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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE HOLY SPIRIT

3. The Deity of the Holy Spirit

In our last article, we endeavored to supply from the testimony of Holy Writ abundant and clear evidence that the Holy Spirit is a conscious, intelligent, personal being. Our present paper concerns the nature and dignity of His person. We sincerely trust that our present inquiry will not strike our readers as being a superfluous one. Surely any mind which is impressed with a due reverence for the subject we are upon, will readily allow that we cannot be too minute and particular in the investigation of a point of such infinite importance. While it be true that almost every passage which we brought forward to demonstrate the Spirit's personality, also contained decisive proof of His Godhead, yet we deemed the present aspect of our subject of such moment as to be justly entitled unto a separate regard. The more so, as error at this point is fatal to the soul.

Having shown, then, that God's Word expressly and unequivocally teaches that the Spirit is a person, the next question to be considered is, Under what character are we to consider Him? What rank does He occupy in the scale of existence? It has been truly said that, "He is either God, possessing, in a distinction of person, an ineffable unity of the divine nature with the Father and the Son, or He is the creature of God, infinitely removed from Him in essence and dignity, and having no other than a derivative excellence in that rank to which He is appointed in creation. There is no medium betwixt the one and the other. Nothing intermediate between the Creator and created can be admissible. So that were the Holy Spirit to be placed at the top of all creation, even as high above the highest angel, as that angel transcends the lowest reptile of animated life, the chasm would be still infinite, and He, who is emphatically called the *Eternal Spirit*, would not be God" (Robert Hawker, 1753-1827).

It will now be our endeavor to show from the Word of truth that the Holy Spirit is distinguished by such names and attributes, that He is endowed with such a plenitude of underived power, and that He is the author of such works as to altogether transcend finite ability, and such as can belong to none but God Himself. However mysterious and inexplicable to human reason the existence of a distinction of persons in the essence of the Godhead may be, yet if we submissively bow to the plain teachings of the divine oracles, then the conclusion that there subsists three divine persons who are coessential, coeternal, and coequal is unavoidable. He of whom such works as the creation of the universe, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the formation of the humanity of Christ, the regeneration and sanctification of the elect, is and must be, GOD or to use the language of 2 Corinthians 3:17, "*Now the Lord is that Spirit.*"

1. The Holy Spirit is expressly called *God*. To Ananias Peter said, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit" and then in the very next verse, he affirms, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but *unto God*" (Act 5:3-4). If, then, lying to the Holy Spirit be lying to God, it necessarily follows that the Spirit must be God. Again, the saints are called "*the temple of God*," and the reason proving this is that "*the Spirit of God dwelleth in you*" (1Co 3:16). In like manner, the body of the individual saint is designated "*the temple of the Holy Spirit*," and then the exhortation is made, "*therefore glorify God in your body*" (1Co 6:19-20). In 1 Corinthians 12, where the diversity of His gifts, administrations, and operations are mentioned, He is spoken of severally as "*the same Spirit*" (1Co 12:4), "*the same Lord*" (1Co 12:5), "*the same God*" (1Co 12:6). In 2 Corinthians 6:16, the Holy Spirit is called, "*the living God*."

2. The Holy Spirit is expressly called *Jehovah*, a name that is utterly incommunicable to all creatures and which can be applied to none except the Great Supreme. It was Jehovah who spake by the mouth of all the holy prophets from the beginning of the world (Luk 1:68-70), yet in 2 Peter 1:21, it is implicitly declared that those prophets all spake "*by the Holy Spirit*." See also 2 Samuel 23:2-3 and compare Acts 1:16! It was Jehovah whom Israel tempted in the wilderness, "*And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the Most High*" (Psa 78:17-18), yet in Isaiah 63:10-11, this is specifically termed, "*rebellious against and vexing the Holy Spirit*"! In Deuteronomy 32:12, we read, "*The Lord alone did lead him [Jacob]*," yet speaking of the same people, at the same time, Isaiah 63:14 declares, "*The Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest; so didst thou lead thy people*." It was Jehovah who bade Isaiah, "*Go and tell this people, hear ye indeed*" (Isa 6:8-9), while the apostle declared, "*Well spake the Holy Spirit by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye*" etc. (Act 28:25-26)! What could more plainly establish the identity of Jehovah and the Holy Spirit? Note that the Holy Spirit is called, "*the Lord*" in 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

3. The *perfections of God* are all found in the Spirit. By what is the nature of any being determined, but by its properties? He who possesses the properties peculiar to an angel or man is rightly esteemed one. So He who possess the attributes or properties which belong alone to God, must be considered and worshipped as God. The Scriptures very clearly and abundantly affirm that the Holy Spirit *is* possessed of the attributes peculiar to God. They ascribe to Him absolute *holiness*. As God is called, "*Holy*," "*the Holy One*," being therein described by that superlatively excellent property of His nature wherein He is "*glorious in*

holiness" (Exo 15:11), so is the third person of the Trinity designated, "the Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4) to denote the holiness of His nature and the deity of His person. The Spirit is *eternal* (Heb 9:14). He is *omnipresent*, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" (Psa 139:7). He is *omniscient*, see 1 Corinthians 2:10-11. He is *omnipotent*, being termed "the power of the Highest" (Luk 1:35). See also Micah 3:8 and compare Isaiah 40:28.

4. The *absolute sovereignty and supremacy* of the Spirit manifest His Godhead. In Matthew 4:1, we are told, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness." Who but a divine person had the right to direct the Mediator? And to whom but God would the Redeemer have submitted! In John 3:8, the Lord Jesus drew an analogy between the wind which "bloweth where it listeth" (not being at the disposal or direction of any creature), and the imperial operations of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:11, it is expressly affirmed that the Holy Spirit has the distribution of all spiritual gifts, having nothing but His own pleasure for His rule. He *must*, then, be "God over all, blessed forever" (Rom 9:5). In Acts 13:2-4, we find the Holy Spirit calling men unto the work of the ministry, which is solely a divine prerogative, though wicked men have abrogated it unto themselves. In these verses it will be found that the Spirit appointed their work, commanded them to be set apart by the church, and sent them forth. In Acts 20:28, it is plainly declared that the Holy Spirit set officers over the church.

5. The *works ascribed to the Spirit* clearly demonstrate His Godhead. Creation itself is attributed to Him, no less than to the Father and the Son: "By the Spirit he hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13). "The Spirit of God hath made me" (Job 33:4). He is concerned in the work of providence, Isaiah 40:13-15, Acts 16:6-7. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2Ti 3:16), the source of which is the Spirit Himself (2Pe 1:21). The humanity of Christ was miraculously formed by the Spirit (Mat 1:20). Christ was anointed for His work by the Spirit (Isa 61:1; Joh 3:34). His miracles were performed by the Spirit's power (Mat 12:28). He was raised from the dead by the Spirit (Rom 8:11). Who but a divine person could have wrought such works as these!

Reader, do you have a personal and inward proof that the Holy Spirit is none other than God? Has He wrought in you that which no finite power could? Has He brought you from death unto life, made you a new creature in Christ, imparted to you a living faith, filled you with holy longings after God? Does He breathe into you the spirit of prayer, take of the things of Christ and show them unto you, apply to your heart both the precepts and promises of God? If, so, then, these are so many witnesses in your own bosom of the deity of the Blessed Spirit.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

63. The Perseverance of Faith (11:13-14)

Having described some of the eminent acts of faith put forth by the earliest members of God's family, the apostle now pauses to insert a general commendation of the faith of those he had already named, and (as is clear from Heb 11:39-40) of others yet to follow. This commendation is set forth in v. 13 and is amplified in the next three verses. The evident design of the Holy Spirit in this was to press upon the Hebrews, and upon us, the imperative need of such a faith as would last, wear, overcome obstacles, and endure unto the end. Even the natural man is capable of "making good resolutions" and has flashes of endeavor to please God, but he is entirely lacking in that principle which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1Co 13:7).

The faith of God's elect is like unto its divine Author in these respects—it is living, incorruptible, and cannot be conquered by the devil. Being implanted by God, the gift and grace of faith can never be lost. Strikingly was this illustrated in the history of the patriarchs. Called upon to leave the land of their birth, to sojourn in a country filled with idolaters, owning no portion of it, dwelling in tents, suffering many hardships and trials, and living without any such peculiar temporal advantages as might answer to the singular favor which the Lord declared He bore to them, nevertheless, they all *died in faith*. The eye of their hearts saw clearly the blessings God had promised, and persuaded that they would be theirs in due season, they joyfully anticipated their future portion and gave up present advantages for the sake thereof.

In the verses which are to be before us, the apostle, then, stresses the great importance of seeking and possessing a persevering faith, therefore does he make mention of the fact that as long as they remained in this world, the Old Testament saints were believers in the promises of God. It is the durability and constancy of their faith which is commended. Despite all the workings of unbelief within (records of which are found in Genesis in the case of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and all the assaults of temptation from without, they persisted in clinging to God and His Word. They lived by faith and they died in faith. Therefore have they left us an example that we should follow their steps. Beautifully did John Calvin (1509-1564) point out:

"There is expressed here a difference between us and the fathers. Though God gave to the fathers only a taste of that grace which is largely poured on us, though He showed to them at a distance only an obscure representation of Christ, who is now set forth to us clearly before our eyes, yet they were satisfied and never fell away from their faith. How much greater reason then have we at this day to persevere! If we grow faint, we are doubly inexcusable. It is then an enhancing circumstance, that the fathers had a distant view of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, while we at this day have so near a view of it, and that they all hailed the promises afar off, while we have them as it were quite near us, for if they nevertheless persevered even unto death, what sloth will it be to become wearied in faith, when the Lord sustains us by so many helps. Were any one to object and say that they could not have believed without receiving the promises on which faith is necessarily founded, to this the answer is, that the expression is to be understood comparatively. For

they were far from that high position to which God has raised us. Hence it is that, though they had the same salvation promised them, yet they had not the promises so clearly revealed to them as they are to us under the kingdom of Christ, but they were content to behold them afar off.”

“These all died in faith” (Heb. 11:13), or more literally, “In [or “according to”] faith died these all.” Differing from most of the commentators, we believe those words take in the persons mentioned previously, from Abel onwards. “These all” grammatically include those who precede as well as those which follow—the relative pronoun embracing all those set forth in the catalog, namely, young and old, male and female, great and small. “The same Spirit works in all, and shows forth his power in all,” see 2Co 4:13 (William Gouge, 1575-1653). Against this it may be objected that Enoch died not. True, but the apostle is referring only to those that died, just as Genesis 46:7 must be understood as excepting Joseph, who was already in Egypt. Moreover, though Enoch died not as the others, he was removed from earth to heaven, and before his translation he continued living by faith unto the very end, which is the main thing here intended.

“These all died in [or “according to”] faith” (Heb. 11:13). The faith in which they died is the same as that described in the first verse of our chapter, namely, a justifying and sanctifying faith. That they “died in faith” does not necessarily mean that their faith was actually in exercise during the hour of death, but more strictly, that they never apostatized from the faith. Though they actually obtained or possessed not that which was the object of their faith, nevertheless, unto the end of their earthly pilgrimage they confidently looked forward unto the same. Five effects or workings of their faith are here mentioned, each of which we must carefully ponder. First, they “received not the promises.” Second, but they saw them “afar off.” Third, they were “persuaded of them.” Fourth, they “embraced” them. Fifth, in consequence thereof, they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

As we shall see (D. V.) when taking up later verses, some of the Old Testament saints died in the actual exercise of faith. To die in faith is to have an assured confidence in an estate of glory and bliss. “And hereunto is required: 1. The firm belief of a substantial existence after this life. Without this, all faith and hope must perish in death. 2. A resignation and trust of their departing souls into the care and power of God. 3. The belief in a future state of blessedness and rest, here called an heavenly country, a city prepared for them by God. 4. Faith of the resurrection of their bodies after death, that their entire persons, which had undergone the pilgrimage of this life, might be instated in eternal rest” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

Thousands who are now in their graves were taught that it was wrong to expect death and make suitable preparation for it. They were told that the return of Christ was so near, He would certainly come during their lifetime. Alas, the writer has, in measure, been guilty of the same thing. True, it is both the Christian’s happy privilege and bounden duty to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13), for this is the grand prospect which God hath set before His people in all ages, but He has nowhere told us *when* His Son shall descend. He *may* do so today. He may not for hundreds of years. But to say that “looking for that blessed hope” makes it wrong to anticipate death is manifestly absurd. The Old Testament saints had just as

definite promises for the first advent of Christ as the New Testament saints have for His second and they thought frequently of death!

It is greatly to be feared that much of the popularity with which the “premillennial and imminent coming of Christ” has been received, may be attributable to a carnal dread of death. A strong appeal is made to the flesh when people can be persuaded that they are likely to escape the grave. That one generation of Christians will do so is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but how many generations have already supposed that *theirs* was the one which would be raptured to heaven, and how many of them were quite unprepared when death overtook them, only that Day will show. We are well aware that these lines are not likely to meet with a favorable reception from some of our readers, but we are not seeking to please them, but God. Any man who is ready to die is prepared for the Lord’s return. As you may very likely die before the second advent, it is only the part of wisdom to make sure you are prepared for death.

And who are they whose souls are prepared for the dissolution of the body? Those who have disarmed death beforehand by plucking out its sting, and this by seeking reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. The hornet is harmless when its sting is extracted. A snake need not be dreaded if its fang and poison have been removed. So it is with death. “The sting of death is *sin*” (1Co 15:56), and if we have repented of our sins, turned from them with full purpose of heart to serve God, and have sought and obtained forgiveness and healing in the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, then death cannot harm us—it will but conduct us into the presence of God and everlasting felicity. Who are ready to die? Those who evidence and establish their title to eternal life by personal holiness, which is the “first fruits” of heavenly glory. It is by *walking in* the light of God’s Word that we make it manifest that we are meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

“These all died in [or “according to”] faith” (Heb 11:13). To die in faith we must live by faith. And for this there must be, first, diligent labor to obtain a knowledge of divine things. The understanding must be instructed before the path of duty can be known. “Teach me thy way,” (Psa 27:11). “Order my steps in thy word,” (Psa 119:133). must be our daily prayer. Second, the hiding of God’s Word in our hearts. Its precepts must be meditated upon, memorized, and made conscience of. Only then will our affections and lives be conformed to them. God’s Word is designed to be not only a light to our understanding, but also a lamp upon our path. Our walk is to be guided by it. Third, the regular contemplation of Christ by the soul—a worshipful and adoring consideration of His fathomless love, His marvelous grace, His infinite compassion, His present intercession. This will deliver from a legal spirit, warm the heart, supply strength for duty, and make us *want* to please Him.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises” (Heb. 11:13). The word “promises” is a metonymy, for the things promised. Literally they *had* “received the promises,” for that which they had heard from God was the basis of their faith. This is clear from Hebrews 11:10, 14, 16. The things promised concerned the spiritual blessings of the Gospel dispensation and the future heavenly inheritance. The promises made to the fathers or “elders” had respect unto Christ the blessed “seed” and to heaven of which Canaan was the type. Observe that this first clause of verse 13 plainly intimates that *the same* promises were given—though the outer shell of them varied—to Abel, Enoch, and

Noah, as were afterwards repeated to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each one died in the firm expectation of the promised Messiah and in believing views of the heavenly glory. *So* to die, was comfortable to themselves, and confirming to others the reality of what they professed.

“Not having received the promises.” The Greek word for “received” signifies the actual participation in and possession of. Faith, then, relies upon and rests in that which is not yet ours. A large part of the life of faith consists in laying hold of and enjoying the things promised, before the actual possession of them is obtained. It is by meditating upon and extracting their sweetness that the soul is fed and strengthened. The present spiritual happiness of the Christian consists more in promises and expectant anticipation than an actual possession, for “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It is this which enables us to say, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which *shall be* revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

“But having seen them afar off” (Heb. 11:13). This, because the eyes of their understanding had been divinely enlightened (Eph 1:18) and thus they were able to perceive in the promises the wisdom, goodness, and love of God. True, the fulfillment of those promises would be in the remote future, but the eye of faith is strong and endowed with long-distance vision. Thus it was with Abraham. He “rejoiced to see my day,” said Christ, “and he saw it, and was glad” (Joh 8:56). Thus it was with Moses who “had respect unto the recompense of the reward” and “endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:26-27). Solemn indeed is the contrast presented in 2 Peter 1:9, where we read of those who failed to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, love, and in consequence of an undeveloped Christian character “cannot see afar off.”

“And were persuaded of them” (Heb. 11:13). This announces the soul’s satisfactory acquiescence in the veracity of God as to the making good of His Word. It was the setting to of their seal that He is true (Joh 3:33), which is done when the heart truly receives His testimony. The word “persuaded” means an assured confidence, which is what faith works in the mind. A blessed example of this is seen in the case of Abraham, who, though about an hundred years old and his wife’s womb dead, yet when God declared they should have a son, he was “fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom 4:21). Ah, my reader, is it not because we are so dilatory in meditating upon the “exceeding great and precious promises” (2Pe 1:4) of God, that our hearts are so little persuaded of the verity and value of them!

“And embraced them,” (Heb. 11:13) not with a cold and formal reception of them, but with a warm and hearty welcome. Such is the nature of true faith when it lays hold of the promises of salvation. This is ever the effect of assurance—a thankful and joyful appropriation of the things of God. Faith not only discerns the value of spiritual things, is fully persuaded of their reality, but also loves them. Faith adheres as well as assents. In Scripture faith is expressed by taste as well as sight. Faith “sees” with the understanding, is “persuaded” in the heart, and “embraces” by the will. Thus, the *order* of the verbs in this verse (Heb 11:13) teaches us an important practical lesson. The promises of God are first viewed or contemplated, then rested upon as reliable, and then delighted in. If then we

would have livelier affections, we must meditate more upon the promises of God. It is the mind which effects the heart.

Ere passing on, let us inquire, are God's promises really precious unto us? Perhaps we are ready to answer at once, yes, but let us test ourselves. Do our hearts cling to them with love and delight? Can we truly say, "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (Psa 119:14)? What influence do God's promises have upon us in seasons of trial and grief? Do they supply us with more comfort than the dearest things of this world? In the midst of distress and sorrow, do we realize that "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2Co 4:17)? What effect do God's promises have upon our praying? Do we plead them before the throne of grace? Do we say with David, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope" (Psa 119:49)?

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). They who really embrace the promises of God are suitably affected and influenced by them. Their delight in heavenly things is manifested by a weanedness from earthly things—as the woman at the well forgot her bucket when Christ was revealed to her soul (Joh 4:28). When a man truly becomes a Christian, he at once begins to view time, and all the objects of time, in a very different light from what he did before. So it was with the patriarchs. Their faith had a powerful and transforming effect upon their lives. They made profession of their faith and hope. They made it manifest that their chief interest was neither in nor of the world. They had such a satisfying portion in the promises of God that they publicly renounced such a concern in the world as other men take whose portion is only in this life.

The patriarchs made no secret of the fact that their citizenship and inheritance was elsewhere. Unto the sons of Heth, Abraham confessed, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you" (Gen 23:4). Unto Pharaoh, Jacob said, "The days of the years of my *pilgrimage* are an hundred and thirty" (Gen 47:9). Nor is this to be explained on the ground that other nations were then in occupation of Canaan. Long after Israel entered into possession of that land David cried, "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (Psa 39:12), and again, "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me" (Psa 119:19). So too before all the congregation he owned unto God, "For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers (1Ch 29:15). Clear proof do these verses furnish that the Old Testament saints, equally with the New, apprehended their *heavenly* calling and glory.

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). The two terms, though very similar in thought, are not identical. The one refers more to the position, the place taken, the other to condition, how one conducts himself in that place. They were "strangers" because their home was in heaven, "pilgrims," because journeying thither. As another has said, "It is possible to be a 'pilgrim' without being a 'stranger.' But once we realize our true strangership, we are perforce compelled to be 'pilgrims.' We may be 'pilgrims,' and yet, in our pilgrimage, may visit all the cities and churches in the world, and include them all in our embrace; but if we are true 'sojourners' we shall be 'strangers' to them all, and shall be compelled, as Abraham was, to erect our own solitary altar to Jehovah in the midst of them all. How could Abraham be a worshipper with the

Canaanites? Impossible! This is why the ‘altar’ is so closely connected with the ‘tent’ in Genesis 12:8 and in Abraham’s sojourn” (E. W. B.)

That which was spiritually typified by the outward life of the patriarchs as “strangers and pilgrims” was the Christian’s renunciation of the world. As those whose citizenship is in heaven (Phi 3:20), we are bidden to be “not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). The patriarchs demonstrated that they were “strangers” by taking no part in the apostate religion, politics, or social life of the Canaanites and evidenced that they were “pilgrims” by dwelling in tents, moving about from place to place. How far are *we* making manifest our crucifixion to the world (Gal 6:14)? Does our daily walk show we are “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1)? Have we ceased looking on this world as our home and its people as our people? Are we seeking to lay up treasure in heaven or do we still hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt? When we pray, “Lord, conform me to Thine image,” do we mean “strip me of all which hinders!”?

The figure of the “stranger” applied to the child of God here on earth is very pertinent and full. The analogies between one who is in a foreign country and the Christian in this world are marked and numerous. In a strange land, one is not appreciated for his birth, but is avoided (Joh 15:19). The habits, ways, language are strange to him (1Pe 4:4). He has to be content with a stranger’s fare (1Ti 6:7-8). He needs to be careful not to give offense to the government (Col 4:6). He has to continually inquire his ways (Psa 5:8). Unless he conforms to the ways of that foreign country, he is easily identified (Mat 26:73). He is often assailed with homesickness, for his heart is not where his body is (Phi 1:23).

The figure of the “pilgrim” as it applies to the Christian is equally suggestive. Moving on from place to place, he never feels at home. He finds himself very much alone, for he meets with few who are traveling his way. Those he does encounter afford him very little encouragement, for they think him peculiar. He is very grateful for any kindness shown him. Sensible of his dependence on providence, he is thankful whenever God grants him favor in the eyes of the wicked. He carries nothing with him but what he deems useful for his journey. All superfluities are regarded as encumbrances. He tarries not to gaze upon the various vanities around him. He never thinks of turning back because of the difficulties of the way. He has a definite goal in view and toward it he steadily presses.

We ought to evidence that we are “strangers and pilgrims” by using the things of this world (when *necessity* requires), but not abusing them (1Co 7:31). By being contented with that portion of this world’s goods which God has assigned us (Phi 4:11). By conscientiously seeking to discharge our own responsibility and not being a “busybody in other men’s matters” (1Pe 4:15). By being moderate and temperate in all things and thus “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11). By laying aside every hindering weight and mortifying our members which are upon the earth, so that we may run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). By daily keeping in mind the brevity and uncertainty of this life (Pro 27:1). By constantly keeping before the heart our future inheritance, knowing that we shall only be satisfied when we awake in our Lord’s likeness.

“If they in spirit amid dark clouds, took a flight into the celestial country, what ought we to do at this day? For Christ stretches forth His hand to us, as it were openly from heaven to raise us up to Himself. If the land of Canaan did not engross their attention, how

more weaned from things below ought we to be, who have no promised habitation in this world?" (John Calvin). When Basil (a devoted servant of Christ, at the beginning of the "Dark Ages") was threatened with exile by Modestus, he said, "I know no banishment, who have no abiding-place here in the world. I do not count this place mine, nor can I say the other is not mine, rather all is God's, whose stranger and pilgrim I am."

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb 11:14). In these words a logical inference is drawn from the last clause of the preceding verse, which supplies a valuable hint on how the Scriptures are to be expounded. The apostle here makes known unto us what was signified by the confession of the patriarchs. Just as the negative implies the positive—"Thou shalt not covet" (Exo 20:17). meaning also, "Thou shalt be content with what God has given"—so for saints to conduct themselves as strangers and pilgrims, and that unto the end of their sojourning in this world, makes manifest the fact that they are journeying heavenwards. "This is the genuine and proper way of interpreting Scripture. When from the words themselves, considered with relation to the persons speaking them and to all their circumstances, we declare what was their determinate mind and sense" (John Owen).

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb. 11:14). Their confession of strangership implied more than that they had not yet entered their promised inheritance, it likewise showed they were earnestly pressing toward it. They had every reason so to do. It was their own "country," for it was there God had blest them with all spiritual blessings before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-4), it was from there they had been born again (Joh 3:3, margin), it was there that their Father, Savior, and fellow-saints dwell. To "seek" the promised inheritance denotes that earnest quest of the believer after that which he supremely desires. It is this which distinguishes him from the empty professor. The latter desires that which is good for himself, as Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous" (Num 23:10), but only the regenerate can truly say, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I *seek after*; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life" (Psa 27:4).

To "seek" after heaven must be the chief aim and supreme task which the Christian sets before him—laying aside all that would hinder and using every means which God has appointed. The world must be held loosely, the affections be set upon things above, and the heart constantly exercised about treading the narrow way, which alone leads thither. "Seek a country"—"Their designs are for it, their desires are after it, their discourses about it. They diligently endeavor to clear up their title to it, to have their temper suited to it, and have their conversation in it, and come to the enjoyment of it" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Heaven is here called a "country" because of its largeness. It is a pleasant country, the land of uprightness, rest and joy. May divine grace conduct both writer and reader into it.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

15. His Address to Saul

In our last article, we left the apostate king of Israel asleep in the cave of Engedi, the very place which had been made a refuge by David and his followers. There Saul lay completely at the mercy of the man whose life he sought. David's men were quick to perceive their advantage and said to their master, "Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee" (1Sa 24:4).

A real temptation presented itself to the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and though he was not completely overcome by it, yet he did not emerge from the conflict without a wound and a stain. "Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily" (1Sa 24:4). How true it is that "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1Co 15:33)! Did this incident come back to his mind when, (probably) at a later date, the Spirit of God moved him to write, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psa 1:1)? Possibly so, at any rate, we find here a solemn warning which each of us does well to take to heart.

"And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt" (1Sa 24:5), which means his conscience accused him and he repented of what he had done. Good is it when our hearts condemn us for what the world regards as trifles. Though David had done no harm to the king's person, and though he had given proof it was in his power to slay him, nevertheless, his action was a serious affront against the royal dignity. No matter what the personal character of the ruler, because of his office, God commands us to "honor the king" (1Pe 2:17). This is a word concerning which all of us need reminding, for we are living in times when an increasing number "despise dominion, and *speak evil* of dignities" (Jude 1:8). God takes note of this!

"David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt." (1Sa 24:5). With this should be compared 2 Samuel 24:10, "And David's heart smote him after that he numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." From these passages it is evident that David was blest with a tender conscience, which is ever a mark of true spirituality. In solemn contrast therefrom, we read of those "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1Ti 4:2), and of some "being past feeling" (Eph 4:19), which is a sure index of those who have been abandoned by God. David soon regretted his rash action and realized he had sinned. May God graciously grant unto reader and writer a sensitive conscience.

"And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD" (1Sa 24:6). How honest of David! He not only repented before God of his rash conduct, but he also confessed his wrongdoing unto those who had witnessed the same. It requires much grace and courage to do this, yet nothing short of it is required of us. Moreover, we know not to whom God may be pleased to bless a faithful and humble acknowledgment of our sins. David now let his men know plainly that he was

filled with abhorrence for having so insulted his sovereign lord. Observe how that it was his looking at things from the *divine* viewpoint which convicted him. He now regarded Saul not as a personal enemy, but as one whom *God* had appointed to reign as long as he lived.

“So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul” (1Sa 24:7). “Stayed” here signifies pacified or quieted them, hindering them from laying rough hands upon the king. The first word of this verse is deeply significant, “So,” in this manner, by what he had just said—how evident that God clothed his words with power! Few things have greater weight with men than their beholding of *reality* in those who bear the name of the Lord. David had honored God by calling the attention of his men to the fact that Saul was His “anointed,” and now He honored David by causing his honest confession to strike home to the hearts of his men. Thus, by restraining his followers, David returned good for evil to him from whom he had received evil for good.

“But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way” (1Sa 24:7). Utterly unconscious of the danger which had threatened him, the king awoke, arose, and went forth out of the cave. How often there was but a step betwixt us and death, and we knew it not. Awake or asleep, our times are in God’s hands, and with the Psalmist, faith realizes, *Thou* holdest my soul in life, see Psa 66:9. None can die a moment before the time his Maker has appointed. Blessed is it when the heart is enabled to rest in God. Each night it is our privilege to say, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety” (Psa 4:8). But how unspeakably solemn is the contrast between the cases of the godly and the wicked. The one is preserved for eternal glory, the other is reserved unto everlasting fire. Such was the difference between David and Saul.

“David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king” (1Sa 24:8). “Though he would not take the opportunity to slay him, yet he wisely took the opportunity, if possible, to slay his enmity, by convincing him that he was not such a man as he took him for” (Matthew Henry). In thus revealing himself to Saul, David intimated that he still entertained an honorable opinion of his sovereign. This was further evidenced by the respectful language which he employed. “And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.” How surprised the bloodthirsty monarch must have been in hearing himself addressed by the one whose life he sought! The posture of David was not that of a cringing criminal, but of a loyal subject. In what follows we have one of the most respectful, pathetic, and forcible addresses ever made to one of earth’s rulers.

“And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?” (1Sa 24:9). It is beautiful to see how David commenced his speech to the king, wherein he endeavors to show how much he was wronged in being so relentlessly persecuted, and how much he desired Saul to be reconciled to him. Most graciously did David throw the blame upon Saul’s courtiers, rather than on the king himself. In the question here asked Saul, it was suggested that his prejudice against David had been provoked by slanderous reports from others. Herein important instruction is furnished us as to what method to follow when seeking to subdue the malice of those who hate us. Proceeding on the assumption that it is not the individual’s own enmity against us, but that it has been unjustly stirred up by others. Particularly does this apply to those in authority.

Respect is due unto them and where they err, due allowance should be made for their having been ill-informed by others.

It is the practical application of the teaching of Scripture to the details of our own lives which is so much needed today. Of what real value is a knowledge of its history or an understanding of its prophecies, if they exert no vital influence upon our conduct? God has given us His Word not only for our information, but as a law to walk by, and every chapter in it contains important rules for us to appropriate and put into practice. What is before us above supplies a timely case in point. How often differences arise between men, breaches between friends, and misunderstandings between fellow-Christians, and how rarely do we see the spirit displayed by David unto Saul exercised now in efforts to effect a reconciliation! Let us earnestly seek grace to profit from the lovely and lowly example here set before us.

“Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD’S anointed” (1Sa 24:10). First, David had refrained from reproaching or sharply expostulating Saul, now he shows that there was no ill-will in his own heart against him. He appealed to the most decisive proof that he had no intention of injuring him. The king had been completely at his mercy, and his men had urged him to dispatch his enemy, but pity for the helpless monarch had restrained him. Moreover, the fear of God governed him and he dared not to lay violent hands upon His “anointed.” By such mild measures did David seek to conciliate his foe. Let us take a leaf out of his copybook and seek by acts of kindness to prove unto those that harbor false thoughts against us that Satan has misled them.

“Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it (1Sa 24:11). “He produceth undeniable evidence to prove the falseness of the suggestion upon which Saul’s malice against him was grounded. David was charged with seeking Saul’s hurt, ‘see,’ saith he, ‘yea, see the skirt of thy robe,’ let this be a witness for me, and an unexceptional witness it is. Had that been true which I am accused of, I had now had thy head in my hand, and not the skirt of thy robe, for I could as easily have cut off that as this” (Matthew Henry). Well for us is it when we can go to one filled with unjust suspicions against us and confirm our words with convincing proofs of our good will.

It is very touching to see David here reminding Saul that there was a more intimate relation between them than that of king and subject. He had been united in marriage to his daughter and therefore does he now address him as “my father” (1Sa 24:11). Here was an appeal not only to his honor, but to his affection. From a monarch one may expect justice, but from a parent, we may surely look for affection. David might have addressed Saul by a hard name, but he sought to “overcome evil with good.” Blessedly did he here prefigure his Lord, who, at the time of his arrest in the garden, addressed the treacherous Judas not as “Betrayor” or “Traitor,” but “Friend.” Nothing is gained by employing harsh terms and sometimes “A soft answer turneth away wrath” (Pro 15:1).

“The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee” (1Sa 24:12). David now appealed unto a higher court. First, he desires that Jehovah Himself shall make it appear who was in the right and who in the wrong. Second, he counts upon the retribution of heaven if Saul should continue to persecute him. Third, he affirms his steadfast resolution that no matter what he might suffer, nor what opportunities might be his to avenge himself, he would not do him hurt, but leave it with God to requite the evil. This was indeed a mild method of reasoning with Saul and the least offensive way of pointing out to him the injustice of his conduct. If men would deal thus with one another how much strife could be avoided and how many quarrels be satisfactorily ended!

“As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee” (1Sa 24:13). This intimates that it is permissible for us to make a right use of the wise sayings of others, particularly of the ancients, even though they are not directly inspired of God. Such aphorisms as, “Look before you leap,” “Too many cooks spoil the broth,” “All is not gold that glitters,” are likely to stand us in good stead if they are stored in the memory and duly pondered. In days gone by, such proverbs were frequently spoken in the hearing of children (we are thankful that they were in ours) and the general absence of them today is only another evidence of the decadence of our times.

“As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.” (1Sa 24:13). The use which David here made of this proverb is obvious. He reminds Saul that a man is revealed by his actions. As a tree is known by its fruits, so our conduct makes manifest the dispositions of our hearts. It was as though David said, “Had I been the evil wretch which you have been made to believe, I would have had no conscience of taking away your life when it was in my power. But I could not—my heart would not let me.” Though the dog barks at the sheep, the sheep do not snap back at the dog.

“After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea” (1Sa 24:14). Here David descends and reasons with Saul on the lowest grounds. In your own judgment I am a worthless fellow, then why go to so much trouble over me! Is it not altogether beneath the dignity of a monarch to take so much pains in hunting after one who is not worthy of his notice? In likening himself to a “flea,” David, by this simile, depicts not only his own weakness, but the circumstances he was in. Obligated to move swiftly from place to place and therefore not easily taken, and if captured, of no value to the king. Why then be so anxious to give chase to one so inconspicuous? “To conquer him would not be his honor, to attempt it only his disparagement. If Saul would consult his own reputation he would slight such an enemy (supposing he were really his enemy), and would think himself in no danger from him.” If Saul had a spark of generosity in him, the humble carriage of David here would surely abate his enmity.

“The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand” (1Sa 24:15). Having pleaded his case so forcibly, David now solemnly warned his enemy that Jehovah would judge righteously between them, deliver him out of his hand, and avenge his cause upon him. When we are innocent of the suspicions entertained against and preferred upon us, we need not fear to leave the

issue with God. This is what our Lord Himself did, "When he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1Pe 2:23). Assured that God would, in due time, vindicate him, David acted faith upon Him and rested in His faithfulness. The justice of God should ever be the refuge and comfort of those who are wrongfully oppressed. The day is coming when the Judge of all the earth shall recompense every evil-doer and reward all the righteous.

A brief analysis of what we may term David's "defense," teaches us what methods we should follow when seeking to show a person that we have given no cause for his malice against us. First, David asked Saul if he had not been unjust in listening to slanders against him (v. 9)? Second, he pointed out that because the fear of God was upon him, he dared not sin presumptuously (v. 10). Third, he appealed to his own actions in proof thereof (v. 11). Fourth, he affirmed he had no intention to retaliate and return evil for evil (v. 12). Fifth, he argued that the known character of a person should prevent others from believing evil reports about him (v. 13). Sixth, he took a lowly place, shaming pride by humility (v. 14). Seventh, he committed his case unto the justice of God (v. 15).

COMING TO CHRIST

Part 3

We trust that sufficient has been said in the previous articles to make clear unto every Christian reader that the saving "coming to Christ" of a poor sinner is neither by physical or mental act, but is wholly spiritual and supernatural—that that act springs not from human reason or human will-power, but from the secret and efficacious operations of God the Spirit. We say clear unto "the Christian reader," for we must not expect the unregenerate to perceive that of which they have no personal experience. The distinction pointed out in the second half of the last article (the whole of which may well be carefully re-read) between a sound intellectual knowledge of Christ and a vital and transforming knowledge of Him, between knowing Christ as He is set forth in the Scriptures, and as He is divinely revealed *in* us (Gal 1:16), is not one which will appeal to the carnal mind, rather it is one which will be contemptuously rejected. But instead of being surprised at this, we should expect it.

Were our last article sent to the average "Fundamentalist" preacher or "Bible teacher," and a request made for his honest opinion of it, in all probability he would say that the writer had lapsed into either "mysticism" or "fanaticism." Just as the religious leaders of Christ's day rejected His spiritual teachings, so the "champions of orthodoxy," those who boast so loudly that *they* are faithfully and earnestly contending for the faith, will not receive the humbling and searching messages of Christ's servants today. The substance of this article would be ridiculed by them. But their very ridicule only serves to demonstrate the solemn truth of 1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him." These words have puzzled some who

have thoughtfully pondered them, for they do not seem to square with the patent facts of observation.

We have personally met the most conscienceless men—untruthful, dishonest, not scrupling to use tactics which many a non-professor would scorn—who, nevertheless, ardently proclaimed the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone. We have had personal dealings with men whose hearts were filled with covetousness and whose ways were worldly almost to the last degree, yet who tiraded against “modernism” and “evolutionism” etc., and “faithfully preached” the Virgin-birth and the blood of Christ as the sinner’s only hope. That these men are “natural” or “carnal,” that is, unregenerate, is plain and unmistakable if we measure them by the infallible rule of Holy Writ. It would not only be a contradiction in terms, but *blasphemy* to say such had been made, by God, “new creatures in Christ.” Nevertheless, so far from the foundation truths of Scripture being “foolishness” unto these unregenerate characters, they warmly endorse and ardently propagate them.

But what has been said above *does not* clash, to the slightest degree, with 1 Corinthians 2:14, when that verse be rightly read and understood. Let it be carefully noted that it does not say the “things *of God* are foolishness” unto the natural man. Had it done so, the writer had been at a complete loss to explain it. No, it declares that the “things *of the Spirit of God*” are foolishness, and what has been said above only serves to illustrate the minute accuracy of this verse. The “things of God” these men profess to believe. The “things of Christ” they appear to valiantly champion, but the “things *of the Spirit of God*,” they are personal strangers unto. And therefore, when His secret and mysterious work upon the souls of God’s elect is pressed upon them, they appear to be so much “foolishness” unto them—either “mysticism” or “fanaticism.” But to the renewed it is far otherwise.

The Spirit’s supernatural operations in the implanting of faith in God’s elect (Col 2:12) produces a “new creation.” Salvation by faith is wrought through the Spirit’s working effectually with the Gospel. Then it is that He *forms* Christ in the soul (Gal 4:19) and lets in the object of faith through the eye of faith, a real “image” of Christ being directly stamped upon the newly quickened soul, which quickening has given ability to discern Christ. Thus, Christ is “formed” in the heart, after the manner that an outward object is formed in the eye. When I say that I have a certain man or object in my eye, I do not mean that this man or object is in my eye *locally*—that is impossible, but they are in my eye objectively—I see them. So, when it is said that Christ is “formed *in us*,” that Christ is “*in you the hope of glory*” (Col 1:27), it is not to be understood that He who is now corporeally at the right hand of God, is *locally and substantially* formed in us. No, but that Christ at the right hand of God, the substance and *object* of faith, is by the Spirit let in from above, so that the soul sees Him by the eye of faith, exactly as He is represented in the Word. So Christ is “formed” in us and thus He “may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17).

What we have endeavored to set forth above is beautifully adumbrated in the lower and visible world. It is indeed striking to discover how much of God’s spiritual works are shadowed out in the material realm. If our minds were but more spiritual and our eyes engaged in a keener lookout, we should find signs and symbols on every side of the invisible realities of God. On a sunny day, when a man looks into clear water, he sees there

a face (his own), formed by representation, which directly answers to the fact outside and above the water. There are not two faces, but one, original and yet represented. But only one face is seen, casting its own single image upon the water. So it is in the soul's history of God's elect, "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, even *as by the Spirit* of the Lord" (2Co 3:18). Oh that His image in us may be more evident to others. We are now ready to turn to,

III. With Our Affections.

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me" (Joh 6:37), declared the Lord Jesus. He who, before the foundation of the world, gave the *persons* of His people unto Christ, now gives them, in regeneration, a *heart* for Christ. The "heart" includes the affections as well as the understanding. In our last article, we pointed out how that no man will (or can) "come to Christ" while ignorant of Him. It is equally true that no man will (or can) "come to Christ" while his affections are alienated from Him. Not only is the understanding of the natural man shrouded in total darkness, but his heart is thoroughly opposed to God. "The carnal mind is enmity [not merely "at enmity," but "enmity" itself] against God" (Rom 8:7). And "enmity" is something more than a train of hostile thoughts, it is the hatred of the affections themselves. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit makes a man a "new creature in Christ," He not only renews his understanding, but He radically changes the heart.

When faith gives us a sight of spiritual things, the heart is warmed with love to them. Note the order in Hebrews 11:13, where, in connection with the patriarchs' faith in God's promises, we are told, "were persuaded of them, and *embraced* them," which is a term denoting great affections. When the understanding is renewed by the Spirit, then the heart is drawn unto Christ with a tender desire for Him. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to make known in the soul the wondrous love of Christ to me, then love unto Him is begotten and goes out toward Him in return. Observe the order in 1 John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." The apostle places knowledge (not intellectual, but spiritual) before faith, and both before a union and communion with divine love. The light and knowledge of Christ and heaven which we have by tradition, education, hearing, or reading, never fires the affections. But when the love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5), O what a difference is produced!

Far too little emphasis has been placed upon this aspect of our subject. In proof of this assertion, weigh carefully the following question. Why is it that "He that *believeth not* shall be damned" (Mar 16:16) is quoted a hundred times more frequently by preachers and tract-writers than "If any man *love not* the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" [accursed] (1Co 16:22)? If we are to properly preserve the balance of truth, we must note carefully the manner in which the Holy Spirit has rung the changes on "believe" and "love" in the New Testament. Consider the following verses, "All things work together for good to them that [not "trust," but] *love* God" (Rom 8:28). "The things which God hath prepared for them that [not only "believe," but] *love* Him" (1Co 2:9). "But if any man *love* God, the same is known [or "approved"] of him" (1Co 8:3). "A crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that [not "believe in," but] *love* his appearing" (2Ti 4:8). "The crown of life

which the Lord hath promised to them that *love* him” (Jam 1:12). “Heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that *love* him” (Jam 2:5). “He that *loveth not* knoweth not God; for God is love” (1Jo 4:8).

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). In our last article, we saw that this “drawing” consists, in part, of the Spirits’ supernatural enlightenment of the understanding. It also consists in the Spirit’s inclining the affections unto Christ. He acts upon sinners agreeably to their nature—not by external force, such as is used on an unwilling animal, but by spiritual influence or power moving their inward faculties, “I drew them with cords of a *man*, with bands of *love*” (Hos 11:4)—by rational conviction of their judgment, by showing them that there is infinitely more goodness and blessedness in Christ than in the creature or the sinful gratification of carnal desires, by winning their hearts to Christ, by communicating to them a powerful sense of His superlative excellency, and complete suitability unto all their needs. To them that “believe, he is *precious*” (1Pe 2:7)—so precious, they are willing to part with the world and everything that they may “win Christ” (Phi 3:8).

As was shown at some length in the opening article, the affections of the natural man are alienated from God, wedded to the things of time and sense, so that he will not come to Christ. Though God’s servants seek to charm him with the lovely music of the Gospel, like the adder he closes his ear. It is as the Lord portrayed it in the parable of the Great Supper, “They all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luk 14:18), one preferring his lands, another his merchandise, another his social recreation. And nothing short of the Almighty power and working of the Holy Spirit in the heart can break the spell which sin and Satan has cast over man, and turn his heart from perishing objects to an imperishable one. This He does in God’s elect by His secret and invincible operations, sweetly working in and alluring them by revealing Christ to them in the winsomeness of His person and the infinite riches of His grace, by letting down His love into their hearts, and by moving them to lay hold of His kind invitations and precious promises.

Most blessedly is this represented to us in, “My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him” (Song. 5:4). Here the door of the heart (Act 16:14), or more specifically, the “door of faith” (Act 14:27), is seen shut against Christ and the object of His love being so loath and unwilling as to rise and open to Him. But though unwelcome, His love cannot be quenched, and He gently enters (He does not burst the door open!) uninvited. His “hand” opening the “door” is a figure of His efficacious grace removing every obstacle in the heart of His elect (cf. Act 11:21), and winning it to Himself. The effect of His gracious entry, by His Spirit, is seen in the “and my bowels were moved for him,” which is a figure of the stirring of the affections after Him—cf. Isaiah 63:15, Philemon 1:12. For the thoughts of this paragraph, we are indebted to the incomparable commentary of John Gill on the Song of Solomon.

O what a miracle of grace has been wrought when the heart is truly turned from the world unto God, from self unto Christ, from love of sin unto love of holiness! It is this which is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise in Ezekiel 36:26, “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.” There is no man that loves money so much, but that he is willing to part with it, for that which he values more highly than the

sum he parts with to purchase it. The natural man esteems material things more highly than he does spiritual, but the regenerated loves Christ more than all other objects beside, and this, because he has been made a "new creature." It is a spiritual love which binds the heart to Christ.

It is not simply a knowledge of the truth which saves, but a *love* of it which is the essential prerequisite. This is clear from 2 Thessalonians 2:10, "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Close attention must be paid unto those words or a wrong conclusion may be drawn. It is not a love *for* the truth, but a love *of* the truth. There are those who have the former, who are destitute of the latter. We have met Russellites and have boarded with Christadelphians, who put many a real Christian to shame. People, who after a long day's work, spent the whole evening in diligently studying the Bible. Nor was it just to satisfy curiosity. Their zeal had lasted for years. Their Bible was as precious to them as a devout Romanist's "beads" or "rosary" are. So too there is a *natural* "love" for Christ, an ardent devotion for Him, which springs not from a renewed heart. Just as one reared among devout Romanists, grows up with a deep veneration and genuine affection for the Virgin, so one carefully trained by Protestant parents, told from infancy that Jesus loves him, grows up with a real but natural love for Him.

There may be an historical faith in all the doctrines of Scripture, where the power of them is never experienced. There may be a fleshly zeal for portions of God's truth (as there was in the case of the Pharisees) and yet the heart not be renewed. There may be joyous emotions felt by a superficial reception of the Word (as there was in the stony-ground hearers, Matthew 13:20), where the "root of the matter" (Job 19:28) be lacking. Tears may flow freely at the pathetic sight of the suffering Savior (as with the company of women who bewailed Christ as He journeyed to the cross, Luke 23:27-28), and yet the heart be as hard as the nether millstone toward God. There may be a rejoicing in the light of God's truth (as was the case with Herod, Mark 6:20) and yet hell never be escaped from.

Since then there is a "love for the truth" in contradistinction from a "love of the truth," and a natural love for Christ in contrast from a spiritual love of Him, how am I to be sure which mine is? We may distinguish between these "loves" thus, first, the one is partial, the other is impartial. The one esteems the doctrines of Scripture but not the duties it enjoins, the promises of Scripture but not the precepts, the blessings of Christ but not His claims, His priestly office but not His kingly rule. But not so with the spiritual lover. Second, the one is occasional, the other is regular. The former balks when personal interests are crossed, not so the latter. Third, the one is evanescent and weak, the other lasting and powerful. The former quickly wanes when other delights compete and prevails not to control the other affections. The latter rules the heart and is strong as death. Fourth, the former betters not its possessor. The latter transforms the life.

That a saving "coming to Christ" *is* the affections being turned to and fixed upon Him, may be further demonstrated from the nature of backsliding, which begins with the heart's departure from Christ. Observe how this is traced to its real source in Revelation 2:4, "Thou hast left [not "lost"] thy first *love*." The reality and genuineness of our *returning* to Christ is evidenced by the *effects* which the workings of the understanding produce upon the affections. A striking example of this is found in Matthew 26:75, "And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny

me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.” That “remembrance” was not merely an historical, but a gracious one—his heart was melted by it. So it ever is when the Holy Spirit works in and “renews” us. I may recall a past sin, without being duly humbled thereby. I may “remember” Christ’s death in a mechanical and speculative way, without the affections being truly moved. It is only as the faculty of our understanding is quickened by the Holy Spirit that the heart is powerfully impressed.

DISPENSATIONALISM

2. The Purpose of God

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15). An elaborate system of error has been built upon an erroneous exegesis of this verse. It has been assumed that the servants of God are there bidden to sectionize the Scriptures, marking out the boundaries of that which pertained each dispensation, and allocating to different companies various parts of the Word of God. It has been supposed that the ability of a man to open up the living oracles is to be determined mainly by his skill to erect arbitrary hedges and shut out the sheep of Christ from the larger portion of the green pastures which God has given them to feed in. Some have carried this pernicious method farther than others, but it is generally agreed that practically all of the Old Testament and the four Gospels are “not for us,” pertaining only to those who lived in previous dispensations.

Now if *the context* of 2 Timothy 2:15 be examined, it will be found that that verse has no more to do with the drawing of lines between the “dispensations” than it has with distinguishing between stars of varying magnitude. There is absolutely nothing in the entire context which, to the slightest degree, favors the strange meaning which has been given to that verse. The plain significance of 2 Timothy 2:15 is interpreted for us by Luke 12:42-43, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” We cannot do better than quote here from one of the Puritans—a company of God’s servants who were endowed with far more spirituality, wisdom, and ability to feed Christ’s sheep, than are we in this decadent age:—

“Ministers are stewards in the house of God and dispensers of the mysteries thereof, and therefore, it is required of them, that they give unto all the servants that are in the house, or do belong unto it, *a meet portion*, according unto their wants, occasions, and services, suitable unto the will and wisdom of their Lord and Master. This giving of provision, and a portion of meat unto the household of Christ, consists principally in the right dividing and distribution of the Word of truth. It is the taking out from those great stores of it in the Scripture and as it were *cutting off a portion* suitable unto the various conditions of those in the family. Herein consists the principal skill of a servant furnished

for the kingdom of Christ, with the wisdom before described. And without this, a common course of dispensing or preaching the Word, without differencing of persons and truths, however it may be gilded over with a flow of words and oratory, is shameful work in the house of God.

“Now unto this skill, sundry things are required. (1.) A sound judgment in general concerning the state and condition of those unto whom any one is so dispensing the Word. It is the duty of a shepherd to know the state of his flock. (2.) An acquaintance with the ways and methods of the work of God’s grace on the minds and hearts of men, that he may pursue and comply with its design in the ministry of the Word. (3.) An acquaintance with the nature of temptation, with the especial hindrances of faith and obedience which may befall those unto whom the Word is dispensed. (4.) A right understanding of the nature of spiritual diseases, distempers, and sicknesses, with their proper cures and remedies belonging thereunto. For the want hereof, the hearts of the wicked are oftentimes made glad in the preaching of the Word, and those of the righteous filled with sorrow—the hands of sinners are strengthened and those who are looking towards God are discouraged or turned out of the way.” (John Owen).

To our dear brethren in the ministry, especially the younger ones, we would respectfully urge the prayerful pondering of the above quotation. It is in the attending to such vital considerations that the preacher may best be guided in the selection of his themes and the material for his sermons. If he is to “speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isa 50:4)—weary of the incessant conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, weary of resisting the continual assaults of Satan, weary of so often confessing to God his repeated failures and falls (tempted to give up in despair). It is to these spiritual problems he had best direct his attention. Ah, my brethren, you will bring more joy to the heart of the great Shepherd and be of far more real help unto His people, by seeking from Him messages suited to their hearts, than by taxing your ingenuity to allot one part of Matthew’s Gospel to the people of Christ’s day, another to the “Jewish remnant” in the tribulation period, and still another to “the millennium.”

It is true that the making of a *practical* application of *all* parts of God’s Word to the varied cases of different souls is not the whole work to which the minister of the Gospel is called, nevertheless, if that be neglected, he is most certainly a physician of no value (Job 13:4). It is also true that the *interpretation* of Holy Writ forms an essential part of a minister’s labor, and that for this an intelligent grasp of God’s purpose and plan is of prime importance. Yet here too there is a great danger of erring. Many *have* erred, and erred grievously, for *their starting point is wrong!* No man can obtain a correct view of God’s “program” by taking his stand in the Garden of Eden. To *start* with “the Adamic dispensation” can lead to nothing but confusion. It is an ominous fact that the great majority of “Dispensationalists,” the men who boast of their ability to “rightly divide the word of truth,” take the creation of man as the commencement of their scheme or system. This at once betrays a woeful ignorance and brands them as incompetent guides.

The key to all of God’s works and ways is *the everlasting covenant*. Long before Adam was made, yea before heaven and earth were created, the Triune God formed His great “purpose” and “plan.” The center of all the divine counsels is Christ, the God-man Mediator, He is “the brightness[or effulgence] of God’s glory” (Heb 1:3). A revenue of

infinite honor and praise was to accrue unto God by the wondrous work which the Redeemer would undertake. In eternity past, a people was given to Him, predestinated to be conformed to His image (Rom 8:29), and in eternity to come, He will "shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness" toward them "through Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7). This is the "eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11), and the stupendous part which Christ was to play in the bringing of this to pass was all determined and fixed in that "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure" (2Sa 23:5).

Now *all* of God's works have this one end in view, namely, the glory of Christ in the redemption of His chosen people, not only in the actual purchasing of redemption, but in all that was preparatory to that purchase, as also in securing the success of it. So too all that Christ does in the discharge of His Mediatorship, in His threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King, either before He became incarnate, during the days of His flesh, or since, and also all that the Father or the Holy Spirit has done before or since the cross, unite in this grand design. Every act of God in creation, providence, or grace, has been wrought in view of the ultimate execution of the eternal covenant of redemption. The various works or dispensations belonging to it, are but parts of one grand whole. It is a single design that was formed, to which all the offices of Christ do directly tend, and in which all the persons of the Trinity do cooperate.

The persons of the Trinity confederated in the great design of redemption. A covenant was entered into between them. In that covenant, the Father appointed the Son, the Son undertaking to work, all things in that work being stipulated and agreed upon. The Holy Spirit pledging Himself for the effectual application of the same unto its predestined beneficiaries. This it is which supplies the key to or throws light upon and explains all the consequent divine actions. The world itself was created in order thereto, for the world was to be the platform or theater on which the great work of redemption was to be wrought out (1Co 4:9). The work of creation was in order to the work of providence, as the building of a house or the making of a machine is for the *use* that is to be made of it; and the center of all God's providential workings is the glorification of the Mediator in the eternal redemption of that people which was given to Him before the foundation of the world.

The creation of heaven was in order to the work of redemption, for it was to be the habitation of the redeemed, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat 25:34). The angels too were created to be employed in this work, and therefore are we told that they are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14). Moreover, it is by means of the wondrous work of redemption that the heavenly hierarchies are being taught the wondrous ways of God, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10).

The entrance of sin was in order to the work of redemption. As the darkness of night is required in order to display the shining stars of the firmament, so sin was needed as a black background to bring out into plainer relief the surpassing love of God unto His own people. As weakness is a foil for strength, ignorance for wisdom, so the Fall of the creature has demonstrated that man's extremity is God's opportunity. The more desperate the case of the patient, the better occasion has the competent physician to exhibit his skill. The

more wretched and unworthy be the object, the more is the favor shown to him enhanced. How can mercy be exercised where there is no transgression? Is not power most clearly seen when formidable obstacles have to be overcome? It was the divine permission of sin to enter the world which provided opportunity for God to more grandly reveal His wondrous attributes.

The government of this world has in view the great work of redemption. God is making all things “work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Take the building of a large house. What a number of workmen are employed, what a variety of materials are used. If we view their actions singly and separately, there seems to be no relation between their labors. One group is engaged in the forest felling trees, another in the kiln making bricks, another in the shop making glass, another in the laboratory mixing paint, another in the plant manufacturing telephone wires, etc., etc. But each is needed, each makes his own essential contribution—all combine to produce the finished house.

Let us give another illustration. Take the publishing of this little magazine. Its design is to provide spiritual food for some of Christ’s scattered sheep. Consider then a few of the wondrous workings and providences of God which make this possible. Trees grew for years that they might be cut down, reduced to pulp, and made into paper. Steel was manufactured and then turned into machines to print, to cut, to fold. Ink too is needed. Railway trains (with all the complicated systems which are necessary to maintain them) must run in a hundred directions to carry these magazines to the varied points of distribution. Yea, many ships must cross thousands of miles of ocean to transfer them to the forty foreign countries to which we send them. Little do the captain and crew of that ship, journeying to a remote island, think that *God* is employing them to carry His messages to one or two of His elect stationed there! Yet so it is!

In all the providential dealings of God, there is “as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel” (Eze 1:16). As we have said above, the great center of all God’s counsels and workings is the glorification of Christ, and that in the saving of His people. In the execution of His purpose, many subsidiary acts are performed and many subservient ends are accomplished, but all move forward to the same grand goal. To make this yet clearer to the reader, consider the Lord’s delivering of the children of Israel from Egypt. The magnifying of His own great name in the redemption of His people was the chief design before Him. But observe the various factors which entered into the same. Jacob and his family must emigrate from the land of Canaan and become sojourners in Egypt—and that was brought about by a mighty famine. There they must be oppressed and enslaved. To that end God raised up Pharaoh to be the merciless persecutor of them.

We must carefully distinguish between the various features of redemption itself and the parts of that work by which the redemption is wrought out. There is an obvious difference between the benefits procured and bestowed, and the operations of God by which those benefits are procured and bestowed. Thus in the case last cited—the difference was marked between the benefit which Israel received and the parts of God’s work by which it was wrought. The benefit which Israel received consisted of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage and misery, and their being brought into a more happy state as the servants of God and heirs of Canaan. But in order to that there was the calling of Moses, his mission to

Pharaoh, the king's obstinacy, the signs and wonders which were wrought before him, with all of God's terrible judgments on his land and people.

Let us now mention some of the principal things which the Triune God designed to be accomplished by the Mediator's work of redemption. First, it was to subdue all God's enemies, for He has decreed that the triumph of His goodness over evil shall finally appear, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1Jo 3:8), and "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1Co 15:25). Second, to restore all the effects of the Fall so far as concerned the elect part of mankind. Originally, man was created in the likeness of God, but the Fall ruined his soul, corrupted his nature, and sank him into spiritual death. Now when the work of redemption is completed, the people of God shall be perfectly conformed unto the image of His Son in spirit and soul and body. Third, to gather together in one all of God's elect angels and men, Ephesians 1:10.

During the interval of time between the Fall and the incarnation of Christ, the works of God were so many forerunners and earnest of the Mediator's advent and preparatory to the work of redemption. There were many great changes and revolutions in the world, yet were they all the turnings of the wheels of providence in order to the coming of Christ into the world. The saints who were saved during those early ages were so many pledges of the future harvest. God wrought many lesser deliverances for them, and these were so many types and foreshadowings of the great salvation which the Redeemer was to work out. God was pleased to reveal Himself to one and another, from time to time, and communicate revelations of light to them. Yet that light was more like that of the moon and stars at nighttime, in comparison with the rising of the Sun of righteousness (Mal 4:2). (Continued in the April issue).

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Part 1

I suppose that every Christian has been exercised at some time or other by verses in Scripture containing the word "perfect" or "perfection." While convinced that those who lay claim to sinless perfection err, yet probably you have not been fully satisfied by any explanation which you have seen of those verses. For example, take such passages as the following, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (1Co 2:6). The Holy Spirit speaking through Paul acknowledges some *are* "perfect," and He was referring to those still on earth. "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2Co 13:9). That was the desire and longing of the apostle for those saints. Did he wish for something unattainable, impossible? "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...that the man of God may be perfect" (2Ti 3:16,17). Such a verse ought to exercise us. "But the God of all grace...make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1Pe 5:10). This too is while we are on earth. "I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Rev 3:2), which clearly

intimates they ought to have been. The Ephesians were being rebuked because their works were imperfect.

Such verses as the above have puzzled and troubled many. Honest hearts have been exercised as to the exact meaning of the term “perfect” or “perfection.” I want then, this morning, to try and give you an outline of the teaching of God’s Word on this important subject. Let us turn next to Job 1:1, “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect.” Yet in Job 9:20, Job says, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.” There seems to be a flat contradiction between those two verses. The explanation is simple. The word “perfect” is used in different senses in those two passages. Job 9:20 signifies, if I were to say I am sinless, faultless, absolutely perfect, I should lie. But what is meant in Job 1:1, where God Himself says that he was “a perfect man”? The term there, and in many other passages of the Old Testament, means “sincere, honest.” Such verses speak of a perfection of *sincerity* as opposed to hypocrisy. Compare Ephesians 6:24.

But there are other verses, especially in the New Testament, where that definition does not fit, where the word “perfect” signifies much more than “honest” or “upright,” and which are by no means easy to interpret. I refer to such verses as we looked at in the beginning. Those verses trouble sincere souls, for such feel that they are very imperfect. While it is true that the Christian may be able to rejoice over what he reads in Hebrews 10:14, “By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified”—yet he mourns and grieves over many imperfections. Coming more closely to our subject, I want to carefully consider what *kind* of “perfection” is attainable in this life by the saint. In Philippians 3:15, Paul says, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect,” and yet in the twelfth verse of the same chapter, the apostle affirmed of himself, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Now Scripture does not contradict itself, yet we need to make distinctions, discriminating between things that differ.

1. We must discriminate between *legal and evangelical perfection*. Legal perfection is that complete and constant conformity in desire, thought, word, and deed which God requires from us unto His holy and righteous law. This is the perfection which God demands from every creature—a full and flawless obedience, both internal and external, loving Him with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves, and this, not occasionally, but perpetually. This has been God’s demand in every age and it cannot be lowered. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10), is the divine sentence resting upon every transgressor. There must be a steady perseverance in doing those things which God has commanded and in abstaining from all those things which He has prohibited. But no fallen human being can possibly meet that demand. As Romans 8:3 declares, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.” An imperfect man cannot live perfectly. A sinful creature cannot yield sinless obedience.

Now it is at this point the marvelous grace of God towards His people appears. As Romans 8:3-4 tells us, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” God sent His Son here as *the surety* of His elect to meet the demands of the law by perfectly obeying it in

their stead. But does this mean that Christ fulfilled the law for us so that *our* responsibility to the law has been removed? Does it mean that Christ has kept the law so that there is no longer need for *us* to keep it? No, that could not be. God cannot forego His claims and Christ would be the minister of sin if He had introduced a system of lawlessness. What then? Christ has procured for His people the gift of the Holy Spirit and in regeneration, the Spirit begets in our hearts *a love for the law*, a desire after that which is holy and righteous before God, and the real Christian longs to meet God's claims, walk obediently, and endeavors *to* do so. Through Christ, God accepts this real desire and genuine effort to obey Him. Here then is where we must draw the first distinction on "perfection." We must discriminate between legal and evangelical perfection.

Legal perfection or sinless obedience was found only in Christ. Evangelical perfection or sincere obedience is found in every Christian. By "sincere obedience" is meant an honest desire and a real effort to keep the law, please God in all things, not allowing any known sin. Evangelical perfection is primarily a thing of the heart, at which God ever mainly looks. The Christian seeks to please and honor God in all things. I speak of what is characteristic or general of him, that which marks the main tenor of his heart and life. Let me illustrate this point to you. The needle of a ship's compass which is in working order, always points to the north. You may take that compass and jar it, and the needle will swing in another direction, but when that compass regains its level, or the interfering finger is removed, the needle resumes its normal and correct relation. Now the normal condition of the heart of a regenerated person points toward God, seeks God, desires God, aims to please Him. There are times—in the storms of life, in the disturbances of temptation, in the assaults of Satan—when the heart is deflected and turned away from God, and this happens frequently in the experience and life of every Christian for "in many things we offend all" (Jam 3:2). Nevertheless, just as surely as the needle of the compass when released from an interfering power turns again to the north, so the heart of a regenerated person comes to itself, recovers its poise, and instinctively turns back to God.

Now this evangelical perfection has marked God's children in every dispensation. Unto Abraham—the father of all them that believe—the Lord said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen 17:1). That was God's standard then—a heart completely surrendered to His claims, a sincere desire and determination to please Him in all things. "I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and *with a perfect heart*, and have done that which is good in thy sight" (2Ki 20:3). This is a verse which has puzzled many, particularly the words we have placed in italics. Was Hezekiah lying? Can you conceive of a man who was dying turning to the Lord and uttering a deliberate falsehood? Was he mistaken? No. The mistake is ours, if we fail to interpret this in the light of other Scriptures. Hezekiah did not mean that his was a sinless heart, nor one that had never deviated from God, but instead, a heart that, in its deepest depths, in its genuine nature, in its real tenor, desired to please God, and which despite many failures, had sought *to* do so. And this is something which every one that will enter heaven must have.

"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with *a perfect heart and with a willing mind*: for the LORD searcheth all hearts" (1Ch 28:9). Here is another scriptural declaration which helps us to understand the nature of evangelical

perfection. The obedience which God requires must be performed readily and not by constraint, with a willing mind. It must be spontaneous and not compulsory. It must proceed from love and not from terror. That obedience which is acceptable to God issues from the gratitude of a renewed heart, and is rendered freely, and not from external constraint. So that to serve Him with "a perfect heart and a willing mind" signifies to obey Him readily and gladly, freely and out of love. As a contrast from 1 Chronicles 28:9 take 2 Chronicles 25:2, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, *but not with a perfect heart.*" Amaziah had received a godly training and had acquired certain godly habits. His external conduct was according to God's law, but He who looks within declared that his heart was not perfect—which refers not to a state of sinlessness, but signifies that his heart was not even honest, it did not ring true. There was not a real desire to please God and an ardent effort to carry out that desire. That is very solemn. It makes one think of James 1:8, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways," and O how many such there are in Christendom today!

Perhaps some amplification of what has just been before us may prove helpful. How often we meet with people who are scarcely the same twice together. They are as variable as the weather. On some occasions they appear to be really spiritual, ready to talk about divine things, anxious to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, desirous of pleasing Him. But perhaps only a few days later, you find them thoroughly wrapped up in the things of the world, with no appetite at all for spiritual converse. The hearts of such people are like the pendulum of a clock in action, never stationary, ever swinging to and fro. It is as the Lord said of Israel of old, "Their heart is divided" (Hos 10:2)—vacillating between love of self and love of God, fluctuating between occupation with Christ and occupation with the world. O my friends, this is solemn and searching. God will not tolerate a rival. Do not mock Him by seeking to give Him half your heart. Do not insult Him by imagining that you can love Him and the world too. Be either one thing or the other, 1 Kings 18:21, Revelation 3:15.

Now to sum up this first point of distinction. Legal perfection is that sinless perfection which the law demands from man—that absolute, undivided, continuous obedience, both inward and outward, to all its precepts. This strict and faultless obedience Christ rendered unto the law in the stead of and on behalf of His people. Evangelical perfection is that sincere desire of a renewed heart to please God in all things, a desire which is inseparably linked to an honest determination and effort *to* do so. True, that desire is never fully realized by any of us in this life, yet He who looks at and knows the heart, perceives its true and deep longings after Himself, and so, for Christ's sake, accepts the will for the deed.

2. We must distinguish between *absolute and relative perfection*. And here too the former was found only in Christ, for He alone received the Spirit without measure (Joh 3:34). He is the only one that could truthfully say, "I do *always* those things which please him" (Joh 8:29). How blessed and refreshing it is for our hearts to turn away from the world, from considering our own failures, and contemplate that blessed One who lived here for thirty-three years, the eye of the Father ever upon Him and always seeing that which delighted Him, ever able to say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat 3:17). And *Christ* is the standard which God sets before us. "Let this mind

be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phi 2:5). "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1Pe 2:21). "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1Jo 2:6).

God has set before us a perfect standard, but it is never fully reached by any Christian, for the flesh is still left within us, and "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). Now that very opposition between the flesh and the Spirit in the Christian, issuing in so many failures and sins, causes him to hang his head in shame, groan, and cry, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom 7:24). That was true of Paul himself, this was his experience. It was the beloved apostle who said, "O wretched man that I am," and he said it not before conversion, nor during the early years of his Christian life, but much later on. So with us there is a daily failing and need for a daily forgiveness. Yet, while sinless perfection is unattainable by us now, there *is* a relative perfection which should be reached by the Christian, and which may be attained in this life. Let me seek to define the nature of this.

It is really twofold. First, *as Christians are compared with non-Christians*. In contrast from the unconverted, the saints are subject to Christ. They have surrendered to His Lordship, accepted His yoke, and so are "perfect" in contrast from those who yield not themselves to Him. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt *be perfect*, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Mat 19:21). The obvious meaning of that word was, "If thou wilt be a Christian, if you are anxious to be saved, here is what you must do—go and sell what you have, give to the poor, come and follow me." In other words, if you wish to enjoy the *privileges* of the Gospel, you must submit to the *rules* of the Gospel. Thus, the word "perfect" is used here in a relative way, to describe the Christian in contrast from the non-Christian. In Christianity, "perfection" is found in contradistinction from Judaism, see Hebrews 6:1. Judaism was but the blade—Christianity is the full corn in the ear. When one becomes a Christian, he has reached relative "perfection," in contrast from those who are not Christians.

Before passing on, we had better anticipate a question, suggested by, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast," (Mat 19:21). which should be linked up with Luke 14:33. The question is this, does God require me to part with all that I have? The answer is yes and no. Yes, in the sense that God requires me to hold everything that I have at His disposal and it may be that, before many months have passed, He will put some of us to the test. God requires me to hold every object I have in this world at *His* disposal, so that if He makes it clear I am to relieve His poor suffering people to the extent that I should give away every cent, I am to do so. Nothing that I have is *mine* absolutely. This must be recognized and owned. What I have is only loaned me by God. Then does this mean that it is wrong for me to have any money in the bank at the present time? No, it means I am to say, "Lord Thou hast been pleased to prosper me, I have so much on hand, but it is for Thee to say how it shall be used. If it is Thy will for me to keep it, Thy will be done. If it is Thy wish for it to be used in relieving the distress of others, I am ready to do so." The man who does this has a "perfect" heart. There is no reserve in it, it is fully yielded to God. The man who has not done this is no Christian. He is not regenerated, for his heart treasures

gold more than God. If he will not place his gold at God's disposal, that money is his god—which proves that he is unsaved. When God saves a man, He works in him *a miracle* of grace. He changes the natural character or bent of the heart. It is the natural bent of the heart to hold on to that which we have worked hard to obtain, but the supernatural grace of God makes us willing to lay all at the Lord's feet.

This is true not only of gold, but of our *children* also. A regenerated person will place each child at the absolute disposal of God, saying, "It is not mine, it is Thine to do with as Thou pleaseth—to enlighten or to leave in darkness, to save and send forth as a missionary to the heathen, or to remain here. It is *Thy* creature and my heart relinquishes all absolute claims upon it." Everything we have and are must be laid before God and by the heart truly held at His sovereign disposal. This is the nature of *relative* Christian "perfection." It is the difference between the heart of a converted and an unconverted person.

Second, there is a relative perfection *as one Christian may be compared with other Christians*. Even saints differ much among themselves. Though none attain unto absolute and sinless perfection, yet there are several degrees of grace and diversity of growth among Christians. There are babes, young men, fathers (1Jo 2:13). The strong and mature Christian is relatively "perfect" in contrast from the weak and immature, who has less wisdom to detect error and less strength with which to resist sin and Satan. I want us to look at Scripture in connection with this point. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro" (Eph 4:14). God is not honored by our remaining spiritual dwarfs. He is not glorified by a Christian continuing a spiritual child all his days. We should outgrow our spiritual babyhood.

"We speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (1Co 2:6). "Perfect" here means matured, fully grown, in contrast from spiritual babes. The Corinthians were squabbling, one saying, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos." (1Co 3:4). They were so carnal as to be fighting among themselves. Consequently the apostle said, "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1Co 3:1). So you see there *are* differences among God's people. "For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age" (Heb 5:13-14). "Brethren, be not children in understanding...be men" (1Co 14:20)—act like such. "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1Co 16:13). Those who are well instructed by the Spirit in the mysteries of the faith, who have made real progress in practical godliness, who are firm and established in their love for God, are comparatively "perfect" in contrast from the "babes" in Christ.

3. There is also a "perfection" *of parts*. Let me illustrate from the physical. A child born minus a limb lacks a complete or perfect body. So one born with two arms and loses one, no longer has a complete or perfect body. Thus it is if a Christian lacks the development of any of the really vital grace. He may have faith, zeal, perseverance, but if he lacks compassion, he is deficient—his spiritual character is maimed. If a Christian has tenderness, patience, great consideration for others, but lacks courage, faithfulness, unflinching righteousness, he is lacking in parts. 2 Peter 1:5-7 is for the correcting of this, inculcating the fully developed Christian character, bidding us cultivate all the graces of the Spirit, and thus be a "perfect" Christian, that is, complete in all his parts. "May grow up

into him in *all* things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15)—not only in faith, courage, patience, but in everything.

4. There is also a "perfection" *of degrees* or growth in grace, an advancing from spiritual babyhood to spiritual maturity. "When I was a child, I spake as a child...but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1Co 13:11). See the little one surrounded by its toys in the nursery, Behold the same child fifteen years later—it has no use for those toys, it has outgrown them. So it should be with us spiritually. Look again at an infant. It is easily peeved, it cries at almost anything, that is the characteristic of a "child," and it is largely the same with a "babe" in Christ—worrying and fretting over trifles. "When I became a man, I *put away* childish things" (1Co 13:11). God help us all to do so.

An address (revised) given by the editor to a little company in the home God has kindly loaned us.

SOUND THE ALARM

The saddest feature to us which is now presented by the worldwide "Depression," is not the material destitution which has overtaken millions of our fellow creatures, but the spiritual poverty of so many of our dear brethren and sisters in Christ. They seem to be as helpless as the poor worldlings, and while no doubt they all have faith that God will not let them starve to death, yet they apparently know of nothing better than simply to ask Him to be merciful and give them patience to wait until times get better again. While they cannot be entirely innocent with the Word of God to their own hand, yet we are convinced that they are more to be pitied than blamed. By far the greater part of the guilt rests upon the preachers and "Bible teachers" whom they have sat under during the past twenty years.

If those who were so zealous in denouncing "Modernism," "Higher Criticism," "Evolution," *ad lib.*, *ad nauseam*, had devoted their energies unto teaching their hearers what it means to *walk with God*, He had been more honored, and they had been more helped. If those who so loudly and so constantly warned against "Russellism," "Pentecostalism," "Eddyism" etc., etc., had been faithful in warning the professing people of God against the sins of covetousness, luxury, and extravagance, and had emphasized the teaching of Scripture upon mortification and the denying of self, though they had not been so popular, far more real good had been accomplished. If those who were so diligent in bidding people "rightly dividing the word of truth," (2Ti 2:15). and adopt their arbitrary methods of sectioning the Scriptures—allocating this part to a company in the remote past, and another part to some company in the distant future—had shown their congregations how to apply the Scriptures practically unto all the varied details of their lives, we should not now witness the pathetic sign which we do.

Were we to follow our own inclinations, we had much prefer writing along different lines from what we are now doing, but we dare not remain silent any longer. While so many of God's people are still in danger of being deceived by blind leaders, it is high time

to warn those whom our pen can reach. So many seem to think that because a preacher is "sound" on all the "fundamentals," that his messages must be helpful, that because they hear "faithful" sermons on the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the Virgin birth of Christ, and so on, that their souls are getting just the food they need. This by no means follows. There is "a *time* to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecc 3:1), there is "the present truth" (2Pe 1:12), and there is such a thing as "a word *in season*" (Isa 50:4). The tragic thing is that scarcely any of the present-day leaders recognize or are experimentally equipped to give out such.

We are well aware that the above language is strong and sweeping, but the published programs of the "Bible conferences," the "subjects" being taken at the "Bible Institutes," the titles of religious books now being published, all illustrate and demonstrate the truth of what we have said. When we hear of those that are without work and reduced to almost the lowest point of existence, being entertained with lectures on "Daniel's seventy weeks" and interpretations of the symbols of the Apocalypse, it makes us think of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning! When we hear of the homes of Christians being seized and sold and of other saints being dependent upon *unsaved* relatives, it seem high time that some voice was raised asking the question, Is *that* a testimony which honors Christ? Is that an experience which witnesses unto the *faithfulness of God* to undertake for His own?

Instead of the poor, suffering, bewildered children of God having explained unto them what is signified by the "four horses" of Revelation 6 or who is represented by the "two beasts" of Revelation 13, they need to be shown how to pray down temporal blessings, how to have God working miracles for them, how to bring about the fulfillment of some of His wondrous promises. But who is there that is engaged in such a ministry today? Are there none who are now proving for themselves the sufficiency of God and can point the way for others to do likewise? Yes, here and there, there is one who is experimentally acquainted with the God of Elijah, but O how pathetically few is their number!

Has not God declared that He is ready *to* "show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2Ch 16:9)? Certainly He has and He cannot lie. If then God has *not* shown Himself "strong" on your behalf, and if He is not *now* doing so, then it must be because your heart has not been and is not now "perfect toward Him." Ah, it is at the *heart* God ever looks! Nor does a "perfect" heart here signify a sinless one—see our article upon "Christian Perfection" in this issue. No, a "perfect" heart is one which genuinely trusts, loves, and obeys God. A "perfect" heart is one which has been weaned from all idols and finds its satisfaction in the Lord Himself.

"Six days shalt thou labor" (Exo 20:9). That is as much a divine command as "The seventh day [after the six—note it does not say, "the seventh day *of the week*"!] is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any [unnecessary] work" (Exo 20:9). But there is many a Christian man who is not working at all. Why? "Because there is none available for him." Ah, that is the answer a worldling would give. "Because *God* is providing none for him" is better, for that places the emphasis where it rightly belongs. And why is not God obtaining an opening for honorable employment? There must be some reason, nothing happens by chance. If you have asked Him to undertake for you and He has not done so, may not that show you have not His ear!

“Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whither soever thou goest. 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* thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and *then* thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:7-8). How many have not “prospered” and do not enjoy “good success”? True, and is the reason far to seek? Have they fulfilled the terms which God has here specified? If not, is not the fault their own? Perhaps someone says *that* promise does not concern *us*. But why not? Is not Joshua 1:5 applied to all Christians in Hebrews 13:5! It is the devil who seeks to persuade us that such *searching* promises as these do not pertain unto Christians today.

“Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in *this* time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mar 10:29-30). Here is a *New Testament* promise which relates to *material* blessings. But mark, it is also a *conditional* one, it is only for those who genuinely put Christ first in their lives, who, at His call, are willing to forsake all things for Him.

Now three things are indispensable if we are to enjoy God’s blessings, rather than suffer His chastisements. First, all known sin—past as well as present—must be repented of, confessed, and forsaken (Pro 28:13). It is unpardoned sins which withhold good things from us (Jer 5:25). This principle has always obtained and will unto the end of time. Second, real trust in the Lord, “According to your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29). Even the promises of God avail us not unless they be personally “embraced” (Heb 11:13). “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (Jam 4:2)—ask not with a real, living, expectant, persistent faith. Third, an honest effort to serve Him. God will not place a premium upon disobedience. In keeping His commandments there is “great reward” (Psa 19:11). True, we do not *purchase* God’s favors, nevertheless, in His moral *government* of the world, He stands pledged to recompense the righteous “in the earth” (Pro 11:31).

The whole history of Israel supplies an illustration of what we have been saying above. God prospered or chastened them in accord with their conduct toward Him. And the principles of His governmental dealings have not changed. When Israel fasted, repented, reformed, and served the Lord wholeheartedly, His rod was removed and His smile again bestowed. There is much in Kings, Chronicles, and Jeremiah that is most pertinent for us today. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (Mat 11:15).

