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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

CONTENTS

The Holy Spirit.....	1
<i>2. The Personality of the Holy Spirit</i>	
The Epistle to the Hebrews	4
<i>62. The Faith of Sarah (11:11-12)</i>	
The Life of David.....	11
<i>14. His Sparing of Saul</i>	
Coming to Christ.....	15
<i>Part 2</i>	
Dispensationalism	21
<i>1. The Promises of God (Concluded)</i>	
Faith	25
Assurance	27
<i>Dialogue 2</i>	
Good News.....	32

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE HOLY SPIRIT

2. The Personality of the Holy Spirit

If we were asked to state in a comprehensive form what constitutes (according to our views of Scripture) the blessedness of the Lord's people on earth, after His work of grace is begun in their souls, we would not hesitate to say that it must be wholly made up of the personal knowledge of and communion with the glorious Trinity in their persons in the Godhead. For as the church is chosen to be everlastingly holy and everlastingly happy, in uninterrupted communion with God in glory when this life is ended, the anticipation of it now by faith must form the purest source of all present joy. But this communion with God in the Trinity of His Persons cannot be enjoyed without a clear apprehension of Him. We must know under divine teaching God in the Trinity of His Persons and we must also know from the same source the special and personal acts of grace by which each glorious Person in the Godhead has condescended to make Himself known unto His people, before we can be said to personally enjoy communion with each and all.

We offer no apology, then, for devoting a separate article to the consideration of *the personality* of the Holy Spirit, for unless we have a right conception of His glorious being, it is impossible that we should entertain right thoughts about Him, and therefore impossible for us to render unto Him that homage, love, confidence, and submission which are His due. To the Christian who is given to realize that he owes to the personal operations of the Spirit every divine influence exercised upon him from the first moment of regeneration until the final consummation in glory, it cannot be a matter of little moment for him to aspire after the fullest apprehension of Him that his finite faculties are capable of. Yes, he will consider no effort too great to obtain spiritual views of Him whose divine grace and power the effectual means of his salvation through Christ are to be

ascribed. To those who are strangers unto the operations of the blessed Spirit in the heart, the theme of this article is likely to be a matter of unconcern, and its details wearisome.

Some of our readers may be surprised to hear that there are men professing to be Christians who flatly deny the personality of the Spirit. We will not sully these pages by transcribing their blasphemies, but we will mention one detail to which appeal is made by the spiritual seducers, because some of our friends have possibly experienced a difficulty with it. In the second chapter of Acts, the Holy Spirit was said to be “poured out” (Act 2:18) and “shed abroad” see Act 2:33. How could such terms be used of a Person? Very easily—that language is *figurative* and not literal. Literal it cannot be for that which is *spiritual* is incapable of being materially “poured out.” The figure is easily interpreted—as water “poured out” *descends*, so the Spirit has come from heaven to earth. As a “pouring” rain is a heavy one, so the Spirit is freely given in the plenitude of His gifts.

Having cleared up, we trust, what has given difficulty to some, the way is now open for us to set forth some of the positive evidence. Let us begin by pointing out that a “person” is an intelligent and voluntary entity, of whom personal properties may be truly predicated. A “person” is a living entity, endowed with understanding and will, being an intelligent and willing agent. Such is the Holy Spirit. All the elements which constitute personality are ascribed to and found in Him. “As the Father hath life in Himself, and the Son has life in Himself, so has the Holy Spirit, since He is the Author of natural and spiritual life to men, which He could not be unless He had life in Himself, and if He has life in Himself, He must subsist in Himself” (John Gill, 1616-1683).

1. Personal properties are predicated of the Spirit. He is endowed with *understanding* or wisdom, which is the first inseparable property of an intelligent agent, “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1Co 2:10). Now to “search” is an act of understanding and the Spirit is said to “search” because He “knoweth” (1Co 2:11). He is endowed with *will*, which is the most eminently distinguishing property of a person, “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing unto every man severally as he will” (1Co 12:11)—how utterly meaningless would be such language were the Spirit only an influence or energy! He *loves*, “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit” (Rom 15:30)—how absurd would it be to speak of the “love of the Spirit” if the Spirit were nought but an impersonal breath or abstract quality!

2. Passive personal properties are ascribed to the Holy Spirit, that is to say, He is the *object* of such actions of men as none but a person can be. “Ye have agreed together to *tempt* the Spirit of the Lord” (Act 5:9)—rightly did John Owen (1616-1683) say, “How can a quality, an accident, an emanation from God be tempted? None can possibly be so but he that hath an understanding to consider what is proposed unto him, and a will to determine upon the proposals made.” In like manner, Ananias is said to “*lie* to the Holy Spirit” (Act 5:3)—none can lie unto any other but such a one as is capable of hearing and receiving a testimony. In Ephesians 4:30, we are bidden not to “*grieve* the Holy Spirit”—how senseless would it be to talk about “grieving” an abstraction, like the law of gravity. Hebrews 10:29 warns us that He may be “done despite unto.”

3. Personal actions are attributed to Him. He *speaks*, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly” (1Ti 4:1). “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 2:7). He *teaches*, “For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour

what ye ought to say” (Luk 12:12). “He shall teach you all things” (Joh 14:26). He *commands* or exercises authority. A striking proof of this is found in Acts 13:2, “The Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them”—how utterly misleading would such language be if the Spirit were not a real person! He *intercedes*, “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:26)—as the intercession of Christ proves Him to be a person, and a distinct one from the Father unto whom He intercedes, so the intercession of the Spirit equally proves His personality, even His distinct personality.

4. Personal characters are ascribed to Him. Four times over, the Lord Jesus referred to the Spirit as “the Comforter,” and not merely as “comfort.” Inanimate things, such as clothes, may give us comfort, but only a living person can be a “comforter.” Again, He is the Witness, “Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us” (Heb 10:15). “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16)—the term is a forensic one, denoting the supplying of valid evidence of legal proof. Obviously, only an intelligent agent is capable of discharging such an office. He is justifier and sanctifier, “But ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and *by the Spirit* of our God” (1Co 6:11).

5. Personal pronouns are used about Him. The word “pneuma” in the Greek, like “spirit” in the English, is neuter, nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is frequently spoken of in the masculine gender, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (Joh 14:26)—the personal pronoun could not, without violating grammar and propriety, be applied to any other but a person. Referring again to Him, Christ said, “If I depart, I will send *him* unto you” (Joh 16:7)—there is no other alternative than to regard the Holy Spirit as a Person or to be guilty of the frightful blasphemy of affirming that the Savior employed language which could only mislead His apostles and bring them into fearful error. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you *another* Comforter” (John 14:16)—no comparison would be possible between Christ (a Person) and an abstract influence.

Borrowing the language of the revered John Owen, we may surely say, “By all these testimonies, we have fully confirmed what was designed to be proved by them, namely, that the Holy Spirit is not a quality, as some speak, residing in the divine nature; not a mere emanation of virtue and power from God; not the acting of the power of God in and unto our sanctification, but a *holy, intelligent subsistent*, or person.” May it please the Eternal Spirit to add His blessings to the above, apply the same to our hearts, and make His adorable Person more real and precious to each of us. Amen.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

62. The Faith of Sarah (11:11-12)

In the verses which are now to be before us, the apostle calls attention to the marvelous power of a God-given faith to exercise itself in the presence of most discouraging circumstances, persevere in the face of the most formidable obstacles, and trust God to do that which unto human reason seemed utterly impossible. They show us that this faith was exercised by a frail and aged woman, who at first was hindered and opposed by the workings of unbelief, but who in the end relied upon the veracity of God and rested upon His promise. They show what an intensely practical thing faith is. That it not only lifts up the soul to heaven, but is able to draw down strength for the body on earth. They demonstrate what great endings sometimes issue from small beginnings, and that like a stone thrown into a lake produces ever-enlarging circles on the rippling waters, so faith issues in fruit which increases from generation to generation.

The more the 11th verse of our present chapter be pondered, the more evident will it appear the faith there spoken of is of a radically different order from that mental and theoretical faith of cozy-chair dreamers. The "faith" of the vast majority of professing Christians is as different from that described in Hebrews 11 as darkness is from light. The one ends in talk, the other was expressed in deeds. The one breaks down when put to the test, the other survived every trial to which it was exposed. The one is inoperative and ineffectual, the other was active and powerful.

The one is unproductive, the other issued into fruits to the glory of God. Ah, is it not evident that the great difference between them is, that one is merely human, the other divine, one merely natural, the other altogether supernatural? This it is which our hearts and consciences need to lay hold of and turn into earnest prayer.

That which has just been pointed out ought to deeply exercise both writer and reader. It ought to search us through and through, causing us to seriously and diligently weigh the character of our "faith." It is of little use to be entertained by interesting articles, unless they lead to careful self-examination. It is of little profit to be made to wonder at the achievements of the faith of those Old Testaments saints, unless we are shamed by them and made to cry mightily unto God for Him to work in us a "like precious faith." Unless our faith issues in works which mere nature cannot produce, unless it is enabling us to "overcome the world" (1Jo 5:4) and triumph over the lusts of the flesh, then we have grave cause to fear that our faith is not "the faith of God's elect" (Ti 1:1). Cry with David, "Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psa 26:2).

It is not that any Christian lives a life of perfect faith—only the Lord Jesus ever did that. No, for in the first place, like all the other spiritual graces, it is subject to growth (2Th 1:3) and full maturity is not reached in this life. In the second place, faith is not always in exercise, nor can we command its activities. He who bestowed it, must also renew it. In the third place, the faith of every saint falters at times. It did in Abraham, in Moses, in Elijah, in the apostles. The flesh is still in us and therefore the reasonings of unbelief are ever ready (unless divine grace subdue them) to oppose the actings of faith. We are not then

urging the reader to search in himself for a faith that is perfect, either in its growth, its constancy, or its achievements. Rather are we to seek divine aid and make sure whether we have *any* faith which is superior to what has been acquired through religious education. Whether we have a faith which, despite the strugglings of unbelief, *does* trust the living God. Whether we have a faith which produces any fruit which manifestly issues from a spiritual root.

Having spoken of Abraham's faith, the apostle now makes mention of Sarah's. "Observe what a blessing it is when a husband and wife are both partners of faith, when both in the same yoke draw one way. Abraham is the father of the faithful and Sarah is recommended among believers as having a fellowship in the same promises and in the same troubles and trials. So it is said of Zachariah and Elizabeth, 'And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless' (Luk 1:6). It is a mighty encouragement when the constant companion of our lives is also a fellow in the same faith. This should direct us in the matter of choice. She cannot be a meet help that goeth a contrary way in religion. Religion decayeth in families by nothing so much as by want of care in matches" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Heb 11:11). There are five things upon which our attention needs to be focused. First, the impediments of her faith. These were her barrenness, old age, and unbelief. Second, the effect of her faith. She "received strength to conceive." Third, the constancy of her faith. She trusted God unto an actual deliverance or birth of the child. Fourth, the foundation of her faith. She rested upon the veracity of the divine Promiser. Fifth, the fruit of her faith. The numerous posterity which issued from her son Isaac. Let us consider each of these separately.

"Through faith also Sarah herself." The Greek is just the same here as in all the other verses and should have been rendered uniformly, "By faith" etc. The word "also" seems to be added for a double purpose. First to counteract and correct any error which might suppose that women were debarred the blessings and privileges of grace. It is true that in the official sphere, God has prohibited them from occupying the place of rule or usurping authority over the men, so that they are commanded to be silent in the churches (1Co 14:34), are not permitted to teach (1Ti 2:12), and are bidden to be in subjection to their husbands (Eph 5:22). But in the spiritual sphere all inequalities disappear, for "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) and therefore the believing husband and the believing wife are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1Pe 3:7).

In the second place, this added "also" informs us that, though a woman, Sarah exercised the same faith as had Abraham. She had left Chaldea when he did, accompanied him to Canaan, dwelt with him in tents. Not only so, but she personally acted faith upon the living God. Necessarily so, for she was equally concerned in the divine revelation with Abraham, and was as much a party to the great difficulties of its accomplishment. The blessing of the promised seed was assigned to and appropriated by her, as much as to and by him, and therefore is she proposed unto the church as an example (1Pe 3:5-6). "As Abraham was the father of the faithful, or of the church, so she was the mother of it, so as

that the distinct mention of her faith was necessary. She was the free woman from whence the church sprang, Galatians 4:22-23. And all believing women are her daughters, 1Pe 3:6" (John Owen).

"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength" (Heb 11:11). The word "herself" is emphatic. It was not her husband only, by whose faith she might receive the blessing, but by her own faith that she received strength, and this, notwithstanding the very real and formidable obstacles which stood in the way of her exercising it. These, as we have pointed out, were three in number. First, she had not borne any children during the customary years of pregnancy. As Genesis 11:30 informs us, "Sarai was barren." "Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children" (Gen 16:1). Second, she was long past the age of childbearing, for she was now "ninety years old" (Gen 17:17). Third, the workings of unbelief interposed, persuading her that it was altogether against nature and reason for a woman, under such circumstances, to give birth unto a child. This comes out in Genesis 18. There we read of three men appearing unto Abraham, one of whom was the Lord in theophanic manifestation. Unto him he said, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. Upon hearing this "Sarah laughed within herself" (Gen 18:12).

Sarah's laughter was that of doubting and distrust, for she said "I am waxed old" (Gen 18:12). At once the Lord rebukes her unbelief, asking, "Is there anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (Gen 18:14). Solemn indeed is the sequel. "Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh" (Gen 18:15). It is always a shame to do amiss, but a greater shame to deny it. It was a sin to give way to unbelief, but it was adding iniquity unto iniquity to cover it with a lie. But we deceive ourselves if we think to impose upon God, for nothing can be concealed from His all-seeing eye. By comparing Hebrews 11:11 with what is recorded in Genesis 18, we learn that after the Lord had reproved Sarah's unbelief and she began to realize that the promise came from God, her faith was called into exercise. Because her laughter came from weakness and not from scorn, God smote her not, as He did Zacharias for his unbelief" (Luk 1:20).

Varied are the lessons which may be learned from the above incident. Many times the Word does not take effect immediately. It did not in Sarah's case, though afterward she believed, at first she laughed. It was only when the divine promise was *repeated* that her faith began to act. Let preachers and Christian parents, who are discouraged by lack of success, lay this to heart. Again, see here that before faith is established often there is a conflict, Shall I have a child who am old?—reason opposed the promise. Just as when a fire is kindled the smoke is seen before the flame, so ere the heart rests upon the Word, there is generally doubting and fear. Once more, observe how graciously God hides the defects of His children. Nothing is said of Rahab's lie (Heb 11:31), of Job's impatience (Jam 5:11), nor here of Sarah's laughing, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love" (Eph 5:1-2)!

Let us next consider what is here ascribed unto the faith of Sarah, "She received strength to conceive seed" (Heb 11:11). She obtained that which previously was not in her. There was now a restoration of her nature to perform its normal functions. Her dead womb was supernaturally vivified. In response to her faith, the Omnipotent One did for Sarah

what He had done to Abraham in response to his trusting of Him, "(I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who *quickeneth* the dead" (Rom 4:17). "All things are possible with God." Yes, and it is also true that "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mar 9:23): how blessedly and strikingly does the incident now before us illustrate this! O that it may speak unto each of our hearts and cause us to long after and pray for an increase of our faith. What is more glorifying to God than a confident looking unto Him to work in and through us that which mere nature cannot produce.

"By faith also Sarah herself received strength" (Heb 11:11). Christian reader, this is recorded both for thine instruction and encouragement. Faith worked a vigor in Sarah's body where it was not before. Is it not written, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall *renew their strength*" (Isa 40:31)? Do we really believe this? Do we act as though we did? The writer can bear witness to the veracity of that promise. When he was in Australia, editing this magazine, keeping up with a heavy correspondence, and preaching five and six times each week, when it was over one hundred in the shade, many a time has he dragged his weary body into the pulpit, and then looked unto the Lord for a definite reinvigoration of body. Never did He fail us. After speaking for two hours, we generally felt fresher than we did when we arose at the beginning of the day. And why not? Has not God promised to "supply *all* our need"? Of how many is it true that "ye have not, because ye [in faith] ask not" (Jam 4:2).

Ah, dear reader, "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that *now* is, and of that which is to come" (1Ti 4:8), "profitable" for the body, as well as for the soul. While we strongly reprobate much that is now going on under the name of "Faith-Healing," yet we have as little patience with the pretended hyper-sanctity which disdains any looking unto God for the supply of our bodily needs. In this same chapter which we are now commenting upon, we read of others who "out of weakness were made strong" (Heb 11:34). Sad it is to see so many of God's dear children living far beneath their privileges. True, many are under the chastening hand of God. But this should not be so. The cause should be sought, the wrong righted, the sin confessed, restoration both spiritual and temporal diligently sought.

We do not wish to convey the impression that the only application unto us of these words, "By faith also Sarah herself received strength" (Heb 11:11), has reference to the reviving of the physical body, not so, though that is, undoubtedly, the first lesson to be learned. But there is a higher signification too. Many a Christian feels his spiritual weakness. That is well, yet instead of this hindering, it should bestir to lay hold of the Lord's strength (Isa 27:5). In the final analysis, it is nothing but lack of faith which so often allows the "flesh" to hinder us from bringing forth the Gospel-fruits of holiness. Despair not of personal frailty, but go forward in the strength of God, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph 6:10). Turn this into believing prayer for divine enablement. "Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase" (Job 8:7).

Does the reader still say, "Ah, but such an experience is not for me. Alas, I am so unworthy, so helpless. I feel so lifeless and listless." So was Sarah! Yet, "by faith" she "received strength." And, dear friend, faith is not occupied with self, but with God.

Abraham “considered not his own body” (Rom 4:19), nor did Sarah. Each of them looked away from self and counted upon God to work a miracle. And God did not fail them. He is pledged to honor those who honor Him and nothing honors Him more than a trustful expectation. He always responds to faith. There is no reason why you should remain weak and listless. True, without Christ, you can do nothing, but there is an infinite fullness in Him (Joh 1:16) for you to draw from. Then from this day onwards, let your attitude be, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13). Apply to Him, count upon Him, “my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1).

“And was delivered of a child” (Heb 11:11). The “and” here connects what follows with each of the preceding verbs. It was “by faith” that Sarah “received strength,” and it was also “by faith” that she was now “delivered of a child.” It is the constancy and perseverance of her faith which is here intimated. There was no abortion, no miscarriage. She trusted God right through unto the end. This brings before us a subject upon which very little is written these days—the duty and privilege of Christian women counting upon God for a safe issue in the most trying and critical season in their lives. Faith is to be exercised not only in acts of worship, but in the ordinary offices of our daily affairs. We are to eat and drink in faith, work and sleep in faith, and the Christian wife should be delivered of her child by faith. The danger is great, and if in any extremity there is need of faith, much more so where life itself is involved. Let us seek to condense from the helpful comments of the Puritan Manton.

First, we must be sensible what *need* we have to exercise faith in this case, that we may not run upon danger blindfolded, and if we escape, then to think our deliverance a mere chance. Rachel died in this case, so also did the wife of Phinehas (1Sa 4:19-20). A great hazard is run and therefore you must be sensible of it. The more difficulty and danger be apprehended, the better the opportunity for the exercise of faith—2 Chronicles 20:12; 2 Corinthians 1:9. Second, because the sorrows of travail are a monument of God’s displeasure against sin (Gen 3:16), therefore this must put you the more earnestly to seek an interest in Christ, that you may have remedy against sin. Third, meditate upon the promise of 1 Timothy 2:15, which is made good eternally or temporally as God sees fit. Fourth, the faith you exercise must be the glorifying of His power and submitting to His will. This expresses the kind of faith which is proper to all temporal mercies—Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst save me—it is sufficient to ease the heart of a great deal of trouble and perplexing fear.

“And was delivered of a child” (Heb 11:11). As we have pointed out in the last paragraph, this clause is added to show the continuance of Sarah’s faith and the blessing of God upon her. True faith not only appropriates His promise, but continues resting on the same till that which is believed be actually accomplished. The principle of this is enunciated in Hebrews 3:14 and 10:36. “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast *unto the end*,” “Cast not away therefore your confidence.” It is at this point so many fail. They endeavor to lay hold of a divine promise, but in the interval of testing, let go of it. This is why Christ said, “If ye have faith, *and doubt not*, ye shall not only do this” etc. Matthew 21:21—“doubt not,” not only at the moment of pleading the promise, but during the time you are awaiting its fulfillment.

Hence also, unto “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart” is added, “and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Pro 3:5).

“When she was past age” (Heb 11:11). This clause is added so as to heighten the miracle which God so graciously wrought in response to Sarah’s faith. It magnifies the glory of His power. It is recorded for our encouragement. It shows us that no difficulty or hindrance should cause a disbelief of the promise. God is not tied down to the order of nature, nor limited by any secondary causes. He will turn nature upside down rather than not be as good as His Word. He has brought water out of a rock, made iron to float (2Ki 6:6), sustained two million people in a howling wilderness.

These things should arouse the Christian to wait upon God with full confidence in the face of the utmost emergency. Yea, the greater the impediments which confront us, faith should be increased.

The trustful heart says, Here is a fit occasion for faith. Now that all creature-streams have run dry is a grand opportunity for counting on God to show Himself strong on my behalf. What cannot He do! He made a woman of ninety to bear a child—a thing quite contrary to nature—so I may surely expect Him to work wonders for me too.

“Because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11). Here is the secret of the whole thing. Here was the ground of Sarah’s confidence, the foundation on which faith rested. She did not look at God’s promises through the mist of interposing obstacles, but she viewed the difficulties and hindrances through the clear light of God’s promises. The act which is here ascribed unto Sarah is that she “judged” or reckoned, reputed and esteemed, God to be faithful. She was assured that He would make good His Word, on which He had caused her to hope. God had spoken. Sarah had heard. In spite of all that seemed to make it impossible that the promise should be fulfilled in her case, she steadfastly believed. Rightly did Luther say, “If you would trust God, you must learn to crucify the question *How*.” Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1Th 5:24). This is sufficient for the heart to rest upon. Faith will cheerfully leave it with omniscience as to *how* the promise will be made good to us.

“Because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11). Let it be carefully noted that Sarah’s faith went beyond the promise. While her mind dwelt upon *the thing* promised, it seemed unto her altogether incredible, but when she took her thoughts off all secondary causes and fixed them on God Himself, then the difficulties no longer disturbed her. Her heart was at rest in God. She knew that God could be depended upon. He is “faithful”—able, willing, sure to perform His Word. Sarah looked beyond the promise to the Promiser, and as she did so, all doubtings were stilled. She rested with full confidence on the immutability of Him that cannot lie, knowing that where divine veracity is engaged, omnipotence will make it good. It is by believing meditations upon the character of God that faith is fed and strengthened to expect the blessing, despite all apparent difficulties and supposed impossibilities. It is the heart’s contemplation of the perfections of God which causes faith to prevail. As this is of such vital practical importance, let us devote another paragraph to enlarging thereon.

To fix our minds on the *things* promised, to have an assured expectation of the enjoyment of them, without the heart first resting upon the veracity, immutability, and omnipotency of God, is but a deceiving imagination. Rightly did John Owen point out that,

“The formal object of faith in the divine promises is not the things promised in the first place, *but God Himself* in His essential excellencies, of truth, or faithfulness and power.” Nevertheless, the divine perfections do not, of themselves, work faith in us. It is only as the heart believingly ponders the divine attributes that we shall “judge” or conclude Him faithful that has promised. It is the man whose mind is stayed upon God Himself, who is kept in “perfect peace” (Isa 26:3). That is, he who joyfully contemplates who and what God is that will be preserved from doubting and wavering while waiting the fulfillment of the promise. As it was with Sarah, so it is with us, every promise of God has tacitly annexed to it this consideration, “Is any thing too hard for the LORD!” (Gen 18:14).

“Wherefore also from one was born, and that too of [one] having become dead, even as the stars of the heaven in multitude, and as the sand which [is] by the shore of the sea the countless” (Heb 11:12). We have quoted the rendering given in the Bagster Interlinear because it is more literal and accurate than our A.V. The “him” in the English translation is misleading, for in this verse there is no masculine pronoun. At the most, the “one” must refer to one couple, but personally we believe it points to one woman, Sarah, as the “born” (rather than the “begotten”) intimates. We regard the twelfth verse as setting forth the fruit of her faith, namely the numerous posterity which issued from her son, Isaac. The double reference to the “sand” and the “stars” calls attention to the twofold seed—the earthly and the heavenly, the natural and the spiritual Israel.

Like the “great multitude, which no man could number” of Revelation 7:9, so “as the stars of the sky for multitude and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable” (Heb 11:12). of our present verse, is obviously an hyperbole. It is figurative language and not to be understood literally. This may seem a bold and unwarrantable statement to some of our readers, yet if Scripture be compared with Scripture, no other conclusion is possible. The following passages make this clear—Deuteronomy 1:10; Joshua 11:4; Judges 7:12; 1 Samuel 13:5; 2 Samuel 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20. For other examples of this figure of speech see Deuteronomy 9:1; Psalm 78:27; Isaiah 60:22; John 21:25. Hyperboles are employed not to move us to believe untruths, but by emphasis, arrest our attention and cause us to heed weighty matters. The following rules are to be observed in the employment of them. First, they are to be used only of such things as are indeed true in the substance of them. Second, only of things which are worthy of more than ordinary consideration. Third, set out, as nearly as possible, in proverbial language. Fourth, expressed in words of similarity and dissimilarity, rather than by words of equality and inequality (William Gouge, 1575-1653).

But let our final thought be upon the rich recompense whereby God rewarded the faith of Sarah. The opening “Therefore” of verse 12 points the blessed consequence of her relying upon the faithfulness of God in the face of the utmost natural discouragements. From her faith, there issued Isaac and from him, ultimately, Christ Himself. And this is recorded for our instruction. Who can estimate the fruits of faith? Who can tell how many lives may be affected for good, even in generations yet to come, through your faith and my faith today! Oh how the thought of this should stir us up to cry more earnestly, “Lord, increase our faith” to the praise of the glory of Thy grace. Amen.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

14. His Sparing of Saul

We began our last article by quoting, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” the remainder of the verse reading, “but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psa 34:19). This does not mean that God always rescues the afflicted one from the physical danger which menaces him. No indeed and we must be constantly on our guard against carnally interpreting the Holy Scriptures.

It is quite true that there are numerous cases recorded in the Word where the Lord was pleased to graciously put forth His power and extricate His people from situations where death immediately threatened them—the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, Elijah from the murderous intentions of Ahab and Jezebel, Daniel from the lion’s den, being striking illustrations in point. Yet the slaying of Abel by Cain, the martyrdom of Zachariah (Mat 23:35), the stoning of Stephen, are examples to the contrary. Then did the promise of Psalm 34:19 fail in these latter instances? No indeed, they received a yet more glorious fulfillment, for they were finally delivered out of this world of sin and suffering.

David was the one whose hand was moved by the Holy Spirit to first pen Psalm 34:19 and signally was it fulfilled in his history in a physical sense. Few men’s lives have been more frequently placed in jeopardy than was his and few men have experienced the Lord’s delivering hand as he did. But there was a special reason for that and it is this to which we would now call attention. David was one of the progenitors of Israel’s Messiah and it is indeed striking and blessed to note the wonderful works of God of old in His miraculously preserving the chosen seed from which Christ, after the flesh, was to spring. Indeed it is this more particularly which supplies the key to many a divine interposition on behalf of the patriarchs and others, who were in the immediate line from which Jesus of Nazareth issued.

Strikingly does this appear in the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who for so many years dwelt in the midst of the Canaanites. The inhabitants of that land were heathen and most wicked, as Genesis 15:16 intimates. Abraham and his descendants were exposed to them as sojourners in the land and men are most apt to be irritated by the peculiar customs of strangers. It was, then, a most remarkable dispensation of providence which preserved the patriarchs in the midst of such a people, see Psalm 105:42. “Thus was this handful, this little root that had the blessing of the Redeemer in it, preserved in the midst of enemies and dangers, which was not unlike to the preserving of the Ark in the midst of the tempestuous deluge” (Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758). Wondrously too did God preserve the infant nation of Israel in Egypt in the wilderness and on their first entering the promised land.

Still more arresting is the illustration which this principle receives in the divine preserving of the life of him who was more immediately and illustriously the sire of Christ. How often was there but a step betwixt David and death! His encountering of the lion and bear in the days of his shepherd life, without divine intervention, could have rent him in pieces as easily as they caught a lamb from his flock. His facing Goliath, who was

powerful enough to break him across his knee and give his flesh to the beasts of the field as he threatened. The exposing of his life to the Philistines, when Saul required one hundred of their foreskins as a dowry for his daughter. The repeated assaults of the king by throwing his javelin at him. The later attempts made to capture and slay him—yet from all these was David delivered. “Thus was the precious seed that virtually contained the Redeemer and all the blessings of redemption, wondrously preserved, when all earth and hell were conspired against it to destroy it” (Jonathan Edwards).

But we must now turn to our present lesson, a lesson which records one of the most striking events in the eventful life of David. Well did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) point out, “We have hitherto had Saul seeking an opportunity to destroy David, and to his shame, he could never find it. In this chapter, David had a fair opportunity to destroy Saul and to his honor, he did not make use of it, and his sparing Saul’s life was as great an instance of God’s *grace* in him, as the preserving of his own life was of God’s *providence* over him.” Most maliciously had Saul sought David’s life, most generously did David spare Saul’s life. It was a glorious triumph of the spirit over the flesh, of grace over sin.

“And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi” (1Sa 24:1). From these words, we gather that Saul had been successful in turning back the invading Philistines. This illustrates a solemn principle which is often lost sight of—human success is no proof of divine approbation. The mere fact that a man is prospering outwardly, does not, of itself, demonstrate that his life is pleasing unto the Lord. No one but an infidel would deny that it was *God* who enabled Saul to clear his land of the Philistines, yet we err seriously if we conclude from this that He delighted in him. As oxen are fattened for the slaughter, so God often ripens the wicked for judgment and damnation by an abundance of His temporal mercies. The immediate sequel shows clearly what Saul still was.

“And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi” (1Sa 24:1). This may be regarded as a testing of Saul, for every thing that happens in each of our lives tests us at some point or other. Miserably did Saul fail under it. Nothing in the outward dispensations of God changes the heart of man. His chastisements do not break the stubborn will, nor His mercies melt the hard heart. Nothing short of the regenerating work of the Spirit can make any man a new creature in Jesus Christ. The success with which God had just favored his military enterprise against the Philistines made no impression upon the reprobate soul of the apostate king. Pause for a moment, dear reader, and face this question, Has the goodness of God brought *you* to repentance?

“Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats” (1Sa 24:2). What a terribly solemn illustration does this verse supply of what is said in Ecclesiastes 8:11, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is *fully* set in them to do evil.” Wicked men are often interrupted in their evil courses, yet they return unto them when the restraint is removed, as if deliverance from trouble were only given that they should add iniquity to iniquity. It was thus with Pharaoh. Time after time God sent a plague which stayed that vile monarch’s hand, yet as soon as respite was granted, he hardened his heart again. So Saul had been providentially blocked while

pursuing David by the invading Philistines, but now, as soon as the hindrance was removed, he redoubled his evil efforts. O unsaved reader, has it not been thus with you? Your course of self-pleasing was suddenly checked by an illness, your round of pleasure-seeking was stopped by a sick-bed. Opportunity was given for you to consider the interests of your immortal soul, to humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God. Perhaps you did so in a superficial way, but what has been the sequel? Health and strength have been mercifully restored by God, but are they being used for His glory, or are you now vainly pursuing the phantoms of this world harder than ever?

Ought not the very invasion of the Philistines to have changed Saul's attitude toward the one whom he was so causelessly and relentlessly pursuing? Ought he not to have realized how more forcibly than ever, that he needed David at the head of his army to repulse the common enemy? And O unsaved reader, is not the case very much the same with thee? The faithful servant of God, who has your best interests at heart, you despise. That Christian friend who begs you to consider the claims of Christ, the solemnities of an unending eternity, the certain and terrible doom of those who live only for this life, you regard as a "killjoy." Saul is now in the torments of hell and in a short time at most *you* will be there too, unless you change your course and beg God to change your heart.

Let us turn our thoughts once more unto David. As we saw at the close of our last article, in answer to believing prayer, God granted him a striking deliverance from the hand of his enemy. Yet that deliverance was but a brief one. Saul now advanced against him with a stronger force than before. Does not every real Christian know something of this in his own spiritual experience? It is written that "we must through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:22). Troubles come and then a respite is granted, and then new troubles follow on the heels of the old ones. Our spiritual enemies will not leave us in peace very long, nevertheless, they are a blessing in disguise if they drive us to our knees. Very few souls thrive as well in times of prosperity as they do in seasons of adversity. Winters' frosts may necessitate warmer clothes, but they also kill the flies and garden pests.

David had now betaken himself unto "the rocks of the wild goats" (1Sa 24:2). Thither Saul and his large army follow him. Once more God undertook for him and that in a striking way. "And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave" (1Sa 24:3). In that section of Palestine there are large caves, partly so by nature, partly so by human labor, for the sheltering of sheep from the heat of the sun. Hence we read in the Song of Solomon 1:7 of "where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon." In one of these spacious caverns, David, and some of his men at least, had taken refuge. Thither did Saul, separated apparently from his men, now turn in order to seek repose. Thus, by a strange carelessness (viewed from the human standpoint), Saul placed himself completely at David's mercy.

"And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee" (1Sa 24:4). David's men at once saw the hand of the Lord in this unexpected turn of events. So far, so good. None but an infidel believes in things happening by chance, though there are many infidels wearing the name of "Christian."

There are no accidents in a world which is governed by the living God, for “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). Therefore does faith perceive the hand of God in every thing which enters our lives, be it great or small. And it is only as we recognize His hand molding all our circumstances that God is honored and our hearts are kept in peace. O for grace to say at all times, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good” (1Sa 3:18).

“And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee” (1Sa 24:4). It is not difficult to trace the line of thought which was in their minds. They felt that here was an opportunity too good to be missed, an opportunity which providence itself had obviously placed in David’s way. One stroke of the sword would rid him of the only man that stood between him and the throne. Not only so, but the slaying of this apostate Saul would probably mean the bringing back of the whole nation unto the Lord. How many there are in Christendom today who believe that the end justifies the means—to get “results” is the all-important thing with them—*how* this is done matters little or nothing. Had such men been present to counsel David they had argued, Be not scrupulous about slaying Saul, see how much good it will issue in!

“What a critical moment it was in David’s history! Had he listened to the specious counselors who urged upon him to do what providence, seemingly, had put in his way, his life of faith would have come to an abrupt end. One stroke of his sword and he steps into a throne! Farewell poverty! Farewell the life of a hunted goat. Reproaches, sneers, defeat, would cease. Adulations, triumphs, riches would be his. But his at the sacrifice of faith, at the sacrifice of a humbled will, ever waiting on God’s time, at the sacrifice of a thousand precious experiences of God’s care, God’s provision, God’s guidance, God’s tenderness. No, even a throne at that price is too dear. Faith will wait” (C. H. Bright).

But there is a deeper lesson taught here, which every Christian does well to take thoroughly to heart. It is this—we need to be exceedingly cautious *how we interpret* the events of providence and what conclusions we draw from them, lest we mistake the opportunity of following out our own inclinations for God’s approbation of our conduct. God had promised David the throne, had His time now come for removing the one obstacle which stood in his way? It looked very much like it. Saul had shown no mercy and there was not the least likelihood that he would do so. Then was it God’s will that David should be His instrument for taking vengeance upon him? It seemed so or why should He have delivered him into his hand? David had cried to God for deliverance and had appealed unto divine justice for vindication (Psa 54:1), had the hour now arrived for his supplication to be answered? The unexpected sight of Saul asleep at his feet, made this more than likely. How easy, how very easy then, for David to have made an erroneous deduction from the event of providence on this occasion!

God was, in reality, *testing* David’s faith, testing his patience, testing his piety. The testing of his faith lay in submission to the Word, which plainly says, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exo 20:13), and God had given him no exceptional command to the contrary. The testing of his patience lay in his quietly waiting God’s time to ascend the throne of Israel. The temptation before him was to take things into his own hands and rush matters. The testing of his piety lay in the mortifying of his natural desires to avenge himself, to act in grace,

and show kindness to one who had sorely mistreated him. It was indeed a very real testing and blessed is it to see how the spirit triumphed over the flesh.

The application of this incident to the daily life of the Christian is of great practical importance. Frequently God tests *us* in similar ways. He so orders His providences as to try our hearts and make manifest what is in them. How often we are exercised about some important matter, some critical step in life, some change in our affairs involving momentous issues. We distrust our own wisdom, we want to be sure of God's will in the matter, we spread our case before the throne of grace, and ask for light and guidance. So far, so good. Then, usually, comes the testing. Events transpire which seem to show that it *is* God's will for us to take a certain step, things appear to point plainly in that direction. Ah, my friend, that may only be God trying your heart. If, notwithstanding your praying over it, your *desires* are really set upon that object or course, then it will be a very simple thing for you to misinterpret the events of providence and jump to a wrong conclusion.

An accurate knowledge of God's Word, a holy state of heart (wherein self is judged and its natural longings mortified), a broken will, are absolutely essential in order to clearly discern the path of duty in important cases and crises. The safest plan is to *deny* all suggestions of revenge, covetousness, ambition, and impatience. A heart that is established in true godliness will rather interpret the dispensations of providence as trials of faith and patience, as occasions to practice self-denial, than as opportunities for self-indulgence. In any case, "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16). "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass...Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him" (Psa 37:5, 7). O for grace to do so, but such grace has to be definitely, diligently, and daily sought for.

COMING TO CHRIST

Part 2

There are some souls greatly distressed and puzzled to know exactly what is signified by "coming to Christ." They have read and heard the words often and perhaps many a preacher has bidden them to "come to Him," yet without giving a scriptural explanation of what that term connotes. Such as have been awakened by the Spirit, shown their woeful condition, convicted of their high-handed and life-long rebellion against God, and brought to realize their dire need of Christ, and who are truly anxious to come savingly to Him, have found it a task altogether beyond their powers. Their cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" (Job 23:3). True, there are not many who pass through such an experience, for *God's* "flock" is but a "little" one (Luk 12:32). True, the vast majority of professing Christians claim that *they* found "coming to Christ" a very simple matter. But in the clear light of John 6:44, we must assure you, dear reader, that if *you* found "coming to Christ" to be easy, then it is proof you have *never* come to Him at all in a spiritual and saving way.

What, then, is meant by “coming to Christ”? First, and negatively, let it be pointed out that it is *not* an act which we perform by any of our bodily members. This is so obvious that there should be no need for us to make the statement. But in these awful days of spiritual ignorance and the carnal perversion of the holy things of God, explanation of the most elementary truths and terms is really required. When so many precious souls have been deluded into thinking that a going forward to a “mourner’s bench” or “penitent form,” or the taking of some preacher’s hand, is the same things as coming to Christ, we dare not pass over the defining of this apparently simple term, nor ignore the need for pointing out what it does not signify.

Second, the word “come,” when used in this connection, is a *metaphorical* one. That is to say, a word which expresses an act of the body is transferred to the soul to denote its act. To “come to Christ” signifies the movement of a Spirit-enlightened mind toward the Lord Jesus—as Prophet, to be instructed by Him, as Priest, whose atonement and intercession are to be relied upon, as King, to be ruled by Him. Coming to Christ implies a turning of our back upon the world and a turning unto Him as our only hope and portion. It is a going out of self so as to rest no longer on anything in self. It is the abandoning of every idol and of all other dependencies, the heart going out to Him in loving submission and trustful confidence. It is the will surrendering to Him as Lord, ready to accept His yoke, take up the cross, and follow Him without reserve.

To “come to Christ” is the turning of the whole soul unto a whole Christ in the exercise of divine grace upon him. It is the mind, heart, and will being supernaturally drawn to Him, so as to trust, love, and serve Him. “It is the duty and interest of weary and heavy-laden sinners to ‘come to Jesus Christ’—renouncing all those things which stand in opposition to Him or in competition with Him. We must accept Him as our Physician and Advocate and give up ourselves to His conduct and government, freely willing to be saved by Him, in His own way, and on His own terms” (Matthew Henry). Ere proceeding further, we would earnestly beg each reader to prayerfully and carefully test and measure himself or herself by what has been said in this and the preceding paragraph. Take nothing for granted. As you value your soul, seek divine help to make sure that you have truly “come to Christ.”

Now a popish “christ” is a christ of *wood* and a false preacher’s “christ” is a christ of *words*, but Christ Jesus our Lord is “the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). The Christ of God fills heaven and earth. He is the One by whom all things exist and consist. He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, having all power, dominion, and might. He is made higher than the heavens and unto Him all principalities and powers are subject. At His presence both the earth and the heavens shall yet flee away. Such a Christ is neither to be offered nor proffered, sold nor given by sinful men. He is the unspeakable gift of the Father to as many as He has ordained to eternal life, and none others. This Christ, this gift of the Father, is supernaturally revealed and applied to the heirs of salvation by the Holy Spirit, when, where, and as He pleases, and not when, where, and how men please.

In the preceding article, we dwelt at length upon those words of Christ in John 6:44, “No man can come unto me,” seeking to show the nature of the fallen creature’s spiritual impotency or why it is the unregenerate are unable to come to Christ in a spiritual and

saving way. Let us now ponder the remainder of our Lord's sentence, "Except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Of what does that "drawing" consist? We answer, first, just as our "coming to Christ" does not refer to any bodily action, so this divine "drawing" respects not the employment of any external force. Second, it signifies a powerful impulse put forth by the Holy Spirit within the elect, whereby their native impotency for performing spiritual actions is overcome and an ability for the same is imparted. It is this secret and effectual operation of the Spirit upon the human soul which enables and causes it to come to Christ. This brings us to our next division,

II. With our Understandings.

1. *A knowledge of Christ is essential.* There can be no movement towards an unknown object. No one can obey a command until he is acquainted with its terms. A prop must be seen before it will be rested on. We must have some acquaintance with a person before he will either be trusted or loved. This principle is so obvious it needs arguing no further. Apply it unto the case in hand, the subject before us. The knowledge of Christ must of necessity precede our believing on Him or our coming to Him. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom 10:14). "He that cometh to God *must* believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). None can come to Christ while they are ignorant about Him. As it was in the old creation, so it is in the new. God first says, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3).

2. *This knowledge of Christ comes to the mind from the Holy Scriptures.* Nothing can be known of Him save that which God has been pleased to reveal concerning Him in the Word of truth. It is there alone that the true "doctrine of Christ" (2Jo 1:9) is to be found. Therefore did our Lord give commandment, "Search the Scriptures...they are they which testify of me" (Joh 5:39). When He berated the two disciples for their slowness of heart to believe, we are told that, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luk 24:27). The divine oracles are designated "the word of Christ" (Col 3:16) because He is the substance of them. Where the Scriptures have not gone, Christ is unknown. Clear proof is this that an acquaintance with Him cannot be gained apart from their inspired testimony.

3. *A theoretical knowledge of Christ is not sufficient.* Upon this point we must dilate at greater length, for much ignorance concerning it prevails today. A head-knowledge about Christ is very frequently mistaken for a heart-acquaintance with Him. But orthodoxy is not salvation. A carnal judgment about Christ, a mere intellectual knowledge of Him, will never bring a dead sinner to His feet. There must be a living experience—God's Word and work meeting together in the soul, renewing the understanding. As 1 Corinthians 13:2 so plainly and solemnly warns us, I may have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, yet if I have not love, then I am nothing. Just as a blind man may, through labor and diligence, acquire an accurate theoretical or notional conception of many subjects and objects which he never saw, so the natural man may, by religious education and personal effort, obtain a sound doctrinal knowledge of the person and work of Christ, without having any spiritual or vital acquaintance with Him.

Not every kind of knowledge, even of God's truth and His Christ, is effectual and saving. There is a form of knowledge, as well as of godliness, which is destitute of power—"which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law" (Rom 2:20). The

reference is to the Jews, who were instructed in the Scriptures, and considered themselves well qualified to teach others. Yet the truth had not been written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit. A "*form* of knowledge" signifies there was a model of it in their brains, so that they were able to discourse freely and fluently upon the things of God, yet were they without the life of God in their souls. O how many have a knowledge *of* salvation, yet not a knowledge *unto* salvation, as the apostle distinguishes it in 2 Timothy 3:15—such a knowledge as the latter must be imparted to the soul by the miracle-working operation of the Holy Spirit.

"They proceed from evil to evil, and *they know not me*, saith the LORD" (Jer 9:3). Of whom was this spoken—of the heathen who were without any written revelation from Him? No, of Israel, who had His law in their hands, His temple in their midst, His prophets speaking to them. They had been favored with many and wondrous manifestations of His majesty, holiness, power, and mercy, yet though they had much intellectual knowledge of Him, they were strangers to Him spiritually. So it was when the Son of God became incarnate. How much *natural* light they had concerning Him. They witnessed His perfect life, saw His wondrous miracles, heard His matchless teaching, were frequently in His immediate presence, yet, though the light shown in the darkness, "the darkness comprehended it not" (Joh 1:5). So it is today. Reader, you may be a diligent student of the New Testament, be thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament types and prophecies, believe all that the Scriptures say concerning Christ, and earnestly teach them to others, and yet be yourself a stranger to Him spiritually.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3), which means that the unregenerate are utterly incapable of discerning the things of God spiritually. True, they may "see" them in a natural way. They may investigate and even admire them theoretically, but to receive them in an experimental and vital way they cannot. As this distinction is of such great importance, and yet so little known today, let us endeavor to illustrate it. Suppose a man who had never heard any music. Others tell him of its beauty and charm, and he decides to make a careful study of it. That man might thoroughly familiarize himself with the art of music, learn all the rules of that art, so that he understood the proportions and harmony of it; but what a different thing is that from listening to a grand oratorio—the ear now taking in what before the mind knew only the theory of! Still greater is the difference between a natural and spiritual knowledge of divine things.

The apostle declared, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery" (1Co 2:7). He did not only affirm that it is a mystery in itself, but that it is still spoken "*in* a mystery." And why is this? Because the unregenerate, even where it is spoken in their hearing, yea, when it is clearly apprehended by them in a notional way, yet they neither know nor apprehend the mystery that is still in it. Proverbs 9:10 declares, "the knowledge of the holy is understanding." There is no true understanding of divine things except the "knowledge of the holy." Every real Christian has a knowledge of divine things, a personal, experimental, vital knowledge of them, which no carnal man possesses or can obtain, no matter how diligently he study them. If I have seen the picture of a man, I have an image in my mind of that man according to his picture, but if I see the man himself, how different is

the image of him which is then formed in my mind! Far greater still is the difference between Christ made known in the Scriptures and Christ revealed *in me* (Gal 1:16).

4. *There must be a spiritual and supernatural knowledge of Christ imparted by the Holy Spirit.* That is in view in 1 John 5:20, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath *given us an understanding*, that we may know him that is true." The faculty must be suited to the object or subject known. The natural understanding is capable of taking in Christ and knowing Him in a natural way, but we must be "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph 4:23) before we can know Christ in a spiritual way. There must be a supernatural work of grace wrought upon the mind by the Holy Spirit before there can be any inward and spiritual apprehension of the supernatural and spiritual person of Christ. That is the true and saving knowledge of Christ which fires the affections, sanctifies the will, and raises up the mind to a spiritual fixation on the Rock of Ages. It is *this* knowledge of Him which is "life eternal" (Joh 17:3). It is *this* knowledge which produces faith in Christ, love for Him, submission to Him. It is *this* knowledge which causes the soul to truthfully and joyously exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa 73:25).

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Joh 6:44). It is by the secret and effectual operation of the Spirit that the Father brings each of his elect to a saving knowledge of Christ. These operations of the Spirit begin by his enlightening the understanding, renewing the mind. Observe carefully the order in Ezekiel 37:14, "And shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live...*then* shall ye *know* that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD." No sinner ever comes to Christ until the Holy Spirit first comes to him! And no sinner will savingly believe on Christ until the Spirit has communicated faith to him (Eph 2:8; Col 2:12), and even then faith is an eye to *discern* Christ before it is a foot to *approach* Him. There can be no act without an object and there can be no exercising of faith upon Christ till Christ is seen in His excellency, sufficiency, and suitability to poor sinners. "That ye may know *and* believe me" (Isa 43:10) is the order. "And they that *know* thy name will [not "ought to"] put their trust in thee" (Psa 9:10). But again, we say, that knowledge must be a spiritual and miraculous one imparted by the Spirit.

The Spirit Himself, and not merely a preacher, must take of the things of Christ and show them unto the heart. It is only in *God's* "light" that we truly "*see* light" (Psa 36:9). The opening of his eyes precedes the conversion of the sinner from Satan unto God (Act 26:18). The light of the sun is seen breaking out at the dawn of day, before its heat is felt. It is those who "see" the Son with a supernaturally enlightened understanding that "believe" on Him with a spiritual and saving faith (Joh 6:40). We *behold* as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, before we are *changed* into His very image (2Co 3:18). Note the order in Romans 3:11, "There is none that understandeth" goes before "there is none that seeketh after God." The Spirit must shed His light upon the understanding, which light conveys the actual image of spiritual things in a spiritual way to the mind, forming them on the soul, much as a sensitive photographic plate receives from the light the images to which it is exposed. *This* is the "*demonstration* of the Spirit and of power" (1Co 2:4).

5. *How is this spiritual and vital knowledge to be known from a mere theoretical and notional one?* By its effects. Unto the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "For our Gospel came not

unto you in *word only*, but *also in power*, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1Th 1:5), which is partly explained in the next verse, “having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit had given that Word an efficacy which no logic, rhetoric, or persuasive power of men could. It had smitten the conscience, torn open the wounds which sin had made, exposed its festering sores. It had pierced them even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It had slain their good opinion of themselves. It had made them feel the wrath of God burning against them. It had caused them to seriously question if such wretches could possibly find mercy at the hands of a holy God. It had communicated faith to look upon the great Physician of souls. It had given a joy such as this poor world knows nothing of.

The light which the Spirit imparts to the understanding is full of efficacy, whereas that which men acquire through their study is not so. Ordinary and strong mineral water are alike in color, but differ much in their taste and virtue. A carnal man may acquire a theoretical knowledge of all that a spiritual man knows vitally, yet is he barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Pe 1:8). The light that he has is ineffectual, for it neither purifies his heart, renews his will, nor transforms his life. The head-knowledge of divine truth, which is all that multitudes of present-day professing Christians possess, has no more influence upon their walk unto practical godliness, than though it was stored up in some other man’s brains. The light which the Spirit gives, humbles and abases its recipient. The knowledge which is acquired by education and personal efforts, puffs up and fills with conceit.

A spiritual and saving knowledge of Christ always constrains the soul unto loving obedience. No sooner did the light of Christ shine into Paul’s heart, than he at once asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Act 9:6). Of the Colossians, the apostle declared, “...the gospel; which is come unto you...bringeth forth fruit...since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” [or “in reality”] (Col 1:5-6). But a mere intellectual knowledge of the truth is held in *unrighteousness* (Rom 1:18). Its possessors are zealous to argue and cavil about it, and look down with contempt upon all who are not so wise as they, yet the *lives* of these frequently put them to shame. A saving knowledge of Christ so endears Him to the soul that all else is esteemed as dung in comparison with His excellency. The light of His glory has cast a complete eclipse over all that is in the world. But a mere doctrinal knowledge of Christ produces no such effects. While its possessors may loudly sing His praises, yet their hearts are still coveting and eagerly pursuing the things of time and sense.

The natural man may know the truth of the things of God, but not the things themselves. He may thoroughly understand the Scriptures in the letter of them, but not in their spirit. He may discourse of them in a sound and orthodox manner, but in no other way than one can *talk of* honey and vinegar, who never tasted the sweetness of the one, nor the sourness of the other. There are hundreds of preachers who have accurate notions of spiritual things, but who see and taste not the things themselves which are wrapt in the words of truth, “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1Ti 1:7). Just as an astronomer who makes a life-study of the stars, knows their names, positions, and varying magnitudes, yet receives no more personal and special influence from them than do other men, so it is with those who study the Scriptures, but are not supernaturally

and savingly enlightened by the Spirit. O my reader, has the Day-Star arisen *in your heart* (2Pe 1:19)?

(D. V. To be continued.)

DISPENSATIONALISM

1. The Promises of God (Concluded)

In view of the confusion which now exists in so many minds, a second article upon this aspect of our subject seems called for. One leading branch of Satan's evil work is to torment the children of God, and as far as he can, destroy their peace. Full well he knows that he cannot prevent them entering their eternal rest (which is evident by his admission in Job 1:10), therefore does he bend his efforts toward undermining their present spiritual comforts. And to a large extent his end is gained in this if he succeeds in weakening or removing our confidence in the precious promises of God, which form a considerable part of the source and substance of the saints' consolation. Knowing that he is unable to shake the faith of the regenerate in the divine inspiration and veracity of the promises recorded in Holy Writ, he has employed the subtler attack (which is equally effective if yielded to) of seeking to persuade us that the great majority of God's promises do not belong unto Christians at all, for, seeing they are recorded in the Old Testament they are the property of the Jews only.

Cleverly indeed has the devil pushed this campaign of enervating the importance and value of the larger half of God's Word. The agents whom he has employed in this evil work have not been open atheists and avowed infidels, but instead, men who posed as the champions of orthodoxy, acknowledging their faith in the full inspiration of the Scriptures. Thereby the confidence of the unwary was gained. Though at first, the radical and revolutionary postulates of the teachers of "dispensational truth" may have awakened a measure of uneasiness in simple-minded souls, only too often they quenched their fears by reassuring themselves that such teachers—so faithful to the "fundamentals," so loyal to Christ, so well-versed in the Scriptures—"must be right." Moreover, the claims made by these men that God had given them much more "light" on His Word than all who had preceded them, made an attractive appeal to the pride of their hearers—for who wants to be "behind the times"?

In Jeremiah 36:23, we are told that when Jehoiakim, king of Judah, heard the prophet read a message from God, that "he cut it with the penknife." This incident has often been referred to by teachers of "dispensational truth," who have applied or accommodated it to the pernicious methods employed by the "higher critics." This too has served to quieten any fears that might exist in the hearer, for supposing that his teachers "stood for the whole Word of God," and impressed by their fervent denunciations of "modernism" and "evolutionism," he thinks that they are to be safely followed in all their assertions. How wily the devil is! Nevertheless, the fact remains that *in the effects produced*, the labors of

the “dispensationalists” have been as subversive of faith as those of the “higher critics.” The latter affirming much of the Old Testament to be spurious, the former insisting that it belongs not unto us. In either case, the greater part of God’s Word is reduced to a dead letter, so far as faith’s receiving of its present validity and virtue is concerned.

But are there not many promises which God gave unto Israel which have no direct application unto the church? Are there not many promises recorded in the Old Testament which Christians of today could by no means appropriate to themselves and rightly expect their fulfillment? Of course not! Were *that* the case, then Romans 15:4 would not be true, “For *whatsoever* things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” What “comfort” can I draw from Scriptures which “do not belong to me”? What “hope” can possibly be inspired in the Christian today by promises which pertain to none but the Jews? Christ came here not to cancel, but “to *confirm* the promises made unto the fathers: *and* that the *Gentiles* might glorify God for his mercy” (Rom. 15:8-9).

Now with regard to all the divine promises which respect temporal or material blessings, the following rules must be steadily borne in mind when pleading for their fulfillment. First, there must be the heart’s entire *submission to the absolute sovereignty of God*. Such general promises as, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive them” (Mat 21:22), must always be understood in the light of, “If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14). The fulfillment of His promises must necessarily be subordinated unto God’s own good pleasure. By this we do not mean that God ever fails to make good any word that He has given, but rather that He has so worded His promises, or so modified them by other declarations, that He is free to exercise His high sovereignty *in* the fulfilling of them, *without* in the slightest degree sully His veracity.

To be more specific—God exercises His sovereignty in the fulfillment of His promises in a threefold way—as unto whom He makes them good, as to how, and as to when He does so. Let us illustrate this by Psalm 34:7, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and *delivereth* them.” First, as *to whom* He makes this good unto. Note the *indefiniteness* of the promise. It does *not* say, “all that fear him.” The three Hebrews were “delivered” from Babylon’s furnace, but others “were stoned” and sawn asunder” (Heb 11:36-37). Second, as to *how*—Daniel was delivered from the lions’ den. Stephen, at his death, was “delivered” from a world of sin and sorrow and removed to heaven! Third, as to *when*—godly Josiah was “delivered” from this scene of wickedness and woe before he reached the age of forty, whereas Noah was suffered to remain on earth till he was nine hundred and fifty!

Second, the heart’s genuine desire for *the glory of God*. In all true prayer the petitions are framed with this specific end in view. Thus has the Lord Jesus Himself plainly taught in the pattern prayer He has graciously given us. “Hallowed be thy name” is the first petition and therefore the standard which measures all that follows. Hereby we are instructed to make this our paramount concern, as well as plea, when we supplicate the throne of grace. Abraham was “strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). This is the chief object which faith sets before it, not only asking for that which will glorify God, but that which shall be *most* for His glory. And this, of course, *He for thyself?* seek them

not” (Jer 45:5), but seek rather that *God* may be honored and magnified—whether He give or whether He withholds that which thy heart so much longs for.

Third, *complete submission to the unerring wisdom of God*. Our loving Father has reserved to Himself the liberty of deciding *what* is best for us and what is not. “And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isa 30:18). His delays are not arbitrary and capricious, but are regulated by both love and omniscience. He tarries not only for the fittest season wherein to manifest His mercy unto us, but decides which are the most suitable gifts to bestow upon us. He has in mind our highest spiritual good as well as our temporal well-being, but it must be left to *Him* to decide what will most promote these.

“To pray for outward and worldly blessings is not contrary to the will of God, for He hath promised to bestow them. But then, as His promise is conditional, if it is consistent with our good, so truly must our prayers be conditional that God would give them to us, if it is consistent with His will and with our good. Whatsoever we thus ask, we do it according to the will of God and we are sure of speeding in our request, either by obtaining our desires or by being blessed with a denial. For, alas! we are blind and ignorant creatures, and cannot look into the designs and drift of providence, and see how God hath laid in order good and evil in His own purpose. Oftentimes we must mistake evil for good, because of the present appearance of good that it hath. Yea, so shortsighted are we that we can look no farther than outward and present appearance. But God, who sees through the whole series and connection of His own counsels, knows, many times, that those things which we account and desire as good are really evil and therefore it is our wisdom to resign all our desires to His disposal, and to say, ‘Lord, though such temporal enjoyments may seem good and desirable to me at present, yet Thou art infinitely wise, and Thou knowest what the consequence and issue of them will be. I beg them, if they may stand with Thy will and if Thou seest they will be as really good for me, as I suppose them now to be. If they be not so, I beg the favor of a denial.’ This is the right frame in which a Christian’s heart should be when he comes to beg temporal mercies of God, and whilst he thus asks any worldly comforts, he cannot ask amiss” (Ezekiel Hopkins, 1633-1689).

Fourth, in keeping with the covenant under which they were given, many of the promises made to the patriarchs and their descendants were *typical* in character. Earthly blessings adumbrated heavenly ones. This is not an arbitrary assertion of ours, for he who knows anything at all about the things of God is aware that everything during the Abrahamic and Mosaic economies had a figurative meaning. While it be true that every Old Testament promise received a literal fulfillment unto some of God’s children, yet not unto all, for even then the promises which concern temporal blessings necessarily had this proviso. If they promote spiritual and eternal happiness—otherwise they would not have been promises but threats, and the fulfillment or bestowment a snare and a curse rather than a blessing.

Yet let it not be concluded from what has just been said that the *literal* purport of those Old Testament promises which relate to material blessings concern not the Christian today. The greater includes the lesser. We who are his spiritual children and so “blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal 3:9), may rightly make the promises to his natural seed the ground

of *our* faith. We are still upon earth in the bod, and our physical needs are the same today as were those of the Jews of old, and according unto our faith and obedience so will it be unto us. The Lord Jesus plainly declared, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat 6:33), and the "these things" refer to food and clothing. 1 Timothy 4:8 expressly affirms "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of *the life that now is*, and of that which is to come."

As an illustration and example of what has been pointed out, take the Lord's promise to Abraham in Genesis 13:15, "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." Now the fulfillment of this promise is to be understood in a twofold way. First, mystically or sacramentally. The land of Canaan is to be regarded not only as a country in Asia, fertile and fruitful, but also as a figure and type of that heavenly Canaan where every blessing is found in its fullness. It is for this reason that Christ denominated heaven "Abraham's bosom" (Luk 16:22), rather than call it after any of the other patriarchs—not "Abel's bosom," not Enoch's, not Moses', not David's, but *Abraham's* bosom." From hence we learn that in fulfilling His promises God often gives not the particular thing promised, but either something proportional to it or something better. Thus, in promising long life (Eph 6:3) He takes some away early unto *eternal life*. Second, Abraham inherited Canaan (four hundred and thirty years after) in his posterity, they being in him when God made the promise.

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal 3:16). Upon this we cannot now do better than quote from James Haldane (1768-1851), "The original promise was that God would bless Abraham and make him a great nation and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gen 12:1-3). After many years had elapsed, God condescended to enter into a solemn covenant or engagement with Abraham, which contained three distinct promises—first, that he who had been so long childless should be the father of many nations; second, that He would be a God to him and to his seed; third, that He would give to him and to his seed the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession (Gen 17:4-8).

"Each of these promises received a literal and spiritual fulfillment. The literal fulfillment of the first was the multitude that sprung from Abraham, the many thousands of Israel (Num 10:36). But this promise had also a spiritual fulfillment of which the literal was but a type or figure, and to this the apostle refers, 'Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations), before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were' (Rom 4:16-17). In this sense, Abraham was the father of all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, and of them only. Hence the Jews, when cast off for their rejection of Christ, are represented as complaining that Abraham does not acknowledge them (Isa 63:16).

"The second promise was that God would be a God to him and to his seed after him. This had its fulfillment in the riches and prosperity of Abraham, and in Israel after the flesh, being brought into covenant with God, whereby He became their God, and acknowledged them as His peculiar people. Its spiritual fulfillment was God becoming the

God of the true Israel—Abraham's children by faith—by a better covenant, established upon better promises.

"The third promise was the possession of the land of Canaan, literally fulfilled in its conquest and occupation and spiritually in the possession of the better country which those who are of the faith of Abraham shall forever inherit. One great means by which Satan has succeeded in corrupting the Gospel has been the blending of the literal and spiritual fulfillment of these promises—thus confounding the old and new covenants. The former was a type of the latter and to this the apostle refers in speaking of the revelation of the mystery 'which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith' (Rom 16:25-26). The mystery here spoken of is *the hidden meaning* of God's dealings with the posterity of Abraham to which in his epistles Paul frequently refers."

Yes, a hundred years ago Satan sought to corrupt the truth of God by confounding the literal and spiritual meaning and fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. During the last two generations, his efforts have been directed toward denying that they have *any* spiritual meaning, value, and application at all. How true it is that "The natural man [no matter how well-versed he be in the letter of Scripture] receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," he cannot know them "for they are spiritually discerned," and not being a spiritual or regenerate man, he has no "spiritual discernment." But we shall, D. V., have more to say on this in future articles.

FAITH

"But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb 11:6). "But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb 4:2). The linking together of these verses shows us the worthlessness of all religious activities where faith be lacking. The outward exercise may be performed diligently and correctly, but unless faith be in operation, God is not honored and the soul is not profited. Faith draws out the heart unto God and faith it is which receives from God—not a mere intellectual assent to what is revealed in Holy Writ, but a supernatural principle of grace which lives upon the God of Scripture. This the natural man, no matter how religious or orthodox he be, has not and no labors of his, no act of his will, can acquire it. It is the sovereign gift of God.

Faith must be operative in all the exercises of the Christian if God is to be glorified and he is to be edified. First, in the reading of the Word, "But these are written, that ye might believe" (Joh 20:31). Second, in listening to the preaching of God's servants, "The hearing of faith" (Gal 3:2). Third, in praying, "let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (Jam 1:6). Fourth, in our daily life, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Co 5:7), "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). Fifth, in our exit from this world, "These all died in faith" (Heb 11:13). What the breath is to the body, faith

is to the soul. For one who is destitute of faith to seek to perform spiritual actions is like putting a spring within a wooden dummy and making it go through mechanical motions.

Now an unregenerate professor may read the Scriptures and yet have no spiritual faith. Just as the devout Hindu peruses the Upanishads and the Mohammedan his Koran, so many in "Christian" countries take up the study of the Bible and yet have no more of the life of God in their souls than have their heathen brethren. Thousands in this land read the Bible, believe in its divine authorship, and become more or less familiar with its contents. A mere professor may read several chapters every day and yet never *appropriate* a single verse. But faith *applies* God's Word. It applies His fearful threats and trembles before them. It applies His solemn warnings and seeks to heed them. It applies His precepts and cries unto Him for grace to walk in them.

It is the same in listening to the Word preached. A carnal professor will boast of having attended this conference and that, of having heard this famous teacher and that renowned preacher, and be no better off in his soul than if he had never heard any of them. He may listen to two sermons every Sunday and fifty years hence be as dead spiritually as he is today. But the regenerated soul appropriates the message and measures himself by what he hears. He is often convicted of his sins and made to mourn over them. He tests himself by God's standard, and feels that he comes so far short of what he ought to be, that he sincerely doubts the honesty of his own profession. The Word pierces him, like a two-edged sword, and causes him to cry, "O wretched man that I am."

So in prayer. The mere professor often makes the humble Christian feel ashamed of himself. The carnal religionist who has "the gift of the gab" is never at a loss for words. Sentences flow from his lips as readily as do the waters of a babbling brook. Verses of Scripture seem to run through his mind as freely as flour passes through a sieve. Whereas the poor burdened child of God is often unable to do any more than cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Ah, my friends, we need to distinguish sharply between a natural aptitude for "making" nice "prayers" and the *spirit* of true supplication. The one consists merely of words, the other of "*groanings* which cannot be uttered." The one is acquired by religious education, the other is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit.

Thus it is too in conversing about the things of God. The frothy professor can talk glibly and often orthodoxly of "doctrines," yes, and of worldly things, too. According to his mood or according to his audience, so is his theme. But the child of God, while being swift to hear that which is unto edification, is "slow to speak." Ah, my reader, beware of talkative people. A drum makes a lot of noise, but it is hollow inside! "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" (Pro 20:6). When a saint of God does open his lips about spiritual matters, it is to tell of what *the Lord*, in His infinite mercy, has done for him, but the carnal religionist is anxious for others to know what *he* is "doing for the Lord."

The difference is just as real between the genuine Christian and the nominal Christian in connection with their daily lives. While the latter may appear outwardly righteous, yet within they are "full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Mat 23:28). They will put on the *skin* of a real sheep, but in reality they are "wolves in sheep's clothing." But God's children have the *nature* of sheep and learn of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart," and as the elect of God, they put on "mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Col

3:12). They are in private what they appear in public. They worship God in spirit and in truth and have been made to know wisdom in the hidden parts of the heart.

So it is on their passing out of this world. An empty professor may die as easily and as quietly as he lived—deserted by the Holy Spirit, undisturbed by the devil. As the psalmist says, “there are no bands in their death” (Psa 73:4). But this is very different from the end of one whose deeply-plowed and consciously-defiled conscience has been “sprinkled” with the precious blood of Chris. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psa 37:37)—yes, a peace which “passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7), having lived the *life* of the righteous, he dies “the *death* of the righteous” (Num 23:10).

And what is it which distinguishes the one character from the other, wherein lies the difference between the genuine Christian and he who is one in name only? This—a God-given, Spirit-wrought faith in the heart. Not a mere head-knowledge and intellectual assent to the truth, but a living, spiritual, vital principle in the heart—a faith which purifies the heart (Act 15:9), which “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), which “overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4). Yes, a faith which is divinely sustained amidst trials within and opposition without, a faith which exclaims, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15).

True, this faith is not always in exercise, nor is it equally strong at all times. The favored possessor of it must be taught by painful experience that as he did not originate it neither can *he* command it. Therefore does he turn unto its Author and say, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mar 9:24). And then it is that, when reading the Word, he is enabled to lay hold of its precious promises. That when bowing before the throne of grace, he is enabled to cast his burden upon the Lord. That when he rises to go about his temporal duties, he is enabled to lean upon the everlasting arms. And that when he is called upon to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, he triumphantly cries, “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psa 23:4). “Lord, increase our faith” (Luk 17:5).

ASSURANCE

Dialogue 2

Mr. Humble Heart: “Good morning, sir. May I beg the favor of an hour of your valuable time?” Editor: “Come in and welcome. What can I do for you?” Humble Heart: “I am sore troubled in spirit. I long so much to be able to call God, ‘my Father,’ but I fear I might be guilty of lying were I to do so. There are many times when I have a little hope that He has begun a good work within me, but alas, for the most part, I find such a mass of corruption working within, that I feel sure that I have never been made a new creature in Christ. My heart is so cold and hard toward God, that it seems impossible the Holy Spirit could have shed abroad God’s love in me. Unbelief and doubtings so often master me that it would be presumptuous to think I possess the faith of God’s elect. Yet I *want* to love Him, trust Him, serve Him, but it seems I cannot.”

Editor: "I am very glad you called. It is rare indeed to meet with an honest soul these days." Humble Heart: "Excuse me, sir, but I do not want you to form a wrong impression of me. An *honest* heart is the very blessing I crave, but I am painfully conscious, from much clear evidence, that I possess it not. *My* heart is deceitful above all things and I am full of hypocrisy. I have often begged God to make me holy and right after, my actions proved that I did not mean what I said. I have often thanked God for His mercies and then have soon fretted and murmured when His providence crossed my will. I had quite a battle before I came here to see you tonight, as to whether I was really seeking help or as to whether my secret desire was to win your esteem, and I am not sure now which was my real motive."

Humble Heart: "To come to the point, sir, if I am not intruding. I have read and re-read your articles on 'Assurance' which appeared in last year's magazines. Some things in those articles seemed to give me a little comfort, but other things almost drove me to despair. Sometimes your description of a born-again soul agreed with my own experience, but at other times I seemed as far from measuring up to it as the poles are asunder. So I do not know where I am. I have sought to heed 2 Corinthians 13:5 and 'examine' myself and when I did so, I could see nothing but a mass of contradictions or it would be more accurate to say, for each one thing I found which seemed to show that I was regenerate, I found ten things to prove that I could not be so. And now, sir, I'm mourning night and day, for I feel of all men the most miserable."

Editor: "Hypocrites are not exercised about their motives, nor troubled over the deceitfulness of their hearts! At any rate, I am thankful to see you are so deeply concerned about your soul's eternal interests." Humble Heart: "Alas, sir, I am not half as much concerned about them as I ought to be. That is another thing which occasions me much anguish. When the Lord Jesus tells us that the human soul is worth more than the whole world put together (Mar 8:36), I feel that I must be thoroughly blinded by Satan and completely under the dominion of sin, seeing that I am so careless. It is true that at times I am alarmed about my state and fearful that I shall soon be in hell. At times too I seem to seek God more earnestly and read His Word more diligently, but alas, my goodness is 'as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away' (Hos 6:4). The cares of this life so soon crowd out thoughts of the life to come. O, sir, I want reality, not pretense; I want to make sure, yet cannot."

Editor: "That is not so simple a task as many would have us believe." Humble Heart: "It certainly is not. I have consulted several Bible teachers, only to find them 'physicians of no value' (Job 13:4). I have also conferred with some who boasted that they never have a doubt, and they quoted to me Acts 16:31, and on telling them I did believe, they cried, 'Peace, peace,' but there was no peace in my heart." See Jer 6:14. Editor: "Ah, dear friend, it is not without reason that God has bidden us '*give diligence* to make your calling and election sure' (2Pe 1:10). And even after we have given diligence, we still need the Holy Spirit to 'beareth witness with our spirit, that we *are* the children of God' (Rom 8:16). Moreover, spiritual assurance may easily be lost, or at least be clouded, as is evident from the case of him who wrote the 23rd Psalm, for at a later date he had to cry unto God, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.'

Editor: "Before proceeding further, had we not better ask the help of the Lord. His Holy Word says, 'In *all* thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths' (Pro 3:6). And now, dear brother, for such I am assured you really are, what is it that most causes you to doubt that you have passed from death unto life?" Humble Heart: "My inward experiences, the wickedness of my heart, the many defeats I encounter daily." Editor: "Perhaps you are looking for perfection in the flesh." Humble Heart: "No, hardly that, for I know the 'flesh' or old nature is still left in the Christian. But I have met with some who claim to be living 'the victorious life,' who say they never have a doubt, never a rising of anger, discontent, or any wicked feelings or desires, that Christ so controls them that unclouded peace and joy are theirs all the time."

Editor: "Bear with me if I speak plainly, but such people are either hypnotized by the devil or they are fearful liars. God's Word says, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1Jo 1:8). And again, 'For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (Ecc 7:20). And again, 'in many things we offend all' (Jam 3:2). The beloved Apostle Paul, when well advanced in the Christian life, declared, 'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members' (Rom 7:21-23).

Humble Heart: "That relieves my mind somewhat, yet it scarcely reaches the root of my difficulty. What troubles me so much is this—when God regenerates a man, he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. The change wrought in him is so great that it is termed a 'passing from death unto life.' It is obvious that if God the Holy Spirit dwells in a person, that there must be a radical difference produced, both inwardly and outwardly, from what he was before. Now it is *this* which I *fail* to find in myself. Instead of being any better than I was a year ago, I feel I am worse. Instead of humility filling my heart, so often pride rules it. Instead of lying passive like clay in the Potter's hand to be molded by Him, I am like a wild ass' colt. Instead of rejoicing in the Lord always, I am frequently filled with bitterness and repinings."

Editor: "Such experiences as you describe *are* very sad and humbling, and need to be mourned over and confessed to God. They must *never* be excused nor glossed over. Nevertheless, they are not incompatible with the Christian state. Rather are they so many proofs that he who is experimentally acquainted with the 'plague of his own heart' (1Ki 8:38) is one in experience with the most eminent of God's saints. Abraham acknowledged he was 'dust and ashes' (Gen 18:27). Job said, 'I abhor myself' (Job 42:6). David prayed, 'Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed' (Psa 6:2). Isaiah exclaimed, 'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips' (Isa 6:5). In the anguish of his heart, Jeremiah asked, 'Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?' (Jer 20:18). Daniel once owned, 'There remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption' (Dan 10:8). Paul cried, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (Rom 7:24).

"One of the principal things which distinguishes a regenerate person from an unregenerate one may be likened unto two rooms which have been swept but not dusted. In

one, the blinds are raised and the sunlight streams in, exposing the dust still lying on the furniture. In the other, the blinds are lowered and one walking through the room would be unable to discern its real condition. Thus it is in the case of one who has been renewed by the Spirit. His eyes have been opened to *see* the awful filth which lurks in every corner of his heart. But in the case of the unregenerate, though they have occasional twinges of conscience when they act wrongly, they are very largely ignorant of the awful fact that they are a complete mass of corruption unto the pure eyes of the thrice holy God. It is true that an unregenerate person may be instructed in the truth of the total depravity of fallen man, and he may 'believe' the same, yet his belief does not humble his heart, fill him with anguish, make him loathe himself, and feel that hell is the only place which is fit for him to dwell in. But it is far otherwise with one who sees light in *God's* light (Psa 36:9). He will not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smites upon his leprous breast, crying, 'God be merciful to me the sinner'."

Humble Heart: "Would you kindly turn to the positive side and give me a brief description of what characterizes a genuine Christian?" Editor: "Among other gifts, every real Christian has such a knowledge of God in Christ, as works by love, that he is stirred up to earnestly inquire after *the will of God*, and studies His Word to learn that will, having a sincere desire and making an honest endeavor to live in the faith and practice of it." Humble Heart: "I cannot boast of my knowledge of God in Christ, yet by divine grace this I may say, that I desire no other heaven on earth than to know and to do God's will and be assured that I have *His* approval." Editor: "That is indeed a good sign that your soul has been actually renewed, and doubtless He who has begun a work of grace in your heart, will make the great change manifest in your life and actions. No matter what he thinks or says, no unregenerate man *really* desires to live a life which is pleasing *to God*."

Humble Heart: "God forbid that I should flatter myself, yet I hope I have often found delight when reading God's Word or hearing it preached, and I do sincerely meditate upon it, and long that I may 'grow in grace.' Yet at times I am tempted with vain and vile thoughts and I strive to banish them, my heart rising up against them, yet sometimes I yield to them. I loathe lying and cursing and cannot endure the company of those who hate practical godliness, yet my withdrawal from them seems nothing but pharisaic hypocrisy, for I am such a miserable failure myself. I pray to God for deliverance from temptation and for grace to resist the devil, but I fear that I do not have His ear, for more often than not I am defeated by sin and Satan."

Editor: "When you thus fall in your duty, or fall into sin, what do you think of yourself and your ways? How are you affected therewith?" Humble Heart: "When I am in this deplorable condition, my soul is grieved, my joy of heart and peace of conscience gone. But when I am a little recovered out of this sinful lethargy, my heart is melted with sorrow over my folly, and I address myself to God with great fear and shame, begging Him to forgive me, pleading 1 John 1:9 and humbly imploring Him to 'renew a right spirit within me'(Psa 51:10)." Editor: "And *why* is it that you are so troubled when sin conquers you?" Humble Heart: "Because I truly wish to please the Lord and it is my greatest grief when I realize that I have dishonored and displeased Him. His mercy has kept me, thus far, from breaking out into open and public sins, yet there is very much *within* which I know He hates."

Editor: "Well, my dear brother and companion in the path of tribulation, God has ordained that the Lamb shall be eaten with '*bitter* herbs' (Exo 12:8). So it was with the apostle, 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (2Co 6:10) summed up his dual experience. 'Sorrowful over his sinful failures, both of omission and commission, yet 'rejoicing' over the provisions which divine grace has made for us while we are in this dreary desert—the Mercy Seat ever open to us, whither we may draw near, unburden our heavy hearts, and pour out our tale of woe, the fountain which has been 'opened for sin and for uncleanness' See Zec 13:1, whither we may repair for cleansing. I am indeed thankful to learn that your conscience confirms what your tongue has uttered. You have expressed enough to clearly evidence that the Holy Spirit has begun a good work in your soul. But I trust you also have faith in the Lord Jesus, the Mediator, by whom alone any sinner can draw near unto God."

Humble Heart: "By divine grace I do desire to acknowledge and embrace the Lord Jesus upon the terms on which He is proclaimed in the Gospel—to believe all His doctrine as my Teacher, to trust in and depend upon the atoning sacrifice which He offered as the great High Priest, and to submit to His rule and government as King. But alas, in connection with the last, 'to *will* is present with me; but how to *perform* that which is good I find not' (Rom 7:18). Editor: "No real Christian ever attains his ideal in this life. He never reaches that perfect standard which God has set before us in His Word and which was so blessedly exemplified in the life of Christ. Even the Apostle Paul, near the close of his life, had to say, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus' (Phi 3:12). But may I ask if you are sensible of how you arrived at the good desires you mentioned? Do you suppose that such a disposition is *natural* to you or that it has resulted from your own improvement of your faculties?"

Humble Heart: "No, sir, I dare not ascribe to nature that which is the effect and fruit of divine grace. If I have any measure of sanctification (which is what I long to be assured of), then it can only be by the gift and operation of God. I am too well acquainted with my wretched self: I know too well that by nature I am alive to vanity and sin, but dead to God and all real goodness, that folly possesses my soul, darkness shrouds my understanding, that I am utterly unable to will or to do what is pleasing in God's sight, and that my natural heart is set contrary to the way of salvation proposed in the Gospel, rising up against its flesh—condemning precepts and commandments. I see, I know, I feel that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth *no* good thing."

Editor: "Then do you realize what must be the outcome if God were to leave you unto yourself?" Humble Heart: "Yes, indeed. Without the assistance of His Holy Spirit, I should certainly make shipwreck of the faith. My daily prayer is, 'Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe' (Psa 119:117). My earnest desire is that I may watch and pray against every temptation. There is nothing I dread more than apostatising, relaxing in my duty, returning to wallow in the mire." Editor: "These are all *plain evidences of the saving grace of God at work within you*, which I beseech Him to continue, so that you may be preserved with a tender conscience, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and obtain a full assurance of His love for you."

Humble Heart: "I thank you kindly, sir, for your patience and help. What you have said makes me feel lighter in heart, but I wish to go home and prayerfully ponder the same, for I

dare not take any *man's* word for it. I want God Himself to 'say unto my soul, I am *thy* salvation' (Psa 35:3). Will you not pray that it may please Him so to do?" Editor: "You shall certainly have a place in my feeble petitions. The Lord be very gracious unto you."

GOOD NEWS

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow." We trust that these (or similar) words will ascend to heaven from many hearts, when we report that, by the unchanging faithfulness and the abounding goodness of the Triune Jehovah, we closed our magazine-books for 1932 (on November 30, 1932) with a balance to the good of \$85 (seventeen pounds). In spite of the worldwide "depression," acutely felt here in the U.S.A., in spite of the fact that we had two hundred less names on our list than in the preceding year, and in spite of the fact that we sent the "Studies" unto hundreds who were unable to have any financial fellowship with this work, our credit-balance for 1932 was larger than any of the previous ten years! What a God we serve!

We trust the above good news will be used by the One whom we are seeking to serve to encourage many of His dear people to trust Him more fully. The publishing of these "Studies" is entirely "a work of faith and labor of love." We are completely dependent upon Him who "faileth not" (Zep 3:5) for funds with which to pay for each issue. We spread our need before Him, plead His sure promises, count upon His veracity, and He never disappoints us. One-third of this balance we have distributed among the "poor of the flock," who are known personally to us. One-third is carried forward unto this year's account. The remainder will be used (D.V.) in printing tracts and booklets. Praise our God and continue in prayer for us.

