

Studies in the Scriptures

December, 1936

The Spirit Transforming.

Though the glory of the Lord be so plainly revealed in the two-fold “glass” of the Law and the Gospel, yet the unregenerate appreciate it not: concerning the one it is said, “But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Cor. 3:15); and of the latter we read, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4). The unregenerate are blind to the loveliness of the Divine character: not that they have no eyes to see with, but they have deliberately “closed them” (Matt. 13:15); not that they are not intellectually convinced of the Divine perfections, but that their hearts are *unaffected* thereby. It is because man is a fallen depraved and vicious creature that he is not won by “the beauty of holiness.”

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Clearest possible proof of this was furnished when the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men. Those who had been “born of God” (John 1:13) could say, “We *beheld His glory*, the glory as of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14); but different indeed was it with those who were left in their natural state. They, notwithstanding their education, culture, and religion, were so far from discerning any form or comeliness in Christ, that they cried “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil” (John 8:48). Yet it is as plain as a sunbeam that the blindness of the Pharisees was due neither to the lack of necessary faculties nor to the want of outward opportunities, but entirely to the perverted state of their minds and the depraved condition of their hearts—which was altogether of a criminal nature.

From what has just been pointed out, then, it is plain when the Apostle declares “but we all, with open face *beholding* as in a glass the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18), that a miracle of grace had been wrought in them. As spiritual blindness consists in an absence of relish for holy beauty—which blindness is capable of being greatly increased and confirmed through the exercise and influence of the various corruptions of a wicked heart, and which Satan augments by all means in his power—so spiritual sight is the soul’s delighting itself in Divine and spiritual things. In regeneration there is begotten in the soul a holy taste, so that the heart now goes out after God and His Christ. This is referred to in Scripture in various ways. It is the fulfillment of that promise “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, *to love* the LORD thy God” (Deut. 30:6).

This new relish for spiritual things which is begotten in the soul by the immediate operations of the Spirit is also the fulfillment of “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26); and of “I will give them an heart to know Me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be My people” (Jer. 24:7). So also, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isa. 35:5). Of Lydia we read, “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). To the Corinthian saints, the Apostle wrote “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, *hath shined in our hearts*” (2 Cor. 4:6). In consequence thereof, the happy subjects of this work of Divine grace perceive and relish the holy character of God and are enamoured with His perfections.

“But we all”: that is, all who have been supernaturally brought from death unto life, out of darkness into God’s marvelous light; “with open face,” or “unveiled face” as it is in the Greek and as the R.V. translates it: that is, with hearts from which “the veil” of prejudice (2 Cor. 3:15) has been removed, from which that “covering cast over all people” (Isa. 25:7), the covering of enmity against God, has been destroyed; “beholding”—note carefully the present tense, for it is a continuous action which is here in view; “as in a glass” or “mirror,” namely, the twofold glass of the Law and the Gospel; “the glory of the Lord,” that is His communicable perfections, His moral character; “*are changed into the same image*,” this clause it is which must next engage our careful attention.

Following our usual custom, let us first give a brief definition and then amplify the same. To be changed into “the same image” means that the regenerated soul becomes conformed unto the Divine character, that answerable principles and affections are wrought in his heart, bringing him into harmony with the perfections of God. This *must* be the case, for since Divinely enlightened souls have such a relish for holy beauty, for *such* beauty as there is in the character of God, then it necessarily follows that every Divine truth as it comes into their view will appear beautiful, and will accordingly beget and excite holy affections corresponding with its nature. Or, more specifically, as the heart is occupied with the several perfections of God exhibited in the Law and in the Gospel, corresponding desires and determinations will be awakened in and exercised by that soul.

It would imply a contradiction to suppose that any heart should be charmed with a character just the opposite to its own. The carnal mind is enmity against God: resenting His authority, disliking His holiness, hating His sovereignty, and condemning His justice: in a word, it is immediately opposed to His glory as it shines in the glass of the Law and the Gospel. But one who has been Divinely enlightened loves the Truth, because he has a frame of heart answerable thereto—just as the unregenerate soul loves the world because it suits his depraved tastes. The regenerate discerns and feels that the Law is righteous in requiring what it does, even though it condemns him for his disobedience. He perceives too that the Gospel is exactly suited to his needs, and that its precepts are wise and excellent. Thus he is brought into conformity with the one and into compliance with the other.

Universal experience teaches us that characters appear agreeable or disagreeable just as they suit our taste or not. To an angel, who has a taste for holy beauty, the moral character of God appears infinitely amiable; but to the Devil, who is being of a contrary taste, God’s moral character appears just the reverse. To the Pharisees, no character was more odious than that of the Lord Jesus; but at the same time Mary and Martha and Lazarus were charmed with Him. To the Jewish nation in general, who groaned under the Roman yoke, and longed for a Messiah to set them at liberty, to make them victorious, rich and honourable; a Messiah in the character of a temporal prince, who had gratified their desires—such an one had appeared glorious in their eyes, and they would have been changed into the same image; that is, every answerable affection had been excited in their hearts.

Now it is this moral transformation in the believer which is *the evidence* of his spiritual enlightenment: “beholding,” he is “changed.” Where a soul has been supernaturally illumined there will issue a corresponding conformity to the Divine image. But in so affirming, many of our Christian readers are likely to feel that we are thereby cutting off

their hopes; they will be ready to exclaim, Alas, *my* character resembles the likeness of the Devil far more than it does the image of God. Let us, then, ease the tension a little. Observe, dear troubled souls, this transformation is not effected instantaneously, but by *degrees*: this great “change” is not accomplished by the Spirit in a moment, but is a gradual work. This is plainly signified in the “*from glory to glory*,” which means, from one degree of it to another. Only as this fact is apprehended can our poor hearts be assured before God.

This expression “from glory to glory” is parallel with “the rain also filleth the pools: they go from strength to strength” (Psa. 84:6, 7), which means that under the gracious revivings of the Spirit believers are renewed again and again, and so go on from one degree of strength to another. So in Romans 1:17 we read of “from faith to faith,” which means from little faith to more faith, until sometimes it may be said, “your faith groweth exceedingly” (2 Thess. 1:3). So it is with this blessed “change” which the Spirit works in believers. The first degree of it is effected at their *regeneration*. The second degree of it is accomplished during their progressive (practical) *sanctification*. The third and last degree of it takes place at their *glorification*. Thus “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18).—A.W.P.

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

108. *Marriage*: 13:4.

From a prescription of duties towards others, the Apostle next proceeds to give directions unto those which concern ourselves, wherein our own persons and walking are concerned. He does this in a prohibition of the two most radical and comprehensive lusts of corrupt nature, namely, uncleanness and covetousness: the first respecting the persons of men in a peculiar manner, the other their conversation or conduct. Acts of moral uncleanness are distinguishable from all other sins which are perpetrated in external acts, in that they are immediately against a man's self and his own person: see 1 Corinthians 6:18, and, therefore is chastity enforced under the means of preserving the same, that is, marriage; while the antidote for covetousness is given, namely, a spirit of contentment. The connection between Hebrews 13:4-6 and 13:1-3 is obvious: unless uncleanness and covetousness be mortified there can be no real love exercised unto the brethren.

As God hath knit the bones and sinews together for the strengthening of our bodies, so He has ordained the joining of man and woman together in wedlock for the strengthening of their lives, for "two are better than one" (Eccl. 4:9); and therefore when God made the woman for the man He said, "I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18), showing that man is *advantaged* by having a wife. That such does not actually prove to be the case in all instances is, for the most part at least, to be attributed unto *departure* from the Divine precepts thereon. As this is a subject of such vital moment, we deem it expedient to present a fairly comprehensive outline of the teaching of Holy Writ upon it, especially for the benefit of our young readers; though we trust we shall be enabled to include that which will be helpful to older ones too.

It is perhaps a trite remark, yet none the less weighty for having been uttered so often, that with the one exception of personal conversion, marriage is the most momentous of all earthly events in the life of a man or woman. It forms a bond of union which binds them until death. It brings them into such intimate relations that they *must* either sweeten or embitter each other's existence. It entails circumstances and consequences which are not less far-reaching than the endless ages of eternity. How essential it is, then, that we should have the blessing of Heaven upon such a solemn yet precious undertaking; and in order to this, how absolutely necessary it is that we be subject to God and to His Word thereon. Far, far better to remain single unto the end of our days, than to enter into the marriage state *without* the Divine benediction upon it. The records of history and the facts of observation bear abundant testimony to the truth of that remark.

Even those who look no further than the temporal happiness of individuals and the welfare of existing society, are not insensible to the great importance of our domestic relations, which the strongest affections of nature secure, and which even our warts and weaknesses cement. We can form no conception of social virtue or felicity, yea, no conception of human society itself, which has not its foundation *in the family*. No matter how excellent the constitution and laws of a country may be, or how vast its resources and prosperity, there is no sure basis for social order, or public as well as private virtue, until it be laid in the wise regulations of its families. After all, a nation is but the aggregate of its families, and unless there be good husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, there cannot possibly be good citizens. Therefore the present decay of home life and family discipline threaten the stability of our nation today far more severely than does any foreign hostility.

But the *Scriptural* view of the relative duties of the members of a Christian household portrays the prevailing effects in a most alarming manner, as being dishonouring to God, disastrous to the spiritual condition of the churches, and as raising up a most serious obstacle in the way of evangelical progress. Sad beyond words is it to see that professing Christians are themselves largely responsible for the lowering of marital standards, the general disregard of domestic relations, and the rapid disappearance of family discipline. As, then, *marriage* is the basis of the home or family, it is incumbent on the writer to summon his readers to a serious and prayerful consideration of the revealed will of God on this vital theme. Though we can hardly hope to arrest the awful disease which is now eating out the very vitals of our nation, yet if God is pleased to bless this article to a few individuals our labour will not be in vain.

We will begin by pointing out *the excellency* of wedlock: "Marriage is honourable," says our text, and it is so first of all because God Himself has placed special honour upon it. All other ordinances or institutions (except the Sabbath) were appointed of God by the medium of men or angels (Acts 7:53), but marriage was ordained *immediately* by the Lord Himself—no man or angel brought the first wife to her husband (Gen. 2:19). Thus marriage had more Divine honour put upon it than had all the other Divine institutions, because it was directly solemnized by God Himself. Again; this was the *first* ordinance God instituted, yea, the first thing He did after man and woman were created, and that, while they were still in their unfallen state. Moreover, *the place* where their marriage occurred shows the honourableness of this institution: whereas all other institutions (save the Sabbath) were instituted outside of Paradise, marriage was solemnized in Eden itself—intimating how happy they are that marry in the Lord.

"*God's crowning creative act* was the making of woman. At the close of each creative day it is formally recorded that 'God saw what He had made, that it was good.' But when Adam was made, it is explicitly recorded that 'God saw it was *not* good that the man should be alone.' As to man the creative work lacked completeness, until, as all animals and even plants had their mates, there should be found for Adam also an help, meet for him—his counterpart and companion. Not until this want was met did God see the work of the last creative day also to be good.

"This is the first great Scripture lesson on family life, and it should be well learned . . . The Divine institution of marriage teaches that *the ideal state* of both man and woman is not in separation but in union, that each is meant and fitted for the other; and that God's ideal is such union, based on a pure and holy love, enduring for life, exclusive of all rivalry or other partnership, and incapable of alienation or unfaithfulness because it is a union in the Lord—a holy wedlock of soul and spirit in mutual sympathy and affection" (A.T. Pierson).

As God the Father honoured the institution of marriage, so also did God the Son. First, by His being "*born of a woman*" (Gal. 4:4). Second, by His *miracles*, for the first supernatural sign that He wrought was at the marriage of Cana in Galilee (John 2:8), where He turned the water into wine, thereby intimating that if Christ be present at your wedding (i.e., if you "marry in the Lord") your life shall be a joyous or blessed one. Third, by His *parables*, for He compared the Kingdom of God unto a marriage (Matt. 22:2) and holiness to a "wedding garment" (Matt. 22:11). So also His teaching: when the Pharisees sought to ensnare Him on the subject of divorce, He set His imprimatur on the original

constitution, adding "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:4-6).

The institution of marriage has been still further honoured by the Holy Spirit, for He has used it as a figure of the union which exists between Christ and the Church. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:31, 32). The relation which obtains between the Redeemer and the redeemed is likened, again and again, unto that which exists between a wedded man and woman: Christ is the "Husband" (Isa. 54:5), the Church is the "Wife" (Rev. 21:9). "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am *married* unto you" (Jer. 3:14). Thus, each Person of the blessed Trinity has set His seal upon the honourableness of the marriage state.

There is no doubt that in a true marriage each party helps the other equally, and in view of what has been pointed out above, any who venture to hold or teach any other doctrine or philosophy join issue with the Most High. This does not lay down a hard and fast rule that *every* man and woman is obliged to enter into matrimony: there may be good and wise reasons for abiding alone, adequate motives for remaining in the single state—physical and moral, domestic and social. Nevertheless, a single life should be regarded as abnormal and exceptional, rather than ideal. Any teaching that leads men and women to think of the marriage bond as the sign of bondage, and the sacrifice of all independence, to construe wifedom and motherhood as drudgery and interference with women's higher destiny, any public sentiment to cultivate celibacy as more desirable and honourable, or to substitute anything else for marriage and home, not only invades God's ordinance, but opens the door to nameless crimes and threatens the very foundations of society.

Now it is clear that marriage must have particular *reasons for the appointment of it*. Three are given in Scripture. First, *for the propagation of children*. This is its obvious and normal purpose. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27)—not both males or both females, but one male and one female; and to make the design of this unmistakably plain, God said, "Be fruitful and multiply." For this reason marriage is called "matrimony," which signifies *motherage*, because it results in virgins becoming mothers. Therefore it is desirable that marriage be entered into at an early age, before the prime of life be passed: twice in Scripture we read of "the wife of thy *youth*" (Prov. 5:18; Mal. 2:14). We have pointed out that the propagation of children is the "normal" end of marriage yet there are special seasons of acute "distress" when 1 Corinthians holds good.

Second, marriage is designed as a *preventive of immorality*: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). If any were exempted it might be supposed that *kings* would be given a dispensation—because of the lack of a successor to the throne should his wife be barren; yet the king is expressly forbidden a plurality of wives (Deut. 17:17), showing that the endangering of a monarchy is not sufficient to countervail the sin of adultery. For this cause a whore is termed a "strange woman" (Prov. 2:16), showing that she should be a stranger to us; and children born out of marriage are called "bastards," which (under the Law) were excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2).

The third purpose of marriage is for the *avoiding of the inconveniences of solitude*, signified in the “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18): as though the Lord had said, This life would be irksome and miserable for man if no wife be given him for a companion: “Woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccl. 4:10). Someone has said, “like a turtle which has lost his mate, like one leg when the other is cut off, like one wing when the other is clipped, so had man been if woman had not been given to him.” Therefore for mutual society and comfort God united man and woman that the cares and fears of this life might be eased by the cheer and help of each other.

Let us next consider *the choice of our mate*. First, the one selected for our life’s partner must be outside those degrees of near kinship prohibited by the Divine Law: Leviticus 18:6-17. Second, the Christian must wed a fellow Christian. From earliest times God has commanded that “the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num. 23:9). His Law unto Israel in connection with the Canaanites, was, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deut. 7:3 and cf. Josh. 23:12). How much more, then, must God require the separation of those who are His people by a spiritual and heavenly tie than those who occupied only a fleshly and earthly relation to Him. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14) is the clarion order to His saints of this dispensation. *Partnerships* of any kind to one who is born again with one in a state of nature is here prohibited, as is evident from the terms used in the next verse—“fellowship, communion, concord, part, agreement.”

There are but two families in this world: the children of God and the children of the Devil (1 John 3:10). If, then, a daughter of God marries a son of the Evil One, she becomes a daughter-in-law to Satan! If a son of God marries a daughter of Satan, he becomes a son-in-law to the Devil! By such an infamous step an affinity is formed between one belonging to the Most High and one belonging to His arch-enemy. “Strong language?!” Yes, but not too strong. O the dishonour to Christ by such a union; O the bitter reaping from such a sowing. In every case it is the poor believer who suffers. Read the Inspired histories of Samson, Solomon, and Ahab, and see what followed *their* unholy alliances in wedlock. As well might an athlete attach to himself a heavy weight and then expect to win a race, as for one to progress spiritually after marrying a worldling.

Should any Christian reader be inclined or expect to become betrothed, the first question for him or her to carefully weigh in the Lord’s presence is, Will this union be with an unbeliever? For if you are really cognizant of, and your heart and soul are impressed with the tremendous *difference* which God, in His grace, has put between you and those who are—however attractive in the flesh—yet in their sins, then you should have no difficulty in rejecting every suggestion and proposal of making common cause with such. *You* are “the righteousness of God” in Christ, but unbelievers are “unrighteous”; *you* are “the light in the Lord,” but they are darkness; *you* have been translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, but unbelievers are under the power of Belial; *you* are a son of peace, whereas all unbelievers are “children of wrath”; therefore “be ye separate, saith the Lord, and *touch not* the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17).

The danger of forming such an alliance is *before* marriage, or even betrothal, neither of which could be seriously entertained by any real Christian unless the sweetness of fellowship with the Lord had been lost. The affections must first be withdrawn from Christ

before we can find delight in social intimacy with those who are alienated from God, and whose interests are confined to this world. The child of God who is “keeping his heart with all diligence” will not, cannot have a joy in intimacies with the unregenerate. Alas, how often is the seeking of the accepting of close friendship with unbelievers the first step to *open* departure from Christ. The path which the Christian is called upon to lead is indeed a narrow one, but if he attempts to widen it, or leave it for a broader road, it must be in contravention of the Word of God, and to his or her own irreparable danger and loss.

Third, “married . . . only *in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 7:39) goes much further than prohibiting an unbeliever for a mate. Even among the children of God there are many who would not be suitable to each other in such a tie. A pretty face is an attraction, but O how vain to be governed in such a serious undertaking by such a trifle. Earthly goods and social position have their value here, yet how base and degrading to suffer them to control such a solemn undertaking. O what watchfulness and prayerfulness is needed in the regulation of our affections! Who fully understands the temperament that will match mine? that will be able to bear patiently with my faults, be a corrective to my tendencies, and a real help in my desire to live for Christ in this world? How many make a fair show at the start, but turn out wretchedly. Who can shield me from a host of evils which beset the unwary, but God my Father?

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband” (Prov. 12:4): a pious and competent wife is the most valuable of all God’s temporal blessings: she is the special gift of His grace. “A Prudent wife is from the LORD” (Prov. 19:14), and He requires to be definitely and diligently *sought unto*: see Genesis 24:12. It is not sufficient to have the approval of trusted friends and parents, valuable and even needful as that (generally) is for our happiness; for though they are concerned for our welfare, yet their wisdom is not sufficiently far-reaching. The One who appointed the ordinance must needs be given the first place in it if we are to have *His* blessing on it. Now prayer is never intended to be a substitute for the proper discharge of our responsibilities: we are ever required to use care and discretion, and must never act hurriedly and rashly. Our better judgment is to regulate our emotions: in the body the head is placed over the heart, and not the heart over the head!

“Whoso findeth a wife (a real one) findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Prov. 18:22): “findeth” implies a definite *quest*. To direct us therein the Holy Spirit has supplied two rules or qualifications. First, *godliness*, because our partner must be like Christ’s Spouse, pure and holy. Second, *fitness*, “a help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18), showing that a wife cannot be a “help” unless she be “meet,” and for that she must have much in common with her mate. If her husband be a labouring man, it would be madness for him to choose a lazy woman; if he be a learned man, a woman with no love of knowledge would be quite unsuited. Marriage is called a “yoke”; and two cannot pull together if all the burden is to fall upon one—as it would if one weak and sickly was the partner chosen.

Now for the benefit of our younger readers, let us point out some of the *marks* by which a godly and fit mate may be *identified*. First, the *reputation*: a good man commonly has a good name (Prov. 22:1), none can accuse him of open sins. Second, the *countenance*: our looks reveal our characters, and therefore Scripture speaks of “proud looks” and “wanton looks,”—“the show of their countenance doth witness against them” (Isa. 3:9). Third, the *speech*, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”:

“the heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Prov. 16:23); “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Prov. 31:26). Fourth, the *apparel*: a modest woman is known by the modesty of her attire. If the clothing be vulgar or showy the heart is vain. Fifth, the *company* kept: birds of a feather flock together—a person may be known by his or her associates.

A word of warning is, perhaps, not quite needless. No matter how carefully and prayerfully one’s partner be selected, you will *not* find marriage a perfect thing. Not that God did not make it perfect, but man has fallen since, and the Fall has marred everything. The apple may be sweet, but it has a worm inside. The rose has not lost its fragrance, but thorns grow with it. Willingly or unwillingly, everywhere we must read the ruin which sin has brought in. Then let us not dream of those faultless people which a diseased fancy can picture and novelists portray. The most godly men and women have their failings; and though such be easy to bear when there is genuine love, yet they have to be *borne*.

A few brief remarks now on *the home-life* of the wedded couple. Light and help will be obtained here if it be borne in mind that marriage pictures the relation between Christ and His Church. This, then, involves three things. First, the attitude and actions of husband and wife are to be regulated by *love*, for *that* is the cementing tie between the Lord Jesus and His Spouse: a holy love, sacrificial love, an enduring love which nought can sever. There is nothing like love to make the wheels of home life run smoothly. The husband sustains to his mate the same relation as does the Redeemer to the redeemed, and hence the exhortation, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church” (Eph. 5:25): with a hearty and constant love, ever seeking her good, ministering to her needs, protecting and providing for her, bearing with her infirmities: thus “giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

Second, the *headship* of the husband. “The head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11:3); “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church” (Eph. 5:23). Unless this Divine appointment be duly heeded there is sure to be confusion. The household must have a leader, and God has committed its rule unto the husband, holding *him* responsible for its orderly management; and serious will be the loss if he shirks his duty and turns the reins of government over to his wife. But this does not mean that Scripture gives him license to be a domestic tyrant, treating his wife as a servant: his dominion is to be exercised in love toward the one who is his consort. “Likewise, ye husbands, *dwell with them*” (1 Peter 3:7): seek their society after the day’s labour is over. That Divine injunction plainly condemns those who leave their wives and go abroad on the pretext of a “call from God.”

Third, the *subjection* of the wife. “Wives, *submit* yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22): there is only one exception to be made in the application of this rule, namely when he commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands. “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands” (1 Peter 3:5): alas, how little of this spiritual “adornment” is evident today! “Even as Sara *obeyed* Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement” (1 Peter 3:6): willing and loving subjection to the husband, out of respect for the authority of God, is what characterises the daughters of Sarah. Where the

wife refuses to submit to her husband, the children are sure to defy their parents—sow the wind, reap the whirlwind.

We have space for only one other matter, which is deeply important for young husbands to heed. “Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and *afterwards* build thine house” (Prov. 24:27). The point here is that the husband is not to think of owning his own house before he can afford it. As Matthew Henry says, “This is a rule of providence in the management of household affairs. We must prefer necessities before luxuries, and not lay that out for show which should be expended for the support of the family.” Alas, in this degenerate age so many young couples want to start where their parents ended, and then feel they must imitate their godless neighbours in various extravagances. Never go into debt or purchase on the “credit system”: “Owe no man anything” (Rom. 13:8)!

And now for a final word on our text. “Marriage is honourable *in all*” who are called thereunto, no class of persons being precluded. This clearly gives the lie to the pernicious teaching of Rome concerning the celibacy of the clergy, as does also 1 Timothy 3:2, etc. “And the bed undefiled” not only signifies fidelity to the marriage vow (1 Thess. 4:4), but that the conjugal act of intercourse is not polluting: in the unfallen state Adam and Eve were bidden to “multiply”; yet moderation and sobriety is to obtain here, as in all things. We do not believe in what is termed “birth control,” but we do earnestly urge *self-control*, especially by the husband, “But whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” This is a most solemn warning against unfaithfulness: those who live and die inpenitently in these sins will eternally perish: Ephesians 5:5.—A.W.P.

The Life of David.

60. *His Son Absalom.*

It was fleshly sentiment, and not concern for God's glory, which moved David to authorise Joab to bring back Absalom. Some of our readers may regard this as a harsh verdict and say, "Possibly the writer is not a parent, if he were, perhaps he would better understand the case before him. Was not David actuated by *love* for his erring son? Surely God does not expect His people to be without natural affection." Ah, dear reader, the claims of the Lord are both high and comprehensive, and His requirements much more exacting than many like to recognize. Right eyes are to be plucked out and right hands cut off (Matt. 5:29, 30)—things which are very dear to us—if they prove a hindrance to our treading the Narrow Way; and *that* is indeed a painful sacrifice, is it not?—so painful, that nothing short of the supernatural but sufficient grace of God can enable any of us thereunto.

"If any man come to Me," said the Lord Christ, "and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). No wonder that He bade intending disciples to "set down first and count the cost" (Luke 14:28). Christ will be Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. He requires the throne of our hearts, and all other interests and inclinations must bow before His sovereign will. Alas, how little are *His* claims emphasised today! How His holy standard has been lowered! How His Gospel has been cheapened! How maudlin sentimentality now ousts the principles of holiness in the great majority of those who bear His name! How those who endeavour, in their feeble way, to press the Divine requirements are now condemned as being heartless and censorious.

"But surely a Christian is not required to become an unemotional stoic, devoid of all natural affection." No, indeed; grace in the heart does not harden, but softens. Nevertheless, holiness, and not carnal sentiment, is to dominate the Christian. Natural affections are not to be granted a lawless license, but are to be *regulated* by the precepts of Scripture. A Christian is permitted to lament the death of a fellow-believer, yet is he bidden to "sorrow not even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). We are exhorted to *mortify* "inordinate affection" (Col. 3:5), that is, lawless and excessive fondness. And sometimes we have to choose—as David did—between honouring God by an obedience which requires us to set aside the yearnings of nature, or dishonour Him by yielding to fleshly emotions: in such a case self (the natural man) is to be *denied*.

Take it on its lowest ground. Do not those parents defeat their own ends who, from a *miscalled* "love," fail to deal sternly with the disobedience and defiance of their little ones; and who when their children are grown up, wink at their sins? How many a shiftless youth, whose every whim is gratified by his doting mother, develops into a worthless wastrel! How many a flighty daughter is allowed in her own way, under the pretext of "let her have a good time," only to end in her becoming a woman of the streets! Even the natural man is responsible to bring his affections under the control of his judgment, and not let his heart run away with his head. But the child of God is to be regulated by far higher and holier principles, and is to subordinate the yearnings of nature to the glory of God by obeying His commandments.

Now in his ordering Joab to fetch back Absalom from Geshur, David acted according to the dictates of "natural affection," and not out of any regard to the honour of the Lord. Joab knew how to work upon his weakness, as is evident from the success of his scheme

through the woman of Tekoah. She so wrought upon his sentiments that he rashly gave a verdict in favour of the criminal depicted in her story; and then she persuaded him to restore his treacherous son. Yet nothing could possibly justify him in disregarding the Divine Law, which cried aloud for the avenging of Amnon. God had given no commandment for his son to be restored, and therefore *His* blessing did not attend it. David paid dearly for his foolish pity, as we shall see from the sequel; and *that* is recorded for *our* learning. God grant that some parents at least who read these lines will take this solemn lesson to heart.

“So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face” (2 Sam. 14:23, 24). Previously we read that “David mourned for his son every day” and “the soul of king David was consumed (margin) to go forth unto Absalom” (2 Sam. 13:37, 39), whereas now that he is brought back to Jerusalem orders are given that he must *not* see the king's face. What a strange thing human nature is! What expedients it will resort to and compromises it will make in order to save its face. Possibly some of the more godly of David's counselors had demurred at his flouting of the Law, and maybe his own heart was uneasy over the step he had taken; and so as a sop to his conscience, and in order to quieten the censure of others, Absalom was confined to his own private dwelling.

Some writers are of the common opinion that this measure of the king was designed for the humbling of his son, hoping that he would now be brought to see the heinousness of his sin and repent for it. But surely there had been sufficient time for that in his three years' sojourn in Geshur. No, we believe that what we have pointed out above is the more likely explanation. By permitting Absalom to return to his own house, David exercised mercy, and by denying him entrance to the court, he made a show of justice, persuading himself by this interdict he evidenced his abhorrence of Amnon's murder. Nevertheless the fact remained that, as chief magistrate in Israel, David had set aside the Divine Law. Therefore he must not be surprised if his wayward son now resorts to further lawlessness, for there is no escape from the working of the principle of sowing and reaping.

“But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him” (2 Sam. 14:25). How this reveals the low state of the Nation at that time! Absalom was not esteemed for his moral worth, for he was utterly lacking in piety, wisdom, or justice. His handsome physique was what appealed to the people. His abominable wickedness was ignored, but his person was admired—which only served to increase his arrogance, ending in his utter ruin—alas, how often a corrupt mind indwells a sound body. How sad it is to observe our decadent generation valuing physical beauty and prowess more highly than moral virtues and spiritual graces. The allowing of his luxuriant hair to grow to such a length, and then afterwards weighing it (v. 26), shows the pride and effeminacy of the man. The three sons born to him (v. 27) evidently died at an early age: see 18:18.

“So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face. Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come” (2 Sam. 14:28, 29). In light of the immediate sequel, it is clear that Absalom was chafing at his confinement (that he “sent for Joab” indicates he was virtually a prisoner in his own house) because it interfered with the development of his evil plans, and that the reason why he was anxious to

be reconciled to the king was that he might obtain his liberty and thus be able to win the Nation over to himself. Probably this was the reason why Joab declined to visit him: suspecting his disloyal designs, knowing what a dangerous character he was to be at large.

"Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire" (v. 30). He was still the same self-willed character: "who is lord over us?" being the language of all his actions. The three years he had spent at Geshur and his two years of isolation in Jerusalem had wrought no change in him: his heart was not humbled and his pride was not mortified. Instead of being thankful that his life had been spared, he deems himself sorely wronged for being secluded from the court. Instead of being grateful to Joab for bringing him back from Geshur, he now takes a mean revenge upon him because he refused his present request. Such conduct displayed a self-will that would brook no denial; a man of violence ready to go to any lengths in order to have his own way. The fear of God was not in him, nor had he any respect for his neighbour.

"Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?" (v. 31). At first sight it seems strange after twice refusing to see Absalom, that now, after being insulted and injured, Joab should grant his request, and mediate for him with the king; yet a little reflection will make it clear. Joab was a shrewd politician, with his finger on the public's pulse, and he knew full well that Absalom stood high in the favour of the people (v. 25); and now that he had further proof of the fury and power of the man—his servants being ready at his bidding to do violence unto the property of the general of the army!—he was afraid to further cross his will; and probably, with an eye to the future, he also wished to keep in his good books.

"And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me" (v. 32). What an arrogant and insolent attitude to assume toward his royal parent: one which manifested the grossest ingratitude, a contempt for the king's authority, and a deliberate challenge for him to enforce the law. Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, "His message was haughty and imperious, and very unbecoming either a son or a subject. He undervalued the favour that had been shown him in recalling him from banishment, and restoring him to his own house. He denies his own crimes, though most notorious, and will not own that there was any iniquity in him, insinuating that, therefore, he had been wronged in the rebukes he had been under. He defies the king's justice, 'Let him kill me, if he can find in his heart,' knowing he loved him too well to do it."

"So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom" (2 Sam. 14:33). Alas, notwithstanding his insulting rudeness Absalom prevailed upon the king to yield. His better judgment blinded by intemperate affection for his son, David invited Absalom to the palace. By prostrating himself before the king, Absalom feigned submission to his authority, yet his heart was full of base designs to secure the throne for himself. David sealed his pardon with a kiss, instead of allowing the Law to take its course. As another has well said, "David's inordinate tenderness only paved the way for Absalom's open rebellion. Terrible warning! Deal tenderly with evil, and it will, assuredly, rise to a head and crush you in the end. On the other hand, meet

evil with a face of flint, and victory is sure. Sport not with the serpent, but at once crush it beneath your feet.”

Whilst all this trouble was brewing around David, a strange passiveness seems to have crept over him, and to have continued till his flight before Absalom. The narrative is singularly silent about him. He appears to be paralyzed by the consciousness of his past sins: he originated nothing. He dared not punish Amnon, and could only weep when he heard of Absalom’s crime. He weakly craved for the return of the latter, but could not bring himself to send for him till Joab urged it. A flash of his old kingliness appeared for a moment in his refusal to see his son, but even that vanished when Joab chose to insist that Absalom should return to the court. He had no will of his own, but had become a mere tool in the hands of his fierce general—Joab having gained this hold over him by his complicity in Uriah’s murder. At every step he was dogged by the consequences of his own wrong-doings, even though God had pardoned his sins.

Beautifully did Alexander Maclaren, in his little work “The Life of David As Reflected in His Psalms,” throw light upon this particular stage of his career, and we feel we cannot do our readers a better service than close this article with a rather lengthy quotation therefrom. “It is not probable that many Psalms were made in those dreary days. But the *Forty-first* and *Fifty-fifth* are, with reasonable probability, referred to this period by many commentators. They give a very touching picture of the old king during the four years in which Absalom’s conspiracy was being hatched. It seems from the 41st that the pain and sorrow of his heart had brought on some serious illness, which his enemies had used for their own purposes and embittered by hypocritical condolences and ill-concealed glee. The sensitive nature of the Psalmist winces under their heartless desertion of him, and pours out its plaint in this pathetic lament. He begins with a blessing on those who ‘consider the afflicted’—having reference, perhaps, to the few who were faithful to him in his languishing sickness. He passes thence to his own case, and, after humble confession of his sin—almost in the words of the 51st Psalm—he tells how his sick bed had been surrounded by different visitors.

“His disease drew no pity, but only fierce impatience that he lingered in life so long. ‘Mine enemies speak evil of me—when will he die, and his name have perished?’ One of them, in especial, who must have been a man in high position to gain access to the sick chamber, has been conspicuous by his lying words of condolence. ‘If he come to see me, he speaketh vanity.’ The sight of the sick king touched no chord of affection, but only increased the traitor’s animosity—‘his heart gathered evil to itself’—and then, having watched his pale face for wished-for unfavourable symptoms, the false friend hurries from the bedside to talk of his hopeless illness—‘he goeth abroad, he telleth it.’ The tidings spread, and are stealthily passed from one conspirator to another: ‘all that hate me whisper together against me.’ They exaggerate the gravity of his condition, and are glad because, making the wish the father to the thought, they believe him dying—‘a thing of Belial (i.e., a destructive disease) say they, is poured out upon him, and now that he lieth, he shall rise up no more.

“We should be disposed to refer the Thirty-ninth Psalm also to this period. It, too, is the meditation of one in sickness, which he knows to be a Divine judgment for his sin. There is little trace of enemies in it; but his attitude is that of *silent submission*, while wicked men are disquieted around him—which is precisely the characteristic of his con-

duct at this period. It consists of two parts (vv. 1-6 and 7-13), in both of which the subjects of his meditations are the same, but the tone of them different. His own sickness and mortality, and man's fleeting, shadowy life, are his themes. The former has led him to think of the latter.

"It may be observed that this supposition of a protracted illness, which is based upon these Psalms, throw light upon the singular passiveness of David during the maturing of Absalom's conspiracy, and may naturally be supposed to have favoured his schemes, an essential part of which was to ingratiate himself with suitors who came to the king for judgment, by affecting great regret that no man was deputed of the king to hear them. The accumulation of untried causes, and the apparent disorganisation of the judicial machinery, are well accounted for by David's sickness."—A.W.P.

The Providence of God.

4. *Jacob's meeting with Rachel: Genesis 29.*

Jacob was a distinguished type of Christ and many points of resemblance present themselves to our view in his history. Among these the following are striking: he was sent by his father to a distant country to seek a wife. "And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother" (Gen. 28:1-2). And Jesus came from Heaven to espouse His bride—the Lamb's wife—bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh. On his journey Jacob slept in the open air, and made the stones of Bethel his pillow. And Jesus, who was Lord of the universe, appeared on earth in the most destitute circumstances. While foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. These points of resemblance were *providential*, resulting naturally from the situation in which Jacob was placed. The wisdom of man could discover in them no designed illustration of future events. But the Ruler of the world can direct the most trifling and seemingly fortuitous events, to serve His own glorious purpose. Jacob was as truly adapted to shadow the Saviour in the lowest parts of His humiliation, as Solomon was in the highest glory of His exaltation.

The Providence of God *directing the journey* of Jacob is strikingly impressed on our notice on his approach to Haran. By what compass he steered through the deserts that lay in his way, by what information he arrived in the neighborhood of Haran, we are not told. But, however, he was directed, one thing we see—he did not miss his way. Without any difficulty he lights at once on the people whom he sought. "Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks" (Gen. 29:1-2). Here he was led by Providence to the point of destination as directly as were the wise men of the East by the star which pointed to the house in Bethlehem in which the Saviour was. At the moment of his arrival there were three flocks of sheep lying by the well. This was providential, for had he arrived at a time when all the flocks were at pasture, he would have *missed* the shepherds of Haran. Throughout all the hours of the light of day, why was it that he happened to come to this spot at the time when the flocks were lying by the well? The thing appears to be marked still more particularly as a fact in Providence. By what Jacob afterwards says to the shepherds (v. 7), it appears that it was rather early for the flocks to come to water, and Rachel's flocks had not then arrived. Divine Providence sent some of the flocks sooner than usual, in order that the shepherds might be in waiting to receive Jacob!

And now comes Rachel, the future wife of this eminent Patriarch; and the Providence of the Lord presented to his view that person whom at random he was seeking, and in whom so much of his earthly happiness was centered. The people of the Lord should see *His hand* in leading them throughout all their earthly pilgrimage. In all their ways they should acknowledge Him. If they have a prosperous journey, they should give the praise to Him who led Jacob to the well of Haran. Nothing is so little as to be below the attention of His Providence; nothing is so great as to be beyond the power of His Providence to accomplish.

5. *Jacob's prosperity at Laban's: Genesis 30.*

Jacob had a hard service and a rigorous master. If he is to grow rich, it will not be from a great dowry, nor the generosity of Laban. He can have nothing but what he earns. Yet God did not forsake him, and *His Providence* made him wealthy in the land of his servitude. And it is remarkable, that even in the extraordinary way in which he was enriched, everything was done not by immediate miracle, but in the way of Providence. God took the possessions of Laban, and gave them to Jacob; but He did it *indirectly*, and by the use of certain means to which His Providence gave effect. God could have commanded Laban to give Jacob what he saw fit. He could have given Jacob wealth without touching or diminishing the property of Laban. But in a way of Providence He transferred a considerable portion of the property of Laban to Jacob as wages for service. And may we not see here a shadow of the kingdom given to Christ by His Father, on account of His hard service? And what was Jacob's was also the property of his wives and children. In like manner, believers are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

This fact affords us a key to open to us the Providence of God in conferring wealth or in diminishing possessions. Whatever may be the means by which prosperity and adversity are brought about, they are in all instances the work of Providence. Divine Providence, indeed, is as much concerned in the prosperity of the wicked as in that of the righteous; and in every instance in which it occurs, the Providence of God has a design in it. In like manner, the poverty or adversity of the people of God is as much overruled by the hand of Providence as is their prosperity. Men of God ought to see *His hand* in their gains and in their losses; in their prosperity and in their adversity.—Alexander Carson.

N.B. This article should have appeared before the one in the October issue, but for lack of space was held over. And the one in October should be numbered 6.—A.W.P.

Union and Communion.

9. *Glory.*

We cannot do better than commence here at the point where we closed in our last, for nowhere in Scripture do we have such a clear and blessed revelation of the Church's future bliss as the Lord Jesus favoured us with in John 17. "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am: that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (v. 24). Every word in this verse calls for separate meditation. Once more the Redeemer says, "Father," for He is suing for a child's portion for each of His people: it is not simply wages, such as a servant receives from his master, but an inheritance, such as children receive from their parents—the inheritance being the Father's house, where the Son now is. He had said "Father" when asking for His own glorification (v. 5), and He does so again in connection with the glorification of His saints: addressing God thus intimated the loving intensity of the Mediator's intercession.

Christ's "I will" here at once arrests our notice—the only record we have of His ever addressing the Father thus, yet it was in as perfect keeping now as His "not My will" in Gethsemane. First, this "I will" was a note of *authority* which became Him who is God and man in one Person, to whom had been committed "power over all flesh" (John 17:2). Moreover, He had a perfect knowledge of the Father's will, and as the Surety of His people, Christ was here suing for the fulfillment of that covenant agreement which had been entered into before He embarked upon His great undertaking. Second, it was a *testamentary disposition*: Christ was about to die and therefore said "I will." "When Christ made His will, Heaven is one of the legacies which He bequeathed to us" (T. Manton). The same thought is found again in "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me" (Luke 22:29). Third, it also reveals His deep earnestness and full purpose of heart, as the "Master, we *would* that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire" (Mark 10:35).

"That they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." Nothing gives a lover such a joy and satisfaction as to be in the immediate presence of his beloved. Heaven will not be Heaven to Christ until His glorified Bride is there by His side: then only will He "see of the travail of his soul and shall *be satisfied*" (Isa. 53:11). Nothing will content the heart of the Head but that His Church should be brought unto the possession of the utmost blessedness, to be continued unto and enjoyed by them forever and ever. It was so that His people might have a clear and comforting knowledge of this that He gave them that exceeding great and precious promise "I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3). How this reveals the heart-attitude of Christ unto us!

"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." That is in sharp and solemn contrast from "where I am, thither ye cannot come" (John 7:34), spoken to the unbelieving Jews. The wicked have no title, no fitness, no heart to be where Christ is: Paradise is still closed against them by the flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). But it will be the consummation of the believer's happiness to be where Christ is: as the Psalmist declared, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (16:11). How utterly different is the attitude of Christ toward His own from that of many of this world, who, when they enter suddenly into earthly riches and

honours, quickly forget the fellows and friends of former days. Not so the Lord Jesus: His heavenly glory does not cause His love to decay in the least degree or take His mind off His people. They are inexpressibly precious to Him, and He cannot be content unless they are with Him.

It is as though Christ said to the Father, As given to Me by Thee, the elect are My “portion” (Deut. 32:9), My “special treasure” (Mal. 3:17, margin), My “royal diadem” (Isa. 62:3), My “joy” (Zeph. 3:17): and as their Head and Mediator I express My will, and it is that they shall be raised to the highest pinnacle that it is possible to elevate creatures, that they may be where I am, and that, not in some distant compartment of Thy House, but in My immediate presence, so that they may behold My glory—feasting their eyes and feeding their hearts upon Myself. Surely nothing can convey to our minds, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, a clearer view of the heart of Christ toward His beloved. O that the blessed Comforter may so shine upon these words of Christ’s, and thereby let in such light into our understandings, as may lift our hearts unto a clearer comprehension and greater admiration of His love than we have ever had before.

“That they may behold My glory.” This beholding is, first *ocular*. The bodily senses have their happiness as well as the faculties of our souls, and this will be realised in a far nobler and purer degree hereafter. Job affirmed thus when he said, “Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold” (19:26, 27)—“see God” in the Person of the God-man Mediator. The saints shall then behold the Person who redeemed them, and that nature in which He suffered so much for them. The outward man will be regaled, as truly as the inner. There is a glory to charm our eyes in Heaven: not only the beautiful mansions and the glorious inhabitants, but above all, *the face of the Lamb*. As it is now said of Christ Himself, so shall it yet be the experience of each of His people: “For Thou hast made Him most blessed forever: Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance” (Psa. 21:6).

This beholding is, secondly, and supremely, *mental and spiritual*. The mind is the noblest faculty, for man is a rational creature, and there is as great an inclination to knowledge in his soul as there is in beasts to carnal pleasures. The drunkard may talk of his delight and the voluptuary of the gratification of sense, but the true delight of the soul is *knowledge*, and therefore it must be satisfied in Heaven, or else we would not be happy. “The pure in heart shall see God” (Matt. 5:8), yet not with the bodily eye, for He who is “Spirit” (John 4:24) cannot be viewed by the bodily senses, and therefore is He called “the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). But God has given man, in preference to the beasts, a mind which is capable of knowing Himself, and in our glorified state our knowledge of Him will be immeasurably increased, so that the soul shall be perfectly satisfied with its mental and spiritual sight of Him.

What an affecting sight it will be to behold the glory of Christ! How it will ravish the heart! Abraham was favoured with an anticipatory glimpse of it and “was glad” (John 8:56). If old Simeon was contented with a view of Christ as an infant—“Lord, *now* lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation” (Luke 2:29, 30)—what will be the effect on us when we stand before His very throne! Even now it fills the soul with joy unspeakable when faith and spiritual illumination beholds Him in the Word and through His ordinances, but words cannot express what it will be to behold the Lord in open vision. To behold the King in His beauty, to

see the Lamb “as it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6)—still bearing in His body the marks of the Cross—will fill us with thanksgiving and praise.

But this glory which the saints are to behold is also a *Divine* one: it will be the luster of the Divine perfections which will be revealed to us through and by Christ, every attribute of God supplying a part, all combining to make up this supreme spiritual splendour. Then will God’s unsearchable *wisdom* be more completely opened to us, for in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Then will God’s illimitable *power* be more fully discovered to us: that power which created a universe out of nothing, that preserved His little flock in the midst of a world of wolves, that will make a footstool of all His enemies. Then will God’s *holiness* be known in all its loveliness, and joyfully shall we then unite with the angels in crying “holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.” Then will God’s *love* be seen without a veil: His smile shall never again be checked with a frown, nor the light of His countenance be obscured by any intervening cloud of sin.

Not till the glorified Church reaches Heaven will its union with God in Christ be complete. Union implies more than *relation*: it imports actual *presence*; not physical or local, but spiritual and cordial, by which the sinless soul, with will and affections guided by restored reason and judgment, closes with and embraces Him; and He in fulfillment of the eternal counsels, and with infinite love and delight, embraces her. When the soul is perfectly formed according to God’s own heart and fully participates in the Divine likeness so as to be perfectly like Him, it is fitted for the most intimate communion which is possible between two such natures—the Divine and human. Nor can pen depict the holy bliss of glorified saints from such a love-union, now perfected between the blessed God and them. The likeness of God upon a creature will cause the eternal One to cleave in love to it, and the beholding of His glory by eyes from which the film of sin has been completely removed will make the soul embrace Him as its ravishing portion.

From that love-union in glory will issue everlasting *communion*. “There is nothing there to hinder God and the holy soul of the most inward fruitions and enjoyments; no animosity, no strangeness, no unsuitableness on either part. Here the glorified spirits of the just have liberty to solace themselves amid the rivers of pleasure at God’s own right hand, without check or restraint. *They* are pure, and *these* pure. They touch nothing that can defile, they defile nothing they can touch. They are not now forbidden the nearest approaches to the once inaccessible Majesty; there is no holy of holies into which they may not enter, no door locked against them. They may have free admission into the innermost secret of the Divine presence, and pour forth themselves in the most liberal effusions of love and joy; as they must be the eternal subjects of those infinitely richer communications from God, even of immense and boundless love and goodness” (J. Howe, “The Blessedness of the Righteous,” 1668).

“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). In the last clause Christ tells the Father *why* He wills that His elect should be with Him and behold His glory. As the God-man, the Man taken into personal union by the Son, and as such the “Fellow” (Zech. 13:7) of Jehovah, He was, from all eternity, the Object of the Father’s ineffable love. He was conceived in the Divine mind before all worlds, being the “Firstborn” of all God’s thoughts, counsels, designs toward all beings, visible and invisible. Christ, as God-man, was the Centre and

Circumference as it respected all God's vast designs in grace, nature and providence. Christ's Person is infinitely precious in God's sight, and therefore has He placed the highest honour of all upon Him as being the Medium through which the invisible God shall shine forth for all eternity, for *thereby* the Church will perceive *how much* the Father loves Christ and that it is the overflowings of the same which falls on them.

"I will, therefore, that they may behold My personal glory, which Thou has given Me, that from that sight they may have the most enlarged views their minds are capable of, concerning Thy love to Me, and to them in Me, as this will be a perfecting them in the full enjoyment of Thine everlasting love. Thou hast possessed *My* mind with it from everlasting; Thou hast taken *Me* up into the mount of personal union and communion with Thee. I have shone forth before Thee in all My personal glory. I have been in Thy bosom, and been admitted into a full knowledge and enjoyment of all the love of Thine heart. Thou lovedst Me from everlasting, and My whole Person, God-man, is the Object of Thine everlasting love. Thou lovedst Me as the Son of God, and as the Son of Man; Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world as the Head of the whole election of grace. Thou lovedst Me as Mediator. I am in every sense the Object of Thy love. I would open Thy whole heart to these, Thine, and My beloved ones. I would express it unto them most freely. I would speak out in their hearing the secrets which have passed from everlasting between Thee and Me, that *they may have* the clearest evidence I can give them of it" (S. E. Pierce).

The Lord Christ will shine forth in His personal glory in the view of His saints, and it will be so beheld by them as to be reflected upon them. Our glory in Heaven will not be independent of Christ, nor will it be inherent in ourselves: our everlasting bliss will be received out of the fullness of the Lord of glory. Just as the glory of the sun is subjective in itself, but objective upon others, so it will be in Heaven: we shall be bathed in the effulgence of Him who is Light. We shall be favoured with such views of Christ, as God-man, as will forever preclude any possibility of sinning, for our souls will be satiated with *His* perfections, filled with unutterable admiration and adoration. We shall be so completely swallowed up with Christ that we shall no longer have any thought about *ourselves*! *This it is* which constitutes the very essence of heavenly blessedness: we shall be so thoroughly absorbed with the loveliness of the Lamb as to forever lose sight of, forget, ourselves! The Church will so centre in God as their Portion and Inheritance that communion with Him, through His Christ, will be the fountain of their life for evermore.

Our thoughts have carried us along so swiftly that we must now go back and consider the several steps in the believer's history which is to terminate in this blessed consummation. The first step or stage occurs at *regeneration*, when he is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, for it is then there is wrought in him a principle (or "nature") which capacitates his (hitherto depraved) soul to visualize and relish spiritual things. A beggar might gaze upon the glory of a king, and yet be no gainer; but when a regenerated soul looks in faith unto the crucified and risen Saviour he is "saved" thereby (Isa. 45:22). The second step or stage in the soul's journey unto the beatific vision occurs in its practical *sanctification*, which is a gradual process and progressive experience, under which, beholding in the glass of the Law and the Gospel the glory of the Lord, he is changed into "the same image" by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

Third, it is *at death* the believer approaches much nearer the goal so longed for by his soul, for then he not only leaves this world behind, but he is forever done with sin—he

leaves *it* behind too. Welcome release! How that should reconcile him to the putting off of the body! Passing strange is it from the spiritual side of things—though not so from the natural—that the great majority of Christians are as reluctant to leave this world as are the godless, and view with such trepidation the valley of the shadows. Not only is there nothing whatever to be feared in death to the saints—for Christ has extracted its sting—but there is much in it and its attendants that should make it welcome. Sin—that plague of the renewed heart, that monster which is the cause of all our spiritual grief, that vile thing which is ever marring and interrupting our communion with God—will be done with forever. And being done with sin, there will be *an end* to all physical sufferings and mental sorrows. The entail of the first Adam will be finally severed. But this—grand as it is—is but the negative side; consider the positive.

As soon as the Lord is pleased to dismiss any of His saints from the body by death, they are *immediately admitted into Heaven*, and there they behold His glory. Christ's glory is great in the estimation of His people: they have a spiritual perception of it now, but they will have a much greater and grander view of it when removed from this vale of tears, when they are "absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Therefore was it that the Apostle exclaimed, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is *far better*" (Phil. 1:23). Heaven is the habitation of all saints upon their departure from this world, and then they shall enjoy a fellowship with God through Christ which greatly exceeds any they are capable of now. At best our present communion with Christ is but feeble and fitful; but it will not be so always: in the intermediate state the redeemed are with Christ and receive wondrous "revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7) from Him.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" (Rev. 14:13): not "shall be," but "blessed *are*" they—a Divine declaration which gives the lie to that Christ-dishonouring idea which supposes that at death the souls of believers, in common with unbelievers, pass into a state of oblivion. Yes, "blessed" beyond words are they who die in the Lord, for not only do they leave all sin behind forever, but they are "with Christ in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). True, that blessedness falls short of the final state, nevertheless, in various respects it approximates thereto. There is much in common for believers between death and resurrection, and after the resurrection, though the latter excels the former. Both are termed a "crown" (Rev. 2:10—immediately after death; 2 Tim. 4:8—at the latter day), both are a being "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8; 1 Thess. 4:17). Both are termed a "sight of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:6, 7)—while in the body we walk by faith, but when absent from the body and present with the Lord, walking by sight is necessarily implied: 1 John 3:2.

Yet great and grand as is the blessedness of the dead in Christ, that which they will enjoy in the resurrection and eternal state shall far surpass it. To the question "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" the inspired answer is returned, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:35-37, 42-44). What a difference are we here taught to expect between the present and the future state of our bodies. From one view, the body that rises is the same that died—personal identity is preserved; but from another view, it is radically changed.

More than a hint of that marvelous change of the believer's body is found in the record of Christ's transfiguration, when "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2), and when after His own resurrection He passed through closed doors (John 20:19); for it is written that He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:21). And if such a great and grand change is awaiting the believer's body in the resurrection state, who can conceive the change *of the soul* when it is "glorified?" Who is so bold as to define the limits of the soul's capacities and capabilities when freed from the burden of sin and made like Christ (1 John 3:2)? Who can estimate the excellency of a glorified soul's operations in connection with Divine things?!—A.W.P.

Unbelief.

This sin may be called the white devil, for it oftentimes, in its mischievous doings in the soul, shows as if it were a little angel of light; yea, it acteth like a counselor of Heaven. Therefore, a little discourse of this evil disease.

First, it is that sin, above all others, that hath some show of *reason* in its attempts; for it keeps the soul from Jesus Christ by pretending its present unfitness and unpreparedness—as a lack of more sense of sin, want of more repentance, want of more humility, want of a more broken heart.

Second, it is the sin that most suiteth with *the conscience*. The conscience of the coming sinner tells him that he hath nothing good, that he stands indictable for ten thousand talents, that he is a very ignorant, and hard-hearted sinner, unworthy to be taken notice of by Jesus Christ; and “will you,” says unbelief, “in such a case as you now are, presume to come to Jesus Christ?”

Third, it is the sin that most suiteth with our sense of *feeling*. The coming sinner feels the workings of sin, of all manner of sin and wretchedness in his flesh; he also feels the wrath and judgment of God due to sin, and often times staggers under it. “Now,” says unbelief, “you may see you have no grace, for that which works in you is corruption. You may also perceive that God doth not love you, because the sense of His wrath abides upon you; therefore, how can you have the face to come to Jesus Christ?”

Fourth, it is that sin, above all others, that most suiteth the *wisdom of our flesh*. The wisdom of our flesh thinks it prudent to question awhile, to stand back awhile, to hearken to both sides awhile, and not to be rash, sudden, or unadvised in too bold or presuming upon Jesus Christ; and this wisdom unbelief falls in with.

Fifth, it is the sin, above all others, that is continually whispering the soul in the ear with *mistrusts* of the faithfulness of God in keeping His promise to them that come to Jesus Christ for life. It also suggests mistrusts about Christ’s willingness to receive and save; and no sin can do this so artificially as unbelief.

Sixth, it is also that sin which is always at hand to *enter an objection* against this or that promise which by the Spirit of God is brought to our hearts to comfort us; and if the poor coming sinner is not aware of it; it will, by some exaction, slight, trick, or cavil, quickly wrest from him the promise again, and he shall but little benefit of it.

Seventh, it is that, above all other sins, that *weakens* our prayers, our faith, our love, our diligence, our hope, and expectations; it even taketh the heart away from God in duty.

Lastly, this sin, as I have said even now, appears in the soul with so many *sweet pretences* to safety and security, that it is, as it were, counsel sent from Heaven, bidding the soul be wise, wary, considerate, well-advised, and to take heed of too rash a venture upon believing. “Be sure first that God loves you; take hold of no promise until you are forced by God unto it; neither be you sure of your salvation; doubt it still, though the testimony of the Lord has been confirmed in you; live not by faith, but by sense; and when you can neither see nor feel, then fear and mistrust, doubt and question all.” This is the counsel of unbelief, which is so covered over with specious pretences that the wisest Christian can hardly shake off these reasons.—John Bunyan, 1670.

The Doctrine of Sanctification.

11. *Its Instrument.*

Having presented an outline in our last article on sanctification, of the part which *faith* plays in sanctification, we shall now endeavour, under God, to offer consolation unto some of our sin-burdened, doubt-harassed, Satan-tormented brethren and sisters in Christ. "Comfort ye, comfort ye *My people*, saith your God" (Isa. 40:1). And why? Because God's children are *the most deeply distressed* people on the face of the earth! Though at times they experience a peace which passeth all understanding, revel in that love which passeth knowledge, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, yet for the most part their souls are much cast down, and fears, bondage, groans, constitute a large part of their experience. They may for a brief season be regaled by the wells and palm trees of Elim, but most of their lives are lived in the "great howling wilderness" (Deut. 32:10), so that they are often constrained to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away, and be at rest."

Such a distressful experience causes many of the regenerate to very seriously doubt whether they are real Christians. They cannot harmonize their gloom with the light-heartedness they behold in religious professors all round them. No, and they need not wish to. The superficial and apostate religion of our day is producing nothing but a generation of flighty and frothy characters, who scorn anything sober, serious, and solemn, and who sneer at that which searches, strips, and abases into the dust. God's Isaacs must not expect to be understood and still less appreciated by the "mocking" Ishmaels (Gen. 21:9), for though these dwell for a while in Abraham's household, yet a different mother has borne them. Unless the sin-distressed and fear-tormented believer is "as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Psa. 102:7), then he will have to say "mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are *against* me" (Jer. 12:9)—there is no oneness, no fellowship.

Many of God's dear children are like Asaph. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily" (Psa. 73:2-8). As Asaph beheld the prosperity of these people he was staggered, supposing that God was with *them* and had deserted *him*.

The *spiritual counterpart* of this is found in modern Laodicea. There is a generation of professing Christians who appear to enjoy great religious "prosperity." They have considerable knowledge of the letter of Scripture; they are experts in "rightly dividing the Word"; they have great light upon the mysteries of prophecy; and are most successful as "soul winners." They have no ups and downs in their experience, no painful twistings and turnings, but go on in a straight course with light hearts and beaming countenances. Providence smiles upon them, and they never have a doubt as to their acceptance in Christ. Satan does not trouble them, nor is indwelling sin a daily plague to them. And the poor Christian, conscious of his weakness, his ignorance, his poverty, his vileness, is sorely tempted to be "envious" of them, for they seem to have "more than heart could

wish," while the longings of *his* heart are denied him, and that which he pursues so eagerly continues to elude his grasp.

Ah, but note well some of the other characteristics of this "prosperous" company. "*Pride compasseth them about as a chain*" (v. 6). Yes, they are utter strangers to humility and lowliness. They are pleased with their peacock feathers, knowing not that God views the same as "filthy rags." "Concerning oppression: they speak loftily" (v. 8). God's children *are* oppressed, sorely oppressed, by their corruptions, by their innumerable failures, by the hidings of the Lord's face, by the accusations of Satan. They are oppressed over the workings of unbelief, over the coldness of their hearts, over the insincerity of their prayers, over their vain imaginations. But these Laodiceans, "speak loftily," ridiculing such things, and prate of *their* peace, joy, and victory. "Therefore His people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them" (v. 10), for as *real* Christians listen to the "testimonies" of the "higher life" people, they conclude that it would be the height of presumption to regard themselves as Christians at all.

"Behold, these are the ungodly," continues Asaph, "who prosper in the (religious) world; they increase in riches" (Psa. 73:12). And as he was occupied with them, contrasting his own sad lot, a spirit of discontent and petulance took possession of him. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain" (v. 13)—what are all my past diligence and efforts worth? I am not "prosperous" like these professors: I do not have their graces or attainments, I do not enjoy the peace, assurance, and victory *they* have. Far from it: "For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (v. 14). Ah, *that* was holy Asaph's experience, my reader; is it *yours*? If so, you are in godly company, much as the present-day Pharisees may despise you.

Then the Psalmist was checked, and realised his wrong in giving way to such wicked sentiments. "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of Thy children" (v. 15). Yes, the generation of God's children *will be* offended when they hear one of their brethren saying it is "vain" to use the appointed means of grace because those have not issued in deliverance from indwelling sin. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I *their end*. Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down into destruction" (vv. 16-18). How unspeakably solemn! Instead of these prosperous Laodiceans having a spiritual experience high above those whose hearts plague them "all the day long," they were total strangers to real spirituality. Instead of being among the chief favourites of God, they had been set by Him in the "slippery places" of error and false religion, to be eventually "cast down into destruction."

What a warning is this, my sin-harassed brother, *not to envy* those who are strangers to the plague of their own hearts, who groan not "being burdened" (2 Cor. 5:4) and who cry not "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24). Envy not the proud Laodiceans, who are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" and know not that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Instead, be thankful if God has made you "*poor in spirit*"—feeling that you are *destitute* of every spiritual grace and fruit; and to "mourn" over your barrenness and waywardness; for none other than Christ pronounces such characters "blessed." And why should you think it strange if you are among that little company who are *the most distressed people* on earth? Have you not been called into fellowship with Christ, and was *He* not "The Man of Sorrows" while He tabernacled in this world? If He sorrowed and suffered so much in endur-

ing the penalty of sin, will you complain because God is now making you groan daily under the felt workings of the power of sin?

The fact of the matter is that very much of that which now passes for sanctification is nothing but a species of pharisaism, which causes its deluded votaries to thank God that they are not like other men; and sad it is to find many of the Lord's people adding to their miseries by grieving over how far *they* come behind the lofty attainments which they imagine these boasters have reached unto. A true and God-honouring "Christian testimony," my reader, does not consist in magnifying *self*, by telling of attainments and excellencies which, with apparent humility, are ascribed to Divine enabling. No indeed, very far from it. That "witness" which is most honouring to the Lord is one which acknowledges His amazing grace and which magnifies His infinite patience in continuing to bear with such an ungrateful, hard-hearted, and unresponsive wretch.

The great mistake made by most of the Lord's people is in hoping to discover *in themselves* that which is to be found in Christ alone. It is this, really, which causes them to become so envious and discontented when they behold the spurious holiness of some and the carnal attractiveness of others. There is such a thing as "the goodness" of the flesh, which is "as the flower of the field" (Isa. 40:6), yet as the very next verse tells us "the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." But so easily are the simple deceived today they often mistake such "goodness" for godliness. Why, my reader, a man (or woman) in his personal make up may be as meek and tractable as a lamb, he may be constitutionally as kind and grateful as a spaniel, and he may be temperamentally as cheerful as a lark; yet there is not a grain of *grace* in these natural qualities. On the other hand, the Christian, in his natural temperament, is likely to be as gloomy as an owl or as wild as a tiger; yet that does not disprove grace within him.

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the *foolish* things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the *weak* things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and *base* things of the world, and things which are *despised*, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not (non-entities, *ciphers*), to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29). If this passage were *really* received at its face value, many of God's sin-afflicted and doubting children would find the key that unlocks much which is bewildering and grievous in their experience.

In His determination to magnify His sovereign grace, God has selected many of *the very worst* of Adam's fallen race to be the everlasting monuments of His fathomless mercy—those whom Luther was wont to designate "The Devil's riff-raffs." This is very evident too from "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the *poor*, and the *maimed*, and the *halt*, and the *blind*" (Luke 14:21)—the most *unlikely* ones as guests for a royal feast, the waifs and strays of society! There are thousands of moral, upright, amiable people who are never effectually called by the Spirit; whereas moral perverts, thieves, and awful-tempered ones are regenerated. When such are born again they still have vile inclinations, horrible dispositions, fiery tempers which are very hard to control, and are subject to temptations that many of the unregenerate have no first-hand acquaintance with.

Hundreds more of God's children, whose animal spirits are much quieter by nature and whose temperament is more even and placid, are plagued by a spirit of pride and self-

righteousness, which is just as hateful in the sight of God as moral degeneracy is to respectable worldlings. Now unless the thoughts of such are formed from the Scriptures, they are sure to entertain erroneous conceptions which will destroy their peace and fill them with doubts and fears, for upon a fuller discovery and clearer sight of the sea of corruption within, they will conclude they have never passed from death unto life. But to call into question our regeneration because we fail to obtain deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, is a great mistake: the new birth neither removes nor refines the flesh, but is the reception of a nature that feels sin to be an intolerable burden, and that yearns after holiness above everything else.

If I have really come to Christ as a leprous and bankrupt sinner, utterly despairing of self-help, and have put my trust in the sufficiency of His sacrifice, then Scripture affirms that God has made Christ to be *sanctification to me* (1 Cor. 1:30) and that I have received a spirit of holiness from Him. Now *faith* accepts this blessed fact notwithstanding an ocean of corruption and the continued raging of sin within. My peace of mind will, then, very largely depend upon *faith's continued apprehension* of the perfect salvation which God has provided for His people in Christ, and which in Heaven they shall enjoy in their own persons. After the sinner has come to Christ savingly, the Holy Spirit gives him a much fuller discovery of his vileness, and makes him a hundredfold more conscious of how much there is in his heart that is opposed to God than ever he realised previously; and unless *faith* be daily in exercise, the activities of the flesh will slay his assurance—instead, they ought to drive him closer and closer to Christ.

O my Christian reader, what a difference it would make were you to steadily realise the truth that, every temptation you encounter, every defeat you suffer, every distressing experience you pass through, is a call and a challenge for the exercise of *faith*. You complain that you are still the subject of sin, that it cleaves to you as the flesh does to your bones, that it mixes with your duties and defiles every act you perform. You often feel that you are nothing but sin. When you attempt to walk with God, inward evil rises up and stops you. When you read His Word or endeavour to pray, unbelieving thoughts, carnal imaginations, worldly lusts, seek to possess your soul. You strive against them; but in vain. Instead of improvement, things grow worse. You beg of God for humility, and pride rises higher; you cry to Him for more patience, but apparently His ear is closed. Ah, you are now learning the painful truth that in your flesh dwelleth “no good thing.”

Yes, but what is a poor soul to do in such a harrowing case? How is it possible for him to preserve *any* peace in his conscience? When the believer is so sorely attacked by sin and Satan, how is he to defend himself? Nothing but *faith* in the sure Word of God can keep him from sinking into abject despair. This is the very time for him to maintain his trust in the sufficiency of Christ's blood and the excellency of His imputed righteousness. His faith is now being tried by the fire that it may come forth as gold. It is by such experiences *the genuineness* of his faith is put to the proof. The believer is cast into the furnace that faith may conflict with unbelief, and though he will be hard put to it, yet victory is sure. The proof of his victory is faith's perseverance (amid a thousand waverings) unto the end. Remember, my reader, that the test of perseverance is not how we act in the face of success, but how we conduct ourselves under a long series of defeats. “For a just man falleth seven times, and *riseth up again*” (Prov. 24:16).

Let it not be overlooked that we can no more take our place before God now as accepted worshippers without a perfect holiness, than we can enter Heaven without it; but

that perfect Heaven is to be found *in Christ* alone—the practical holiness of the Christian is, at present, but a very, very faint reflection of it. The more I feel my utter unworthiness and total unfitness to approach unto God and call upon Him in my *own* name, the more thankful I should be for the Mediator, and the unspeakable privilege of calling upon God in *Christ's* name. And it is faith which counts the glorious fact that the thrice holy God *can* exercise His grace and goodness toward one so vile as I, and that, consistently with His majesty and justice—Christ has honoured the Law infinitely more than my sins dishonour it. One who feels that, as a Christian, he is “an utter failure,” and who is conscious of his continued abuse of God's mercies, can only draw nigh to God with confidence as he *exercises faith* in the infinite merits of Christ.

As we stated at the beginning, our principal object in writing this article is, under God, to comfort His sin-distressed, doubt-harassed, Satan-tormented people. We are not unmindful that among the ranks of nominal Christians there are, on the one hand, many “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth” (2 Tim 3:5, 7), who will regard as highly “dangerous” much of what we have said; while on the other hand, there are “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 1:4), who are likely to abuse the same by adopting it as an intellectual opinion, from which they may derive peace in their defiance of God. Yet notwithstanding these likely eventualities, we shall not withhold a needful portion of the children's bread.

Those who claim to have received the “second blessing” and to be “entirely sanctified” in themselves, have never seen their hearts in the light of God. Those who boast of their sinless perfection are deceived by Satan, and “the truth is not in them” (1 John 1:8). Two things ever go together in the experience of a genuine believer: a growing discovery of the vileness of self, and a deepening appreciation of the preciousness of Christ. There is no solid ground for the believer to rest upon till he see that Christ has *fully* answered to God for him. In exact proportion to his *faith* will be his peace and joy. “Ye are *complete* in Him” (Col. 2:10): believers now possess a perfect holiness in their Covenant-Head, but at present they are far from being perfect in the grace which flows to them from Him. God honours and rewards that faith which is exercised upon our holiness in Christ: not necessarily by subduing sin or granting victory over it, but by enabling its possessor to continue cleaving to Christ as his only hope.

O my Christian reader, be content to be *nothing in yourself*, that *Christ* may be your ALL. O to truly say “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Growth in grace is a being brought more and more off from self-complacency and self-dependency, to an entire reliance upon Christ and the free grace of God through Him. This temper is begun in the believer at regeneration, and like the tiny mustard seed, it at last develops into a large tree. As the Christian grows in grace he finds himself to be increasingly full of wants, and further off than ever from being worthy to receive the supply of them. More and more the spirit of a beggar possesses him. As the Spirit grants more light, he has a growing realisation of the beauty of holiness, of what Christ is entitled to from him; and there is a corresponding self-loathing and grief because he is so unholy in himself and fails so miserably to render unto Christ His due.

Fellowship with God and walking in the light as He is in the light, so far from filling the Christian with self-satisfaction, causes him to groan because of his darkness and filthiness—the clearer light now making manifest what before was unperceived. Nothing

is more perilous to the soul than that we should be occupied with *our* achievements, victories, enjoyments. If Paul was in danger of being exalted by the abundance of the revelations vouchsafed him, can the danger be less of *our* being puffed up with thoughts of spiritual progress, spiritual conquests, spiritual excellencies? And yet the cherishing of *such* thoughts is the very thing which is now being increasingly encouraged by the religious quacks of the day. No matter what fellowship with Christ be enjoyed, what growth in grace be made, it will ever remain true that “we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened” (2 Cor. 5:4).

So far from what we have said in this article encouraging a real Christian to entertain low views of sin, it is only in the vital and experimental knowledge of the same that a life of holiness begins. Nothing will cause a renewed soul to hate sin so much as a realisation of God’s *grace*; nothing will move him to mourn so genuinely over his sins as a sense of Christ’s dying love. It is *that* which breaks his heart: the realisation that there is so much in him that is opposed to Christ. But a life of holiness is a life of faith (the heart turning daily to Christ), and the fruits of faith are genuine repentance, true humility, praising God for His infinite patience and mercy, pantings after conformity to Christ, praying to be made more obedient, and continually confessing our disobedience. Day-dreaming about complete deliverance from indwelling sin, seeking to persuade ourselves that the flesh is becoming less active, cannot counter-balance the humbling reality of our present state; but our corruptions should not quench a true Gospel hope.

Those who have read the previous articles on this series cannot suppose that we have any design to lower the standard of the Christian life, or to speak peace to deluded souls who “profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16). Some indeed may charge us with encouraging light views of the sinfulness of sin, yet it must be remembered that the grand truth of Divine *grace* has ever appeared “dangerous” to mere human wisdom. A worldly moralist must think it subservient of the very foundations of virtue to proclaim to men, *without regard* to what they have done, and *without stipulation* as to what they are to do, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be *saved*.” If I believed *that*, says the unrenewed man, I would take my fill of sin, without fear or remorse. Ah, but a saving faith from God is always accomplished by a principle which hates sin and loves holiness; and the greatest grief of its possessor is that its aspirations are so often thwarted. But those very thwartings are *the testings of faith*, and should daily drive us back to Christ for fresh cleansings. Lord, increase our faith.—A.W.P.

Our Annual Letter.

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect (or “complete”) before God” (Rev. 3:2). This is the verse which is impressed upon the editor as he takes up his pen to round off another year’s work: and a suitable one it surely is, for it not only utters a timely exhortation, but sets forth that at which we are seeking to aim. First, “be watchful” against the workings of pride and self-exaltation: against the mingling of error with Divine Truth.

Second, “and strengthen the things which remain.” This is, primarily, a ministerial injunction, being addressed to the public and official servant; though, of course, it has a wider application to all God’s people. Was there ever a time when the watchmen on Zion’s walls more needed to set themselves unto this work? What a sad state things are in, even compared with those of fifty years ago; how many voices crying in the wilderness are now silent! How many candlesticks have been removed! But mourning over this will not help anyone: sighing over departed blessings must not be allowed to paralyze present endeavour—“the things which *remain*” are what demand attention and help. “Which are ready to die”: this is what gives point to the exhortation—it is a matter of pressing urgency. May God deliver us all from a spirit of fatalistic inertia.

Third, “for I have *not* found thy works *complete* before God.” This is what most impresses the writer in connection with the present situation. Each of the leading denominations maintain certain aspects of the Truth—some more than others; but we know of none which contends earnestly for *the whole* of Faith once delivered to the saints. A few are faithfully pressing the requirements of God’s Law, but very feebly herald the Gospel of His grace; whereas others whose Gospel trumpet gives forth no uncertain sound, totally reject the Law as the believer’s rule of life. A few are maintaining the “five points of Calvinism,” but repudiate human responsibility. Some make much of Christ, but are silent about the work of the Spirit. Some are wrapped in speculations about the fulfillment of prophecy, yet place no emphasis on a godly walk. There is *incompleteness*, lack of symmetry, one-sidedness on every hand today. O what a need there now is for a full-orbed and balanced presentation of the Truth.

What are the things which need “strengthening”? A long list might be enumerated. First, a clear setting forth of the basic facts of God’s sovereignty and man’s accountability. Second, of the imperative necessity and varied operations of the Holy Spirit in connection with salvation. Third, of a personal and experimental knowledge of the Truth, a heart-acquaintance with God, a *felt* realization of Gospel verities—in contrast from much head-knowledge and lip-profession. Fourth, what a life of faith consists of, in contrast from much fanaticism now posing as faith. Fifth, a comforting of those who mourn over their corruptions and who, in their feelings, are “ready to die” because they greatly fear that sin has complete dominion over them. Sixth, magnifying the Law as God’s unchanging standard of conduct, with particular emphasis upon keeping holy the Sabbath Day. Seventh, insisting on Gospel *fruit* as the evidence of regeneration. In many sections of Christendom most of these are now “ready to die.”

Not a few readers of “Studies” sat regularly under our oral ministry in days gone by, and happy and intimate fellowship was enjoyed together. Many others whom we have not met personally have received this magazine for upwards of ten years, and considerable correspondence has passed between them and us, and a bond unites us to them which is far closer than that which exists between editor and subscriber: it is one of love and spiri-

tual friendship. They are deeply interested in this little work, and look for a yearly report of its progress. Excerpts from the letters of readers published in the "Welcome Tidings" of the July issue, gave intimation that the God of All Grace is still pleased to bless these pages unto one and another of His scattered, needy, and tried people. We feel that we must quote here from one other letter:

"Greetings to you and Mrs. Pink in the name of Him of whom the Holy Spirit caused the Apostle to write, 'For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds' (Heb. 12:3). This Scripture, together with your most helpful comments on the same, was a great encouragement to me lately. Although I read your exposition of it with much interest over a year ago, a very heartfelt message was impressed upon me as the three of us recently re-read and meditated upon the article [many readers testify to a greater blessing at the second reading: *preserve* your copies and go over them again—editor]. I received a rebuke, for I realized how I had failed to 'consider Him.'

"I had become so occupied with my own trials and problems that they obscured my spiritual vision, so that I was *not* 'looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of faith.' My faith therefore became weak and wavering. I was so harassed by Satan that I seemed to doubt my salvation. No message or blessing could I get from the Word; and when engaged in prayer, Heaven seemed as brass over my head. I became so 'wearied and faint' in my mind that I was near giving up the race. But God in His great love and tender mercy to such an unworthy sinner lifted me from this low and perilous state and your article was most helpful to me. Will you pray that this Scripture may be used to His glory in keeping me from plunging again into such awful depths of sin and despair?

"Later, in reading your February, 1936, 'Sanctification' article I was struck with Hebrews 13:12 and your statement, 'O what a difference it makes to the peace and joy of the soul once the child of God *firmly grasps* the blessed truth that a perfect sanctification is his *present* and inalienable portion, that God has made Christ to be unto him sanctification as well as righteousness.' This was like a *reviving cordial* to me, and it seemed as though never before had I understood the wonderful truth of our sanctification by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. I wanted to tell you these things that you might see the Lord is blessing your work of faith and labour of love, and that it might encourage your heart." Rich recompense is this: the Lord is very gracious in sending in to us, frequently, such cheering words along the way. O that our hearts might be more truly humbled by His favours. Alas, pride is every ready to puff us up by the very things which should lay us in the dust.

A Complete decade has now passed since we were led to remove the subscription-price from this magazine, looking unto the Lord to move the readers to voluntarily contribute unto the expenses of publication. Nor has He disappointed us. For the tenth successive year we are privileged to report that, after paying every bill promptly, there is a substantial credit-balance on hand. During 1936 God has graciously moved His stewards to contribute more freely than ever, so that we have a larger amount than usual to carry forward to next year. Surely this is cause for fervent praise. We are thankful that an increasing number of readers feel it a duty to help maintain this printed testimony. We are connected with no denomination, have no "Board" or "Committee" behind us, and receive no "collections" from any "churches." The living God never fails those who are enabled to trust Him fully. Lord, *increase our faith*.

We are also thankful to say that the Lord has again given us sufficient readers to justify the publishing of "Studies" for another year. This has largely been made possible by more of the friends *co-operating* with us in bringing this magazine to the notice of those likely to welcome it; and by an increasing number allowing us to send them two or three copies of each issue, using the extra ones to pass on to different people, thereby seeking to secure new regular readers. Surely there are many others who could help in this way! If *you* receive blessing, under God, from these pages, are there not *others*—lonely, starved, tried souls—to whom you could introduce this little monthly messenger? Bed-ridden Christians, those in isolated places cut off from preaching, poor widows *unable* to purchase literature, are those we long to reach, providing they have an appetite for spiritual things.

We are very diffident from writing about ourselves, lest in appearing to magnify the grace and patience of God we are but seeking to gain a reputation of being very humble. Spiritually speaking our experience is an up and down, in and out one, with faith and unbelief ever alternating. Not a day passes that we do not have to go to the Throne of Grace for *mercy*. In our outward circumstances things are now more pleasant for us than for years past; but inwardly sin appears to be raging more fiercely. For another 12 months each of us has been favoured with excellent health. Since the Homegoing of our parents our temporal needs are fully provided for, and all that is sent in to us we apply to the expenses of "Studies." We do not expect to engage again in any oral ministry, but are devoting the energies of our remaining days to the Magazine and the correspondence which it entails—we have no "office" help.

The future remains with God: our times are in His hands. An increasing number of our readers have been called to leave this earthly scene during 1936, and it is no easy matter to secure interested ones to fill their places. Our greatest problem continues to be the locating of those who welcome a publication of this type. Many will read nothing which is not published by *their* denomination; others crave that which is light and frothy or sensational, and resent anything that searches and strips. Not a few are finding the demands of modern business increasingly trying, but time spent in secret with God and in reading that which is a help to the soul is never lost; and it still remains true that "Where there is a will, there is a way." No one can afford to neglect his *eternal* interests. Give more time to reading spiritual literature on the Sabbath Day, and less in running around to so many meetings.

Again we have to reluctantly remove hundreds of names from our mailing list: those whose silence intimates they are not really interested. If genuinely unable to contribute anything towards publishing expenses, and you have been helped spiritually by this year's issues, *write us*, and we will *gladly* send the "Studies" to you next year. The poor of the flock are more than welcome, but we will not knowingly be a party to the dishonesty of those seeking something for nothing. The 1936 bound volume is now ready; 4/- (one dollar) post paid. We also have some of the 1935 volumes left: the two for 7/6 post paid. Quite a few of our readers give away their loose copies at the end of the year, and purchase a bound volume for permanent use and reference.

But let our closing thoughts return to the passage with which we opened. Were we engaged in oral ministry, this would be one of our texts; as these columns now constitute our only pulpit, we have to do our sermonizing through their medium. "Be watchful," dear reader. Watchful, of the state of your soul, of those things that hinder a growth in

grace, against lapsing into a prayerless condition. “Be watchful” of your associations, against being imposed upon by frothy professors. Seek no familiarity with those who are not God-fearing, humble, and meek; avoid the flippant, talkative, and boastful. Above all “Be watchful” of displeasing the Lord, and delay not to confess your sins when conscious of disobedience.

“And strengthen the things which remain.” Your own soul needs “strengthening” by more regularly feeding on the Word itself. Good books have their place, spiritual periodicals are not to be despised, sitting under sound preaching is a holy privilege; but none of these must supplant first-hand reading of and meditating upon the Scriptures—a portion *every* morning and evening. Those servants of God which still “remain” need “strengthening” *by your prayers*: let not a day pass without your remembering them at the Throne of Grace and begging for them fresh supplies of the Spirit. Your brethren and sisters in Christ need “strengthening”: would not some of them be aided by your sending this magazine, and then drop them a line asking them to read it because it has been a means of blessing to you? May the Lord graciously bless both reader and writer, preserving from all evil, and working in and through us that which is well pleasing in His sight. With loving greeting, Yours by God’s abounding mercy.—A.W. and V.E. Pink.

