

Vol. XXIII

March, 1944

No. 3

# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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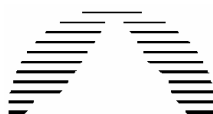
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*Studies in the Scriptures* appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to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

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## WISDOM FOR THE WISE

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

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

Limiting ourselves first to the above, we learn *who* are the "wise" and *how* their wisdom is manifested. This incident is indeed a striking one. At the time of its occurrence Daniel was but a young man, and so far as Scripture informs us he had never previously received a prophetic "vision" from God! Yet such was his confidence in the Lord that he tells the king, without any hesitation or qualification, that if allowed time he *would* (not "might" or that he "hoped to") tell him both his dream and its signification. It should also be duly noted that Daniel and his fellows had no specific promise they could plead before God, no detail in His Word which exactly suited their present emergency, and therefore they fell back upon the general "desiring mercies" from Him. We may also point out that this happened at a time when Israel's spirituality was at an exceedingly low ebb, when the Divine judgments were heavy upon that nation, when many of her sons were in captivity in a heathen land. Nevertheless, Daniel had no fear that God would suffer him to be confounded or put to confusion. In childlike assurance he bowed the knee before Him and obtained that which he sought.

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

And unto *that* "wise" man God gave more "wisdom" as He "giveth more grace" unto the humble (James 4:5). And this striking and blessed incident has been recorded for our learning: to show us what spiritual wisdom is, how it acts, and what it obtains. Natural knowledge puffs up its possessor, and the more he has the more self-sufficient he deems himself. But it is the very opposite with spiritual wisdom: the more God bestows of that upon His child, the more ignorant and stupid he feels himself to be, and the more dependent upon the Holy Spirit does he become. Then it is that he really values that precious promise "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it *shall be*

given him" (James 1:5). The truly "wise" person will not only greatly prize such a promise, but he will daily *make use* of it, mixing faith therewith, pleading it before the throne of grace, and obtaining answers of peace. As it is "when I am weak [in myself], then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10), so it is when we (spiritually speaking) conduct ourselves as "babes" that God reveals unto us what is hidden from the worldly wise and prudent (Matt. 11:25).

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

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

## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 3. *Romans 15:5-7*

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

In the Christian company at Rome, as in almost all the then churches of God beyond the bounds of Judea, there were two classes clearly distinguished from each other. The one was composed of Gentile converts and the more enlightened of their Jewish brethren, who (rightly) viewed the institutions of the Mosaic law as annulled by the new and better covenant. The other class comprised the great body of Jewish converts, who, whilst they believed in the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah and Savior, yet held that the Mosaic law was not and could not be repealed, and therefore continued zealous for it—not only observing its ceremonial requirements themselves but desirous of imposing the same on the Gentile Christians. The particular points here raised were abstinence from those “meats” which were prohibited under the old covenant, and the observance of certain “holy” days connected with the feasts of Judaism. The epistle of Hebrews had not then been written, and little explicit teaching given on the subject. Until God overthrew Judaism in A.D. 70 He tolerated the slowness of understanding on the part of many Jewish Christians.

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

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

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

But there are not a few who go yet farther. They not only insist that others should walk by the rule *they* have set up (or accept the particular interpretation of certain scriptures which they give *and* the specific application of the term “meat” which they make) but stigmatise as “unclean,” “carnal,” and “sinful” the conduct of those differing from them. This is a very serious matter, for it is a manifest and flagrant commission of that which this particular portion of God’s Word expressly reprehends. “Let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth...who art thou that judgest another man’s servant...why dost thou judge thy brother?...let us not therefore judge one another any more” (Rom. 14:3,4,10,13)! Thus the very ones who are so forward in judging their brethren are condemned by God! It is surely significant that there is no other portion of Holy Writ which so strongly and so repeatedly forbids passing judgment on others as this chapter to which appeal is so often (wrongly) made by those who condemn their fellows for things which Scripture has not prohibited.

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

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

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

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” (Rom. 14:1). The reference is not to one of feeble faith, beset by doubts, but rather to one who is imperfectly instructed in the Faith, who has not yet grasped the real meaning of Christian liberty, who was still in bondage to the prohibitions of Judaism. Notwithstanding his lack of knowledge, receive him into your affections, treat him kindly: cf. Acts 28:2 and Philemon 15-17 for the force of “receive.” He was neither to be excommunicated from Christian circles nor looked upon with contempt because he had less light than others. “But not to doubtful disputations” means, that he is not to be disturbed about his own conscientious views and practices, nor on the other hand is he to be allowed to pester his brethren by seeking to convert them to his views. There is to be mutual forbearance and amity between believers. “Each Christian has, and ought to have, the judgment of discretion, and should have his senses exercised to the discerning between good and evil, truth and error,” (Matthew Henry).

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

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

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

A sharp distinction is to be drawn between moderation and abstinence. To be "temperate in all things" (1 Cor. 9:25) is a dictate of prudence—to put it on the lowest ground. "Let your moderation be known to all men" (Phil. 4:5) is a Divine injunction. It is not the use but the abuse of many things which mark the difference between innocence and sin. But because many abuse certain of God's creatures, that is no sufficient reason why others should altogether shun them. As Spurgeon once said, "Shall I cease to use knives because some men cut their throats with them?" Shall, then, my wife remove her wedding ring because certain people profess to be "stumbled" at the sight of one on her finger? Does love to them require her to become fanatical? Would it really make for their profit, their edification, by conforming to their scruples? or would it not be more likely to encourage a spirit of self-righteousness. We once lived for two years in a small place where there was a church of these people, but we saw little signs of humility in those who were constantly complaining of pride in others.

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

It is written, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32), yet like many another precept that one cannot be taken absolutely without any qualification. For example, if I be invited to occupy an Arminian pulpit it would give great offence should I preach upon unconditional Election, yet would that warrant my keeping silent thereon? Hyper-Calvinists do not like to

hear about man's responsibility, but should I therefore withhold what is needful to and profitable for them? Would brotherly love require this of me? None more pliable and adaptable than he who wrote "Unto the Jews I became a Jew, that I might gain the Jews...To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak" etc. (1 Cor. 9:20-22), yet when Peter was to be blamed because he toadied to those who condemned eating with the Gentiles, he "*withstood him to the face*" (Gal. 2:11,12), and when false brethren sought to bring them into bondage, he refused to have Titus circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5).

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

But we must draw to a close. The exercise of Christian charity is an essential duty, yet it is not to override everything else, any more than God has not exercised love at the expense of righteousness. The exercising of love does not mean that the Christian himself is to become a non-entity, a mere straw blown hither and thither by every current of wind he encounters. He is never to please his brethren at the expense of displeasing God. Love is not to oust liberty. The exercise of love does not require the Christian to yield principle, to wound his own conscience or to become the slave of every fanatic he meets. It *does* enjoin the curbing of his own desires and seeking the good, the profit, the edification, of his brethren, but *not* the subscribing to their errors and depriving him of the right of personal judgment. There is a balance to be preserved here: a happy medium between the cultivation of unselfishness and becoming the victim of the selfishness of others. —AWP



## THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

### 15. Tenth Miracle - part 2

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

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

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

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

Do you not suppose, dear friend, that both the maid and her parents were greatly perplexed? Must they not have been sorely tried by this mysterious providence? Why, O why? must have been asked by them a hundred times. Why had God allowed the joy of their home to be shattered? Passing strange, if the maiden reflected at all, must she have thought her lot. Why was she, a favored daughter of Abraham, now a servant in Naaman's household? Why this enforced separation from her parents? Why this cruel captivity? Such questions she might have asked at first, and asked in vain. Ah, does the reader perceive the point we are leading up to? It is this: God had a good reason for this trial. He was shaping things in His own unfathomable way for the outworking of His good and wise purpose. There is nothing happens in this world by mere

chance. A predestinating God has planned every detail in our lives. Our "times are in *His* hand" (Ps. 31:15). He "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). What a resting place for our poor hearts does that grand truth supply!

It was God who directed that this "little maid" of Israel should become a member of Naaman's household. And why? That she might be a link in the chain which ended not only in the healing of his leprosy, but also most probably in the salvation of his soul. Here then is the important lesson for us to take to heart from this incident. Here is the light which it casts upon the mysterious ways of God in providence: He has a wise and good reason behind each of the perplexing and heart-exercising trials which enter our lives. The particular reason for each trial is frequently concealed from us at the time it comes upon us—if it were not, there would be no room for the exercise of faith and patience in it. But just as surely as God had a good reason for allowing the happiness of this Hebrew household to be darkened, so He has in ordering whatever sorrow has entered your life. It was *the sequel* which made manifest God's gracious design; and it is for the sequel you must quietly and trustfully wait. This incident is among the things recorded in the Old Testament "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

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

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

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

"And one went in and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel" (v. 4). A very incidental and apparently trivial statement is this, yet being a part of God's eternal Truth it is not to be passed over lightly and hurriedly. We are ever the losers by such irreverent treatment of the Word. There is nothing meaningless in that Holy Volume: each single verse in it sparkles with beauty if we view it in the right light and attentively survey it. It is so here. First, this verse informs us that the little maid's words to her mistress did not pass unheeded. Well they might have done, humanly speaking, for it would be quite natural for those about her—a mere child, a foreigner in their midst—to have paid no attention unto her remarks. Even had they done so, surely such a statement as she had made must have sounded like foolish boasting. If the best physicians in Syria were helpless in the presence of leprosy, who would credit

that a man of another religion, in despised Samaria, should be able to heal him! But strange as it may seem, her words *were* heeded.

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

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

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

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

Third, *its misapprehension*. "Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel." As will appear in the sequel, the Lord had a reason for suffering the king to act thus. Poor Naaman was now *misdirected* by the carnal wisdom of his master. The little maid had said nothing about "the king of Israel," but had specified "the prophet that is in Samaria." It had been much better for the leper to have heeded more closely her directions, then had he been spared needless trouble. Yet how true to life is the typical picture here presented. How often is the sinner, who has been awakened to his desperate condition, wrongly counseled and turned aside to cisterns which hold no water! Rarely does an exercised soul find relief at once. More frequently his experience is like that of the old woman in Mark 5:26 who tried "many physicians" in vain, before she came to Christ; or like the prodigal son when he "began to be in want" and went and joined himself to a citizen of the far country and got nothing better than "the husks that the swine did eat" (Luke 15:14,15), ere he sought unto the Father.

"And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (v. 5). It has been computed that the value of these things would be at least seventy thousand dollars or fifteen thousand pounds. The Hebrew maid had said nothing of the need for silver and gold, but knowing nought of the *grace* of God Naaman was prepared to pay handsomely for his healing. Again we exclaim, how true to life is this typical picture. How many there are who think the "gift of God" may be purchased (Acts 8:20), if not literally with money, yet by works of righteousness and religious performances. And even where that delusion has been removed, another equally erroneous often takes its place: the idea that a heavily-burdened conscience, a deep sense of personal unworthiness, accompanied by sighs and tears and groans, is the required qualification for applying to Christ and the ground of peace be-

fore God. Fatal mistake: "without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1) excludes all frames, feelings and experiences, as truly as it does the paying of a papish priest to absolve me.

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

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

Perhaps the Christian reader is tempted to congratulate himself that there is nothing searching for him in verse 7. If so, such complacency may be premature. Are you quite sure, friend, that there has been *no* parallel in your past conduct to that of Israel's king? Were you never guilty of the thing wherein he failed? When some heavy demand was made upon you, some real test or trial confronted you, did you never respond by saying, I am not sufficient for this: it is quite beyond my feeble powers? Possibly you imagined that was a pious acknowledgment of your weakness, when in reality it was a voicing of your unbelief. True, the Christian is impotent in himself; so too is the non-Christian. Is then the saint no better off than the ungodly? If the Christian continues impotent, the fault is his. God's grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Feeble knees and hands which hang down bring no glory to God. He has bidden us "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). Then cease imitating this defeatist attitude of Israel's king, and "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). —AWP

## THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

### *1. Introduction*

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

Second, because of a felt need of again bringing conspicuously before our readers "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is His sacrificial work which is prominent yea dominant in the reconciling of God to His people. It was by the shedding of Christ's precious blood that God was placated and His wrath averted. It was by Christ's being chastised that peace has been made for us. And it is by the preaching of the Cross that our awful enmity against God is slain and that we are moved to abandon our vile warfare against Him. As it is upwards of twelve years since we completed the rather lengthy series of articles we wrote upon the Atonement, under the title "The Satisfaction of Christ," it seems high time that we once more contemplated the greatest marvel and miracle of all history, namely, the Lamb of God being slain for the redemption of sinners. The doctrine of reconciliation has much to do with what took place at Calvary, yea apart from *that* no reconciliation with God had been possible. It is therefore a subject which should warm the hearts of the saints and bow them in adoration at the feet of the Redeemer.

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

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

Such is the view of the Plymouth Brethren. In his work "The Ministry of Reconciliation" C. H. Macintosh (one of the most influential of their early men) declares: "We often hear it said that 'the death of Christ was necessary in order to reconcile God to man.' This is a pious mistake, arising from inattention to the language of the Holy Spirit and indeed to the plain meaning of the word 'reconcile.' God never changed, never stepped out of His normal and true position. He abides faithful. There was, and could be, no derangement, no confusion, no alienation, so far as He was concerned; and hence there could be no need of reconciling Him to us. In fact it was exactly the contrary. Man had gone astray; he was the enemy, and needed to be reconciled...Wherefore, then, as might be expected, Scripture never speaks of reconciling God

to man. There is no such expression to be found within the covers of the New Testament." This is something he calls a "point of immense importance," and consequently all who have succeeded him in that strange system have echoed his teaching: how far it is removed from the Truth will be shown (D.V.) in the articles that follow.

Some hyper-Calvinists are also much confused on this doctrine. Through failing to see that God's being reconciled to sinners who believe concerns His *official* relationship and not His essential character, they have demurred at the expression "a reconciled God," supposing it connotes some charge within Himself. They argue that since God has loved His elect with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3) and that since He changes not (Mal. 3:6), it is wrong for us to suppose that reconciliation is anything more on our side only. They insist that to speak of God's being reconciled unto us implies an alteration either in His affections or purpose, and that neither of these can stand with His immutability. To speak of God's first loving His people, then hating them, and then again loving them, appears to them as imputing fickleness to Him. So it would be if these predictions of God were made of Him considered in the *same character* and relationship. But they are not. As their Father God has loved His people with an unalterable love, but as the Moral Governor of this world and the Judge of all the earth He has a legal enmity against those who trample His Law beneath their feet.

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

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

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

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

"By steadily bearing these two things in mind, we shall be the better prepared to understand in what reconciliation through the blood of the cross consists. Against the persons of the elect there was, in the mind of God, no vindictive wrath, no penal anger (Isa. 27:4); but there was a displeasure against their sins, and so far with them for their sins. So God was angry with Moses (Deut. 1:37), with Aaron (Deut. 9:20), with David (2 Sam.

11:27; 1 Chron. 21:7), with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9) for their personal sins, though all of them were in the covenant of grace, and loved by Him with an everlasting love. Thus the Scriptures speak of the anger and wrath of God, and of that wrath being turned away and pacified (Isa. 12:1; Ezek. 16:63), which it could only be by the blood of the Lamb.

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

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

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

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

In his next paragraph he virtually or in effect contradicts what he had advanced in the previous one, for he expressly declares "Against the persons of the elect there was in the mind of God no vindictive wrath, *no penal anger*." Then wherein lay the need of a "propitiation"? "Penal" means "relating to punishment": if there was no judicial anger on God's part as Governor and Judge and if His elect were not exposed to the punishment of the Law because of their sins, then why the sacrifice of Christ for them? Clearly Mr. P. felt the shoe pinching him here, for in his next paragraph he brings in the violation of the justice of God and the

“satisfaction” this required. Yet toward the end he wavers again by saying “sin having, as it were, burst in to make a separation between God and them.” Why such hesitating qualification? sin *did* cause a breach on both sides, and the one Party needed to be “propitiated,” and the other “converted” before the breach could be healed. Our purpose in quoting from C.H. Mackintosh and J.C. Philpot (whose writings served to mould the views of many thousands) is to demonstrate the need for a Scriptural exposition of this doctrine.

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



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

### *3a. Its Necessity*

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

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

1. Christian progress does not signify advancing in God's favor. The believer's growth in grace does not further him one iota in God's esteem. How could it, since He is the Giver of his faith and the One who has "wrought all our works in us" (Isa. 26:12)! God's favorable regard of His people originated not in anything whatever in them, either actual or foreseen. God's grace is absolutely free, being the spontaneous exercise of His own mere good pleasure. The cause of its exercise lies wholly within Himself. The *purposing* grace of God is that good will which He had unto His people from all eternity: "Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). And the *dispensing* grace of God is but the execution of His purpose, ministering to His people: thus we read "God *giveth* grace," yea that "He *giveth* more grace" (James 4:6). It is entirely gratuitous, sovereignly bestowed, without any inducement being found in its object.

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

The Christian is not accepted because of his "graces," for the very *graces* (as their name connotes) are bestowed upon him by Divine bounty, and are not attained by any efforts of his. And so far from these *graces* being the reason why God accepts him, they are the *fruits* of his being "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" and, decretively, "blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3,4). Settle it then in your own mind once for all, my reader, that growth in grace does not signify growing in the favor of God. This is essentially a Papish delusion, and though a creature-flattering it is a

horribly Christ-dishonoring one. Since God's elect are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6) it is impossible that any subsequent change wrought in or attained by them could render them more excellent in His esteem or advance them in His love. When the Father announced concerning the incarnate Word "this is My beloved Son [not "with whom" but] *in whom* I am well pleased," He was expressing His delight in the whole election of grace, for He was speaking of Christ in His federal character, as the last Adam, as Head of His mystical body.

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

2. Christian progress does not denote that the work of regeneration was incomplete. Great care needs to be taken in stating this truth of spiritual growth lest we repudiate the perfection of the new birth. We must repeat here in substance what was pointed out in the first article. When a normal child is born into this world naturally the babe is an entire entity, complete in all its parts, possessing a full set of bodily members and mental faculties. As the child grows there is a strengthening of its body and mind, a development of its members and an expansion of its faculties, with a fuller use of the one and a clearer manifestation of the other; yet no new member or additional faculty is or can be added to him. It is precisely so spiritually. The spiritual life or nature received at the new birth contains within itself all the "senses" (Heb. 5:14) and graces, and though these may be nourished and strengthened, and increased by exercise yet not by addition, no, not in Heaven itself. "I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). The "babe" in Christ is just as truly and completely a child of God as the most matured "father" in Christ.

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

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

It has not been sufficiently realised that God's pronouncement of justification is very much more than a mere sense of acquittal or non-condemnation. It includes as well a positive imputation of righteousness. As James Hervey so beautifully illustrated it: "When yonder orb makes his first appearance in the east, what effects are produced? Not only are the shades of night dispersed, but the light of day is diffused. Thus it is when the Author of salvation is manifested to the soul: He brings at once pardon *and acceptance*." Not only are our filthy rags removed, but "the best robe" is put upon us (Luke 15:22), and no efforts or attainments of ours can add anything to such a Divine adornment. Christ not only delivered from death, but purchased life for us; He not only put away our sins, but merited an Inheritance for us. The most mature

and advanced Christian has nought to plead before God for his acceptance than the righteousness of Christ: *that*, nothing but that, and nothing added to it, as his perfect title to Glory.

4. Christian progress does not make us meet for Heaven. Many of those who are more or less clear on the three points considered above are far from being so upon this one, and therefore we must enter into it at greater length. Thousands have been taught to believe that when a person has been justified by God and tasted the blessedness of "the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," that much still remains to be done for the soul before it is ready for the celestial courts. A widespread impression prevails that after his justification the believer must undergo the refining process of sanctification, and that for this he must be left for a time amid the trials and conflicts of a hostile world; yea so strongly held is this view that some are likely to take exception to what follows. Nevertheless, such a theory repudiates the fact that it is the new-creative work of the Spirit which not only capacitates the soul to take in and enjoy spiritual things now (John 3:3,5), but also fits it experimentally for the eternal fruition of God.

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

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

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

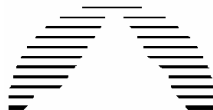
Instead of striving after and praying that God would make us more fit for Heaven, how much better to join with the apostle in "Giving thanks unto the Father who *hath made us meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), and then seek grace to walk suitably unto such a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

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

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

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

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



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