

Vol. XXV

August, 1946

No. 8

STUDIES

IN THE

SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

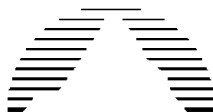
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Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886, and born again by God's Spirit in 1908. He studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago before his pastoral work in Colorado, California, Kentucky, and South Carolina, USA, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, taking his final residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952.

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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THE THREEFOLD MARVEL

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15). It will at once be obvious to a spiritual mind that no human pen, however gifted, could begin to do justice to such a verse as this; rather is he likely to detract from its sublimity and depreciate its grandeur in the estimation of the reader. It is one of those outstanding declarations of Holy Writ which is stamped so unmistakably with the autograph of its Divine Author. The mind of the creature could not have invented it, for the thoughts of a fallen being would never soar to such heights, conceive of such an ineffable Object as is here presented to our view, nor have imagined such an amazing act on His part as here predicated of Him. As a whole, it exhibits a threefold marvel and miracle.

First, a marvel and miracle of *Divine condescension*, namely, that of the Highest and the lowest meeting together. Our estimation of the stupendous and amazing nature of this marvel will be proportioned by our concept of the greatness and majesty of the Lord God. Alas, that in our day, this is so little perceived even by the majority of those who profess to be His people. So little does the modern pulpit set forth the perfections of Deity; yea, so wretchedly is He caricatured, that He has good reason to say of those in the pew, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psa 50:21): Feeble, fickle, compromising—unable to accomplish His purpose, swayed by the events of time, indifferent to sin. It is not, too, such to say that the God of Scripture is “THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Act 17:23) of modern Christendom. The “god” of the “churches” possesses scarcely any of the attributes of the living God, but is instead, a disgusting figment of their own perverted imagination and corrupt sentiments.

“For thus saith the high and lofty One” (Isa 57:15), He is the One “who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?...Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing...All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” (Isa 40:12-18). Pause, my reader, carefully ponder those words; and then ask yourself, “Is there not a real and pressing need for me to revise, yea, radically alter my concept of this mighty and majestic Being?” “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isa 44:6).

The God of Scripture is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (1Ti 6:15-16). If that were more clearly grasped by our minds, and if it more powerfully influenced our hearts, we should stand in awe of such an One, and in astonishment, exclaim with one of old, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth?” (1Ki 8:27). Such was the wondering exclamation of Solomon upon the completion of the temple—probably the most remarkable and imposing building ever erected by man on this earth—the placing of all its sacred vessels in their proper places, and the dedication of the whole. For Jehovah to take up His abode therein seemed to him a thing incredible, impossible. Considering His immensity, he went on to say, “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1Ki 8:27).

The One whom the heavens are incapable of containing cannot be circumscribed in place nor held by space, being infinite and omnipresent. The Heaven is His throne and the earth is His “footstool”—shall then the King of glory occupy *that* for His seat! Can such an One take up His abode in a human heart? Surely such a thing is far beyond the widest stretch of imagination. What! That He “who humbleth himself to [so much as] behold the things that are in heaven” (Psa 113:6) should deign to tabernacle in a worm of the earth is utterly beyond comprehension. That He who is infinite should make His home in one that is finite had never been thought of by mortal mind. That He who “inhabiteth eternity” (Isa 57:15) should indwell a creature of time, what is it but indeed a marvel and miracle of condescension—one which should bow us before Him in overwhelming wonderment and worship.

Yet Jehovah is not only the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, but “whose name is *Holy*” (Isa 57:15): His very nature is ineffably pure. To His immaculate eyes, the heavens themselves are unclean (Job 15:15), “the stars are not pure in his sight” (Job 25:5). “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst

not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). If, then, it be a thing incredible for the great God to dwell on the earth, if it would be a thing comprehensible for Him to tabernacle in a finite creature of time—even if that creature were himself sinless—what shall it be for One who is infinitely Holy to dwell within one that is fallen, corrupt, and vile? That is indeed a marvel and miracle of grace—appreciated only in proportion as we apprehend *Who* He is and what *we* are! We read that “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid” (Isa 11:6), and that is a miracle of nature; but for the Holy One to indwell a sinner is a miracle of miracles, the transcendent marvel of grace.

Yes, it is not only a marvel of condescension that the infinite God should indwell a finite creature, but it is also a miracle of *Divine mercy* that the ineffably Holy One should take up His abode in the heart of a fallen and sinful creature. Were it not that the Word of Truth clearly and repeatedly taught this, we had not dared to affirm it, nor even imagine such a wonder for ourselves. “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly” (Psa 138:6). O that our hearts were duly affected by His peerless benignity. If they were, we should exclaim with the Psalmist, “Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people” (Psa 113:5-8). The high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, yet “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10).

“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15). That exhibits to us, third, a marvel and miracle of *Divine power*. By nature, there are none of “a contrite and humble spirit.” So far from it, all the fallen children of Adam are in love with sin and self. The world over, the unregenerate are intractable, impenitent, proud, and self-willed. It is only by the supernatural operations of Divine power that the wild are tamed, the stout-hearted made contrite, and the haughty become lowly. Above, we have said that the great God takes up His abode in a worm of the earth, yet it is not one considered as a “worm of the earth” that He does so. No, rather is it as one upon whom the Lord had set His heart from before the foundation of the world, as one redeemed by Christ and cleansed by His precious blood, as one who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit, as one who has thrown down the weapons of his warfare and surrendered to the claims of God, as one who has been made a new creature by the might of Omnipotence. Wonder and adore at this threefold marvel and miracle.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

32. *Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 8 (3:20-21)*

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). In connection therewith, let the Christian reader honestly face the Lord’s own question: “Believe ye that I *am able* to do this?” (Mat 9:28). Unless we are much mistaken, quite a number will reply, “Yes, I believe He is able to do so for me, but I fear that He may not be *willing* to.” If such be your answer, then you are very much mistaken—not only about Him, but also about yourself. If you really think that God is able to bring you into a closer walk and more constant fellowship with Himself, that He is able to make all grace abound toward you and fill you with Himself, but doubt His willingness to do so, then your heart is deceiving you and causing you to think more highly of yourself than you have any right to do. The fact is, dear friend, you do not believe He is able; if you *did*, you would not doubt His willingness. You do not agree with that statement, but rather indignantly deny it, saying, “Surely I know myself better than you do! *I know* that I believe implicitly in the omnipotence of God, but I often question whether He is willing to exercise it on my behalf.” We repeat, You are sadly mistaken.

Suffer us to be faithful with you, dear reader. If such be your assertion, then you are flattering yourself. Sin is blinding your judgment. Your heart is more deceitful than you realise; your case is far worse than you will allow. You have too good an opinion of yourself. You are trying to hide your wicked unbelief under the fair cover of humility. You persuade yourself it would be presumptuous to entertain the assurance that God is willing to work miracles on your behalf, and congratulate yourself that your doubting such a thing is a mark of lowly-mindedness. How you delude yourself! You may indeed believe intellectually in the ability and all-sufficiency of God, but your heart has not laid hold of the same. If it had, you would not call into question His willingness. The fact is that you entertain a horribly-distorted view of God. In reality, you fondly imagine that you are more anxious to receive spiritual blessings than He is desirous of bestowing them; that you are more willing, more concerned about your spiritual prosperity than He is. Call things by their proper names. Hide your face for shame. Confess to God your excuseless unbelief and cease posing as a very humble person.

God does not mock His people by declaring to them that “He is able” when at the same time, He is unwilling. Re-examine the passages quoted in our last: “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25)—does not that include His willingness? Of course it does. “He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18); yes, and willing, too—or such a word would have no comfort in it. “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12)—what assurance could that give me, if He were unwilling to “keep”? When the Lord rebuked the skeptical laughter of Sarah, was it because she questioned His willingness, or because she doubted His power? The latter, as is clear from His challenge: “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” (Gen 18:13-14). When He rebuked Moses for his unbelief, was it because he distrusted God’s willingness, or might? Clearly the latter: “Is the LORD’S hand waxed short?” (Num 11:22-23). And if you really believed in God’s omnipotence, you would promptly avail yourself of it! You would say, “Lord, I know that Thou art able to undertake for me; and therefore, I count upon Thee doing so.”

“He is able” is a brief, but comprehensive, affirmation of God’s goodness, willingness, sufficiency, and munificence. Because God is good, He withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly (Psa 84:11) and makes all things work together for good to them that love Him (Rom 8:28). Because God is good, He is willing and ready to supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phi 4:19). Because He is God, He is self-sufficient: No creature can thwart Him, no situation dismay Him, no emergency arise which is beyond His resources. Because God is munificent, He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). Because God is the all-mighty and all-sufficient One, He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). What a God is ours! How different from the creature! Have we not in some hour of need appealed to one of our fellows who had the wherewithal to succour, but refused? And have we not witnessed a fond mother anxious to relieve her suffering child, but was unable to do so! But the One with whom the Christian has to do, his Father in Heaven, has both the willingness and the power.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). How different would be many of our prayers if we always viewed God thus when approaching His mercy-

seat! If faith regarded Him in this character, our petitions would be framed accordingly, and our confidence would be greater and more honouring to Him. Each word in that wonderful sentence should be duly weighed, and its cumulative and climacteric force grasped by us. God is not only able to do what we “ask,” but also “think”—some of our thoughts are beyond expression in words. He is able to do *all* that we ask or think, not merely some or even most of them, but even our loftiest conceptions. But more: He is able to do *above all* what we ask or think, exceeding our highest aspirations and largest requests. Better still: He is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think—O that the Holy Spirit would enable us to understand that and our faith to obtain a better grip upon it. Best of all, He is able to do “*exceeding* abundantly above *all* that we ask or think.” Human language is utterly incapable of expressing the infinite sufficiency and illimitable bounty of the One to whom prayer is addressed, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9) is His own declaration.

For the further encouraging of our hearts and strengthening of our faith, let us consider some recorded examples of God’s answers far exceeding the requests of His people. “And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” (Gen 15:2)—he asked for a son. What was the response made by the bountiful Giver? This: “And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Gen 15:5)! Jacob’s thought rose no higher than “bread to eat, and raiment to put on” (Gen 28:20), but the Divine munificence bestowed upon him “oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants” (Gen 32:5). The Hebrews had been quite content to remain in Egypt if deliverance from bondage was granted them (Exo 2:23), but God brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey! David asked life of God, and He not only gave him “the request of his lips,” but bestowed upon him a throne as well (Psa 21:1-4). Solomon sought “an understanding heart” (1Ki 3:9) and God not only supplied it, but said, “I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour” (1Ki 3:13).

And has it not been thus with each of us? Has not the bountiful One given above our expectations? Go back, my brother, my sister, to the dawn of your Christian life. Recall the season when you were under conviction of sin and a weighty sense of the wrath of God oppressed you: Did your desires at that time ascend any higher than to be delivered from the everlasting burnings and be granted an assurance of pardon? Bring your mind back to that time when you were painfully aware of being in the far country, where you sought in vain to find satisfaction in the husks that the swine feed on, and when you cried, “I perish with hunger” (Luk 15:17). At that time, did your aspirations go beyond that of the prodigal? Had you not been quite content if the Father made you one of His “hired servants” (Luk 15:19)? Ah, how truly did He then do exceeding abundantly above all that you asked or thought! He gave you such a welcome as you never dreamed of. He greeted you with such manifestations of love as completely melted your heart. He decked you out with clothing befitting His favoured child. He spread a feast before you and filled your heart with merriment. And my friend, He has not changed! He is still the all-bountiful One!

It is because He has not changed that He presents Himself before you as He does here in Ephesians 3:20. He would have you contemplate Him as the all-sufficient One. He would have you view Him thus when you approach the Throne of Grace—as the One whose resources are illimitable, whose ability to use them is infinite, and whose willingness so to do is demonstrated once for all in giving His only-begotten Son for you and to you. That was the confidence and assurance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when Nebuchadnezzar appointed that they should suffer a horrible death, if they refused to worship the golden image which he had set up. Hear their intrepid reply: “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so [that you really mean to carry out your threat], our God whom we serve is *able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and *he will* deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Dan 3:16-17). With faith steadfastly fixed on God’s power, they had no doubt whatever about His willingness! And that—together with the glorious sequel—is recorded for *our* instruction, as well as our encouragement. Again, we say, God has not changed! He is still the omnipotent One!

Ponder carefully the following passage concerning Abraham: “Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom 4:18-21). To carnal reason, it seemed an impossibility that the infirm Sarah should bear the patriarch a son in his old age, but he refused to be dismayed by the insuperable obstacles as

presented to sight. To “experience” too, the situation also appeared hopeless; but that also daunted him not. He was strong in faith. Why? Because he had a tight grip on God’s promise. He was “fully persuaded” (Rom 4:21). How? Because his heart relied upon the infinite sufficiency and all-mighty power of the Promiser. That was what sustained, yea, rejoiced him, while waiting the fulfillment of God’s promise. God did not disappoint him! This too is recorded for our learning. Once more, we say, God has not changed: He is still El Shaddai—the all-sufficient One.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to”—what? According to His sovereign pleasure? According to His eternal decree? According to His secret will? No, true though that be; yet it was not that which the heart of the apostle was here occupied with! What then? “According to the *power* that worketh in us.” Say what we may, plead as plausibly as we please of our uncertainty about God’s willingness to show Himself strong on our behalf; at the bottom, it is our wicked unbelief, our doubting of His *power*, our secret questioning of His ability to extricate us from such and such a predicament, or furnish a table for us in the wilderness. It was at that point the faith of Zacharias failed—doubting the power of God to make good the word He had given through the angel (Luk 1:18-20). It was his questioning of Christ’s power that caused Him to chide Peter with “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Mat 14:31). It was because the apostles lacked confidence in His omnipotence that none of them expected Him to rise again on the third day. It was not His willingness, but His power, which they doubted. So it is with us.

He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” is the particular character in which we should ever view God as we approach the mercy-seat: “According to the power that worketh in us” is the standard to which faith should ever appeal in prayer. It is that wondrous power of which we already have personal experience. It is a *mighty* power, for it brought us from death unto life and called us out of darkness into His marvellous light: “For God, who [in Gen 1:3] commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts” (2Co 4:6). It is an *invincible* power, for it subdued our inveterate enmity, overcame our stubborn obstinacy, and made us willing to receive Christ as our Lord and King, to take His yoke upon us and submit to His scepter. It is a *holy* power, for it caused us to repudiate all our righteousness as filthy rags and made us nothing in our own sight. It is a *gracious* power, for it wrought within us not only when we had no merits of our own, but when we had no desire to be subjects of it. It is a “*glorious* power” (Col 1:11), for by it, all our godly affections are sustained and all our acceptable works wrought.

It is an *infinite* power—“whereby he is able even to subdue *all* things unto himself” (Phi 3:21). Sinful corruptions cannot thwart it, Satan and his hosts cannot hinder it, death and the grave cannot defy it. That power can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, can make the blind to see, and the dumb to sing. That power can restore the years that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25), and give “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:3). However urgent may be our situation, that power can relieve it; however great our need, that power can supply it; however potent our temptations, that power can deliver us; however sore may be our trials, that power can support us in them; however distressing our circumstances, that power can keep our hearts in perfect peace. It is an *eternal* power. It is not one which becomes exhausted by expenditure. It never wearies or diminishes; and therefore, since it has begun a good work within us, it will most certainly complete the same (Phi 1:6). It will yet make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight (Heb 13:21).

Let us now point out the *use* we should make of what has been before us. 1. The language of this doxology ought to deeply *humble* us. Its lofty terms rebuke our groveling petitions and expectations. Look at it again—we cannot ponder it too frequently! “Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”: Should not that make us thoroughly ashamed of our petty requests, our feeble anticipations, our low spiritual attainments? We need to realise the fact that there is such a thing as a modesty in our asking which *dishonours* God, that we come far short of seeking from Him that which accords with His benevolence and bounty. We are coming to a king and should therefore “large petitions with us bring.” “Is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jer 32:27) is His own challenge: No matter how sore our strait, or how staggering our difficulty, it will be as nothing to Him. Alas, how like are we unto Joash, who, when bidden by the prophet to smite upon the ground, smote three times and “stayed,” when he should have smitten “five or six times” and thereby obtained a far greater victory (2Ki 13:18-19).

2. It should greatly *encourage us*. Was not that one of the patent purposes of the Spirit in recording this doxology?—to raise the expectations of God's people. And in order thereto show them how faith should view God! It is most important that the saints should at all times contemplate God as the infinitely-sufficient One; but it is peculiarly necessary they should do so as they are about to approach Him in prayer. Nothing is more calculated to enlarge our desires, warm our hearts, and deepen our confidence than to regard Him as here set forth. We ought not to be straitened either in our thoughts of Him or expectations from Him. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psa 81:10) is His own gracious invitation and assurance. Men may talk of receiving "sips" of His goodness and "bites" of His bounties, but that is something to be ashamed of rather than to proclaim with satisfaction. "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song 5:1) tells out His heart unto us. As the Puritan Thomas Manton (1620-1677) well expressed it: "God's bounty is not only ever flowing, but overflowing." The fault is wholly ours if we have but "sips" from it.

3. It should serve as a *challenge unto us*. The language of this doxology is but God saying to us in another way, "Prove Me now herewith. Bring your hard problems to Me. Spread your deep needs before Me. Make known your largest spiritual desires unto Me, and count upon My sufficiency and bounty." As William Carey (1761-1834) counseled, "Ask great things of God, and expect great things from Him." Question not His willingness, for that is reflecting on His goodness and doubting His benevolence. Suffer not Satan to deceive you any longer with a feigned humility, under the pretence of deterring you from spiritual arrogance and forwardness. Recall the case of those who brought unto Christ the one sick of the palsy, who, when they could not reach Him because of the press, broke through the roof and let down the bed on which the sufferer lay! Was the Lord displeased at their "impudence"? No; indeed, He honoured the faith of those who so counted upon His compassion and grace. When the centurion besought Him on behalf of his sick servant, did Christ rebuke him for his "presumption"? No; He "marvelled" at his faith (Mat 8:10; Luk 7:9). O my reader, He delights to be trusted.

4. It should *instruct us*. Having presented the petitions recorded in verses 16-19, the apostle closes with this adoring doxology: "Now unto him that is able...Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21). We often beg the Lord, "Teach us to pray" (Luk 11:1). He has already furnished us with the necessary instructions, both in His own prayers and in those given us through His apostles! In them, He has plainly revealed that we should be deeply concerned with *the glory* of God, that it should actuate and regulate us in all our supplications. In that prayer which He taught His disciples—and after which ours should always be patterned—He bade us conclude our addresses unto the Father with, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Mat 6:13). It is not only that those words should be upon our lips, but that the substance and sentiment of them should ever affect our hearts, that we should make the glory of God our one supreme and constant aim, that we should ask only for those things which will promote His honour, and that we should make that our prevailing plea in the preferring of all our requests. "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake" (Psa 79:9)!

It is at this very point that we may clearly perceive one of the great differences which exists between the spiritual believer and the carnal professor. The formalist and the hypocrite never seek unto God (except when, Pharisee-like, he would parade himself before men), but under the pressure of his *own* needs and not from any concern of God's honour. But the upright seek unto God, because they delight in Him and desire communion with Him, and their love to Him makes them deeply concerned for His glory. When their God is dishonoured, they grieve sorely: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psa 119:136 and compare Eze 9:4). The regenerate prefer God's interests to their own and set *His* glory high above *their* comforts and concerns. In *that*, they follow the example which Christ has left them: "Father, save me from this hour"—that was the innocent inclination of His humanity. "But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify *thy* name" (Joh 12:27-28)—He subordinated everything to that.

It is fitting, then, that we should conclude our prayers thus. As Matthew Henry says, "When we come to ask grace from God, we ought to give glory to God." To give glory to God is to ascribe all excellency unto Him. "Unto him be glory" (Eph 3:21): That was the adoring language of one whose heart was filled with love to God. It was an expression of fervent praise to Him, because He is the all-sufficient and bounteous One. If God be spiritually viewed as the Fountain of all blessings, whose fulness is inexhaustible, whose resources are illimitable, whose benignity is infinite, then the soul cannot but burst forth in acclamation, "unto him be glory." It was also an avowal of expectation. The apostle was assured that the Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ *would* grant the petitions which he had just presented, and he gives thanks for the same. This is the ground of the saint's confidence: that God has joined together His glory and our good. His honour is bound up in promoting the interests of His people: "That *we* should be to the praise of *his* glory" (Eph 1:12). The possession which Christ purchased is "unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14). "Glorified in his saints" (2Th 1:10).

"Unto him be glory" (Eph 3:21) was the homage of the apostle's own heart. Then it was as though he felt his own personal worship was altogether inadequate, and so he added "in the Church"—let all the redeemed unite with me in exalting Him. The Church is indeed the grand seat of His glory: It is "The branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified" (Isa 60:21). "Israel my glory" (Isa 46:13) He calls her. None do, none can truly honour and acknowledge Him, but the Church. But the apostle knew that even the Church—ordained though she be as the subject and instrument of the Divine glory—is yet not equal to the task, and so he added, "by Christ Jesus." As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) so beautifully put it: "Thou, Lord Jesus, Thou art He alone among men eloquent enough to express the glory of God. Grace is poured into Thy lips, and Thou canst declare our praises." But even then, the apostle was not satisfied: "Throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph 3:21)—that a revenue of praise should be paid Him during all generations, and that eternity itself should never cease to resound with the glory of God! And what more suitable response can *we* make to such sentiments than by adding our "*Amen*"!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

12. Rahab (2:6-11)

Little as Joshua may have realised it, he was Divinely impelled and directed to send forth the two spies to “go view the land, *even Jericho*” (Jos 2:1). Why so? Because there was one of God’s elect residing in that city, and none of His sheep shall perish (Joh 10:27-28). Unto that vessel of mercy were they led, in order that arrangements should be made for her protection, so that she “perished not with them that believed not” (Heb 11:31). There was, then, a *needs be* why those two spies should visit Jericho and converse with Rahab—not merely a military needs be, but one far more vital and blessed. It is still another example of what we have, on several occasions, called attention to in these pages—namely, that when God works, He always works at *both* ends of the line. As it was in the case of the Ethiopian and Philip the evangelist, and of Cornelius and Peter, so it was here. Before those two men set foot in Jericho, the Lord had already wrought—signally and savingly—in the heart of Rahab; and now, opportunity is afforded for her to confess her faith, to receive a token for good, and to be made a blessing unto others.

The needs be for those spies entering Jericho reminds one of John 4; and there are some striking parallels between what is recorded there and the case of Rahab. First, we are told of the Lord Jesus that “He must needs go through Samaria” (Joh 4:4). That “must” was not a geographical, but a moral one. From all eternity, it had been ordained that He *should* go through Samaria. There was one of God’s elect there, and though she was “alienated from the common-wealth of Israel” (Eph 2:12), being a Samaritan, yet she could not be ignored: “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I *must* bring” (Joh 10:16) declared the good Shepherd. There were those in Samaria whom the Father had given Him from before the foundation of the world, and them He *must* save. And, my reader, if you be one of God’s elect, even though now unregenerate, there is a needs be put on the Lord Jesus to save *you*. For years, you have been fleeing from Him, but when the appointed time arrives, He will overtake you. You may kick against the pricks, as did Saul of Tarsus, but He will overcome your rebellion and reluctance, and win you to Himself.

Second, not only was the one whom Christ was constrained to seek and save in John 4 a woman and a Gentile, but she was one of loose moral character. Said He to her, “Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband” (Joh 4:18). Such too had been this chosen one in Jericho: Defiled both in mind and body with idolatry and adultery—“Rahab the harlot.” Many of God’s elect—though by no means all of them—fall into gross wickedness in their unconverted days: Fornicators, idolaters, thieves, drunkards, extortioners: “And *such were* some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:9-11). How illustriously is the sovereign mercy and invincible might of God displayed in the conforming of such unto His image! “Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen” And why so? “That no flesh should glory in his presence” (1Co 1:26-29), that His wondrous *grace* might the more clearly appear.

But grace does not leave its subjects in the condition in which it finds them. No; indeed, it appears, “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:12-13). Saving faith is ever accompanied by evangelical repentance, which mourns over past sins and resolves to avoid a repetition of them in the future. Saving faith ever produces obedience, being fruitful in good works. Those who are the recipients of God’s grace are not only grateful for their own salvation, but are concerned about the salvation of others, especially of those near and dear to them by nature. When Christ stood revealed to the Samaritan adulteress, she “went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” and “many...believed on him” (Joh 4:28-29, 39). So too Rahab asked for kindness to be shown her father’s house, and her whole family found deliverance (Jos 2:12-13, 18). But we are anticipating.

The case of Rahab is worthy of our closest attention, for it exemplifies and magnifies the riches of Divine mercy in many striking respects. Born and brought up in heathendom, belonging to a race that was to be exterminated, her salvation was a signal display of God’s dominion, who not only singles out whom He pleases to be the recipients of His favours, but is trammelled by nothing in the bestowal of them. “She was not only a Gentile, but an Amoritess, of that race and seed which, in general, was devoted to destruction. She was, therefore, an instance of God’s sovereignty in dispensing with His positive laws, as it seemed good unto Him, for of His own mere pleasure, He exempted her from the doom announced against all those

of her original and traduction” (John Owen, 1616-1683). Being the supreme Potentate, God is not bound by any law or consideration other than His own imperial will, and “therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom 9:18).

In God’s saving of Rahab and bringing her into the congregation of His people, we may perceive a clear and glorious foreshadowing of the fuller scope of His eternal purpose, as it is now made more plainly manifest in this New Testament era. Since Rahab was a Canaanite, she was by nature cut off from the Abrahamic stock, and therefore, a stranger “from the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:12). By her conversion and admission into the congregation of Israel, she was obviously both a type and a pledge of the calling of the Gentiles and their reception into the mystical Body of Christ. Thus did coming events cast their shadows before them. In such cases as Rahab and Ruth, God gave an early intimation that His redemptive purpose was not confined to a single people, but that it reaches out unto favoured individuals in all nations. Their incorporation by marriage among the Hebrews was a blessed adumbration of the “wild olive tree” being grafted in and made a partaker of “the root and fatness of the [good] olive tree” (Rom 11:17). Such we believe is, in part at least, the typical and dispensational significance of what is here before us.

But the outstanding feature of this remarkable case is the free and discriminating grace of God toward her. Not only did Rahab belong to a heathen race, but she was a notorious profligate, and in singling her out to be the recipient of His distinguishing and saving favour, God made it evident that He is no respecter of persons. By her choice, she was given up to the vilest of sins, but by the Divine choice, she was predestinated to be delivered from the miry pit and washed whiter than snow by the precious blood of Christ, and given a place in His own family. It is in just such cases as her that the unmerited favour of God shines forth the more resplendently. There was nothing whatever in that poor fallen woman to commend her to God’s favourable regard, but where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound, bestowing upon her His unsolicited and unearned favours—the gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23), the gift of saving faith (Eph 2:8-9), the gift of evangelical repentance (Act 5:31). He is indeed “the God of all grace” (1Pe 5:10); and as such, He is a giving and freely-conferring God, and not one who barter and sells. His bestowments are “without money and without price,” imparted to spiritual bankrupts and paupers.

Not only may we behold in Rahab’s case the exercise of Divine sovereignty and the manifestation of Divine grace, but we may also pause and admire the wondrous working of God’s power. This is best perceived if we take into careful consideration the virtually unparalleled element which entered into it: Here the Holy Spirit wrought almost entirely apart from the ordinary means of grace. There were no Sabbaths observed in Jericho, there were no Scriptures available for reading, there were no prophets sounding forth messages from Heaven; nevertheless, Rahab was quickened unto newness of life and brought unto a saving knowledge of the true God. The Lord Almighty is not restricted to the employing of certain agencies, nor hindered by the lack of instruments: He deigns to use such, or dispenses with them entirely as He pleases. He has but to speak, and it is done; to command, and it stands fast (Psa 33:9). It is to be duly noted that this woman who had previously walked in open sin was regenerated and converted *before* the spies came to her house: Their visit simply afforded an opportunity for the avowal and public manifestation of her faith.

It is quite clear from both the Old and New Testament that Rahab was converted before the two spies first spoke to her. Her language to them was that of a believer: “*I know* that the LORD *hath* given you the land...for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Jos 2:9, 11)—yea, such assurance puts many a modern professing believer to shame. “*By faith* the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31). Summing up the whole of her conduct on that occasion, Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out: “It cannot therefore be reasonably doubted her faith had, before this, been accompanied with deep repentance of those sinful practices from which she derived the name of ‘Rahab the harlot’”—with which we heartily concur. But some, who have been poisoned with the errors of dispensationalism, and others who are slaves to the mere letter and sound of the Word, are likely to object, saying *that* is a gratuitous assumption, for the word “repentance” is never found in Scripture in connection with Rahab. For their benefit, we will devote another paragraph or two unto this subject.

“Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mar 1:15); “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). A contrite spirit and a heart acceptance of the Gospel are inseparably connected, so that wherever the one is mentioned, the other is presupposed. For example, take the passages recording the Gospel commission: In Mark 16:16, the emphasis is on “believing,” while in Luke 24:47, it is on “repentance”—the two together explaining the “make

disciples” of Matthew 28:19-20. The one cannot exist without the other: It is just as morally impossible for an impenitent heart to believe, as it is for an unbeliever to repent. There may indeed be a mental assent to the Truth unaccompanied by any brokenness of heart, as there may be natural remorse where no faith exists; but there can be no saving faith where evangelical repentance is absent. Since the faith of Rahab was a saving one, as Hebrews 11 clearly shows, it must have been attended with godly sorrow for sin and reformation of life. There can be no pardon while there is no repentance (Isa 55:7, Luk 24:47, Act 3:19), i.e. mourning over and abandoning of our evil ways.

Repentance is a change of mind—one that goes much deeper and includes far more than a mere change of opinion or creed. It is a changed mind, a new perception, an altogether different outlook on things as they previously appeared. It is the necessary effect of a new heart. Repentance consists of a radical change of mind about God, about sin, about self, about the world. Previously God was resisted; now He is owned as our rightful Lord. Previously sin was delighted in, but now it is hated and mourned over. Previously self was esteemed, but now it is abhorred. Previously we were of the world and its friendship was sought and prized; now our hearts have been divorced from the world, and we regard it as an enemy. Everything is viewed with other eyes than formerly, and an entirely different estimate is formed of them. The impenitent see in Christ no beauty that they should desire Him, but a broken and contrite heart perceives that He is perfectly suited to him. Thus, while He continues to be despised by the self-righteous Pharisees, He is welcomed and entertained by publicans and sinners. Repentance softens the hard soil of the soul and makes it receptive to the Gospel Seed.

Repentance necessarily leads to a change of *conduct*, for a change of mind must produce a change of action: Repentance and reformation of life are inseparable. It must have been thus with Rahab: She who had been a harlot would become chaste, and a life of wanton pleasure would give place to one of honest work. Some may deem our conclusion a ‘far-fetched’ one; but personally, we consider that we are given a plain intimation of her changed manner of life. In Joshua 2:6, we are told that “she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of *flax*, which she *had* laid in order upon the roof.” As there is not a superfluous nor meaningless word in the Scriptures, why then has the Holy Spirit specified the particular kind of straw which Rahab used to cover and conceal the two spies? Now “flax” was labouriously gathered by the industrious women, laid out on the flat roofs of the houses to dry, and was then used for spinning and weaving. The presence of a quantity of it “laid out” on Rahab’s roof was an evidence she was now living a useful life.

But that is not all the presence of the “flax” tells us. If we go to the trouble of searching our concordance and comparing Scripture with Scripture, we discover something yet more praiseworthy. In the last chapter of the book of Proverbs, we are supplied with a full-length portrait of “a *virtuous* woman,” and one of her features is that “she seeketh wool, and *flax*, and worketh willingly with her hands” (Pro 31:13)! Such we are assured was now the character and occupation of this outstanding monument of mercy. Another mark of repentance is a changed esteem of and attitude toward the people of God: Formerly their presence irritated, for their piety condemned us; but when the heart be changed by the operations of Divine grace, their company and communion is desired and valued. It was thus with Rahab and the two Israelites: She “received the spies with peace” (Heb 11:31) is the Divine testimony. It was not with reluctance and complaint that she accepted them into her abode, but with a spirit of goodwill, welcoming and giving them shelter. Admire, then, the blessed transformation which the operations of the Spirit had wrought in her character.

Let us now consider more particularly her faith. First, the *ground* of it. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). This does not mean that faith is *originated* by hearing the Word of God, any more than that the shining of the sun imparts sight to the eye. No, faith is bestowed by a sovereign act of the Spirit, and then it is instructed and nourished by the Word. As an unimpaired eye receives light from the sun and is thereby enabled to perceive objects, so faith takes in the testimony of God and is regulated thereby. My acceptance of the Truth does not create faith, but makes manifest that I *have* faith; and it becomes the sure ground on which my faith rests. Unto the spies, Rahab said, “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have *heard* how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you” (Jos 2:9-11).

How marked the contrast between Rahab and that generation of Israel whose carcasses fell in the wilderness! They not only “heard” of, but were the actual eye-witnesses of those wonderful prodigies which Jehovah wrought on behalf of His people. They personally saw Him cleave a way for them right through the Red Sea, so that they passed through it dryshod; and then His causing the waters to come together again to the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts. They beheld the solemn manifestation of His august presence on Sinai. They were the daily recipients of a supernatural supply of food from Heaven, and drank of water which was made to gush from a smitten rock. But their hearts were unaffected and no faith was begotten within them. They too “heard” God’s voice (Heb 3:7-8), but responded not, and therefore, were debarred from the promised land: “They could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). Ah, my reader, something more than the beholding of miracles, or witnessing outward displays of God’s power, is required in order to beget faith in those who are spiritually dead, as was evidenced again in the days of Christ.

How marked the contrast, too, between Rahab and the rest of her compatriots! As her words in Joshua 2:9-11 clearly indicate, *they too* heard the same reports she did of the marvels performed by the Lord’s might; yet they produced no faith in them. They were indeed awestruck and terrified by the accounts of the same that reached them, so that for a season, there did not remain any more courage in them; but that was all. Just as under the faithful preaching of God’s servants, many have been temporarily affected by announcements of the Day of Judgment and the wrath to come, but never surrendered themselves to the Lord. God declared unto Israel, “This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee” (Deu 2:25). That was literally fulfilled in the case of the inhabitants of Jericho, yet it wrought no spiritual change in them, for they were children in whom was no faith; and they had no faith, because no miracle of grace was wrought in their souls. Of itself, the soundest preaching effects no spiritual change in those who hear it.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

11b. Its Criteria

We commence this portion at the point where we left off in our last: Those who are at peace with sin are at enmity with God; but those who are reconciled to God are antagonistic to sin. It cannot be otherwise: Satan and God, sin and holiness, are diametrically and irreconcilably opposed. As the "sceptre of righteousness" (Heb 1:8) holds sway over the Kingdom of God and of Christ, iniquity is the dominant power in the empire of Satan: "He that committeth sin is of the devil" (1Jo 3:8). It therefore follows that all real Christians are opposed to Satan as the common enemy, and evince the same by fighting against sin. Satan's principal work lies in drawing men to sin; and therefore are the saints bidden, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jam 4:7); and again, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pe 5:8). To resist the Devil is to refuse his temptations, to fight against sin; contrariwise, to trifle with temptation and commit sin is to render service unto him.

The forwarding of sin is the Devil's main instrument to lead his subjects into more and more of a revolt against their Maker; and the more any yield to his solicitations, the more do they perform his work. To sin is to "give place to the devil" (Eph 4:27); and to depart from Christ is to turn "aside after Satan" (1Ti 5:15). Whenever we knowingly sin, we join with Satan in his battle against God—we take sides with him and strengthen his cause. How that awful consideration should restrain us and make us tread warily! How it should humble us before God when we have yielded to temptation, and thus aided His arch-enemy! Again; the love of God and the love of the world cannot possibly stand together: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). Thus, the lines are plainly drawn: If I be a friend of the world, the abettor of Satan, the servant of sin, I cannot possibly be at peace with God. But if I be reconciled to God, then I am in avowed and open antagonism to that evil trinity.

While any soul be at peace with sin, he is certainly not at peace with God, for He is ineffably holy and hates all sin. It was sin which caused the breach between Him and us: "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them" (Isa 63:10). Since sin be the inveterate enemy of God and man, it must be fought, or it will destroy us. Hence, His call is "be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20). When a soul really responds to that call, he ceases his opposition to God and inlists under the banner of Christ. Christ becomes his "captain" (Heb 2:10), and he engages to fight against all His enemies. He severs his old allegiance with the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and binds himself by a solemn bond to live unto God and be the Lord's for evermore. Henceforth, there can be no truce between corruptions and grace, carnal reasonings, and the teaching of Holy Writ. "Neither yield ye your members as *instruments* [weapons] of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God" (Rom 6:13).

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, *striving against sin*" (Heb 12:4). The leading thought of the context is the need for faithful perseverance in a time of persecution and suffering. In the urging thereof, the apostle set before them (and us) the grand example of Jesus Christ, and how we should improve the same. Then he points out that severe as had been the trials experienced, yet not so fearful as might yet be encountered. They had indeed suffered considerably (Heb 10:32-33); but so far, God had restrained their enemies from going to extreme lengths. The afflictions already undergone did not discharge them from their warfare; rather, must they continue therein to the point of being prepared to lay down their lives. That warfare consisted of "striving against sin" (Heb 12:4)—sin in themselves, which inclined them to take the line of least resistance; sin in their persecutors, who sought to drive them to apostatize.

In Hebrews 12:4, the apostle continues to use the figure of the Public Games which he had employed in verse 1; only there, he refers to the "race," while here, he alludes to the mortal conflict or combat between gladiators—wherein one contend for his life against another who had entered the lists against him. In like manner, the Christian has to contend with a mortal adversary, namely sin—both external and internal. He is called upon to wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness (Eph 6:12); and therefore, he is exhorted to take unto him, "the whole armour of God" (Eph 6:11, 13). So too he is to strive against his own indwelling corruptions: "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which *war* against the soul" (1Pe 2:11). Those lusts are violent and powerful, ever seeking to dominate and regulate the soul, antagonizing the principle of grace, endeavouring to overcome our faith and prevent our obedience to God. Sin is a dead-

ly enemy which will slay us, unless we daily strive against it with determination of mind and resolute effort.

Here then is one of the principal features which distinguishes the children of God from the children of the Devil. Here is an essential part of the evidence which clearly makes manifest those in whom a miracle of grace has been wrought. Here is the proof that I am reconciled to God. By nature, sin is my element, and I take to it as ducks do to the water and swine to the mire. By nature, I delight in sin: Do I not love myself? And in loving myself, I am delighting in sin, for sin is part and parcel of my being. I was shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5). If then I now hate my natural self, loathe sin, vigorously resist it, I must be a new creature in Christ Jesus, at peace with God. If I compare myself with what I was in my unregenerate days, is it not obvious that a radical change has taken place! Did I then abhor myself? No; indeed, far from it. I was pleased with myself. Did I then look upon iniquity as that "abominable thing" (Jer 44:4) which the Holy One hates and take sides with Him against it? Alas, I did not: I thirsted after it, drank greedily of it, and took pleasure therein.

The natural man may indeed seek to overcome some grosser lust, the yielding to which humiliates his pride. He may seriously endeavour to conquer an unruly temper, so that he may not be put to shame before his fellows. But that is a very different matter. One who is truly reconciled to God has voluntarily entered into a covenant to fight against sin *as sin*, and not merely this or that particular form and outbreaking thereof. He is daily engaged in contending with his indwelling corruptions, resisting the Devil, refusing the allurements of the world, mortifying his members which are upon the earth. Here, then, is the matter reduced to its simplest possible terms, here is the plain but sufficient rule by which you may test the validity of your profession. You *know* whether or not you really are fighting against sin. We do not say fighting against it as faithfully, diligently, zealously as you ought to be. Nor do we say meeting with that success which you could wish. It is the *fact* itself we would have you consider: If you are really warring against indwelling sin, you must be one with God.

Probably the reader says, "Tell us more explicitly what you mean by fighting against sin." Very well. Fighting against sin implies that you hate it—for you do not war against anything you love. Likewise, it signifies you earnestly desire to avoid it, keep away from it, have no commerce with it. To countenance sin is rebellion against God; to condemn and oppose sin is conformity to Him. If I hate sin and am engaged in a warfare against it, I shall not trifle with temptation, but watch jealously for and seek to suppress the first motions of sin in my heart. When my corruptions clamour for satisfaction, I shall earnestly endeavour to deny them. When the apostle averred, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1Co 9:27), he was describing one aspect of his fight against sin. When another of the apostles enjoined, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1Jo 5:21), he was calling them unto a further part of the same conflict. It was an affectionate appeal for them to avoid, resist, and renounce will worship and whatever would captivate our affections.

This fighting against sin is *from evangelical motives*. Here, too, the line is clearly drawn between the regenerate and the unregenerate. Whatever resistance the latter makes against sin, it is from carnal or legal considerations. That which deters the natural man from the outward commission of evil is either pride or self-respect, because he would retain the good opinion of his fellows, or the fear of consequences. But different far is it with the spiritual man: He would hate and resist sin, even if assured there is no Hell awaiting evildoers hereafter! It is love of God, a desire to please Him, a concern for His glory, a horror of doing that which would sully his profession, bring shame upon the cause of Christ, or stumble any of His little ones. Hence it is that when Satan gets the better of him, and he is overtaken in a fault, he mourns before God. If we be reconciled to God, we love Him, and repentance is the first expression of that love—the sorrowing part of it. Those fighting against sin do not "allow" or excuse their failures, but grieve over, confess them, and seek to prevent a repetition of the same.

Let us repeat, it is not the measure of our success in this warfare, but the genuineness of our *sincerity* therein, which is the criterion by which we are to measure ourselves. As one of the old worthies said, "This is the seal which assures us the patent is the authentic grant of the Prince of peace." Or as John Owen (1616-1683) put it, "Mortification of sin is the soul's opposition to self, wherein sincerity is most evident." To which we may add, none of our exercises and efforts have *any sincerity* in them—neither reading, hearing, prayer nor worship—unless we are genuinely endeavouring to earnestly and vigorously resist sin. Sin is ever assailing the soul, contending for rule and sovereignty over it. But if a principle of grace be in my heart, then it will constantly *challenge* sin's right to usurp authority and oppose its assaults. "The subduing

of our souls to God, the forming of us to a resemblance unto Him, is a more certain sign that we belong to Him, than if we had with Isaiah seen in vision His glory with all His train of angels about Him" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

"Granted," says the exercised soul, "but there is so much in me that is *not* yet subdued to God, yea, which is contrary to Him; and this it is which makes me seriously doubt my reconciliation. I fear that I should be uttering an idle boast and thinking of myself more highly than I ought to, if I declared myself to be engaged in seriously fighting against sin." Dear reader, hypocrites are never troubled over the deceitfulness of their hearts, nor are they concerned at all of being presumptuous; and if *you* really *are* exercised over such things, then must you not belong to a totally different class! Vain and empty professors are not exercised about their sincerity, but instead, are filled with a self-confidence and sense of security which no expostulations or warnings of man can shake. They are total strangers to the jealous fears and holy exercises of soul, which engage those with humble hearts. "They had rather go to hell on a feather bed than to Heaven in a fiery chariot," as one quaintly but solemnly expressed it.

Am I reconciled to God, at peace with Him? Yes, if I am daily and sincerely engaged in fighting against sin. "But," says the reader, "if I am engaged in such a fight, mine is a *losing* one, for the more I endeavour to resist my corruptions, the more fiercely do they oppose me and thwart my efforts. Yea, so often do my lusts master me, I can only conclude that I am still at war against *God*." Not so, if you take sides *against* your lusts and grieve over their prevalency. As it is not the fighting of a number of individuals belonging to two different countries which causes one of those states to declare war against the other, but rather its consenting to and maintaining them in their hostility; so it is not the rising up of our lusts against our graces which constitutes an act of war against God, but only when we approve of them, consent to, and defend their presumptuous enmity. While we take up and maintain a constant fight against God's enemies—no matter how often we may be worsted in the conflict—hating and disavowing their outrageous uprisings, the peace between God and us holds.

In the articles on *our reception* of that peace which Christ effected Godwards on behalf of His people, we showed at some length what God requires from the sinner if he is to become a personal partaker of that peace; and every exercised reader should go carefully over those articles again with one particular design before him—to discover whether he or she *has met* those requirements. From the lengthy quotation from Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) in the February issue, it was shown that in preparing us to be reconciled to God, it is necessary that we be convinced we are His *enemies*, and that He accounts us such. Thus, if the reader has never been painfully convicted of his revolt against the Most High, he is in no condition to seek reconciliation unto Him. If I have been made aware that I am a lifelong rebel against Heaven, that all my days have been spent in fighting against God, then I shall be sensible and deeply affected by such a realisation. I shall mourn over my wickedness. I shall "remember thy ways, and be ashamed." I shall be "confounded" and have not one word to say in my self-defence (Eze 16:61-63).

If the Holy Spirit has awakened me from the sleep of self-security, opened my eyes to see my true character in the sight of God, filled me with horror and contrition over my dreadful enmity against Him, then I shall readily respond to that peremptory call, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa 55:7), and cease my hostility against the Lord. At first, it will appear to me that I have sinned beyond the hope of forgiveness, that it is impossible God should ever be reconciled to such a rebel as I now know myself to be, that nought but the everlasting burnings can be the portion of such a wretch. But later, the same gracious Spirit who revealed to me my horrible plight, acquaints me that God has "thoughts of peace" (Jer 29:11) toward those who throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him. But that seems too good to be true; and for a season, the stricken soul finds itself unable to credit the same. To him, it appears that a holy God can do nought but abhor him, that a righteous God must surely exact vengeance upon him, that his doom is irrevocably sealed. Do *you* know anything of such an experience as that?

When God begins a work of grace in a soul, He does not cease when it is but half finished. If He wounds, it is that He may heal; if at first, He drives to despair, later He awakens hope. When the Law has performed its office—of stripping us of our self-righteousness—then we are prepared to listen to the message of the Gospel, which tells of the garments of salvation provided for bankrupts. The glorious evangel of Divine grace announces that God is not implacable, but inclinable unto peace, that His wisdom has found a way whereby the requirements of His holiness and the demands of His justice are fully met, so that He can—without sully His honour, yea, to the everlasting glory of His matchless name—show mercy to the

very chief of sinners. As the soul begins to give credence to that good news, he is persuaded better things of God than his fears allowed, hope is born within him that even his case is not beyond remedy, and the sweet music is borne to his ears, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and *he will have mercy upon him*; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:7).

But it is in Christ, and Christ alone, that the thrice Holy God meets the sinner in pardoning mercy. Christ is the One who met His claims and endured His wrath on the behalf of all who put their trust in Him. Christ is the alone Mediator whereby transgressors can approach unto a reconciled God. It is the Lord Jesus who is "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom 3:25). And therefore, "he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). It is in and through Christ that sinners may enter into covenant with God, and by whom He enters into covenant with them, for Christ is the "surety" and "the mediator" of a better covenant (Heb 7:22; 8:6). Christ is the One who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luk 19:10), and who declares, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37). Have you gone unto Him as a desperately-ill person who seeks a physician, or as a drowning man who clutches at a lifebuoy? You either have, or you have not; and it should not be difficult for you to determine. But am I come to Christ in the *right* way? Answer: The only right way is to come as a lost sinner, trusting in His merits.

Have you, then, complied with the terms expressed in Isaiah 55:1-3 (explained in the March article)?—for it is with those doing so, that God makes an everlasting covenant. That is but another way of asking, Have you really embraced the Gospel offer, which is made freely to all who hear it? Have you seriously, thoughtfully, broken-heartedly received Christ as your own personal Lord and Saviour? Have you exercised faith in His mediatorial sacrifice? Your faith may indeed have been so weak that you touched but the hem of His garment, yet if it was *His* garment, that was sufficient. The saving virtue lies not in our faith, but in Christ—faith being simply the empty and leprous hand which lays hold of the great Physician. Every penitent believer may be infallibly assured on the Word of Him that cannot lie, that his sins were all transferred to his blessed Surety and forever put away by Him; and that he is now made the righteousness of God in Christ (2Co 5:21).

But the honest soul who would "make assurance doubly sure" should go further, and test himself by Psalm 50:5, Isaiah 56:4-6, Jeremiah 50:4-5. There we have described the character of those making a covenant with God and who "taketh hold" of His covenant (Isa 56:6); and it is our wisdom and duty to seriously compare ourselves with those characters and ascertain whether we possess their marks. Have I surrendered to God as my absolute Lord and chosen Him to be my all-sufficient Portion? Have I renounced and relinquished the things which He hates and chosen "the things that please" Him (Isa 56:4)? Have I given myself up to Him wholly to love and serve Him, and that not for a brief season only, but forever? Am I now manifesting the sincerity of my surrender by being concerned for His honour and having respect to His Law? Have the resolutions I formed at my conversion been translated unto actual practice?—not perfectly so, but by genuine effort nevertheless. If so, then I have good reason to believe that I have savingly complied with His call, "be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20).

THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE

This piece is taken from volume 4 of "The Gospel Magazine" (1777). It forms part of a letter written by a W. M. to a Christian friend:

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). You ask, Whether the Spirit of God can in any sense be called a spirit of bondage? I freely answer, I think not; no, not in any sound, Scriptural sense at all: for it is quite contrary to His name as the Spirit of promise—the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of liberty—a free Spirit—the Spirit of adoption; as well as contrary to His office, as The Comforter—the Glorifier of Jesus—by taking the things of Christ and showing them to us, and bearing witness to our spirits; of that holy freedom and happy liberty which we have in Him from all kinds of bondage, whether of sin, the law, death, or Satan.

You may be ready to ask, in experience, "May we not in some cases, and on some accounts, find, that the Spirit of God becomes a spirit of bondage?" I humbly presume to say, No, not at all; not in any one instance. But you ask, "What then does the apostle mean when he says, 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage *again* to fear' (Rom 8:15)? Does he not seem to imply that they had once received the Spirit of God as a Spirit of bondage?" No, I humbly apprehend not. I well know, you here allude to His first convictions of sin, and bringing sinners under what some call a *law work*, whereby they experience a sense of bondage to fear the curses of the law denounced against sin, and upon them as sinners. However needful this may be to the real conversion of the soul to Christ, yet I humbly conceive that even here, the Spirit does not act as a Spirit of bondage. For, even when our Lord speaks of His convicting of sin, He calls Him *the Comforter*: 'When the Comforter is come, He will convince of sin' etc. (Joh 16:7). Now the office of a Comforter is surely quite opposite to that of a spirit of bondage to fear. It is great, an awful truth, we are all naturally under bondage to the law, sin, and death. But it is as true that we are naturally dead to any real sense, or proper fear, care, or concern about it, or how to be delivered from it. But when the good, gracious, and condescending Lord, the Spirit is pleased to visit our souls with His quickening power, and enlightening agency, then we see, know, and feel the miserable bondage which we are in and under: we fear the terrors of a broken Law, dread the sword of vindictive justice, tremble under the sense of sin, and are horribly afraid of the stroke of death. But, even here, the Spirit can with no propriety be called the Spirit of bondage.

My friend will remember, when lately we visited your neighbour—in a high fever and a strong delirium, by the blessing of God upon the physician's skill—was restored to his reason; and then he complained of pains and disorders, which he was, before, insensible of. Now, who shall presume to say, because the physician had been instrumental of restoring him to his right mind and proper sense and feeling, that therefore, he was at all the cause of his patient's pains and disorders? So the Holy Spirit, when He quickens us and brings us to our right mind, whereby we feel and are sensible of our bondage, is not the spirit of bondage to us, nor the cause of bondage in us; but He testifies of Christ and acts as the Comforter by showing us Christ's love and salvation and leading our thoughts and hopes to Him. Therefore, when the apostle tells the converted Romans, "ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Rom 8:15), I humbly presume we are to understand that he was speaking of their former, natural state, subject to perpetual dread and slavish tormenting fear of coming short of life and salvation, which they, as Jews or Gentiles, must forever have done, without Christ and His salvation. But being now brought to believe in Him for justification unto life, they "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). Now we are delivered from our natural, slavish bondage to sin, Satan, the law and death, and from fear of the wrath of God due to our sins; we look up to Him as our reconciled Father in Jesus, and have, through the faith of Him, the love and cry of children in our hearts to Him.

"But after the Holy Spirit is become a spirit of adoption to any soul, may He not again become a spirit of bondage in the soul?" Mr. Burkitt (1650-1703), your favourite expositor, says, No. He observes, that "God's Holy Spirit, after He has been once a Spirit of adoption, never again becomes a spirit of bondage to the same soul." "But may not that same soul be again brought into the spirit of bondage, to fear?" Yes, doubtless, but not by the Spirit of adoption. Ah, my dear friend, here is a turning and important point. O that you and I, and all God's dear children, studied it more deeply, constantly and attentively!—for then we should not have such miserable, bondage-work in our consciences, as we, too, too often have.

Without the Holy Spirit becoming a Spirit of bondage to any soul, it is only for Him to withdraw His enlightening, comforting witness from the heart; and then we are left to experience the woeful bondage of our own nature, haunted with fears, doubts, and distress. I know the gall and wormwood of this; and, therefore, we ought constantly to deprecate with David, "Take not thy holy spirit from me" (Psa 51:11). Yea, and we ought, my dear friend, ever to attend to the apostle's advice, "Grieve not the holy Spirit" (Eph 4:30); for if we do—by turning to and seeking righteousness, pardon, peace, justification, the hope of eternal life, or any comfort and satisfaction in any object, in opposition to or besides the blessed *Jesus*, whom the Spirit testifies of, bears witness to, and glorifies with the Word, in the hearts of believers—verily we shall grieve the Holy Spirit, and we shall certainly find the awful difference between enjoying Him as a Spirit of adoption, and being left to the bondage of our own spirits, to fear. For the Holy Spirit is never sent away grieved from our hearts, but He leaves the heart grieved for its folly, and lamenting its conduct. And indeed, my dear friend, this is a genuine evidence of a regenerate soul, that it does mourn and grieve for the absence of the Spirit; and that above all other enjoyments, it prizes His comforting presence. The Lord make us daily more and more watchful and jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy.

If I have dropped any thing in these loose, scattered hints, which may elucidate this point and give you satisfaction, I shall rejoice. If I have advanced any thing contrary to your or the sentiments of others, I am open to conviction. I would cautiously avoid all controversy; but above all, I would fear to advance any thing contrary to the Truth as it is in Jesus, and the Analogy of Faith; should anything of this kind have dropped from my pen, God be merciful and pardon a weak, imperfect, miserable sinner, who, in the love of Christ, is your faithful and affectionate friend.

WELCOME TIDINGS

As the darkness deepens, as the love of a rapidly-increasing number grows cold, a ministry which seeks to expose a worthless profession on the one hand, and to promote a closer walking with God on the other, will meet with less and less acceptance. The religious public today seek that which is newsy and racy—an attempt to show that the “scarlet coloured beast” (Rev 17:3) of the Apocalypse symbolises “the Reds,” or some wresting of the Word which makes it foretell the destruction of the earth by atom bombs; in short, *anything* save that which searches the conscience, calls to serious self-examination, or requires the mortifying of our lusts. And much grace is needed to resist the popular appeal and refuse to lower the standard. Nevertheless, God’s order to His servant remains unchanged: “Thou shalt speak *my words* unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear” (Eze 2:7). May the Lord enable us to do so unto the end.

Few indeed desire to hear God’s words today; and we are more fully persuaded than ever that it is nothing short of a *miracle* of Divine power and mercy that still gives us a sufficient handful of readers to enable us to continue publishing this little monthly messenger. Each year, interested friends kindly send us in the names of those whom they believe will welcome the “Studies,” and we enter them upon our mailing-list; but it is very rare that we ever hear from any of them, and when we drop them, they do not write us requesting a renewal. It is not to be expected that those who are enamoured by the “movies,” or others who devote their leisure hours listening-in to the “radio,” will have any relish for spiritual food. None, but the ones sincerely endeavouring to walk as “strangers and pilgrims” (1Pe 2:11) through this wilderness world, will value that which exhorts them to “fight the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12); and such have well-nigh vanished from the earth.

The absence of many letters (!) and the tenour of some which are received reflect the sad deterioration of religious conditions. With some, it is the “cares”; with some it is the “riches”; and with others, it is “the pleasures of this life” which are the “thorns” that “choke” the Seed and cause them to “bring no fruit to perfection” (Luk 8:14). Numbers who formerly declared that they greatly enjoyed and were much helped by the “Studies” desire them no longer. Those who could hardly wait for the next issue, and wished it had double the number of pages, now only read an article here and there. But is not this a strange way in which to begin a piece on “Welcome Tidings”? Hardly. The shining of the sun is doubly welcome after days of fog! A cup of water is deeply appreciated by one who is parched. And in a “day of small things” (Zec 4:10), a few encouraging words mean much to those who become discouraged by general indifference—be it preacher or writer. Some of which we now quote:

“I thank our God and Father through the Lord Jesus Christ for light which I have received from the ‘Studies.’ This gives me more to understand His will to us. It helps me very much in this dark age” (*A Polish Brother*).

“We are especially enjoying the articles on Spiritual Growth and I trust profiting by them. The ‘Studies’ are all we have precious outside our Bibles, so do hope and pray we may still have them” (*Australia*).

“With deep gratitude, I enclose an M. O. for the Studies. They have reached me so far without loss, and continue to be very searching. I trust you may long be enabled to continue this splendid ministry” (*New Zealand*).

“Glad to say I receive the magazine regularly, for which I thank you. I always look forward to getting them, and appreciate their contents more and more. They are to me like fruit, which becomes more luscious as it nears the fully ripe stage. May God spare you long and bless your efforts in His service. I am enclosing a small donation in fellowship” (*Canada*).

“I appreciate your magazine a great deal, and find in it real meat for the soul. May the Lord continue to bless you in this excellent work” (*Preacher*).

“I cannot express what the ‘Studies’ have meant to me over the years, and yet more abundantly. Especially have the articles on the Doctrine of Reconciliation been of great benefit and instruction to me. I must confess that I have to go over such several times to make them my own. But I say, ‘Thank you, Lord’ often when the new light and the old shines unto me” (*U.S.A.*).

“Your magazine grows more and more of a necessary part in my daily devotions. There are so few to which a lay student like myself can have access that are in any measure worth studying; most are so very superficial. I am continually grateful to you for the depth of your articles which, in turn, make my own Scripture reading more serious and deeper.”

“It is a pleasure in Him to be able once more to thank you for the faithful arrival of ‘Studies’ through 1945; and believe me I do enjoy them. I rise one hour earlier each morning so that I can spend it before I go out, which hour is 4:30-5:30a.m.; I would not do without it. That I have done all through the war years. It is really impossible to fully express the great joy it is to study the Word with you, and prayerfully seek to carry out the instruction contained therein” (Wales). How that puts to shame the excuses, the idle excuses—for where there’s a will, there’s a way!—of those who say they have no time available for solid reading-matter! “The soul of the diligent [not the ‘dilatory’] shall be made fat” (Pro 13:4).

“I am very glad to have the Magazine. Although the doctrine you teach is not acceptable to many people, I feel all you write has the Word of God for authority; and other than that, I would not have. May He bless you in your work” (England).

“I feel very thankful to God for supplying so much need through you. To me, there is no reading I can get on the Word of God so helpful. We pray that you and Mrs. Pink may long be spared and blest to continue in this ministry” (Ireland).

“I wish to thank you indeed for the Studies. It gives me great pleasure to read them, and I trust more than that; indeed, I have to bless the Lord often, and often in my heart, for such reading” (Scotland).

“‘Studies’ have indeed proved a real blessing to my spiritual welfare; and needless to say, I look forward expectantly to their arrival every two months. May it please our gracious Lord to grant you continued strength and wisdom as you labour on for His glory” (Preacher).

“Once again, I write to thank you for all your labour in the Lord to provide us with the spiritually-helpful ‘Studies.’ We do thank God for the truth brought clearly out for our benefit and enrichment” (Preacher).

“I am writing to tell you what a tremendous blessing they have been to me, both in their acute analysis of spiritual truth and their warm expression of devotion to our Lord Jesus. I cannot but feel that your written ministry meets a deep and wide need amongst God’s people” (Preacher).

THE EARTH

Part 2 (excerpted from Letters of James Hervey, 1714-1758)

So judicious is the arrangement of this grand edifice! So beneficent the destination of its whole furniture, which is all regulated with consummate skill, and touched with the highest perfection! All is most exactly adapted to the various intentions of Providence, and the manifold exigencies of mankind; supplying every want we can feel, and gratifying every wish we can form.

Insomuch that the whole system affords a favourite topic of praise, even to those distinguished beings who “stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Rev 15:2) in their hands. They lift their voices and sing, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints”! (Rev 15:3)—the first part seems to mean what the inspired writer calls, “the song of Moses”; the second contains what he styles, “the song of the Lamb.” The first, I should imagine, relates to the stupendous works of *creation*. The second alludes to the far more wonderful scheme of *redemption*. The former describing the system of nature is recorded by Moses; the latter, comprehending the salvation of the saints, is accomplished by Christ. And is there not reason, infinite reason, for *us* to join this triumphant choir? Adding gratitude to our wonder, and love to our hallelujahs! Since all these things are to us not merely objects of contemplation, but sources of accommodation; not only a majestic spectacle bright with the display of our Creator’s wisdom, but an inestimable gift rich with the emanations of His goodness. The earth hath He *set before* the inhabitants of glory, but the earth hath He *given to* the children of men (Psa 115:16). Having given us ourselves, given us a world, has He not a right, a most unquestionable right, to make that tender demand, “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26)?

Shall I add another passage? Which, viewed with any other but the last paragraph, will be like the head of gold, eminent, and conspicuous on feet of iron and clay. It is taken from the finest philosophical oration that ever was made. I never read it but with a glow of delight and with impressions of awe. It is, in short, inimitably spirited and sublime. Forbear to be delighted, if you can; cease to admire it, if you can; when you hear Omniscience itself declaring that, on sight of this universal fabric, emerging out of nothing, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The system was so graceful, so magnificent, and in all respects, so exquisitely finished, that the most accomplished intelligences were charmed, were transported. They knew not how to express themselves on the great occasion, but in shouts of exultation and songs of delight. Is it possible for imagination to conceive an encomium so just, so high, so beautifully sublime! I am sure that after so much delicacy and majesty of sentiment, any thing of mine must be intolerably flat.

