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A SEARCHING QUESTION.

“For what dost thou make request?” Nehemiah 2:4.

Nehemiah was a man whom many would envy. His environment was attractive and he occupied a position of prominence and honour. He dwelt “in the palace” (1:1) and was “the king’s cupbearer” (1:11). Nevertheless he was far from being happy. Ah, my reader, material things cannot satisfy—neither wealth nor dignities supply contentment to their possessors. But Nehemiah was stricken with something more than natural discontent: his spirit was grieved because of the dishonour which had been done the Lord, because of the reproach which lay upon His cause, because of the woeful condition of His people. Jerusalem was in ruins: the temple was desolate. Israel were captives in a strange land, suffering because of the sins of their fathers. Nehemiah was deeply exercised, so that he “sat down and wept and mourned certain days and fasted” (1:4). Then he poured out his heart in contrite prayer and earnest supplication (1:5-11). Having prevailed with God, chapter 2 shows us how he prevailed with the king of Persia.

When Nehemiah appeared again before the king to serve him with wine, his countenance reflected the anguish of his soul. Whereupon his royal master inquired as to the cause of his sadness. For a moment Nehemiah was affrighted, sought the help of God, and then, like a man, told the king the cause of his grief. So far from being angry, the king asked, “For what dost thou make request?” The privilege of offering petition unto me is yours: what is it thou wouldst have me to do for thee? God touched the heart of this monarch showing that “the king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1). The Lord had given His servant favour in the eyes of this august ruler. Beautiful is it to behold the sequel. Nehemiah refused to take personal advantage of such an opportunity and seek his own aggrandizement. Instead of asking for higher honours and emoluments for himself, he sought that which was for the glory of God and the good of His people.

“For what dost thou make request?” It is surely not a straining of this passage to apply it to the subject of prayer. Doing so, we may observe here, first, a call to *solemn consideration* when we are about to engage in this holy exercise. It is not an equal you are approaching, but the Majesty of Heaven. It is the Most High, the King of kings, the ineffably Holy One you are going to address. A realization of that fact should deeply impress the soul. Even though I am a real Christian, that gives me no license to rush into the Lord’s presence with unbecoming familiarity and unholy irreverence. If Nehemiah was afraid in the presence of Artaxerxes, how much more cause have I to tremble before the Almighty: not with the trembling of servile dread but with the awe of His sovereignty, His infiniteness, His omniscience. Far be it from God’s children to offer the “sacrifice of fools” unto Him before whom the very seraphim veil their faces. This searching question, then, bids us remove the shoes of carnality, approach with humility, and weigh beforehand the petitions we propose to present. Is my request suited to the character of Him whom I supplicate?

“For what dost thou make request?” Second, this is a call to *definiteness*. May we not legitimately take this as the King of Zion making similar inquiry of us? You seek unto His Throne of Grace: you desire an audience with His sacred Majesty—for what purpose? Why, to unburden your heart before Him, to obtain grace to help in time of need. But if you are not to insult Him and if your quest is not to be profitless, He requires defi-

niteness. He stops you, as it were, on the threshold with this challenge: “for what dost thou make request?” Vague and undefined desires, indefinite and general petitions will get you nowhere. It is very necessary that we should put this question to ourselves ere we bow the knee before the Lord—exactly what is it I am going to ask for? Suppose that you were limited to a single request, for what would it be? If you might ask for one thing only, what would you select? Much of our praying fails because of *lack of* this definiteness. Can you remember the chief thing for which you supplicated even yesterday? If not, is there any wonder your praying accomplishes so little?

“For what dost thou make request?” Third, this is a test of *the state of our souls*. That for which we make request supplies an index to our inward condition, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” The natural man will ask for natural (material) things, the selfish for that which will minister to his own gratification—he asks amiss that he may “consume it upon his own lusts.” But the spiritual will ask for spiritual mercies that he may honour God and glorify Christ. He will ask for a heart that hates sin and loves holiness. He will ask for the subjugation of that which rises up in rebellion against the Lord. That He will “subdue his iniquities.” He will ask for God’s love to be shed more abundantly in his heart and His Law to be written more deeply in his mind. He will ask for the strengthening of his graces: “quicken me according to Thy Word.” He will beg the Divine Husbandman to make him a more fruitful branch of the Vine.

“For what dost thou make request?” Fourth, this puts to the proof the *breadth of our affections*. The prayers of a genuine Christian are by no means restricted to the supply of his own personal need, but are concerned with those of his brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus our requests not only reveal the state of our hearts but the breadth of them. How we need to pray “Lord, enlarge my heart” (Psa. 119:32): deliver me from a selfish and sectarian spirit. What a word is that: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18). “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14), many of whom we have never seen in the flesh and are not even acquainted with their names! And how do we evidence our love for them? Because we find they are laid on our hearts: because we make their cause and welfare our own: because we daily make request for their blessing.

For what *ought* I to make request? What should be the chief burden of my petitions? Is not the reply furnished in the two prayers of the Lord Jesus: the one which He gave to His disciples (Matt. 6), and the other which He offered Himself (John 17)? A pondering of them in the light of our present inquiry reveals three things. First, that we should make the honour of God our chief concern, that His glory might be more and more manifested in us and by us and through us. That is where our Redeemer began: “When ye pray say, Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name” (Matt 6:9) and “Father the hour is come, glorify Thy Son that Thy Son also may glorify Thee” (John 17:1) This is what lay nearest His heart and should it not ours, too? Second, that we should supplicate for the whole Household of Faith. The prayer which He taught His disciples is the *Family Prayer*: all its pronouns are in the plural number. It is not “*my* Father” but “*our* Father.” It is not “give *me* and forgive *me*,” but “give *us* and forgive *us*.” Our hearts are to take in and go out to all our brothers and sisters. We behold the same thing in the petitions of our great High Priest: “I pray for *them*: I pray not for the world” (John 17:9). Six times over in that prayer we find Him making mention of the company “given to Him”: it was (and

is) for the whole election of grace He intercedes. Third, that we should ask chiefly, though not solely, for spiritual blessings upon our fellow-saints. Only one of the petitions of Matthew 6 relates to the supply of temporal needs. In John 17 Christ prays for the preservation (v. 12), the joy (v. 13), the sanctification (v. 17), the unification, (v. 21), the perfecting (v. 23) and the glorification (v. 24) of the elect.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

25. *False Prophets*: Matthew 7:15-20.

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (v. 15). No idle or needless warning was this, but one which should be seriously taken to heart by all who have any concern for the glory of God or value their eternal interests. Our danger is real and pressing, for “false prophets” are not few in number but “many” (1 John 4:1) and instead of being found only in the notoriously heretical sects have “crept in” among saints until they now dominate nearly all the centres of orthodoxy. If we are deceived by them and imbibe their lies the result is almost certain to be fatal, for error acts upon the soul as deadly poison does on the body. The very fact that these impostors assume “sheep’s clothing” and pose as the servants of Christ greatly increases the peril of the unwary and unsuspecting. For these reasons it is imperative that we should be on our guard. But to be properly on our guard requires that we should be informed, that we should know how to recognize these deceivers. Nor has our Lord left us unfurnished at this vital point, as the succeeding verses show.

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.” Three questions are suggested by this statement, to which it is necessary we should obtain correct answers if this rule here laid down by Christ is to be used by us to good advantage. First, what sort of knowledge is it that is mentioned? Is it relative or absolute? Is it the forming of a credible and reliable judgment of the teachers we sit under and whose writings we peruse, or is it an unerring discernment which precludes us from making any mistake? Second, how is this knowledge obtained? Is it a Divine endowment or a human acquirement? Is it one of the spiritual gifts which accompanies regeneration, a sense of spiritual perception bestowed upon the Christian, or is it something after which we must labour, which can be procured only by our own diligence and industry. Third, what are the “fruit’s” brought forth by the false prophets? Are they their character and conduct or is something else intended? Really, it is this third question which is the principal one to be pondered but we will say a little upon the first two before taking it up.

The answer to the first question should be fairly obvious, for even in the day of human deification we have heard of none laying claim to infallibility except the arch-humbag at Rome. But though the knowledge here predicated is not an inerrant one, yet it is something much superior to a vague and uncertain one. In those words our Lord lays down a rule, and like all general rules we may make mistakes—both favourable and unfavourable—in the application of it. The knowledge which Christ here attributes to His people is such a persuasion as to inform them how they should act toward those who appear before them as preachers and teachers, enabling them to test their claims and weigh their messages. Though it does not always enable its possessor to penetrate the disguise worn by impostors, yet it is sufficient to arouse his suspicion and if acted on to preserve him from falling a prey to deceivers. It is a knowledge which fortifies the Christian from being beguiled by religious seducers.

And how is this knowledge procured? It is both obtained and attained from God, attained by practice. Spiritual discernment is one of the accompaniments of the new birth: necessarily so, for regeneration is a being brought out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. In that light the Christian is able to perceive things which previously were hidden from him, yet he must perforce walk with Him who is light if he is not to recede into the shadows. There are degrees of light, and the measure of our spiritual illumination de-

creases as distance increases between us and “the Sun of righteousness.” Moreover, sight is as essential as light for clear vision. The faculty of spiritual perception belongs to each soul renewed by the Spirit, yet faculties unemployed soon become useless to their possessors. When the Apostle was contrasting unhealthy saints with the healthy (Heb. 5:11-14) he described the latter as “those who by reason of *use* have their senses *exercised* to discern both good and evil.” The more we walk in the light and the more we exercise our spiritual faculties the more readily shall we perceive the snares and stumbling stones in our path.

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.” False prophets are to be identified by what they produce. By their “fruits” we understand, principally, their creed, their character, and their converts. Is it not by these three things that we recognize the true Prophets? The genuine servants of God give evidence of their Divine commission by *the doctrine* they proclaim: their preaching is in full accord with the Word of Truth. The general tenor of their lives is in harmony wherewith, so that their daily walk is an example of practical godliness. Those whom the Spirit quickens and edifies under their preaching bear the features of their ministerial fathers and follow the lead of their shepherds. Conversely, the ministers of Satan though feigning to be the champions of the Truth oppose and corrupt it: some by denying its Divine authority, some by mingling human tradition with it, others by “wresting” it or by withholding vital portions thereof. Though their outward conduct is often beyond reproach, their inward character, the spirit which actuates them, is that of the *wolf*—sly, cruel, fierce. And their converts or disciples are like unto them.

The true Prophet accords God *His rightful place*. He is owned as the King of kings and Lord of lords, as the One who “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” He is acknowledged to be the sovereign Ruler of Heaven and earth, at whose disposal are all creatures and all events, for whose pleasure they are created (Rev. 4:11), whose will is invincible and whose power is irresistible. He is declared to be God in *fact* as well as in name. He is the One whose claims upon us are paramount and incontestable. The One who is to be held in the utmost reverence and awe—the One who is to be served with fear and rejoiced in with trembling (Psa. 2:11). Such a God the false prophets neither believe in nor preach. On the contrary, they prate about a “God” who wants to do this and who would like to do that but cannot because His creatures will not permit it. Having endowed man with a free will, he must neither be compelled nor coerced and while Deity is filled with amiable intentions He is unable to carry them out. Man is the architect of his fortunes and the decider of his own destiny and God a mere Spectator.

The true Prophet gives *Christ His rightful Place*, which is very much more than to be sound concerning His Person. Romanists are more orthodox about the Deity and humanity of Christ than are multitudes of Protestants, yet the former as much as the latter are grossly heterodox upon His official status. The true Prophet proclaims the Lord Jesus as *the Covenant Head* of His people, who was set up before the foundation of the world to fulfill all the terms of the Covenant of Grace [Everlasting Covenant] on their behalf and to secure for them all its blessings. He sets forth Christ as the “Surety” and “Mediator” of the Covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6); as the One who came here to fulfill His Covenant engagements: “Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:9)—it was a voluntary act, yet in discharge of a sacred agreement. All that Christ did here upon earth and that which He is now doing in Heaven was and is the working out of an eternal compact. Everything relating to the Church’s salvation was planned and settled by Covenant stipulation be-

tween the Eternal Three. Nothing was left to chance, nothing remained uncertain, nothing was rendered contingent upon anything the creature must do. About this glorious and fundamental Truth the false prophets are completely silent.

It was to fit Him for His Covenant engagements the Surety became incarnate. It was to redeem His people from the curse of the Law that Christ was made under it, fulfilled its terms, endured its penalty in the place and stead of His Covenant people. It was for them and no others He shed His precious blood. Because He faithfully and perfectly discharged His covenant obligations, the Father has sworn with an oath that all for whom He acted shall be eternally saved, that not one of them should perish, solemnly declaring that "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). God has made with Christ and His people in Him, "an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and *sure*" (2 Sam. 23:5). But the false prophets reverse all this. They misrepresent the redemptive work of Christ as being a vague, indefinite, general promiscuous thing, rendering nothing sure. They believe Christ shed His blood for Judas equally with Peter and for Pilate as truly as Paul. They preach a salvation which is uncertain and contingent, as though it were for anybody or nobody as the caprice of men shall decide: Christ provided it and if we accept it, well and good; if not, He will be disappointed.

The true Prophet *puts man in his proper place*. He declares that man is a depraved, ruined and lost creature, dead in trespasses and sins. He points out that man is alienated from God, that his mind is enmity against Him, that he is an inveterate rebel against Him. He shows this is true not only of those in heathendom but equally so of those born in Christendom: that "there is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:10, 11). He makes it clear that man is a total wreck, that no part of his being has escaped the fearful consequences of his original revolt from his Maker: that his understanding is darkened, his affections corrupted, his will enslaved. Because of what transpired in Eden man has become the slave of sin and the captive of the Devil. He has no love for the true and living God. He has instead a heart that is filled with hatred against Him—so far from desiring or seeking after Him, he endeavours by every imaginable means to banish God from his thoughts. He is blind to His excellency, deaf to His voice, defiant of His authority and unconcerned for His glory.

The true Prophet goes still further. He not only portrays the sinner as he actually is but he announces that man is utterly unable to change himself or better his condition one iota. He solemnly announces man to be "without strength," that he *cannot* bring himself into subjection to the Divine Law or perform a single action pleasing to God (Rom. 8:7, 8). He insists that the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots more readily than they who are accustomed to do evil can perform that which is good (Jer. 13:23). In short, he declares that man is hopelessly and irremediably lost unless a sovereign God is pleased to perform a miracle of grace upon him. But it is the very opposite with the false prophets. They speak "smooth things" and flatter their hearers, persuading them that their case is very far from being as desperate as it really is. If they do not expressly repudiate the Fall, or term it (as the Evolutionists) a "fall upward," they greatly minimize it, making it appear to be only a slight accident which may be repaired by our own exertion, that man is little affected by it, that he still has "the power to accept Christ."

According as the Fall of man be viewed and preached so will be the conceptions of men concerning the need and nature of redemption. Almost every Gospel Truth will necessarily be coloured by the light in which we view the extent of the Fall. Take the Truth

of *Election*: which is the deciding factor? God's will or mine? Why, if I be in possession of freedom of will and am not on probation, everything must turn on the use I make of this all-important endowment. But can this be made to square with the Scriptures? Yes, by a little wresting of them. It is true that false prophets hate the very word "election," but if they are pressed into a corner they will try and wriggle out of by saying those whom God elected unto salvation are the ones whom He foreknew would be willing to accept Christ and that explanation satisfies ninety-nine per cent of their hearers. The truth is God foreknew that if He left men to their pleasure *none would* ever accept Christ (Rom. 9:29), and therefore He made a sovereign and unconditional selection from among them. Had not God eternally chosen me, I certainly had never chosen Him.

The same holds true of *regeneration*. If the sinner is spiritually impotent and his case hopeless so far as all self-effort and help is concerned, then he can no more quicken himself than can a rotten corpse in the tomb. A dead man is powerless and that is precisely the *natural* condition of every member of the human race, religious and irreligious alike: "*dead* in trespasses and sin." The individual concerned in it contributes no more to his new birth than he did to his first. This was expressly insisted upon by Christ when He declared, "which were born not of blood (by descent from godly parents), nor of the will of the flesh (by his own volition), nor of the will of man (by a persuasive preacher), but of God" (John 1:13). There must be an act of *Divine* creation before anyone is made a new creature in Christ. But the false prophets represent man to be merely "bruised" or at most crippled by the Fall and insist that he may be born again simply by accepting Christ as his personal Saviour—a thing which none can do until he is brought from death unto life.

The genuine Prophet trumpets forth with no uncertain sound the grand Truth of *justification*. Rightly did Luther declare that, "Justification by faith is the doctrine of a standing or falling church," for those who pervert it corrupt the Gospel at its very heart. In view of man's fallen and depraved condition, in view of his being a transgressor of the Divine Law, lying beneath its awful condemnation, the question was asked of old, "How then, can man be justified with God?" (Job 25:4). To be "justified" is very much more than being pardoned: it is the declaration by the Divine Judge that the believer is *righteous* and therefore entitled to the *reward* of the Law. But how is this possible when man has no righteousness of his own and totally unable to produce any? The answer is that Christ not only bore in His own body the sins of God's elect but He rendered to the Law a perfect obedience in their place—the moment they believe in Him His obedience is reckoned to their account, so that each can say, "in the LORD have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24). But the false prophets deny and ridicule this basic truth of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The true Prophet gives the *Holy Spirit His rightful place*, not only in the Godhead, as co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Son but in connection with salvation. Salvation is the *gift* of the Triune God: the Father planned it, the Son purchased it, the Spirit communicates it. The genuine servant of God is very explicit in declaring that the work of the Holy Spirit is as indispensable as the work of Christ: the One serving *for* His people, the Other acting *in* them. It is the distinctive office of the Spirit to illumine the understanding of God's elect, to search their conscience and convict them of their ruined and guilty condition. It is His office to work repentance in them, to communicate faith unto them and to draw out their hearts unto Christ. The most sound and faithful preaching

in the world will avail nothing unless the Holy Spirit applies it in quickening power. The most winsome offers and persuasive appeals will be useless until the Spirit bestows the hearing ear. The true Prophet knows this and therefore he has no confidence in his own abilities but humbly seeks and earnestly prays for the power of the Spirit to rest upon him. But how different is it with deceivers of souls!

The genuine servant of God not only realizes the truth of that word, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of Hosts" (Zech. 4:6) in connection with the fruitage of his labours. And he is also deeply conscious of his own need of being personally *taught* by the Spirit. He has been made to feel his utter insufficiency to handle sacred things and to realize that if he is to enter into the spiritual meaning of the Word he must be Divinely taught in his own soul. A mere intellectual study of the letter of Scripture cannot satisfy one who longs for a deeper experimental knowledge of the Truth, nor will he be content with simply informing the minds of his hearers. As it is a tender conscience and a fuller heart-acquaintance with God and His Christ that he covets for himself, so it is to the conscience and heart of his *hearers* he addresses himself. It is the opposite with the false prophets: they are occupied solely with the letter of Scripture, with outward profession: there is no deep probing, nothing searching in their messages, nothing to disturb the religious worldling.

Another mark by which many of the false prophets may be recognized is the disproportionate place they give to prophecy in their preaching and teaching. This has ever been a favourite device of religious charlatans as those versed in ecclesiastical history are well aware. Nor should any observer of human nature be surprised at this. God has placed an impenetrable veil upon the future, so that none can know "what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1). But man is intensely curious about coming events and gives a ready ear to any who pretend to be able to enlighten him. If on the one hand the irreligious will flock to palmists, astrologers and other fortune-tellers, the religious will crowd around anyone who claims to be able to explain the mysterious content of the Apocalypse. In times of war and national calamity the curious are easily beguiled by men with charts on the book of Daniel. The express prohibition of our Lord, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons" (Acts 1:7) should deter His people from giving ear to those who claim to have "light" thereon.

In this article we have not dealt with false prophets generally but have confined ourselves to those who wear "sheep's clothing," whose attacks are made upon the flock of Christ. These are men who boast of their soundness in the Faith, and obtain a hearing among those who regard themselves as the cream of orthodoxy. Thus far we have dwelt upon their creed, of what they believe and teach. Next month (D. V.) we shall describe some of the distinguishing traits of their characters and then point out that the type of converts they make also serves to identify them by the "fruit" they produce. Our design in entering into such detail is that young Christians may be furnished with a full-length photo of these deceivers and to make it clear we are not condemning such because they differ from us on one or two minor matters, but are thoroughly corrupt in doctrine. Furthermore, in all that has been before us it should be clear that we should labour diligently to become thoroughly acquainted with God's Word for ourselves, or how shall we be fitted to detect these seducers of souls? Ponder Acts 17:11.—A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

2. *His Call.*

In our introductory article we sought to point out the close connection there is between the missions and ministries of Elijah and Elisha—let us now consider the personal relation that existed between the two Prophets themselves. This is something more than a point of interest: it throws light upon the character and career of the latter, and it enables us to discern the deeper spiritual meaning which is to be found in this portion of the Word. There was a twofold relation between them: one official and the other more intimate. The former is seen in 1 Kings 19:16 where we learn that Elijah was commanded to “anoint Elisha to be Prophet,” and it is worthy of note that while it is generally believed all the Prophets were officially “anointed” yet Elisha’s case is the only one expressly recorded in Scripture. Next we learn that immediately following his call Elisha “went after Elijah and ministered unto him” (19:21), so the relation between them was that of master and servant, confirmed by the statement that he “poured water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kings 3:11).

But there was more than an official union between these two men: the ties of affection bound them together. There is reason to believe that Elisha accompanied Elijah during the last ten years of his earthly life, and during the closing scenes we are shown how closely they were knit together and how strong was the love of the younger man to his master. During their lengthy journey from Gilgal to the Jordan, Elijah said to his companion, again and again, “Tarry ye here, I pray thee,” but nothing could deter Elisha from spending the final hours in the immediate presence of the one who had won his heart or make him willing to break their communion: so they “still went on, and talked” (2 Kings 2:11). Observe how the Spirit has emphasized this: first “they went down to Bethel” (v. 2), but later “they *two* went on” (v. 6), “they two stood by Jordan” (v. 7), “they two went on dry ground” (v. 8), refusing to be separated. And when they *must* be, Elisha cried, “My father! my father” (v. 12)—a term of endearment. And in token of his deep grief “took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces.”

As the invariable rule of Scripture, it is the *first* mention which supplies the key to all that follows: “Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be Prophet in *thy room*” (1 Kings 19:16). Those words signify something more than that he was to be his successor. Elisha was to take Elijah’s place and act as his accredited representative. This is confirmed by the fact that when he found Elisha, Elijah “cast his mantle upon him” (v. 19), which signified the closest possible identification. It is very remarkable to find that when Joash, the king of Israel, visited the dying Elisha he uttered the self-same words over him as the Prophet had used when Elijah was departing from this world. Elisha cried “My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof”—the real defense of Israel (2 Kings 2:12). And Joash said, “O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof” (2 Kings 13:14): that not only marked the identification of Elisha with Elijah, but the identification as actually *owned* by the king himself.

Another detail which serves to manifest the relation between the two Prophets is found in the striking reply made by Elisha unto the question of his master: “Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken from thee,” namely, “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (2 Kings 2: 9). That his request was granted appears clear from the sequel: “if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee,” and verse 12 assures us, “and Elisha saw it.” Moreover, when the young Prophets saw him smite

the waters of the Jordan with his master's mantle so that they "parted hither and thither, they exclaimed, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (v. 15). The "double portion" was that which pertained to the firstborn or oldest son and heir: "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a *double* portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength: the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:17), and cf., 1 Chronicles 5:1.

Elisha, then, was far more than the historical successor of Elijah: he was appointed and anointed to be his *representative*—we might almost say his "ambassador." He was the man who had been called by God to take Elijah's place before Israel. Though Elijah had left this scene and gone on High, his ministry was not to cease: true, he was no longer here in person but he would be so in spirit. Elisha was to be in "his room" (1 Kings 19:16), for the starting point of his mission was the ascension of his master. Now what, we may ask, is the spiritual significance of this? What is the important instruction to be found in it for us today? Surely the answer is not far to seek. The relation between Elijah and Elisha was that of *master* and *servant*. Since the anointing of Elisha into the prophetic office is the only case of its kind expressly recorded in Scripture, are we not required to took upon it as a representative or *pattern* one? Since Elijah was a figure of Christ, is it not evident that Elisha is a type of those servants specially called to represent Him here upon earth?

The conclusion drawn above is manifestly confirmed by all the preliminary details recorded of Elisha ere he entered upon his life's work. Those details may all be summed up under the following heads: his call, the testing to which he was submitted and from which he successfully emerged, the oath he was required to follow, and the special endowment which he received equipping him for his service. The closer these details are examined and the more they be prayerfully pondered, the more evidently will it appear to anointed eyes that the experiences through which Elisha passed are those which substantially each genuine servant of Christ is required to encounter. Let us consider them in the order named. First, the call of which he was the recipient. This was his induction into the sacred ministry. It was a clear definite call by God, the absence of which makes it the height of presumption for anyone to invade the holy office.

The summons which Elisha received to quit his temporal avocation and henceforth devote the whole of his time and energies to God and His people is noted in, "So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who, plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth; and Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him" (1 Kings 19:19). Observe how that here, as everywhere, God took the initiative: Elisha was not seeking unto God. But the Lord through Elijah sought him out. Elisha was not found in his study but in the field, not with a book in his hand, but at the plow. As one of the Puritans said when commenting thereon, "God seeth not as man seeth, neither does He choose men because they *are* fit, but He fits them because He hath chosen them." Sovereignty is stamped plainly upon the Divine choice, as appears also in the calling of the sons of Zebedee while "mending their nets" (Matt. 4:21), of Matthew while he was "sitting at the receipt of custom" (Matt. 9:9), and Saul of Tarsus when persecuting the early Christians.

Though Elisha does not appear to have been seeking or expecting a call from the Lord to engage in His service, yet it is to be noted that he was *actively engaged* when the call came to him, as was each of the others alluded to above. The ministry of Christ is no

place for idlers and drones who wish to spend much of their time driving around in cars or being entertained in the homes of their members and friends. No, it is a vocation which calls for constant self-sacrifice, which entails the burning of the midnight oil and which demands tireless devotion to the performance of duty. Those, then, who are most likely to be sincere and energetic in the ministry are those who are industrious and business-like in their temporal avocation. Alas, how many who wish to shirk their natural responsibilities and shelve hard work have entered the ministry to enjoy a life of comparative ease.

“Elisha” means “God is Saviour” and his father’s name “Shaphat” signifies “judge.” “Abelmeholah” is literally “meadow of the dance” and was a place in the inheritance of Issachar, at the north of the Jordan valley. Elisha’s father was evidently a man of some means for he had “twelve yoke of oxen” engaged in plowing, yet he did not allow his son to grow up in idleness as so often is the case with the wealthy. It was while Elisha was usefully engaged in the performance of duty, undertaking the strenuous work of plowing, that he was made the recipient of a Divine call unto special service. This was indicated by the approach of the Prophet Elijah and his casting his mantle—the insignia of his office—upon him. It was a clear intimation of his own investiture of the Prophetic office. This call was accompanied by Divine power, the Holy Spirit moving Elisha to accept the same, as may be seen from the promptness and decidedness of his response.

Before we look at his response let us consider the very real and stern *test* to which Elisha was subjected. The issue was clearly drawn: to enter upon the prophetic office, to identify himself with Elijah meant a drastic change in his manner of life. It meant the throwing up of a lucrative worldly position—the leaving of the farm—for the servant and soldier of Jesus Christ *must not* “entangle himself with the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:4)—Paul’s labouring at “tent-making” was quite the exception to the rule and a sad reflection upon the parsimoniousness of those to whom he ministered. It meant the breaking away from home and natural ties. Said the Lord Jesus, “he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37): if such immoderate affection was an effectual bar to Christian discipleship (Luke 14:26) how much more so from the Christian ministry? The test often comes at this very point: it did so with the present writer, who was called to labour in a part of the Lord’s vineyard thousands of miles from his native land, so that he saw not his parents for the space of thirteen years.

There was first, then, the testing of Elisha’s affections, but he shrank not from the sacrifice he was now called upon to make. “And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah.” Note the alacrity, the absence of any reluctance. And he said, “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother and I will follow thee.” Observe his humble spirit: he had already taken the *servant’s* place, and would not even perform a filial duty without first receiving permission from his master. Let any who may be exercised in mind as to whether or not they have received a call to the ministry search and examine themselves at this point, to see if such a spirit has been wrought in them. The nature of Elisha’s request shows clearly that he was not a man devoid of natural feelings, but an affectionate son, warmly attached to his parents. So far from being an excuse for delaying his obedience to the call, it was a proof of his promptness in accepting it and of his readiness to make a deliberate break from all natural ties.

“And he (Elijah) said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?” (v. 20). It was as though the Prophet said: Do not act impulsively, but sit down and count the cost

ere you definitely commit yourself. Elijah did not seek to influence or persuade him: it is not to me but to God you are accountable—it is *His* call which you are to weigh. He knew quite well that if the Holy Spirit were operating He would complete the work and Elisha would return to him. O that the rank and file of God's people would heed this lesson! How many a young man, never called of God, has been pressed into the ministry by well-meaning friends who had more zeal than knowledge? None may rightly count upon the Divine blessing in the service of Christ unless he has been expressly set apart thereto by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2). One of the most fearful catastrophes which has come upon the churches (and those terming themselves "assemblies") during the past century has been the repetition of what God complained of old: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran" (Jer. 23:21). To intrude into the sacred office calls down Heaven's curse (2 Sam. 6:6, 7).

But Elisha's acceptance of this call from God not only meant the throwing up of a comfortable worldly position and the breaking away from home and natural ties. It also involved his following or casting in his lot with one who was very far from being a popular hero. Elijah had powerful enemies who more than once had made determined attempts on his life. Those were dangerous times, when persecution was not only a possibility but a probability. It was well, then, for Elisha to sit down and count the cost: by consorting with Elijah he would be exposed to the malice of Jezebel and all her priests. The same is true in principle of the Christian minister. Christ is despised and dejected of men, and to be faithfully engaged in His service is to court the hostility not only of the secular but of the religious world as well. It was on religious grounds that Jezebel persecuted Elijah, and it is by the false prophets of Christendom and their devotees that the genuine ministers of God will be most hated and hounded. Nought but love for Christ and His people enable him to triumph over his enemies.

"And he returned back from him and took a yoke of oxen and slew them and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen and gave unto the people and they did eat" (1 Kings 19:21). This farewell feast was a token of joy at his new calling and an expression of gratitude to God for His distinguishing favour. The burning of the oxen's tackle was a sign that he was bidding a final adieu to his old employment. Those oxen and tools of industry, wherein his former labours had been bestowed, were now gladly devoted to the celebration of the high honor of being called to engage in the service of God Himself. Those who rightly esteem the sacred ministry will freely renounce every other interest and pleasure, though called upon to labour amid poverty and persecution; yea, they who enter into the work of our heavenly Master without holy cheerfulness are not at all likely to prosper therein. Levi the publican made Christ "a great feast in his own house" to celebrate his call to the ministry, inviting a great company thereto (Luke 5:27-29).

"Then he arose and went after Elijah." See here the power of the Holy Spirit! The evidence of God's effectual call is a heart made willing to respond thereto. Divine grace is able to subdue every lust, conquer every prejudice, surmount every difficulty. Elisha left his worldly employment, the riches to which he was heir, his parents and friends, and threw in his lot with one who was an outcast here. Thus it was with Moses, who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26). Love for Christ and His saints, faith in His ultimate

“Well done,” were the motive-springs of his actions. And such must actuate one entering the ministry today.

“Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him” (1 Kings 19:21). That was the final element in this initial test. Was he prepared to take a subordinate and lowly place, to become a servant, subjecting himself to the will of another? That is what a servant is: one who places himself at the disposal of another, ready to take orders from him, desirous of promoting *his* interests. He who would be given important commissions must prove himself. Thus did God approve of Stephen’s service to the poor (Acts 6:5) by later permitting him to address the leaders of the nation (Acts 7:1, 2). Because Phillip “disdained not to serve tables” (Acts 6:2, 5) he was advanced to the rank of missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 8:5, 26). On the other hand, Mark was discontented to be merely a servant of an Apostle (Acts 15:37, 39) and so lost the opportunity of being trained for personal participation in the most momentous missionary journey ever undertaken. Elisha became the servant of God’s servant, and we shall see (D. V.) how he was rewarded.—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

6. *Its Blessedness.*

2. What comfort is there here *for fearing saints*! All Christians have a reverential and filial fear of God and an evangelical horror of sin. Some are beset with legal fears and most of them with anxieties which are the product of a mingling of legal and evangelical principles. These latter are occasioned more immediately by anxious doubts, painful misgivings, evil surmisings of unbelief. More remotely, they are the result of the permissive appointment of God, who has decreed that perfect happiness must be waited till His people get home to Heaven. Were our graces complete, our bliss would be complete, too. In the meantime it is needful for the Christian traveler to be exercised with a thorn in the flesh and that "thorn" assumes a variety of forms with different believers. Whatever its form, it is effectual in convincing them that this earth is not their rest or a mount whereon to pitch tabernacles of continuance. In many instances that "thorn" consists of anxious misgivings, as the frequent "fear not" of Scripture intimates: the fear of being completely overcome by temptation, of making shipwreck of the faith, of failing to endure unto the end.

Once again we would quote those words of Christ, "Of them whom Thou gavest Me have I lost none" (John 18:9). Is not that inexpressibly blessed! That every one of the dear children whom the Father has entrusted to the care and custody of the Mediator shall be brought safely to Glory! The feeblest as much as the strongest, those with the least degree of grace as those with the most, the babes as truly as the full grown. Where true grace is imparted, though it be as a grain of mustard seed, it shall be quickened and nourished so that it shall not perish. This should be of great consolation to those timid and doubting ones who are apt to think it will be well with Christians of great faith and eminent gifts but that such frail creatures as they know themselves to be, will never hold out, who dread that Satan's next attack will utterly vanquish them. Let them know that the self-same Divine protection is given to all the redeemed. It is not because one is more godly than another but because both are held fast in the hand of God. The tiny mouse was as safe in the ark as the ponderous elephant.

What encouragement is there here for the godly, who, when they view the numerous Amaleks in the way and hear of the giants and walled cities before them, are prone to dread their meeting with them. How many a one has trembled as he has pondered that word of Christ, "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23, 24) and said the Apostles, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 25). If it be such a difficult matter to get to Heaven, if the gate be so strait and the way so narrow—and so many of those professing to tread it turn out to be hypocrites and apostates, what will become of me? When thus exercised, remember Christ's answer to the astonished disciples, "with God all things are possible" (v. 26). He who kept Israel on the march for forty years without their shoes wearing out, can quite easily preserve you, O you of little faith.

"Thou has a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand" (Psa 89:13). Grandly is that fact displayed in creation. Who has stretched out the heavens with a span? Who upholds the pillars of the earth? Who has set limits to the raging ocean, so that it cannot overflow its bounds? Whose finger kindled the sun, the moon and the stars, and kept those mysterious lamps of the sky alight all these thousands of years? Whose hand

has filled the sea with fish, the fields with herds and made the earth fertile and fruitful? So, too, the mightiness of the Lord's arm is manifest in *Divine Providence*. Who directs the destinies of nations and shapes the affairs of kingdoms? Who sets the monarch upon his throne and casts him from it when it so pleases Him? Who supplies the daily needs of a countless myriad of creatures so that even the sparrow is provided for when the earth is blanketed with snow? Who makes all things work together for good—even in a world which lies in the Wicked one—to them that love Him, who are the called according to His purpose?

When a soul is truly reconciled to God and brought to delight in Him, it rejoices in all His attributes. At first it is apt to dwell much upon His love and mercy but as it grows in grace and experience it delights in His holiness and power. It is a mark of spiritual understanding when we have learned to distinguish the manifold perfections of God, to take pleasure in each of them. It is a proof of more intimate communion with the Lord when we perceive how adorable is the Divine character, so that we meditate upon its excellences separately and in detail and praise and bless Him for each of them. The more we are given to behold all the varied rays of His pure light, the more we are occupied with the many glories of His crown, the more shall we bow in wonderment before Him. Not only shall we perceive how infinitely He is above us, but how there is everything in Him suited to our need—grace to meet our unworthiness, mercy to pardon our sins, wisdom to supply our ignorance, strength to minister to our weakness. “Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods! who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!” (Exo. 15:11).

How this glorious attribute of God's power ensures the final perseverance of the saints! Some of our readers have passed through sore trials and severe tribulations, yet they prevailed not against them: they shook them to their foundations but they did not overthrow their faith. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19). Fierce were the foes which many a time gathered against you and had not the Lord been on your side you would have quickly been devoured. But in Him we find a sure refuge. The Divine strength has been manifested in our weakness. Is it not so, my brother, my sister: that such a frail worm as yourself has never been crushed by the weight of opposition that has come upon you?—ah, “underneath *were* the everlasting arms.” Though you trembled at your feebleness, yet “out of weakness *were* made strong” (Heb. 11:34) has been your case, too. Kept alive with death all around you, preserved when Satan and his hosts encompassed you. Must you not say “strong is Thy right hand”!

3. What comfort is there here for souls who are *tempted to entertain hard thoughts of God*! The awful corruptions of the flesh which still remain in the believer are ever ready to complain at the difficulties of the way and murmur against the dispensations of Divine Providence. The questionings of unbelief constantly ask, Has God ceased to be gracious? How can He love me if He deals with me thus? These questions are sufficient in themselves to destroy the soul's peace and quench its joy. But when to these are added the infidelities of Arminianism which declare that God takes no more care of His children than to suffer the Devil to enter in among and devour them, that the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, affords no more security to His flock than to allow wolves and lions to come among and devour them at their pleasure—how shall the poor Christian maintain his confidence in the love and faithfulness of the Lord? Such blasphemies are

like buckets of cold water poured upon the flames of his affection for God and are calculated only to destroy that delight which he has taken in the riches of Divine grace.

The uninstructed and unestablished believer is apt to think within himself, I may for the present be in a good state and condition but what assurance is there that I shall *continue* thus? Were not the apostate angels once in a far better state and more excellent condition than mine? They dwelt in Heaven itself but now they are cast down into Hell, being “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6)! Adam in Paradise had no lusts within to tempt and seduce him, no world without to oppose and entangle, yet being in honour he continued not but apostatised and perished. If it was not in *their* power to persevere much less so in mine, who is “sold under sin” and encompassed with a world of temptations, what hope is there left to me? Let a man be exercised with such thoughts as these, let him be cast back solely upon himself and what is there that can give him any relief or bring his soul to any degree of composure? Nothing whatever, for the so-called “power of free will” availed not either the angels which fell or our first parents.

And what is it which will deliver the distressed soul from these breathings of despair? Nothing but a believing and laying hold of this grand comfort: that the child of God has an infallible promise from his Father that he shall be preserved unto His heavenly kingdom, that he shall be kept from apostasy, that the intercession of his great High Priest prevents the total failing of his faith. So far from God’s being indifferent to the welfare of His children and failing in His care for them, He has sworn, “I will not turn away from them to do them good” (Jer. 32:40). So far from the good Shepherd proving unfaithful to His trust, He has given express assurance that not one of His sheep shall perish. Rest on those assurances, my reader, and your hard thoughts about God will be effectually silenced. As to the stability and excellency of the Divine love, is it not written, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17)? What can more endear God to His people than that?! How it should fix their souls in their love to Him.

Well might Stephen Charnock say of Arminians, “Can these men fancy Infinite Tenderness so unconcerned as to let the apple of His eye be plucked out, as to be a careless Spectator of the pillage of His jewels by the powers of Hell, to have the delight of His soul (if I may so speak) tossed like a tennis ball between himself and the Devil?” He that does the greater thing for His people shall He not also do the less: to regenerate them is more wonderful than to preserve them, as the bestowal of life exceeds the maintaining of it. The reconciliation of enemies is far harder than dealing with the failings of friends: “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. *Much more then*, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath though Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:8-10). If there were such efficacy in the death of Christ, who can estimate the virtue of His resurrection! “He ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25).

4. What comfort is there here for *aged pilgrims*! Some perhaps may be surprised at this heading, supposing that those who have been longest in the way and have experienced most of God’s faithfulness have the least need of consolation from this truth. But such a view is sadly superficial to say the least. No matter how matured in the faith one may be, or how well acquainted with the Divine goodness, so long as he is left down here

he has no might of his own and is completely dependent upon Divine grace to preserve him. Methuselah stood in as much need of God's supporting hand during the closing days of his pilgrimage as does the veriest babe in Christ. Look at it from the human side of things: the aged believer, filled with infirmities, the spiritual companions of his youth all gone, perhaps bereft of the partner of his bosom, cut off from the public means of grace—looks forward to the final conflict with trepidation.

“And even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you” (Isa. 46:4). Why has such a tender and appropriate promise been given by God if His aged saints have no need of the same? They, any more than the young, are not immune from Satan's attacks. He is not slow to tell the tottering believer that as many a ship has foundered when in sight of port, so the closing storm of life will prove too much for him: that though God has borne long with his unbelief and waywardness, even His patience is now exhausted. How then is he to meet such assaults of the Fiend? In the same way as he has done all through his course—by taking the shield of faith, wherewith he shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the Wicked one (Eph. 6:16)—by having recourse to the sure promise of Him who has said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end” (Matt. 28:20).

Ah, my aged friend, how often have you proved in your experience the truth of those words, “thine enemies shall be found *liars* unto thee” (Deut. 33:29). What a shameless liar the Devil is! Did he not tell you in some severe trial, “The hand of the Lord is gone out against you: He has forsaken you and will no more be gracious to you. He has deserted you as He did Saul the king and now you are wholly given up unto the powers of evil: the Lord will no more answer you from His holy oracle; He has utterly cast you off”? Yet you found that God had not deserted you after all and this very day you are able to join the writer in thanking Him for His lovingkindness and to testify of His unfailing faithfulness. How often has your own unbelief whispered to you, “I shall one day perish at the hand of this foe who seeks my life: my strength is gone, the Spirit withholds His assistance, I am left alone and must perish”? Yet year after year has passed and though faint you are still pursuing, though feeble you will hold on your way, by His grace!

Has not Satan often told you in the past, “Your profession is a sham, iniquities prevail over you, the root of the matter is not in you. You were a fool to make a profession and cast in your lot with God's people: there is no stability in you. You are certain to apostatise and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ”? And did not your own doubts second his motion, telling you that your experience was but a flash in the pan, some evanescent emotion which like a firebrand would die out into black ashes? Unbelief has whispered a thousand falsehoods into your ear, saying this duty is too difficult, this toil will prove too great, this adversity will drown you. What madness it was to lend an ear to such lies! Can God ever cast away one on whom He has fixed His everlasting love? Can He renounce one who was purchased by the blood of Christ? Thus will it prove of your last fears: “Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee.”

5. What comfort is there here *for preachers*! Many a rural minister views with uneasiness the departure into cities of some of his young converts. And may well he be exercised at the prospect of them leaving their sheltered homes to be brought into close contact with temptations to which they were formerly strangers. It is both his duty and privilege to give them godly counsel and warning, to follow them with his prayers, to write them: but if they be soundly converted he need not fear about their ultimate well-

being. Servants of God called to move into other parts are fearful about the babes in Christ which they will leave behind, yet if they really be such they may find consolation in the blessed fact that the great Shepherd of the sheep will never leave nor forsake them.—A.W.P.

THE UNKNOWN WAYS OF LOVE.

C.H. Spurgeon—1876

Conclusion

“Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13: 7).

III. Our not being able to know what the Lord does *should never shake our confidence in Him*. I hope, dear brethren, our faith in Christ does not rest upon our capacity to understand what He does: if so, I fear it is not faith at all, but a mere exercise of self-conceited carnal reason. Some things which the Lord has done bear upon their very fore-front the impress of His infinite love, but I hope you know enough of Him now to be able to believe that where there are no traces of love apparent to you, His love is surely there. I rejoice in that part of my text which runs thus: “What I do.” This washing of the feet was not being done by Bartholomew or Nathaniel: it was the personal act of the Lord Himself. Now, when the Master and Lord is the Actor, who wants to raise a question or to suggest inquiry? It must be right if *He* does it: to question His conduct would be an insult to His majestic love.

Do you know Christ? Then you know the character of His deeds. Do you know your Lord? Then you are sure that He will never act unkindly, unbecomingly, or unwisely. He can never send a needless sorrow, or wantonly cause a tear to flow. Can He? Here, then, is the question, not why is it done—but who is doing it? And if the Lord is doing it, we can have no doubt about the excellence of His design. We believe that He is right when we cannot see that He is so. If we do not trust Him far beyond what we know, it will show that our confidence in Him is very limited. When a person only obeys another because he chooses to obey and sees it a proper thing to do, he has not the spirit of implicit obedience at all. And when a person only confides in another as far as he can see that he is safe, he is a stranger to implicit confidence. Confidence has its sphere beyond the boundaries of knowledge: where judgment ceases, faith begins. “What I do thou knowest not now.” Ah, You best beloved of our souls, in that You speak truly, but we can reply to You that we know and are sure that what You do is supremely good.

IV. Our want of understanding as to what our Lord does generally shows itself most in reference to *His personal dealings with us*. “What I do thou knowest not now” refers to His washing Peter’s feet. Brethren, if there is anything which we are not likely to understand thoroughly, it is that which has to do with ourselves. We are too close home to see clearly. In this case the looker-on sees more than the player. We generally form a better opinion of the character, position, and needs of another than we do concerning ourselves. It is said of Moses’ face that everyone saw it shine but one man, and that was Moses, for he could not see his own countenance. So also if a man’s face is black it is black to everybody but himself: he does not see his own spots. We cannot form accurate estimates of ourselves and so we must not expect when Christ is personally dealing with us that we should be able to understand what He does to us.

If the Lord is dealing with us in an afflicting way we are generally in an unfavourable state of mind for forming any judgment at all, being, as a rule, too disturbed in mind by the affliction itself. When an hospital patient is under the knife he is a poor judge of the necessity of the operation or the skill of the surgeon. In after days, when the wound is healed he will judge better than he can do when the knife is just cutting through nerves and sinew and bone. Judge nothing before the time. You are not in a right condition to

judge, and therefore do not attempt it. When you are smarting under the rod, your opinions and estimates and forecasts are about as much to be depended upon as the whistling of the wind or the dashing of the waves. Cease from judging, calculating and foreboding, and believe that He who ordains our lot orders all things in kindness and wisdom.

I do not wonder that Peter was puzzled and could not understand his Lord's procedure, for it is always a hard thing for an active and energetic mind to see the wisdom of being compelled to do nothing. Here is a man who can drag a net to the shore full of big fishes, and instead of using his strength he is made to sit still and do nothing! Peter, the hardy, vigorous worker, must sit down like a gentleman or a cripple and do nothing. He cannot make it out. He has been very useful and he thinks he could be useful now; he could at any rate wait at the table, or carry the basin, or wash his fellows' feet, if it must be done. But he is bound to sit still and do nothing and does not understand it. Brethren, the hardest work a man ever has to do who wants to serve the Lord Jesus is to stand aside in forced inactivity and take no share in what is going on. It is hard to be put on the shelf among the cracked crockery and to be of no more use than a broken vessel, while you feel you could be useful if you had but strength to leave your chamber. The proud idea that you have been wonderfully useful tempts you to repine at being laid among the lumber and you feel it to be a very mysterious business.

Then what is worse, Peter not only cannot do anything, he is *receiving from others* and must be waited on by them, and chiefly by his Master, who he at other times loved to serve. To have his feet washed must have appeared to a hardy fisherman like Peter a strange luxury. He would say, "Cannot I do it myself? I am not used to being waited on." To sit there and while doing nothing, to be also engrossing the care of another must have been a singular position to him. It is very unpleasant to an active man to be unable to work and to be dependent upon others for every little detail and necessity of life. To borrow other people's strength and tax other people's care is not desirable. To stand in need of anxious prayers and to arouse pitying thoughts seem strange to those who have been accustomed to do rather than to suffer. "Why," you seem to say, "I have prayed for them, I have worked for them: are they now to pray and work for me? I have fed the sheep; are the sheep going to feed me? I have washed the saints' feet; are they going to wash mine? Am I to be dependent upon others and not to be able to lend a hand or lift a finger?" Ah, well, we must not ask questions, but we are very apt to do so. We do not know and we become inquisitive, but the Saviour says, "What I do thou knowest not now."

All the while there is very prominent in our mind a sense of insignificance and unworthiness, which makes our receipt of favours the more perplexing. "What," says Peter, "I, I unworthy Peter, shall I be washed by the Lord Jesus Christ?" So it seems to us unworthy sinners. Why should God's people be thinking about me, and careful about me? Why has the Lord Himself deigned to make my bed in my sickness? Why has His blessed Spirit condescended to be my Comforter, applying precious promises to me? Whence is this to me? We do not comprehend it. We are lost in wonder, and it is no marvel that we are.

That we greatly need the sacred purging of Jesus is not so wonderfully mysterious after all, for we *need* purging and cleansing love for the removal of daily defilement. Sometimes trials in business, sad bereavements, acts of ingratitude, pains of sickness, or depressions of spirit are just the basin and the water and the towel with which our Lord is washing our feet. We are clean through the blood of Jesus, but the daily cleansing we still

need. It is a wonder that some of us are ever out of the furnace, for our dross is so abundant. I shall not be surprised if I find myself often under the flail, for the straw and the chaff are plentiful in me. Some metals are so apt to rust that it is no wonder they are so often burnished. Some soils need a deal of plowing; they are very apt to cake and grow hard and therefore must be broken up. So it is with us, there is a need be for what the Lord is doing.

In Peter's case there was a need of fellowship, for our Lord said, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me." You cannot have fellowship with Christ except He does this or that for you, nay, especially except He tries you; for how shall you know the suffering Saviour except you suffer yourself? Communion with the afflicted Redeemer is promoted by our personal afflictions. There was a need yet again for Peter and the rest to learn the lesson of washing their brethren's feet by seeing the Lord wash theirs. No man can rightly wash another's feet till his own feet have been washed by his Saviour. It is in the kingdom of Christ a law that there must be experience before there can be expertness. You must be comforted or you cannot comfort; you must find mercy yourself or you cannot lead others in the search. You must be washed or you cannot wash. Thus there were good reasons for our Lord's act but they were not seen by Peter, nor do the motives for our Lord's dispensations toward us always appear upon the surface. When Jesus Himself is dealing with us, especially if it is in a way of trial, we do not understand it and He has need to say, "What I do thou knowest not now."

V. Upon this point and upon many others *we shall one day be informed*. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know *hereafter*." That "hereafter" may be very soon. Peter knew within a few minutes what Jesus meant, for He says to him, "Know ye what I have done unto you? If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet." Thus the light was not long in breaking. Why are you in such a hurry when you are in trouble to begin spelling out a naughty reason for God's dealings, when if you will but wait you shall know the right reason in a short time? A child is in an ill temper because there has been a rule made by the father and not explained. And so it sits down and sulks and thinks of some unkind, ungenerous motive, on the father's part. In a minute or two after it understands it all and has to eat its own words, and confess, "How bad of me to impute such unkindness to my dear father, who is always seeking my good." If you will get reasoning in haste about your Lord's dispensations, you will have to take all your reasonings back and you will have to afflict your soul for being so hasty. Therefore wait a while, for "thou shalt know hereafter," and that "hereafter" may be very near.

Peter understood his Master's washing his feet better after his sad fall and threefold denial. I should not wonder that when the Lord turned and looked upon Peter and he went out and wept bitterly, the penitent disciple said to himself, "Now I begin to see why my Lord washed my feet." When he perceived how sadly he needed washing, he would prize the token which his Lord had given him. He saw his own frailties and imperfections as he had not seen them before, for he had said, "Though all men should be offended, yet will I never be offended." But after his sad denial he knew himself to be as apt to err as the rest of the others were. At a certain point of your experience you will possibly discover the explanation of your present adversity. After the Lord had met with Peter at the sea and had said to him, "feed My sheep" and "feed My lambs" another method of explanation was open to him. When Peter began to be a pastor and to deal with the souls of others, he

would clearly see why his Master washed his feet, for he would find that he had much to do of the same kind of service. Often does our work for Christ unfold the work of Christ and we know our Lord by being called to follow His steps.

Yonder in Heaven, best of all, Peter understands why the Master washed his feet and surely sometimes Peter must inwardly smile to think of what he once thought and said. Peter sings amid the heavenly throng, "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood," and then he thinks to himself, "In my folly in the days of my flesh I said unto Him, 'Thou shalt never wash my feet.' I loved Him when I said it, but what monstrous folly lay in my speech." Ah, he understands it now and we shall soon understand as he does. All things will be clear when we once pass into the region of light.

I anticipate the blessed confidences of Heaven. How blessed will be those familiar revelations of mysteries so long obscure! What sweet communications there will be between God and His people in the world to come. I look forward to the time when we shall see the knots untied and the riddles all explained: then shall we see the good of apparent evil and the life which lay in the bosom of death. Could we hear the stories of pilgrims who have reached Home they would run like this—"I was traveling a pleasant road, blessing God for so delightful a pilgrimage but suddenly a huge rock fell across my path and I had with regret to turn back and traverse a more rugged road. I never understood why until I came Home to Heaven and now He tells me, 'Child, there was a precipice but a little way in front, and you would have been dashed to pieces and therefore I blocked up your way.'"

Another who has reached the desired haven will tell us, "The vessel in which I sailed was wrecked; she struck upon a rock, and on a broken fragment of her timbers I swam to shore. I could never comprehend the reason for this calamity till now. For now I learn that the boat was being steered by crafty hands to a shore whereon I should have been made a slave and kept in lifelong captivity—and there was no way of deliverance but by dashing the boat to shivers and landing her passengers where they would be free."

Brethren, you will probably bless God in Heaven more for your sorrows than for your joys. When you once ascend the celestial hills you will see that the best blessings came to you in the roughest garments; your pearls were found in oyster shells and your jewels were brought out of Egypt. Sickness, trial, adversity, bereavement and pain have been more truly angels of God to you than your wealth, your health, your strength, your comfort—ininitely more so than your laughter and your ease. O brothers and sisters, we shall know hereafter. Well, as we shall know hereafter we may leave the knowing till then, and give all our attention to the obeying and the trusting.

I have done when I have addressed a warning to those out of Christ. There are some in this congregation who do not know my Lord. I have been much exercised in my mind about you while I have been confined to my chamber and unable to address you. My prayer has been that the Holy Spirit would bless to your conversion the messages of my brethren who have kindly occupied this pulpit. If you still remain unconverted, I would like to say that you do not know what God has been doing with you, or what He is doing with you now—but you will know hereafter. You have Sabbath-Days, but you do not know their value: you will value them differently by and by, when you lie dying and especially when you are called before the judgment seat of God.

You have your Bible, and you neglect it. You do not know that God has sent a love letter to you in that form—you will know it when you stand before His awful bar. Some

of you have been pleaded with very often and earnestly entreated to lay hold on eternal life. The Lord has backed up our entreaties by sending sickness to you and personal trouble. Well, you have not known much about it and you have not wished to know—but you will have to know hereafter. If you die without Christ you will wake up in eternity and cry, “Ah me, that ever the Lord should call me and I refuse, that He should stretch out His hand and I should disregard.”

In Hell it will be an awful discovery, “I was the subject of Gospel invitations, I was the object of earnest expostulations but I continued in my sin and here I am eternally lost.” What I earnestly desire should happen would be that you should this morning find out what the Lord has done for you and you should understand it and open your eyes and say, “Here am I, a man who has lived long in sin and I have been spared on purpose that God might save me ere I die.”

Or perhaps it will take this form: “Here I am, a young man and I came in here this morning with no precise motive, little knowing what God was about to do with me but I know it now—He has brought me hither that I may, this morning, believe in Jesus and give my heart to Him.” O hearers of the Gospel, if you once come to know what God has really done with you and for you, you will hardly forgive yourselves for your conduct towards Him! You will say, “Did He really love me so, redeem me with such a price and have I been so unkind and thoughtless towards Him?” You will upbraid yourselves and chasten yourselves, and grieve to think you should have treated so good a Friend so ill. O may the Divine Spirit this morning open your eyes to know what the Lord Jesus does unto you! May His grace be magnified in you. Amen and Amen.

DIVINE HEALING.

Fourth, there is the grotesque idea of the Dispensationalists. These are a class of men who pose as being exceptionally enlightened and under the guise of “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” arbitrarily partition the Scriptures. They affirm “*this* is not for us,” “*that* does not pertain to this present era of Grace,” “*that* relates to the Tribulation period,” “*this* will be fulfilled in the Millennium.” Because the opening verse of James reads, “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings,” these robbers of God’s children declare this Epistle is “entirely Jewish.” As well might they reason that the first Epistle of Paul is designed only for Papists because it is addressed to “all that be in Rome” (Rom. 1:1). The Epistle of James belongs to all the “beloved brethren,” to all born-again souls (1:16, 18). It is surely striking that the very passage we are here considering (5:14-16) comes right between a reference to Job (a Gentile) who endured patiently his affliction and found the Lord to be “pitiful and of tender mercy” (v. 11) and to Elijah who is described as “a man subject to like passions as we are” yet mighty in prayer (v. 17)—as though the Spirit was anticipating and refuting this mad notion.

Now where such widely different interpretations are given of a passage it usually follows that the true one ties somewhere between the two extremes and such we believe is the case here. We are very loath to regard our passage as being an obsolete one, that it refers to something which pertained only to the apostolic age and relates not at all to us. When referring to the Popish travesty of this “anointing with oil” Thomas Goodwin said: “The Reformed churches seeing that such a sacrament could not be and this must needs be a perversion of it, did justly reject it, only in rejecting it (as in some other things) they went too far, even denying it to have that use of restoring the sick as a seal of the promise and an indefinite means to convey that blessing which God in mercy hath appointed it to be.” We are strongly inclined to agree with this eminent Puritan that the churches which grew out of the Reformation went too far when they set aside this passage as containing Divine directions to be followed by Gospel churches throughout this Christian era. Such a sweeping conclusion needs qualifying.

The knotty point to be settled is, how far and at which points is this qualification to be made? Personally we believe the general principle and promise of the passage holds good for all generations—seasons of great spiritual declension and deadness only excepted. In normal times it is the privilege of the saint—when seriously ill, or suffering great pain—and not on every light occasion to send for the “elders” (pastors, ministers) of the local Gospel church to which he belongs. They who preach God’s Word to him should surely be the fittest to spread his case before Him: cf. Job 42:8. They are to pray over him, commending him to the mercy of God and seeking recovery for him if that is according to the Divine will. Whether or not the “anointing with oil” should accompany the praying is a detail on which we are not prepared to state dogmatically. But where the sick one desires it, his request should be complied with. The kind of oil is not specified, though most likely olive was used in the first century.

It should be pointed out that those promises of God which relate to temporal and eternal mercies are quite different from those pertaining to spiritual and eternal things—the former being general and indefinite and not unconditional and absolute as are many of the latter—and therefore as God reserves to Himself the freedom to make them good when, as, and to whom He pleases, we must ask in full submission to His sovereign pleasure. To illustrate: if I am starting out on a journey I ask God to preserve me from all

harm and danger if that be His holy will (Rom. 1:10). But I make no such proviso when requesting Him to deliver me from those who assault my soul (2 Tim. 4:18). Thus the "Prayer of faith" here is not a definite expectation that God will heal but a peaceful assurance that He will do that which is most for His glory and the sick one's good. That the promise of James 5:15 is an indefinite and not an absolute one is clear from this consideration: if it were not so, he could continually claim the promise and so never die—the "and IF he have committed sins" further confirms the indefiniteness of what is here in view.

Some are likely to object against what has been pointed out in the last paragraph and say, But faith must have a foundation to rest upon and it has none other than the Word of God: if then there be here no definite promise to lay hold of and plead before God, the "prayer of *faith*" is impossible, for there is no assurance the sick one will be healed. That may sound very plausible and pious, yet it is wrong. There *is* a faith of reliance and submission as well as a faith of *expectation*. There is no higher, no stronger, no grander faith than one which has such confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God as leads me to present my case to Him and say, "Do as seemeth Thee good." It is always a help when we can plead a promise but God is greater than all His promises and where some specific need or emergency is not covered by some express promise, faith may count upon the mercy and power of God Himself—this is what Abraham did: Hebrews 11:19!

Personally we greatly fear that there are very few "elders" now left on earth whom it would be any good to send for in an emergency: only those living close to God and blessed with strong faith would be of any use. This is a day of "small things." Nevertheless the Lord remains unchanged and ready to show Himself strong on the behalf of those who walk uprightly. Though there be no spiritual elders available, yet *God is* accessible; seek unto Him and if He grants you the "prayer of faith" then healing is certain either by natural means or supernatural intervention. "The Lord is undoubtedly present with His people to assist them in all ages and when necessary He heals their diseases as much as He did in ancient times. But He does not display those miraculous powers or dispense miracles by the hands of Apostles, because that gift was only of temporary duration" (Calvin).

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). Here the scope of our passage is widened: in verse 13 the afflicted or tried one is to pray for himself; in verse 14 the ministers are to pray for the one seriously sick, now fellow-Christians are to pray for each other. But first they are bidden to confess their faults one to another, which does *not* mean revealing the secrets of their hearts or acquainting their brethren with that which is suited only for the ear of God—but cases where they have tempted or injured *one another* or consented to the same evil gossiping, for example. A mutual acknowledgement of those faults which cause coldness and estrangement, exciting one another to repentance for the same, promotes the spirit of prayer and fellowship. The "healing" here is also wider, referring primarily to that of the soul (Psa. 41:4) and breaches (Heb. 12:13), being the term used in 1 Peter 2:24, yet also includes removal of physical chastisements.

A few brief observations on our passage In conclusion, 1. Personal prayer (James 5:13) is enjoined before ministerial (v. 14) and social (v. 16): individual responsibility cannot be shelved. 2. God is not indifferent to the sickness of His people (v. 14), but cares for their bodies as well as their souls. 3. Are not ministers too free in visiting the sick

and praying over them, instead of waiting until they are sent for (v. 14)? 4. If none but “elders” (ministers) were to anoint with oil, surely they alone are eligible to administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper! 5. All sickness is not occasioned by *sin* or the “if” of verse 15 would be meaningless. 6. Yet God *does* sometimes visit with physical chastisements as the “if” denotes. 7. The mutual confession of verse 16 refutes the Popish error of “auricular confession,” for the priest does *not* confess *his* sins to those revealing to him the secrets of their souls!—A.W.P.

STRENGTH RENEWED.

“They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isa. 41:31). What a blessed promise is this for those conscious of their feebleness! But it must be personally appropriated if we are to enjoy the good of it: faith must lay definite hold of the same and humbly but earnestly plead it before God. Nor should we regard it as restricted to the reviving of our *souls*: it includes also the re-energizing of our bodies, as not a few can testify. It is blessedly true that those who trustfully wait upon the Lord shall have their graces quickened, their spiritual strength renewed. But it is equally true that the greater includes the less and that if we confidently count upon His doing so, the Lord will renew our physical strength. “Through faith also Sarah herself received strength” (Heb. 11:11), and as the remainder of the verse shows, it was physical strength—but it was received “through faith”!

“The LORD shall renew their strength.” On many occasions has this writer—when preaching six times a week (rarely for less than an hour, usually seventy-five to ninety minutes) in the heat of Australia, journeying here and there to do so—returned home at 10 p.m. feeling worn and weary and pleading this promise expectantly and partaking of light refreshment, sat down for four hours’ hard study and writing an article for this magazine. So also has his wife, born of parents who died before she was ten and herself of frail constitution, found this one of her chief stand-by’s for many years past and proven for herself those words, “out of weakness were made strong” (Heb. 11:34). And why should not you also, Christian reader? Read carefully Isaiah 40:28-31 and turn it into believing prayer: but remember the strength must be used in the performance of duty and not frittered away! As prevention is better than cure, so is the renewing of our vitality more desirable than “faith healing.”—A.W.P.

