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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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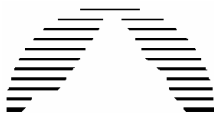
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<i>1. Introduction</i>	

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

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A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR

This is our desire both for our readers and for ourselves. But the mere wishing or desiring of it will not bring the same to pass. What more is necessary? Only God can grant us prosperity either spiritual or temporal, and we must submit to his good pleasure. True, but He is not capricious in this. Prosperity or the absence of it is not a fortuitous thing, nor is it the product of a blind and inexorable fate. If we enjoy not prosperity the fault is entirely our own, and we are dishonest if we ascribe it solely unto the sovereignty of God. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and *ye would not*" (Isa. 30:15)—had it not been flagrantly dishonest if they attributed their disquietude and fears to the sovereign will of God? "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river" (Isa. 48:18)—then how wicked to charge God with being responsible for their lack of peace.

If we consult the Scriptures we shall find definite teaching on this subject: that there are clearly-revealed laws which *we* must observe, conditions which we are required to meet, if we are to enjoy prosperity. Let us first consider one or two things which *hinder* prosperity. "Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord that ye cannot prosper" (2 Chron. 24:20). Ah, here is the cause of all our troubles; disobedience, for "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Observe how emphatically and absolutely it is expressed: "ye cannot prosper"—a holy God will not place a premium on insubordination. He may suffer "the wicked" to flourish as a green bay tree, for he is like a beast being fattened for the slaughter; but not so with those who profess His name. Disobedience, then, chokes the channel of blessing. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper" (Prov. 28:13). Unconfessed sin in the heart of a believer is like a worm at the root of prosperity. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa. 66:18)—prayer is then futile. Unless we keep short accounts with God we shall not enjoy His smile. Jeremiah 10:21 tells us what prevents "pastors" from prospering: self-sufficiency, failing to be cast entirely upon the Lord.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for *then* shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and *then* thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8). Here is the positive side, the making known the conditions which regulate and determine prosperity, as the repeated "then" plainly intimates. The passage begins at verse 5, and the whole of verses 5-8 should be attentively weighed. Let us first anticipate an objection by asking the question "was it written for his sake alone" (Rom. 4:23)? Undoubtedly those words had a special reference to Joshua himself, yet that they have a wider bearing is clear from other passages, and that they have a general application to God's children today is definitely established by the New Testament. But as some of our readers have come under the influence of those who would rob the Christian of his rightful portion, under the pretext of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth," we must labour the point.

Note then how unhesitatingly David appropriated these words of the Lord to Joshua when he spoke to his son, for he emphatically assured him that if Divine grace enabled him to "keep the Law of the Lord his God" taking heed to "fulfill the statutes and judgments" of it, "*then* shalt thou prosper" (1 Chron. 22:12,13). But more pertinently still, observe how the apostle expressly appropriates the promise of Joshua 1:5 "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" and insists that it belongs equally to the whole household of faith, immediately adding "so that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is *my* Helper" (Heb. 13:5,6). That precious promise of God, then, belongs as truly *to me* as it did to Joshua of old. Are not the needs of believers the same in one age as in another? Is not God affected alike unto all of His children: does He not bear to them the same love? If He would not desert Joshua, He will not desert you! Consequently, if I would ascertain the laws which will determine my prosperity, I must pay attention to those which regulated *his*.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth." It was the Rule given to act by. In Joshua's case it furnished him with Divine authority for his conduct in the governing of Israel. In our case we may give these words a spiritual meaning. God's Word is our appointed food: thus the "mouth" speaks to us of feeding upon it. In verse 6 God says, "Be strong and of a good courage," and in verse 7 adds, "only be thou strong and very courageous that [in order that] thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law." Obedience to God calls for firmness, resolution, boldness. Without it we shall yield unto temptations to compromise, being intimidated by the ridicule and opposition of our fellows. How, then, is this strength and courage to be obtained? By feeding on the Word, being "nourished up in the words of faith" (1 Tim. 4:6), having the Law of the Lord continually in our "mouth." This is the interpretation made by the apostle; appropriate that promise "I will never leave thee" and then, says he, every believer may confidently declare "The Lord is *my* Helper, and I will *not fear* what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6). There is the proof that feeding on the Word imparts strength and courage.

“But thou shalt meditate therein day and night.” Only thus will its injunctions be fixed in the memory: only thus shall we be able to ascertain our duty: only thus shall we discern the rightful application of the Divine precepts to all the varied details of our daily lives. It is entirely our own fault if we be ignorant of God’s “mind” in connection with any situation confronting us. God’s will for us is revealed in His Word, and “a good understanding have all they that do His commandments” (Psa. 111:10). The more I am regulated by the Divine Rule, the more shall I be preserved from the “mistakes” or folly which characterises those who follow a course of self-pleasing. But in order to *do* God’s commandments I must be conversant with them and in order to perceive their breadth and specific application unto any problem or decision confronting me, I must “meditate therein day and night.” Meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. Prosperity eludes the dilatory and careless.

“That thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.” *This* must be the dominating motive and object. God’s Word is to be appropriated and masticated—fed and meditated upon—first and foremost, day in and day out. Not for the purpose of understanding its prophecies or obtaining an insight into its mysteries, but in order to learn God’s will for me, and having learned it to conform thereto. God’s Word is given to us chiefly not to gratify curiosity or to entertain our imagination, but as “a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path” (Psa. 119:105) in this dark world. It is a Rule for us to walk by: it is a heavenly Standard for the regulation of all our conduct. It points out the things to be avoided, the things which would harm us. It tells of the things to be followed and practiced, the things which are for our good, our peace. It contains not only good advice, but is clothed with Divine authority, commanding implicit and unqualified obedience.

“For then—if we feed on the Word, if we constantly meditate upon its precepts and promises, if we render to it entire obedience—shalt thou make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success.” The promise is emphatic, unqualified, sure. If then this new year is not a prosperous one for me the fault is entirely my own: it will be because I have failed to meet the conditions prescribed in the context. Turn to 2 Chronicles 20:20 and see how well Jehoshaphat understood the secret of prosperity. Mark what occasioned the prosperity of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 31:20,21). Compare Job 36:11. Ponder all that precedes the last clause of Psalm 1:3. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man *shall be blessed* in his deed” (James 1:25). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

1. Introduction

Much has been written upon what is usually called "The Lord's Prayer" but which we prefer to term "The Family Prayer," and much upon the High Priestly prayer of Christ in John 17, but very little upon the prayers of the apostles. Personally we know of no book devoted to the same, and except for a booklet on the two prayers of Ephesians 1 and 3 have seen scarcely anything thereon. It is not easy to explain this omission, for one had thought the apostolic prayers had such importance and value for us that they had attracted the attention of those who wrote on devotional subjects. While we very much deprecate the efforts of those who would have us believe the prayers of the Old Testament are obsolete and unfitted to the saints of this dispensation, yet that there is a peculiar suitability unto Christians of the prayers recorded in *the epistles* seems evident. Excepting only the prayers of the Redeemer, in them alone are the praises and petitions specifically addressed unto "the Father," in them alone are they offered in the name of the Mediator, and in them alone do we find the full breathings of the Spirit of adoption.

How blessed it is to hear some aged saint, who has long walked with God and enjoyed intimate communion with Him, pouring out his heart before Him in adoration and supplication. But how much more blessed should we esteem it could we have listened to the utterances of those who had companied with Christ in person during the days when He tabernacled in this scene. And if one of the apostles was still here upon earth what a high privilege we should deem it to hear him engage in prayer! Such a high one, that methinks most of us would be quite willing to go to considerable inconvenience and travel a long distance in order to be thus favoured. And if our desire was granted how closely we would listen to his words, how diligently we should seek to treasure them up in our memories. Well, no such inconvenience, no such journey is required: it has pleased the Holy Spirit to record quite a number of the apostolic prayers for our instruction and satisfaction. Do we evidence our appreciation of such a boon? Have we ever made a list of them and meditated upon their import?

In our preliminary task of surveying and tabulating the recorded prayers of the apostles two things impressed us: one, which at first seems quite surprising, the other which was to be expected. That which is apt to strike us as strange—to some of our readers it may be almost startling—is the book of Acts, which supplies us with most of the information we possess about the apostles, has not a single prayer of theirs in its twenty-eight chapters. Yet a little reflection should show us that this omission is in full accord with the special character of that book, for the Acts is much more historical than devotional, consisting far more of a chronicle of what the Spirit wrought through the apostles than in them. It is the public deeds of Christ's ambassadors which is there made prominent, rather than their private exercises. True, they are shown to be men of prayer, as is seen by: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4), and again and again we behold them engaged in this holy exercise (9:40; 10:9; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8), yet we are not told what they *said*, the nearest approach being 8:15, yet their words are not recorded—we regard the prayer of 1:24 as that of the hundred and twenty, and that of 4:24-30 as that of "their own company."

The second feature which impressed us while contemplating the field which is to be before us, was that the great majority of the recorded prayers of the apostles issued from the heart of *Paul*; and this, as we have said, was really to be expected. If it be asked, why so, several reasons may be returned. He was, preeminently, the apostle unto the Gentiles. Peter, James, and John ministered principally to Jewish believers (Gal. 2:9), and, even in their unconverted days *they* had been accustomed to bow the knee before the Lord. But the Gentiles had come out of heathenism and it was fitting that their spiritual father should also be their devotional exemplar. Moreover, he wrote twice as many epistles as all the other apostles added together, nevertheless there are eight times as many prayers in his epistles as in all of theirs. But chiefly, we call to mind the first thing said of Paul after his conversion; "Behold, he *prayeth*" (Acts 9:11): it is as though that struck the keynote of his subsequent life, that he would be, to an especial degree, marked as a man of prayer.

It is not that the other apostles were devoid of this spirit, for God does not employ prayerless ministers, as He has no dumb children. To "cry day and night unto Him" is given by Christ as one of the distinguishing marks of His elect (Luke 18:7). Yet certain of His servants and some of His saints are permitted to enjoy closer and more constant fellowship with the Lord than others, and such was obviously the case (excepting John) with the man who on one occasion was even caught up into Paradise. A special measure of "grace and supplications" (Zech. 12:10) was vouchsafed him, so that he appears to have been favoured with

a spirit of prayer above even his fellows, which dwelt in him to a remarkable degree. Such was the fervor of his love for Christ and the members of His mystical Body, such was his intense solicitude for their spiritual wellbeing and growth, that there continually gushed from his soul a flow of prayer to God for them, and of thanksgiving on their behalf. If we are permitted to proceed with these expository meditations, many illustrations of what has just been said will come before us, examples of where ebullitions of devotion broke forth in the midst of his doctrinal and practical instructions.

Ere proceeding further it should be pointed out that in this series of articles I do not propose to confine myself to the petitionary prayers of the apostles, but rather to take in a wider range. In Scripture "Prayer" includes much more than making known our requests unto God, and this is something which His people now need reminding of—some of them instructing, in these days of superficiality and ignorance. The very verse that presents to us the privilege of spreading our needs before the Lord emphasises this very thing: "in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6) unless gratitude be expressed for mercies already received and thanks be given for granting us the continued favor of petitioning our Father, how can we expect to obtain His ear and to receive answers of peace. Yet prayer, in its highest and fullest sense, rises above thanksgiving for gifts vouchsafed: the heart is drawn out in contemplating the Giver Himself so that the soul is prostrated before Him in worship and adoration.

In the above paragraph our pen traveled faster than it should have done. Though we ought not to digress from our immediate theme and enter into the subject of prayer in general, yet it should be pointed out that there is yet another aspect which needs to take precedence of those referred to above, namely self-aborrence and confession of our own unworthiness and sinfulness. The soul must solemnly remind itself of *Who it is* that is to be approached, even the Most High, before whom the very seraphim "veil their faces" (Isa. 6:2). Though Divine grace has made the Christian a "son," nevertheless he is still a *creature*, and as such at an infinite and inconceivable distance below the Creator and therefore it is fitting he should both deeply feel and acknowledge this by taking his place before Him in the dust. Moreover, we need to remember *what we are*, namely, not only creatures, but (considered in ourselves) *sinful* creatures and thus there needs to be both a sense and an owning of this as we bow before the Holy One. Only thus can we, with any meaning and reality, plead the mediation and merits of Christ as the ground of our approach.

Thus, broadly speaking, "prayer" takes in or includes confession of sin, petitions for the supply of our needs, and the homage of our hearts unto the Giver Himself. Or, we may say its principal branches are humiliation, supplication and adoration. Hence we hope to embrace within the scope of this series not only passages like Ephesians 1:16-19 and 3:14-21, but also single verses such as 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3. That "blessed be God," is itself a form of prayer is clear from Psalm 100:4, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, bless His name"—other references might be given, but let this suffice. The "incense" which was offered in the tabernacle and temple consisted of various spices compounded together (Exod. 30:34,35), and it was the blending of one with another that made the perfume so fragrant and refreshing. The incense was a type of the intercession of our great High Priest (Rev. 8:3,4) and of the prayers of saints (Mal. 1:11). In like manner there should be a proportioned mingling of humiliation, supplication, and adoration in our approaches to the throne of grace, not one to the exclusion of the others but a blending of them together.

The fact that so many prayers are found in the New Testament epistles calls attention to an important aspect of *ministerial duty*. The preacher's obligations are not fully discharged when he leaves the pulpit, for he needs to water the Seed which he has sown. As this magazine is now being sent to quite a number of young preachers we will enlarge a little upon this point. It has already been seen that the apostles devoted themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" and therein have they left an excellent example to be observed by all who follow them in the sacred vocation. Observe the order, and not only observe but heed and practice the same. The most laborious and carefully-prepared sermon is likely to fall unctionless on the hearers unless it has been born out of travail of soul before God. Unless the sermon be the product of earnest prayer we must not expect it to waken the spirit of prayer in those who hear it. As we have pointed out, Paul mingled supplications with his instructions. It is our privilege and duty to retire to the secret place after we leave the pulpit and beg God to write His Word on the hearts of those who have listened to us, to prevent the Enemy snatching away the Seed, to so bless our efforts that they may bear fruit to His eternal praise.

Luther was wont to say "There are three things that go to the making of a successful preacher: supplication, meditation, and tribulation." This was taken down by one of his students from his "Table talks." We know not what elaboration the great Reformer made, but suppose he meant that, prayer is necessary to

bring the preacher into a suitable frame to handle Divine things and to endue him with power; that meditation on the Word is essential in order to supply him with material for his message; and that tribulation is required as ballast for his vessel, for the minister of the Gospel needs trials to keep him humble, as the apostle was given a thorn in the flesh that he might not be unduly exalted by the abundance of the revelations granted to him. Prayer is the appointed medium of receiving spiritual communications for the instruction of our people. We must be much with God before we can be fitted to go forth and speak in His name. The Colossians were reminded that their master was “always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Could your church be truthfully told that of *you*?

But let it not be thought that this marked characteristic of the epistles points a lesson for preachers only. Far from it. These epistles are addressed to God’s children at large, and everything in them is both needed by and suited to their Christian lives. Believers too should pray much not only for themselves but for *all* their brethren and sisters in Christ, and especially according to these apostolic models, petitioning for the particular blessings they specify. We have long been convinced there is no better way—no more practical, valuable, and effective way—of expressing solicitude and affection for our fellow saints than by bearing them up before God in the arms of our faith and love. It is by studying these prayers in the epistles and pondering them clause by clause that we may learn more clearly what blessings we should desire for ourselves and others—what spiritual gifts and graces we most need to ask for. The very fact that these prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have been placed on permanent record in the Sacred Volume intimates that the particular favors are to be sought and obtained from God.

We will conclude these preliminary and general observations by calling attention to a few of the more definite features of the apostolic prayers. Observe then, *to Whom* these prayers are addressed. While there is not uniformity of expression but rather appropriate variety in this matter, yet the most frequent manner in which the Deity is addressed therein is as: “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3); “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3); “the Father of glory” (Eph. 1:17); “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:14). In this we may see of how the holy apostles had heeded the injunction of their Master, for when they requested of Him saying, “Lord, teach us to pray,” He responded thus: “When ye pray, say, our *Father* which art in heaven” (Luke 11:1,2) an example of which He also set before them in John 17:1, 5, 11. This too has been recorded for our learning. We are not unmindful of how many have unlawfully and lightly addressed God as “Father,” yet their abuse does not warrant our non-use of owning this blessed relationship. Nothing is more calculated to warm the heart and give liberty of utterance as a realisation that we are approaching our “Father.” If we have received “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15) let us not quench the same.

Next, we note their *brevity*. The prayers of the apostles are short ones: not some, or even most, but all of them are exceedingly brief, most of them comprised in but one or two verses, and the longest in only seven verses. How this rebukes the lengthy, lifeless and wearisome prayers of many a pulpit. Wordy prayers are usually windy ones. I quote again from Martin Luther, this time from his comments on the Lord’s prayer to simple laymen: “When thou prayest let thy words be few, but thy thoughts and affections many, and above all let them be profound. The less thou speakest the better thou prayest... External and bodily prayer is that buzzing of the lips, that outside babble that is gone through without any attention, and which strikes the ears of men; but prayer in spirit and in truth is the inward desire, the motions, the sighs, which issue from the depths of the heart. The former is the prayer of hypocrites and of all who trust in themselves: the latter is the prayer of the children of God, who walk in His fear.”

Observe too their *definiteness*. Though exceedingly brief yet their prayers are very explicit. There were no vague ramblings or mere generalisations, but specific requests for definite things. How much failure there is at this point. How many prayers have we heard that were so incoherent and aimless, so lacking in point and unity, that when the Amen was reached we could scarcely remember one thing for which thanks had been given or request had been made, only a blurred impression remaining on the mind and a feeling that the supplicant had engaged more in a form of indirect preaching than direct praying. But examine any of the prayers of the apostles and it will be seen at a glance that theirs are like those of their Master’s in Matthew 6:9-13 and John 17—made up of definitive adorations and sharply-defined petitions. There is no moralising and uttering of pious platitudes, but a spreading before God of certain needs and a simple asking for the supply of them.

Consider also *the burden of them*. In the apostolic prayers there is no supplicating God for the supply of temporal needs and (with a single exception) no asking Him to interpose on their behalf in a providential way. Instead, the things asked for are wholly of a spiritual and gracious nature. That the Father may give

unto us the spirit of understanding and revelation in the knowledge of Himself, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened so that we may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power to usward (Eph. 1:17-19). That He would grant us according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19). That our love may abound more and more, that we might be sincere and without offence, and be filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:9-11), walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (Col. 1:10), that we might be sanctified wholly (1 Thess. 5:23).

Note also the *catholicity* of them. Not that it is either wrong or unspiritual to pray for ourselves individually, any more than it is to supplicate for temporal and providential mercies; rather are we directing attention to where the apostles placed all their emphasis. In one only do we find Paul praying for himself, and rarely for particular individuals. His general custom was to pray for the whole Household of Faith. In this he adheres closely to the pattern prayer given us by Christ, and which we like to think of as the *Family* prayer. All its pronouns are in the plural number: "give us" (not only "me"), "forgive us" etc. Accordingly we find the apostle exhorting us to be making "supplication for *all* saints" (Eph. 6:18), and in his prayers he sets us an example of this very thing. He asked that the Ephesian church might "be able to comprehend with *all* saints what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (3:18). What a corrective for self-centeredness! If I am praying for "all saints" I include myself!

Finally, let us point out a striking *omission*. If all the apostolic prayers be read attentively it will be found that in none of them is any place given to that which occupies such prominence in those of Arminians. Not once do we find God asked to save the world or to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. The apostles did not so much as pray for the conversion of the city in which a particular Christian church was located. In this they conformed again to the example set for them by Christ: "I pray not for the world," said He, "but for them which Thou hast given Me" (John 17:9). Should it be objected that the Lord Jesus was there praying only for His immediate apostles or disciples, the answer is that when He extended His prayer beyond them it was not for the world, but only for His believing people unto the end of time: see verses 20, 21. It is true the apostle exhorts that prayers, "be made for all [classes of] men: for kings and all that are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:1)—in which duty many are woefully remiss—yet it is not for their salvation, but "that *we* may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (v. 2). There is much to be learned from the prayers of the apostles. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

13. Ninth Miracle

It seems strange so very few have perceived that a miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 4:42-44, for surely a careful reading of those verses makes it evident that they describe the wonder-working power of the Lord, for no otherwise can we explain the feeding of so many with such a little and then a surplus remaining. It is even more strange that scarcely any appear to have recognised that we have here a most striking foreshadowment of the only miracle wrought by the Lord Jesus which is narrated by all the four Evangelists, namely, His feeding of the multitude from a few loaves and fishes. In all of our reading we have not only never come across a sermon thereon, but so far as memory serves us, not so much as a quotation from or allusion to this striking passage. Thomas Scott dismisses the incident with a single paragraph, and though Matthew Henry is a little fuller, he too says nothing about the supernatural character of it. We wonder how many of our readers, before turning to this article, could have answered the question, Where in the Old Testament is described the miracle of the feeding of a multitude through the hands of a man?

First, *its occasion*. Though there was a "dearth [famine] in the land" (2 Kings 4:38) yet we learn from the first verse of our passage that it was not a total or universal one: some barley had been grown in Baal-shalisha. In this we may perceive how that in wrath the Lord remembers mercy. Even where the crops of an entire country are a complete failure—an exceedingly exceptional occurrence—there is always food available in adjoining lands. Therein we behold an exemplification of God's goodness and faithfulness. Of old He declared "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night *shall not cease*" (Gen. 8:22). Though more than four thousand years have passed since then, each returning one has furnished clear evidence of the fulfillment of that promise—a demonstration both of the Divine veracity and of God's continuous regulation of the affairs of earth. As we have said, it is very rare for there to be a total failure of the crops in any single country, for as the Lord declares "I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon and the piece whereon it rained not withered" (Amos 4:7).

Second, *its contributor*. "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits" (2 Kings 4:42). Let us begin by observing how naturally and artlessly the conduct of this unnamed man is introduced. Here was one who had a heart for the Lord's servant in a time of need, who thought of him in this season of scarcity and distress, and who grudged not to go to some trouble in ministering to him. "Shalisha" adjoined "mount Ephraim" (1 Sam. 9:4) and probably a journey of considerable distance had to be taken in order to reach the prophet. Ah, but there was more behind this man's action than meets the eye: we must look deeper if we are to discover the springs of his deed. It is written "the steps are ordered of the Lord" (Ps. 37:23). And thus it was in the case before us: this man now befriended Elisha because God had worked in him "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). It is only by comparing Scripture with Scripture we can discover the fullness of meaning in any verse.

Ere passing on let us pause and make application unto ourselves of the truth to which attention has just been called. It has an important bearing on each of us, and one which needs the more to be emphasised in this day of practical atheism. The whole trend of things in our evil generation is to be so occupied with what are termed "the laws of Nature," that the operations of the Creator are lost sight of; man and his doings are so eulogised and deified that the hand of God in providence is totally obscured. It should be otherwise with the saint. When some friend comes and ministers to your need, while being grateful to him for the same, look above him and his kindness to the One who has sent him. I may pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" and then, because I am so absorbed with secondary causes and the instruments which He may employ fail to see my Father's hand as He graciously answers my petition. God is the Giver of every temporal as well as spiritual thing, even though He uses human agents in the conveying of them.

"And there came a man from Baal-shalisha." This town was originally called "Shalisha" but the evil power exerted by Jezebel had stamped upon it the name of her false god, as was the case with other places—(compare "Baal-hermon," 1 Chron 5:23). But even in this seat of idolatry there was at least one who feared the Lord, who was regulated by His law, and who had a heart for His servant. This should be a comfort to the saints in a time of such fearful and widespread declension as now obtains. But however dark things may get, and we believe they will yet become much darker before there is any improvement, God will preserve to Himself a remnant. He always has, and He always will. In the antediluvian world there was

a Noah, who by grace was upright in his generations and walked with God. In Egypt, when the name of Jehovah was unknown among the Hebrews, a Moses was raised up, who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." So now there is one here and there as "a voice in the wilderness." Though the name of this man from Shalisha is not given, we doubt not it is inscribed in the Book of Life.

"And there came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits." Again we point out that there is more here than meets the careless eye or is obvious to the casual glance. Other passages which make mention of the "firstfruits" must be compared if we are to learn the deeper meaning of what is here recorded and discover that this man's action was something more than one of thoughtfulness and kindness to Elisha. "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God" (Ex. 23:19—repeats in 34:26). The "firstfruits," then, belonged to the Lord, being an acknowledgment both of His goodness and proprietorship: a fuller and very beautiful passage thereon is found in Deuteronomy 26:1-11. From Numbers 18:8-13 we learn that these became the portion of the priests: "whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they [the people] shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine [Aaron's and his sons] every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it" (v. 13). The same holds good in the rebuilt temple: "the first of all the firstfruits... shall be the priest's" (Ezek. 44:30).

This man from Shalisha then, was, in principle, acting in obedience to the Divine Law. We say "in principle," because it was enjoined that the firstfruits should be taken into "the house of the Lord" and that they became the priest's portion. But this man belonged to the kingdom of Israel and not of Judah: he lived in Samaria and had no access to Jerusalem, and even had he gone there, entrance to the temple had been forbidden. In Samaria there were none of the priests of the Lord, only those of Baal's. But though he rendered not obedience to the letter, he certainly did so in the spirit, for he recognised that these firstfruits were not for his own use; and though Elisha was not a priest he was a prophet, a servant of the Lord. It is for this reason, we believe, that it is said he brought the firstfruits not to "Elisha" but to "the man of God." That designation occurs first in Deuteronomy 33:1 in connection with Moses, and is descriptive not of his character but of his office—one wholly devoted to God, his entire time spent in His service. In the Old Testament it is applied only to the prophets and extra-ordinary teachers: 1 Samuel 2:27, 9:6; 1 Kings 17:18 etc., but in the New Testament it seems to belong to all of God's servants: 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17.

What has been pointed out above should throw light on a problem which is now exercising many conscientious souls and which should provide comfort in these evil days. The situation of many of God's people is now much like that which obtained when our present incident occurred. It was a time of apostasy, when everything was out of order. Such is the present case of Christendom. It is the clear duty of God's people to render obedience to the letter of His Word wherever that is possible, but when it is not they may do so in spirit. Daniel and his fellows could not observe the Passover feast in Babylon, and no doubt that was a sore grief to them. But that very grief signified their desire to observe it, and in such cases God accepts the will for the deed. For many years past this writer and his wife have been unable to conscientiously celebrate the Lord's supper, yet (by grace) we do so in spirit, by remembering the Lord's death for His people in our hearts and minds. "Not forsaking the assembling of *ourselves* together" (Heb. 10:25) is very far from meaning that the sheep of Christ should attend a place where the "goats" preponderate, or where their presence would sanction what is dishonoring to their Master.

Ere passing on we should point out another instructive and encouraging lesson here for the humble saint. As this man from Shalisha, acting in the spirit of God's Law, journeying with his firstfruits to where Elisha was, he could have had no thought in his mind that by this action he was going to be a contributor unto a remarkable miracle. Yet such was actually the case, for those very loaves of his became the means under the wonder-working power of God of feeding a large company of people. And this is but a single illustration of a principle which, by the benign government of God, is of frequent occurrence, as probably most of us have witnessed for ourselves. Ah, my reader, we never know how far-reaching may be the effects and what fruits may issue for eternity from the most inconspicuous act done for God's glory or the good of one of His people. How often has some obscure Christian, in the kindness of his heart, done something or given something which God has been pleased to bless and multiply unto others in a manner and to an extent which never entered his or her mind.

"And brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof." How it appears that it delighted the Holy Spirit to describe this offering in detail. Bearing in mind that a time of serious "dearth" then obtained, may we not see in the varied nature of this gift thoughtfulness and consideration on the part of him that made it. Had the whole of it been made up in the form of "loaves" some of it might have gone moldy before the whole of it was eaten: at best it would need to be consumed quickly: to obviate that, part of the barley was brought in the husk. On the other hand, had

all been brought in the ear time would be required for the grinding and baking thereof, and in the meanwhile the prophet might be famished and fainting. By such a division both disadvantages were prevented. From the whole, we are taught that in making gifts to another or in ministering to his needs we should exercise care in seeing that it is in a form best suited to his requirements. The application of this principle pertains to spiritual things as well as temporal.

Third, *its generosity*. Before noting the use to which Elisha put this offering, let us observe that, gifts sometimes come from the most unexpected quarters. Had this man come from Bethel or Shunem there would be no occasion for surprise, but that one from Baal-shalisha should bring God's servant an offering of his firstfruits was certainly not to be looked for. Ah, does not each of God's servants know something of this experience! If on the one hand some on whose cooperation he had reason to count failed and disappointed him, others who were strangers have befriended him. More than once or twice have the writer and his wife had this pleasant surprise: we cherish their memory, while seeking to forget the contrasting ones. Joseph might be envied and mistreated by his brethren, but he found favor in the eyes of Potiphar. Moses may be despised by the Hebrews, but he received kindly treatment in the house of Jethro. Rather than Elijah should starve by the brook Cherith, the Lord commanded the ravens to feed him. Our supplies are sure, though at times they may come from strange quarters.

"And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat" (v. 42). In the preceding miracle this same trait is manifest: nothing is there said of Elisha partaking of the pottage, nor even of the young prophets in his charge, but rather "the people." Such liberality will not go unrewarded by God, for He has promised "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38). Such was the case here, for the very next thing recorded after his "Pour out for the people that they may eat" (v. 41) is the receiving of these twenty loaves. And what use does he now make of them? His first thought was not for himself, but for others. We must not conclude from the silence of this verse that the prophet failed either to perceive the hand of God in this gift or that he neglected to return thanks unto Him. Had the Scriptures given a full and detailed account of such matters, they had run into many volumes instead of being a single one. According to the law of analogy we are justified in concluding that he did both. Moreover, what follows shows plainly that his mind was stayed upon the Lord.

The situation which confronted Elisha is one that in principle has often faced God's people. What the Lord gives to me is not to be used selfishly but is to be shared with others. Yet sometimes we are in the position where what is on hand does not appear sufficient for that purpose. My supply may be scanty and the claims of a growing family have to be met: if I contribute to the Lord's cause and minister to His servants and people, may not my little ones go short? Here is where the exercise of *faith* comes in: lay hold of such promises as Luke 6:38 and 2 Corinthians 9:8, act on them and you shall prove that "the liberal soul shall be made fat" (Prov. 11:25). Especially should the ministers of Christ set an example in this respect: if they be close handed it will greatly hinder their usefulness. Elisha did not scruple to make practical use of what was designed as an offering to the Lord, as David did not hesitate to take the "shewbread" and give to his hungry men.

Fourth, *its opposition*. "And his servitor said, What! should I set *this* before an hundred men?" (v. 43). Ah, the servant of God must not expect others to be equally zealous in exercising a gracious spirit or to co-operate with him in the works of faith, no not even those who are his assistants—none can walk by the faith of another. When Luther announced his intention of going to Worms even his dearest brethren sought to dissuade him. But was not such an objection a natural one? Yes, but certainly not spiritual. It shows how shallow and fleeting must have been the impression made on the man by the previous miracles. It was quite in keeping with what we read of this "servitor," Gehazi, elsewhere. His language expressed incredulity and unbelief. Was he thinking of himself? Did he resent his master's generosity and think, *We* shall need this food for ourselves? And this, after all the miracles he had seen God work through Elisha! Ah it takes something more than the witnessing of miracles to regenerate a dead soul, as the Jews made evident when the Son of God wrought in their midst.

Fifth, *its means*: faith in God and His Word. "He said again, Give the people that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof" (v. 43). Where there is real faith in God it is not stumbled by the unbelief of others, but when it stands in the wisdom of men it is soon paralyzed by the opposition it encounters. When blind Bartimaeus began to cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me," and many charged him that he should hold his peace, "he cried the more a great deal" (Mark 10:48). On the other hand, one with a stony-ground hearer's faith endureth for awhile, "for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by [quickly] he is offended" (Matt. 13:21). When Elisha had first said, "Give unto the people, that they may eat" it was the language of faith. Verse 41 seems to show

that the people had been seeking the prophet in the extremity of their need. His own barrel of meal had probably run low, and it is likely he had been praying for its replenishment. And here was God's answer—yet in such a form or measure as to further test his faith! Elisha saw the hand of God in this gift and counted upon His making it sufficient to meet the needs of the crowd. Elisha regarded those twenty loaves as an “earnest” of greater bounties.

Do we regard such providences as “a token for good” or are we so wrapped up in the token itself that we look no further? It was a bold and courageous faith in Elisha: he was not afraid the Lord would put him to confusion and cause him to become a laughingstock to the people. At first his faith was a general (yet sufficient) one in the character of God. Then it met with a rebuff from Gehazi, but he refused to be shaken. And now it seems to us that the Lord rewarded His servant's faith by giving him a definite word from Himself. The way to get more faith is to use what has already been given us (Luke 8:18), for God ever honors those who honor Him. Trust Him fully and He will then bestow assurance. The minister of Christ must not be deterred by the carnality and unbelief of those who ought to be the ones to strengthen his hands and co-operate with him. Alas, how many have let distrustful deacons to quench their zeal by the difficulties and objections which they raise. How often the children of Israel opposed Moses and murmured against him, but “by faith he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

Sixth, *its antitype*. There is no doubt whatever in our minds that the above incident supplies the Old Testament foreshadowment of our Lord's miracle in feeding the multitude, and it is both interesting and instructive to compare and contrast the type with its antitype. Note then the following parallels. First, in each case there was a crowd of hungry people. Second, Elisha took pity on them, and Christ had compassion on the needy multitude (Matt. 14:14). Third, a few “loaves” formed the principal article of diet, and in each case they were “barley” ones (John 6:9). Fourth, in each case, the order went forth “give [not ‘sell’] the people that they may eat” (cf. Mark 6:37). Fifth, in each case an unbelieving attendant raised objection (John 6:7). Sixth, Elisha fed the crowd through his servant (v. 44) and Christ through His apostles (Matt. 14:19). Seventh, in each case a surplus remained after the people had eaten (v. 44 and cf. Matt. 14:20). And now observe wherein Christ has “the pre-eminence.” First, He fed a much larger company: over 5,000 (Matt. 14:21) instead of 100. Second, He employed fewer loaves: 5 (Matt. 14:17) instead of 20. Third, He supplied a richer feast, fish as well as bread. Fourth, He wrought by His own power.

Seventh, *its meaning*. It will suffice if we just summarise what we have previously dwelt upon. 1. The servant of God who is faithful in giving out to others will not himself be kept on short rations. 2. The more such an one obtains from God, the more should he impart to the people: “Freely ye have received, freely give.” 3. God ever makes His grace abound unto those who are generous. 4. A true servant of God has implicit confidence in the Divine character. 5. Though he encounters opposition he refuses to be stumbled thereby. 6. Though other ministers ridicule him, he acts according to God's Word. 7. God does not fail him, but honors his trust. —AWP

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE

10. *Its Benefits*

It has been pointed out on a previous occasion that what has been engaging our attention is far more than a subject for theological debate: it is full of practical value. It must be so, for it occupies a prominent place in the Divinely-inspired Scriptures which are "profitable for doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:16), and that, because it is "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3)—revealing the standard of piety and actually promoting piety in the soul and life of him who receives it by faith. Everything revealed in the Word and all the activities of God have two chief ends in view: His own glory and the good of His people. And as we draw to the close of this series it is fitting that we should seek to set before readers some of the benefits which are conferred by a believing apprehension of this truth, some of the blessed effects it produces and fruits it yields. We somewhat anticipated this aspect of our subject by what we said under its Blessedness (in the Jan. and Feb. 1942 issues), yet as we then did little more than generalise it behooves us now to more definitely particularise.

In attempting to describe some of the benefits which this doctrine affords we shall be regulated by whether we are viewing it from the Divine side or the human, for as we have sought to make clear in the preceding articles, the perseverance of the saints in holiness and obedience is the direct effect of the continued operations of Divine grace and power within them, and those operations are guaranteed by the promises of the everlasting covenant. Viewed from the Divine side, perseverance in the faith and in the paths of righteousness is itself a gift, a distinct gift from God: "who shall also confirm you unto the end" (1 Cor. 1:8). Absolutely considered God's preservation of His people turns upon no condition to be fulfilled by them, but depends entirely on the immutability and invincibility of the Divine purpose. Nevertheless, God does not preserve His people by mere physical power and without their concurrence, as He keeps the planets steadfast in their orbits. No, rather does He treat them throughout as moral agents and responsible creatures, drawing them with the cords of love, inclining their hearts unto Himself, rendering effectual the motives He sets before them and the means which He requires them to use.

The infallible certainty of the Divine operations on behalf of and within His saints and the mode of their working cannot be insisted upon too emphatically or repeated too often. On the one hand, the crown of honor and glory must be ascribed to the King Himself; and on the other hand, the response and concurrence or loyalty of His subjects is to be made equally plain. God preserves His people by renewing them in the inner man day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), by quickening them according to His Word, by granting them fresh supplies of grace, and also by moving them to heed His warnings and respond to His exhortations; in a word, by working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Thus our portrayal of some of the benefits and fruits of this doctrine will be governed by our viewpoint: whether we trace out what follows faith's appropriating of the Divine promises or what follows from faith's appropriation of the Divine precepts. God has promised to carry forward in sanctification and complete in glorification the work begun in regeneration, yet not without requiring us to perform the duties of piety and avoid everything contrary thereto.

1. Here is cause *for adoring God*. The doctrine set forth in this series most certainly redounds more to the glory of God than does the contrary one, which leaves our everlasting felicity in uncertainty. It exemplifies God's *power*, whereby He not only restrains our external foes from overthrowing our salvation, but also by fixing the wavering disposition of our wills that we do not cease from the love of and desire after holiness. Also His *truth* in the promises of the Covenant, on which we securely rely, being assured that He who gave them will certainly make the same good. His *goodness*, whereby He patiently bears with our weakness and dullness, so that when we fall into sin, He does not cast us off, but by His loving chastenings recovers us through moving us to renewed repentance. His *holiness*, when because of our folly we trifle with temptation for a season, disregarding His warnings, He makes us conscious of His displeasure by withholding tokens of His favor and declining an answer to our prayers, bringing us to confess and forsake our sins, that fellowship with Him may be restored and that peace and joy may again be our portion.

2. Here is *peace for the soul* in a world of strife and where men's hearts fail them for fear of the future. This is evident if we consider the opposite. In themselves believers are weak and unstable, unable to do anything as they ought. They have no strength of their own to keep themselves in the love of God, but carry about with them a body of sin and death. They are continually exposed to temptations which ensnare the wisest and overthrow the strongest. Suppose then they had received no guarantee of the unchangeableness of God's purpose, no infallible word of the continuance of His love, no pledge that He will keep and secure

them by the working of His mighty power, no declaration that unfailing supplies of His Spirit and grace shall be vouchsafed them, no assurance that He will never leave them nor forsake them, no revelation of an Advocate on high to plead their cause and of the sufficiency of His mediation and the efficacy of His intercession. But rather that they are left to their own fidelity: and in consequence some of the most eminent saints have apostatized from the faith, that thousands have utterly fallen out of God's love and favor, and so been cast from His covenant, from whence few have ever recovered; and all confidence and peace will be at an end, and fear and terror fill their place.

How vastly different is the teaching of the Word from what we have supposed above. There we find God, as it were, saying to His people: I know your weakness and insufficiency, your dullness and darkness, how that without My Son and continual supplies of His Spirit you can do nothing. The power and rage of your indwelling sin is not hidden from Me, and how with violence it brings you into captivity against your desires. I know that though you believe, yet you are frequently made to groan over your unbelief, and that you are then ready to fear the worst. And when in that case Satan assaults and tempts, seeking to devour you; that first he acts like a serpent, attempting to beguile and ensnare, and then as a lion to terrify. But be not ignorant of his devices: resist him steadfast in the faith: take unto you the whole armor of God, watch night and day that ye be not seduced by him, and you shall overcome him by the blood of the Lamb. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. 41:10). Though you may be tripped up, ye shall not utterly fall. Though you be fearful, My kindness shall not be removed from you. So be of good cheer, and run with patience the race that is set before you.

3. Here is *solid comfort* for the saints in a day of declension, when there is a great "falling away" of those who once appeared to run well. Though what is termed "organised Christianity" be a demonstrated failure, though corporate Christendom be now in ruins, though ten thousands have apostatised yet let the saints be fully assured that God has and will reserve to Himself a remnant who bow not the knee to Baal; and therefore may those who have the living God for their "refuge" confidently exclaim "Therefore will not we fear though the earth [the most stable and ancient establishments] be removed, and though the mountains [the leaders and most towering professors] be carried [by the winds of false doctrine] into the midst of the sea"—the masses of the wicked: Isaiah 57:20. When many of the nominal disciples of Christ "went back and walked no more with Him," He turned to the apostles and said "Will ye also go away?" Whereupon Simon Peter as their spokesman answered "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:66-68). Thus it was then, has been throughout the centuries, and will be unto the end of time. The sheep are secure, while the goats turn aside and perish.

Observe how Paul emphasizes this very note in 2 Timothy 2. Hymeneus and Philetus eminent men in the church had apostatised, and by their defection and false teaching had overthrown the doctrinal faith of some; yet says the apostle, This is no reason why the real children of God should be made to quake and imagine that their end is uncertain. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: the Lord knoweth them that are His; and, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (v. 19). Note the two sides of that "seal," preserving the balance of Truth: on the one side there is a cordial—those who are built upon the foundation of God's unchanging purpose and love shall not be prevailed against; on the other there is a warning—trifle not with "iniquity," whether it be doctrinal or practical, but "depart" from it. Similarly John assures believers who might be shaken at seeing certain in their assemblies being seduced by the antichrists of that day, but such were only *unregenerate* professors (1 John 2:19), and therefore that the regenerate, held in the hand of Christ, shall not be overcome by deceivers.

4. Here is *ground for holy confidence*. The Lord knows how difficult is the task assigned His people and how deep is the sense of their own insufficiency. He knows too that nothing more enervates their hearts and enfeebles their hands than doubts and fears, and therefore has He made absolute promise to those who hear His voice and follow Him that "they shall never perish" (John 10:29). It was this which armed Joshua to the battle: "There shall not a man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." And from thence the Lord drew an argument—the very opposite of that which the legalistic Arminian infers—namely, "Be strong and of a good courage" (Josh. 1:5, 6). Such a promise would not make a Joshua reckless or lax, whatever effect it might have upon a self-righteous freewiller. No, rather would it produce a holy confidence, which prompted to the use of lawful means and gave assurance of God's blessing thereon. Such a confidence causes its possessor to trust in the Lord with all his heart and lean not unto his own understanding.

Such encouragement is conveyed and such confidence is engendered by the Divine declaration "the righteous shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9). As the young believer contemplates the likely length of the

journey before him and the difficulties of the road which has to be trod, he is apt to give way to despair; but if his faith lays hold of this promise that he shall certainly reach the desired goal, new strength will be imparted to his feeble knees and increased resolution to his fainting heart. It is the confidence that by continuing to plod along the weary traveler will reach home, which causes him to take courage and refuse to give in. It is the assurance of success which is to the right-minded and best stimulus of labor. If the Christian be persuaded that the world shall not overcome him, that sin shall not slay him, that Satan shall not triumph over him, then will he take unto him the shield of faith and the Sword of the Spirit and fight like a man and be more than conqueror. As it has been truly said "This is one of the reasons why British troops have so often won the fight: because the drummer boys know not how to beat a retreat and the soldiers refused to believe in the possibility of defeat."

5. Here is *consolation for us in the severest trials*. Let us illustrate this point from the case of Job, for it is difficult to conceive one more acute and extreme than his. You know how severe, how many, and how protracted were those afflictions. You know how far Satan was permitted to proceed with him. You know how his wife turned against and his so-called friends tantalised him. His cup of trouble was indeed filled to the brim, yet we find him looking above his afflictions and censorious critics, exclaiming "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as *gold*" (23:10). Weigh well those words and bring to mind the situation of the one who uttered them. Observe that there was no doubt or uncertainty in his mind about the issue of his afflictions: it was not "I fear I shall perish in the furnace," for he refused to allow those fiery trials to turn him into a skeptic. Nor did he merely cherish a faltering hope that things might possibly be well with him at the end, and say "I *may* come forth as gold." No, there was the undoubting, positive conviction "I shall"!

Ah, my reader, Job saw "the bright light in the cloud" (37:21). He drew comfort from what assured Cowper when he wrote those lines—

*"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace:
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face."*

Job knew that God maketh "all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28), and therefore he knew there could be no possibility of his perishing in the fires. And why was there no doubting as to the outcome of his trials? Because he could say "For I know that *my Redeemer liveth*" and therefore could he add "and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh *shall I see God*" (19:25,26). That was the ground of his confidence—nothing in himself. That was what caused him to triumphantly exclaim "I shall come forth as gold." Cheer up fellow believer: the process may be painful, but the end is sure; the path may be rough and you may feel faint, but the prospect is entrancing and certain.

6. Here is *cause for praise*. Why should I be found still holding on my way when so many who made a bright profession and who appeared to make much faster progress in spiritual things than I did, have long ago dropped out of the race, and have gone right back into the world? Certainly not because I was any better by nature. No, I freely ascribe all the glory unto God who has so graciously ministered unto me and continued to work in me; who has been so longsuffering and recovered me when I strayed. O what thanks are due unto Him. How often have I had occasion to say "He restoreth my soul" (Psa. 23:3)—as He did Abraham's, Jacob's, Peter's. Thus I may say with David "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord *forever*" (Psa. 89:1). Not today or tomorrow, but for "forever"; not only when I come to the brink of the Jordan, but after I have passed safely through it, the high praises of His faithfulness shall be the theme of my song throughout eternity.

7. Here is *a powerful incentive to confirm Christians* in their spiritual lives and to spur them unto the duties of piety. This is evident from what regeneration works in them. All the arguments drawn from the possibility of the apostasy of saints are derived from the terror of dreadful threatenings and the fear of eternal punishment; whereas those taken from the assurances conveyed by the everlasting covenant breathe nothing but the sweetness of grace. Since the children of God have received "the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry Father, Father" (Rom. 8:15), they are more powerfully drawn by the cords of love than by the scourge of horror. Moreover since all acceptable obedience springs from gratitude, then that which most effectually promotes gratitude must be the most powerful spring of obedience, and as to whether a grace bestowed by the Lord is perpetual or one which may be lost is likely to inspire the deepest gratitude, we leave to the judgment of our readers. The more firmly be secured the reward of duty, the more diligent shall we be in performing duty.

8. Here is *an incentive to practical godliness*. If Christian perseverance is one of continuance in the path of obedience and holiness, then will the saints make diligent use of the aids which God has provided for them and eschew the contrary. Especially will they be encouraged to ask for and seek after the grace which God has promised. As it is a sight and sense of Christ's being crucified because of *my* heinous sins which produces evangelical repentance (Zech. 12:10), so it is a realisation of the immutability of God's purpose, the unchangeableness of His love, and the preciousness of His promises which strengthen faith and inflame love to serve and please Him. This twofold doctrine of Divine preservation and perseverance in holiness supplies effectual motives unto piety. Negatively, it removes discouragements by letting us know that our denials of self, mortifications of the flesh and efforts to resist the Devil, are not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9). Positively, it places upon us the most powerful obligations to live unto God, to show forth His praises, and adorn the doctrine we profess (2 Cor. 7:1).

9. Here we are shown *the need of continual diligence* in order to persevere unto the end. But, says the Arminian, I would have concluded the very opposite, since final perseverance be guaranteed. That is due to his misconception. God has declared "The righteous shall hold on his way": not become slack and sit down, still less that he will forsake it for the way of the ungodly. That very promise is the best means of producing the desired result. If a man could be definitely assured that in a certain line of business he would make a fortune, would such assurance cause him to refuse that business or lead him to lie in bed all day? No, rather would it be an incentive to diligence in order to prosper. Napoleon believed he was "the man of destiny": did that conviction freeze his energies? No, the very opposite. God's promising a thing unto His children causes them to pray for the same with greater confidence, earnestness and importunity. God hath promised to bless our use of lawful means and therefore we employ them with diligence and expectation.

10. Here is *a truth to humble us*. Admittedly it has been wrested by Antinomians and perverted unto the feeding of a spirit of presumption. But it is "ungodly men" and not the saints who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness (Jude 4). Different far is the effect of this truth upon the regenerate. It works in them a sense of their own insufficiency, causing them to look outside of themselves for help and strength. So far from rendering them slothful, it deepens their desires after holiness and makes them seek it more earnestly. As the Christian realises "Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently," he is moved to pray "O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes diligently...Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for herein do I delight" (Psa. 119:4,5,35). The more he is taught of the Spirit the more will he cry "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Psa. 119:117). —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

1. Introduction

The name which is usually given to our subject by Christian writers is that of "Growth in Grace" which is a Scriptural expression, being found 2 Peter 3:18. But it appears to us that, strictly speaking, growing "in grace" has reference to but a single aspect or branch of our theme: "that your *love* may abound yet more and more" (Phil. 1:9) treats of another aspect, and "your *faith* groweth exceedingly" (2 Thess. 1:3), with yet another. It seems then that "spiritual growth" is a more comprehensive and inclusive term and more accurately covers that most important and desirable attainment "may grow up into Him in *all* things, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Let it not be thought from this that we have selected our title in a capacious spirit or because we are striving after originality. Not so: we have no criticism to make against those who may prefer some other appellation. We have chosen this one simply because it seems more fitly and fully describe the ground which we hope to cover. Our readers understand clearly what is connoted by "physical growth" or "mental growth," nor should "spiritual growth" be any the less intelligible.

The subject which is to be before us is a "deeply important" one. First, that we may understand aright the Spirit's teaching thereon. There seems to be comparatively few who do so, and the consequence is that the Lord is robbed of much of the praise which is His due, while many of His people suffer much needless distress. Because so many Christians walk more by sense than by faith, measuring themselves by their feelings and moods rather than by the Word, their peace of mind is greatly destroyed and their joy of heart much decreased. Not a few saints are seriously the losers through misapprehensions upon this subject. Scriptural knowledge is essential if we are to better understand ourselves and diagnose more accurately our spiritual case. Many exercised souls form quite an erroneous opinion of themselves because of failure at this very point. Surely it is a matter of great practical moment that we should be able to judge aright of our spiritual progress or retrogression, that we may not flatter ourselves on the one hand or unduly depreciate ourselves on the other.

Some are tempted in one direction, some in the other—depending partly on their personal temperament and partly on the kind of teaching they sat under. Many are inclined to think more highly of themselves than they ought to, and because they have obtained considerably increased intellectual knowledge of the Truth imagine they have made a proportionate spiritual growth. But others with weaker memories and who acquire a mental grasp of things more slowly, suppose this to signify a lack of spirituality. Unless our thoughts about spiritual growth be formed by the Word of God we are certain to err and jump to a wrong conclusion. As it is with our bodies, so it is with our souls. Some suppose they are healthy while suffering from an insidious disease; whereas others imagine themselves to be ill when in fact they are hale and sound. Divine revelation and not human imagination ought to be our guide in determining whether or not we be "babes, young men, or fathers"—and our natural age has nothing to do with it.

It is deeply important that our views should be rightly formed, not only that we may be able to ascertain our own spiritual stature, but also that of our fellow Christians. If I long to be made a help and blessing to them then obviously I must first be capable of deciding whether they be in a healthy or unhealthy condition. Or, if I desire spiritual counsel and assistance then I shall meet with disappointment unless I know whom to go to. How can I regulate my course and suit my converse with the saints I contact if at a loss to gauge their religious caliber? God has not left us to our own erring judgment in this matter, but has supplied rules to guide us. To mention but one other reason which indicates the importance of our subject: unless I can ascertain wherein I have been enabled to make spiritual progress and wherein I have failed, how can I know what to pray for, and unless I can perceive the same about my brethren how can I intelligently ask for the supply of what they most need?

Our subject is a very mysterious one. Physical growth is beyond human comprehension. We know something of what is essential in order to it, and the thing itself may be discovered, but the operation and process is hidden from us: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Eccl. 11:5). How much more so must spiritual growth be incomprehensible. The beginning of our spiritual life is shrouded in mystery (John 3:8), and to a considerable extent this is true also of its development. God's workings in the soul are secret, indiscernible to the eye of carnal reason and imperceptible to our senses. "The things of God knoweth no man" save to whom the Spirit is pleased to reveal them (1 Cor. 2:11,12). If we know so little about ourselves and the operation of our faculties in connection with natural things, how

much less competent are we to comprehend ourselves and our graces in connection with that which is supernatural.

The "new creature" is from above, whereof our natural reason has no acquaintance: it is a product supernatural and can only be known by revelation supernatural. In like manner, the spiritual life received at the new birth *thrives* as to its degrees, unperceived by our senses. A child, by weighing and measuring himself, may discover he has grown, yet he was not conscious of the process while growing. So it is with the new man: it is "renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16) yet in such a hidden way that the renewing itself is not felt, though its effects become apparent. Thus there is no good reason to be disheartened because we do not *feel* that any progress is being made or to conclude there is no advance because such feeling is absent. "There are some of the Lord's people in whom the essence and reality of holiness dwell, who do not perceive in themselves any spiritual growth. It should therefore be remembered that there is a real growth in grace where it is not perceived. We should judge of it not by what we experience of it in ourselves, but by the Word. It is a subject for *faith* to be exercised on" (S. E. Pierce). If we desire the pure milk of the Word and feed thereon, then we must not doubt that we duly "grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:3).

To quote again from Pierce: "Spiritual growth is a mystery and is more evident in some than in others. The more the Holy Spirit shines upon the mind and puts forth His life-giving influences in the heart, so much the more sin is seen, felt and loathed, as the greatest of all evils. And this is an evidence of spiritual growth, namely, to hate sin as sin and to abhor it on account of its contrariety to the nature of God. The quick perception and insight which we have of inherent sin, and our feeling of it, so as to look on ourselves as most vile, to renounce ourselves and all we can do for ourselves, and look wholly and immediately to Christ for relief and strength, are growth in grace, and a most certain evidence of it." How little is the natural man capable of understanding that! Having no experience of the same, it sounds to him like a doleful delusion. And how the believer needs to beg God to teach him the truth about the same. As we can know nothing whatever about the new birth save what God has revealed in His Word, so we can form no correct comprehension about spiritual growth except from the same source.

Our subject is not only mysterious but it is also a difficult one. This is due in part to Satan's having confused the issue by inventing such plausible imitations that multitudes are deceived thereby, and knowing this the conscientious soul is troubled. Under certain influences and from various motives people are induced to suddenly and radically reform their lives, and their absence from the grosser forms of sin accompanied by a zealous performance of the common duties of religion, is often mistaken for genuine conversion and progress in the Christian life. These are the "tares" which so closely resemble the wheat they are often indistinguishable until the harvest. Moreover, there is a work of the Law, quite distinct from the saving effects wrought by the Gospel, which in its fruits both external and internal cannot be distinguished from a work of grace except by the light of Scripture and the teaching of the Spirit. The terrors of the Law have come in power to the conscience of many an one, producing poignant convictions of sin and horrors of the wrath to come, issuing in much activity in the works of righteousness; but resulting in no faith in Christ, and no love for Him.

Again: spiritual progress is difficult to discern because growth in grace is often not nearly so apparent as first conversion. In many cases conversion is a radical experience of which we are personally conscious at the time and of which a vivid memory remains with us. It marked a revolutionary change in our life. It was when we were relieved of the intolerable burden of guilt and the peace of God which passeth all understanding possessed our souls. It was a being brought out of the awful and total spiritual darkness of nature into God's marvelous light, whereas spiritual growth is but the enjoying further degrees of that light. It was that tremendous change from having no grace at all to the beginnings of grace within us, whereas that which follows is the receiving of additions of grace. It was a spiritual resurrection, a being brought from death unto life, but the subsequent experience is only renewings of the life then received. For Joseph to be suddenly translated out of prison to sit upon the throne of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, would affect him far more powerfully than to have any new kingdoms added to him later, such as Alexander had. At first everything in the spiritual life is new to the Christian; later he learns more perfectly what was then discovered to him, yet the effect made is not so perceptible and entrancing.

Further: the spiritual life or nature communicated at regeneration is not the only thing in the Christian: the principle of sin still remains in the soul after the principle of grace has been imparted. Those two principles are at direct variance with each other, engaged in a ceaseless warfare as long as the saint is left in this world. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). That fearful conflict is apt to confuse the issue in the mind of its subject, yea, it is certain to lead the believer to draw a false inference from

it unless he clearly apprehends the teaching of Scripture thereon. The discovery of so much opposition within, the thwarting of his aspirations and endeavors, his felt inability to wage the warfare successfully, makes him seriously to doubt whether holiness has been imparted to his heart. The ragings of indwelling sin, the discovery of unsuspected corruptions, the consciousness of unbelief, the defeats experienced, all appear to give the lie direct to any spiritual progress. *That* presents an acute problem to a conscientious soul.

Our subject is both a *complex and comprehensive* one. By which we mean that this is a tree with many branches, which bears a different manner of fruits according to the season. It is a subject into which various elements enter, one that needs to be viewed from many angles. Spiritual growth is both upward and downward, and it is both inward and outward. An increased knowledge of God leads to an increased knowledge of self, and as one results in higher adoration of its Object, the other brings deeper humiliation in its subject. These issue in more and more inward denials of self and abounding more and more outwardly in good works. Yet this spiritual growth needs to be most carefully stated, lest we repudiate the completeness of regeneration. In the strictest sense, spiritual growth consists of the Spirit's drawing out what He wrought in the soul when He quickened it. When a babe is born into this world it is complete in parts though not in development: no new members can be added to its body nor any additional faculties to its mind.

There is a growth of the natural child, a development of its members, an expansion of its faculties, with a fuller expression and clearer manifestation of the latter, but nothing more. The analogy holds good with a babe in Christ. "Though there are innumerable circumstantial differences in the cases and experience of the called people of God, and though there is a growth suited to them, considered as 'babes, young men and fathers,' yet there is but *one common life* in the various stages and degrees of the *same* life carried on to its perfection by the Holy Spirit until it issues in glory eternal. The work of God the Spirit in regeneration is eternally complete. It admits of no increase nor decrease. It is one and the same in all believers. There will not be the least addition to it in Heaven: not one grace, holy affection, desire or disposition then, which is not in it now. The whole of the Spirit's work therefore from the moment of regeneration to our glorification is to draw out those graces into act and exercise which He hath wrought within us. And though one believer may abound in the fruits of righteousness more than another, yet there is not one of them more regenerated than another." (S. E. Pierce)

The complexity of our subject is due in part to both the Divine and the human elements entering into it, and who is competent to explain or set forth their meeting-point! Yet the analogy supplied from the physical realm again affords us some help. Absolutely considered, all growth is due to the Divine operations, yet relatively there are certain conditions which we must meet or there will be no growth—to name no other, the partaking of suitable food is an essential prerequisite; nevertheless that will not nourish unless God be pleased to bless the same. To insist that there are certain conditions we must meet, certain means we must use in order to our spiritual progress, is not to divide the honors with God, but is simply pointing out the *order* He has established and the connection He has appointed between one thing and another. In like manner there are certain hindrances which we must avoid, or growth will inevitably be arrested and spiritual progress retarded. Nor does that imply that we are thwarting God, but only disregarding His warnings and paying the penalty of breaking those laws which He has instituted.

The very complexity of our subject increases the difficulty before the one attempting to expound the same, for as is the case with so many other problems presented to our limited intelligence, it involves the matter of seeking to preserve a due balance between the Divine and the human elements. The operations of Divine grace and the discharge of our responsibility must each be insisted upon, and the concurring of the latter with the former, as well as the superabounding of the former over the latter be proportionately set forth. In like manner our contemplation of spiritual growth upward must not be allowed to crowd out that of our growth downward, nor must our deeper loathing of self be suffered to hinder an increasing living upon Christ. The more sensible we are of our emptiness, the more we must draw upon His fullness. Nor is our task rendered easier when we remember these articles fall into the hands of very different types of readers, who sit under varied kinds of ministry—the one needing emphasis upon a different note from another.

That there *is* such a thing as spiritual growth is abundantly clear from the Scriptures. In addition to the passages alluded to in the opening paragraph we may quote the following. "They go from strength to strength" (Ps. 84:7). "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord" (Hos. 6:3). "But unto you that fear the Lord shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings, and ye shall go forth and *grow up* as calves of the stall" (Mal. 4:2). "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace"

(John 1:16). “Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from *glory to glory* as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). “Increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). “As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye abound more and more” (1 Thess. 4:1). “He giveth more grace (James 4:6).

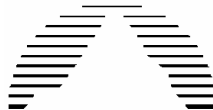
The above list might be extended considerably, but sufficient references have been given to show that not only is such a thing as spiritual growth clearly revealed in the Scriptures, but that it is given a prominent place therein. Let the reader duly observe the *variety* of expressions which are employed by the Spirit to set forth this progress or development—thereby preserving us from too circumscribed a conception by showing us the many-sidedness of the same. Some of them relate to what is internal, others to what is external. Some of them describe the Divine operations, others the necessary acts and exercises of the Christian. Some of them make mention of increased light and knowledge, others of increased grace and strength, and yet others of increased conformity to Christ and fruitfulness. It is thus that the Holy Spirit has preserved the balance and it is by our carefully noting the same that we shall be kept from a narrow and one-sided idea of what spiritual growth consists of. If due attention be paid to this varied description we shall be kept from painful mistakes, and the better enabled to test or measure ourselves and discover what spiritual stature we have attained unto.

From what has been pointed out in the last few paragraphs it will be seen that this is an intensely *practical subject*. It is no small matter that we should be able to arrive at the clear apprehension of what spiritual growth actually consists of, and thereby be delivered from mistaking for it mere fantasy. If there be conditions which we have to comply with in order to the making of progress, it is most desirable that we should acquaint ourselves with the same and then translate such knowledge into prayer. If God has appointed certain means and aids, the sooner we learn what they are and make diligent use of them the better for us. And if there be other things which act as deterrents and are inimical to our welfare, the more we are placed upon our guard the less likely we are to be hindered by them. And if Christian growth has many sides to it this should govern our thinking and acting thereon, that we may strive after a fitly-proportioned and well-rounded Christian character, and grow up into Christ not merely in one or two respects but “in *all things*” that our development may be uniform and symmetrical. —AWP

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

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

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