sottish are we that our poor hearts are overwhelmed, and all we can do is to sigh and groan; even when the Spirit has convicted us of our corruptions and imparted a deep yearning for Divine grace, we are incapable of articulating our wants or expressing our longings: rather is our case then like the Psalmist's, "I was *dumb* with silence" (39:2). If left to ourselves, the distress occasioned by our felt sinfulness would quite *disable* us to pray.

It may be objected, To what purpose is it that the Spirit should stir up such "groanings," which the Christian can neither understand nor express? Ah, this brings us to the brighter side again: "He that searcheth the hearts *knoweth what is* the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27). *God* knows what those groanings mean, for He discerns the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. How comforting is this: to realise in prayer we are coming to One who thoroughly understands us! How blessed to be assured that God will rightly interpret every motion the Spirit prompts within us. God "knows" the "mind of the Spirit"—His intention in producing our anguish. God is able to distinguish between the moanings of mere nature and the "groanings" of which the Spirit is the Author.

There is a fourfold "spirit" which works in prayer. First, the natural spirit of man, which seeks his own welfare and preservation. This is not sinful, as may be seen from the case of Christ in Gethsemane: the innocent desire of human nature to be delivered from the awful pressure upon Him; and then subjecting His will to the Father's. Second, a carnal and sinful spirit: "your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My name's sake, said, *Let the LORD be glorified*" (Isa. 66:5), but God did not answer them in the way they meant. Third, the new nature in the believer, which has holy aspirations, but is powerless of itself to express them. Fourth, "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20)—by His prompting and power. Now God discerns between the motions of nature, the lustings of the flesh, the longings of grace, and the desires wrought by the Spirit. This it is which explains "The LORD weigheth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2)—the fourfold "spirit" mentioned above.

None but God *is able* to thus distinguish and interpret the “groanings” of the Spirit in the saint. A striking proof of this is found in, “Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken” (1 Sam 1:13)—even the high priest of Israel was incapable of discerning the anguish of her heart and what the Spirit had prompted within her. “He that searcheth the hearts *knoweth* what is the mind of the Spirit,” (Rom. 8:27), signifies far more than that He understands: God *approves* and *delights in*—for *this* use of the word “know” see Psalm 1:6; Amos 3:2; John 10:14; 1 Corinthians 8:3. And *why* is it that God thus finds perfect complacency in the mind of our Helper? Because as the Father and the Son are One, so the Father and the Spirit are *One*—one in nature, in purpose, in glory.

“Because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:27). Here is additional ground for our encouragement. The words “the will of” are in italics, which means they are not in the Greek, but have been supplied by our translators. They interpose a needless limitation. That which the Spirit produces in the saint is, first, in accord with God’s *nature*—spiritual and holy. Second, it is according to God’s Word, for the Spirit ever prompts us to ask for what has been revealed or promised. Third, it is according to God’s *purpose*, for the Spirit is fully cognizant of all the Divine counsels. Fourth, it is according to God’s *glory*, for the Spirit teaches us to make *that* our end in asking. O what encouragement is here: the Spirit creates within us holy desires, the Son presents them, the Father understands and approves them! Then let us “*come boldly* to the Throne of Grace.”—A.W.P.

“Come, Holy Spirit, come  
with energy Divine;  
And on this poor benighted soul  
With beams of mercy shine.”

## The Epistle to the Hebrews.

106. *Brotherly Love*: 13:1

Most of the commentators regard the final chapter of Hebrews as an appendix or post-script, containing sundry exhortations which have no direct relation to the body of the Epistle. Personally, we regard it as a serious mistake, due to lack of perspicuity, to ignore the organic connection between the central theme of the Apostle and the various duties which he here inculcates; rather do we agree with Owen that in these closing verses there is exhibited an exemplification of “that Divine *wisdom* wherewith he was actuated in writing of the whole, which the Apostle Peter refers to in 2 Peter 3:15.” The more an anointed mind meditates on this fact, with the faith and reverence which the Holy Scriptures call for, the more will the Divine inspiration of this portion be revealed. It is a great pity that so many writers become slack when they reach the final chapter of an Epistle, seeming to imagine that its contents are of less importance and value than those of the earlier ones.

Unless we carefully bear in mind the *order* which the Apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to follow in this treatise, we shall fail to learn some most vital and valuable lessons concerning the proper method and manner of setting forth the Truth of God before the souls of men. Not only is the teacher of God’s Word to hold fast the system of doctrine contained therein (introducing no speculations of his own), to preserve a due balance of Truth (not allowing personal preference to make him a hobbyist), but in order for his ministry to be most acceptable to God and profitable to his hearers or readers he must adhere strictly to *the order of Scripture*; for if the context and connections of a passage be ignored, there is great danger of perverting it, for its proper emphasis is then lost and the chain of Truth is broken. Let preachers especially attend closely to the remarks which follow.

A careful reading through of our Epistle at a single sitting will reveal the fact that throughout the first twelve chapters not a single moral or ecclesiastical duty is inculcated. It is true that here and there the Apostle breaks in upon the orderly development of his thesis, by urging an exhortation unto obedience to God and perseverance in the faith, or by interspersing a solemn warning against the fatal consequences of apostasy; nevertheless, never once does he formally press upon the Hebrews any of the duties enjoined by the second table of the Law—those were reserved for his closing words. The course followed by the Apostle was, first, to set forth the glorious Person, offices, and work of Christ, and then, having laid a firm foundation for faith and obedience, to exhort unto evangelical and moral duties. As we deem this a most essential consideration we subjoin a paragraph from that master exegete John Owen.

“He prescribes by his own example, as he also doth in most of his other Epistles, the true order and method of preaching the Gospel; that is, first, to declare the mysteries of it, with the grace of God therein, and then to improve it unto practical duties of obedience. And they will be mistaken, who in this work propose unto themselves any other method; and those most of all, who think one part of it enough without the other. For as the declaration of spiritual truths, without showing how they are the vital quickening form of obedience, and without the application of them thereunto, tends only unto that knowledge which puffeth up, but doth not edify; so the pressing of moral duties, without a due declaration of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, which alone enables us unto them, and renders

them acceptable unto God, with their necessary dependence thereon, is but to deceive the souls of men, and lead them out of the way and off from the Gospel.”

The Divine mysteries unfolded and the great doctrines expounded in the Holy Scriptures are not mere abstractions addressed to the intellect, devoid of valuable fruits and effects: where they are truly received into the soul and there mixed with faith, they issue, first, in the heart being spiritually molded thereby and drawn out Godwards, and second, they issue in practical results manward. If the Gospel makes known the infinite love and amazing grace of God in Christ, it also directs unto the performance of spiritual and moral duties. So far from the Gospel freeing believers from the duties required by the Law, it lays upon us additional obligations, directs to their right performance, and supplies new and powerful motives to their discharge.

So much, then, for the *general* relation of the contents of Hebrews 13 to what preceded it; now for the more *specific* connection. So far from there being a radical break between Hebrews 12 and 13, the closing verses of the former and the opening ones of the latter are closely linked together. There the Apostle had mentioned the principal duties which believers are to perform Godwards, namely, to “hear” (v. 25) and to “serve Him acceptably” (v. 28); here, he tabulates those duties which are to be performed manwards. He begins with what is really the sum and substance of all the rest, brotherly love: first, the loving of *God* with all our hearts, and then our *neighbour* as ourselves. Adolph Saphir pointed out another link of connection which is not so evident at first sight: having just reminded the Hebrews that “things that are made” shall be shaken and removed (12:27), he now exhorts them to let that *abide* which is of God, which is eternal, even *love*.

“Let brotherly love continue” (13:1). The first application in the case of the Hebrews would be, See to it that your having become Christians does not make you behave in a less kindly manner unto your brethren according to the flesh, the Jews. True, they are occasioning great provocation by their enmity and persecution, yet this does not warrant your retaliating in a like spirit, rather does it provide opportunity for the exercise and manifestation of Divine grace. Remember the example left by your Master: the Jews treated Him most vilely, yet He bore patiently their revilings; yea continued to seek their good—then do you follow His steps. Most blessedly did the writer of this Epistle emulate his Lord, and practise what he here inculcated: see Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1. This lower application of our text holds good for any of us who may, in our measure, be circumstanced similarly to the Hebrews. Since yielding ourselves to the claims of the Lord Jesus, our relations and friends may have turned against us, and, stirred up by Satan, are now opposing, annoying, ill-treating us. In such a case the word comes to us “Let brotherly love continue.” Avenge not yourself: answer not railing with railing: but exercise a spirit of true benevolence, desiring and seeking only their good. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20, 21).

“Let brotherly love continue.” The higher reference is, of course, to that special and spiritual affection which is to be cultivated between and among God’s children. “He calls love *brotherly*, not only to teach us that we ought to be mutually united together by a peculiar and inward feeling of love, but also that we may remember that *we cannot be Christians without loving the brethren*, for he speaks of the love which the Household of Faith ought to cultivate one towards another, as the Lord has bound them closely together by the common bond of adoption” (John Calvin). Matthew Henry well pointed out “the

spirit of Christianity is a spirit of love." The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). "Faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). "Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). Love to the brethren is both the first indication and fruit of the Christian life (Acts 16:33) and the final aim and result of Divine grace (2 Peter 1:7).

It is to be noted that these Hebrew believers were not exhorted "let us *have* brotherly love," but "let brotherly love *continue*." Thus the Apostle's language clearly supposes that they already had love for each other, that he approvingly notices the same, and then calls upon them for a continuance of it. Like his Master, Paul combines exhortation with commendation: let all His servants do so whenever possible. He had already reminded them "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of *love*, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10); and "Ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye *became companions* of them that were so used" (Heb. 10:32, 33). But the Apostle felt there was danger of their brotherly love decaying, for there were disputes among them concerning the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, and wrangling over religious differences bodes ill for the health of spiritual affection. He therefore puts them on their guard, and bids them live and love as "brethren."

"All love hath its foundation in *relation*. While there is relation, there is love, or there ought so to be; and where there is no relation, there can be no love, properly so called. Hence it is here mentioned with respect unto a brotherhood . . . This brotherhood is religious: all believers have one Father (Matt. 23:8, 9), one elder Brother (Rom. 8:29), who is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11); have one spirit, and are called in one hope of calling (Eph. 4:4), which being a spirit of adoption interesteth them all in the same family (Eph. 3:14, 15)"—John Owen. Brotherly love we would define as that gracious bond which knits together the hearts of God's children; or more definitely, it is that spiritual and affectionate solicitude which Christians have toward each other, manifested by a desiring and endeavouring after their highest mutual interests.

This duty was enjoined upon His disciples by the Lord Jesus: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). It was to this word of Christ's that His Apostle referred in "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you" (1 John 2:7, 8 and cf. 3:11). Some have been puzzled by his "I write no new commandment unto you . . . Again, a new commandment I write unto you," yet the seeming ambiguity is easily explained. When a statute is *renewed* under another administration of government it is counted a "new" one. So it is in this case. That which was required by the Law (Lev. 19:18) is repeated by the Gospel (John 15:12), so that absolutely speaking it is not a new, but an old commandment. Yet relatively, it *is* "new," because enforced by new motives (1 John 3:16) and a new Pattern (1 John 4:10, 11). Thus "Let us do good unto all men, *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), because the latter have peculiar claims upon our affections, being created in the same image, professing the same faith, and having the same infirmities.

The maintenance of brotherly love tends in various ways to the spiritual blessing of the Church, the honour of the Gospel, and the comfort of believers. The exercise thereof is the best testimony to the world of the genuineness of our profession. The cultivation and manifestation of Christian affection between the people of God is a far more weighty argument with unbelievers than any apologetics. Believers should conduct themselves toward each other in such a way that no button or pin is needed to label them as brethren in Christ. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have *love one to another*" (John 13:35). It should be made quite evident that their hearts are knit together by a bond more intimate, spiritual, and enduring than any which mere nature can produce. Their deportment unto each other should be such as not only to mark them as fellow disciples, but as Christ says, "*My disciples*"—reflecting *His* love!

The exercise of brotherly love is not only a testimony unto the world, but it is also an evidence to Christians themselves of their regeneration: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14). There should be a word of comfort here for those poor saints whose souls are cast down. At present they cannot "read their title clear to mansions in the sky," and are afraid to cry "Abba, Father" lest they be guilty of presumption. But here is a door of hope opened to Christ's *little* ones: you may, dear reader, be afraid to affirm that you love *God*, but do you not love *His people*? If you do, you must have been born again, and have in you the same spiritual nature which is in them. But *do* I love them? Well, do you relish the company, admire what you see of Christ in them, wish them well, pray for them, and seek their good? If so, you certainly love them.

But not only is the exercise of Christian love a testimony unto the world of our Christian discipleship, and a sure evidence of our own regeneration, but it is also that which *delights God Himself*. Of course it does! It is the product of His own grace: the immediate fruit of His Spirit. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1) is what the Lord Himself declares. This also comes out very sweetly in Revelation 3. There we find one of the epistles addressed to the seven churches which are in Asia, namely, the Philadelphian, the church of "brotherly love," for that is the meaning of the word "Philadelphia," and in *that* epistle there are *no censures* or rebukes: there was that there which refreshed the heart of the Lord!

But our text refers not so much to the existence and exercise of brotherly love, as it does to its *maintenance*: "Let brotherly love *continue*" or "abide constant" as some render it, for the word includes the idea of enduring in the face of difficulties and temptations. That which is enjoined is perseverance in a pure and unselfish affection toward fellow-Christians. Brotherly love is a tender plant which requires much attention: if it be not watched and watered, it quickly wilts. It is an exotic, for it is not a native of the soil of fallen human nature—"hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3) is a solemn description of what we were in our unregenerate state. Yes, brotherly love is a very tender plant and quickly affected by the cold air of unkindness, easily nipped by the frost of harsh words. If it is to thrive, it must needs be carefully protected and diligently cultivated.

"Let brotherly love continue": what a *needful* word is this! It was so at the beginning, and therefore did the Lord God make it a fundamental in man's duty: "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." O what strife and bloodshed, suffering and sorrow had been avoided, had this commandment been universally heeded. But alas, sin has domineered and dominated, and where sin is regnant, love is dormant. If we wish to obtain a better

idea of what sin is then contrast it with its opposite—*God*. Now God is Spirit (John 4:24), God is light (1 John 1:5), God is love (1 John 4:8); whereas sin is fleshly, sin is darkness, sin is hatred. But if we have enlisted under the banner of Christ we are called unto a warfare against sin: against fleshliness, against hatred. Then “let brotherly love continue.”

Yes, a most needful exhortation is this: not only because hatred so largely sways the world, but also because of the state of Christendom. Two hundred and fifty years ago John Owen wrote, “It (brotherly love) is, as unto its lustre and splendour, retired to Heaven, abiding in its power and efficacious exercise only in some corners of the earth. Envy, wrath, selfishness, love of the world, with coldness in all the concerns of religion, have possessed the place of it. And in vain shall men wrangle and contend about their differences in faith and worship, pretending to design the advancement of religion by an imposition of their persuasion on others: unless this holy love be again re-introduced among all those who profess the name of Christ, all the concerns of religion will more and more run into ruin. The very name of a brotherhood amongst Christians is a matter of scorn and reproach, and all the consequents of such a relation are despised.”

Nor are things any better today. O how little is brotherly love in evidence, generally speaking, among professing Christians. Is not that tragic word of Christ’s receiving its prophetic fulfillment: “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12). But, my reader, Christ’s love has not changed, nor should ours: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them *unto the end*” (John 13:1). Alas, have not all of us reason to hang our heads in shame! Such an exhortation as this is most needful today when there is such a wide tendency to value light more highly than love, to esteem an understanding of the mysteries of Faith above the drawing out our affections unto each other. Here is a searching question which each of us should honestly face: Is my love for the brethren keeping pace with my growing (intellectual) knowledge of the Truth?

“Let brotherly love continue.” What a *humbling* word is this! One had thought that those bound together by such intimate ties, fellow-members of the Body of Christ, would spontaneously love each other, and make it our constant aim to promote their interests. Ah, my reader, the Holy Spirit deemed it requisite *to* call upon us to perform this duty. What sort of creatures are we that still require to be thus exhorted! How this ought to hide

pride from us: surely we have little cause for self-complacency when we need *bidding* to love one another! “Hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3): true, that was in our unregenerate days, nevertheless the *root* of that “hatred” still remains in the believer, and unless it be judged and mortified will greatly hinder the maintenance and exercise of Christian affection.

“Let brotherly love continue.” What a *solemn* word is this! Is the reader startled by *that* adjective?—a needful and humbling one, but scarcely a “solemn.” Ah, have we forgotten the context? Look at the verse which immediately precedes, and remember that when this Epistle was first written there were no chapter-breaks: 12:29 and 13:1 read consecutively, without any hiatus—“our God is a consuming fire: let brotherly love continue!” The fact that these two verses are placed in immediate juxtaposition strikes a most solemn note. Go back in your mind to the first pair of brothers who ever walked the earth: did “brotherly love continue” with them? Far otherwise: Cain hated and murdered his brother. And did not *he* find our God to be “a consuming fire?” Most assuredly he



did, as his own words testify, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4:13)—the wrath of God burned in his conscience, and he had a fearful foretaste of Hell before he went there.

But it may be objected to what has just been said, The case of Cain and Abel is scarcely a pertinent and appropriate one, for they were merely *natural* brothers whereas the text relates primarily to those who are brethren *spiritually*. True, but the natural frequently adumbrates the spiritual, and there is much in Genesis 4 which each Christian needs to take to heart. However, let us pass on down the course of human history a few centuries. Were not Abraham and Lot brethren spiritually? They were: then did brotherly love continue between them? It did not: strife arose between their herdsmen, and they separated (Gen. 13). Lot preferred the well-watered plains and a home in Sodom to fellowship with the father of the faithful. And what was the sequel? Did *he* find that “our God is a consuming fire”? Witness the destruction of all his property in that city when God rained down fire and brimstone from heaven!—another solemn warning is that for us.

“Let brotherly love continue.” But what a *gracious* word is this! Consider its implications: are they not similar to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, *forbearing one another in love*” (Eph. 4:1, 2)? That means we are to conduct ourselves not according to the dictates of the flesh, but according to the requirements of *grace*. If grace has been shown toward me, then surely I ought to be gracious to others. But that is not always easy: not only has the root of “hatred” been left in me, but the “flesh” still remains in my brethren! And there will be much in them to test and try my love, otherwise, there would be no need for this exhortation “forbearing one another in love.” God has wisely so ordered this that our love might rise above the mere amiability of nature. We are not merely to govern our tempers, act courteously, be pleasant to one another, but *bear with* infirmities and be ready to forgive a slight: “Love suffereth long, and is kind” (1 Cor. 13:4).

“Let brotherly love continue.” What a *comprehensive* word is this! Had we the ability to fully open it and space to bring out all that is included, it would be necessary to quote a large percentage of the precepts of Scripture. If brotherly love is to continue, then we must exhort one another daily, provoke unto good works, minister to each other in many different ways. It includes far more than dwelling together in peace and harmony, though unless *that* be present, other things cannot follow. It also involves a godly concern for each other: see Leviticus 19:17 and 1 John 5:2. It also embraces our praying definitely for each other. Another practical form of it is to write helpful spiritual letters to those now at a distance from us: you once enjoyed sweet converse together, but Providence has divided your paths: well, keep in touch via the post! “Let brotherly love *continue*.”

“Let brotherly love continue.” What a *forcible* word is this, by which we mean, it should drive all of us to our knees! We are just as dependent upon the Holy Spirit to call forth *love* into action as we are our *faith*: not only toward God, but toward each other—“The Lord direct *your hearts into* the love of God” (2 Thess. 3:5). Observe the forcible emphasis Christ placed upon this precept in His Pascal discourse: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another” (John 13:34). Ah, but the Saviour did not deem that enough: “This is My commandment, That ye love one another; as I have loved you” (John 15:12): why that repetition? Nor did *that* suffice: “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (John 15:17). In an earlier paragraph we re-

minded the reader that the Philadelphian church is the church of “Brotherly love.” Have you observed the central exhortation in the Epistle addressed to *that* church: “*Hold that fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3:11).

“Let brotherly love continue.” What a *Divine* word is this. The love which is here enjoined is a holy and spiritual one, made possible “because the love of *God* is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5), for until *then* there is naught but hatred. Love for the brethren is a love for the image of God stamped upon their souls: “every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). No man can love another for the grace that is in his heart, unless grace be in his own heart. It is *natural* to love those who are kind and generous to us; it is *supernatural* to love those who are faithful and holy in their dealings with us.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on LOVE, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:12-14).—A.W.P.

### The Life of David.

#### 58. *His Son Absalom.*

The chastenings, which were the natural fruits of David's sins, quickly began to fall upon him. Though God had made with him a covenant "ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5), and though he was the man after His own heart, yet He was very far from regarding his sins lightly. The honour of Jehovah's name required that such transgressions as David's should be marked by no ordinary tokens of displeasure. He had "given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2 Sam. 12:14), and therefore did He proclaim His disapproval more loudly by suffering David to live and pass through one tremendous sorrow after another, than had He slain him instantly after his crime against Uriah. Yet we may also behold therein the faithfulness, wisdom, and grace of God towards His servant by using those very sorrows for the renewing of him in holiness; that this *was* accomplished appears blessedly in the sequel.

David was now to prove to the full the solemn truth of "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts" (Jer. 2:19). It was through those nearest and dearest to himself that David was to experience what "an evil thing and bitter" it is to depart from the Lord. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of *thine own house*" (2 Sam. 12:11) the Lord had declared. What must have been the feelings of his poor heart with this dread threat hanging over his family! How often do *we* moralize upon the wisdom and mercy of God in withholding from us a knowledge of the future: how it would spoil our present peace and comfort if we were acquainted with the trials and sorrows lying ahead of us; the more so if it were now revealed to us the evils which would overtake the members of our household. But the case was otherwise with David: *he knew* that the sore judgments of God were about to fall within his family circle!

One can readily imagine with what trepidation David would now look upon his several children, wondering upon which of them the Divine blow would first fall. The death of Bathsheba's infant was but the prelude of the fearful storm which was about to descend upon his loved ones. It seems quite clear from all that follows, one of the family-failings of David was that he had been too easy-going with and indulgent toward his children, allowing his natural affections to override his better judgment, instead of (as it should be) the judgment guiding the affections—it is not without reason and meaning that the head is set *above* the heart in our physical bodies! No doubt the fact that David had several wives made it much more difficult to rule his offspring as duty required—how one wrong leads to another!

As we have seen in earlier chapters, David was a man of strong natural passions, and the deep feelings he cherished for his children was in full accord therewith. The fear of his servants to tell him that his infant was dead (2 Sam. 12:18); the advice of Jonadab to Amnon, who had read David's disposition aright, to feign himself sick, that "when his father came to see him" (2 Sam. 13:5) he might proffer his requests; his "weeping so sore" for the death of this son, and then again, his anguish having subsided, "his soul longing to go forth" to the other son who had slain him (2 Sam. 13:39); and the final instructions to his officers touching the safety of Absalom, even when he was in arms against his father—"deal gently, for my sake, with Absalom" (2 Sam. 18:5)—being far

more concerned with the care of his child than the outcome of the battle; are so many illustrations of this trait.

But that which throws light upon the doting fondness of David for his children, a fondness which caused him to set aside the claimant calls of duty, comes out in his failure to punish Amnon for his crime against Tamar, and his failure to punish Absalom for his murder of Amnon. What light is thrown upon this infirmity of David's when, in connection with Adonijah's rebellion, "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" (1 Kings 1:6). Little wonder, then, that his own offspring were made a scourge to him. Alas, he followed far too closely the evil example of Eli, the high priest of Israel, of whom it is written, "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Sam. 3:13). Wisely did Thomas Scott say, "children are always uncertain comforts, but *indulged* children surely prove trials to pious parents, whose foolish fondness induces them to neglect their duty to God"—who *requires* them to duly discipline their offspring.

Yet David's children had been preserved from open wickedness in their early years: it was not until *their father* became guilty of aggravated crimes that the restraining hand of God was removed from *them*! How this should speak to the hearts of parents today: if *they* forsake the paths of righteousness, there is good reason to believe that God will chasten them by suffering *their offspring* to do likewise. Children in their youth naturally consider the evil example of their parents an excuse why they may follow in their steps; and grown up ones too are emboldened and confirmed in sin by the sinful conduct of fathers and mothers. "Let this be a warning to us to watch and pray against temptations, lest by the misconduct of one unguarded hour we should occasion such future consequences to our offspring, and such misery to ourselves throughout our future lives" (Thomas Scott).

It is both deeply instructive and unspeakably solemn to observe *the method* followed by the Lord in the execution of His awful threatenings through Nathan. It was not that David's palace was now burned by fire from Heaven or rased to the ground by a cyclone. Nor was it that one of his sons was killed by a flash of lightening, and another swallowed up by an earthquake. No, *that* is not God's customary way: not by physical miracles, but by the operation of moral laws, is the retribution meted out by His government conducted. "God denounced the most grievous afflictions against the house of David on account of his conduct toward Uriah. Those afflictions were all executed in a way of Providence . . . Every part of the Divine sentence against David was executed by His providence without a miracle. Who can work like God?" (Alexander Carson). This is exceedingly striking and worthy of our closest attention, for it casts much light upon God's government over the world today.

Yes, the manner in which God's awful threatenings were fulfilled is most noteworthy: it was done in a way of *natural consequence* from David's own transgressions. The curse which God pronounced upon him corresponded exactly to the character of his iniquities. He had despised the commandment of the Lord (2 Sam. 12:9, namely, "Thou shalt not commit adultery") by taking to himself the wife of another man, and now the women of his own household should be defiled. He had become a man of blood in the butchery of Uriah, and now of blood his own family should be made to drink. He had yielded to his lusts, and by that same baneful passion in others was he to be scourged for the rest of his days. The *complexion* of his remaining years was set by his own conduct in the palace at

Jerusalem! And though David himself was spared from the violent hand of the avenger, yet he was long made the spectacle of righteous suffering before the world.

In marked contrast from the opening of 2 Samuel 11, chapter 12 closes by showing us David occupying again his proper position. There he slighted the post of duty, but here he is seen at the head of his people fighting the battles of the Lord. In the previous case David was made to pay dearly for his fleshly ease, but here God prospered his efforts by delivering Rabbah into his hands. After the victory David and his army returned *to Jerusalem*, yet only for him to suffer one calamitous grief after another. The chapter which is now to be considered by us chronicles two of the most horrible crimes which ever disrupted the harmony of a family circle. One of David's sons now dishonours David's daughter, while another of his sons, after biding his time, revenged the outraged honour of his sister by murdering her seducer. Thus, lust and fratricide now desolated the king's own household.

David's children had learned the lesson which the fall of their father had taught them. Tragic indeed was the harvest the king now reaped, for a parent can have no sharper pang than the sight of his own sins reappearing in his children. "David saw the ghastly reflection of his unbridled passion in his eldest son's foul crime (and even a gleam of it in his unhappy daughter), and of his murderous craft in his second son's blood revenge" (Alexander Maclaren). There is little need for us to dwell upon the revolting details. First, Amnon had determined to commit the fearful sin of incest against his half-sister, who was "fair" or beautiful (2 Sam. 13:1). Ah, how many a young woman has grieved because she was not pretty: alas, good looks often prove to be a fatal snare, and those endowed with them need to be doubly cautious.

The most solemn features of this first calamity may be seen in tracing the workings of God's righteous retribution in it. First, we have the Spirit's time-mark in the opening words of our chapter, "and it came to pass after this," which, as we have intimated above, was when the king had returned *to Jerusalem*—where his own fearful fall had taken place! Second, Amnon was the king's oldest son (2 Sam. 3:2) and therefore the one in immediate line for the throne, and probably the one he loved the most. Third, Amnon was at a loss to think of means for the gratification of his base desires, but there was at hand a cunning counselor who promptly devised a plot whereby he succeeded, and that man was a nephew of David's (2 Sam. 13:3)! Fourth, the workings of Providence were such that David himself was made an unwilling accessory to his daughter's ravishment. When the king saw Amnon, who pretended to be sick, God not only withheld from him a discernment of his evil designs, but David was the one who sent for Tamar: as poor Uriah had been deceived by him, now he was deceived by his son!

After gross insult (v. 17) had been added to her grievous injury Tamar found a home with Absalom, who was her full brother. His question to her (v. 20) indicates that the character of Amnon was well known, which renders the more excuseless the king's consenting for his daughter to visit him. Yet "the counsel of the Lord, that *shall* stand" (Prov. 19:21), and though it evidenced His "severity" (Rom. 11:22), nevertheless it was what even this world would designate a case of "poetic justice," so far as David was concerned. The more closely the case be examined the more will appear the righteous retribution which characterises it. As Joab had been so far from refusing to execute David's wicked plan, but had been a willing party to the same (2 Sam. 11:15, 16), so Jonadab instead of recoiling with horror from the vile design of Amnon, helped him to secure it!

“But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth” (2 Sam. 13:21). A severe testing of his character was now presented, for it must be remembered that as king he was the chief magistrate in Israel, and therefore under the highest obligations to see that the Law of God was impartially enforced. Merely to be “very wroth” by no means met the requirements of the case: as head of the nation it was his bounden, though exceedingly painful, duty, to see that his debauched son was punished. The law was very express concerning such a case (see Lev. 20:17), yet there is no intimation that David inflicted this penalty. Was it the workings of his own guilty conscience (calling to remembrance his sin), or parental softness toward his offspring which deterred him? Whichever it was, a dangerous precedent was set, for mildness unto transgressors by magistrates only serves to encourage greater evils. But though the king failed in his public duty, later on, the Lord dealt with Amnon, and in such a way as to greatly add to David’s domestic trials.

“And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar” (2 Sam. 13:22). The Holy Spirit now introduces to our notice one of the most despicable, vile, and God-abandoned characters whose record is chronicled in the Scriptures. The first thing that we learn about him is his antecedents: he issued from a heathenish stock! His mother was a Gentile, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3). The Geshurites were a fierce and intractable people, and the stain of their lawlessness passed into his blood. In taking Maacah unto himself David disobeyed a plain command of the Lord: “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deut. 7:3). Need we wonder then that, having sown the wind, David was made to reap the whirlwind? God will not be defied with impunity.

“To Maacah were born Tamar and Absalom. Both were fair; both attractive. ‘In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him’ (2 Sam. 14:25). David probably was proud of the attractiveness which adorned his house, and was willing to forget the source from which it sprang. The attractiveness wrought its effects; and as might be expected from the attractiveness of nature, the resulting consequences were sin and sorrow. The beauty of Tamar was the cause of sin and destruction to Amnon, who fell beneath the revengeful hand of Absalom his brother; and the attractiveness of Absalom wrought on the hearts of the men of Israel till they were drawn away from David and his throne. Such were the results of an attractiveness derived from sources foreign and forbidden to God’s people” (B. W. Newton).

Little wonder that Mr. Newton went on to ask, “Has Christianity profited by the lesson, or has it also formed alliances with the stranger?” Alas, that these questions are so easily answered. One of the chief reasons why poor Christendom is in such a sad condition today is because she has been so largely attracted by that which makes an appeal to the flesh. Nor is this evil by any means restricted to Rome, with its ornate architecture, imposing ritual, appeal to the senses. The same thing, in varied forms, now blights the greater part of Protestantism. The plain exposition of the Scriptures is replaced by the popular topics of the day, congregational singing has been pushed into the background by professional vocalists in the choir, and all sorts of worldly devices are employed to “draw” the young people. All of this is but the present form of Israel being allured by the physical attractions of a godless Absalom.

Singularly enough the meaning of “Absalom” is “the father of peace,” but his was the peace of *a deceiver*. He was the child of him that was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and he knew no other master—there is not a single intimation that *God* ever had any place in his thoughts. The deceitfulness and treachery of his character appears from the beginning. His words to Tamar were “hold now thy peace, my sister: he (Amnon) is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar *remained* desolate in her brother Absalom’s house” (2 Sam. 13:20), apparently with no suspicion of his murderous intentions. Meanwhile, “Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar” (v. 22). The spirit of revenge consumed him, and he only waited his time for a suitable opportunity to exercise it. Absalom was the rod appointed by the Lord for the further chastening of David; a rod, as we have seen, taken out of his own stem, his own child. “The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small!”—A.W.P.

## The Divine Covenants.

### 5. The Siniatic.

Considered as a part of the gradual and progressive unfolding of God's eternal purpose, the Siniatic transaction marked a decided step forward upon the Abrahamic Covenant for Christianity; considered separately by itself, the Siniatic transaction was the giving of a system of government designed for the immediate use of the Jews. These two leading aspects must be kept distinct if hopeless confusion is to be avoided. It is of the second we continue to treat, namely, the Siniatic Covenant as it pertained strictly to *the nation* of Israel. It announced certain outward and temporal blessings on the condition that Israel *as a people* remained in subjection to their Divine King, while it threatened national curses and calamities if they rejected His sceptre and flouted His laws. *This* it is which supplies the key to the entire history of the Jews.

As an example and exemplification of what has just been said, take the following, "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I *will bring you in unto the land*, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD" (Exo. 6:6-8). Now that passage has presented a formidable difficulty to those who have thoughtfully pondered it, for scarcely any of the adults whom God brought out of Egypt ever entered Canaan! How, then, is this to be explained?

Thus: first, that promise concerned Israel *as a people*, and did not by any means necessarily imply that all, or even any of *that* particular generation were to enter Canaan. The Divine veracity was not sullied: forty years later the Nation *did* obtain the promised inheritance. Second, other passages must be compared with it. In Exodus 6 no express condition was mentioned in connection with the promise, not even the believing of it. Yet, so far as that generation was concerned, this, as the sequel clearly shows, *was* implied: for if it had been an absolute, unconditional promise to that generation, it must have been performed, otherwise God had failed to make good His word. That the promise to that generation was suspended upon their faith is plain from Hebrews 3:18, 19. Third, therein we see the *contrast*: the fulfillment of every condition is secured for *us* in and by Christ.

The Siniatic Covenant, then, was a compact promising to Israel as a people certain material and national blessings on the condition of their rendering to God a general obedience to His Laws. But at this point it may be objected that God, who is infinitely holy and whose prerogative it is to search the heart, could never be satisfied with an outward and general obedience, which in the case of many would be hollow and insincere. The objection is pertinent, and presents a real difficulty: how can we meet it? Very simply: this would be true of *individuals* as such, but not necessarily so where the *nations* are concerned. And why not, it may be asked? For this reason: because nations as such have only a *temporary* existence, and therefore they must be rewarded or punished in this *present* world, or not at all! This being so, the kind of obedience required from *them*, is lower than from individuals, whose rewards and punishments shall be *eternal*.



But again it might be objected, Did not the Lord declare "I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exo. 6:7)? Is there not something far more spiritual implied there than a national covenant, something in its terms which could not be exhausted by merely outward and temporal blessings? Once more we must insist upon drawing a broad line between what pertains to individuals and that which is applicable to nations. This objection would be quite valid if that promised described the relation of God to *the individual* soul, but the case is quite different when we remember the relation in which God stands to *a nation* as such! To ascertain the exact purport and scope of the Divine promises to Israel as a people we must take note of the actual engagements which we find He entered into with them as a Nation. This is quite obvious, yet few theologians have followed it out consistently when dealing with what is now before us.

Let it next be pointed out that the view we have propounded above (and in the preceding article) of the nature and scope of the Siniatic Covenant agrees fully with the statements made regarding it in the New Testament, the most important of which is found in Hebrews 8, where it is contrasted from the better and new covenant under which Christians are now living. At first view it may appear that the antithesis drawn between the two covenants in Hebrews 8 is so radical, that it must be an opposition between the Covenant of Works made with Adam, and the Covenant of Grace made with believers under the Gospel; in fact several able commentators so understand it. But this is quite a mistake, and one which carries serious implication, for error on one point affects, more or less, the whole of our theological thinking. A little reflection should quickly determine this matter.

In the first place, the people of God, even before the incarnation of Christ, were *not* under the broken Covenant of Works, with its inevitable curse; but enjoyed the blessings of the Everlasting Covenant which God had made with their Surety before the foundation of the world. In the second place, such a view of the Siniatic Covenant (i.e. making it a repetition of the one entered into with Adam) would be in flat contradiction to what is said in the Epistle to the Galatians, where it is specifically declared that, whatever may have been God's purpose in the giving of the Law, it was not meant to and could not annul the promises made to Abraham or supersede the previous method of salvation by faith which was revealed to that Patriarch. But if we understand the Apostle (and remember he was addressing Jews in the Hebrews Epistle) to be drawing a contrast between the *national* covenant made with their fathers at Sinai, and the far higher and better covenant into which Jews and Gentiles are brought by faith in Christ, then we get a satisfactory explanation of Hebrews 8 and one that brings it into complete harmony with Galatians 3.

Observe carefully what is said in Hebrews 8 to be the characteristic difference between the new and the old economies: "I will put My laws into their mind, and write them *in their hearts*" (v. 10). No promise in any wise comparable to this was given at Sinai. But the absence of any assurance of the Spirit's internal and effectual operations was quite in keeping with the fact that the Mosaic economy required not so much an inward and spiritual, as an outward and natural obedience to the Law, which for them had nothing higher than temporal sanctions. This is a fundamental principle which has not received the consideration to which it is entitled: it is vital to a clear understanding of the radical difference which obtains between Judaism and Christianity. Under the former, God dealt with one nation only, now He is manifesting His grace to elect individuals

scattered among all nations. Under the former He simply made known His requirements; in the latter He actually produces that which meets His requirements.

Galatians 3 shows plainly that the Siniatic Covenant was *subsidiary* to the promises given to Abraham concerning his Seed: "Wherefore then serveth the Law? (i.e., the entire Legal economy). It was *added* because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (v. 19). Thus it is clear that from the first the Mosaic economy was designed to be but *temporary*, to last only from the time of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness till Christ. It was needed because of their "transgressions." The children of Israel were so intractable and perverse, so prone to depart from God, that without such a Divinely-provided hedge, they would have lost their national identity, mixing themselves with the surrounding nations, and becoming sunk in their idolatrous ways. The Holy Spirit was not then so largely given that, by the potent influences of His grace, such a disastrous issue would have been prevented. Therefore a *temporary arrangement*, such as Judaism provided, was essential to preserve a pure stock from which the promised Messiah should issue; and *this* end the Siniatic Covenant, with its promises and penalties, *did* effect!

But there was another and deeper reason for the Legal Economy. Though the Siniatic compact was not identical with the Covenant of Works made with Adam, yet in some respects, it *closely resembled it*: it was analogous to it, only on a lower plane. During the fifteen hundred years which had elapsed between Sinai and Bethlehem God carried out a practical demonstration with the two great divisions of the human race. The Gentiles were left to the light of nature: they were "suffered to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16 and cf. 17:26-30), and this in order to supply answer (for men) to question, "Can fallen man, in the exercise of his own unaided reason and conscience find out God, and raise himself to a higher and better life?" One has only to consult the history of the great nations of that period—the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans—to see the hopelessness of such an attempt: Romans 1:21-31 gives the inspired comment thereon.

Running parallel with God's suffering all nations (the Gentiles) to walk in their own ways, was another experiment (speaking from the human side of things, for from the Divine side "Known unto God are *all* His works from the beginning of the world": Acts 15:18), conducted on a smaller scale, yet quite as decisive in its outcome. The Jews were placed under a Covenant of Law to supply answer to this further question, "Can fallen man, when placed in most favourable circumstances, win eternal life by any doings of his own? Can he, even when separated from the heathen, taken into outward covenant with God, supplied with a complete Divine code for the regulation of his conduct, conquer indwelling sin and act so as to secure his acceptance with the thrice holy God?" The answer furnished by the history of Israel is an emphatic negative. The lesson supplied thereby for all succeeding generations of the human race is writ in unmistakable language: If *Israel* failed under the National Covenant of outward and general obedience, how impossible it is for any member of Adam's depraved offspring to render spiritual and perfect obedience!

In the spirit of it, the Siniatic Covenant contained the same moral law as the law of nature under which Adam was created and placed in Eden—the tenth commandment giving warning that something more than outward things were required by God: yet only those *Divinely illumined* could perceive this—it was not until the Holy Spirit applied that

tenth commandment in power to the conscience of Saul of Tarsus that he first realised that he was an inward transgressor of the Law (Rom. 7:7, etc.). The great bulk of the Nation, blinded by their self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, turned the Siniatic compact into a Covenant of Works, elevating the handmaid into the position of the married wife—as Abraham did with Hagar. Galatians 4 reveals that, while the Siniatic Covenant was regarded as *subservient* to the Covenant of Grace it served important practical ends; but when Israel perversely elevated it to the place which the better covenant was designed to hold, it became a hindrance and the fruitful mother of bondage.

The grievous error into which so many of the Jews fell concerning the design of God in giving them His Law has been perpetuated, though in a modified form, by some of our theologians. This is due to their failure to properly recognize *the condition of Israel* at Sinai: once we see what they already possessed, it rules out of court the idea of the Law being intended to convey the same to them. When was it that they received from God His Law? Not while they were still in the land of Pharaoh, nor while they were on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea, but after they had been completely delivered from their taskmasters. It is clear then beyond contradiction, from the very time of its introduction, that the Law was not given to Israel in order to deliver them from evil or as a procurer of blessing. It could not have for its design the delivering them from death or the obtaining of God's favour, for such blessings were *already* theirs!

It is of great importance to keep distinctly in view what the Law was never designed to effect. If we exalt it to a position which it was never meant to occupy, or expect benefits from it which it was never fitted to yield, then we shall not only err in our own reckonings, but deprive ourselves of any clear knowledge of the dispensation to which it belonged. It was in order to define *the negative* side of the Law—what it was *not* intended to procure—that the Apostle declared “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham *by promise*” (Gal. 3:17, 18). This is decisive, yet perhaps a few words of explanation will enable the reader to more easily grasp its purport.

It was because the Jews had, for the most part, come to regard their obedience to the Law as constituting their title to the inheritance, and because certain of the Judaisers were beginning to corrupt the Galatian converts with the leaven of their self-righteousness, that the Apostle was here moved by the Spirit to check this evil, and to expose the basic error from which it proceeded. He presses upon them the Scriptural facts of the nature and design of Jehovah's covenant with Abraham, which he declares was “confirmed before of God concerning Christ.” The covenant-promise made to Abraham is said to be “concerning Christ,” first, because it had pre-eminent regard to Him; and second, because it had in view the Covenant of Redemption which He was to establish. The particular point which the Apostle now emphasised was, that the Abrahamic covenant expressly conferred on his posterity, as God's *free gift*, the inheritance of the land of Canaan—which entailed their deliverance from the land of bondage and their safe passage through the wilderness, which were necessary in order to their entrance into the possession thereof.

Thus the Apostle made it unmistakably clear that Israel's title to Canaan could not possibly need to be re-acquired by a law-righteousness performed by them personally, for in such a case the Law would revoke the Covenant of Promise, and thereby the latter

revelation which God made at Sinai would overthrow the foundation of what He had laid in His promises to Abraham. That the Lord never meant for the Law to interfere with the gifts and promises of the Abrahamic covenant, is abundantly clear from what He said to Israel immediately *before* the Law was formally announced from Sinai: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exo. 19:4-6).

From the above quotation it will be seen that God addressed Israel as *already* standing in such a blessed relation to Him as evidenced for them an interest in His love and faithfulness. He appealed to the proofs which He had given of this, as being not only sufficient to set their hearts at rest, but also to encourage them to expect whatever might still be needed to complete their felicity. "Now *therefore*, if ye will obey My voice": not because ye *have* obeyed it have I wrought so mightily for you: but these things have been done that ye might render Me loving and loyal subjection. So too He prefaced the Ten Commandments with "I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exo. 20:2): He rests His claims to their obedience on *the grace* that He had already bestowed upon them!

N.B. For much in the early paragraphs of this article we are indebted to an able discussion of the character of the Sinaiic Covenant by Robert Balfour, which appeared in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review of July 1877.—A.W.P.

### The Providence of God.

#### 4. *Jacob meeting Esau: Genesis 32.*

Notwithstanding that Esau was determined on the murder of his brother, on account of the great provocations he had received from him, yet the eternal purpose of God secured his safety, as much as if he had been in Heaven, under the throne of the Most High. But *how* does God preserve him? By his *providence* alone, in the use of ordinary means, in which the eye of human wisdom would see nothing of Divine interference at all. No miracle appears in altering the purpose of the intended murderer. All is natural. Providence works through the prudence of his servant. Jacob proposes to meet his brother, and disarm his wrath by the most consummate human wisdom. He avails himself of a deep knowledge of human nature; and connects such a series of conciliating circumstances, that the stubborn soul of Esau is broken to child-like tenderness. The Patriarch sent messengers before him to apprise his brother of his approach; and charges them, in the first place, to inform him of his wonderful prosperity and riches. This in itself is a conciliating circumstance. Prosperity creates friends.

But in the case of these brothers, this was calculated to have a peculiar effect. Length of time might have cooled the passion of the discontented brother, but his *interest* still equally demands the murder. This alone can restore the inheritance, and disappoint the subtlety of Jacob. Nothing was so well calculated to allay the suspicions of evil from Jacob, as the fact of uncommon wealth. Esau had no respect for the spiritual promises; and the great prosperity of Jacob would tend to convince him that he was in no danger of the machinations of his brother to deprive him of the wealth of Isaac. The messengers are instructed also to recognise, in Jacob's name, the superiority of his elder brother. He uses the most honourable forms of address to Esau, recognising the lordship over him, and the most humiliating expressions with regard to himself. This was well calculated to soothe the pride of Esau, and soften his rugged heart.

In the answer of the messengers on their return from Esau, we may see a remarkable instance of Providence. "And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him" (Gen. 32:6). That this was with hostile intentions is most apparent. Jacob himself understood the matter in this light: "then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (v. 7). It was not to honour his brother that Esau would take such an escort to meet him. Yet there was no threatening. Not a word in reply, either good or bad. There is great cause for apprehension; there is some room for hope.

Here we see that Divine Providence brings His people into danger, and surrounds them with circumstances that create alarm, and keeps them for a time in suspense, in order to try and exercise their faith and patience. Providence might have instantly relieved Jacob, from apprehensions on the return of the messengers. Esau might have been moved instantly to mercy, and to use language that would relieve his brother from his anxiety. Why did he not do so? Does God take pleasure in the pain of His people? No; but it was in *wisdom* that Jacob was not instantly relieved. Had he got a favourable answer, he would not have had room to exhibit the admirable combination of faith and works which is now presented to our view. His suspense was good for him; it is good for us. For a like reason, Jesus did not instantly relieve the woman of Syro-Phoenicia. Let the Lord's people, then, in their distresses think of this. Let them hope against hope; and let them never cease to trust in God, and use the means that they may judge most prudent to avert any

threatened evil, or obtain any wished-for good. The dark clouds that thicken over their heads may burst in blessings. Providence may bring them to the brink of ruin, and keep them trembling over the precipice; but He can prevent them from falling over, and can draw them back when He pleases.

On the return of the messengers Jacob was greatly alarmed; but he did not despair; he used every precaution of prudence, while he looked to the Lord for deliverance. It is plain that he expected deliverance only from the interposition of Providence; and it is equally plain that he expected this interposition *in the use of means*. Indeed, though Jacob took the most effectual means of softening Esau, yet all these means would have been utterly ineffectual without the interposition of Providence. Jacob, therefore, while he was planning and employing these means, still says, "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hands of my brother." Means succeed *by Providence*, not without it. After all the preparations of Jacob, Esau might have remained obstinate and relentless. Human wisdom will say, "If God delivers, then leave it to Him. Why use means?" "If God says He will save, throw yourself in the river." So said Satan, "Cast Thyself down, for it is written." But Christ replies, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The means are appointed by God as well as the end. God commanded Jacob to return, and promised to be with him. But in returning Jacob is in great danger, both from Laban and from Esau; and he uses the means of defence that God put in his power. In the use of these means God delivered him out of the hands of his enemies. Jacob, in faith, reminds God of His command and promise: "Return unto thy county, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" (Gen. 32:9). But while he looks to God for deliverance, he plans and executes a most consummate scheme of wisdom. He divides his flock with the two bands, that if the one should be taken the other might have a chance of escape. Then he selected a present for his brother from his flocks and herds, and divided them into several bands, that the effect on his brother's mind might be the greater; with orders to his servants how to express themselves on the occasion. All these things were well calculated to effect his purpose, and appease the wrath of Esau. But when Jacob had planned and put in train all that his prudence could contrive to appease his incensed brother, *he trusts not to his preparation*. His confidence was in the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. He spent the night in prayer, and his God gave efficiency to the means which His servant had employed.

How interesting is the meeting of the brothers! Jacob's only hope of safety is *in God*, for as yet he sees no instance nor symptom of reconciliation in his brother. He approaches him whom he had so greatly offended. "He bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother" (Gen. 33:3). The God who has the hearts of all men in His hands was not forgetful of His servant. Esau is overcome. Not only does he not injure, but natural affection bursts in tears from his eyes: "And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept" (v. 4). How glorious does the Providence of God appear in this interesting scene!—Alexander Carson.

## Union and Communion.

### 8. *Experimental.*

We would ask our readers to please bear with us for writing further on the present aspect of our many-sided subject, namely, the restoration to fellowship with Christ of a backslidden believer. The need for it appears to us so pressing that we feel constrained to make another effort toward helping some of our brethren and sisters who have fallen by the wayside. How many there are who for a year or two seem very earnest and zealous in the Christian life, and then become cold and careless, semi-worldly or weighted down with the cares of this life. Frequently such cases settle down in a state of partial despair: they feel that they are “utter failures,” and conclude that daily communion with Christ is not for such as they. Instead of humbly confessing their failures to the Lord and trustfully seeking pardon and fresh supplies of grace, they go halting and mourning the rest of their days.

We greatly fear that there are not a few of God’s dear children who, to a greater or less degree, are held captives by the Devil, and are largely ignorant of the means for recovery. It is the duty of God’s servants to seek out such and acquaint them with the provisions of Divine grace: not to make light of sin and excuse backsliding, but to faithfully and tenderly point out how much Christ is being dishonoured and what they are losing by their conduct, and then to set forth the means which God has appointed for their restoration, particularly emphasising the fact we have a great High Priest who has compassion on them that are out of the way (Heb. 5:2), and is willing and able to save unto the uttermost them that come to God by Him (Heb. 7:25).

Perhaps one of our readers says, But the Lord has turned away from me the light of His countenance, and therefore I have much reason to fear that I am not in His favour. Such an objection is answered in the Charter of Grace: “I *will not* turn away them, to do them good” (Jer. 32:40). The Lord has withheld from thee His smile, His comforts, and thou art troubled about it; but that very trouble is for good—it should put thee upon inquiring into the reason for His strangeness toward thee: it should humble thee: it should bring thee into the dust before Him in sincere and contrite confession. And then, thou shouldest exercise thy faith on such a Scripture as this, “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid Me, and was wroth, and he went on forwardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him” (Isa. 57:17, 18)—it was Fatherly chastisement which smote thee, but His love is unchanged, and He is ready to heal and comfort.

Perhaps another fears that God has not only hidden His face, but has quite forsaken him. He may have done so to thy sense and feeling, yet not so as to His own gracious purpose, which changeth not. Hear how He speaks to thee, distressed one, “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer” (Isa. 54:7, 8)—how that should silence thy doubts. How gracious is thy God! How infinitely merciful was it that He should give thee such promises, so suited to thy needs, thy case. How well-fitted is such a word as this to preserve thee under the trials of faith and to bring thee out of them. Read it over and over until the clouds of unbelief are dispersed, and thou art again assured that God has a loving and royal welcome for every returning prodigal.

But possibly there is a reader who says, My case is much more desperate. God is incensed against me, and justly so. He has cast me off, and I can expect no more favour at His hands. Once, indeed, I thought that He loved me, and that I loved Him: but I have fouled my garments, fallen into great sin, disgraced my profession. My conscience accuses me of being a dog which has returned to his vomit. I deliberately flouted my privileges, sinned against light, and conviction, and I am verily guilty of that which is not to be found in the truly regenerate. Ah, dear friend, sad indeed as is such a case, yet your language is not that of a reprobate. Thou art fallen into the mire, but are you determined to remain there? You are under a load of guilt, but wilt thou *nurse it*, and so add sin to sin? No matter how vile thy fall, thou canst not be truly humbled for it until thou turnest to God and trustest the plenteous redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Let us anticipate a possible objection at this point: Is it altogether *wise* to speak so freely of the relief available for even a desperate case? None but a self-righteous Pharisee would ask such a question, therefore it is hardly deserving of any answer at all. But for the sake of any who may be perturbed by such a question, let it be pointed out, that there is no subject revealed in Scripture but that the wicked may pervert it (2 Peter 3:16). No matter how carefully the truth be presented, how guarded the language used, how well balanced the presentation, those who are determined to do so will wrest it to their own destruction. It is a great pity that some of God's servants do not recognise this fact more clearly, and act accordingly. They are so afraid that a wrong use may be made of what they say, or that their teaching may be denounced as "dangerous," that they are muzzled, and often hold back a most needful and precious part "of the children's bread."

Let us not attempt to be wiser than the Holy Spirit. He hesitates not to tell forth the riches of Divine grace unto the most notorious sinners and the worst backsliders. "My little children, these write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1): here is a guide for us. First, there is a presentation of the exalted standard which God sets before His people, a pressing of the requirements of His holiness. Second, there is a plain declaration of God's gracious provision for those who sadly fail to measure up to His standard, announcing the freeness of Divine mercy. This is the order for us to follow, and this is the "balance" which we are to observe. First, a stressing of God's unchanging claims, with His hatred of all sin; and then the recounting of the gracious provision made for His failing people. "If any one (of His children) sin," *not* they are cast off by God and forfeit their salvation, but "they have *an Advocate* with the Father." Naught but the apprehension of this latter fact will melt the backslider's heart.

So it is all through the Scriptures. Take the 6th Chapter of Numbers, which treats of Nazarite dedication to God. There we have in type the *highest* form of separation from carnal delights and devotedness to the Lord, yet even here we find God anticipating *failure* and providing for it: "And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath *defiled* the head of his consecration, then he shall shave his head" etc. (vv. 9-12). God knows what we are even after our regeneration, and that there is never a day passes but what we need His pardoning mercy. He knows that while we are left down here, there will always be sin to be confessed, judged, forgiven and put away. And therefore, while He never lowers the requirements of His holiness, yet His grace is ever found amply sufficient for His failing peoples' need, even though that very need be the result of their sins. The preacher is never to excuse sin or lightly regard the declension of saints; yet he must not



fail to make clear and present the rich and full provision which a gracious and compassionate God has made for those that wander from Him.

As a further example of what has just been said, let us for a while consider together the precious contents of Hosea 14:1-6. "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the works of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon." This passage belongs as truly unto spiritual Israel today, as it applied to natural Israel in the past: Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11.

The name "Israel" is used in Scripture with varying latitude: it has a wider scope when employed nationally, and a narrower when used spiritually. It belongs to all the fleshly descendants of Jacob, but it had a special force unto the elect remnant among them. Inside the Nation as a whole were "Israelites indeed" (John 1:47), concerning whom it was said "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Psa. 73:1). This distinction is clearly recognised in the New Testament: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly.....but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly" (Rom. 2:28, 29); "Behold Israel *after the flesh*" (1 Cor. 10:18), which clearly implies there is another Israel "after the spirit"! It has helped the writer much to perceive that the Nation of Israel in Old Testament times was a type of Christendom as a whole, and that the godly remnant in that Nation foreshadowed the little flock of the regenerate amid the great mass of professing Christians.

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hosea 14:1). These words, then, had a wider and a narrower application. They were addressed first to the Nation as a whole; they were spoken secondly to saved individuals in the Nation. Hosea prophesied in very dark times. He lived during the reign of wicked Jeroboam, of whom it is said so often, "he caused Israel to sin"; and while Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahab were over Judah. Idolatry was rampant, yet seven thousand had been preserved from bowing the knee to Baal. History has repeated itself, for our lot is cast in a day when spiritual idolatry is sadly rife, and when many of God's own people are infected and affected by the evil spirit which is abroad. There is much in Hosea 14 which is truly pertinent and of great practical importance for us now. Once we get beneath the different figures there used, their spiritual significance will be readily seen.

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." How blessedly has God here revealed His desire for backsliders to return unto Himself! The manner in which this call is given is very impressive and heart-melting. "O" is a note of exclamation. It is like one who has done much to help an indigent friend, now surprised and grieved at his base requital, saying, "O John!"; or a devoted husband saying to his unfaithful spouse "O wife!" So God says to those for whom He has done so much, and whose waywardness He has borne with such patience, "O Israel." It is a note of exclamation addressed to their affections. God does not barely say "Israel, return unto Me," still less does He gruffly command them so to do; but He tenderly entreats them "O Israel return." What *love* that expresses!

The backslider must seriously examine his condition and solemnly consider his sad plight. He has forsaken the paths of righteousness; unless he retraces his steps what will his end be! Let him heed, then, this Divine injunction. "Return": the Hebrew word is very emphatic, yet difficult to reproduce in English—"return *even* unto" or "*quite up to*" is the thought: no partial return will satisfy *His* heart. "Return unto the Lord *thy* God": unto Him who has taken thee into covenant relationship with Himself, who has shown thee such favours; unto Him who alone can do thee any real good. Return unto the One whom thou hast so grievously wronged, so excuselessly insulted, by allowing forbidden objects to draw away thy heart from Him. "For thou *hast fallen* by thine iniquity"—into spiritual sloth, into sickness of soul, into a joyless state, out of which none but God can lift you. Then return to Him, for none but He can pardon, cleanse, heal, deliver you from the toils of Satan.

But what is meant by "*return unto the Lord thy God*"? First of all it denotes that the backslider honestly and solemnly face the fact that he has departed from the Lord, that he has followed the evil devices of his own heart, yielded to the temptations of the Devil, entered forbidden paths. Second, it signifies that he must now consider his ways and "cease to do evil." Third, it implies that he judge himself unsparingly for his folly and wickedness, taking sides with God against himself. Fourth, it means that he must humble himself before God, acknowledging his transgressions, confessing his unworthiness, earnestly seeking the Divine mercy. Finally, it includes the setting of his affections again on things above, diligently seeking grace to live as becometh a child of God.

It is not difficult for us to write down what is intended by a "return unto the Lord," but it is far from easy for a backslider to carry it out. Satan will make a strenuous effort to retain his victim: if he can no longer allure him with his baits, he will seek to drive him to despair with his accusations, telling him that he has sinned away the day of grace, that he has committed the great transgression, that such high-handed rebellion as he is guilty of is beyond forgiveness; that his case is quite hopeless. Unto any such who may read these lines let us say, Abraham, the father of the faithful, fell into the same sin again and again; David transgressed very grievously; Peter, though definitely forewarned, denied his Master; yet *they* were recovered out of the snare of the Devil. Remember it is written, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from *all* sin" (1 John 1:7).

Read through Hosea 13 and note well the condition of Israel at that time: they were guilty of great wickedness, and under the threatening of Divine wrath, yet to them came this tender appeal, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God." How that shows us there are no seasons or circumstances which shall obstruct sovereign grace when God is pleased to exercise it toward His erring people. There is "A fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). That Fountain possesses an infinite virtue to wash away every spot and stain of sin. It is a public Fountain standing available for daily use, that befouled believers may wash therein. Does not God say to His erring people "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17): then why reject the comfort of such a promise; it is perfectly suited to thy present distress and is the remedy.

"Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously" (Hosea 14:2). So desirous is God that His backslidden people turn to Him, He here dictates a prayer for their use: the injured One instructs them! Here God graciously makes known the means of recovery, for so ignorant are we of the way of

return that we have to be *told* what to do—"we know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26)! Yet simple as the remedy appears, it is far from easy to carry out: as a child is slow to acknowledge its naughtiness, so pride of heart in a backslider makes him reluctant to own his iniquities. Alas, how many postpone their restoration by delaying their confession; yet it is to their own great loss and harm that they refuse to acknowledge their sins.

The worse be our case, the greater is our need of coming to Christ. On a bitterly cold day the genial heat of a fire can only be enjoyed by our *drawing near to it*; we cannot bask in the warmth of Christ's love while we determine to remain away from Him, hence the "O Israel, *return* unto the LORD thy God" of Hosea 14:1 is at once followed by "Take with you words, and *turn to* the LORD." No empty "words" will suffice: the whole soul must go out to God, so that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The one who is conscious that he has left his first love and has a real purpose to return to the Lord, must definitely look to the Holy Spirit to work in his heart the substance of this prayer, so that it truly voices his deep desires.

But why does God order that we "take with us words"? Is He not fully acquainted with the thoughts and intents of our hearts? Yes, but He requires us to humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand, to take unto ourselves the shame of our fall, to stir us up to *feel* the enormity of our crimes. Say unto him, "Take away all *iniquity*": *this* is what is to deeply exercise the penitent's heart—that which has so grievously dishonoured the Lord, befouled his own garments, and occasioned such a stumbling block unto his fellows. Repentance is to act itself in prayer, requesting that God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves—either remove the guilt and defilement of our sins or subdue their raging within. "Take away" the love of, the bondage of, the pollution of, from heart, conscience and life. "Take away *all* iniquity": there must be no reservation: all sin is equally burdensome and hateful to a penitent soul.

"And receive us graciously": faith must individualize it and say "receive *me* graciously": deal with me not according to my evil deserts but according to Thine infinite mercy; look upon the atoning Blood and pardon me; regard me no longer with displeasure, but grant me fresh tokens of Thy favour and acceptance. "*So* will we render the calves of our lips," that is, offer praise unto Thee (Heb. 13:15). The *order* is unchangeable: only as the backslider returns to the Lord, humbles himself before Him, repents of his sins, seeks His forgiveness, is he experimentally fitted to be a *worshipper* once more. God will not accept the praise of rebels!

"Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hosea 14:3). The force of these words can best be understood by reading Hosea 5:13; 7:11; 8:8, 9; 12:1—"horses" were what the unbelieving Hebrews put their trust in during times of war. Fleshly confidence and idolatry were *their* two worst sins, and here they are confessed and disowned; so we must acknowledge and renounce (in detail) *our* sins. The "fatherless" are those conscious of their deep need, helplessness, dependency. O turn to Him and find the Lord "a very present help in trouble."

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him" (Hosea 14:4). This is ever God's response to a returning backslider who penitently confesses his sins and truly desires to be delivered from a repetition of them. Sin is a disease which wounds the soul, and only God can "heal" it. When He loves us "freely"

“He manifests himself to” us (John 14:21). “I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily” (Hosea 14:5): “dew” comes from above, falls insensibly, cooling the air, refreshing vegetation, making fruitful: it is a beautiful figure of the Spirit’s *renewing* the restored believer, granting him fresh supplies of grace. The “lily” speaks of lowliness, purity, fragrance. “And cast forth his roots as Lebanon” (v. 5), that is, be more firmly fixed in the love of Christ, and so less easily swayed by the customs of the world and assaults of Satan. “His beauty shall be as the olive tree” useful and fruitful; “and his smell (the fragrance he emits) as Lebanon” (v. 6): a restored Christian is a joy to God’s servants and an encouragement to his brethren—(see v. 7), others are encouraged to “return.” O what inducements are here set before the backslider *to* “turn unto the LORD”: yet *faith* must be exercised so as to *appropriate* the precious promises of verses 4-8.—A.W.P.

## The Doctrine of Sanctification.

### 10. *Its Rule (Completed).*

The unchanging moral Law of God, which requires us to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves, is the believer's rule of life, the standard of holiness to which his character and conduct must be conformed, the line and plummet by which his internal desires and thoughts as well as outward deeds are measured. And, as has been shown, we are conformed to that Law by the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit. This He does by making us see and feel the heinousness of all sin, by delivering us from its reigning power, and by communicating to us an inclination and disposition of heart *unto* the requirements of the Law, so that we are thereby fitted and enabled to the practice of obedience. While enmity against God reigns within—as it does in every unregenerate soul—it is impossible to give that obedience which the Law demands.

We concluded our last paper by showing something of the marvelous and radical change which a sinner passes through when he is truly converted to God. One who has really surrendered to the claims of God *approves* of His Law: "I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:127, 128). And why do not the unregenerate do likewise? Because they have no love for a holy God. But believers, loving a holy God in Christ, must love the Law also, since in it the image of His holiness is displayed. The converted have a real inclination of heart *unto the whole* Law: "The Law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver . . . *all* Thy commandments are faithful" (Psa. 119:72, 86). There is in the regenerate a fixed principle which lies the same way as the holy Law, bending away from what the Law forbids and toward what it enjoins.

The converted habitually *endeavour to conform* their outward conduct to the whole Law: "O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments" (Psa. 119:5, 6). They desire a *fuller knowledge* of and obedience to the Law: "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy Law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa. 119:33-35). Should any object that these quotations are all made from the *Old Testament* (waiving now the fact that such an objection is quite pointless, for regeneration and its effects, conversion and its fruits, are the same in *all* ages), we would point out that the Apostle Paul described his own experience in identically the same terms: "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man . . . with the mind I myself serve the Law of God" (Rom. 7:22, 25). Thus Christ conforms His people to the Law by causing His Spirit to work in them an inclination toward it, a love for it, and an obedience to it.

But at this point a very real and serious difficulty is presented to the believer, for a genuine Christian has an *honest* heart, and detests lies and hypocrisy. That difficulty may be stated thus: If conversion consists in a real conformity to the holiness of God's Law, with submission and obedience to its authority, accompanied by a sincere and constant purpose of heart, with habitual endeavour in actual practice, then I dare not regard myself as one who is genuinely converted, for I cannot say that such is *my* experience; nay, I have to sorrowfully and shamefacedly lament that very much is my case in the exact re-

verse. So far from the reigning power of sin being broken in me, I find my corruptions and lusts raging more fiercely than ever, while my heart is a cage of all unclean things.

The above language will accurately express the feelings of many a trembling heart. As the preceding articles upon the Rule of our sanctification have been thoughtfully pondered, not a few, we doubt not, are seriously disturbed in their minds. On the one hand, they cannot gainsay what has been written, for they both see and feel that it is according to the Truth; but on the other hand, it *condemns* them, it makes them realise how far, far short they come of measuring up to such a standard; yea, it plainly appears to them that they do not in any sense or to any degree measure up to it at all. Conscious of so much in them that is opposed to the Law, conscious of their lack of conformity to it, both inwards and outwards, they bitterly bewail themselves, and cry, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24).

Our first reply is, Thank God for such an honest confession, for it supplies clear evidence that you *are* truly converted. No hypocrite—except it be in the hour of death—ever cries "O wretched man that I am!" No unregenerate soul ever mourns over his lack of conformity to God's Law! Such godly sorrow, dear Christian reader, will enable you to appropriate at least one verse of Scripture to your own case: "My tears have been my meat day and night" (Psa. 42:3), and those words proceeded not from the bitter remorse of a Judas, but were the utterance of one who had exclaimed "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (v. 1). Alas that so many today are ignorant of what constitutes the actual experience of a Christian: defeat as well as victory, grief as well as joy.

Whilst it be a fact that at regeneration a new nature is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit, a nature which is inclined toward and loves the Law, it is also a fact that the old nature is *not* removed, nor its opposition to and hatred of the Law changed. Whilst it be a fact that a supernatural principle of holiness is communicated to us by the Spirit, it is also a fact that the principle and root of indwelling sin remains, being neither eradicated nor sublimated. The Christian has in him two opposite and opposing principles, which produce in him a state of constant warfare: "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 "cannot" looks *both* ways: because of the restraining presence of the "Spirit," the "flesh" is prevented from fully gratifying its evil desires; and because of the hindering presence of the "flesh," the "Spirit" is unable to fully realise its aspirations.

It is the presence of and the warfare between these two natures, the "flesh" and the "Spirit," the principles of sin and holiness, which explains the bewildering state and conflicting experience of the real Christian; and it is only as he traces more fully the teaching of Holy Scripture and carefully compares himself therewith, that light is cast upon what is so puzzling and staggering in his experience. Particularly it is in the Seventh Chapter of Romans that we have the clearest and most complete description of the dual history of a converted soul. Therein we find the Apostle Paul, as moved by the Spirit, portraying most vividly and intimately his own spiritual biography. There are few Chapters in the New Testament which the Devil hates more than Romans 7, and strenuously and subtly does he strive to rob the Christian of its comforting and establishing message.

As we have shown above, the Christian approves of the Law, and owns it to be "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). He does so, even though the Law *condemns* many

things in him, yea condemns all in him which is unholy or ungodly. But more: the Christian *condemns himself*—"For that which I do I *allow not*: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (Rom. 7:15). So far from sin affording him satisfaction, it is the Christian's greatest grief. The more he perceives the excellency of God and what He is entitled to from His creatures, and the more he realises what a debtor he is to Divine grace and the loving obedience he ought to render out of gratitude, the more acute is the Christian's sorrow for his sad and continual failures to be what he ought to be and to live as he should.

Our second answer to one who is deeply distressed over the raging of his lusts and fears that he has never been soundly converted, is this: the fact is, that the more holy a person is, and the more his heart is truly sanctified, the more clearly does he perceive his corruptions and the more painfully does he feel the plague of his heart; while he utters his complaints in strong expressions and with bitterness of soul. In God's light we see light! It is not that sin has greater control of us than formerly, but that we now have *eyes to see* its fearful workings, and our consciences are *more sensitive* to feel its guilt. An unregenerate person is like a sow wallowing in the mire: his impurities and iniquities afford him satisfaction, and give him little or no concern, no, not even the unholiness of his outward practice, much less the unholiness of his heart.

There is a notable difference between the sensibilities and expressions of the unconverted and converted. An unregenerate person, who indulges freely in a course of evil practice, will nevertheless give a *favourable* account of himself: he will boast of his good-heartedness, his kindness, his generosity, his praiseworthy qualities and good deeds. On the other hand, persons truly holy, even when kept pure in their outward behaviour, yet conscious of their indwelling corruptions, will *condemn* themselves in unsparing language. The unholy fix their attention on any thing good they can find in themselves, and this renders them easy in an evil course. But a truly sanctified person is ready to overlook his spiritual attainments and fruits, and fixes his attention, with painful consciousness, on those respects in which he *lacks* conformity to Christ.

A Christian will say, I thought I had tasted that the Lord is gracious and that my heart had undergone a happy change, with a powerful determination toward God and holiness. I concluded I had some sound evidence of true conversion and of a heart that was really regenerated. Yet I knew the effect should be to grow in grace, to advance in holiness, and to be more delivered from sin. But alas, I find it quite otherwise. If there is grace in me, it is becoming weaker, and even though my outward conduct be regulated by the precepts of the Law, yet in my heart sin is becoming stronger and stronger—evil lusts, carnal affections, worldly desires, and disorderly passions, are daily stirring, often with great vehemence, defiling my spirit. Alas, after all, I fear my past experience was only a delusion, and the dread of the final outcome often strikes terror throughout my whole soul.

Dear friend, it is true that there is much in every Christian which affords great cause for self-judgment and deep humbling of ourselves before God; yet this is a very different matter from sin obtaining fuller dominion over us. Where sin gains power, there is always a corresponding *hardening* of heart and spiritual *insensibility*. Sin is served *willingly* by the wicked, and is sweet and pleasant to them. But if *you* sorrow over sin, sincerely and vigorously oppose it, condemn yourself for it, then old things have passed away and all is become new. "Christians may be assured that a growing sensibility of conscience and heart sorrow for sin is among the chief evidences of growth in grace and

of good advances in holiness that they are likely to have on this side of Heaven. For the more pure and holy the heart is, it will naturally have the more quick feeling of whatever sin remaineth in it" (James Fraser, 1760).

The *dual* experience of the Christian is plainly intimated in Paul's statement: "So then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7:25). But someone may reply, The opening verse of the next Chapter says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who *walk not after the flesh*, but after the Spirit." Ah, note the minute accuracy of Scripture: had it said, "who *act not according to the flesh*" we might well despair, and conclude for a certainty we were not Christians at all. But "walking" is a *deliberate* course, in which a man proceeds *freely*, without force or struggle; it is the reverse of being dragged or driven. But when the believer follows the dictates of the flesh, it is *against* the holy desires of his heart, and with reluctance to the new nature! But does not Romans 8:4 affirm that Christ died in order that "the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us?" Again we answer, admire the marvelous accuracy of Scripture, it does *not* say, the righteousness of the Law is *now* fulfilled in us." It is not so, perfectly, in this life, but it will be so at our glorification.

Perhaps the reader is inclined to ask, But *why* does God suffer the sinful nature to remain in the Christian: He could easily remove it. Beware, my friend, of calling into question God's infinite wisdom: He knows what is best, and *His* thoughts and ways are often the opposite of ours (Isa. 55:8). But let me ask, *Which* magnifies God's *power* the more: to preserve in this wicked world one who still has within him a corrupt nature, or one that has been made as sinless as the holy angels? Can there be any doubt as to the answer! But why does God not *subdue* my lusts: would it not be more for His glory if He did? Again, we say, Beware of measuring God with *your* mind. He knows which is most for His glory. But answer this question: If your lusts *were* greatly subdued and you sinned far less than you do, would you appreciate and adore His *grace* as you now do?

Our third answer to the deeply exercised soul who calls into question the genuineness of his conversion, is this: Honestly apply to yourself the following tests. First, in seasons of retirement from the noise and business of the world, or during the sacred hours of the Sabbath, or in your secret devotions, *what* are your thoughts, what is the real temper of your mind? Do you *know* God, commune with and delight in Him? Is His Word precious, is prayer a welcome exercise? Do you delight in God's perfections and esteem Him for His absolute supremacy and sovereignty? Do you feel and lament your remaining blindness and ignorance, do you mourn over your lack of conformity to God's Law and your natural contrariety to it, and hate yourself for it? Do you watch and pray and fight against the corruptions of your heart? Not indeed as you *should*, but do you really and sincerely do so at all?

Second, what are the *grounds* of your love to God? From what motives are you influenced to love Him? Because you believe He loves you? or because He appears infinitely great and glorious in Himself? Are you glad that He *is* infinitely holy, that He knows and sees all things, that He possesses all power? Does it suit your heart that God governs the world, and requires that all creatures should bow in the dust before Him, that He alone may be exalted? Does it appear perfectly reasonable that you should love God with all your heart, and do you loath and resist everything contrary to Him? Do you feel yourself to be wholly to blame for not being altogether such as the Law requires? Third, is there



being formed within you a disposition to love your neighbour as yourself, so that you wish and seek only his good? And do you hate and mourn over any contrary spirit within you? Honest answers to these questions should enable you to ascertain your real spiritual state.

“The holiness which the Gospel requireth will *not* be maintained either in the heart or lives of men *without a continual conflict*, warring, contending; and that with all diligence, watchfulness, and perseverance therein. It is our *warfare*, and the Scripture abounds in the discovery of the adversaries we have to conflict withal, their power and subtlety, as also in directions and encouragements unto their resistance. To suppose that Gospel obedience will be kept in our hearts and lives without a continual management of a vigorous warfare against its enemies, is to deny the Scripture and the experience of all that believe and obey God in sincerity. Satan, sin, and the world, are continually assaulting of it, and seeking to ruin its interest in us. The Devil will not be resisted, which is our duty to do (1 Peter 5:8, 9) without a sharp contest; in the management whereof we are commanded to ‘take unto ourselves the whole armour of God’ (Eph. 6:13). Fleshly lusts do continually war against our souls (1 Peter 2:11), and if we maintain not a warfare unto the end against them, they will be our ruin. Nor will the power of the world be any otherwise avoided than by a victory over it (1 John 5:4), which will not be carried without contending.

“But I suppose it needs no great confirmation unto any who know what it is to serve and obey God in temptations, that the life of faith and race of holiness will *not* be preserved in *without a severe striving*, labouring, contending, with diligence and persistence; so that I shall take it as a principle (notionally at least) agreed upon by the generality of Christians. If we like not to be holy on *these* terms, we must let it alone, for on any other we shall never be so. If we faint in *this* course, if we give it over, if we think what we aim at herein not to be worth the obtaining or persevering by such a severe contention all our days, we must be content to be without it. Nothing doth so promote the interest of Hell and destruction in the world as a presumption that a lazy slothful performance of some duties, and an abstinence from some sins, is that which God will accept as our obedience. Crucifying of sin, mortifying our inordinate affections, contesting against the whole interest of the flesh, Satan, and the world, and that in *inward* actings of grace, and all instances of outward duties, and that *always* while we live in this world, are required of us hereunto” (John Owen, 1660).

From all that has been said it should be evident that the Christian needs to exercise the greatest possible care, *daily*, over the inward purity of his heart, earnestly opposing *the first motions* of every fleshly lust, inordinate affection, evil imagination, and unholy passion. The *heart* is the real seat of holiness. Heart-holiness is the chief part of our conformity to the spiritual Law of God, nor is any outward work considered as holy by Him if the heart be not right with Him—desiring and seeking after obedience to Him—for He sees and tries *the heart*. Holiness of heart is absolutely necessary to peace of mind and joy of soul, for only a cleansed heart can commune with the thrice Holy God: then “keep thy heart *with all diligence*, for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

In the last paragraph we have said nothing which in anywise clashes with our remarks in the body of this article; rather have we emphasised once more another aspect of our subject, namely, the pressing duty which lies upon the Christian to bring his heart and life into fuller conformity with the Law. It would be a grievous sin on the part of the writer

were he to lower the standard which God has set before us to the level of our present attainments. Vast indeed is the difference between what we *ought to be* and what we actually *are* in our character and conduct, and deep should be our sorrow over this. Nevertheless, if the root of the matter be in us, there will be a longing after, a praying for and a pressing forward unto increased personal and practical holiness.—A.W.P

N.B. This aspect of our theme has been purposely developed by us somewhat disproportionately. The supreme importance of it required fullness of detail. The prevailing ignorance called for a lengthy treatment of the subject. Unless we know *what* the Rule of Sanctification is, and seek to conform thereto, all our efforts after holiness will and must be wide of the mark. Nothing is more honouring to God, and nothing makes more for our own true happiness than His LAW to be revered, loved, and obeyed by us.

