

A photograph of a lit candle, an open book, and a magnifying glass. The candle is lit, casting a warm glow. The book is open, and a magnifying glass is resting on it. The background is dark.

Annual Volume

1936

STUDIES IN THE
SCRIPTURES

ARTHUR W. PINK (1886-1952)

Studies in the Scriptures

Annual Volume 1936

Vol. XV

by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

Contents

January

| | |
|--|----|
| The Holy Spirit..... | 1 |
| <i>32. The Spirit Assuring (Part 1)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 3 |
| <i>97. The Inferiority of Judaism (12:18-19)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 9 |
| <i>49. His Servants Insulted</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 13 |
| <i>4. The Abrahamic (Continued)</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 17 |
| <i>8. Its Procurer</i> | |
| Union and Communion..... | 22 |
| <i>5. Vital</i> | |
| Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures | 27 |
| Good News..... | 29 |

February

| | |
|--|----|
| The Holy Spirit..... | 30 |
| <i>32. The Spirit Assuring (Part 2)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 32 |
| <i>98. The Inferiority of Judaism (12:20-21)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 38 |
| <i>50. His Kindness Repulsed</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 42 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 4. <i>The Abrahamic (Continued)</i> | 42 |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 46 |
| 8. <i>Its Procurer</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 51 |
| 6. <i>Saving</i> | |
| A Prayer for the Nation | 55 |
| Help Sought..... | 56 |
| March | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 58 |
| 33. <i>The Spirit Witnessing (Part 1)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 60 |
| 99. <i>The Superiority of Christianity (12:22-24)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 66 |
| 51. <i>His Fearful Fall</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 70 |
| 4. <i>The Abrahamic (Continued)</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 74 |
| 7. <i>Practical</i> | |
| Divine Comfort | 79 |
| Ministerial Address to the Unconverted | 83 |
| Love to All the Saints..... | 86 |
| April | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 88 |
| 33. <i>The Spirit Witnessing (Part 2)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 90 |
| 100. <i>The Superiority of Christianity (12:22-24)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 96 |
| 52. <i>His Terrible Sin</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 100 |
| 4. <i>The Abrahamic (Continued)</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 105 |
| 8. <i>Practical</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 110 |
| 8. <i>Its Procurer</i> | |
| Gradual Conquest..... | 116 |

May

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Holy Spirit..... | 117 |
| <i>33. The Spirit Witnessing (Part 3)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 119 |
| <i>101. The Call to Hear (12:25-26)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 125 |
| <i>53. His Terrible Sin</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 129 |
| <i>9. Experimental</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 134 |
| <i>9. Its Securer</i> | |
| Grace Preparing for Glory..... | 139 |
| Duty Faith | 143 |

June

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Holy Spirit..... | 146 |
| <i>34. The Spirit Sealing</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 148 |
| <i>102. The Passing of Judaism (12:26-27)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 155 |
| <i>54. His Conviction</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 159 |
| <i>5. The Siniatic</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 163 |
| <i>10. Experimental</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 168 |
| <i>10. Its Securer</i> | |
| God's Use of a Tract | 174 |

July

| | |
|--|-----|
| The Holy Spirit..... | 176 |
| <i>35. The Spirit Assisting (Part 1)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 178 |
| <i>103. The Establishing of Christianity (12:27)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 184 |
| <i>55. His Repentance</i> | |
| Union And Communion | 189 |
| <i>11. Experimental</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 194 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 11. <i>Its Rule</i> | |
| Divine Providence | 198 |
| The Providence of God | 200 |
| 1. <i>The Entangled Ram</i> | |
| 2. <i>Hagar Expelled</i> | |
| Welcome Tidings | 202 |
| August | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 206 |
| 35. <i>The Spirit Assisting (Part 2)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 208 |
| 104. <i>The Kingdom of Christ (12:28)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 214 |
| 56. <i>His Forgiveness</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 219 |
| 12. <i>Experimental</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 223 |
| 5. <i>The Siniatic</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 228 |
| <i>Its Rule</i> | |
| Duty Faith | 233 |
| September | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 236 |
| 36. <i>The Spirit Interceding (Part 1)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 238 |
| 105. <i>The Final Warning (12:28-29)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 245 |
| 57. <i>His Chastenings</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 249 |
| 13. <i>Experimental</i> | |
| The Providence of God | 254 |
| 3. <i>Jacob Deceiving His Father</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 257 |
| <i>Its Rule (Continued)</i> | |
| Oil in the Vessel | 262 |
| October | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 266 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 36. <i>The Spirit Interceding (Part 2)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 269 |
| 106. <i>Brotherly Love (13:1)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 275 |
| 58. <i>His Son Absalom</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 279 |
| 14. <i>Experimental</i> | |
| The Providence of God | 284 |
| 4. <i>Jacob Meeting Esau (Genesis 32)</i> | |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 286 |
| 10. <i>Its Rule (Completed)</i> | |
| November | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 292 |
| 37. <i>The Spirit Transforming (Part 1)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 294 |
| 107. <i>Brotherly Love (13:1-3)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 301 |
| 59. <i>His Son Absalom</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 305 |
| 15. <i>Glory</i> | |
| The Divine Covenants..... | 310 |
| 5. <i>The Siniatic</i> | |
| Humility | 314 |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification | 317 |
| 11. <i>Its Instrument</i> | |
| December | |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 322 |
| 37. <i>The Spirit Transforming (Part 2)</i> | |
| The Epistle to the Hebrews | 324 |
| 108. <i>Marriage (13:4)</i> | |
| The Life of David..... | 331 |
| 60. <i>His Son Absalom</i> | |
| Union and Communion | 335 |
| 16. <i>Glory</i> | |
| The Providence of God | 340 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 4. <i>Jacob's Meeting With Rachel (Genesis 29)</i> | |
| 5. <i>Jacob's Prosperity At Laban's (Genesis 30)</i> | |
| Unbelief..... | 342 |
| The Doctrine of Sanctification..... | 343 |
| 11. <i>Its Instrument</i> | |
| Our Annual Letter | 348 |
| Appendices | |
| <i>About Studies in the Scriptures</i> | 352 |
| Biography of A.W. Pink | 354 |
| <i>By Erroll Hulse</i> | |
| Chapel Library Resources | 359 |

January

THE HOLY SPIRIT

32. The Spirit Assuring (Part 1)

We do not propose to treat of the Spirit assuring in a topical and general way, but to confine ourselves to His inspiring the Christian with a sense of his adoption into the family of God, limiting ourselves unto two or three particular passages which treat specifically thereof. In Romans 8:15, we read, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The eighth chapter of Romans has ever been a great favourite with the Lord’s people, for it contains a wide variety of cordials for their encouragement, and strengthening in the running of that heavenly race which is marked out and set before them in the Word of God. The apostle is there writing to such as have been brought, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, to know and believe on the Lord Jesus, and who by their communion with Him are led to set their affection upon things above.

First, let us observe that Romans 8:15 opens with the word “For,” which not only suggests a close connection with that which precedes, but intimates that a proof is now furnished of what had just been affirmed. In the twelfth verse, the apostle had said, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” The “Therefore” being a conclusion drawn from all the considerations set forth in verses 1-11. Next, the apostle had declared, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13), which means, first, ye shall *continue* to “live” a life of *grace* now, and second, this shall be followed by a “life” of *glory* throughout eternity. Then the apostle added, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14), which is a confirmation and amplification of verse 13. None live a life of grace save those who are “led by the Spirit of God”—are inwardly controlled and outwardly governed by Him, for they only are “the sons of God.”

Now, in verse 15, the apostle both amplifies and confirms what he had said in verse 14. There he shows the reality of that relationship with God which our regeneration makes manifest—obedient subjection to Him as dear children. Here he brings before us further proof of our divine sonship—deliverance from a servile fear, the exercise of a filial confidence. Let us consider the negative first. “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom 8:14). By nature we were in “bondage” to sin, to Satan, to the world. Yet they did not work in us a spirit of “fear,” so they cannot be (as some have supposed) what the apostle had reference to. Rather is it

what the Spirit's convicting us of sin wrought in us. When He applies the law to the conscience our complacency is shattered, our false peace is destroyed, and we are terrified at the thought of God's righteous wrath and the prospect of eternal punishment.

When a soul has received life and light from the Spirit of God, so that he perceives the infinite enormity and filthiness of sin, and the total depravity and corruption of every faculty of his soul and body, that spirit of *legality* which is in all men by nature, is at once stirred up and alarmed, so that the mind is possessed with secret doubts and suspicions of God's mercy in Christ to save, and thereby the soul is brought into a state of legal bondage and fear. When a soul is first awakened by the Holy Spirit, it is subject to a variety of fears—yet it does not follow from thence that *He* works those fears or is the author of them. Rather are they to be ascribed unto our own unbelief. When the Spirit is pleased to convict of sin and gives the conscience to feel the guilt of it, it is to show him his need of *Christ*, and not to drive unto despair.

No doubt there is also a dispensational allusion in the passage we are now considering. During the Mosaic economy, believing Israelites were to a considerable extent under the spirit of legal bondage, because the sacrifices and ablutions of the Levitical institutions could not take away sins. The precepts of the ceremonial law were so numerous, so various, so burdensome, that the Jews were kept in perpetual bondage. Hence, we find Peter referring to the same as “a yoke...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Act 15:10). Much under the Old Testament dispensation tended to a legal spirit. But believers, under the Gospel, are favoured with a clearer, fuller, and more glorious display and revelation of God's grace in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the evangel making known the design and sufficiency of His finished work, so that full provision is now made to deliver them from all servile fear.

Turning now to the positive side. Believers have “received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father.” They have received that unspeakable gift which attests and makes known to them their adoption by God. Before the foundation of the world, God predestinated them “unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (Eph 1:5). But more—the elect were not only predestinated *unto* the adoption of children—to actually and openly enjoy this inestimable favour in time—but this blessing was itself provided and bestowed upon them in the Everlasting Covenant of grace, in which they not only had promise of this relationship, but were given in that Covenant to Christ under that very character. Therefore does the Lord Jesus say, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb 2:13).

It is to be carefully noted that God's elect are spoken of as “children” *previous* to the Holy Spirit's being sent into their hearts, “Because ye *are* sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts” (Gal 4:6). They are not, then, made children by the new birth. They were “children” before Christ died for them, “he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one *the children* of God that were scattered abroad” (Joh 11:51-52). They were not, then, made children by what Christ did for them. Yea, they were “children” before the Lord Jesus became incarnate, “Forasmuch then as *the children* are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same” (Heb 2:14). Thus it is a great mistake to confound adoption and regeneration. They are two distinct things. The latter being both the effect and evidence of the former. Adoption was by an act of God's will in eternity—regeneration is by the work of His grace in time.

Had there been no adoption, there would be no regeneration. Yet the former is not complete without the latter. By adoption the elect were put into *the relation* of children—by regeneration they are given *a nature* suited to that relation. So high is the honour of being taken into the family of God, and so wondrous is the privilege of having God for our Father, that some extraordinary

benefit is needed by us to assure our hearts of the same. This we have when we receive the Spirit of adoption. For God to give us His Spirit is far more than if He had given us all the world, for the latter would be something *outside* Himself, whereas the former *is* Himself! The death of Christ on the cross was a demonstration of God's love for His people, yet that was done without them. But in connection with what we are now considering "the love of God is shed abroad *in our hearts* by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom 5:5).

Wondrous and blessed fact that, God manifests His love to the members of His church in precisely the same way that He evidenced His love unto its Head when He became incarnate, namely, by the transcendent gift of His Spirit. The Spirit came upon Jesus Christ as the proof of God's love to Him and also as the visible demonstration of His Sonship. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and abode upon Him, and then the Father's voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat 3:17)—compare John 3:34-35. In fulfillment of Christ's prayer, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be *in them*" (Joh 17:26). The Spirit is given to His redeemed, to signify the sameness of the Father's love unto His Son, and unto His sons. Thus, the inhabitation of the Spirit in the Christian is both the surest sign of God's fatherly love and the proof of his adoption.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

97. The Inferiority of Judaism (12:18-19)

As there are certain parts of a country which offer less attraction than others unto tourists and sight-seers, so there are some portions of Scripture which are of less interest to most readers and writers. As there are some scenes in nature which can be taken in at a glance, while others invite a repeated survey, so there are verses in each epistle which afford less scope than others unto the teacher. That is why almost every preacher has a sermon on certain favourite texts, whereas other verses are neglected by nearly all pulpits. But the expositor has not the same freedom to follow his inclinations as the textual sermonizer. Unless he shirks his duty, he must go through a passage verse by verse, and clause by clause. Still more so is this the case with one who essays to write a commentary upon a whole book of the Bible. He is not free to pick and choose, nor yield to his personal preferences, but must give the same attention and enlargement to one part as to another.

The above reflections have occurred to the editor as he has pondered the verses which next claim our consideration in Hebrews 12. Their contents are not likely to make much appeal unto the ordinary reader, for there seems little in them which would be relished either by those who have an appetite for "strong meat" or by those preferring the "milk" of babes. Our passage neither sets forth any of the "doctrines of grace" nor presents any practical exhortation for the Christian life. Instead, it alludes to an historical incident which was chiefly of interest to the Jews, and multiplies details from the same which would be tedious unto the average church-goer of this untoward generation. Nevertheless, it is a part of *God's Word*, and as it lies in our immediate path

through this epistle we shall not ignore or turn from it. As the Lord enables, we shall endeavour to give it the same attention and space as what has preceded it.

The passage upon which we are about to enter (which reaches from 12:18 to the end of the chapter) has been variously interpreted by different commentators. One class of more recent writers have, it seems to us, been far more anxious to read into it their own pet theory regarding the future, than to interpret these verses in accord with the theme of the epistle in which they are found. It would indeed be strange for the apostle to introduce here a reference to some future “millennium”—the more so in view of the fact that he has studiously avoided the use of the future tense—note the emphatic “ye *are* come” (v. 22) and “but *now*” (v. 26). If due attention be paid unto the main line of the apostle’s argument in this treatise, then there should be no difficulty in arriving at a correct understanding—of the substance of it, at least—of this portion of it.

As we pointed out so frequently in the earlier articles of this series, the immediate and principal design of the apostle in this epistle was to prevail with the Hebrews in persuading them unto a perseverance in their profession of the Gospel, for therein they appear at that time to have been greatly shaken. Therefore does he warn them, again and again, of the various causes and occasions of backsliding. Principal among these were, first, an evil heart of unbelief, the sin which did so easily beset them. Second, an undue valuation of the excellency of Judaism and the Mosaic church-state. Third, wavering under the afflictions and persecutions which fidelity to the Gospel entailed. Fourth, prevalent lusts, such as profaneness and fornication. Each of which we have considered in the preceding sections.

The principal argument which the apostle had urged unto their constancy in Christianity was the superlative excellency, glory, and benefit of the Gospel-state into which the Hebrews had been called. This he has accomplished and proved by setting forth the person and office of its Author, His priesthood and sacrifice, with all the spiritual worship and privileges belonging thereto. Each of these he compared and contrasted with the things that corresponded unto the same during the Old Testament dispensation. Thereby he set over against each other the type and the antitype, the shadow and the substance, and by so doing made it unmistakably evident that the new economy was immeasurably superior to the old, that all the ordinances and institutions of the law were but prefigurations of those spiritual realities which are now revealed by the Gospel.

Having insisted so largely and so particularly on these things in the preceding chapters, and brought his arguments from them to a plain issue, he now recapitulates them as a whole. In the passage which is now to engage our attention, the apostle presents a brief scheme of the two states or economies (designated as “testaments” or “covenants”), balancing them one against another, and thereby demonstrating the conclusive force of his central argument and the exhortations which he had based upon it, unto constancy and perseverance in the faith of the Gospel. It is no new argument which he here proceeds with, nor is it a special amplification of the warning pointed by the example of Esau. Still less is it a departure from his great theme by a sudden excursus into the realm of eschatology. Instead, it is a forcible summary, under a new dress, of all he had previously advanced.

The central design, then, of our passage as a whole, was to present one more and final antithesis of Judaism and Christianity. The contrast here drawn is virtually parallel with the one instituted in Galatians 4 between Hagar and Sarah, the figure of two “mounts” being used instead of the two women. The great honour and chief privilege of the Judaical church-state whereon all particular advantages did depend, was their coming to and station in Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. It was there that JEHOVAH revealed Himself with all the insignia of His awe-inspiring majesty. It was there that they were taken into covenant with the Lord (Exo 24), to be His

particular people above all the world. It was there that Israel was formed into a national church (Act 7:38). It was there that they had committed unto them all the privileges of divine worship. It is that very glory which the Jews boast of to this day, and whereon they rest in their rejection of the Gospel.

It was necessary, then, for the apostle to make direct reference unto that upon which the unbelieving Hebrews based all their hopes, and to which they were appealing in their efforts to get their believing brethren to apostatize from Christ. His argument had neither been complete nor conclusive unless he could undermine their confidence in the foundational glory of Judaism, take off their hearts from unduly admiring, and show that it had been succeeded by that which “excelleth.” He therefore directs attention to those features in connection with the giving of the law, which so far from being calculated to win the affections, inspired with dread and terror. He points out a number of items which by their very nature intimated that the divine communications vouchsafed at Sinai were not the full and final unveiling of the divine character, such as the souls of awakened sinners longed for.

Our introduction has been a somewhat lengthy one, though briefer than that of John Owen’s (1616-1683), which we have closely followed in the last paragraphs, yet we deemed it necessary. The details of our present passage cannot be viewed in their true perspective until they are rightly focused in the light of our epistle as a whole. The *scope* of the passage must first be determined, before we are ready to examine its several members. This calls for time and real *study*, yet only as this preliminary work is properly executed will we be preserved from those errors which are inevitably fallen into when a passage is treated hurriedly and superficially. This is only another way of saying that the foundation must be well and securely laid, if it is to bear successfully the superstructure which is raised upon it. Alas that such foundation-labour is so little appreciated today.

“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire” (Heb 12:18). The apostle here returns to his central theme by an easy and natural transition. He had just been dehorting from backsliding, pointed by the solemn case of Esau. Now he urges unto constancy by appealing to the privileges they enjoyed. As Calvin (1509-1564) well put it, “The higher the excellency of Christ’s kingdom than the dispensation of Moses, and the more glorious our calling than that of the ancient people, the more disgraceful and the less excusable is our ingratitude, unless we embrace in a becoming manner the great favour offered to us, and humbly adore the majesty of Christ which is here made evident. And then, as God does not present Himself to us clothed in terrors as He did formerly to the Jews, but lovingly and kindly invites us to Himself, so the sin of ingratitude will be thus doubled, except we willingly and in earnest respond to His gracious invitation.”

“For you are not come unto the mount that might be touched” (Heb 12:18). The principal design which the apostle here had in hand was to set forth, in its most attractive form (see vv. 22-24) that evangelical state whereunto the Hebrews had been called and into which they had entered. This he first does *negatively*, by describing the church-state under the Old Testament, from which they had been delivered. Thus, before the “Ye are come” of verse 22, he introduces this “For ye are not come.” Two things were thereby noted—that order or system to which their fathers belonged, but from which *they* had been freed by their responding to the Gospel call. They were no more concerned in all that dread and terror, and their consideration of that fact supplied a powerful motive to their perseverance in the Christian faith.

Freely granting that a great privilege was conferred on their fathers at Sinai, the apostle observes “that it was done in such a way of dread and terror, as that sundry things are manifest

therein: as, 1. That there was no evidence in all that was done of God's being reconciled to them, in and by those things. The whole representation of Him was of an absolute Sovereign and severe Judge. Nothing declared Him as a Father, gracious and merciful. 2. There was no intimation of any condescension from the exact severity of what was required in the law or of any relief or pardon in case of transgression. 3. There was no promise of grace in a way of aid or assistance for the performance of what was required. Thunders, voices, earthquakes, and fire gave no signification of these things. 4. The whole was hereby nothing but a glorious ministration of death and condemnation (as the apostle speaks in 2 Cor 3:7) whence the consciences of sinners were forced to subscribe to their own condemnation, as just and equal.

"5. God has here represented in all outward demonstrations of infinite holiness, justice, severity, and terrible majesty on the one hand; and on the other, men in their lowest condition of sin, misery, guilt and death. If there be not therefore something else to interpose between God and men, somewhat to fill up the space between infinite severity and inexpressible guilt, all this glorious preparation was nothing but a theatre set up for the pronouncing of judgment and the sentence of eternal condemnation against sinners. And on this consideration depends the force of the apostle's argument; and the due apprehension and declaration of, is a better explanation of verses 18-21 than the opening of the particular expressions will amount to. Yet they also must be explained.

"It is hence evident that the Israelites in the station of Sinai, did bear the person of sinners under the sentence of the law. There might be many of them justified in their own persons by faith in the promise, but as they stood and heard and received the law, they represented sinners under the sentence of it, not yet relieved by the Gospel. And this we may have respect to in our exposition, as that which is that final intention of the apostle to declare, as is manifest from the description which he gives of the Gospel state, and of those that are interested therein" (John Owen).

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched" (Heb 12:18). It is both pathetic and amusing to read the various shifts made by some of the commentators to "harmonize" the opening words of our text with what is said in Exodus 19:12, "Thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, *or touch* the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death." Some have pleaded that the little "*not* be touched" was inadvertently dropped by copyist of the Greek manuscript. Others insist our verse should be rendered, "Ye are come to a mount not to be touched" But the only "discrepancy" here is in the understanding of the expositors. The apostle was not making a quotation from Exodus, but rather describing, negatively, that *order of things* unto which the Gospel had brought the believing Hebrews. In so doing he shows the striking contrast between it and the order of things connected with the giving of the law.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched" (Heb 12:18). The simple and evident meaning of which is, the Gospel has not brought you unto that which is material and visible, palpable and touchable by the physical senses, but unto what is spiritual and can only be apprehended by faith. A "mount" is a thing *of the earth*, whereas the glory of Christianity is entirely celestial. The passage which most clearly interprets this clause is found in our Lord's discourse with the woman at the well. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father....But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father *in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:21, 23). Judaism was the church's kindergarten, in which its infantile members were

instructed, mainly, through their bodily senses. Christianity has introduced a far superior order of things.

“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched” (Heb 12:18), then, is a figurative way of saying that Christ has opened a way into something infinitely superior to a system which, as such, had nothing better than “a *worldly* sanctuary” and “*carnal* ordinances” (Heb 9:1, 10). The Greek word for “come” in our text is that technical or religious term which had been used repeatedly by the apostle in this epistle to express a *sacred access* or coming to God in His worship, see 4:16, 7:25, 10:1—last clause “comers thereunto.” Mount Sinai was a material thing, exposed to the outward senses, and was an emblem of the entire order of things connected with Judaism. As such, it was in complete contrast from that order of things brought in by Christ, which is wholly spiritual, invisible, and celestial. The one was addressed to the bodily senses, the other to the higher faculties of the soul. Spiritually speaking, Romanists and all other Ritualists are occupied with “the mount that might be touched!”

“And that burned with fire” (Heb 12:18). In their literal acceptance those words allude to what transpired at Sinai. In Exodus 19:18, we read, “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire.” But it is with their figurative purport we are more concerned. In Scripture, “fire” is the symbol of divine wrath and judgment. As we are told in Deuteronomy 4:24, “The LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God,” and the “jealousy” of God is His holy severity against sin, not to leave it unpunished. With respect unto the law which He there gave—for Deuteronomy 33:2 declares “from his right hand went a fiery law”—it signified its inexorable sternness and efficacy to destroy its transgressors. Thus, the “fire” denoted the awful majesty of God as an inflexible Judge, and the terror which His law strikes into the minds of its violators with expectation of fiery indignation.

This was the first thing which the people beheld when they came to Sinai—God as a “consuming fire” presented to their view! Thus it is in the experience of those whom God saves. For many years, it may be, they lived in a state of unconcern. They had no heart-affecting views of the majesty and authority of God, and no pride-withering apprehensions of the fearfulness of their guilt. But when the Spirit awakens them from the sleep of death, gives them to realize *Who it is* with whom they have to do, and whose anger burns against sin; when the law is applied to their conscience, convicting them of their innumerable offences, their hearts are filled with dread and misery as they perceive their undone condition. There the law leaves them, and there they must be consumed, unless they obtain deliverance by Jesus Christ.

And that was exactly what, by divine grace, these believing Hebrews *had* obtained. The Redeemer had “delivered us from the wrath to come” (1Th 1:10). They were now as secure in Him as Noah was in the ark. The fire of God’s wrath had spent itself in the person of the Substitute. God was now reconciled to them, and henceforth they had an inalienable standing before Him—not as trembling criminals, but as accepted sons. To them the word was “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). No, as Christians, we have nothing more to do with the mount “that burned with fire,” but only with “the throne of grace.” Hallelujah! And that, so many Christians are being robbed of their birthright. If Romanists and Ritualists are guilty of being occupied with “the mount that might be touched” (Heb 12:18). then those who are constantly presenting God before His people in His dread majesty—instead of as a loving Father—are taking them back to that mount “that burned with fire” (Heb 12:18).

“Nor unto blackness and darkness” (Heb 12:18). Here again the literal allusion is unto the awe-inspiring phenomena which attended the giving of the law. There was “a thick cloud upon

the mount....mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke” (Exo 19:16, 18). Different commentators have resorted to various conjectures in their efforts to “harmonize” the “blackness and darkness” with the “fire,” some suggesting the one was followed by the other after an interval of time, others supposing the “darkness” was over the camp and the “fire” at the summit of the mount. But such theorizing’s are worthless in the face of Deuteronomy 5:22-23, “The LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness....heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire).” The fact is this “fire” was *supernatural*—as that of Babylon’s furnace *burned not* while the three Hebrews were in it (Dan 3), this *glowed not* increasing the terror of its beholders because it emitted no light!

If the above explanation be deemed “far fetched,” we would appeal to the corroborating correspondency in the experience of those who have been saved. Was it not a fact that when we were shut up under guilt and terrified by the representation of God’s severity against sin, we looked in vain for anything in the law which could yield relief? When the glory of God’s holiness shined into your conscience and His law was applied in convicting and condemning power, did you perceive His *merciful design* in the same? No, indeed—at that time, His gracious purpose was covered with “blackness,” and “darkness” filled your soul. You perceived not that the law was His instrument for flaying your self-righteous hopes (Rom 7:11) and “a schoolmaster...unto *Christ*” (Gal 3:24). Your case appeared hopeless, and despite the fiery power of the law, you knew not how to “order our speech [before God] by reason of darkness” (Job 37:19).

“And tempest” (Heb 12:18)—under this term the apostle comprises the thunderings, lightnings, the earthquake which were on and in mount Sinai (Exo 19:16, 18), all of which symbolized the disquieting character of so much that marked the Mosaic economy—in contrast from the peace and assurance which the Gospel imparts to those who believingly appropriate it. The order here agrees with the experience of those whom God saves. First, there is an application of the “fiery law,” which burns and terrifies the conscience. Second, there is the blackness and darkness of despair which follows the discovery of our lost condition. Third, there is the agitation of mind and turmoil of heart in seeking help by self-efforts and finding none. The soul has no light and knows not what to do. The mind is in a tumult, for no escape from the law’s just curse seems possible. Not yet has Christ appeared to the distressed one.

“And the sound of a trumpet” (Heb 12:19). This too, we believe, was a supernatural one, emitting ear-splitting tones, shrill and loud, designed to inspire both awe and fear. It signified the near approach of God. It was to summon the people before Him as their Lawgiver and Judge (Exo 19:17). It was the outward sign of the promulgation of the law, for immediately upon the sound of it, God spoke unto them. It was a pledge of the final judgment, when all flesh shall be summoned before God to answer the terms of His law. Experimentally, it is the imperative summons of the Word for the soul to answer to God’s call. Those who neglect it, will have to answer for the whole when they receive the final summons at the last day. Those who answer it now are brought into God’s presence in fear and trembling, Who then reveals to them Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour.

“And the voice of words” (Heb 12:19). This is the *seventh* and final detail which the apostle here noticed. The “voice of words” was articulate and intelligible, in contrast from the dull roar of the thunder and the shrill tones of the trumpet. Those “words” were the Ten Commandments, written afterward on the two tables of stone, see Deuteronomy 5:22 and the preceding verses. Those “words” were uttered by the voice of the Lord God Almighty (Exo 20:1), concerning which we are told, “The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty;

the voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars” (Psa 29:4-5), etc. It was God declaring unto His church the eternal establishment of His law, that no alteration should be made in its commands or penalties, but that all must be fulfilled.

“Which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more” (Heb 12:19). This reveals the terror-stricken state of those who were encamped before Sinai. There was that on every side which inspired awe and dread. Nature itself convulsed and supernatural phenomena attending the same. This was intended to show the people that God had ascended His awful tribunal as a strict Judge. But that which filled them with intolerable consternation was the voice of God Himself speaking immediately to them. It was not that they refused to hear Him, but that they desired Him to speak to them through Moses, the typical Mediator. Experimentally, the sinner is overwhelmed when the voice of God in the law comes in power to his conscience.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

49. His Servants Insulted

The next incident recorded in the life of David needs to be pondered from more than one viewpoint. This is intimated to us by the fact that in 2 Samuel 10, it is given immediately after the account of the grace which he showed unto Mephibosheth, whereas in 1 Chronicles 19, it is placed right after a parallel account of what is mentioned in 2 Samuel 8. Yet though the context of 2 Samuel 10 and 1 Chronicles 19 is so different, each of them opens with *the same* words, “And [‘Now’] it came to pass after this.” Thereby it is suggested that in as much as this incident is described at length in almost identical language in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, it possesses a *twofold* significance—because it is given different settings, that it requires to be considered *separately* its relation to each one. We shall endeavour, then, to follow up this clear viewing the subject first as it comes immediately after what was before us in last month’s article.

The king of the Ammonites having died, David purposed to express a neighbourly and friendly sympathy for his son. Accordingly, he sent some of his servants “to comfort him.” But instead of this kindly overture meeting with appreciation, it was regarded with distrustful suspicion. The princes of the Ammonites imagined that David had evil designs against the city, and that the men who had ostensibly come to console their bereaved master, were but spies, seeking information with a view to their overthrowing. Whereupon Hanun the king grievously insulted his visitors and put them to an open shame. His action was a declaration of war against David, and so the king of Israel regarded it. The remainder of the chapter records the fighting which their insult gave rise to. But it is the typical and spiritual meaning of it which we are desirous of being occupied with. Nor should this be difficult to arrive at.

The link of connection between 2 Samuel 9 and 10 is obvious on the surface—the former opens with “and David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may *show him kindness* for Jonathan’s sake?” The latter opens with, “And it came to pass after this, that the king

of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, *I will show kindness* unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me.” But with the exception of the words we have just italicized, everything else is in sharp and solemn contrast. In 2 Samuel 9, David shows kindness to an Israelite, in 2 Samuel 10 he shows kindness to an Ammonite. In the former, it was to the descendant of his arch-enemy, in the latter it was to the son of one who had befriended him. In the one, his gracious overtures were deeply appreciated, in the other, they were maliciously resented.

Now as we showed at length in our two articles upon 2 Samuel 9, that chapter gives us a most lovely typical picture of the free and sovereign grace of God upon His elect. What, then, is it which is distinctively prefigured here in 2 Samuel 10? In seeking the answer to this question, as we attend closely to each word used in the first five verses of it, we notice a further contrast throughout 2 Samuel 9. It is David himself who is prominent, whereas in 2 Samuel 10 it is his ambassadors who occupy the centre of the stage. In verses 2-4, the *servants* of David are referred to no less than four times, whereas his servants are not mentioned once in the preceding chapter. Here, then, is the key to our incident—typically, it is the ambassadors of the Son of David who are in view.

“But after that the kindness and pity [margin] of God our Saviour toward *man* appeared” (Ti 3:4). And wherein is that “kindness and pity of God our Saviour” revealed? In the Gospel. And to whom is His Gospel to be preached? To “every creature” (Mar 16:15). There are some of our readers—preachers—who need reminding of this. Christ has commissioned His servants to preach the Gospel, to make known His “kindness and pity,” not only to those who give evidence of having been awakened by the Holy Spirit, but also to the unregenerate. There is something seriously wrong with any creed or theological system which cramps and fetters the preacher in his free proclamation of the Gospel. They who imagine that the Gospel is only for the elect, err grievously. In order to “do the work of an evangelist” (2Ti 4:5) one does not have to embrace the errors of Arminians and believe either in a general redemption or in the free-will of fallen man.

In the parable of the sower, Christ makes it very clear that *He* sowed the seed upon *all* parts of the field, and not on the “good ground” only. In the closing parable of Matthew 13, He represents the Gospel “net” as gathering in fish of all kinds, “bad” as well as “good.” In the parable of the Great Supper, the servant is sent forth to say, “Come; for all things are now ready,” and this, even unto those who “all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luk 14:17-18). In the closing section of the parable of the two sons, Christ declared concerning the *elder* brother (the self-righteous, hard-hearted Pharisee) “therefore came his father *out*, and *entreated* him” (Luk 15:28). O my dear brethren in the ministry, seek grace and wisdom to make *your* ministry square with that of Christ’s! HE did not allow the eternal decrees of God to tie His hands or muzzle His mouth.

It was the same with those that immediately succeeded Christ. It was to a *promiscuous* audience (Act 3:9), to those who were unbelievers (v. 17), that Peter said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Act 3:19)! “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Act 8:5). We are not told that it was to a small and picked company, who had been quickened by the Spirit, but to “the *city of Samaria*” in general. And what was the theme of his preaching? *Christ!*—as an all-sufficient Saviour for the very chief of sinners. The apostle Paul was not cramped in his message, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). The impenitent he called upon *to* repent, and the unbelieving, he bade believe on the Saviour. Are not these very things recorded for *our* learning, as a precedent for us to follow!

That which we have sought to emphasize in the last three paragraphs receives striking illustration and confirmation in the incident we are here considering. If 2 Samuel 9 supplies a blessed representation of the kindness of God shown toward one of His elect, our present chapter gives an equally clear type of the overtures of the Lord's kindness extended unto the non-elect. Here is the reason why the two incidents are placed side by side—the one *supplements* the other. If in the last chapter, we beheld the “kindness” of David manifested unto one with whom he was in covenant relationship, in the chapter now before us we see his “kindness” being shown to one who was outside the commonwealth of Israel, to one who was a heathen. And it is in *that* particular fact lies the typical beauty of our passage, and the great evangelical lesson which we need to learn from it.

“And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. *Then* said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash” (2Sa 10:1-2). It is only as we attend closely unto each detail here that we can appreciate the accuracy of our typical picture. *Death* provided the dark background for it. It was the decease of Nahash which supplied the opportunity for David to manifest the kindness of his heart! Once our minds are definitely focused on this item, what anointed eye can fail to perceive its spiritual signification? No “comfort” was needed by man in his unfallen state. The Gospel had been entirely unsuited to Adam during the brief season that he remained in unclouded communion with his Maker. But the entrance of sin entirely altered the case.

Adam's transgression cast a pall of blackness over the fair scene of Eden, nor was its darkness in anywise relieved till the light of the Gospel (Gen 3:15) broke in on it. It is *sin* which exhibited the need for a Saviour. It was the spiritual *death* into which the fall plunged the whole family, which made evident the glad tidings of life in Christ. The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. And it was where sin abounded that grace did much more abound. The sin of men brought out the marvellous grace that was in the heart of God. The Lord had by no means acted unjustly had He eternally doomed the whole human race, when their father and federal head apostatised from Him. But He did not do so—in wrath He “remembered mercy.”

Here, then, is the first line in our typical picture—*death* provides it a suitable background. The more the awfulness be felt of that spiritual death which it adumbrated, the more will we appreciate the blessedness of that wondrous “comfort” which divine mercy hath provided. The terrible fall which brought in spiritual death was of such an aggravated nature that it left all whom Adam represented without excuse. The nature of our spiritual death is described in Ephesians 4:18, “Having the understanding darkened, being *alienated from the life of God* through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” It has wrought in us a carnal mind which “is enmity” against God (Rom 8:7). Why, then, should the Lord have any regard for us? Why should He concern Himself about those who prefer darkness to light, evil to good, death to life? Had He totally abandoned us to our ruin and wretchedness, that had been all we deserved.

“Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun” (2Sa 10:2). Here is the second line in our typical picture, pointing us unto the One who is the author of all that is good, gentle, sympathetic, and unselfish in His creatures and is Himself “of great kindness” (Jon 4:2). O what kindness did the Lord show when He left heaven's glory and came down to this sin-cursed earth! What kindness for the Lord to take upon Himself the form of a servant, and minister unto others rather than be ministered unto. What compassion He exhibited when in the presence of want, suffering, and misery. What kindness when He healed “all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Mat 4:23). Thus did the kindness of David shadow forth the infinitely greater kindness of his Son and Lord.

“And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants” (2Sa 10:2). This gives the third line in our typical picture. During the days of His flesh, Christ announced, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luk 4:18). Since His ascension, He has continued this gracious ministry through His ambassadors and servants, 2 Corinthians 5:20; Mark 16:20. O what a message of “comfort” have Christ’s ministers for every poor sinner that will give ear to their message which makes known a way of escape from the wrath to come, that tells of how the forgiveness of sins may be obtained, how peace, joy, everlasting life, and bliss may become our portion.

The fourth line in our picture is given in the next words of 2 Samuel 10:2, “And David servants came into the land of the children of Ammon.” If those words be carefully weighed by those of us who may be inclined toward hyper-Calvinism—the term is justly warranted, for his own writings make it very clear that Calvin himself pressed the requirements of the Gospel (repentance and faith) upon all and sundry. These servants of David were not like Jonah, who demurred when called upon to preach unto the Ninevites. No, they made no objection against going *outside* the bounds of God’s covenant people, and journeying to a place of idolaters. As such, they prefigured the obedient servants of the Son of David, whose commission is “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among *all nations*” (Luk 24:47).

“And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?” (2Sa 10:3). Is any interpreter required here? Is not this next line in our picture so clear that it speaks for itself! The common experience of the Christian evangelist is identical in substance with that which befell the servants of David. Though his intentions are of the best, they are interpreted as being evil. Though he comes with a message of true “comfort,” the poor blinded dupes of Satan regard him as a “kill-joy.” Though his only object be to make known the “kindness” of his royal Master, the vast majority of those to whom he comes, resent his mission. Alas, that now, in many circles of professing Christians, the true servant of Christ is not wanted, but rather looked upon with suspicion, as a “self-seeker” or “disturber of the peace.”

“Wherefore Hanun took David’s servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away” (2Sa 10:4). This line in our picture is also so obvious that it needs little comment from us. It foreshadowed the treatment which the Son of David’s servants would receive from those whose welfare they sought. Those servants were mocked and insulted—not wanted, they were “sent away” in shame. Men today have other ways of insulting and disgracing the ministers of the Gospel beside the methods used by those Ammonites, but they are just as effective. Wrongful charges are made against them, false reports are spread, so that they are excluded from many places.

“When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return” (2Sa 10:5). Here is the sequel to the unkind treatment they had met with—the servants of David are called upon *to retire from the public eye*. They have to spend a season—one of some months at least—in seclusion, cut off from fellowship. One wonders how many today are, like the writer, “tarrying at Jericho!” Not a few “teachers” are now “removed into a corner” (Isa 30:20), for the time hath come “when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2Ti 4:3). Concerning Israel of old we read, “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets,

until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was *no remedy*” (2Ch 36:16)—is this soon to be repeated in the history of Christendom?

The final line in our typical picture—occupying the remainder of 2 Samuel 10—is a very solemn one, *David avenged his insulted servants*. He regarded the ignominy heaped on them as a direct affront upon himself. Thus it is in the antitype. Concerning His ministers, Christ has said, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth *you* despiseth *me*” (Luk 10:16). He regards the ill-usage of *them* as a declaration of war against *Himself*. Thus He has said, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (Psa 105:15), and He will not be disobeyed with impunity. Solemn is it to look forward to the time when those who have despised, slandered, insulted, and cast out His servants, will yet have to answer to the Son of David Himself.

Many and important are the lessons for the servants of Christ in this incident. Chief among them are—1. They are to obediently carry out the orders of their royal Master, no matter how unreasonable they may appear or how distasteful they be unto themselves. 2. They must be prepared for their best intentions and kindest actions to expose them unto the basest suspicions. They must expect ingratitude, contempt, and abuse, but sufficient for the servant to be as his Lord. 3. These things must not discourage them, for eventually, Christ Himself will plead their cause! 4. They must not attempt to avenge themselves, but rather follow the example left by their Master, 1 Peter 2:23. 5. If now, for a season, they are required to “tarry at Jericho,” they may take comfort from the fact that it is their Lord who has ordered that isolated seclusion.

THE DIVINE COVENANTS

4. The Abrahamic (Continued)

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). In this simple narrative, we have *the original promise* made to Abraham that the Messiah should come of his family. This divine pledge was made to the patriarch when he was only a little short of seventy-five years of age. It was given at a point in human history half way between the creation of the first Adam and the incarnation of the last Adam—that is, two thousand years after the entrance of sin into the world, and two thousand years before the advent of the Saviour.

The first great purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant was to make known *the stock* from which the Messiah was to spring. This was the most prominent aspect of truth revealed in it—the appearing of the promised seed in Abraham’s own line. The primary intimation of this was given to the patriarch when God first appeared to him, “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Two things are to be noted in the language there used. First, the “all families *of the earth* be blessed” obviously looks back to Genesis 3:15, for the “*all families*” was sufficiently

definite to announce the international scope of the blessing. It is indeed very striking to observe that in Genesis 12:3, God did not use the word “*eretz*” (as in Gen 1:1; 14:19; 18:25, etc.), but “*adamah*” as in Genesis 3:17. The manifest link between “*Cursed is the ground*” (Gen 3:17) had been made more evident had Genesis 12:3 been rendered “in thee shall all families of the *ground* be *blessed*”—the curse was to be removed by Christ!

Second, the terms of this Messianic intimation were quite *general* in their character. Later, this original promise was repeated in more specific form—the “*in thee* shall all the families of the ground be blessed” being defined as “*in thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” This illustrates an important principle which may be discerned throughout the divine revelation, namely, that of progressive unfolding, “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mar 4:28). This is evident here by a comparison of the far-reaching promises made to Abraham with the prophecies of Noah concerning his three sons. JEHOVAH was the God of Shem, yet Japheth should dwell in his tents (Gen 9:26-27). Now He becomes known as “the God of Abraham,” but *all* families of the ground should be blessed in him and his seed. What a striking advance was here made in the divine plan, by revealing the breadth of its meaning and the explicitness of its purpose!

“By his call Abraham was raised to a very singular pre-eminence and constituted in a manner the root and centre of the world’s future history, as concerned the attainment of real blessing. Still, even in that respect, not exclusively. The blessing was to come chiefly to Abraham, and through him, but, as already indicated in the prophecy on Shem, others were to stand, though in a subordinate rank, on the same line—since those also were to be blessed who blessed him—that is, who held substantially the same faith, and occupied the same friendly relation to God. The cases of such persons in the patriarch’s own day, as his kinsman Lot, who was not formally admitted into Abraham’s covenant, and still more of Melchizedek, who was not even of Abraham’s line, and yet individually stood in some sense higher than Abraham himself, clearly showed, and were no doubt partly raised up for the purpose of showing that there was nothing arbitrary in Abraham’s position, and that the ground he occupied was to a certain extent common to believers generally.

“The peculiar honour conceded to him was that the great trunk of blessing was to be of him, while only some isolated twigs or scattered branches were to be found elsewhere, and even these could only be found by persons coming, in a manner, to make common cause with him. In regard to himself, however, the large dowry of good conveyed to him in the divine promise could manifestly not be realised through him personally. There could at the most be but a beginning made in his own experience and history, and the widening of the circle of blessing to other kindreds and regions, till it reached to the most distant families of the earth, must necessarily be affected by means of those who were to spring from him. Hence the original word of promise, ‘In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,’ was afterwards changed into, ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’” (Patrick Fairbairn, 1805-1874).

It needs pointing out, though, that *each* of those expressions had its own specific significance and importance, and that they must be conjoined so as to bring out the full design of God in the calling of Abraham. The promised blessing was to be wrought out in its widest sense not by Abraham individually and immediately, but through him mediately, by means of the “seed” that should be given to him. This clearly implied that that “seed” must possess far higher qualities than any to be found in Abraham himself, since blessing from it would flow out so widely. Yea, it only thinly veiled the truth that there should be a wondrous commingling of the divine with the

human. Christ, then, as the essential kernel of the promise and the seed of Abraham, rather, than Abraham himself, was to have the honour of blessing all nations.

But what we have just called attention to by no means evacuates the force of the original “*In thee shall all families of the ground be blessed*” (Gen 12:3), for by so definitely connecting the good with Abraham himself as well as with his “seed,” the organic connection was marked between the one and the other. “The blessing to be brought to the world through his line had even in his time a present though small realisation—precisely as the kingdom of Christ had its commencement in that of David, and the one ultimately merged into the other. And so, in Abraham as the living root of all that was to follow, the whole and every part may be said to take its rise” (Patrick Fairbairn). Not only was Christ after the flesh “the Son of Abraham” (Mat 1:1), but every believer in Christ is of Abraham’s “seed” (Gal 3:29), and the entire company of the redeemed shall have their place and portion “with Abraham” in the kingdom of God (Mat 8:11).

Other promises followed, such as, “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (Gen 12:7), “to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen 17:7) etc., which Lord willing, we shall consider later. That which immediately concerns us is the meaning of the term “seed” in these passages. The Scripture which throws the most light thereon is Galatians 3:16-17, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” Yet strange to say, this passage has occasioned the commentators much trouble, no two of them agreeing in its interpretation. It is commonly regarded as one of the most abstruse passages in all the Pauline epistles.

Matthew Henry says, “The covenant is made with Abraham and his seed. And he [the apostle] gives us a very surprising exposition of that but he attempts no detailed interpretation at all.” J. N. Darby (1800-1882) seeks to undo the knot by changing the apostle’s “promises” to “the promise,” restricting the reference unto Genesis 22. Yet not only is the Greek in the plural number, but such an idea is plainly refuted by the “four hundred and thirty years after,” which necessarily carries us back to Genesis 12. Albert Barnes (1798-1870) discusses at great length what he terms “the perplexities of this very difficult passage of Scripture.” But as usual, the commentators have created their own difficulties—partly by failing to take into full account the immediate context, and partly through a slavish adherence to “the letter,” there is missing the “spirit” of the verse.

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made” (Gal 3:16). Abraham was the “father” of a twofold “seed,” a natural and a spiritual, and if we attend unto the context here, there is not the slightest difficulty in determining *which* of them the Holy Spirit has in view. In verse 6, He had said, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,” from which the conclusion is drawn, “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). What could be plainer than that? They which are “of faith,” genuine believers are “the *children* of Abraham”—that is, his *spiritual* children—he being their “father” as the pattern to which they are conformed. In other words—sinners today are justified by God in precisely the same way as Abraham was—by faith.

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [Gentiles] through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal 3:8-9). The same truth is here reaffirmed. In view of God’s purpose to justify Gentiles by faith, He proclaimed that Gospel to Abraham himself, saying, “In thee shall all nations be blessed.” Let it be carefully noted that the Holy Spirit here quotes from Genesis 12, and *not* from Genesis 22! The same conclusion is again

drawn—believers receive the identical spiritual blessing that Abraham did, namely, the righteousness of Christ imputed to their account, so that they now measure up to every requirement of the law. And that, because “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13), this having opened the way “that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14).

“Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto” (Gal 3:15). But in the case before us we have far more than “a man’s covenant”—we have a *divine* “covenant,” for God solemnly ratified His promises to Abraham by covenant. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made” (Gal 3:16). Now in the light of “the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7), “They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal 3:9), and “that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:14), “to Abraham and his seed” *must* mean “to Abraham and his *spiritual* seed were the promises made.” Collateral proof of this is supplied by Romans 4:16, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,” for it is only *all* of his *spiritual* “seed” who are assured of the blessings promised.

“He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16). This is the clause which many have found so perplexing. They have pointed out that, both in the Old Testament and the New, the term “seed” often refers to descendants *without* limitation, just as the word “posterity” does with us. Furthermore, it is a fact, which a use of the concordance will amply confirm, that this term “seed” is *never* used in the plural at all to denote a posterity, the singular form being constantly employed for that purpose. Indeed, the plural form of the word never occurs except here in Galatians 3:16. This presents a problem for which no literalist can supply any satisfactory solution, which plainly intimates that it was not with the surface-meaning of the term the apostle was here treating.

“The force of his reasoning here depends not on the mere dictionary *word* ‘seed,’ but upon the great scriptural *idea* which, more and more clearly in Old Testament revelation, becomes manifested through that word—the idea of an individual person, who should sum up in Himself the covenant people as well as (for them) the covenant blessings, that is, the promised Messiah, *Christ*” (James MacGregor, on Galatians, 1879). This is the only writer we are acquainted with who has indicated the direction in which we must look for the true explanation of the apostle’s terms, namely, not in their merely literal signification, but in the spiritual concept which they embodied—just as the term “Christ” literally signifies “anointed,” but is employed as the special title of the Saviour, and is given to Him not as a private but public person, including both the Head and members of the church (1Co 12:12).

“He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16). Abraham had two entirely different “seeds,” one by humble procreation, the other by divine regeneration. But the promises were not made to both his seeds, but to one of them only, namely, the spiritual, the *mystical* “Christ”—the Redeemer and all who are legally and vitally united to Him. Thus the antithesis drawn by the apostle is between the *unity* of the “seed” in contrast from the *diversity* of the “seeds.” This has been strikingly shadowed forth on the earth plane. Abraham had two sons, but one of them, Ishmael, was excluded from the highest privileges, “In *Isaac* shall thy seed be called” (Gen 21:12). But those words did not signify—All

the descendants of Isaac are destined unto heavenly bliss—rather do they affirm that it was from Isaac the promised Messiah, would, according to the flesh, descend.

Later, the line of Messiah's descent was more definitely restricted, for of Isaac's two sons, Esau was rejected and Jacob was chosen as the progenitor of Christ. Out of Jacob's twelve sons, Judah was selected as the tribe from which the promised seed should issue. Out of all the thousands of Judah the family of Jesse was the one honoured to give birth to the Saviour (Isa 11:1). Of Jesse's eight sons (1Sa 16:10-11), David was appointed to be the father of the Messiah. Thus we may see that as time went on the channel through which Abraham's "seed" should issue was more definitely narrowed down and defined, and therein and thereby God gradually made it known *how* His original promises to Abraham were to receive their fulfillment. The *limitation* of these promises was evidenced by the rejection of Ishmael, and then of Esau, which clearly intimated that *all* of Abraham's descendants were *not* included therein, until, ultimately, it was seen that their *fulfillment* was received in Christ Himself and those united to Him.

Had the promises of God to Abraham embraced both branches of his family, including Ishmael as well as Isaac, then some other term than "seed" had been used. But God so ordered that so different were the circumstances of the births and future lives, so diverse were the prophecies respecting them, and so utterly dissimilar were the two races that sprang from them, that in Scripture the descendants of Ishmael ceased to be spoken of as the posterity of Abraham. And therein God adumbrated the wide gulf which separated the *natural* descendants of Abraham (the Jews) from his *spiritual* children (Christians), and has thereby rendered excuseless our confounding the one with the other when looking for *fulfillment* of the promises. The promises were *limited* originally, and that limitation was evidenced more clearly by successive revelations until it was shown that none but Christ (and those united to Him) were included, "And to thy seed, which is *Christ*" (mystical)!!

"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal 3:16). To sum up. The promises of God were never made to all the descendants of Abraham, like so many different kinds of "seed," but were limited to the *spiritual* line, that is, to "Christ" *mystical*. Hence the *unbelieving* descendants of *Jacob* were as much excluded from those promises as were the posterity of Ishmael and Esau. Contrariwise, believing Gentiles, one with Christ in the Everlasting Covenant, were as truly embraced by them as was Isaac and Jacob and all the godly Israelites.

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

8. Its Procurer

We have now reached what is to our mind the most important and certainly the most blessed aspect of our many-sided subject, yet that which is the least understood in not a few circles of Christendom. It is the *objective* side of sanctification that we now turn to, that perfect and unforfeitable holiness which every believer has in Christ. We are *not* now going to write upon

sanctification as a moral quality or attribute, nor of that which is a manner of experience or attainment by us. Rather shall we contemplate something entirely *outside ourselves*, namely, that which is a fundamental part of our standing and state in Christ. That which we are about to consider is one of those “spiritual blessings” which God has blest us with “in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). It is an immediate consequence of His blood shedding, and results from our actual union with Him as “the holy one of God.” It is that which His perfect offering has sanctified us *unto*, as well as what it has sanctified us *from*.

Among all the terrible effects and fruits which sin produces, the two chief are alienation from God and condemnation by God—sin necessarily excludes from His sanctuary, and brings the sinner before the judgment-seat of His law. Contrariwise, among all the blessed fruits and effects which Christ’s sacrifice procures, the two chief ones are justification and sanctification—it cannot be otherwise. Inasmuch as Christ’s sacrifice has “put away” (Heb 9:26) “made an end” (see Dan 9:24) of the sins of His people, they are not only freed from all condemnation, but they are also given the right and the meetness to draw nigh unto God as purged worshipers. Sin not only entails guilt, it *defiles*—and the blood of Christ has not only secured pardon, it *cleanses*. Yet simple, clear, and conclusive as is this *dual* fact, Christians find it much harder to apprehend the second part of it than they do the first.

When we first believed in Christ, and the burden of our sins rolled away, we supposed that (as one hymn expresses it) we would be happy all the day. Assured of God’s forgiveness, that we had entered His family by the new birth and that an eternity with Christ in unclouded bliss was our certain inheritance, what could possibly dampen our joy? Ah, but it was not long before we discovered that we were still *sinners*, living in a world of sin. Yea, as time went on, we were made more and more conscious of the sink of iniquity that indwells us, ever sending forth its foul streams, polluting our thoughts, words, and actions. This forced from us the agonized inquiry, *How* can such vile creatures as we see, feel, and know ourselves to be, either pray to, serve, or worship the thrice holy God? Only in His own blessed Word can be found a sufficient and a satisfying answer to this burning question.

“The epistle to the Romans, is, as is well-known, that part of Scripture in which the question of justification is most fully treated. There, especially, we are taught to think of God as a Judge presiding in the Courts of His holy judgment. Accordingly, the expressions employed throughout that epistle are ‘forensic’ or ‘judicial.’ They refer to our relation to God, or His relation to us, in His judicial Courts—the great question there being, how criminals can be brought into such a relation to Him, as to have, not criminality, but righteousness, imputed to them.

“But if, in the epistle to the Romans, we see God in the Courts of His judgment, equally in the epistle to the Hebrews, we see Him in the Temple of His worship. ‘Sanctified’ is a word that has the same prominence in the epistle to the Hebrews, that ‘justified’ has in the epistle to the Romans. It is a *Temple*-word, descriptive of our relation to God in the Courts of His worship, just as ‘justified’ is a *forensic* word, descriptive of our relation to God in the Courts of His judgment. Before there can be any question about serving or worshipping God acceptably, the necessity of His holiness requires that the claims both of the Courts of His judgment, and also of the Courts of His worship, should be fully met. He who is regarded in the judicial Courts of God as an unpardoned criminal, or who, in relation to the Temple of God, is regarded as having the stains of his guilt upon him, cannot be allowed to take his stand among God’s servants. No leper that was not thoroughly cleansed could serve in the tabernacle. The existence of one stain not adequately covered by compensatory atonement, shuts out from the presence of God.

“We must stand ‘uncharged’ in relation to the judicial Courts of God and imputatively ‘spotless’ in relation to the Courts of His worship. In other words, we must be perfectly ‘justified’ and perfectly ‘sanctified’ before we can attempt to worship or serve Him. ‘Sanctification,’ therefore, when used in this sense, is not to be contrasted with justification, as if the latter were complete, but the former incomplete and progressive. *Both are complete to the believer.* The same moment that brings the complete ‘justification’ of the fifth of Romans, brings the equally complete ‘sanctification’ of the tenth of Hebrews—both being equally needed in order that God, as respects the claims of His holiness, might be ‘appeased’ or ‘placated’ toward us—and therefore equally needed as pre-requisites to our entrance on the worship and service of God in His heavenly Temple. For until wrath is effectually appeased there can be no entrance there.

“The complete and finished sanctification of believers by the blood of Jesus, is the great subject of the ninth and tenth of the Hebrews. ‘The blood of bulls and goats’ gave to them who were sprinkled therewith a title to enter into the courts of the typical tabernacle, but that title was not an abiding title. It was no sooner gained than it was lost by the first recurring taint. Repetition therefore of offering, and repetition of sprinkling was needed again and again. The same circle was endlessly trodden and retrodden, and yet never was perpetuity of acceptance obtained. The tabernacle and its services were but shadows, but they teach us that, as ‘the blood of bulls and goats’ gave to them who were sprinkled therewith a temporary title to enter into that typical tabernacle, so, the blood of Christ, once offered, gives to all those who are once sprinkled therewith (and all believers *are* sprinkled) a title, not temporary, but abiding, to enter into God’s presence as those who are sanctified for heaven” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899).

“We *are* sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all....For by one offering he hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:10, 14). These blessed declarations have no reference whatsoever to anything which the Spirit does in the Christian, but relate exclusively to what Christ has secured *for* them. They speak of that which results from our *identification* with Christ. They affirm that by virtue of the sacrifice of Calvary every believer is not only counted righteous in the courts of God’s judgment, but is perfectly hallowed for the courts of His worship. The precious blood of the Lamb not only delivers from hell, but it also fits us for heaven.

By the redemptive work of Christ, the entire church has been set apart—consecrated unto and accepted by God. The grand truth is that the feeble and most uninstructed believer was as *completely sanctified before God* the first moment that he trusted in Christ, as he will be when he dwells in heaven in his glorified state. True, both his sphere and his circumstances will then be quite different from what they now are, nevertheless, his title to heaven, his meetness for the immediate presence of the thrice Holy One, will be no better than it is today. It is *his relation to Christ* (and that alone) which qualifies him to enter the Father’s house, and it is his relation to Christ (and that alone) which gives him the right to *now* draw nigh within the veil. True, the believer still carries around with him “this body of death” (a depraved nature), but that *affects not* his perfect standing, his completeness in Christ, his acceptance, his justification, and sanctification before God.

But as we said, in an earlier paragraph, the Christian finds it much easier to believe in or grasp the truth of justification, than he does of his present perfect sanctification in Christ. For this reason we deem it advisable to proceed slowly and enter rather fully into this aspect of our subject. Let us begin with our Lord’s own words in John 17:19, “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” Unto whom did Christ allude when He spoke there of sanctifying Himself? Certainly He could not possibly be referring to anything subjective

or experimental, for in His own person He was “the holy one of God” (Mar 1:24), and as such, He could not increase in holiness, or become more holy. His language then must have respect unto what was *objective*, relating to the exercise of His mediatorial office.

When Christ said, “For their sakes I sanctify myself,” He denoted that He was then on the very point of dedicating Himself to the full and final execution of the work of making Himself a sacrifice for sin, to satisfy all the demands of God’s law and justice. Christ, then, was therein expressing His readiness to present Himself before the Father as the Surety of His People—to place Himself on the altar as a vicarious propitiation for His church. It was “for the sake” of others that He sanctified Himself—for the sake of His eleven apostles, who are there to be regarded as the representatives of the entire election of grace. It is on their behalf, for their express benefit that He set Himself apart unto the full discharge of His mediatorial office that the fruit thereof might redound unto them. Christ unreservedly devoted Himself unto God, that His people might reap the full advantages thereof.

The particular end here mentioned of Christ’s sanctifying Himself was “that they also might be *sanctified* through the truth” (Joh 17:19), which is a very faulty rendering of the original, the Greek preposition being “in” and not “through,” and there is no article before “truth.” The marginal rendering, therefore, is much to be preferred—“that they might be truly sanctified”—Bagster Interlinear and the R.V. give “sanctified in truth.” The meaning is “that they might be” actually, really, verily “sanctified”—in contrast from the typical and ceremonial sanctification which obtained under the Mosaic dispensation, compare John 4:24, Colossians 1:6, 1 John 3:18 for “in truth.” As the result of Christ’s sanctifying Himself—devoting Himself as a whole burnt offering to God, His people are perfectly sanctified. Their sins are put away, their persons are cleansed from all defilement. And not only so, but the excellency of His infinitely meritorious work is imputed to them, so that they are perfectly acceptable to God, meet for His presence, fitted for His worship.

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14)—not by anything which the Spirit works in them, but solely by what Christ’s sanctifying of Himself has wrought for them. It is this sanctification in and through Christ which gives Christians their *priestly* character, the title to draw near unto God within the veil as purged worshipers. Access to God, or the worship of a people made nigh by blood, was central in the divinely appointed system of Judaism (Heb 9:13). The antitype, the substance, the blessed reality of this, is what Christ has secured for His church. Believers are already perfectly sanctified *objectively*, as the immediate fruit of the Saviour’s sacrifice. Priestly nearness is now their blessed portion in consequence of Christ’s priestly offering of Himself. This it is, and nought else, which gives us “boldness to enter into the holiest” (Heb 10:19).

Many Christians who are quite clear that they must look alone to *Christ* for their justification before God, often fail to view *Him* as their complete sanctification before God. But this ought not to be, for Scripture is just as clear on the one point as on the other. Yea, the two are therein inseparably joined together. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1Co 1:30). And here we must dissent from the exposition of this verse given by Charles Hodge (1797-1878) (in his commentary) and others of his school, who interpret “sanctification” here as Christ’s Spirit indwelling His people as the Spirit of holiness, transforming them unto His likeness. But this verse is speaking of that sanctification which *Christ is made unto us*, and not that which we are *made by Christ*—the distinction is real and vital, and to ignore or confound it is inexcusable in a theologian.

Christ crucified (see the context of 1 Cor 1:30—vv. 17-18, 23), “Of God is made unto us” four things, and this in precisely the same way that God “made him [Christ] to be sin for us” (2Co 5:21), namely, objectively and imputatively. First, Christ is “made unto us wisdom,” objectively, for He is the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid. It is true that by the Spirit we are made wise unto salvation, nevertheless, we are far from being as wise as we ought to be—see 1 Corinthians 8:2. But all the wisdom God requires of us is found in Christ, and as the “wisdom” of the book of Proverbs, He is ours. Second, Christ is “made unto us righteousness,” objectively, as He is Himself “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6), and therefore does the believer exclaim, “In the LORD have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24). As the law raises its accusing voice against me, I point to Christ as the One who has, by His active and passive obedience, met its every demand on my behalf.

Third, Christ is “made unto us sanctification,” *objectively*. In Him we have an absolute purity, and by the imputation to us of the efficacy and merits of His cross-work we, who were excluded from God on account of sin, are now given access to Him. If Israel became a holy people when sprinkled with the blood of bulls and goats, so that they were readmitted to JEHOVAH’s worship, how much more has the infinitely valuable blood of Christ sanctified us, that we may approach God as acceptable worshipers. This sanctification is not something which we have in our own persons, but was ours in Christ as soon as we laid hold of Him by faith. Fourth, Christ is “made unto us redemption,” *objectively*. He is in His own person both our Redeemer and redemption—“*in whom* we have redemption” (Eph 1:7). Christ is “made unto us redemption” not by enabling us to redeem ourselves, but by Himself paying the price.

1 Corinthians 1:30, then, affirms that we are *complete* in Christ. That whatever the law demands of us, it has received on our account in the Surety. If we are considered as what we are in ourselves, not as we stand in Christ (as one with Him) then a thousand things may be “laid to our charge.” It may be laid to our charge that we are woefully ignorant of many parts of the divine Word, but the sufficient answer is, Christ is our wisdom. It may be laid to our charge that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, but the sufficient answer is, that Christ is our righteousness. It may be laid to our charge that we do many things and fail to do many others which unfit us for the presence of a holy God, but the sufficient answer is, that Christ is our sanctification. It may be laid to our charge that we are largely in bondage to the flesh, but the sufficient answer is, Christ is our redemption.

1 Corinthians 1:30, then, is *a unit*. We cannot define the “wisdom” and the “sanctification” as what the Spirit works in us, and the “righteousness” and the “redemption” as what Christ has wrought for us—all four are either objective or subjective. Christ is here said to be “sanctification” unto us, just as He is our righteousness and redemption. To suppose that the sanctification here spoken of is that which is wrought in us, would oblige me to explain the righteousness and redemption here spoken of, as that which we had in ourselves—but such a thought Mr. Hodge would rightly have rejected with abhorrence. The righteousness which Christ is “made unto us” is most certainly not the righteousness which He works in us (the Romanist heresy), but the righteousness which He wrought out *for* us. So it is with the sanctification which Christ is “made unto us.” It is not in ourselves, but in Him. It is not an incomplete and progressive thing, but a perfect and eternal one.

God has made Christ to be sanctification unto us by imputing to us the infinite purity and excellency of His sacrifice. We are made nigh to God by Christ’s blood (Eph 2:13) *before* we are brought nigh to Him by the effectual call of the Spirit (1Pe 2:9). The former being the necessary foundation of the latter—in the types the oil could only be placed upon the blood. And it is on this

account we “are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1Co 1:2). How vastly different is this—how immeasurably superior to—what the advocates of “the higher life” or the “victorious life” set before their hearers and readers! It is not merely that Christ is able to do this or willing to do that for us, but every Christian *is already* “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” My ignorance of this does not alter the blessed fact, and neither does my failure to clearly understand nor the weakness of my faith to firmly grasp it, in anywise impair it. Nor have my feelings or experience anything whatever to do with it. *God* says it, God *has* done it, and nothing can alter it.

UNION AND COMMUNION

5. Vital

In last month’s article it was shown God established a legal or federal union between the Redeemer and those who were to be redeemed by Him, so that He became answerable for them to the divine justice. But something more was necessary in order to *their actual enjoyment* of the benefits of Christ’s representation. God not only determined that His Son should sustain the character of their Surety, but also that a vital and spiritual relation should take place between them, through which there should be *conveyed to them* the benefits of His purchase. God ordained that as Christ and the church were one in the law, so also they should be one experimentally—that not only should His righteousness be imputed to His members, but that His very life should also be imparted to them.

Though the elect were federally united to Christ in the Everlasting Covenant, yet until they are regenerated they are personally and experimentally *far from* God and Christ, so far as their actual state is concerned. This is abundantly clear from, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh...that at that time ye were *without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12). But at the new birth, Christ unites them to Himself in a vital way. This He does by sending His Spirit to take possession of them and communicate to them a principle of spiritual life, namely, His *own* life, whereby they are made *living* members of His body, the church. Previously we were “in Christ” mystically (Eph 1:4) and representatively (1Co 15:22), now we are “in Christ” vitally (2Co 5:17; 12:2; Rom 16:7).

As we were not the actual possessors of Adam’s guilt until we were conceived by our mothers and thereby united to him by carnal generation, neither are we the actual possessors of Christ’s merits until we are quickened by His Spirit and thereby united to Him by regeneration. While there was a legal union between Adam and us in Eden, yet not until we are born into this world do we enter into personal communion with what his conduct entailed. In like manner, though there was a federal union between Christ and us when He served as our Sponsor, yet not until we are born again do we begin to enjoy that which the discharge of His Surety-engagement obtained for us. Though there was a mystical and federal union between Christ and His people, not until their regeneration can they have any *communion* with Him.

The human race was inseparably linked to Adam in a *double* way—federally and naturally, as he was both the legal representative and father of his posterity. So too the elect are related to Christ in a double way—federally and vitally, as He is both their legal Representative and their spiritual Quickener, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19). Those whom Adam represented (the first “many”) were “made sinners” judicially the moment he fell, but they were only “made sinners” experimentally when they were “shapen in iniquity” (Psa 51:5). Those whom Christ represented (the second “many,” which is *not* co-extensive with the first) were “made righteous” judicially when He rose again from the dead, but they are only “made righteous” experimentally when they are born again and believe.

This is only another way of saying that Christ’s *Headship* is of a twofold character. He is unto His mystical body both a Head of government and a Head of influence. The term “head” has a twofold extension in our common speech. It is that by which we name the highest part of our physical organism, and it is also that by which we describe the chief ruler, be he over a family, a corporation, or a nation. Such is its significance as applied to Christ—He is both the life and the Lord of His people. Remarkably has God caused this to be adumbrated in the natural realm—sever the head from the physical organism, and all its members are at once reduced to a state of lifelessness. Likewise, if the brain were removed, the members become incapable of action—they are regulated and dominated by the mind.

In the natural body, the head is the seat of sensation, and from it feelings and motions are communicated to all of its members by means of the nerves which have their origin in the brain. Here again the natural supplies an object-lesson of the spiritual. It is from Christ, the Head, there flows that life and grace by which the members of His mystical body are enabled to perform the various functions of the Christian life. “May grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: *from whom* the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16). It is from the Head there proceeds that which causes “the effectual working in the measure of every part” of His body.

The same blessed truth is set before us again in, “And not holding the Head, *from which* all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19). Here the apostle was setting forth the evil tendency of one of the errors of Gnosticism, which now occupies a prominent place in the vile system of Romanism. Under the pretense of honouring Christ and abasing man, the Gnostic taught that He was so far above us in the scale of being that access could only be obtained to Him via the angels (Col 2:18). In like manner, Romanism introduces various mediators between Christ and the sinner. But this is failing to hold fast the doctrine of the Head. It is only by *immediate* union and communion with Christ Himself that His members are nourished and strengthened.

Christ, then, is not only the Head of authority, the Lord and Ruler of His church, but He is also the Head of influence—its Quickener and Nourisher. In God’s appointed time, the Lord Jesus sends down the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His people when they are dead in trespasses and sins, imparting spiritual life to their souls, and thus making them one with Himself in a *vital* way, and this He does by virtue of the prior mystical and federal union existing between them. It is our *eternal* union with, interest in, and relation to the person of Christ in the Everlasting Covenant, which is the foundation of the Spirit’s work in our souls during the time-state. It is by communicating His own life into the members of His body, the church, that their mystical and legal union with Him is then made real and actual to them in their own experience.

As Adam is the root of generation, so Christ is the root of regeneration, note “his seed” and “the travail of his soul” in Isaiah 53:10-11. If we had not been in Adam by divine creation, we would not have been produced from him by generation, and had we not been given a super-creation being in Christ by divine election, we had never been manifested in Him by regeneration. Had there been no *oneness with* Christ, there could be no *life from* Him, and if no life, then no justification, salvation, or glorification. And in order to our having life from Christ, we must receive His Spirit. For as our physical bodies are lifeless without the natural spirit (Jam 2:26), so the soul is spiritually dead without the Spirit of God. At regeneration, the Holy Spirit becomes to the soul—though in a far more excellent manner—what the soul is to the body with respect to its animal and rational life.

The vital union which is effected between Christ and His people is a work of God by which His elect are made spiritually one with their Head, for the same Spirit which indwells Him now takes up His abode within them. Herein we may perceive how each person in the Holy Trinity is distinctively honoured, and endeared unto us. God the Father gave us a mystical union to Christ when He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. God the Son gave us a legal union to Himself when He took upon Him the office of Surety. And God the Spirit gives us a vital union to Christ by imparting to us His life and making us living members of His church. It is only by means of this third union that the first and second are made manifest to us, “*Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit*” (1Jo 4:13).

This union has also been variously designated by different writers. It has been called the “new-creation” union, because it is effected by our being born again. It has been called the “influential” union, because only through it do we receive the virtues of the mystical and federal unions. It has been called the “manifestive” union, because by it is revealed to us our eternal oneness with Christ. We have called it the “vital” union because it is that which gives us a living relation with Christ. This it is which capacitates the Christian to know Christ, to receive Him, to have communion with Him, to live upon and enjoy Him. The Spirit unites us to Christ at the very first moment the “good work” of God is “begun” (Phi 1:6) in the heart. Then it is that we are “delivered...from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col 1:13), so that we are brought into open and actual fellowship with Him.

Then also it is that we are “made...meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). It was Christ’s work *for* us which secured our *title* to the heavenly inheritance, but it is the Spirit’s work *in* us which supplies the *fitness* or capacity to enjoy the same. This is confirmed by what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:5, “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” The context here is also speaking of the heavenly inheritance of the saints, when “mortality shall be swallowed up of life.” And “for” that inheritance (the “selfsame thing”) God hath “wrought us” or fashioned and fitted us, for we are “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). In addition to the *evidence* which His work in our souls gives us, that we are vessels of mercy “prepared unto glory,” the Spirit Himself indwells us as an *earnest* or guaranty of our future bliss.

Christ has a threefold union with the church, and the church has a threefold union with Him. First, He had a mystical union, when God elected Him to be the Head of His church. Second, He had a legal union, when He agreed to serve as our Representative and Sponsor. Third, this began to be *openly effected* when He became incarnate, entering into a natural union with us by being made flesh. In like manner, our mystical and federal union with Christ becomes manifest and efficacious when we are vitally joined to Him by the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The entrance of Christ into our nature capacitated Him to discharge His office-work of Surety, and

fitted Him to be a merciful High Priest who could be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. The communication of Christ's nature unto us qualifies us for communion with Him and fits unto the discharge of our Christian duties "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1Co 6:17).

As in our natural bodies, the members receive life (the animal spirits) from their head, so in the mystical body of Christ the members receive the life-giving Spirit from their Head. This, we believe, is the meaning of John 1:16, "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." What is signified *here* by Christ's "fullness?" Let it be noted that in John 1:16, Christ is not presented absolutely as the second person in the Godhead, but as incarnate (Joh 1:14), as the God-man Mediator, as the next verse shows. What then, was His "fullness" as Mediator, *furnishing Him* for the discharge of that office? Was it not His being "anointed...with the Holy Spirit" (Act 10:38)? Is not the key to this word "fullness" in John 1:16 found in John 3:34, "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him"?—Christ as God-man was capacitated to receive the Spirit *without* "measure," to receive Him in all His fullness.

Therefore it is that Christ is represented as "He that *hath* the seven Spirits of God" (Rev 3:1), that is, the Spirit in His plenitude or fullness—cf. that sevenfold reference to the Spirit as given in Isaiah 11:1-2! Thus Christ's *Mediatorial* "fullness" is the Holy Spirit indwelling Him *without* "measure." But let it be observed that Christ received the Spirit not for Himself alone, but also for and in order to communicate Him to His people. This is clear from Acts 2:33, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this [at Pentecost], which ye now see and hear." Thus "out of [Greek] his fullness have all we received" signifies that Christ has communicated to us the same Spirit He received—called "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9) and "the Spirit of his Son" (Gal 4:6). A beautiful illustration of this is found in John 20:22, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, *Receive ye* the Holy Ghost."

Perhaps a word should be given upon the last clause of John 1:16, for we have never seen any interpretation of it which quite satisfied us, "and grace for grace." Just as the same life which is in the vine is in each of its branches producing "after its *own* kind," so the same "grace" (the same in nature, though not in degree) which the Spirit produced in Christ (*see* Luke 2:40 and 52!) He reproduces in His people. Was the lovely "fruit" of Galatians 5:22-23 found in it *fullness* in Christ?—then the Spirit works the same in us *in measure*. "Grace for grace," then, means grace *answerable to* grace—the same spiritual excellency which abides in the Head, is communicated to the members of His body, and thus are they being "conformed" unto His "image."

"The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1Co 15:45). It is as such that He sends forth the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His own. "He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly *through Jesus Christ* our Saviour" (Ti 3:5-6). "But ye have an unction from the Holy One" (1Jo 2:20)—the "unction" (the Greek word for which is rendered "anointing" in 2Co 1:21 and 1Jo 2:27) is the Holy Spirit and He comes to us from "thine Holy One," that is, Christ (Psa 16:10, Mar 1:24). A blessed type of this is seen in Psalm 133:2, "The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments." Here we behold the high priest of Israel anointed unto his holy office, and the "precious ointment"—emblem of the Holy Spirit—proceeding from his head to that part of his vestments which touched the earth!

"There is one body, and one Spirit" (Eph 4:4) which animates it, "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1Co 12:13). As the soul and body of man are so united as to form one entire person, so God's elect and their Head are so united as to form one mystical and

spiritual body, the church. Just as the human soul gives a living union between the most widely separated members—the head and the feet—so the divine Spirit livingly unites together the Head in heaven and His members on earth. “If a man were never so tall that his head should reach the stars, yet having but one soul, he would be but one man still. Though Christ in His nature be exceedingly distanced from us, yet there being but one and the selfsame Spirit in Him and in us, we are one mystical Christ” (John Owen, 1818-1863).

The distance between Christ in heaven and believers on earth is no obstacle to their vital union, for being God, the Spirit is *omnipresent*, and therefore does He indwell both Head and members. A very striking proof of the Spirit’s being the living bond of union between Christ and the church is found in Romans 8:11, “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall *also* quicken your mortal bodies *by his Spirit* that dwelleth in you.” The saints will not be raised from the dead by the naked power of God *without* them, but by virtue of their risen Head sending forth the quickening influences of His Spirit *within* their bodies. This is wonderfully adumbrated in the natural—when awakening out of sleep, the animal spirits arouse the *head* first, and then the senses are awakened throughout the whole body!

A real living union is effected between Christ and His members, not (as it were) by soldering two souls together, but by the Spirit anointing and indwelling *both*, for He being *infinite* is able to conjoin those who, in themselves, are so far apart. The whole person of the Christian (1Co 6:15) is united to the whole person of Christ, “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (Joh 14:20). The same Spirit who lives in our exalted Redeemer, lives in His people on earth. By this spiritual union a far more blessed relation is established than which obtains between a king and his subjects, or even between a husband and wife—the tie connecting Him with His people is so intimate that He indwells them—“*Christ liveth in me*” (Gal 2:20).

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2Co 13:14). Let it be duly noted that as “grace” is predicated of Christ and “love” of God (the Father), so “communion” is as expressly ascribed to the Holy Spirit, and as we said so often in the earlier articles of this series, there can be no “communion” unless there first be *union*. It is by the Spirit there is union and communion between Christ and the church. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9), that is, he is not yet grafted as a *living* member into His mystical body. Let it be pointed out in conclusion that, blessed and glorious as is this vital union, yet it falls far below the mediatorial union—that was two distinct natures (the divine and the human) forming together *one person*—this is of different persons being joined together so as to make *one body*, the church.

DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2Ti 3:16). The word “inspire” signifies to in-breathe, and breath is both the means and evidence of *life*, for as soon as a person ceases to breathe he is dead. The Word of God, then, is vitalized by the very life of God, and therefore it is a *living* book. Men’s books are like themselves—dying creatures, but God’s book is like Himself—it “liveth and abideth for ever” (1Pe 1:23). Yet, let it be pointed out that, unless we are on our guard, our belief of this fact is liable to lead us into error. Because the Scriptures are a living book, some seem to think they possess, abstractly, some magical virtue of their own. Have you never heard one say, “Give them the Word of God—it will do its own work,” he meant well, but expressed himself inaccurately.

More than the Scriptures are needed to bring a sinner out of darkness into God’s marvellous light, namely, the person and work of *the Holy Spirit*. It is only as He *applies* the Word that the conscience is pierced, the heart searched, and the will moved. Perhaps someone retorts, “But did not Christ say in John 6:63, ‘The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,’ and does not that prove the very words of Scripture are life-giving?” Ah, go back to the first part of that very verse, “It is *the Spirit* that quickeneth”! We must not separate the Spirit from the Word. He is the divine Agent, the Word is the instrument which He uses.

On the other hand, we must not exalt the Spirit to the detriment of the Word. It is sadly wrong to say that, “Apart from the Spirit, the Scriptures are a dead letter.” How *can* they be such when “inspired of God”—instinct with His very “breath” or life! Well, then, since they are a *living* Word, will they not impart life of themselves? No. Let me use an illustration. The farmer sows wheat in his ground. It is good wheat, possessing a living germ. Will *it* “do its own work” and yield an increase? Not of itself. If there be no rain, there will be no grain. So the seed of the Word may lie in the hearts of sinners, but until the Spirit descends as dew from heaven, it never springs up into life.

The Scriptures, then, are the living Word of the living God. Observe carefully how our opening passage expresses it, “All Scripture *IS* given by inspiration of God,” *not* “all Scripture *was* given by inspiration of God,” as man would have expressed it. The Holy Scriptures not only *were* “inspired of God,” but they *are* so now. They come as really and as truly God’s Word *to us*, as they did unto those to whom they were first addressed. In substantiation of what I have just said, it is striking to note, “Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:7-8), and again, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit *saith* [not “said”] unto the churches” (Rev 2:7). Now a book that presents itself to us as a messenger from heaven should have convincing credentials to set before those to whom it comes, and such it has—its high claims are well attested.

First, we call attention to *its self-evidencing authority*. Let me explain what I mean by that expression. Health is self-evidencing—the bright eye, the glowing cheek, the firm step, manifest that its possessor is hale and hearty. Fire is self-evidencing—it carries its own conviction to our senses, so that other witness or proof is quite unnecessary. Light is self-evidencing—it supplies its own demonstration. It is the very nature of light to manifest itself, yea, it does so by a

necessity of its nature. Now the Scriptures are *light*—heavenly, spiritual, divine. They clearly evidence they are sure by giving illumination unto all upon whom they shine, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa 119:105).

Just as God’s works in creation have stamped upon them the unmistakable marks of His power and wisdom, so has His Word. The surest way to ascertain this is to read and study it for yourselves, for the majesty and authority of its author shines through every page. An astronomer might prove to you by accurate calculation that at nine tomorrow morning the sun will be above the horizon, but what need would I have of his mathematical demonstration if my own eyes beheld it and my whole body was warmed by its genial rays? The Scriptures need not the voice of the “church” to authenticate them. They authenticate themselves by their own uniqueness and by the spiritual effects which they, under the Spirit, produce on those who read and yield to them.

Second, a word upon *its suitability for our times*. The Bible was completed eighteen hundred years ago, when by far the greater part of the world were barbarians. Yet it comes to us as something far more than an interesting relic of the past. Its sacred contents are exactly suited to *our needs*. Here is a remarkable phenomenon—God breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul. He also breathed into the Scriptures, and therefore they are a living book, one which has upon it the dew of perpetual youth. Herein it differs from all other books. The writings of men soon become out of date. Take any other writings as old as the Pentateuch—three thousand five hundred years—and what do you find? Why something to be placed in a museum, side by side with the Egyptian mummies.

The literary relics of antiquity have no application to our own times. They are musty documents relating to a state of society long since passed away and buried in oblivion. They are of no practical worth *to us*. How striking is the contrast! Here is God’s Word for us today, exactly suited to our own needs. It is suited to every age, to every clime, to every class. And why? Because in and through it there speaks the voice of Him who changes not. Millions of books have been written since the Canon of Scripture was closed, yet today we know no more about the origin of life, the nature and duty of man, the character of God, or the future, than did the readers of Scripture two thousand years ago!

Third, let me call attention to *its historical narratives*. Everything about the Scriptures is unique—even the history found in it is so. In the first place, it *contains* that which no other records, namely, a satisfying accord of the creation of the heavens and the earth—which is in marked contrast from the cosmogonies of the heathen. It furnishes a satisfying explanation of the origin of man and how he became a sinful creature—which is in marked contrast from the fables of antiquity. We know nothing whatever of the first fifteen hundred years’ history of the world apart from the Scriptures. In the second place, its *omissions* are equally striking. Its method of chronicling events is entirely different from all human histories. It ignores those events which are most interesting to men of the world, and which govern the pen of all human historians—the great empires of antiquity and men of renown are passed by in silence, or mentioned only so far as they bear on the main subject.

In the third place, consider the history of *Israel* recorded in Scripture. Had the Old Testament been the product of uninspired Jews, a desire for applause had caused them to magnify the exploits and courage of their nation, and their victories had been trumpeted as the result of *their* unparalleled military skill and valour. Why was not the capture of Jericho and the conquest of Canaan attributed to the brilliance of Joshua and the bravery of his men? Never is a single victory ascribed to *their own* prowess. Nor are their successes ascribed to the mere partiality of God, but

rather did He bless their arms when they were subject to His will, and caused them to suffer defeat when they had followed a course of disobedience.

Fourth, the fact of *personal confirmation*. Those who submit themselves to the authority of the Scriptures obtain an inward proof of their divine authorship. In his own experience the Christian finds a personal corroboration of the teachings of God's Word, "The entrance of thy words giveth light" (Psa 119:130) is verified in his own soul. "The gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom 1:16). This he has proved for himself, so that he is able to affirm "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25). In like manner, he now knows for himself that God hears and answers prayer. He has daily evidence in his own life that the divine promises are reliable. Again, he reads "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). This also he *knows* to be true, for such is his actual experience inwardly.

Let me now anticipate an objection. Since the proof for the divine inspiration of the Scriptures is so clear and abundant, why is it that the great majority of our fellows refuse to receive them as God's Word? why is there such a widespread unbelief of their authenticity and authority? It is not because of the lack of plain and decisive testimony, but because men have so long abused the eyes of their souls that they cannot perceive its glory. But this only *verifies* their teachings, and shows that the unregenerate are just what the Scriptures declare them to be—possessed of a carnal mind which is enmity against God (Rom 8:7), and who love darkness rather than the light (John 3:19).

But the mere fact *you* are fully convinced of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, is no proof, in itself, that your *heart* is right with God—the devil believes the same! Those brought up under sound teaching are in danger of mistaking orthodox views for a work of divine grace in the soul. Finally, since the Scriptures *are* the Word of God, they have unique claims upon us and demand unquestioning submission from us. They contain far more than good advice or wise counsel—they utter the commands of the living God which we disregard to our eternal undoing.

N.B. The above is a digest of the editor's first address in Scotland, in Bethany Hall, Camelon, Falkirk.

GOOD NEWS

The Lord, in His abounding goodness, granted us a record November so far as gifts were concerned, so that on the 30th, after paying every bill promptly, we closed the year [1935] with a nice credit balance, which we have carried forward to 1936. Hallelujah! We serve a great God and He is greatly to be praised. We have been much encouraged by letters from *praying* friends. Our principal difficulty is the decreasing circulation. We are finding it extremely hard to obtain enough interested readers to justify our continuing to publish. Please do what *you* can to make this magazine known to God's people. We also rejoice to report that doors are beginning to be opened for us in Glasgow for oral ministry.

[Brother Pink's comments to his readers over 60 years ago!]

February

THE HOLY SPIRIT

32. The Spirit Assuring (Part 2)

“Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). Because they had been eternally predestinated unto the adoption of sons (Eph 1:4-5), because they were actually given to Christ under that character in the Everlasting Covenant (Joh 17:2, Heb 2:13), at God’s appointed time the Holy Spirit is sent unto their hearts to give them a knowledge of the wondrous fact that they have a place in the very family of God and that God is their Father. This it is which inclines their hearts to love Him, delight in Him, and place all their dependence on Him. The great design of the Gospel is to reveal the love of God to His people, and thereby recover their love to God, that they may love Him again who first loved them. But the bare revelation of that love in the Word will not secure this, until “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5).

It is by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit that the elect are recovered from the flesh and the world unto God. By nature, they love themselves and the world above God, but the Holy Spirit imparts to them a new nature, and Himself indwells them, so that they now love God and live to Him. This it is which prepares them to believe and appropriate the Gospel. The effects of the Spirit’s entering as the Spirit of adoption are liberty, confidence, and holy delight. As they had “received” from the first Adam “the spirit of bondage”—a legalistic spirit which produced “fear” (Rom 5:5)—their receiving the Spirit of adoption is all the more grateful—liberty being the sweeter because of the former captivity. The law having done its work in the conscience, they can now appreciate the glad tidings of the Gospel—the revelation of the amazing love and grace of God in Jesus Christ. A spirit of love is now bred in them by the knowledge of the same.

The blessed fruit of receiving the Spirit of adoption is that there is born in the heart a childlike affection toward God and a childlike confidence in Him, “Whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). The apostle employs in the original two different languages, “Abba” being Syrian and “Father” being Greek, the one familiar to the Jews, the other to the Gentiles. By so doing he denotes that believing Jews and Gentiles are children of one family, alike privileged to approach God as their Father. “Christ, our peace, having broken down the middle wall of partition between them; and now, at the same mercy seat, the Christian Jew and the believing Gentile both one in

Christ Jesus, *meet*, as the rays of light converge and blend in one common centre—at the feet of the reconciled Father” (Octavius Winslow, 1808-1878).

As the Spirit of adoption, the Holy Spirit bestows upon the quickened soul a filial spirit. He acts in unison with the Son and gives a sense of our relationship as sons. Emancipating from that bondage and fear which the application of the law stirred up within us, He brings into the joyous liberty which the reception of the Gospel bestows. O the blessedness of being delivered from the covenant of works! O the bliss of reading our sentence of pardon in the blood of Immanuel! It is by virtue of our having received the Spirit of adoption that we cry, “Father! Father!” It is the cry of our own heart, the desire of our soul going out unto God. And yet *our* spirit does not originate it—without the immediate presence, operation, and grace of the Holy Spirit we neither would nor could know God as our “Father.” The Spirit is the author of everything in us which goes out after God.

This filial spirit which the Christian has received is evidenced in various ways. First, by a holy *reverence* for God our Father, as the natural child should honour or reverence his human parent. Second, by *confidence* in God our Father, as the natural child trusts in and relies upon his earthly parent. Third, by *love* for our Father, as the natural child has an affectionate regard for his parent. Fourth, by *subjection* to God our Father, as the natural child obeys his parent. This filial spirit prompts him to approach God with spiritual freedom, so that he clings to Him with the confidence of a babe, and leans upon Him with the calm repose of a little one lying on its parent’s breast. It admits to the closest intimacy. Unto God *as his* “Father” the Christian should repair at all times, casting all his care upon Him, knowing that He careth for him (1Pe 5:7). It is to be manifested by an affectionate subjection (obedience) to Him “as dear children” (Eph 5:1).

“The Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of God, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and who is sent by them to shed abroad the love of God in the heart, to give a real enjoyment of it, and to fill the soul with joy and peace in believing. He comes to testify of Christ—and by taking of the things which are His, and showing them to His people, He draws their heart to Him, and by opening unto them the freeness and fullness of divine grace, and the exceeding great and precious promises which God has given unto His people, He leads them to know their interest in Christ, and helps them in His name, blood, and righteousness, to approach their heavenly Father with holy delight” (S. E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

John Gill (1697-1771) observes that the word “Abba” reads backwards the same as forwards, implying that God is the Father of His people in adversity as well as prosperity. The Christian’s is an inalienable relationship. God is as much his “Father” when He chastens as when He delights, as much so when He frowns as when He smiles. God will never disown His own children or disinherit them as heirs. When Christ taught His disciples to pray, He bade them approach the mercy seat and say, “Our Father which art in heaven.” He Himself, in Gethsemane, cried, “Abba, Father” (Mar 14:36)—expressive of His confidence in and dependency upon Him. To address God as “Father” encourages faith, confirms hope, warms the heart, and draws out its affections to Him who is Love itself.

Let it next be pointed out that this filial spirit is subject to the state and place in which the Christian yet is. Some suppose that if we have received the Spirit of adoption there must be produced a steady and uniform assurance, a perpetual fire burning upon the altar of the heart. Not so. When the Son of God became incarnate, He condescended to yield unto all the sinless infirmities of human nature, so that He hungered and ate, wearied and slept. In like manner, the Holy Spirit deigns to submit Himself unto the laws and circumstances which ordinarily regulate human nature. In heaven the man Christ Jesus is glorified, and in heaven the Spirit in the

Christian will shine like a perpetual star. But on earth, He indwells our hearts like a flickering flame, never to be extinguished, but not always bright, and needing to be guarded from rude blasts, or why bid us “quench not the Spirit” (1Th 5:19)?

The Spirit, then, does not grant the believer assurance irrespective of his own carefulness and diligence. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights *burning*” (Luk 12:35). The latter being largely determined by the former. The Christian is not always in the enjoyment of a child-like confidence. And why? Because he is often guilty of “grieving” the Spirit, and then, He withholds much of His comfort. Hereby we may ascertain our communion with God and when it is interrupted, when He be pleased or displeased with us—by the motions or withdrawals of the Spirit’s consolation. Note the order in Acts 9:31, “Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,” and again in Acts 11:24, “He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost.” Hence, when our confidence toward “the Father” is clouded, we should search our ways and find out what is the matter.

Empty professors are fatally deluded by a false *confidence*, a complacent taking for granted that they are real Christians, when they have never been born again. But many true possessors are plagued by a *false diffidence*, a doubting whether they be Christians at all. None are so inextricably caught in the toils of a false confidence as they who suspect not their delusion and are unconscious of their imminent danger. On the other hand, none are so far away from that false confidence as those who tremble lest *they* be cherishing it. True diffidence is a distrust of *myself*. True confidence is a leaning wholly upon *Christ*, and *that* is ever accompanied by utter renunciation of myself. Self-renunciation is the heart-felt acknowledgment that my resolutions, best efforts, faith, and holiness, are nothing before God, and that Christ must be my all.

In all genuine Christians there is a co-mingling of real confidence and false diffidence, because as long as they remain on this earth there is in them the root of faith and the root of doubt. Hence their prayer is, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mar 9:24). In some Christians *faith* prevails more than it does in others, in some *unbelief* is more active than in others. Therefore some have a stronger and steadier assurance than others. The presence of the indwelling Spirit is largely evidenced by our frequent recourse to the Father in prayer—often with sighs, sobs, and groans. The consciousness of the Spirit of adoption within us is largely regulated by the extent to which we yield ourselves unto His government.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

98. The Inferiority of Judaism (12:20-21)

The divine law was, for the substance of it, originally written in the hearts of mankind by God Himself, when their federal head and father was created in His own image and likeness. But through the fall, it was considerably marred, as to its efficacious motions in the human heart. The entrance of sin and the corruption of our nature largely silenced its authoritative voice in the soul. Nevertheless, its unchanging demand and dread penalty were secured in the consciences of

Adam's depraved posterity. The law is so inlaid with the principles of our moral nature, so engrafted on all the faculties of our souls, that none has been able to completely get from under its power. Though the wicked find it utterly contrary to their desires and designs, and continually threatening their everlasting ruin, yet they cannot utterly cast off its yoke, see Romans 2:14-15. Hence it is that, even among the most degraded and savage tribes, a knowledge of right and wrong, with some standard of conduct, is preserved.

Not only was the impression of the divine law upon the human heart largely—though not totally—defaced by Adam's apostasy, but from Cain unto the Exodus, succeeding generations more and more flouted its authority, and disregarded its requirements in their common practice. Therefore, when God took Israel into covenant relationship with Himself and established them into a national church, He *restored to them His law*, in all its purity, majesty, and terror. This He did, not only to renew it as a guide unto all righteousness and holiness, as the only rule of obedience unto Himself and of right and equity amongst men, and also to be a check unto sin by its commands and threatenings, but principally to declare in the church *the eternal establishment of it*, that no alteration should be made in it, but that all must be fulfilled to the uttermost before any sinner could have any acceptance with Him.

As the law was the original rule of obedience between God and mankind, and as it had failed of its end through the entrance of sin, the Lord had never revived and proclaimed it in so solemn a manner at Sinai, had it been capable of any abrogation and alteration at any time. Nay, He then gave many *additional evidences of its perpetuity and abiding authority*. It was solely for the promulgation of His law that the presence of God appeared on the mount, attended with such dreadful solemnity. The Ten Commandments were the *only* communication which God then gave directly unto the people themselves—those institutions which *were* to be repealed at a later date (the ceremonial laws) were given through Moses! Those Ten Commandments were spoken directly unto the whole nation with a voice that was great and terrible. Later, they were written by His own finger on tables of stone. Thus did God confirm His law and evidenced it was incapable of dissolution—how it has been established and fulfilled the epistle to the Romans makes known.

The *different forms* which the Lord's appearances took in Old Testament times were always in accord with each distinct revelation of His mind and will. He appeared to Abraham in the shape of a man (Gen 18:1-2), because He came to give promise of the seed of blessing and to vouchsafe a representation of the future incarnation. To Moses He appeared as a flame in a bush which was not consumed (Exo 3), because He would intimate that all the fiery trials through which the church should pass would not consume it, and that because *He* was in it. To Joshua He appeared as a man of war, with drawn sword in His hand (Jos 5:13), because He would assure him of victory over all his enemies. But at Sinai His appearing was surrounded by terrors, because He would represent the severity of His law, with the inevitable and awful destruction of all those who lay not hold of the promise for deliverance.

The *place* of this glorious and solemn appearing of the Lord was also full of significance. It was neither in Egypt nor yet in Canaan, but in the midst of a great howling desert. Only those who have actually seen the place, can form any adequate conception of the abject dreariness and desolation of the scene. It was an absolute solitude, far removed from the habitation and converse of man. Here the people could neither see nor hear anything but God and themselves. There was no shelter or place of retirement. They were brought out into the open, face to face with God. Therein He gave a type and representation of the Great Judgment at the last day, when all who are out of Christ will be brought face to face with their Judge, and will behold nothing but the tokens of His wrath, and hear only the law's dread sentence announcing their irrevocable doom.

Sinai was surrounded by a barren and fruitless wilderness, wherein there was neither food nor water. Accurately does that depict the unregenerate in a state of sin. The law brings forth nothing in their lives which is acceptable to God or really beneficial to the souls of men. The Mount itself produced nothing but bushes and brambles, from which some scholars say its name is derived. From a distance that vegetation makes an appearance of some fruitfulness in the place, but when it be more closely examined it is found that there is nothing except that which is *fit for the fire*. Thus it is with sinners under the law. They seem to perform many works of obedience, yea, such as they trust in and make their boast of, but when they are weighed in the divine balance, they are found to be but thorns and briars, the dead works of those whose minds are enmity against God. Nothing else can the law bring forth from those who are out of Christ, “*From me is thy fruit found*” (Hos 14:8) is His own avowal.

Nor was there any water in the desert of Horeb to make it fruitful. Pause, my reader, and admire the “wondrous works” (Psa 145:5) of God. When we are given eyes to see, we may discern the Creator’s handiwork as plainly in the desolate wastes of nature as in the fertile field and gardens, as truly in the barren and forbidding mountains as in the fruitful and attractive valleys. He whose fingers had shaped the place where His Son was crucified as “a place of *a skull*” (Mat 27:33), had diverted from the desert of Horeb all rivers and streams. That water upon which the people of God then lived, issued from the smitten rock (Exo 17:6), for it is only through Christ that *the Holy Spirit is given*, see John 7:28, 39, Acts 2:33, Titus 3:5-6. They who reject Christ have not the Spirit, see Romans 8:9, Jude 1:19.

We may further observe that the appearing of the Lord God at the giving of the law was on the top of a high mountain, and not in a plain. This added to both the glory and the terror of it. This gave a striking adumbration of the throne of His majesty, high over the people, who were far below at its base. As they looked up, they saw the Mount above them full of fire and smoke, the ground on which they stood quaking beneath their feet, the air filled with thunderings and lightnings, with the piercing blasts of the trumpet and the voice of the Lord Himself falling on their ears. What other thought could fill their minds than that it was “a fearful thing” to be summoned to judgment before the ineffably Holy One? O that the preachers of our day could say with him who had experienced the reality of Sinai in his own soul, “Knowing therefore *the terror of the Lord*, we persuade men” (2Co 5:11).

The Lord’s appearing on Mount Sinai was only a *temporary* one—in contrast from His “dwelling” in Zion (Isa 8:18). This shadowed-forth the fact that the *economy* there instituted was but a transient one—though the *law* there promulgated is eternal. Those, then, who turn unto Sinai for salvation are left entirely unto themselves. “God dwells no more on Sinai. Those who abide under the law [as a covenant, A.W.P.] shall neither have His presence nor any gracious pledge of it. And all these things are spoken to stir us up to seek for an interest in that blessed Gospel-state which is here proposed to us. And thus much we have seen already, that without it there is neither relief from the curse of the law, nor acceptable fruit of obedience, nor pledge of divine favour to be obtained” (John Owen, whom we have again followed closely in the above paragraphs, 1616-1683).

Before turning to the final lines in the graphic picture which the apostle gave of the appearing of the Lord at Sinai, let us again remind ourselves of his principal *design* in the same. The immediate end which the apostle had before him, was to persuade the Hebrews to adhere closely to the Gospel, his appeal being drawn from the evident fact of the superlative excellency of it to the law. In particular, he was here enforcing his former exhortations unto steadfastness under afflictions, to an upright walk in the ways of God, to the following of peace with all men, and to

persevere diligently that they failed not of the grace of God. This he does by pointing out that ancient order of things *from which they had been delivered*, for such is the force of his openings words “ye are *not* come unto” etc. (Heb 12:18).

“For they could not endure that which was commanded” (Heb 12:20). Having mentioned in the preceding verses seven thing which their fathers came unto at Sinai, the apostle now describes *the effects* which those startling phenomena produced upon them. The first was, the people “entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more” (Heb 12:19), the reason being “for they could not endure” (Heb 12:20) it. The display of God’s terrible majesty, the distance from Him they were required to maintain, and the high spirituality of the law then promulgated, with its fearful penalty attending the least infraction of it, completely overwhelmed them. So it is still—a view of God *as a Judge*, represented in fire and blackness, will fill the souls of *convicted* sinners with dread and terror. No matter how boldly and blatantly they have carried themselves, when the Spirit brings a transgressor to that mount, the stoutest heart will quake.

When God deals with men by the law, He shuts them up to Himself and their own conscience. As we pointed out in an earlier paragraph, God gave the law to Israel neither in Egypt nor in Canaan, but in a desert, a place of absolute solitude, remote from the commerce of men. There the people could neither see nor hear anything but God and themselves. There was no shelter or place of retirement. They were brought out into the open, face to face with Him with whom they had to do. So it is now. When God has designs of mercy toward a sinner, when He takes him in hand, He brings him out of all his retreats and refuges, and compels him to face the just demands of His law, and the unspeakably dreadful manner in which he has hitherto disregarded its requirements and sought to hear not its accusations.

When the law is preached to sinners—alas in so many places today that which gives “the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20) is entirely omitted—it usually falls upon the ears of those who promptly betake themselves to various retreats and reliefs for evading its searching and terror-producing message. They seek refuge in the concerns and amusements of this life in order to crowd out serious and solemn thoughts of the life to come. They listen to the bewitching promises of self-pleasing, “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25). Or they put far forward in their minds the “evil day” and take security in resolutions of repentance and reformation before death shall come upon them. They have many other things to engage their attention than to listen to the voice of the law—at least, they persuade themselves it is not yet necessary that they should seriously hearken thereto.

But when God brings the sinner to the Mount, as He most certainly will, either here or hereafter, all these pretenses and false comforts vanish, every prop is knocked from under him—to hide away from his Judge is now impossible. “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the *refuge* of lies, and the waters shall overflow the *hiding* place” (Isa 28:17). Then it is that the sinner discovers “for the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it” (Isa 28:20). He is forced out into the open. He is brought face to face with his Maker. He is compelled to attend unto the voice of the law. There is neither escape nor relief for him. His *conscience* is now held to that which he can neither endure nor avoid. He is made to come out from behind the trees, to find his fig-leaves provide no covering (Gen 3:9-11).

As the stern and inexorable voice of the law enters into his innermost being, “piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12), the poor sinner is paralyzed with fear. The sight of the divine Majesty on His throne overwhelms him. The terms and curse of the law slay his every

hope. Now he experiences the truth of Romans 7:9-10, “For I was alive [in my own estimation] without the law once: but when the commandment came [applied in power to the conscience by the Spirit], sin revived [became a living, raging, cursed reality], and I died [to all expectation of winning God’s approval]. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.” Like Israel before Sinai, the sinner *cannot endure* the voice of the law. The law commands him, but provides no strength to meet its requirements. It shows him his sins, but it reveals no Saviour. He is encompassed with terror and sees no way of escape from eternal death.

That is the very office of the law in the hands of the Holy Spirit. To shatter the sinner’s unconcern, to make him conscious of the claims of the holy God, to convict him of his lifelong rebellion against Him, to strip him of the rags of his self-righteousness, to slay all hope of self-help and self-deliverance, to bring him to the realization that he is *lost*, utterly undone, *sentenced to death*. “Which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: For they could not endure that which was commanded” (Heb 12:19-20). When the Holy Spirit applies the law, in power, the sinner’s own conscience is obliged to acknowledge that his condemnation is *just*. And there the law leaves him—wretched, hopeless, terror-stricken. Unless he flies for refuge to Christ he is lost forever.

Reader, suffer us please to make this a personal issue. Have *you* ever experienced anything which corresponds, in substance, to what we have said above? Have you ever heard the thunderings and felt the lightnings of Sinai in your own soul? Have you, in your conscience, been brought face to face with your Judge, and heard Him read the fearful record of your transgressions? Have you received by the law such a knowledge of sin that you are painfully conscious that every faculty of your soul and every member of your body is defiled and corrupt? Have you been driven out of every refuge and relief, and brought into the presence of Him who is ineffably holy and inflexibly just, who “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7)? Have you heard that dread sentence, “*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)? Has it brought you down into the dust to cry, “I am lost—utterly lost, hopelessly lost—there is *nothing* I can do to deliver myself”? The ground must be ploughed before it can receive seed, and the heart must be broken up by the law before it is ready for the Gospel.

In addition to the other terror-producing elements connected with the institution of Judaism, the apostle mentions two other features. “And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart” (Heb 12:20). To increase the reverence which was due to the appearing of JEHOVAH on Sinai, the people were required to keep their distance at the base of the Mount, and were strictly forbidden an approach beyond the bounds fixed to them. This command was confirmed by a penalty, that every one who transgressed it should be put to death, as a disobedient rebel, devoted to utter destruction. This restriction and its sanction was also designed to produce in the people awe and terror of God in His giving of the law.

That to which the apostle referred is recorded in Exodus 19:12-13, “Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live.” As Owen well suggested, the prohibition respecting the cattle of the Israelites not only made the more manifest the absolute inaccessibleness of God in and by the law, but also seemed to intimate the uncleanness of *all* things which sinners possess, by virtue of their relation to them. Everything that fallen man touches is defiled by him, and even “the *sacrifice* of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD” (Pro 15:8).

The punishment of the man who defiantly touched the Mount was death by stoning, that of a beast by stoning or being thrust through with a dart. In either case, they were slain at a distance. No hand *touched* the one who had offended. This emphasised the heinousness of the offence and the execrableness of the offender—others must not be defiled by coming into immediate contact with them—at what distance ought we to keep ourselves from everything which falls under the curse of the law! How the whole of this brings out the stern *severity* of the law! “If even an irrational animal was to be put to death in a manner which marked it as unclean—as something not to be touched—what might rational offenders expect as the punishment of their sins? and if the violation of a *positive* institution of this kind involved consequences so fearful, what must be the result of transgressing the *moral* requirements of the great Lawgiver?” (John Brown, 1784-1858).

“And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb 12:21). The apostle now turns from the people themselves, and describes the effect upon their leader of the terror-producing phenomena that attended the institution of Judaism. Here was the very man who had dared, again and again, to confront the powerful monarch of Egypt and make known to him the demand of God, and later announced to his face the coming of plague after plague. Here was the commander-in-chief of Israel’s hosts who had boldly led them through the Red Sea. He was a holy person, more eminent in grace than all others of his time, for he was “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). Now if *such* a man was overcome with dread, how terrible must be the severity and curse of the divine law!

Furthermore, let it be carefully borne in mind that Moses was no stranger to the Lord Himself—not only was he accustomed to receive divine revelations, but he had previously beheld a representation of the Lord’s presence at the bush. Moreover, he was the divinely-appointed intermediary, the mediator between God and the people at that time. Yet none of these privileges exempted him from an overwhelming dread of the terror of the Lord in the giving of the law. What a proof is this that the very best of men cannot stand before God on the ground of their own righteousness! How utterly vain are the hopes of those who think to be saved by Moses (Joh 9:28)! Surely if there be anything in all the Scriptures which should turn us from resting on the law for salvation, it is the horror and terror of Moses on Mount Sinai.

“And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb 12:21). The fact that there is no record given in the Old Testament of this particular item, occasions no difficulty whatever unto those who believe in the full inspiration of Holy Writ. Nor is there any need for us to have recourse unto the Romish theory of “unwritten tradition,” and suppose that a knowledge of the terror of Moses had been orally preserved among the Jews. That which had not been chronicled in the book of Exodus, was here revealed to the apostle by the Holy Spirit Himself, and was now recorded by him for the purpose of accentuating the awfulness of what occurred at Sinai, and this, that the Hebrews should be increasingly thankful that divine grace had connected them with so different an order of things.

The scope and design of the whole of our passage should now be obvious to the reader. The purpose of the apostle was to show again how inferior Judaism was to Christianity. This he here does by taking us back to Sinai, where Judaism was formally instituted by the appearing of JEHOVAH at the giving of the law, and where the Mosaic economy was established by a covenant based thereon. All the circumstances connected with its institution were in most striking accord with the leading features and characteristics of that dispensation. At that time the nation of Israel was in a waste, howling wilderness, standing in speechless terror at the foot of the Mount. There JEHOVAH manifested Himself in His awful holiness and majesty, as Lawgiver and Judge,

the people at a distance fenced off from Him. How profoundly thankful should Christians be that *they* belong to a much more mild and gracious order of things!

Sinai was “the mount that might be touched” (Heb 12:18)—a symbol of that order of things which was addressed to the outward senses. The “blackness and darkness” which covered it was emblematic of the *obscurity* of spiritual things under the Mosaic economy, a thick veil of types and shadows hiding the substance and reality now revealed by the Gospel. The people being fenced off at the base of the Mount denoted that under Judaism they had no way of approach and no access into the immediate presence of God. The thunderings, lightnings, and fire, expressed the wrath of God against all who transgress His righteous law. The “tempest” was a sign of the instability and temporariness of that dispensation, in contrast from the peace which Christ has made, and the permanent and eternal order of things which He has brought in. The utter consternation of Moses gave clear proof that *he* was not the perfect and ultimate mediator between God and men. All of which plainly intimated the need for something else, something better, something more suited unto lost sinners.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

50. His Kindness Repulsed

“I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad” (Psa 119:96). The Chaldee Paraphrase renders this verse, “I have seen an end of all things about which I have employed my care; but thy commandment is very large.” The Syriac version reads, “I have seen an end of all regions and countries [that is, I have found the compass of the habitable world to be finite and limited], but thy commandment is of vast extent.” The contrast drawn by the Psalmist is between the works of the creature and the Word of the Creator. The most perfect of worldly things are but imperfect, even man, at his best estate, is “altogether vanity” (Psa 39:5). We may quickly see “the end” or “the bound” of man’s works, for the profoundest product of human wisdom is but shallow, superficial, and having its limits, but it is far otherwise with the Scriptures of truth.

“But thy commandment is exceeding broad” (Psa 119:96). The Word partakes of the perfections of its divine author—holiness, inerrancy, infinitude, and eternity, are numbered among its wondrous qualities. God’s Word is so deep that none can fathom it (Psa 36:6), so high that it is established in heaven (Psa 119:89), so long that it will endure forever (1Pe 1:23), so exceeding broad that none can measure it, so full that its contents will never be exhausted. It is such a rich storehouse of spiritual treasure, that no matter how many draw upon it, the wealth thereof remains undiminished. It has in it such an inconceivable vastness of wisdom, that no single verse in it has been fully fathomed by any man. No matter how many may have previously written upon a certain chapter, the Spirit can still reveal wonders and beauties in it never before perceived.

We are now to go over again the same passage which was before us last month, but this time it is to be considered from an entirely different viewpoint. Perhaps some explanatory remarks are called for at this point, that none of our readers may be confused. There are many portions of the Word that are not only capable of several legitimate applications, but which *require* to be pondered from distinct and separate angles. Oftentimes the same incident which manifests the goodness and grace of God also exhibits the depravity and sin of man. Many parts of the life of Samson furnish most striking prefigurations of Christ, yet at the same time we see in them the grievous failures of Samson himself. The same dual principle is exemplified in the lives of other characters prominent in the Old Testament. Instead of being stumbled thereby, let us rather admire the wisdom of Him who has brought together things so diverse.

Moses erred sadly when, instead of trustfully responding promptly unto the Lord's call for him to make known His request unto Pharaoh, he gave way to unbelief and voiced one objection after another (Exo 3 and 4), nevertheless, in the same way we may perceive a lovely exemplification of the self-diffidence of those called upon to minister in divine things, and their personal sense of unfitness and utter unworthiness. The two things are quite distinct, though they are found in one and the same incident—the personal failure of Moses, yet his very failure supplying a blessed type of humility in the true servant of God. That which is found in 2 Samuel 10 affords a parallel—the action of David in expressing his condolence to the king of the Ammonites supplies a beautiful type of Christ sending forth His servants with a message of comfort for sinners. Yet, as we shall see, from a *personal* viewpoint, David's conduct was to be blamed.

The same thing is seen again in connection with Jonah. We have the Lord's own authority for regarding him as a type or “sign” of Himself (Mat 12:39-40), and marvelously did that prophet foreshadow the Saviour in many different details. But that in nowise alters or militates against the fact that, as we read the personal history of Jonah, we find some grievous sins recorded against him. Let it not seem strange, then, if our present exposition of 2 Samuel 10 differs so radically from our treatment of it last month. There is no “contradiction” between the two articles. Instead, they approach the same incident from two widely separated angles. Our justification for so doing lies in the fact that the incident is described in identical terms in 1 Chronicles 19, yet its context there is *quite different* from 2 Samuel 10.

On this occasion, instead of admiring the lovely typical picture which 2 Samuel 10 sets forth, we shall examine the personal conduct of David, seeking to take to heart the lessons and warnings which the same inculcates. “And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father” (2Sa 10:1-2).

In seeking to get at the practical teaching of these verses, the first question which needs to be pondered is, *why* did David send his servants with a message of comfort to the king of Ammon? What was the motive which prompted him? It is no sufficient answer to reply, The kindness of his heart—for that only changes the form of our inquiry to, *Why* should he determine to show kindness unto the head of this heathen tribe? And how are we to discover the answer to our question? By noting carefully the context. This time, the context of 1 Chronicles 19, which is the same as the *remoter* context in 2 Samuel 10, for 1 Chronicles 18 is parallel with 2 Samuel 8. And what do we find there? David engaging in warfare, subduing the Philistines (2Sa 8:1), the Moabites (2Sa 8:2), Hadadezer (2Sa 8:3), the Syrians (2Sa 8:5), placing garrisons in Edom, and setting in order the affairs of his kingdom (2Sa 8:15-18).

After engaging in so much fighting, it appears that David now desired a season of rest. This is borne out by what we are told in the very first verse of the next chapter, “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. *But David tarried still at Jerusalem*” (2Sa 11:1). Thus, in the light of the immediate context, both before and after what is recorded in 2 Samuel 10 and 1 Chronicles 19, it seems clear that David’s sending a message of comfort to Hanun after the death of his father, was a diplomatic move on his part to secure peace between the Ammonites and Israel. In other words, reduced to first principles, it was an attempt to promote amity between the ungodly and the godly. The Lord *blew upon this move*, and caused it to come to naught.

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that *the friendship* of the world is enmity with God?” (Jam 4:4). Yes, we may know it in theory, but alas, how often we disobey it in practice. God requires His people to be separated from the world, to be strangers and pilgrims therein, to have no close familiarity with its subjects, to refuse all “yokes” with them. And is not that both right and necessary? What fellowship can there be between those who love His Son and those who hate Him? between those who are subject to His sceptre and those who are in league with Satan? Yet, self-evident as is this principle, how slow many of us are to conform our *ways* to its requirements! How prone we are to flirt with those who are the enemies of God.

But if *we* are careless and disobedient, *God* is faithful. In His love for us, He often causes worldlings to *repulse* our friendly advances, to wrongly interpret our kindly overtures, to despise, mock, and insult us. If we will not keep on *our* side of the line which God has drawn between the kingdom of His Son and the kingdom of Satan, then we must not be surprised if He employs the wicked to drive us out of *their* territory. Herein lies the key, my reader, to many a painful experience which often perplexes the Christian. Why does a righteous God suffer me to receive such unjust and cruel treatment from those I wish to be “nice to?” God permits that “enmity” which *He* has placed between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman to burst out against the latter, because they were becoming too intimate with the former.

It is not only that God rebukes us for disregarding the line which He has drawn between the world and the church, but that it is our spiritual profit which He designs to promote. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Yes, Christian reader, and that “*all things*” includes the present aloofness of some unsaved people who were once very friendly towards you—that “*all things*” includes the coldness of Christless relatives, the unkind attitude of neighbours, the unfriendliness of those who work side by side with you in the office, store, or workshop. God sees the *danger*, if you do not! Because of His love for you, He prevents your becoming drawn into alliances with those whose influence would greatly hinder your growth in grace. Then instead of chafing against the attitude of your fellows, thank the Lord for *His* faithfulness.

Against what has been said above it may be objected, but you surely do not mean that, in his separation from the world, the Christian must be unsociable and live like a hermit, or that God requires us to be uncivil and morose toward our fellow-creatures. No, dear reader, *that* is not our meaning. We are required to be “pitiful” and “courteous” (1Pe 3:8), and to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). Moreover, the Christian must be very watchful against assuming an “I am holier than thou” attitude toward his fellow-men. Nevertheless, there is a real difference between a respectful and kindly conduct toward the unsaved, and an undue intimacy with them—making close friends of them.

It may be further objected, but in David's case, it was proper and needful for him to act as he did, for verse 2 expressly states that Hanun's father had shown kindness to him. Then would it not have been rebukable ingratitude if David had failed to make some suitable return? Exactly what was the nature of that "kindness" which Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, had shown David, Scripture does not inform us, and therefore speculation is useless. But if David had *sought* some favour from him, as he did from Achish, the son of the king of Gath (1Sa 27:1-7), then he was guilty of turning aside from the high calling and privileged place of one whose dependency should be on the living God alone. When such is the case, when we place our confidence in man and lean upon the creature, we must not be surprised if God rebukes and foils our carnal hopes.

There is a principle involved here which it is important for us to be clear upon, but the application of which is likely to exercise those who are of a tender conscience. How far is it permissible for the Christian to receive favours from unbelievers? Something depends upon the relation borne to him by the one who proffers them—something upon the motive likely to be actuating the profferer—something upon the nature of what is proffered. Obviously, the Christian must never accept anything from one who has no right to tender it—a dishonest employee, for example. Nor must he accept anything which the Word of God condemns—such as an immodest dress, a ticket to the theatre, etc. Firmly must he refuse any favour which would bring him *under obligation* to a worldling. It is at *this* point that Satan often seeks to ensnare the believer—by bringing him under the power of the ungodly through becoming indebted to them.

But though we are not informed of how and when Nahash had befriended David, the Holy Spirit *has* placed on record an incident which reveals the character of this king, "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel" (1Sa 11:1-2). Why, then, should David now show respect unto the memory of one who had evidenced himself such a cruel enemy of the people of God! It could not be any *spiritual* principle which actuated Israel's king on this occasion. A clear word for our guidance concerning those who are the open enemies of God is given us in, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD?"! (2Ch 19:2).

But not only should the evil character of Nahash have restrained David from showing respect to his memory, but *the race* to which he belonged ought to have been a separating barrier. He was an Ammonite, and as such under the interdict of the Lord, because that nation had refused to meet the children of Israel "with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt," and they together with the Moabites (because they had hired Balaam against them) were debarred from entering into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation (Deu 23:3-4). But more—concerning both the Ammonites and the Moabites, God expressly prohibited, "Thou shalt *not* seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever" (Deu 23:6). David, then, disobeyed a plain command of God on this occasion.

As to whether or not David was personally acquainted with that particular divine statute, we cannot say. Probably the only thought in his mind was to diplomatically time his effort to secure peace between the two nations. But God blew upon his political scheme, and in so doing gave warning unto His people throughout all generations that, only disappointment and vexation can be expected from their attempts to court the friendship of the ungodly. "And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" (2Sa 10:3). Treacherous minds always suspect

other people of perfidy. Beware of those, my reader, who are ever ready to think the worst of others and place an evil construction on the most innocent actions.

“Wherefore Hanun took David’s servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away” (2Sa 10:4). And why did God allow those princes to wrongly interpret David’s kindness, and their king to heed them and now insult David by thus disgracing his ambassadors? Because He had far different designs than His servant. These men had filled up “the measure” of their iniquity (Gen 15:16; Mat 23:32). Their hearts were ripe for ruin, and therefore were they hardened to their destruction (2Sa 11:1). God had not forgotten what is recorded in 1 Samuel 11:1-2, though it had taken place many years before. His mills “grind slowly,” yet in the end, “they grind exceeding small” (Longfellow).

THE DIVINE COVENANTS

4. The Abrahamic (Continued)

What was before us last month is of fundamental importance—not only to aright understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant itself, but also for a sound interpretation of much of the Old Testament. Once it be clearly recognised that *the type merges into the antitype*, that believers in Christ are Abraham’s “children” (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:7), citizens of the free and heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Eph 2:19; Rev 21:2, 14), the “circumcision” (Phi 3:3), the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16; Eph 2:12-13), the “comers unto Mount Zion” (Heb 12:22), it will be found that we have a reliable guide for conducting us through the mazes of prophecy, without which we are sure to lose ourselves in inextricable confusion and uncertainty. This was common knowledge among the saints in days gone by, but alas a generation succeeded them boasting they had new light, only to plunge themselves and their followers into gross darkness.

The promises of God to Abraham and his seed were never made to his natural descendants, but belonged to those who had a like faith with him. It could not be otherwise, “For all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2Co 1:20). *All* the “promises” (not “prophecies”) of God are made *in Christ*—that is, all the *blessings* promised are placed in the hands of the Mediator, and none who are out of Christ can lay claim to a single one of them. All who are out of Christ, are out of God’s favour, and therefore the divine threatenings, and not the promises, are *their* portion. Here, then, is our reply to those who complain, “You apply to the church all the good things of the Old Testament, but the bad ones you relegate to the Jews.” Of course we do—the *blessings* of God pertain to all who are in Christ, the *curses* of God to all—Jews or Gentiles—who are out of Christ.

Thus, the *unbelieving* descendants of Jacob were as much excluded from the Abrahamic promises as were the posterity of Ishmael and Esau, whereas those promises belonged as really and truly to *believing Gentiles* as they did to Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. But alas this basic truth, so clearly revealed in Scripture, is repudiated by “Dispensationalists,” who are perpetuating the error of those who opposed Christ in the days of His flesh. When He spoke of the *spiritual* freedom

which He could bestow, His unregenerate hearers exclaimed, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man” (Joh 8:33). When He made mention of His Father, the carnal Jews answered, “Abraham is *our* father,” to which the Saviour replied, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (Joh 8:39). Alas, alas, that so many of our moderns know not *who are* “Abraham’s children.”

The vital importance of what we sought to present in last month’s article will appear still more evident when it be pointed out that believers in Christ have a *joint-heritage with Abraham*, as well as a common standing before God. But many will at once object to this—That cannot be. Why, the inheritance of Abraham and his seed was an *earthly* one—it was the land of Canaan which God promised them! Our first answer is, Such was the firm belief of those who crucified the Lord of Glory, such is still the conviction of all the “orthodox” Jews on earth today—Jews who despise and reject the Christ of God. Are *they* safe guides to follow? To say the least, professing Christians who share this view are not in very good company! The very fact that this idea is so widely entertained among Jews who have not the Spirit of God, should raise a strong suspicion in those claiming to have spiritual discernment.

Our second answer is that, if the inheritance of Abraham *was* an “earthly” one, namely, the land of Canaan, then most certainly *the Christians’ inheritance* is an earthly one too, for we are all joint-heirs with Abraham. Are you, my reader, (no matter what you may have received from “deep students of prophecy”) prepared to settle this question by the plain teaching of Holy Scriptures? If you are, it may quickly be brought to a simple issue, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, *and heirs* according to the promise” (Gal 3:29). What could be clearer than that, “If children, then heirs” (Rom 8:17)—if children of God, then heirs of God, and in like manner, if “children” of Abraham, then “heirs” of and with Abraham. There is no legitimate escape from that obvious conclusion.

In the last verse of Galatians 3, the apostle drew the unavoidable inference from the premises which he had established in the context. Let us return for a moment to Galatians 3:16, and then observe what follows. There the plain statement is made, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made,” and as we fully proved in last month’s article, the reference is to his *spiritual* “seed,” but as though to remove all possible uncertainty, the Holy Spirit has added, “And to thy seed, which is *Christ*”—Christ mystical as in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Colossians 1:24—that is, Christ Himself and all who are united to Him. Thus there is no room left for a shadow of doubt as to *whom* the Abrahamic promises belonged—his carnal seed being expressly excluded in the “he saith not, and to seeds, as of many.”

“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal 3:17). The only difficulty lies in the words “in Christ.” Inasmuch as “the covenant” here mentioned was confirmed only four hundred and thirty years before the law (at Sinai) the reference *cannot be* to the everlasting covenant—which *was* “confirmed” by God in Christ ere the world began (Ti 1:2, etc.). Hence we are obliged to adopt the rendering given by spiritual and able scholars “the covenant that was confirmed before God *concerning* Christ”—just as “eis Christon” is translated “*concerning* Christ” in Ephesians 5:32 and “eis auton” is rendered “*concerning* him” in Acts 2:25. Here, then, is a further word from God that His covenant with Abraham concerned *Christ*, that is Christ *mystical*.

Now the special point that the apostle was labouring in Galatians 3 was that the promises given by God to Abraham (which were solemnly “confirmed” by His covenant-oath) were given centuries before the Siniatic economy was established, and that inasmuch as God is faithful so

that His Word cannot be broken (v. 15), then there could be nothing in connection with the giving of the law that would to the slightest degree invalidate what He was pledged to bestow, “The law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal 3:17). The Be it observed that *here* “the promise” is in the singular number, the reason for this being that the apostle was about to confine himself to one particular promise, namely that which respected the *inheritance*.

“For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Gal 3:18). The “inheritance” was given to Abraham by God long before the law. The question now before us is *what was* the “Inheritance” which God gave to Abraham? Easily answered, replies someone, Genesis 12:7 and 13:15, etc., tell us it was “the land of Canaan,” and when God said, “this land” He means that, and nothing else. Not quite so fast, dear friend. When a young believer reads Exodus 12 with its varied details of the slaying of the lamb, and the promise of shelter beneath its blood, and wonders what is the *spiritual* significance thereof, by far his best course is to turn to the New Testament, and prayerfully search for the answer. Eventually he will find that answer in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Christ *our* passover is sacrificed for us.”

When the young believer reads Leviticus 16, describing the elaborate ritual which the high priest of Israel was required to observe on the annual day of atonement, and is concerned to discover the *spiritual* meaning of the same, the ninth of Hebrews will give him much light thereon. In like manner, those reading the historical account in Genesis 14 of Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God, bringing forth bread and wine and blessing Abraham, to whom the patriarch paid tithes, may learn from Hebrews 7 that Melchizedek supplied a striking fore-shadowment of the Lord Jesus in His official character. Now let us point out two things which are common to all these examples. First, the New Testament teaching thereon in nowise reduces those important Old Testament incidents to mere allegories—it neither repudiates their historicity nor evacuates their liberality. Second, but the New Testament *does* reveal that those Old Testament events possessed a *higher* meaning than their “literal” significance, that the historical was but a shadowing forth on earth of that which has its reality or antitype in heaven.

Why not, then, apply this *same* principle to God’s promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed? Since believers in Christ are Abraham’s children and “*heirs* according to the promise” (Gal 3:29). The then it clearly follows that *they* are interested in ALL that was said or promised to *him*. It is a great mistake to regard certain of the Abrahamic promises as being simply of a temporal kind and restricted to his natural descendants, and that others were of a celestial character and pertain to his spiritual seed. The fact is that the outward and the temporal never existed by itself nor for itself, but was appointed as an adumbration of the spiritual and eternal, and as a *means* for the obtaining thereof. The outward and the temporal must be *consistently* viewed throughout as the shell and shadow of the spiritual and eternal.

Nor is the establishing of this important principle left in any doubt as it applies to the subject of the inheritance of Abraham and his seed. In the eleventh of Hebrews we find the patriarchs themselves *identifying their* prospects of a future inheritance *with ours*. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a *strange* country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he *looked* for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them *afar off*, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*. For they that say *such* things declare plainly that they *seek* a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out,

they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an *heavenly*: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:9-10, 13-16). How clear it is from these verses that they looked *beyond* the “literal” purport of the promises, unto a heavenly and eternal inheritance, namely, to the *same* described in 1 Peter 1:4.

We are not now concerned with considering the immediate ends which were served by the *natural* descendants of Abraham occupying the *earthly* Canaan—a consideration parallel with the *temporal* advantages enjoyed by those who lived under the “literal” exercise of the Aaronic priesthood. What ever be or be not the future of Palestine in relation to the Jews, even though they again occupy it for a thousand years, certain it is that the promise of God that Abraham and his seed should have “the land of Canaan, for an *everlasting* possession” (Gen 17:8) has not, will not, and cannot be fulfilled in his natural posterity, for that land, in common with the whole earth, is to be *destroyed*! No, rather are we now concerned with the spiritual and antitypical meaning thereof.

Our third answer, then, to the oft-made affirmation that the inheritance of Abraham and his seed was an *earthly* one, is, that it is repudiated by Scripture itself. Was the inheritance of Moses an “earthly” one? No indeed, for of him we read, “Esteeming the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the *recompense of the reward*” (Heb 11:26). Was the inheritance of David an “earthly” one? No indeed, for after his kingdom was established, he declared, “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*” (Psa 119:19). The “land of Canaan” is no more to be understood in a carnal way than the “seed” of Abraham is to be regarded as his natural posterity. The land of Canaan was no more given to the Jews after the flesh than the “*blessing of Abraham*” (namely, the Holy Spirit—Gal 3:14) has come upon them.

“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, *or to his seed*, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13). Observe two things—first, it was promised that Abraham should not be merely “the heir of Palestine,” but “of the world,” and second, this promise was made to Abraham *and* “to his seed,” which “seed is defined in verse 12 as those who “walk in the steps of that faith” which their “father Abraham” had. In perfect harmony with this, our Lord declared, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit [possess, have dominion over, enjoy] *the earth*” (Mat 5:5)—if “literalists” have cast such a shadow over this verse that some readers find it hard to understand, then we suggest that they ponder it in the light of 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 and 1 John 5:4! In concluding this important article, we feel that we cannot do better than give the spiritual John Calvin’s (1509-1564) comments on Romans 4:13, which are a refreshing contrast from the carnalizing of “Dispensationalists.”

“Since he now speaks of eternal salvation, the apostle seems to have somewhat unseasonably led his readers to ‘the world,’ but he includes generally under this word ‘world,’ *the restoration* which was expected through Christ. The chief thing was indeed the restoration of life. It was yet necessary that the fallen state of the whole world should be repaired. The apostle, in Hebrews 1:2, calls Christ the Heir of all the good things of God; for the adoption which we obtain through His favour restores to us the possession of the inheritance which we lost in Adam; and as under the type of the land of Canaan, not only the hope of a heavenly life was exhibited to Abraham, but also the full and complete blessing of God, the apostle rightly teaches us that *the dominion of the world* was promised to him. Some taste of this the godly have in the present life, for how much soever they may at times be oppressed with want, yet as they partake with a peaceable conscience of those things which God has created for their use, and as they enjoy through His mercy and goodwill His earthly benefits no otherwise than as pledges and earnest of eternal life, their

poverty does in no degree prevent them from acknowledging heaven and the earth, and the sea, *as their own possessions*.

“Though the ungodly swallow up the riches of the world, they can yet call nothing as their own, but they rather snatch them as it were by stealth, for they possess them under the curse of God. It is indeed a great comfort to the godly in their poverty, that though they fare slenderly, they yet steal nothing of what belongs to another, but receive their lawful allowance from the hand of their heavenly Father, until they enter on the full possession of their inheritance, when all creatures shall be made subservient to their glory—for both heaven and earth shall be renewed for this end—that according to their measure they may contribute to render glorious the kingdom of God.” It will repay the reader to re-read the above and meditate thereon as a helpful opening-up of Romans 4:13, with its application to us.

N.B. We follow this article by another which we have entitled “The Typical Canaan,” that was too lengthy to insert in the above. It is a quotation from a deeply-taught servant of God.

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

8. Its Procurer

It has been pointed out in the earlier papers of this series that the Scriptures present the believer’s sanctification from several distinct points of view, the chief of which are, first, our sanctification in the eternal purpose of God, when in His decree He chose us in Christ “that we should be *holy* and without blame before him” (Eph 1:4). That is what is referred to at the beginning of Hebrews 10:10, “by the which *will* we are sanctified.” This is our sanctification by God the Father (Jude 1), which was considered by us in the seventh article, under the author of our sanctification. Second, there is the *fulfilling* of that “will” of God, the accomplishing of His eternal purpose by our actual sanctification through the sacrifice of Christ. That is what is referred to in “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:12). This is our sanctification by God the Son, and is what we are now considering. Third, there is the *application* of this sanctification to the individual by the Holy Spirit, when He separates him from those who are dead in sins by quickening him, and by the new birth imparting to him a new nature. This is our sanctification by God the Spirit.

Fourth, there is the *fruit* of these in the Christian’s character and conduct whereby he is separated in his life and walk from the world which lieth in the wicked one, and this is by the Holy Spirit’s working in him and applying the Word to him, so that he is (in measure—for now we see “through a glass darkly”) enabled to apprehend by faith his separation to God by the precious blood of Christ. Yet both his inward and outward life is far from being perfect, for though possessing a new and spiritual nature, the flesh remains in him, unchanged, to the end of his earthly pilgrimage. Those around him know little or nothing of the inward conflict of which he is the subject. They see his outward failures, but hear not his secret groanings before God. It is

not yet made manifest what he shall be, but though very imperfect at present through indwelling sin, yet the promise is sure “when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*” (1Jo 3:2).

Now though in this fourth sense our *practical* sanctification is incomplete, this in nowise alters the fact, nor to the slightest degree invalidates it, that our sanctification in the first three senses mentioned above is entire and eternal, that “by one offering he (Christ) hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Though these three phases of the believer’s sanctification are quite distinct as to their development or manifestation, yet they are blessedly combined together, and form our one complete acceptance before God. That which we are here considering has to do with the *objective* side of our subject—by which we mean that it is something entirely *outside of ourselves*, resulting from what Christ has done for us. It is that which we have in Christ and by Christ, and therefore it can be received and enjoyed by *faith alone*. O what a difference it makes to the peace and joy of the soul once the child of God firmly grasps the blessed truth that a perfect sanctification is his present and inalienable portion, that God has made Christ to be unto him sanctification as well as righteousness.

Every real Christian has already been sanctified or set apart *as holy unto God* by the precious blood of the Lamb. But though many believers are consciously and confessedly “*justified* by his blood” (Rom 5:9), yet not a few of them are unwittingly dishonouring that blood by striving (in their desires after holiness of life) to *offer God* “entire consecration” or “full surrender” (as they call it) *in order to get sanctified*—so much “living sacrifice” they present to God for so much sanctification. They have been beguiled into the attempt to lay *self* on some imaginary “altar” so that their sinful nature might be “consumed by the fire of the Spirit.” Alas, they neither enter into *God’s* estimate of Christ’s blood, nor will they accept the fact that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and *desperately* wicked” (Jer 17:9). They neither realise that God has “made Christ to be sanctification unto them” (see 1Cor 1:30) or that “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7).

It is greatly to be regretted that many theologians have confined their views far too exclusively to the *legal* aspect of the atonement, whereas both the Old Testament types and the New Testament testimony, with equal clearness, exhibit its efficacy in *all* our relations to God. Because we are in Christ, *all* that He is for us must be ours. “The blood of Christ cleanses us from *all sin*, and the believer does not more truly take his place in Christ before the justice of God as one against whom there is *no charge*, than he takes his place in Christ before the holiness of God as one upon whom there is *no stain*” (James Inglis, 1813-1872, in “Waymarks in the Wilderness” to whom we are indebted for much in this and last month’s article). Not only is the believer “*justified* by his blood” (Rom 5:9), but we are “*sanctified* [set apart, consecrated unto God, fitted and adorned for His presence] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). It is *this* blessed aspect of sanctification which the denominational Creeds and writings of the Puritans almost totally ignored.

In the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly the question is asked, “What is sanctification?” To which the following answer is returned—“Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby, they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time through the powerful operation of His Spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life.”

Now far be it from us to sit in judgment upon such an excellent and helpful production as this Catechism, which God has richly blest to thousands of His people, or that we should make any harsh criticisms against men whose shoes we are certainly not worthy to unloose. Nevertheless, we are assured that were its compilers on earth today, they would be the last of all to lay claim to any infallibility, nor do we believe they would offer any objection against their statements being brought to the bar of Holy Scripture. The best of men are but men at the best, and therefore we must call no man “Father.” A deep veneration for servants of God and a high regard for their spiritual learning, must not deter us from complying with “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (1Th 5:21). The Bereans were commended for testing the teachings even of the apostle Paul, “And searched the scriptures daily, *whether* those things were so” (Act 17:11). It is in this spirit that we beg to offer two observations on the above quotation.

First, the definition or description of sanctification of the Westminster divines is altogether *inadequate*, for it entirely *omits* the most important aspect and fundamental element in the believer’s sanctification. It says nothing about our sanctification *by Christ* (Heb 10:10; 13:12), but confines itself to the work of the Spirit, which is founded upon that of the Son. This is truly a serious loss, and affords another illustration that God has not granted light on *all* His Word to any one man or body of men. A fuller and better answer to the question of, “What is sanctification?” would be, “Sanctification is, first, that act of God whereby He set the elect apart in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy. Second, it is that perfect holiness which the church has in Christ and that excellent purity which she has before God by virtue of Christ’s cleansing blood. Third, it is that work of God’s Spirit which, by His quickening operation, sets them apart from those who are dead in sins, conveying to them a holy life or nature, etc.”

Thus we cannot but regard this particular definition of the Larger Catechism as being defective, for it commences at the middle, instead of starting at the beginning. Instead of placing before the believer that complete and perfect sanctification which God has made Christ to be unto him, it occupies him with the incomplete and progressive work of the Spirit. Instead of moving the Christian to look away from himself with all his sinful failures, unto Christ in whom he is “complete” (Col 2:10), it encourages him to look within, where he will often search in vain for the fine gold of the new creation amid all the dross and mire of the old creation. This is to leave him without the joyous assurance of knowing that he has been “perfected forever” by the one offering of Christ (Heb 10:14), and if he be destitute of *that*, then doubts and fears must constantly assail him and the full assurance of faith allude every striving after it.

Our second observation upon this definition is, that its wording is *faulty and misleading*. Let the young believer be credibly assured that he will “more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life,” and what will be the inevitable outcome? As he proceeds on his way, the devil assailing him more and more fiercely, the inward conflict between the flesh and the spirit becoming more and more distressing, increasing light from God’s Word more and more exposing his sinful failures, until the cry is forced from him, “I am vile; ‘O wretched man that I am!’” (Rom 7:24), what conclusion *must* he draw? Why this—if the Catechism-definition be correct then I was sadly mistaken, *I have never been sanctified at all*. So far from the “more and more die unto sin” agreeing with *his* experience, he discovers that sin is more active within and that he is more alive to sin now, than he was ten years ago!

Will any venture to gainsay what we have just pointed out above, then we would ask the most mature and godly reader, Dare you solemnly affirm, as in the presence of God, that *you* have “more and more died unto sin?” If you answer, Yes, the writer for one would not believe you. But we do not believe for a moment that you would utter such an untruth. Rather do we think we can

hear you saying, “Such has been my deep *desire*, such has been my sincere *design* in using the means of grace, such is still my daily *prayer*, but alas, alas! I find as truly and as frequently today as I ever did in the past that, “When I would do good, evil is present with me; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do” (see Rom 7:4-25). Ah, there is a vast difference between what *ought* to be, and that which actually *obtains* in our experience.

That we may not be charged with partiality, we quote from the “Confession of Faith” adopted by the Baptist Association, which met in Philadelphia 1742, giving the first two sections of their brief chapter on sanctification, “They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit in them through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, are also (a) further sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, (b) by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; (c) the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, (d) and the several lusts thereof *more and more weakened* and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. 2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still *some remnants* of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war.”—*italics ours*.

Like the previous one, this description of sanctification by the Baptists leaves something to be desired, for it makes no clear and direct statement upon the all-important and flawless holiness which every believer has *in Christ*, and that spotless and impeccable purity which is *upon* him by God’s imputation of the cleansing efficacy of His Son’s sacrifice. Such a serious omission is too vital for us to ignore. In the second place, the words which we have placed in italics not only perpetuate the faulty wording of the Westminster Catechism, but also convey a misleading conception of the present condition of the Christian. To speak of “some remnants of corruption” still remaining in the believer, necessarily implies that by far the greater part of his original corruption has been removed, and that only a trifling portion of the same now remains. But something vastly different from *that* is what every true Christian discovers to his daily grief and humiliation.

Contrast, dear reader, with the “some remnants of corruption” remaining in the Christian (an expression frequently found in the writings of the Puritans) the honest confession of the heavenly-minded Jonathan Edwards, “When I look into my heart and take a view of its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me that, were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fullness of the great JEHOVAH, and the arm of His grace stretched forth in all the majesty of His power and in all the glory of His sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself. It is affecting to think how ignorant I was when a young Christian, of the bottomless depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy, and filth left in my heart.” The closer we walk with God, the more *conscious* will we be of our utter depravity.

Among the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (Episcopalian) there is none treating of the important doctrine of sanctification! We believe that all the Reformation “standards” (creeds, confessions, and catechisms) will be searched in vain for any clear statement upon the perfect holiness which the church has in Christ or of God’s making Him to be, imputatively, sanctification unto His people. In consequence of this, most theological systems have taught that while justification is accomplished the moment the sinner truly believes in Christ, yet is his sanctification only then begun, and is a protracted process to be carried on throughout the remainder of this life by means of the Word and ordinances, seconded by the discipline of trial and affliction. But if this be the case, then there must be a time in the history of every believer when he is “justified from all things” and yet *unfit* to appear in the presence of God, and before he

can appear there, the process must be completed—he must attain what is called “entire sanctification” and be able to say “I have no sin,” which, according to 1 John 1:8, would be the proof of self-deception.

Here, then, is a real dilemma, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and yet, according to the doctrine of “progressive sanctification,” until we *can* say (though it be inarticulately in the moment of death) we are not meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. What an awful thought it is, that Christ may come any hour to those who realise that the process of sanctification within them is *incomplete*. But more—not only are those who have no complete sanctification unfit for eternal glory, but it would be daring presumption for them to boldly enter the Holiest now—the “new and living way” is not yet available for them, they cannot draw near “with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” What wonder, then, that those who believe this doctrine are plunged into perplexity, that such a cloud rests over their acceptance with God. But, thank God, many triumph over their creed. Their hearts are better than their heads, otherwise their communion with God and their approach to the throne of His grace would be impossible.

Now in blessed contrast from this inadequate doctrine of theology, the glorious Gospel of God reveals to us a *perfect* Saviour. It exhibits One who has not only made complete satisfaction to the righteous Ruler and Judge, providing for His people a perfect righteousness before Him, but whose sacrifice has also fitted us to worship and serve a holy God acceptably, and to approach the Father with full confidence and filial love. A knowledge of the truth of justification is not sufficient to thus assure the heart, there must be something more than a realization that the curse of the law is removed—if the conscience be still defiled, if the eye of God rests upon us as unpurged and unclean, then confidence before Him is impossible, for we feel utterly unfit for His ineffable presence. But forever blessed be His name, the precious Gospel of God announces that the blood of Christ freely meets *this* exigency also.

“Now where remission of these [sins] is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:18-19). The same sacrifice which has procured the remission of our sins, provides the right for us to draw nigh unto God as acceptable worshipers. “By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12). Now that which gives the One who took our place *the right* to enter heaven itself, also gives *us* the right to take *the same* place. That which entitled Christ to enter heaven was “his own blood,” and that which entitles the feeblest believer to approach the very throne of God “with boldness,” is “the blood of Jesus.” Our title to enter heaven *now*, in spirit, is precisely the same *as Christ’s* was!

The same precious blood which appeased the wrath of God, covers every stain of sin’s guilt and defilement, and not only so, but in the very place of that which it covers and cleanses, it leaves its own excellency, so that because of its infinite purity and merit, the Christian is regarded not only as guiltless and unreprougeable, but also as *spotless and holy*. O to realise by faith that *we* are assured of the same welcome by God *now* as His beloved Son received when He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. God views us *in Christ* His “Holy One,” as possessing a holiness as perfect as is the righteousness in which we are accepted, both of them being as perfect as Christ Himself. “In us, as we present ourselves before Him through Christ, God *sees no sin*! He looks on us in the face of His Anointed, and there He sees us purer than the heavens” (Alexander Carson, 1776-1844).

God willing, this article will be completed in the next issue. It is only fair we should point out that on *this* aspect of our subject, namely, the believer’s perfect sanctification in and by Christ, the writings of those known as Plymouth Brethren are much to be preferred above others.

UNION AND COMMUNION

6. Saving

That which unites the believer to Christ may (for the purpose of simplification) be likened to a golden chain, a chain possessing a number of distinct links, yet inseparably welded together. The first of these links we denominated “mystical,” having reference to our original uniting to Christ, when the Father chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. The second link we denominated “federal,” having reference to our covenant-oneness with Christ, wherein He served as our Surety, we having a representative or legal being in Him. The third link we denominated “vital,” having reference to the Spirit’s quickening us, whereby we became livingly united to our Head in heaven. Now, this wondrous chain is let down still lower, for the fourth link in it is formed by our personally cleaving unto Christ. This is a union *unto* Christ, as the previous ones were *in* Him.

In last month’s article we pointed out that it is by means of the vital union that our mystical and federal oneness with Christ is made manifest. Not until the Holy Spirit has brought us from death unto life can we have any experimental knowledge of the Father’s love and the Son’s work for us. In like manner, it is not until we have a *saving* union with Christ by our believing in Him, that we have any personal evidence we have been vitally joined to Him. In other words, we are only able to apprehend the outworking of God’s eternal purpose *in the inverse order* to His execution of it. He proceeds from cause to effect, but we have to work back from effect to cause. Or to use the terms of our illustration—as we grasp the lowest link in the chain *that* brings into our view the one next above it.

Thus, the whole of this article will supply answer to a question which may have been raised in exercised readers by the last one, namely, *How* may I ascertain whether or not spiritual life has actually been communicated to *my* soul? O how urgently it behooves each one of us to earnestly and prayerfully examine ourselves on this all-important matter. Before developing the distinctive theme of this article, and as a suitable introduction thereto, let us offer one or two observations by way of determining the above matter. First, where there is spiritual life, there is spiritual *sensibility*—“senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14). Just as our natural senses recognize and feel the difference between cold and heat, so the spiritual senses of a quickened soul perceive and feel the difference between good and evil, sin and holiness. If there be spiritual life within, the soul cannot but be sensible of and groan under the burden of sin.

What we have just alluded to is something radically different from those prickings of conscience and pangs of fear which the unregenerate are sometimes conscious of. They may be alarmed at the condemnation of sin, but they are not grieved and horror-stricken at its pollution. They may be terrified of hell, yet never horrified at displeasing God. They are mortified if a fellow-creature discovers them in a lie, but they make no conscience of it Godwards. Second, where there is spiritual life, there is spiritual *hunger and thirst*, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word” (1Pe 2:2). Those who have been born again have a strong intuition that none but Christ can meet their deep need. Third, if there be spiritual life, there must be spiritual *activity*. This will be enlarged upon as we proceed.

It may surprise some of the more critical readers that we have drawn a sharp distinction between vital union and saving union, for many suppose they are one and the same, that the moment a sinner is born again he is actually saved. Not so—regeneration and salvation are quite distinct, though the one necessarily makes way for the other. We are not “saved” until we personally “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Act 16:31). But as saving faith is a spiritual act, one who is spiritually dead cannot perform it. The Spirit quickens the soul in order to capacitate it unto a saving faith in Christ. Note carefully the order in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, “God hath from the beginning chosen you *to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*” The “sanctification of the Spirit” is His impartation of life, whereby He separates us from those who are dead in sins, and this *precedes* our “belief of the truth.”

It is the Spirit’s quickening of us into newness of life which lays the foundation for feeling our deep need of Christ and casting ourselves upon Him. Until the sinner be regenerated, there can be no repentance unto life, no believing unto salvation, no hope which maketh not ashamed. As the union which exists between a man’s soul and his body is absolutely necessary in order for him to think and reason, speak and perform such actions as are in keeping with his natural life, so a vital union between the soul and Christ is indispensable in order to enable us to perform any spiritual functions. No vital act of faith can be put forth by us until a vital principle has been communicated to us. Notice the order in “Whosoever (1) liveth and (2) believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou *this*?” (Joh 11:26)—how few *do* believe that the impartation of spiritual life precedes faith.

“Except a man be born again, he *cannot see* the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3), still less is he capable of entering it. Until a supernatural work of grace has been wrought upon his heart, fallen man is utterly incapable of discerning the nature of God’s kingdom, the superlative excellency of it, or the way of entrance into it. “No man can come to me,” said Christ, “except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44), and that divine “drawing” consists first in his being brought out of spiritual death and made “a new creature” in Christ. When that miracle of grace takes place, the subject of it is still *the same person* he was before, but he has been “renewed” by a principle of spiritual life being infused into him from above, and now he has new desires and aspirations, which issue in a new experience and conduct.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power [the right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Joh 1:11-12). When Christ appeared unto the Jewish nation, the great majority in it “despised and rejected” Him. But here and there was one who “received him”—received Him as the Sent One of God, received Him as the Lord of their hearts and lives, received Him as the all-sufficient Saviour. And why *did* those “receive” Christ? Was it because *their* wills were less stubborn than their fellows? Not at all. Our question is answered in the explanatory verse which immediately follows, “Which [those who “received him”] *were born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God.*” What could be clearer: those who receive Christ are *previously* born of God.

No sinner believes savingly in Christ until he has been convicted of his lost condition and made to feel his dire need of a Saviour, and that is not until God has “begun a good work *in*” him (Phi 1:6). No man will truly come to Christ until he has been quickened by Christ. Nor does that statement conflict in anywise with his own words, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (Joh 5:40). If the unregenerate *would* come to Christ, there is life for them. They ought to come. They are freely invited to come, but they “will not,” and no argument or persuasion of man can induce them to do so. Were God to do nothing more than send the Gospel to the unsaved, in

every instance it would fall on deaf ears and unresponsive hearts. “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned” (Jer 31:18). We had to be turned *by* God before ever we turn *to* Him.

The trouble with so many today is that their theology is derived from their experiences, instead of from the Scriptures. They prefer to follow the testimony of their senses, instead of the teaching of God’s Word. The first thing of which the Christian became conscious was *his* sense of need, *his* realization that he was a lost sinner, *his* crying unto God for mercy, *his* turning to Christ. And because he was *not conscious* of the quickening work of the Spirit within him *before* he was ever awakened and convicted, he is very slow to allow the reality of it. But this ought not to be. “To the law and to the testimony” must be the final court of appeal. Were we not alive physically (in the antenatal state) long before we had any consciousness of our existence? So it is spiritually—there must be life, before there can be the consciousness of that life.

A supernatural object requires a supernatural faith, and this the natural man is utterly incapable of putting forth. He must, then, have imparted to him a spiritual life ere he can savingly believe on the Lord Jesus. “This faith is not merely a natural act of the mind, assenting to the truth of the Gospel, as it assents to any other truth upon reliable testimony, but it is a supernatural act, an effect produced by the power of the Spirit of grace, and is *such* a persuasion of the truth as calls forth exercises suitable to the nature of its object. It is a cordial approbation of the Saviour, heartily consenting to His offers, an acceptance of Him in His entire character, as Prophet, Priest, and King” (John Dick, 1764-1833). Saving faith is the heart going off all others and cleaving to Christ alone.

Now Christ’s design in quickening us is that we should turn to and put our trust in Him, for we are not *saved* until we do so. “For by grace are ye saved *through faith*” (Eph 2:8). True, we are not saved because of our faith, yet, we cannot be saved without it. Rightly did Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), the Puritan, affirm, “Faith in its place is as necessary as the blood of Christ is in its place.” “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever *believeth* in him shall receive remission of sins” (Act 10:43). The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ is “unto all and upon all them that *believe*” (Rom 3:22), and it is not upon them until they do. Christ is a “propitiation through *faith* in his blood” (Rom 3:25), for His blood avails none but those who *plead* it. To the Hebrew Christians Paul wrote, We are “of them that *believe to the saving of the soul*” (Heb 10:39).

Let us not confuse things that differ. Though it be true that the elect were saved in the purpose of God before the world began (2Ti 1:9), and that they were saved representatively when their Head rose again from the dead (Eph 2:6), yet they are not saved personally and actually until they “come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1Ti 2:4). Trusting in Christ obtains something more than a *knowledge* of our salvation. It brings salvation itself to us. Surely there is no salvation actually bestowed where an individual’s sins have not yet been “remitted,” and no one’s sins are remitted until he has believed (Act 10:43). Nor is this making a saviour of faith. Christ is the Saviour, but faith must lay hold of Him for salvation. Nothing but food will save a starving man from death, yet food untouched will serve him nothing. It is not his *eating* which saves him, yet the food *must* be eaten if he is to be saved!

While it be true, on the one hand, that faith does not give us a being in Christ, but rather is our cleaving to Him an evidence and effect *of* our being in Him, yet, on the other hand, faith does *unite* us to Christ, as is clear from His own words, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall *believe* on me through their word; *that* they all *may be one*; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (Joh 17:20-21). Moreover, do we not read, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts *by faith*” (Eph 3:17). It is faith which gives Him a real

subsistence in the soul. Here, then, is the principal difference between what was before us in last month's article and the present aspect of our subject—in the forming of the vital union we were *passive*, but in the making of the saving union we are *active*. Here is the order, "That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phi 3:12).

Having been "apprehended" or "laid hold of" by Christ (through His quickening Spirit), we now apprehend Him. We cannot lay hold of Him, until He has first laid hold of us. But having been laid hold of by Christ, the soul now draws near to Him, joins itself to Him, appropriates Him by faith as its very own. And from *this* union there follows our justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. The *federal* union was necessary so that the demands of the law might be met by our Surety. The *vital* union was necessary so that a principle of life, grace, holiness, might be imparted to the soul, qualifying its recipient to perform spiritual acts and live a spiritual life. The *believing* union is necessary so that we may personally receive the salvation of God and have His receipt for it written in our own hearts.

Our believing in Christ is the sequel to His, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever" (Hos 2:19), for faith is it which ties the marriage-knot between us, for there must be a personal consent on our part. In the Gospel, Christ offers Himself to us, and saving faith is our acceptance of Him. Saving faith, therefore, presupposes a turning from all others—from the seductions of the world and from trusting in my own righteousness—and yielding myself to Christ as my only Lord. It is a willingness to receive Christ on His own terms. It is turning our backs upon our idols and saying with Ruth, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Since a mediator is not a mediator of one, but requires the mutual consent of both parties, so there must be a personal acceptance of Christ as Mediator on our part. This makes the union *reciprocal*. As a woman, by her free consent, accepts a man for her husband, so the believer accepts Christ as his only Lord and Saviour.

This union also has been variously designated by the older writers—for alas! most modern writers seem to know little or nothing of this wondrous and blessed subject. Some of them call it the "voluntary" union, in order to distinguish it from the previous ones, which are quite involuntary on our part, and because this one is consummated by an act of our own wills. Some call it the "fiducial" or "believing" union, because it is brought about by faith, defining more definitely the nature of our voluntary act. Others call it the "conjugal" union, because it signifies our acceptance of Christ as our loving Lord or Husband. We have preferred to designate it the *saving* union, because a section of our readers need to have this aspect of the truth pressed upon their notice, and also because it seems to express more than the other terms do.

The manner in which this saving union is brought about may be illustrated from the meaning of the names borne by the first three sons of Jacob. Reuben signifies "See! the son." It is as such the Gospel sets forth Christ, and its call is, "*Behold* the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29), for it is only as we are favored with spiritual and believing views of Him that spiritual blessings flow into the soul. Simeon signifies "Hearing," and it is only as we hear the voice of Christ Himself speaking to us through the Gospel that peace comes to our conscience and joy fills the heart. Levi signifies "Joined," as we see the Son responsively and hear Him believably, we become *connected with Him*. It was well put by Hermann Witsius (1636-1708) when he said, "Faith in its actings is the echo or repercussion of the divine voice speaking to the soul."

It is only the quickened soul which sees, hears, and receives Christ in a spiritual way. A distressed child's cleaving to and hanging upon its beloved father with entreaties and expectations

of succor, are in consequence of a relation and union between them *prior* to those actings. So it is with the elect sinner—having been joined to Him by the Spirit, he now looks to Christ, lays hold of, embraces, and cleaves unto Him; and thus his saving union is effected. As a woman accepts the marriage proposal of her wooer by yielding herself and all her future interests into his care, so the believer is able to say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have *committed unto him* against that day” (2Ti 1:12). And again, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song 2:16)—His by my own consent and acceptance.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35). Separation necessarily implies a joining together, for nothing can be “separated” but what was first united. Union with Christ is by the Spirit on His part, and by faith on our part, and both of them are made known *by love*, and this it is which makes the union indissoluble. The Spirit is given to us as the great proof and fruit of Christ’s love to us, and He sheds abroad God’s love in our hearts. The faith which lays hold of Christ for salvation is a “faith which worketh *by love*” (Gal 5:6), for it is “with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). And nothing can unclasp those mutual embraces. The believer is now united to Christ by his affections, for he loves what Christ loves and hates what He hates. “A Christian is held by his heart rather than by his head” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

Vital union takes place at regeneration. In it we were entirely passive, and at the time thereof had no knowledge at all of it. Saving union takes place when the awakened sinner receives Christ as He is offered to him in the Gospel. In it he is active and has a definite consciousness of what he is doing. As the Israelite of old gave a personal consent to God’s gracious provision by laying his hand on the head of his sacrifice (Lev 1:4), so the believer rests upon Christ as an all-sufficient sacrifice for all his sins. Saving union takes place when the returning prodigal falls into the arms of his loving Father in Christ (Luk 15:20), when the fugitive, chased by the avenging law (Num 35:11-12) crosses the threshold of the City of Refuge (Heb 6:18), when the sin-sick soul is able to stretch forth the hand of faith and receive healing from Christ by personal contact with Him (Mar 5:27-29).

A PRAYER FOR THE NATION

O Lord Jesus Christ, it is by Thee kings reign, and princes decree justice. Thou hast been very gracious to the people of this Isle. Thy church in this land has long been Thy peculiar care. Many mercies Thou hast bestowed on us. Many deliverances Thou hast wrought for us, which ought to be remembered by us to Thy praise and glory. Thou hast sent and long continued Thy blessed and everlasting Gospel amongst us. Notwithstanding all our heinous, aggravated, and detestable crimes, which are more and more increasing, and which we as a nation groan under, yet such is Thy goodness, Thou dost spare us as a nation, nor doth Thy whole displeasure arise. Thou hast contended with us by various afflictive providences, yet in all Thou art saying, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst

of thee: and I will not enter into the city.” O Thy patience and forbearance towards us, as a nation, is beyond the very uttermost of our conceptions.

We would desire to be found with such as mourn and sigh for the abominations of the times. Pour out Thy Spirit on the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, as the Spirit of prayer and supplication. O turn from Thy fierce wrath towards us, that we perish not. O turn us from our national impieties, that they become not our national ruin. O consider us as a people on whom Thy name is called. Let it yet be manifest that Thou art in the midst of us; leave us not. O Thou hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, exercise for Thy great name’s sake, Thy mercy towards and upon the people of this land. Have respect to Thy church and people throughout Great Britain. Be with all Thy ministers and truth-bearers. Many of them are under the cross. Lord, sanctify it unto them. Lord, do Thou bear them up, and powerfully sustain them.

Have respect unto Thy churches. They are in a low state, as it respects Gospel truth, order, and discipline. O revive them, and revive Thy work amongst them. Have respect to Thine both collectively and individually. Do Thou in Thy good pleasure unto Thy Zion, do Thou build up the walls of Jerusalem. Lord, remember Thine ancient people the Jews, and Thy promises concerning them. Hasten the time for the accomplishing of Thy good Word and grace respecting them. Look upon them, that they may look on Thee, and to Thee. Then they shall mourn as one that mourneth for an only son; then they shall be converted unto Thee. Lord, bring in with them the fullness of the Gentiles, and let both be one fold under Thee, the one shepherd, Jesus, the Conqueror. Turn sinners from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Grant this, O Lord Jesus Christ, for Thy mercy’s sake. Amen.—S. E. Pierce, 1820.

HELP SOUGHT

“When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Psa 61:2). Yes, Lord! I would make this my morning, noon, and evening petition, that the great Glorifier of Jesus would gently lead me to Him who is a rock, and whose work is perfect. I know, Lord, in theory, and can even reason upon it in seasons of coolness, that Thy strength and Thy security never fail—the failure is in me and my unbelief. And it is only when I lose sight of Thee and Thy promises, that I am tossed about with doubts and misgivings. If Christ be out of sight, and thwarting dispensations arise, Oh! how soon is my poor forgetful heart ready to exclaim with the church of old, “I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the LORD.” Then come on the reasonings of flesh and blood, and then arises the question whether my interest in the Lord Jesus and His salvation be sure. And then my poor heart goes forth, like the dove of Noah from the ark, having lost sight of Christ, and can find no resting-place for the sole of my foot. Oh! Lord the Spirit, in all such seasons, do Thou “lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

If Thou, blessed Leader of the Lord’s distressed ones, wouldst be my Pilot when those storms are beating upon me, I should soon be blown upon the firm landing-place of Jesus’ security. Oh! how should I ride out the storm even when the tempest was highest, as long as God the Holy Spirit enabled me to cast the anchor of faith upon this eternal Rock of Jesus. Oh! lead me then, Thou sovereign Lord, continually to an all-precious Christ. Open the door of communication, and

keep it constantly open, between Christ and my soul. Faith will find a soft and quiet bed to sleep on, in the arms of Jesus, and no noise of wars shall break the soul's rest while reposing on Him, for so the promise runs, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in Thee." Oh! then once again, I send up the earnest cry of my soul, let it be continually answered in mercy, "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I" (Robert Hawker, 1820).

*"When darkness veils His lovely face,
I'd rest on His unchanging grace;
In every rough and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I'd stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."*

March

THE HOLY SPIRIT

33. The Spirit Witnessing (Part 1)

The Holy Spirit is first a witness *for* Christ, and then He is a witness *to* His people of Christ's infinite love and the sufficiency of His finished work. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify ["bear witness"] of me" (Joh 15:26). The Spirit bears His testimony for Christ in the Scriptures. He bears His testimony to us in our renewed minds. He is a witness for the Lord Jesus by all that is revealed in the sacred volume concerning Him. He bears witness to the abiding efficacy of Christ's offering—that sin is effectually put away thereby, that the Father hath accepted it, that the elect are forever perfected thereby, and that pardon of sins is the fruit of Christ's oblation.

The sufficiency of the Spirit to be witness for Christ unto His people appears first, from His being a divine person, second, from His being present when the everlasting covenant was drawn up, third, from His perfect knowledge of the identity of each member of the election of grace. When the ordained hour strikes for each one to be quickened by Him, He capacitates the soul to receive a spiritual knowledge of Christ. He shines upon the Scriptures of truth and into the renewed mind. He enables the one born again to receive into his heart the Father's record concerning His beloved Son, and to give full credit to it. He enables him to realise that the Father is everlastingly well pleased with every one who is satisfied with the person, righteousness, and atonement of His co-equal Son, and who rests his entire hope and salvation thereon. Thereby He assures him of the Father's acceptance of him in the Beloved.

Now the Spirit is a witness unto God's people both objectively and subjectively, that is to say, He bears witness *to* them, and He also bears witness *in* them—such is His wondrous grace toward them. His witness to them is in and through and by means of the Scriptures. "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us" (Heb 10:14-15), which is explained in what immediately follows. A quotation is made from the prophet Jeremiah, who had spoken as he was moved by the Holy Spirit (2Pe 1:21). The Lord declares of His people "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb 10:17). Whereupon the Holy Spirit points out, "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Heb 10:18). Thus does He witness to us, through the Word, of the sufficiency and finality of Christ's one offering.

But something more is still required by God's needy people, for they are the subjects of many fears, and Satan frequently attacks their faith. It is not that they have any doubt about the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, or the unerring reliability of everything recorded therein. Nor is it that they are disposed for a moment to call into question the infinite sufficiency and abiding efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. No, that which occasions them such deep concern is, whether *they* have a saving interest therein. Not only are they aware that there is a faith (such as the demons have—Jam 2:19) which obtains no salvation, not only do they perceive that the faith of which many empty professors boast so loudly is *not evidenced* by their works, but they discover so much in themselves that appears to be altogether incompatible with their being new creatures in Christ, until they often fear their own conversion was but a delusion after all.

When an honest soul contemplates the amazing greatness of the honour and the stupendousness of the relation of regarding itself as a joint-heir with Christ, it is startled and staggered. What, *me* a child of God! God *my* Father! Who am I to be thus exalted into the divine favour? Surely it cannot be so. When I consider my fearful sinfulness and unworthiness, the awful depravity of my heart, the carnality of my mind, such rebellion of will, so prone to evil every moment, and such glaring flaws in all I undertake—surely I cannot have been made a partaker of the divine nature. It seems impossible, and Satan is ever ready to assure me that I am not God's child. If the reader be a stranger to such tormenting fears, we sincerely pity him. But if his experience tallies with what we have just described, he will see how indispensable it is that the Holy Spirit should bear witness to him *within*.

But there are some who say that it is a sin for the Christian to question his acceptance with God because he is still so depraved, or to doubt his salvation because he can perceive little or no holiness within. They say that such doubting is to call God's truth and faithfulness into question, for He has assured us of His love and His readiness to save all who believe in His Son. They affirm it is not our duty to examine our hearts, that we shall never obtain any assurance by so doing, that we must look to Christ alone, and rest on His naked Word. But does not Scripture say, "For our rejoicing is this, *the testimony of our conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2Co 1:12)? And again, we are told, "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And *hereby* we know that we are of the truth, and shall *assure our hearts* before him" (1Jo 3:18-19).

But it is insisted that Scripture forbids all doubting, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Mat 14:31). Yes, but Christ was *not* there blaming Peter for doubting his spiritual *state*, but for fearing he would be drowned. Yet Christ "upbraided them with their unbelief" (Mar 16:14). True, for not believing He was risen from the dead—not for calling into question their regeneration! But Abraham is commended because "against hope [all appearances]" he "believed in hope" (Rom 4:18). Yes, and that was that he should have a son!—how is that relevant to what we are now discussing? But "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Co 5:7). Yes, the conduct of the apostles was governed by a realisation of that which is to come (see 2Co 5:11). But "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23), but this is nothing to the purpose. If a man does not believe it is right to do some act, and yet ventures to do it, he sins.

Let us define more closely the point now under discussion. We may state it thus—Does God require anyone to believe he has been born again when he has no clear *evidence* that such be the case? Surely the question answers itself—the God of truth never asks any one to believe a lie. If my sins have *not* been pardoned, then the more firmly convinced I am that they *have been*, the worse for me, and very ready is Satan to second me in my self-deception! The devil would have

me assured that all is well with me, *without* a diligent search and thorough examination for sufficient *evidence* that I am a new creature in Christ. O how many he is deceiving by making them believe it is wrong to challenge their profession and put their hearts to a real trial.

True, it *is* a sin for a real Christian so to live that his evidences of regeneration are not clear, but it is no sin for him to be honest and impartial, or to doubt when, in fact, his evidences are not clear. It is sin to darken my evidences, but it is no sin to discover that they *are* darkened. It is a sin for a man, by rioting and drunkenness, to make himself ill, but it is no sin to *feel* he is sick, if there be grounds for it, to doubt if he will survive his sickness. Our sins bring upon us *inward* calamities as well as outward, but these are chastisements rather than sins. It is the Christian's sins which lay the foundation for doubts, which occasions them, yet those doubtings are not themselves sins.

But it will be said, believers are exhorted to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6) and that “we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb 3:6). Yes, but *that* “confidence” is that Jesus is the Christ, together with a true faith in Him, as is clear from the whole context there. Nothing is more absurd than to say that professing Christians are made partakers of Christ by holding fast the confidence *that they are saved*, for that is what many a *deceived* soul does, and does to the very end (Mat 7:22). There can be no well-grounded confidence unless it rests upon clear evidence or reliable testimony. And for *that*, there must be not only “the answer of a good conscience” (1Pe 3:21), but the confirmatory witness of the Spirit. But our space is exhausted—see the April cover-pages article for the continuation of this.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

99. The Superiority of Christianity (12:22-24)

“But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24). In these verses, the apostle completes the last great contrast which he drew between Judaism and Christianity, in which he displays the immeasurable superiority of the later over the former. Though there may not be in them much of personal interest to some of our readers, yet we feel it incumbent upon us to give the same careful attention to this passage as we have to the previous sections of this epistle.

The central design of the apostle in Hebrews 12:18-24 was to convince the believing Hebrews of the pre-eminence of the new covenant above the old, that is, of the Gospel-economy over the legal. To this end he first directed attention to the awful phenomena which attended the institution of Judaism, and now he sets before them the attractive features which characterises Christianity. Everything connected with the giving of the law was fearful and terrifying, but all that marks the

evangelical system is blessed and winsome. The manifestations of the divine presence at Sinai, though vivid and truly magnificent, were awe-inspiring, but the revelation of His love and grace in the Gospel prompts to peace and joy. Those pertained to things of the earth, these concern heaven itself—those were addressed to the senses of the body, these call into exercise the higher faculties of the soul.

When going over verses 18-21, we sought to make clear the *figurative* meaning of their contents. Though there be in them an allusion to historical facts, yet it should be obvious that it is not with their literal signification the apostle was chiefly concerned. As this may not be fully apparent to some of our readers, we must labour the point a little—rendered the more necessary by the gross and carnal ideas entertained by modern dispensationalists. Surely it is quite plain to any unbiased mind that when he said, “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire” (Heb 12:18), the apostle had reference to something else than a mountain in Arabia. There would be neither force nor even sense in telling Christians, “Ye are not come to mount Sinai”—why even of the Hebrew believers it is improbable that any of them had ever seen it.

If then, the words, “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched” (Heb 12:18) refer not to any material mount, then they must intimate *that order of things* which was formally inaugurated at Sinai, the moral features of which were suitably symbolized and strikingly adumbrated by the physical phenomena which attended the giving of the law. This we sought to show in the course of the two previous months’ articles. Now the same principle of interpretation holds good and must be applied to the terms of the passage upon which we are now entering. “But ye are come unto mount Zion” (Heb 12:22) no more has reference to a natural mountain than, “We have an altar” (Heb 13:10) means that Christians have a tangible and visible altar. Whatever future the earthly Sion may yet have, it is the antitypical, the spiritual, the heavenly Sion, which is here in view.

One of the hardest tasks which sometimes confronts the careful and honest expositor of Holy Writ is to determine when its language is to be understood literally and when it is to be regarded as figurative. Nor is this always to be settled so easily as many suppose. The old controversy upon the meaning of our Lord’s words at the institution of the holy “Supper,” “This is my body” (Mat 26:26) shows otherwise. It had been a simple matter for Him to say, “This [bread] *represents* my body,” but He did not—why, is best known to Himself. Nor does this example stand by any means alone. Much of Christ’s language was of a figurative character, and more than once His own apostle’s failed to understand His purport—see Matthew 16:5-7; Mark 7:14-18; John 4:31-34 and 21:22-23.

No, it is by no means always an easy matter to determine when the language of Scripture is to be regarded literally, and when it is to be understood figuratively. In previous generations perhaps there was a tendency to “spiritualize” too much—whether that be so or no, certainly the pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme. How very often do we hear it said, “The language of Scripture means just what it says, and says just what it means.” Many believe that such a declaration is very honouring to God’s Word, and suppose that anything to the contrary savours strongly of “Modernism.” But surely, a little reflection will soon indicate that such a statement needs qualifying, for there is not a little of the language of Scripture which *must* be understood other than literally.

To say nothing about many poetic expressions in the Psalms (such as “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”) (Psa 23:2), and symbolic language in the prophets (like “then will I sprinkle clean water upon you...I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh”) (Eze 36:25-

26). Take such a saying of our Lord's as this, "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" (Mar 10:29-30)—the impossibility of *literalizing* such a promise appears, for example, in a man's receiving or having a hundred mothers. Now if *that* statement is not to be interpreted literally, why should an outcry be raised if the writer presents good reasons for interpreting *other* verses figuratively?

After reading the above, some may be inclined to say, "All of this is very bewildering and confusing." Our reply is, Then you must have sat under very superficial preaching—any well-instructed scribe would have taught you that there is great variety used in the language of Holy Writ, and often much care and pains are required in order to ascertain its precise character—that is one reason why God has graciously provided "*teachers*" (Eph 4:11) for His people. True, the path of duty is so plainly defined for us that the wayfaring man (though a fool) need not err therein, but that does not alter the fact that in order to ascertain the exact significance of many particular expressions of Scripture, much prayer, study, and comparing passage with passage, is called for. The Bible is not a lazy man's book, and the Holy Spirit has designedly put not a little therein to stain the pride of men.

Now much help is obtained upon this difficulty by recognising that many of the things which pertain to the new covenant are expressed in language taken from the old, the antitype being presented under the phraseology of the type. For instance, when Christ announced the free intercourse between heaven and earth which was to result from His mediation, He described it to Nathanael in the words of Jacob's vision, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (Joh 1:51)—not that the Lord Jesus was ever to present the appearance of a ladder for that purpose, such as the patriarch saw in his dream, but that spiritually there would be a like medium of communication established and the agency of a like intercourse maintained. In a similar manner, the death of Christ is frequently spoken of under the terms of the Levitical sacrifices, while the application of His atonement to the soul is called the "sprinkling of His blood on the conscience."

Not until we clearly perceive that most of that which pertains to the new economy is exhibited to us under the images of the old, are we in the position to understand much of the language found in the prophets, and many of the expressions employed by our Lord and His apostles. Thus, Christ is spoken of as "our Passover" (1Co 5:7) and as Priest "after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 6:20). Paradise is described as "Abraham's bosom" (Luk 16:22). The New Testament saints are referred to as "the children of Abraham" (Gal 3:7) as "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), as "the circumcision" (Phi 3:3), as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1Pe 2:9), and that "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal 4:26). Such terminology as this should amply prepare us for "ye are come unto *Mount Sion*," and should remove all uncertainty as to what is denoted thereby.

"But ye are come unto mount Zion" (Heb 12:22). In these words the apostle commences the second member of the comparison between Judaism and Christianity, which completes the foundation on which he bases the great exhortation found in verses Heb 12:25-29. In the former member (Heb 12:18-21), he had described the state of the Israelitish people (and the church in it) as they existed under the legal economy, taken from the terror-producing character of the giving of the law and the nature of its demands, "they could not endure that which was commanded...and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (Heb 12:20-21). But now the apostle contrasted the blessed and glorious state into which believers have

been called by the Gospel, thereby, making manifest how incomparably more excellent was the new covenant it itself than the old, and how infinitely more beneficial are its privileges unto those whom divine grace gives a part therein. No less than eight of these privileges are here enumerated—always the number of *a new beginning*.

“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph 1:10). These words throw light on the passage now before us. All the *spiritual* things of grace and glory, both in heaven and in earth, have been headed up in Christ, so that they all now centre in Him. By His mediatorial work, the Lord Jesus has repaired the great breach which the sin of Adam entailed. Before sin entered the world there was perfect harmony between heaven and earth, man and angels uniting in hymning their glorious Creator. Together they formed one spiritual society of worshippers. But upon the fall, that spiritual union was broken, and not only did the human race (in their federal head) become alienated from God Himself, but they became alienated from the holy spirits which surround His throne. But the last Adam has restored the disruption which the first Adam’s sin produced, and in reconciling His people to God, He has also brought them back into fellowship with the angelic hosts.

Now because God has gathered together in one, recapitulated or headed up, “all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are in earth” (Eph 1:10), when we savingly “come” to Christ we, at the same time, “come” to all that God has made to centre in Him—or in other words, we obtain an interest or right in all that is headed up in Him. Let the reader seek to grasp clearly this fact—it is because believers have been brought *to Christ* that they “are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels!” (Heb 12:22). By their initiation into the Gospel state, Christians are also inducted into and given access unto all these privileges. Christ and His mediation are specifically mentioned at the close of the various privileges here listed (Heb 12:24), to teach us it is on *that* account we are interested in them and as the reason for our being so interested.

Yes, it is to *Christ* and Him alone (though not, of course, to the exclusion of the Father and His eternal love, or the Holy Spirit and His gracious operations) that the Christian owes every blessing—his standing before God, his new creation state, his induction into the society of the holy, his eternal inheritance. It was by Christ that he was delivered from the condemnation and curse of the law, with the unspeakable terror it caused him. And it is by Christ that he has been brought to the antitypical Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem. Not by anything he has done or will do are such inestimable blessings made his. Observe how jealously the Spirit of truth has guarded this very point, in using the passive and not the active voice. The verb is “ye *are* come” and “ye *have* come.” The same fact is emphasised in 1 Peter 2:25, “ye were as sheep going astray; but *are* [not “have”] now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls”—because of what the Spirit wrought in us, we being entirely passive.

“But ye are come unto mount Zion” (Heb 12:22). We need hardly say that this language looks back to the “Zion” of the Old Testament, the variation in spelling being due to the difference between the Hebrew and Greek word. It is in fact to the Old Testament we must turn for light upon our present verse, and as usual, the *initial* reference is the one which supplies us with the needed key. The first time that “Zion” is mentioned there is in 2 Samuel 5:6-7, “And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land...thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.” The deeper significance of this appears when we carefully ponder *its setting*. Zion was captured by David when Israel had been thoroughly tried and found completely wanting. It occurred at a

notable crisis in the history of the nation, namely, after the priesthood had been deplorably corrupted (1Sa 2:22, 25) and after the king of *their* choice (Saul) had reduced himself (1Sa 28:7) and them (1Sa 31:1, 7) to the lowest degradation.

It was, then, at a time when Israel's fortunes were at a low ebb, when they were thoroughly disheartened, and when (because of their great wickedness) they had the least reason to expect it, that God graciously intervened. Just when Saul and Jonathan had been slain in battle, when the Philistines triumphed and Israel had fled before them in dismay, the Lord brought forth the man of *His* choice—David, whose name means the “Beloved.” Up to this time the hill of Zion had been a continual menace to Israel, but now David wrested it out of the hand of the Jebusites and made it the stronghold of Jerusalem. On one of its eminences the temple was erected, which was the dwelling place of JEHOVAH in the midst of His people. “Zion,” then, stands for the highest revelation of divine *grace* in Old Testament times.

Zion lay to the south-west of Jerusalem, being the oldest and highest part of that ancient city. It was outside of the city itself and separate from it, though in Scripture frequently identified with it. Mount Zion had two heads or peaks—Moriah on which the temple was erected, the seat of the *worship* of God, and the other, whereon the palace of David was built, the *royal* residence of the kings of Judah—a striking figure of the priestly and kingly offices meeting in Christ. Zion, then, was situated in the best part of the world—Canaan, the land which flowed with milk and honey—in the best part of that land—in Judah's portion, in the best part of his heritage—Jerusalem—and in the best part of that metropolis—the highest point, the “city of David.” Let the interested reader carefully ponder the following passages and observe the precious things said of Zion—Psalm 48:2-3; 50:2; 132:13-14; 133:3.

“Zion is, first, the place of God's habitation, where He dwells forever, Psalm 9:11; 76:2. Second, it is the seat of the throne, reign and kingdom of Christ, Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 24:23. Third, it is the object of divine promises innumerable, Psalm 125:1; 128:5, of Christ Himself, Isaiah 59:20. Fourth, thence did the Gospel proceed and the law of Christ come forth, Isaiah 40:9, Micah 4:2. Fifth, it was the object of God's especial love and the place of the birth of His elect, Psalm 87:2, 5. Sixth, the joy of the whole earth, Psalm 48:2. Seventh, salvation and all blessings came forth out of Zion, Psalm 14:7; 110:2; 128:5. Now these things were not spoken of nor accomplished towards that Mount Zion which was in Jerusalem absolutely, but only as it was *typical* of believers under the Gospel. So the meaning of the apostle is, that by the Gospel believers do come to that state wherein they have an interest in and a right to all the blessed and glorious things that are spoken in the Scriptures concerning and to Zion. All the privileges ascribed, all the promises made to it, are theirs. Zion is the place of God's especial gracious residence, of the throne of Christ in His reign, the object of all promises. This is the first privilege of believers under the Gospel. They come to Mount Zion, they are interested in all the promises of God recorded in the Scriptures made to Zion—in all the love and care of God expressed towards it, in all the spiritual glories assigned to it. The things spoken of it were never accomplished in the earthly Zion, but only typically. Spiritually, and in their reality, they belong to believers under the New Testament” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

The contrasts between Sinai and Sion were very marked. The former was located in one of the dreariest and driest places on earth, a “howling desert,” the other was situated in the midst of that land which flowed with milk and honey. The one was ugly, barren, forbidding, the other was “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth.” Sinai was enveloped in “blackness and darkness,” while Sion signified “sunny” or “shown upon.” God came down on Sinai for only a brief moment, but He dwells in Sion “forever.” On the former He appeared in terrible majesty, in

the other He is manifested in grace and blessing. At Sinai the typical mediator trembled and quaked, on Sion Christ is crowned with glory and honour.

“But ye are come to mount Zion” (Heb 12:22). By this, then, we understand, first, that in being brought to Christ, the believer comes to the antitypical, the spiritual, Sion. Second, more specifically, we understand by this expression that believers are come to *the throne of grace*. Just as, originally, the historical Sion was *a menace* to Israel, so while we were under the curse of the law, God’s throne was one of *judgment*. But just as David (the “Beloved”) secured Sion for Israel and it became the place of blessing, where God abode in grace, so as the result of Christ’s work, the throne of heaven has become the throne of grace, He being Himself seated thereon. Third, in its wider scope, it signifies that believers have a right or title to all the good and glorious things spoken of and to Sion in the Old Testament.

“And unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22), by which we understand heaven itself, of which the earthly Jerusalem—the seat and centre of the worship of God—was the emblem. From earliest times the saints were taught by the Holy Spirit to contemplate the future blessedness of the righteous under the image of a splendid “city,” reared on permanent foundations. Of Abraham it is declared, “He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). The force of that statement is best perceived in the light of the previous verse, “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb 11:9) Abraham was given to realise that Canaan was but a figure of his everlasting heritage, and therefore did he look forward to (Heb 10:10), “seek” (Heb 10:14), and “desire a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb 10:16). The eternal abode of the blessed is there called both a “city” and a “country.”

Many are the allusions to this “city” in the Psalms and the prophets. We single out a few of the more prominent ones. “There is a river [The Spirit], the streams [His graces] whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High” (Psa 46:4). “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness” (Psa 48:1). “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (Psa 87:3). “He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psa 107:7). “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks” (Isa 26:1). It is to be noted that in several passages the “city” is mentioned with particular reference to “Zion,” for we can only have access to God via the throne of grace, John 14:6.

The “city of the living God” (Heb 12:22) intimates the *nearness* of the saints to God, for Jerusalem was adjacent to Zion—their homes and dwellings were near to *His*. This figure of the “city” is also found in, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but *fellowcitizens* with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph 2:19)—see too Revelation 3:12. It is designated “the heavenly Jerusalem” in contrast from the earthly, the “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal 4:26). It is referred to again in Hebrews 13:14. A “city” is a place of permanent residence, in contrast from the moving tent of the wilderness. In Bible times a “city” was a place of safety, being surrounded by strong and high walls, so in heaven we shall be eternally secure from sin and Satan, death and every enemy. A city is well stocked with provisions, so in heaven nothing is lacking which is good and blessed.

“But ye are come unto...the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22) “The apostle herein prefers the privileges of the Gospel not only above what the people were made partakers of at Sinai in the wilderness, but also above all that they afterwards enjoyed in Jerusalem in the land of Canaan. In the glory and privileges of that city the Hebrews greatly

boasted. But the apostle casts *that* city in the state wherein it then was, into the *same* condition with Mount Sinai in Arabia, that is, *under bondage*, as indeed it then was (Gal 4:25), and he opposeth thereunto that ‘Jerusalem which is above’ (Gal 4:26) that is, this heavenly Jerusalem. This the second privilege of the Gospel-state, wherein all the remaining promises of the Old Testament are transferred and made over to believers. Whatever is spoken of the city of God or of Jerusalem that is *spiritual*, that contains in it the love or favour of God, it is all made theirs. Faith can lay a claim to it all.

“Believers are to ‘come’ to this city, as to be inhabitants, free denizens, possessors of it, to whom all the rights, privileges, and immunities of it do belong. And what is spoken of it in the Scripture is a ground of faith to them, and a spring of consolation. For they may with confidence make application of what is so spoken to themselves in every condition. A ‘city’ is the only place of rest, peace, safety, and honour, among men in this world—to all these in the spiritual sense we are brought by the Gospel. Whilst men are under the law they are at Sinai—in a wilderness where is none of these things—the souls of sinners can find no place of rest or safety under the law. But we have all these things by the Gospel—rest in Christ, peace with God, order in the communion of faith, safety in divine protection, and honour in our relation to God in Christ” (John Owen).

THE LIFE OF DAVID

51. His Fearful Fall

A difficult and most unwelcome task now confronts us—to contemplate and comment upon the darkest blot of all in the fair character of David. But who are we, so full of sin in ourself, unworthy to unloose his shoes, to take it upon us to sit in judgment upon the sweet Psalmist of Israel? Certainly we would not select this subject from personal choice, for it affords us no pleasure to gaze upon an eminent saint of God befouling himself in the mire of evil. O that we may be enabled to approach it with true humility, in fear and trembling, remembering that “as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19). Only then may we hope to derive any profit from our perusal; the same applies to the reader. Before proceeding further, let each of us ask God to awe our hearts by the solemn scene which is to be before us.

It must be for God’s glory and our profit that the Holy Spirit has placed on record this account of David’s fearful fall, otherwise it would not have been given a permanent place on the imperishable pages of Holy Writ. But in order to derive any good from it for our souls, it is surely necessary that we approach this sad incident with a sober mind and in a spirit of meekness “considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). This inspired record is to be regarded as a divine beacon, warning us of the rocks upon which David’s life was wrecked—as a danger-signal, bidding us be on our guard, lest we, through unwatchfulness, experience a similar calamity. Viewed thus, there are valuable lessons to be learned. Instruction which will stand us in good stead if it be humbly appropriated.

The fearful fall of David supplies a concrete exemplification of many solemn statements of Scripture concerning the nature and character of fallen man. Its teaching in regard to human depravity is very pointed and unpalatable, and often has it been made a subject of unholy jest by godless scoffers. Such declarations as, “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21), “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9), “In my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18), are highly objectionable to human pride, yet *the truth* of them cannot be gainsaid. Fearful and forbidding as are such descriptions of fallen man, nevertheless their accuracy is illustrated and demonstrated again and again in the lives of Bible characters, as well as in the world today.

Rightly has it been said that, “One of the most astounding demonstrations of the truth of the Bible is its unhesitating revelation and denunciation of sin, in the professed follower of God. It conceals nothing. On the contrary, it pulls aside the veil and discloses all. It condones nothing. Instead, it either utters the terrible wrath of God against the guilty one or records His judgments as they fall upon the unhappy sinner, even to the third and fourth generation (Exo 34:7).

“It exalts Noah as a preacher of righteousness in an evil and violent generation—with equal faithfulness it records his drunkenness and shame (Gen 9:20-21). Abraham is set before us as a man of faith. In the hour of famine, instead of waiting in quietness upon God, he goes down into Egypt. Once there, he persuades his wife to misrepresent her relationship to him, and through the acted falsehood imperils his peace and her own (Gen 12:12-13). Lot falls away after his deliverance from Sodom, and through love of wine is subjected to the lust of his wanton daughters. Aaron and Miriam are filled with jealousy and speak evilly against Moses, their brother. Moses speaks unadvisedly with his lips and is shut out from the land of promise. The white light of truth flashes on every page, and the faults, the follies, the sins, and inexcusable iniquities of those who call themselves the people and servants of God, are seen in all their repulsive forms” (I. M. Haldeman, 1845-1933).

Thus it was in the tragic case now before us. The fearful conduct of David reveals to us with terrible vividness that not only is the natural man a fallen and depraved creature, but also that the redeemed and regenerated man is liable to fall into the most heinous evil. Yea, that unless God is pleased to sovereignly interpose, unwatchfulness on the part of the believer is certain to issue in consequences highly dishonouring to the Lord and fearfully injurious to himself. This it is which above all else makes our present portion so unspeakably solemn. Here we behold the lusts of the flesh allowed full sway not by a man of the world, but by a member of the household of faith. Here we behold a saint, eminent in holiness, in an unguarded moment, surprised, seduced, and led captive by the devil. The “flesh” in the believer is no different and no better than the flesh in an unbeliever!

Yes, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, who had enjoyed such long and close communion with God, still had the “flesh” within him, and because he *failed to mortify* its lusts, he now flung away the joys of divine fellowship, defiled his conscience, ruined his soul’s prosperity, brought down upon himself (for all his remaining years) a storm of calamities, and made his name and religion a target for the arrows of sarcasm and blasphemy of each succeeding generation. Every claim that God had upon him, every obligation of his high office, all the fences which divine mercy had provided, were ruthlessly trampled underfoot by the fiery lust now burning in him. He who in the day of his distress cried, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Psa 42:2) now lusted after a forbidden object. Alas, what is man? Truly “man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psa 39:5).

But how are we to account for David's fearful fall? Why was it that he succumbed so readily in the presence of temptation? What was it that led up to and occasioned his heinous sin? These questions are capable of a twofold answer, according as we view them in the light of the high sovereignty of God or the responsibility of man. For the present we shall consider them from the latter viewpoint. And it is here we should derive the most practical help for our own souls. It is in tracing the *relation* between God's chastisements and what occasions them, between men's sins and what leads up to them, that we discover what is most essential for us to lay to heart. The reasons why Abraham "went *down* to Egypt" (Gen 12:10) are revealed in the context. Peter's denial of Christ may be traced back to his self-confidence in following his Master "afar off." And we shall see, the divine record enables us to trace David's fall back to the springs which occasioned it.

"And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house" (2Sa 11:1-4). We cannot do better than seek to fill in the outline of Matthew Henry's on these verses. First, the occasions of this sin, second, the steps of sin, third, the aggravations of the sin.

The occasions of or what led up to David's fearful fall are plainly intimated in the above verses. We begin by noticing the time-mark here mentioned, "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle" (2Sa 11:1), which signifies, at the season of spring, after the winter is over. Following the period of enforced inactivity, upon the return of favourable weather, the military activities against the Ammonites were resumed. Joab and the army went forth, "BUT David tarried still at Jerusalem" (2Sam 11:1) Ominous "But," noting the Spirit's disapproval at the king's conduct. Here is the first key which explains what follows, and we do well to weigh it attentively, for it is recorded "for *our* learning" and warning. Reduced to its simplest terms, that which is here signified is *David's failure to follow the path of duty*.

It is obvious that at this time the king's place—his accustomed one hitherto (see 2Sam 10:17)—was at the head of his fighting men, leading them to the overthrow of Israel's enemies. Had he been out fighting the battles of the Lord, he had not been subject to the temptation which soon confronted him. It may appear a very trifling matter in our eyes that the king should tarry at Jerusalem. If so, it shows we sadly fail to view things in their proper perspective—it is never a trifling matter to forsake *the post of obligation*, be that post the most menial one. The fact is that we cannot count upon divine protection when we forsake the path of duty. *That* was the force of our Saviour's reply when the devil bade Him cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple—that pinnacle lay not in the path of His duty, hence His "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

David relaxed when he should have girded on the sword. He preferred the luxuries of the palace to the hardships of the battlefield! Ah, it is so easy to follow the line of least resistance. It requires grace (diligently sought) to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2Ti 2:3). Alas that David had failed to profit from a previous failure along this same line—when he had *sought rest* among the Philistines at an earlier date, he fell readily into sin (1Sa 21:13), so it

was now, when he sought ease in Jerusalem. The important principle here for the Christian to lay to heart is, David had *taken off his armour*, and therefore he was without protection when the enemy assailed him. Ah, my reader, this world is no place to rest in, rather is it the arena where faith has to wage its fight, and that fight is certain to be a losing one if we disregard that exhortation, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11).

“And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house” (2Sa 11:2). Here is the second thing for us to observe. Not only had David shunned the post of duty, but he was guilty of *slothfulness*. It was not the slumbers of nighttime which the Spirit here takes notice of, for it was eveningtide when he “arose”—it was the afternoon which he had wasted in self-luxuriation. David had failed to redeem the time. He was not engaged either in seeking to be of use to others or in improving himself. Laziness gives great advantage to the tempter. It was “while men slept” that the enemy “came and sowed tares among the wheat” (Mat 13:25). It is written “The hand of the diligent shall bear rule [in measure, over his lusts]; but the slothful shall be *under tribute*” (Pro 12:24).

What a word is this, “I went by the field of *the slothful*, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, *lo*, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down” (Pro 24:30-31). Does not the reader perceive the *spiritual* meaning of this—the “field” is his life, open before all, the “vineyard” (private property) is his heart. And what a state they are in—through idle neglect, filled with that which is obnoxious to God and worthless to men. “Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction” (Pro 24:32). Do *we*? do we lay it to heart and profit therefrom when we behold so many wrecked and fruitless lives around us—ruined by spiritual *indolence*. “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth; and thy want as an armed man” (Pro 24:33-34)—are not those verses a solemn commentary on 2 Samuel 11:2!

“And from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon” (2Sa 11:2). Here is the third thing—a *wandering eye*. In Isaiah 33:15-16, we are told concerning the one that “shutteth his eye from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks.” Alas, this is what David did not do. Instead, he suffered his eyes to dwell upon an alluring but prohibited object. Among his prayers was this petition, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity” (Psa 119:37), but we cannot expect God to answer us if we deliberately spy upon the privacy of others. We turn now to consider the actual steps in this fall.

“And David sent and inquired after the woman” (2Sa 11:3). He purposed now to satisfy his lust. He who had once boasted, “I *will* behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I *will* walk within my house with a perfect heart. I *will* set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A forward heart shall depart from me: I *will not* know a wicked person” (Psa 101:2-4), now determined to commit adultery. Note the repeated “I will” in the above passage, and learn therefrom how much the “free will” of man is worth!

“And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2Sa 11:3). Here was calm deliberation and pre-meditation on the part of David. Here too was a merciful interposition on the part of God, for one of the king’s servants dared to remind his royal master that the woman he was inquiring about was the *wife* of another. How often does the Lord in His grace and faithfulness place some

obstacle across our path, when we are planning something which is evil in His sight! It is this which renders our sin far worse, when we defiantly break through any hedge which the providence of God places about us. O that we may draw back with a shudder when such obstacles confront us, and not rush blindly like an ox to the slaughter.

“And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her” (2Sa 11:4). The order is very solemn. First “he saw” (2Sa 11:2), then he “sent and inquired” (2Sa 11:3), and now “he lay with her” (2Sa 11:4). Yet that does not give us the complete picture. We need to go back to verse 1 in order to take in the entire scene, and as we do, we obtain a vivid and solemn illustration of what is declared in James 1:14-15. First, David was “drawn away of his own lust” (Jam 1:14)—of fleshly ease and indolence. Second, he was then “enticed” (Jam 1:14)—by the sight of a beautiful woman. Third, “then when lust had conceived, it bringeth forth sin” (Jam 1:15)—that of premeditated adultery, and as the terrible sequel shows, “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth *death*”—the murder of Uriah her husband.

The *aggravations* of his sin were marked and many. First, David was no longer a hot-blooded youth, but a man of some fifty years of age. Second, he was not a single man, but one who already had several wives of his own—this is emphasised in 2Sa 12:8, when God sent the prophet to charge him with his wickedness. Third, he had sons who had almost reached the age of manhood. What a fearful example for a father to set before them! Fourth, he was the king of Israel, and therefore under binding obligation to set before his subjects a pattern of righteousness. Fifth, Uriah, the man whom he so grievously wronged, was even then hazarding his life in the king’s service. And above all, he was a child of God, and as such, under bonds to honour and glorify His name.

THE DIVINE COVENANTS

4. The Abrahamic (Continued)

In the last two months’ articles upon this most interesting subject, we sought to establish the basic fact that the promises of God to Abraham were never made to his natural descendants, but rather to his *spiritual* “seed,” that is, to those possessing a like faith with his. Consequently, the *unbelieving* posterity of Jacob were as much excluded from the spiritual blessings of the covenant as were the offspring of Ishmael and Esau. Then we sought to show, by an appeal to Romans 4:13-16, Galatians 3:16-18, 29, Hebrews 11:9-16 that *all* who belong to Christ have a joint-heritage with Abraham. At the close of last month’s paper, we endeavoured to dispose of the objection that the inheritance promised to Abraham was merely an “earthly” one. Before proceeding further, we make a suggestive quotation from the writings of Robert Haldane (1764-1842).

“The land of Canaan was a type of the heavenly country. It was the inheritance given by promise to Abraham and his posterity—as his descendants after the flesh inherited the one, so his spiritual seed shall inherit the other. Canaan was the land of rest, after the toils and dangers of the

wilderness. To make it a fit inheritance, and an emblem of that inheritance which is undefiled, and into which there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, it was cleared of the ungodly inhabitants. As the introduction of the people of Israel into that land was not effected by their own power or efforts (Jos 24:12, Psa 44:4), but by the unmerited goodness and power of Go, so the children of God do not obtain possession of the heavenly inheritance by their own power or efforts, but by the free grace and power of God (Rom 9:16). As those who believed not were excluded from Canaan, so all unbelievers will be excluded from heaven. As Moses could not lead the people of Israel into Canaan, that honour being reserved for Joshua, so it is not by the law that the people of God shall enter heaven, but by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the true Joshua. No other country on earth could have been selected as a fitter emblem of heaven. It is called in Scripture ‘the pleasant land’ (Psa 106:24), ‘the glory of all lands’ (Eze 20:6), ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’ (Eze 20:6).”

Not only was Palestine a striking and beautiful type of heaven, but the promise of the heavenly Canaan was couched under the promise of the earthly Canaan. The patriarchs themselves so understood it, as is abundantly evident from Hebrews 11. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed” (Heb 11:8)—that “place” which he was to afterward receive “for an inheritance” could not be the earthly Canaan, for we are distinctly told that God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on” (Act 7:5), and in the absence of any scriptural statement to that effect, it would seem most incongruous to suppose that after spending four thousand years in heaven, the patriarch, after the resurrection, will again reside upon earth. No, his hope concerned a “heavenly country” (Heb 11:14, 16), yet no promise concerning *it* is found anywhere in the Old Testament, unless it be the real kernel inside the promise of the earthly Canaan. That *our* “hope” is the same as Abraham’s is clear from Hebrews 6:17-19.

In addition to the two great promises which our patriarch received, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed and the inheritance be secured to them, was the still greater and yet more comprehensive assurance “to be a *God* unto thee, and to thy seed after thee....I will be their *God*” (Gen 17:7-8). This divine declaration was designed to make known the infinitely condescending relation which JEHOVAH meant to sustain to His believing people, and to encourage them in the exercise of strong confidence in Him. It was a new revelation to Abraham of the gracious intercourse which He would maintain with them, for so far as Scripture records no similar word has been given to any of the saints which preceded. Here, then, was a further and fuller unfolding of the divine communications under the Abrahamic Covenant, a distinct advance upon what had been previously revealed.

When the Most High promises to be a *God* unto any, it is in effect declaring that He takes them into His favour and under His protection, that *He* will be their portion, and that there is nothing good—with a wise respect to their welfare—which He will withhold from them. All there is of evil which needs to be averted, all there is of real good that can suitably be bestowed, is included in this grand assurance. Our finite minds are incapable of defining the capacity of God to bless, or to adequately comprehend all that such a statement includes. Its application is not limited to this life only, but also looks forward to the never-ending ages of eternity. The great JEHOVAH is solemnly pledged to guide, guard, glorify His covenant people, “*My God* shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:19).

Now each of the promises to Abraham received a *double* fulfillment—a “letter” and a “spirit,” or as we prefer to designate them, a carnal and a spiritual. “Thou shalt be a father of many nations....and kings shall come out of thee” (Gen 17:4-6). In addition to the Israelites, Abraham

was the father of the Ishmaelites and the various children of Keturah (Gen 25:1-2). But these were all born after the flesh (Gal 4:23), and were only a figure of the real seed, the spiritual. This is clear from, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure *to all the seed*; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is *the father of us all*, (as it is written, I have made thee *a father of many nations*)” (Rom. 4:16-17). Thus, in the truest and highest sense, Abraham was the father of *believers*, whether Jews or Gentiles, and of them *only*. In John 8:39 and 44, Christ emphatically denied that Abraham was the “father” of the unbelieving Jews of His day.

“And I will establish my *covenant* between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:7). The making good of this was adumbrated when Israel after the flesh was taken into covenant by JEHOVAH at Sinai, whereby He formally became their God and acknowledged them as His people, Exodus 19:5-6, Leviticus 26:12, etc. But the actual and ultimate accomplishment of Genesis 17:7 is in connection with the spiritual Israel, Abraham’s children by faith, and this by a “better covenant.” For with the true house of Israel He says, “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people....I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:10, 12).

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, *the land* wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8). Israel’s conquest and occupation of the earthly Canaan in the days of Joshua was the figurative and lower fulfillment of this promise. As we have already shown, its spiritual realisation lies in the possession of the “better country,” which those who are of the faith of Abraham shall eternally inherit. Thus it was that the patriarchs themselves understood this promise, as is unmistakably evident from Hebrews 11:9-16—their faith was more especially directed to the “*heavenly country*,” of which the earthly was but an emblem.

The same truth was brought out clearly in our Lord’s reasoning with the Sadducees, who denied all that was spiritual. “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Luk 20:37). The covenant-promises taught the patriarchs that their resurrection and glorification was necessary to the fulfillment of them. That the “Canaan” in which they were to dwell after the resurrection was to be, not on earth, but in heaven, is equally plain from the previous part of this same conversation of Christ, “The children of *this* world [the earthly Canaan in which the Sadducees then were] marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain *that* world [the heavenly Canaan], and the resurrection from the dead, [to prepare them for it] neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels” (Luk 20:34-36).

The apostle Paul gave an exposition of the covenant-promises in perfect accord with that which we have just considered from the lips of the Lord Jesus. In his defence before King Agrippa, he hesitated not to say, and that in the presence of the Jewish leaders, “I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews” (Act 26:6-7). And *what* was that “promise”? Their unimpeded and happy enjoyment of the land of Palestine? No indeed, but “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should *raise the dead*?” (Act 26:8). So also, when before Felix, he declared, “I confess unto thee, that after the way which they [the unbelieving Jews] call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written *in the law* and in the prophets: and

have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be *a resurrection* of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Act 24:14-15).

But where is the promise made unto the fathers of the resurrection from the dead “written *in the law*”? The answer is, nowhere, unless it be *in the covenant-promises* made to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. Nor is it there, except in the sense in which they have now been explained. God will raise from the dead all the *spiritual* seed of Abraham, and will give them “for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8) that Canaan above, of which the Canaan on earth was the appointed emblem and shadow. Rightly did James Haldane point out that “One great means by which Satan has succeeded in corrupting the Gospel, has been the blending [we may add “the confusing”] of the literal and spiritual fulfillment of these promises—thus confounding the old and new covenants. This is seen in the attempts made to apply to the carnal ‘seed’ of believers [Christians] the promises made to the spiritual ‘seed of Abraham.’”

We are not unmindful that some of our readers are likely to object strongly to what they would term this “spiritualizing” method of interpreting the Scriptures. But let it be pointed out that this giving to the covenant-promises both a “letter” and “spirit” significance is not a theory formed to serve a purpose—it is in keeping with and required by every part of the Old Testament dispensation, wherein the things of earth were employed to shadow forth heavenly realities, types pointing forward to antitypes. Take for example the temple. It was “the house of God” in the letter, but Christ and His church is so in the spirit. To now call any earthly building “the house of God” is as far below the sense which that expression bears when it is applied to the church of Christ, as calling the *nation* of Israel the “people of God” was far below the meaning of that phrase when applied to the *spiritual* Israel (Gal 6:16).

Things are said of the house of God in the letter which only fully suit the spirit. Solomon declared, “I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever” (1Ki 8:13). Now the incongruity of supposing that *He* whom “the heaven of heavens cannot contain” should dwell in any earthly and material house forever, as “a settled habitation,” is only removed by referring it to the spirit. Christ’s body (personal and mystical) is the only “temple” (Joh 2:19, 21; Eph 2:18-22) of which this is fully true. This is not open to argument. God *did not* “dwell forever” in the temple built by Solomon, for it was destroyed thousands of years ago, but in His *spiritual* “temple” it is accomplished to its utmost extent. According to the same principle must the covenant-promises be interpreted. The temporal things promised therein being but images of those “better things” which God promised to bestow upon Abraham’s believing children.

Reviewing the ground now covered, let us point out that the first great purpose of the covenant was to make known *the stock* from which the Messiah was to spring. Second, this covenant revealed that God’s ultimate design was the *worldwide* diffusion of the benefits it announced. Before Nimrod, the whole race was as one language and had an easy intercourse with each other. But upon the confusion of tongues, they were divided and scattered abroad, and were all alike fast falling into a state of confirmed defection from God. When Abraham was called, and his family selected as a people to whom God was to communicate a knowledge of His will, and attach (by sovereign grace) to His service, it would be natural to infer that the rest of the nations were totally and finally abandoned to their own evil devices, and that only the one favoured nation would participate in the triumphs of the future Deliverer. It is instructive to note how this logical, but erroneous conclusion was anticipated by God from the beginning, and refuted by the very terms of the covenant which He made with Abraham.

The patriarch and his descendants were indeed set apart from all others—peculiar privileges and blessings of the highest value were conferred upon them. But at the very conferring of them the Lord gave an express intimation that those privileges were confined to them *in trust*, and that the Israelitish theocracy was only a *temporary* arrangement, for in Abraham would “*all families of the earth be blessed*” (Gen 12:3). Thus clear announcement was made that the time would come when the middle wall of partition would be broken down and all restrictions removed, and the blessings of Abraham be extended to a far wider circle. The *external* arrangements of the covenant were simply a necessity for a time, with the object of securing grander and more comprehensive results. “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen 22:18) was a definite publication of the *international* scope of the divine mercy.

Thus, the Abrahamic Covenant, taken as a whole, not only defined the particular line from which the Messiah was to spring, announced the needful (temporal) arrangements in preparation for His appearing, and the extent to which His glorious work was destined to reach, but it placed in a clearer light the relation which (in consequence of it) God condescended to sustain to His redeemed people—and it supplied a striking intimation and typification of the *nature of* the blessings, which, in virtue of that relation, He designed to confer upon them. It was a wonderful enlargement of revelation. It was the Gospel in figure and is so regarded in the New Testament (Joh 8:56, Gal 3:8). The apostle Paul refers to the Abrahamic Covenant again and again as foreshadowing and illustrating the privileges bestowed upon Christians, and of the principle on which those privileges are conferred—a faith which is evidenced by obedience.

UNION AND COMMUNION

7. Practical

What is divine “salvation”? It is a rescuing or deliverance. From what? From the penalty, power, and presence of sin. How is it effected? By the joint-operations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May a real Christian regard himself as a “saved” person? In one sense, yes—in another sense, no. What do you mean? This, that God’s salvation is presented to us in Scripture under three tenses, past, present, and future. There is a real sense in which every Christian has already been saved; there is a real sense in which every Christian is now being saved; and there is a real sense in which the salvation of every Christian on earth is yet future. Every Christian on earth has been saved from the penalty of sin, because Christ suffered it in his stead. But the sinful nature is left within, and though its complete dominion over us has been broken, it is still active and operative, and from its power and defiling effects we need saving.

Now the design of God in saving His people is to recover them from the fall, to deliver them from its effects, to restore them to their state of happy fellowship with Him. It is true, blessedly true, that the redeemed gain far more through the last Adam than they lost by the first Adam. Yet that in nowise conflicts with what we have said in the preceding sentence—the surpassing gain through Christ will come before us (D.V.) in the final article of this series. Before the fall, we, in

Adam, were in blissful communion with God. Our nature was in tune with His, our joy lay in a ready responsiveness to His will. God and man were then of one accord, each finding delight in the other, yet the difference between the Creator and the creature being suitably sustained by the relation which was appointed—that of Sovereign and subject.

Only as Sovereign and subject could God and man maintain their relative positions. There must be the exercise of *authority* on the part of the former, and of *submission* on the part of the latter. Thereby there was a mutual indwelling of the one and the other—God ruling, man obeying. Such mutual indwelling and concord would daily become more intimate and confident—man increasingly perceiving the exceeding excellency of the commandments he was keeping (and of Him whose nature and will those commandments discovered), and God having increasing delight in the growing intelligence and love by which His subject obeyed. Thus at the beginning, holiness and happiness were made inseparable in the experience of the creature—holiness in walking in complete subjection to his Maker’s revealed will, happiness in the joyous fellowship which this secured. Thus, too, were the relative positions and relations of Creator and creature perfectly sustained.

But alas, sin entered. Entered by Eve’s entertaining the serpent’s suggestion that God’s restraints were tyrannical and irksome, and freedom from them being greatly to be desired, culminating in the overt act of rebellious disobedience. In consequence thereof a breach was made. Harmony no longer existed between God and man, and happy fellowship which already obtained was broken. Henceforth, God and disobedient man must dwell apart, so Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise. Outside paradise *away from God*, were all their descendants born—“afar off” (Eph. 2:17) are the awful words written over the brow of all the first Adam’s offspring, “*alienated from the life of God*” (Eph 4:18). “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5) is true of all alike, and because this is so, “the wicked are *estranged from the womb*” (Psa 58:3).

How this terrible situation is counteracted by God in the saving of His people we have endeavoured to show in the preceding articles of this series. Christ was made their Head, and their redemption was entrusted to Him—a union was established between them. First, a mystical union, when they were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Second, a federal union, whereby Christ should act as their Representative and Surety. Third, a vital union, by the incarnation, when He assumed their nature, and by regeneration, when they became partakers of His nature. Fourth, a saving union, when the soul (previously quickened) exercises faith, lays hold of and cleaves unto Christ. Then is it that the trusting sinner enters into the legal benefits which the Saviour’s atonement secured for him, “By him all that believe are justified from all things” (Act 13:39). Saving union is the personal acceptance of Christ on His own terms. The penitent heart now rests upon Christ as an all-sufficient sacrifice for all his sins.

A new relation has been entered into by the believer which radically changes the course of his life, and which is to regulate all of his future conduct. He is no longer his own. He has given himself to the Lord (2Co 8:5). Henceforth to please and honour Him must be his paramount concern. As the wedding, when the knot is tied, is but the beginning of married life, so the soul’s surrender to and acceptance of Christ as Lord, is but the commencement of the Christian life. As the bride has turned her back upon all other lovers and solemnly vowed to be faithful to and obey her husband in all things, so the believer has disowned all other lords and promised to be in subjection to Christ alone (Isa 26:13). As the purpose of marriage is the production of offspring, so we read, “Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be *married*

to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should *bring forth fruit* unto God” (Rom 7:4).

Marriage, then, is a new beginning, the entering into a new order of things, the starting point of *a fresh life*. Before her marriage, the woman, perhaps, was alone in the world, without father or brothers to defend her. She had to look after herself and plan her own career and course. But now she has taken upon her the marriage-yoke, she has given herself up to the one who loves her more dearly than any other creature, to the one who has won her heart, and who has now assumed the sole responsibility of being her provider and protector. It is now *for her good* to meekly submit to her husband’s loving rule (1Pe 3:1-6), to seek and promote his interests, to adorn the home he has made for her. His will is supreme. Her good is his concern and it is her welfare to act in submission to his wishes. Such is the ideal of married life. On the one hand, love’s authority maintained by the head of the home, on the other, love’s obedience joyously rendered by the dutiful and devoted wife—a shadowing forth of the relation which exists between the Redeemer and His redeemed, and the new order of things into which the saved soul enters.

Marriage is a means to an end, the making possible of wedded union, with its responsibilities and privileges, its duties, and joys. In like manner, saving union with Christ is a means to an end, the making possible of *the Christian life*, which is to *evidence* the new relationship that has been entered into. In other words, just as the vital union between Christ and the Christian (effected by the Spirit at the new birth) capacitates the soul for a saving union with Christ (accomplished by believing in Him), so that saving union, in turn, makes way for a *practical union* with Him. Thus, at the very outset, the Lord Jesus says to the sin-weary and conscience-burdened sinner who comes to Him for relief, “Take my *yoke* upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls”! (Mat 11:29). Now a “yoke” is that which harnesses two oxen, that they may walk and work *together*, and the Lord employed this figure to denote the relation now obtaining between Himself and His people.

In last month’s article we pointed out that one of the main characteristics which distinguishes the saving from the vital union is, that in the latter the soul is *active*, whereas in the former the soul was *passive*. That is to say, in regeneration something was wrought *in* us, but in connection with salvation something is required *of* us, namely, our voluntary act of surrendering to, laying hold of, and cleaving unto Christ. So is it in connection with the *practical* union which exists between the Saviour and the saved. He does not place the yoke upon us, but says “*Take* my yoke upon you.” It is a voluntary and conscious act upon *our* part. The figure is a very plain one. Previously the ox roamed at large in the fields, but now it is no longer free to please itself—it is subservient to the will of its owner and master. The “yoke,” then, speaks of *subjection*, and thus it is with the believer. He has yielded himself to the claims of Christ, bowed to His Lordship, and entered into the place of submission, to be directed and used of Him.

But alas, we now witness very little in actual realization of what we have said above, either in the natural or the spiritual sphere. The “yoke” is looked upon as something which is objectionable. Our lot is cast in a day when the spirit of lawlessness is rife on every hand, when any restraints are regarded as irksome and repellent. The equality of the sexes, the woman’s rights, the repudiation of the man’s headship, is being proclaimed in almost every quarter. The modern wife is “willing to be led” (providing the leading suits her whims), but refuses to be ruled. The idea of meekly *obeying* her husband is altogether foreign to her disposition and ideas. And my readers, *that* is only an adumbration on the lower plane of what now obtains so widely in the religious sphere. Multitudes profess to be resting on the finished work of Christ, but they *refuse*

His “yoke.” They want to be saved from hell, but they do not want His commandments, and the two cannot be separated.

In days gone by, preachers frequently made it plain that, “No cross, no crown.” Alas, the pulpit is now pandering to a self-indulging generation. But God has not changed, nor has He lowered the claims of His holiness. Christ *must be followed* if ever we are to arrive at the Place where He has gone, and to “follow” Christ is to take upon us *His* “yoke”—to enter the same position of servitude and subjection which He did. Christ “pleased not himself” (Rom 15:3), and His imperative word is, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat 16:24). Christ lived in full submission to the revealed will of God, and He left us an “example” that we should “follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21). We must “suffer *with* him” if ever we are to be “glorified *together*” (Rom 8:17).

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). Here again is brought before us the *practical* union which exists between Christ and His people. If there is to be true fellowship, there must first be harmony, oneness of accord in mind and will. All real communion is based upon union, and as the “*walk together*” intimates, it is not the vital or the saving union which is there in view, but the practical—the actual living out of the Christian life. And the Christian life (alas that the life of the average Christian falls so far short) is summed up in one word, “For to me to live *is Christ*” (Phi 1:21). But Christ is holy, and He will not walk with us in any of the by-paths of unrighteousness, “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?” (2Co 6:14-15).

Just as the ideal married life can only be maintained by the exercise of love’s authority on the one hand and love’s obedience on the other, so it is in the Christian life. “If ye love me,” says Christ, “keep my commandments” (Joh 14:15). *Obedience* is not only the prime condition of practical union and communion with Christ, but it is of its very essence, for only thus is restored the relation which existed between God and His creature before sin entered—love’s rule and love’s submission. Before the fall, there was perfect complacency on both sides, Creator and creature dwelling in each other with unalloyed satisfaction, as the “very good” of Genesis 1:31 clearly denotes. Yet that mutual indwelling of God in man and man in God was *not procured* by man’s keeping God’s commandments, rather was that the channel of its outgoing and conscious realization, and only thus could they maintain their relative positions of Sovereign and servant.

We repeat what was said in an earlier paragraph—the grand design in salvation is to bring us back again into communion with God in Christ—not merely into a nominal communion, but into a real, intelligent, and joyous one. But “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3)—walk together in a way of holy and spiritual fellowship? No indeed, for *that* we must be of one mind and will with Christ Himself. For *that* we must receive His commandments into our hearts, be well-pleased with them, and live under their controlling influence. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we *walk in the light*, as he is in the light, *we have fellowship* one with another” (1Jo 1:5-7).

“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Act 11:21-23). Having “*turned unto* the Lord” these young converts were now exhorted to “*cleave unto* the Lord,” that is, since a saving union with Christ had been effected,

they were bidden to “with purpose of heart” maintain a practical union and communion with Him. To “cleave unto the Lord” is to live a life of dependence upon and devotedness unto Him. Having “come” to Him, they are now to diligently “follow” him, or “to walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6). Only by the continued exercise of faith, a bold profession of His name, and obedience to His commands, can we “follow on to know the LORD” (Hos 6:3).

Practical union with Christ consists in the exercise of *obedience*, and that is impossible till there has been a saving union. The only kind of obedience which is acceptable to God is evangelical obedience, that is “the obedience *of faith*” (Rom 16:26)—an obedience which springs from faith, which is animated by faith. There can be no true obedience before faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6), and therefore without faith it is impossible to obey Him. Faith is (from our side) the bond of union which unites with Christ, and obedience is the fruit of that believing union, see Romans 7:4 again—all “fruit” before marriage is bastard. Our persons must first be accepted in Christ before our services can be pleasing to God. All the good works recorded in Hebrews 11 were the fruits or obedience of faith.

Though inseparably connected, faith and obedience are quite distinct. Faith is the principle, obedience is the product. Faith is the cause, obedience is the effect. Faith is the root, obedience is the fruit. By faith we receive and own Christ as our rightful Lord, by obedience we regulate our conduct according to His commands. By faith a saving union with Christ is effected, by obedience a practical union with Him is maintained. “He that hath my commandments, and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (Joh 14:21). Christ only *manifests* Himself in the intimacies of His love to those who are treading the path of obedience. A striking illustration of this is seen by a comparison of Genesis 18 and 19, “*the LORD* appeared unto” Abraham (Gen 18:1) accompanied by two angels, manifesting Himself in human form. But only the “two angels” came to Lot (Gen 19:1), who was not walking in practical union with the Lord. O how much we miss by allowing self-will to dominate and regulate us.

There is another spiritual grace which is inseparably connected with faith, “Faith which *worketh by love*” (Gal 5:6). The reality and sincerity of faith is only evidenced by the presence and operations of love. Faith is the hand which works, but love is the power that moves it. Faith is the feet walking, but love is the energy that stirs them into action. Hence we find the Psalmist declaring, “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt *enlarge my heart*” (Psa 119:32). Now as there can be no saving union with Christ without faith, so there can be no practical union with Him without love. Love must be answered by love, “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26) is our loving Lord’s call. Love is the mainspring in the soul which moves every faculty and grace, and therefore is love denominated “the *fulfilling of the law*” (Rom 13:10).

True repentance also flows from love. The warmer our love to God, the stronger will be our hatred of sin, as contrary to Him. The sweeter the fellowship of Christ to our hearts, the more bitter the realization of our offenses against Him. This is that “*godly sorrow*” which worketh repentance to salvation “not to be repented of” (2Co 7:10). It is a sorrow issuing from a heart that truly loves the Lord, and which is grieved for having displeased and dishonoured Him. Love mourns the breaking of fellowship and the hiding of the Lord’s countenance. Then it is that the agonized soul cries, “The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. I remember the days of old...I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah. Hear me

speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit” (Psa 143:3-7).

In what has been said above we have sought to indicate the relation between the saving and the practical union between the believer and Christ, what practical union actually consists of, and how it is to be restored when broken—by true repentance and humble confession. As this branch of our subject is so much neglected today, as it so intimately concerns the glory of Christ, and the wellbeing of our souls, a further article thereon seems called for.

DIVINE COMFORT

Below is the editor’s first sermon in Glasgow, preached December 22, 1935, on what the world calls “Christmas Sunday.”

The Lord has given me two texts for tonight, the second one I will announce near the end. The first is “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Mat 5:4). Whatever bearing the beatitudes may yet have upon a future godly remnant of the Jews, their present application is obvious and simple. They supply a divine description of those who are the subjects and citizens of Christ’s spiritual kingdom. To me it appears the beatitudes are *eight* in number (the last being a double one), which speaks of *a new beginning*, for only those *renewed* by the Holy Spirit possess the character here delineated. Thus I regard these beatitudes as supplying us with a moral portrait of those who have been born again, and with its several features we should honestly and diligently compare our hearts and lives. It is on the second of them I feel led to speak tonight.

“Blessed are they that *mourn*: for they shall be comforted” (Mat 5:4). Now it is obvious that Christ does not here refer to *every* species of “mourning.” There are thousands of mourners in the world tonight who are not included within our text—those mourning over blighted hopes, over financial reverses, over the loss of loved ones. But alas, so far from many of them coming beneath this divine benediction, they are under God’s condemnation, nor is there any promise or guarantee that they shall ever be divinely “comforted.” There are three kinds of “mourning” referred to in the Scriptures—a *natural*, such as I have just described; a *sinful*, which is disconsolate and inordinate grief, refusing to be comforted, or a hopeless remorse like that of Judas; and a *gracious*, a “godly sorrow,” of which the Holy Spirit is the Author.

The “mourning” of our text is a *spiritual* one. The previous verse indicates the line of thought here, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Yes, “blessed are the poor,” not the poor in purse, but the poor in heart. Those who realise themselves to be spiritual bankrupts in themselves, paupers before God. That felt poverty of spirit is the very opposite of the Laodiceanism which is so rife today, that self-complacency which says, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” So it is spiritual mourning here. Furthermore, *these* “mourners” Christ pronounced “blessed.” They are so because the Spirit of God has wrought a work of grace in them, and hence they have been awakened to see and feel their lost condition. They are “blessed” because God does not leave them at that point, “They shall be comforted.”

Now it has to be acknowledged that my text brings before us an aspect of truth which is not very popular today. In this age, people had much rather hear about that which is bright and cheerful, than what is somber and doleful. The Gospel is far more acceptable than the law. People had rather hear about Christ than that which, under the Spirit, is calculated to reveal to them their deep need of Christ. Nevertheless our text raises a most important question, which I feel led to press on your hearts, and on my own, Do *I* really belong to the class which Christ here pronounces “Blessed,” for observe it is a *class*, as the plural pronoun denotes—not “blessed is he,” but “*they* that mourn.”

But why raise such a question here? Are not the majority of *us* professing Christians? Do we not believe firmly that the Scriptures are the Word of God? are we not “resting on the finished work of Christ”? are we not rejoicing in the assurance that our sins are forgiven? Ah, may I remind you of the Lord’s parable of the sower. Of the stony-ground hearer He declared, “He received the word,” and received it “with *joy*,” yet, of him Christ solemnly affirmed “yet hath he not root in himself” (Mat 13:21). And it is greatly to be feared there are many such today in orthodox circles of Christendom—the product of a superficial “evangelism,” which is so eager to secure quick and visible “results”—their conversion *was not* preceded by conviction and contrition.

There is a class which come to the great Physician, though they do not feel themselves to be desperately and deadly sick. They have a certain kind of “faith”—I dare not call it a saving faith—but it is not preceded by repentance! They apparently feed on the Lamb, but there is no “bitter herbs” (Exo 12:8). There is a “joy,” but it is not one which follows a deep sorrow. There is a “comfort” experienced, yet there is no previous “mourning.” But my dear friends, what is *the divine order*? Is there not a stripping before clothing, a wounding before healing, an abasing before exalting? Must not the ground of the hard heart be *plowed* before the good seed can enter and take root? They that are whole—in their own estimation and feelings—need not a physician, but they that are sick. How was it with Israel in Egypt—the greatest of the Old Testament types of salvation. Were not the Hebrews sorely afflicted, groaning, and crying out in deep distress, *before* God sent them a deliverer?

Turn with me now to the following Scriptures, and note carefully the *order of truth* presented in them. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa 30:5). “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psa 126:5). “The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy” (Pro 14:10). “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:3). The same order is also observable in the New Testament, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2Co 6:10). “Having received the word *in much affliction* [did you so “receive” it?], with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1Th 1:6). “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (Jam 5:13). So it is in our text, the “mourning” *precedes* the “comfort.” Therefore I press upon you, and upon myself, am I among this class of spiritual “mourners”?

The pressing importance of this question appears when we thoughtfully observe that Christ pronounces those in this class “blessed”—the divine benediction rests upon them. Do you know *what* it is which rests upon those who *do not* belong to this class? The divine *condemnation*! There is no middle ground, no third class. It is one or the other. You may remember that after Israel crossed the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan, certain ones were required to stand upon mount Gerizim and pronounce upon the obedient the *blessings* of God, while others were to stand upon mount Ebal and pronounce upon the disobedient the *curses* of God (Deu 27:12-13). So

again in Matthew 25, unto the sheep Christ says, “Come, ye *blessed* of my Father” (Mat 25:34), whereas to the goats He says, “Depart from me, ye *cursed*” (Mat 25:41). If, then, we really value our souls, if we are truly concerned as to where we shall spend eternity, it behooves us to seriously examine our hearts and make sure of *which class we belong to*.

“Blessed are they that *mourn*” (Mat 5:4). The first reference is to that initial “mourning” which ever precedes a genuine conversion. Do not misunderstand me. I am not arguing for any stereotyped experience, for any definitely defined *depth* of sorrow or any *protracted* season of grief. But I do insist (as Scripture does) that repentance *precedes* forgiveness, that there must be a real sense of sin *before* the remedy for it will even be desired. Thousands acknowledge they are sinners, who have never *mourned* over the fact. Take the woman of Luke 7, who washed the Saviour’s feet with her tears—have you ever shed any over *your* sins? Take the prodigal in Luke 15, *before* he left the far country he said, “I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luk 15:18-19). Ah, where shall we find those today with this sense of their sinnership? Take the publican of Luke 18, why did he “smote upon his *breast*” and say “God be merciful to me a sinner”? (Luk 18:13). Because he felt the plague of his own heart. So of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost—they were “pricked in their heart” (Act 2:37), and cried out!

This “mourning” springs from a sense of sin, from a tender conscience, from a broken heart. It is a godly sorrow over rebellion against God and hostility to His will. In some cases, it is a grief over the very morality in which the heart has trusted, over the self-righteousness which has caused such complacency. This “mourning” is the agonizing realisation that it was *my* sins which nailed to the cross the Lord of Glory. When Israel shall see Christ, “they shall *mourn* for him” (Zec 12:10). So it is now when, by the power of the Spirit, the contrite sinner sees Christ by faith. And it is *such* tears and groans which prepare the heart to truly welcome and receive the “balm of Gilead,” the comfort of the Gospel.

But our text is by no means to be confined unto the initial experience of conviction and contrition, for observe the tense of the verb—it is not “have mourned,” but “mourn”—a present and continual experience. The Christian himself has much to *mourn* over. The sins which he now commits—both of omission and commission are a sense of daily grief to him, or should be so, and *will be* if his conscience is tender. An ever-deepening discovery of the depravity of his nature, the plague of his heart, the sea of corruption within, ever polluting all that he does, deeply exercises him. Consciousness of the surgings of unbelief, the swellings of pride, the coldness of his love, and his paucity of fruit, make him cry, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom 7:24). An humbling recollection of past offences, “Wherefore remember, that ye being *in time past*” (Eph 2:11).

Yes, “Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves *groan* within ourselves” (Rom 8:23). Does not the Christian groan when under the disciplining rod of the Father, “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but *grievous*” (Heb 12:11). And is he not deeply pained by the awful dishonour now done to the Lord Jesus on every side. But blessed be God it is written, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that *sigh and that cry* for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Eze 9:4). So too there is a sympathetic mourning over the sorrows of others, “Weep with them that weep” (Rom 12:15).

And these holy mourners Christ pronounced “Blessed.” This is at complete variance with the world’s ideas. In all ages and climes men have deemed the prosperous and the light-hearted the happy ones, but He who spake as never man spake, declared “Blessed are the poor in

spirit....Blessed are they that mourn” (Mat 5:3-4). And *why* are these mourners “blessed”? First, because such mourning proves they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who maketh intercession for them “with *groanings* which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). Second, because this holy mourning brings them into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. When here He was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). Third, because they shall be divinely “comforted.”

Learn, then, from what has been before us, the folly of measuring the *helpfulness* of the books we read or the preaching we hear by the degree of peace and joy which it imparts to our hearts. Ah, the truth is, dear friends, that sometimes the address which is of most help and blessing, is the one which causes us to get alone with God and weep before Him! Our souls are by no means always in a fit condition to be regaled by the sweets of the Gospel. When we have flirted with the world, or indulged the lusts of the flesh, the *Holy Spirit* gives us a rebuke or admonition!

“For they shall be *comforted*” (Mat 5:4). There is a threefold reference here. First, to the initial “comfort” which immediately follows a sound conversion (one that is preceded by conviction and contrition), namely, the removal of that conscious guilt which lies as an intolerable load on the conscience. Then it is Christ says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28). Note that there again we have presupposed one who feels sin to be a “burden” *before* he comes to Christ—that is what propels him to Christ for relief. Then it is Christ gives rest to the sin-weary heart. Then it is the Holy Spirit applies the comfort of the Gospel to the stricken soul. It is the realisation of free and full forgiveness by the blood of Christ.

Second, there is continual “comforting” of the “mourning” saint by the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter. The one who mourns over his departures from Christ is comforted by the assurance that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). The one who mourns under the chastening rod of God is comforted by the promise, “Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb 12:11). The one who mourns over the awful dishonour done to his Lord in the religious world, is comforted by the fact that Satan’s time is now short, and soon Christ will bruise him beneath His feet.

Third, the final “comfort” is when we leave this world and have done with sin forever. Then shall “sorrow and sighing” (Isa 35:10) flee away. To the rich man in hell, Abraham said of the one who had begged at the gate, “Now he is *comforted*” (Luk 16:25). The best wine is reserved for the last. The “comfort” of heaven will more than compensate for all the “mourning” of earth.

The second text is, “Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luk 6:25). What a solemn commentary are these words of the Lord on the festivities of *this* week—indulging the lusts of the flesh under the pretence of keeping Christ-mass! O the unholy mirth and jollification of the world, with the sacred name of Christ tacked over it all! It is nothing but paganism perpetuated by Rome. Alas that so many professing Christians should adopt it. “A merry Christmas”—carnal indulgence over the memory of the unwanted Son of God lying in a manger!

“Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luk 6:25). This is a joy that is fleshly, the pleasures of sin for a season—unto such applies, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (Jam 4:9). There is the less need for me to speak at length on this second text, because it enunciates identically the same truth as the first, only it gives the reverse side. “Woe unto you that laugh now” (Luk 6:25). I need hardly say that the “laughter” here is not to be confined to the exercise of the facial muscles. It is a *state of heart* which the Lord is here reprehending. It is an indifference to God’s demands, an

unconcern about the claims of Christ, a thinking only about enjoying the things of time and sense. Eternal concerns are deliberately shelved. The paramount interests of the soul are ignored. Sin is regarded lightly, “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18).

“Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luk 6:25). Such “laugh” (though they may be too well-bred to do so outwardly) at the warnings of Christian friends, considering them as “kill-joys” or fanatics. They “laugh” at the solemn truth of eternal punishment, supposing it to be a bogey with which to frighten ignorant people. And so they go giddily and gaily along the broad road which leadeth to destruction—“laughing” while hastening to a hopeless eternity! How solemn is that word of God’s, “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Pro 1:26)!

Now dear friends, I have sought to hold up these texts as a mirror in which we may see ourselves, and ascertain *to which* of the two classes we belong. The class of spiritual “mourners” Christ declares *blessed*—the class of carnal “laughers,” is the one upon which He pronounces His solemn *woe*. The Lord graciously grant that in HIS light, we may “see light,” and clearly perceive to which of these diverse companies *we* really belong.

MINISTERIAL ADDRESS TO THE UNCONVERTED

Sir,—In a late conversation you desired my thoughts concerning a Scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are not a little divided, and it therefore becomes me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom, in general, I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the Word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due measure, the doctrines of either the law or the Gospel. And they apprehend that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of a carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application what they had laboured to establish in the course of their sermon.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power, yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents, and as such, besides declaring the

counsel of God in a doctrinal way *to warn them*, by His tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God in a preached Gospel in vain. Nor can it be denied but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will, perhaps, appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honoured with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation or address, while they who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labours have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than adding to their number. Now, as “he that winneth souls is wise” (Pro 11:30), and as every faithful labourer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favour of those who, besides stating the doctrines of the Gospel, endeavour, by earnest persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and intreat and warn them to consider, “How we shall escape, if we neglect so great salvation” (Heb 2:3). For it is not easy to conceive that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favour of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the truth and with itself.

But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of His authorized ministers, the apostles, are both *our rule and our warrant*. The Lord Jesus was the great Preacher of free grace, “who spake as never man spake,” and His ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared that none would come unto Him, unless drawn and taught of God, John 6:44-46. And yet He often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be *His*, might perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal, John 6:27, Luke 13:24-27, John 12:35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not of His disciples, but to the multitude. The apostles copied from their Lord—they taught that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom 9:16). Yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that *before* they had given evident signs that they were pricked in the heart as Acts 2:21) to “repent” and turn from their vanities to the living God, Acts 3:19, 14:15, 17:30. Peter’s advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point, for though he perceived him to be “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Act 8:23), he *exhorted* him to “repent” and to “pray...if perhaps the thought of thine heart might be forgiven” (Act 8:22). It may be presumed that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our readers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus, and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the apostle’s example.

You have been told that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary, and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave.

To this it may be answered that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise to warrant the attempt, for then we might expect His power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel in chapter 37 may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel ministry. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" (Eze 37:3). Our response, like that of the prophet's is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord, "O Lord, Thou knowest, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for Thee to raise them unto life; therefore *we renounce our own reasonings*, and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at Thy bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is Thine, and to Thee be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the prophet, but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived, but the word was spoken to them *considered as dry and dead*.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope He often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly *to them*, only the truths of the Gospel being declared in their hearing, but He who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave them condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which He often effects the purposes of His grace—though none of the means of grace by which He ordinarily works can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of His Spirit. Should we admit that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, *extend too far*, even to prove the impropriety of *all* exhortation universally. For when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Christ, that they may find rest, when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent and do their first works," yea, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory," in each of these cases we press them to acts for which *they* have *no* inherent power of their own, and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the Word to their hearts, we do but speak to the air and our endeavours can have no more effect in these instances than if we were to say to a dead body, "Arise, and walk." For an exertion of divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking of a hard heart, and only He who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways, they know they are mortal, and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins—that they do so, is not for want of power, but for want of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning till night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace, and though the Lord only can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel-promises, to seek to Him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do for them that which they cannot do for

themselves, and who has said “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). Perhaps it will not be easily proved that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner’s salvation from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavour to maintain a consistency in our preaching, but unless we keep the plan and manner of Scriptures constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of “consistency” may fetter our sentiments, and greatly *preclude* our usefulness. We need not wish to be more “consistent” *than the inspired writers*, nor be afraid of speaking as *they* have spoken before us! We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers *by nice reasonings* on the nature of human liberty, and the divine agency on the hearts of men, but such disquisitions *are better avoided*. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects till we arrive in the world of light. In the meantime, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favours you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with His constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amuse you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words, and while your bowels yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, John Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, “Exhortations unto believing.” It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, which I recommend to your attentive consideration. I am etc., John Newton, 1770.

N.B. We heartily commend the above to the thoughtful and prayerful perusal of those of our ministerial brethren who are inclined to be hyper-Calvinistic. The above was written by one who was a marvelous trophy of sovereign grace, deeply taught in divine things, wondrously helped in maintaining the *balance* of truth, and mightily used in the blessing of souls. Personally, we have often lamented the fact that Mr. Gadsby, and later, Mr. Philpot, followed (what we believe was the error of) William Huntington, instead of adhering to that path which had been almost uniformly trodden by the Reformers and Puritans. Had they done so, we believe that the Strict and Particular Baptist churches would be in a far healthier and livelier spiritual state than they are now in.

LOVE TO ALL THE SAINTS

How should I regard Christians who “follow not with us?” a young believer may ask. Well, how would that Great-Heart, the apostle Paul, have regarded them? Are they not children of God? Hearts may agree although heads differ, and God sees grace where we see none. If you think that these people have less light than you, their need is a claim upon your help, and believe it or not, they can teach *you* something! Be on your guard against viewing them with suspicion or contempt. You are made of exactly the same flesh and blood as they are, and the same grace is at work in them as in you. God loves persons rather than places.

You may not find every believer very approachable, but try to cultivate spiritual fellowship with *all* God's people by dwelling upon the big things that all true Christians hold in common. In this way you will help to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). Be a living link of fellowship between believers. Sympathy is better than criticism. Disbelieve those who have no faith in their fellow-Christians. Do not take the world's side against God's people.

Each group or school of thought has its own emphasis and sometimes its own phraseology. Do not attach too much importance to pious phrase—the same truth can be expressed in different ways. We should learn to welcome *all* the truth, through whatever channel it may come to us. And the gifts of Christ are for *all* His people. (E. Adams).

April

THE HOLY SPIRIT

33. The Spirit Witnessing (Part 2)

The Holy Spirit who dwelleth in Christ, the great and eternal Head of His people, dwelleth also in all the living members of His mystical body, to conform them to Him and to make them like Him in their measure. He it is who takes possession of every quickened soul, dwelling in them as the Spirit of life, of grace, of holiness, of consolation, of glory. He who made them alive *in* the Lord, now makes them alive *to* the Lord. He gives them to know the Father in the Son and their union with Christ. He leads them into communion with the Father and the Son, and fulfills all the good pleasure of His will in them, and the work of faith with power (2Th 1:11). In the carrying on of His “good work” in the soul—commenced in regeneration, and manifested in conversion to the Lord—the Spirit is pleased to act and perform the office of witness, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).

Now the office of a “witness” is to bear testimony or supply evidence for the purpose of adducing proof. The first time this term occurs is in the epistle to the Romans in 2:15, “Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also *bearing witness*, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing.” The reference is to the heathen—though they had not received from God a written revelation (like the Jews had), nevertheless, they were His creatures, responsible creatures, subject to His authority, and will yet be judged by Him. The grounds upon which God holds them accountable are, first, the revelation which He has given them of Himself in creation, which renders them “without excuse” (Rom 1:19-20), and second, the work of His law written in their hearts, that is, their rationality or “the light of nature.” But not only do their moral instincts instruct them in the difference between right and wrong, and warn them of a future day of reckoning, but their conscience also bears witness—it is a divine monitor within, *supplying evidence* that God is their Governor and Judge.

But while the Christian ever remains a creature accountable to his Maker and Ruler, he is also a child of God, and normally (that is, while he is sincerely endeavouring to walk as such), his renewed conscience bears witness to—supplies evidence of—the fact. We say “renewed conscience,” for the Christian has been renewed throughout the whole of his inner man. The genuine Christian is able to say, “We trust we have a good conscience, in all things *willing* to live honestly” (Heb 13:18)—the bent of his heart is for God and obedience to Him. Not only is there a desire to please God, but there are answerable *endeavours*, “Herein do I exercise myself, to have

always a conscience void of offence toward God, and men” (Act 24:16). When these endeavours are carried on there is inward assurance of our state, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience” (2Co 1:12).

Thus, the Christian’s sincerity is evidenced by his conscience. It is true that there is also “another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin” (Rom 7:23) yet *that* is his grief and not his joy, his burden and not his satisfaction. It is true that “to will is present with him; but how to perform that which is good [how to attain unto what he ardently desires and prays for] he finds not,” yea, the good that he loves to do, he often does not, and the evil which he hates, he often falls into (Rom 7:18-19). Even so, yet, blameworthy and lamentable though such things be, it in nowise alters the fact that the one whose experience it is, can call God Himself to witness that he wishes with all his heart it were otherwise, and his own conscience testifies to his sincerity in expressing such a desire.

It is most important that the Christian should be quite clear as to *what it is* his own “spirit” or conscience bears witness to. It is *not* to the eradication of evil from his heart, nor is it to any purification of or improvement in his carnal nature—any one whose conscience bears witness to *that*, bears witness to *a lie*, for “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1Jo 1:8). So long as the Christian remains on earth, “the flesh [the principle of sin] lusteth against the Spirit”—the principle of grace (Gal 5:17). Moreover, the more our thoughts are formed by the Word, the more do we discover how full of corruption we are—the closer we walk with God, the more light we have, and the more are the hidden (unsuspected) things of darkness within discovered to our horrified gaze. Thus, the Christian’s assurance that he is a regenerate person by no means signifies he is conscious that he is more and more dying to the presence and activities of indwelling sin. God does not intend that we should be in love with ourselves.

That which the renewed conscience of the Christian bears witness to is the fact that he is a child of God. Side by side with the sink of iniquity which indwells the believer—of which he becomes increasingly conscious and over which he daily groans—is the spirit of adoption which has been communicated to his heart. That filial spirit draws out his heart in love to God, so that he craves after the conscious enjoyment of His smiling countenance, and esteems fellowship with Him high above all other privileges. That filial spirit inspires confidence toward God, so that he pleads His promises, counts on His mercy, and relies on His goodness. That filial spirit begets reverence for God, so that His ineffable majesty is held in awe. His high authority is respected, and he trembles at His Word. That filial spirit produces subjection to God, so that he desires to obey Him in all things, and sincerely endeavours to walk according to His commands and precepts.

Now here are definite marks by which the Christian may test himself. True, he is yet very far from being what he *should* be, or what he *would* be could his earnest longings only be realised, nevertheless, is not his present case very different from what it once was? Instead of seeking to banish God from your thoughts, is it not now the desire of your heart for your mind to be stayed upon Him and is it not a joy to meditate upon His perfections? Instead of giving little or no concern as to whether your conduct honoured or dishonoured the Lord, is it not now your sincere endeavour to please Him in all your ways? Instead of paying no attention to indwelling sin, has not the plague of your heart become your greatest burden and grief? Well, then, these very things *evidence* you are a child of God. They were not in your nature, so they must have been implanted by the Holy Spirit. Those graces may be very feeble, yet their *presence struggling* amid corruptions—are marks of the new birth.

If with honesty of purpose, lowliness of heart, and prayerful inquiry, I find myself breathing after holiness, panting after conformity to Christ, and mourning over my failures to realise the same, then so far from it being presumption for me to conclude I am a child of God, it would be willful blindness to refuse to recognise the work of the Spirit in my soul. If my conscience bears witness to the fact that I honestly desire and sincerely endeavour to serve and glorify God, then it is wrong for me to deny, or even to doubt, that God has “begun a good work” in me. Take note of your health, dear reader, as well as of your disease. Appropriate to yourself the language of Christ’s spouse, “I sleep, but my heart waketh” (Song 5:2)—grace is to be owned amid infirmities—that which is a cause for humiliation must not be made a ground for doubting.

But notwithstanding the evidences which a Christian has of his divine sonship, he finds it no easy matter to be assured of his sincerity or to establish solid comfort in his soul. His moods are fitful, his frames variable. Grace in the best of us is but small and weak, and we have just cause to mourn the feebleness of our faith, the coldness of our love, and the grievous imperfections of our obedience. But it is at this very point the blessed Spirit of God, in His wondrous grace and infinite condescension, helps our infirmities. He adds *His* witness to the testimony of our renewed conscience, so that (at times) the conviction is confirmed and the trembling heart is assured. It is at such seasons the Christian is able to say, “My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 9:1).

The question which most deeply exercises a genuine saint is not, have I repented, have I faith in Christ, have I any love for God? but rather, are my repentance, faith, and love *sincere and genuine*? He has discovered that Scripture distinguishes between repentance (1Ki 21:27) and repentance “not to be repented of” (2Co 7:10), between faith (Act 8:13) and “faith unfeigned” (1Ti 1:5), between love (Mat 26:49) and “love in sincerity” (Eph 6:24), and only by the gracious enabling of the Holy Spirit can any soul discern between them. He who bestowed upon the Christian repentance and faith must also make him to *know* the things which are freely given to him of God (1Co 2:12). Grace can only be known by grace, as the sun can only be seen in its own light. It is only by the Spirit Himself that we can be truly assured we have been born of Him. But we must leave till our next paper (D.V.) the most important branch of this subject.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

100. The Superiority of Christianity (12:22-24)

“But ye are come unto” etc., (Heb 12:22). These words do not, in fact cannot, mean that in some mystical sense believers are “in spirit” projected into the future, to something which will only be actualized in “the millennium.” The Greek verb has a specific significance in this epistle, as may be seen by a careful reference to Hebrews 4:16, 7:25, 11:6, “to come unto” here means *to approach as worshippers*. In the verses now before us, we are shown the high density and honour of that spiritual worship which is the privilege of Christians under the Gospel dispensation. When they meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus, as His people, and with a due observance of His

holy institutions, they “are come unto,” have access to, the eight privileges here enumerated. They draw nigh by faith to heaven itself, to the antitypical holy of holies. But this is possible only to *spiritual* worshippers.

They who are strangers to experimental spirituality soon grow weary even of the outward form of worship, unless their eyes are entertained with an imposing ritual and their ears regaled by appealing music. This is the secret of the pomp and pageantry of Romanism—now, alas, being more and more imitated by professing Protestants—it is to attract and charm religious worldlings—Ritualists quite obscure the simplicity and beauty of true Gospel worship. Man in his natural estate is far too carnal to be pleased with a worship in which there is nothing calculated to fire the imagination and intoxicate the senses by means of tangible objects. But they who worship in spirit and in truth can draw nigh to God more joyously in a barn, and mingle their praises with the songs of heaven, than if they were in a cathedral.

How vast is the difference between that spiritual adoration which issues from renewed hearts and that “form of godliness” which is associated with altars and candles, choirs and surpliced ministers! Only that is acceptable to God which is produced by the Holy Spirit through sinners washed in the blood of the Lamb. Under grace-magnifying and Christ-exalting preaching, the spiritual senses of real Christians are exercised, as they behold the Saviour’s glories in the glass of the Gospel, as they hear His voice, they have an inward impression of His presence, they taste afresh of His goodness, and His name is to them as ointment poured forth, perfuming their spirits. In this joyous frame, their hearts are drawn heavenwards, and their songs of praise mingle with those of the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect.

“But ye are come unto mount Zion” (Heb 12:22). David, after having taken Mount Zion from the Jebusites, made it the place of his residence, so that it became “the city of the great king.” There he reigned and ruled, there he issued his laws, and thence he extended the sway of his peaceful sceptre over the whole of the holy land. From that circumstance, Mount Zion became the great type of the kingdom of God, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Sovereign. As David ruling upon Mount Zion in the palace built there as his royal seat, issuing his commands which were obeyed all over the land, so our blessed Redeemer has been exalted according to God’s promise, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Psa 2:6 and cf. Heb 2:9), and there sitting as King in Sion, issues His mandates and sways His peaceful sceptre over the hearts of His obedient people.

“And unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22). Most of the older writers understood these terms to refer to the church, but we think this is a mistake, for the church is referred to, separately, in a latter clause. As pointed out in last month’s article, we regard this language as signifying heaven itself, as the residence of God and the eternal abode of His people. “The living God” is the true and only God, the triune JEHOVAH, the fountain of all life, the One who is “from everlasting to everlasting,” without beginning or end. This title is given to each of the eternal Three—Matthew 16:16, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Corinthians 6:16, cf. 1 Corinthians 3:15. As “Zion” was the seat of David’s throne, so “Jerusalem” was the dwelling place of JEHOVAH in the midst of His covenant people. “Jerusalem” signifies “the Vision of Peace,” and in heaven the “son of peace” (Luk 10:6) will behold the glory of God in the face of the Prince of Peace.

“And to an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22). This is the third great privilege enjoyed by the true worshipers under the Christian economy—having mentioned the place to which divine grace has brought believers, the Holy Spirit now described the *inhabitants* of the heavenly Jerusalem. The angels, who are worshippers of God and His Christ, are perhaps mentioned first because they are in closer proximity to the throne, because they are the original

denizens of heaven, and because they are greatly in the majority. The reference is, of course, to the holy angels who kept their first estate and sinned not when some of their fellows apostatised. They are “the elect angels” (1Ti 5:21), and although they have not been redeemed by the atoning blood of the Lamb, it appears highly probable that they were *confirmed* in their standing by the incarnation of the Son, for God has united in Christ both elect men and elect angels (Eph 1:10), that He might be “the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10).

“Ye are come unto...an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22). This sets before us a further contrast between that which characterises Christianity and what obtained under the Mosaic economy—that is, so far as the Israelitish nation as a whole was concerned. It is clear from several passages that “angels” were connected with the giving of the law, when Judaism was formally instituted. We read, “The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them” (Deu 33:2), and again, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them, as in Sinai” (Psa 68:17). But while many “thousands” of the heavenly hosts attended JEHOVAH upon Sinai, this was very different from the “innumerable company” with which we are connected, namely the “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” of Revelation 5:11. And even to the many thousands of angels at Sinai the nation *did not* “come,” instead, they were fenced off at the foot of the mount.

Redeemed sinners who have fellowship with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit are of one spirit with all the heavenly hosts, for there is a union of sentiment between them. Christians have been brought into a state of amity and friendship with the holy angels. They are members of the same family (Eph 3:15), are united under the same Head (Col 2:10), and joined together in the same worship (Heb 1:6; Rev 5:9-14). We are “come unto” them *by a spiritual relation*, entering into association with them, sharing the benefits of their kind offices, for “are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:14). The angels are “*fellow* servants” with believers “that have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 19:10). Wondrous fact is this that sinners of the earth, while here in this world, have communion with the angels in heaven, for they are constantly engaged in the same worship of God in Christ as we are—thus there is perfect oneness of accord between us.

As we pointed out in last month’s article, the church’s spiritual union with the holy angels—being united together in one spiritual society and family—is due to the atoning work of Christ, who by putting away the sins of His people has restored the breach made by Adam’s fall and reconciled “*all* things unto himself” (Col 1:20). Hence we believe that in the verse now before us there is not only a contrast drawn between Judaism and Christianity, but that its ultimate reference is to the immense difference brought in between the offence of the first Adam and the righteousness of the last Adam. Upon the transgression of Adam we read, “So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). There God made His “angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire” (Heb 1:7) to execute His vengeance against us, but now these same angels are our associates in worship and service.

God is “the LORD of hosts” (Psa 46:7), myriads of holy celestial creatures being in an attendance upon Him—“*an innumerable* company of angels”—how this should help us to realise the majesty and grandeur of that kingdom into which divine grace has brought us. In this expression, we may also discern a word to encourage our trembling hearts in connection with our wrestling against the hosts of wicked spirits (Eph 6:12)—numerous as are the forces of Satan assailing us, an “*innumerable* company of angels” are defending us! This was the blessed truth by

which Elisha comforted his fearing servant, “They that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2Ki 6:16). “When the thought of Satan and his legions brings fear, we ought to comfort ourselves with the assurance that more in number and greater in power are the loving and watchful angels, who for Christ’s sake regard us with the deepest interest and affection” (Adolph Saphir, 1831-1891).

Before turning to the next item, a word should be said in refutation of the blasphemous error of Romanists concerning our relation to angels. They teach that we are “come unto” the angels with our prayers, which is one of their empty superstitions—there is not a word in Scripture to countenance such an idea. Though it be true that the angels are superior to us in dignity and power, yet in communion with God we are their equals, “*fellow servant*” (Rev 22:9), and as John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out, “Nothing can be more groundless than that fellow-servants should worship one another”—the worshipping of angels is *condemned* in Colossians 2:18 and Revelation 22:8-9. Well did Owen also point out, “It is the highest madness for anyone to pretend himself to be the head of the church, as the pope does, unless he assume also to himself to be the head of all the angels in heaven, for we belong to the same holy society.”

“To the general assembly” (Heb 12:23). This expression occasions some difficulty, for in the first place it is not quite clear as to what the Spirit specifically alludes unto. In the second place, the Greek word (*pangueris*, a compound one) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, so that we are not able to obtain any help from its usage in other passages. In the third place, it is not very easy to decide whether this clause is to be linked with the one immediately preceding or with the one following it. In its classical usage, the Greek word was employed in connection with a public convocation, when all the people were gathered together to celebrate a public festival or solemnity. Most of the commentators link this word with what follows, “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn” understanding the reference to be unto the (“general”) union of believing Jews and believing Gentiles in one body. Personally, we think this is a mistake.

First, such language would be tautological, (needless repetition) for if the “general assembly” points to the middle wall of partition being broken down, and converted Jews and Gentiles being joined together in one body, *that* would be “the church.” Second, the denomination “church of the firstborn” takes in *the totality* of God’s elect and redeemed people of all ages. Third, there is no “and” between the “innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22-23). and the “general assembly,” as there is in every other instance in these verses where a *new* object is introduced. Personally, we regard this third expression as in apposition (the placing together of two nouns, one of which explains the other) to the former, thus, “unto an innumerable company of angels—the general assembly.” There are various ranks and orders among the angels—principalities and powers, thrones and dominions, seraphim and cherubim, and the “general assembly” of them would be the solemn convocation of all the angelic hosts before the throne of God—compare, “A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: *the judgment* (a special convocation) was set, and the books were opened” (Dan 7:10).

No doubt this amplifying expression (of the “innumerable company of angels”) also emphasises another contrast between the privileges of Christianity and that which obtained under Judaism. Perhaps the contrastive allusion is a double one. First, from the general assembly of Israel at Sinai, when the whole of the nation was then formally assembled together—in fear and trembling. Second, to the general assembly of all the male Israelites three times in the year at the solemn feasts of the Old Testament church (Exo 34:23, Deu 16:16) which was called “the great congregation” (Psa 22:25; 35:18, etc.)—in joy and praise. But each of these were on earth, by

men in the flesh, whereas Christians, in their worship, unite with all the holy hosts of heaven in blessing and adoring the Triune God.

“And church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb 12:23), that is, to the entire company of God’s redeemed. “This is that church whereunto all the promises do belong; the church built on the rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail; the spouse, the body of Christ, the temple of God, His habitation forever. This is the church which Christ loved and gave Himself for, which He washed in His own blood, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:25-27). This is the church, out of which, none can be saved, and whereof no one member shall be lost” (John Owen).

This is the only place in the New Testament where the election of grace is designated “the church of the firstborn ones” (plural number in the Greek). Why so here? For at least three reasons. First, so as to identify the church with Christ *as* the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). The prominent idea associated with the “firstborn” in Scripture is *not* that of priority, but rather excellency, dignity, dominion, and right to the inheritance. This is clear from “Reuben, thou art my firstborn....the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power” (Gen 49:3), and again, “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Psa 89:27). For the “firstborn” and the “inheritance” see Genesis 27:19, 28-29 and cf. Hebrews 12:16; Deuteronomy 21:16; 1 Chronicles 5:1. Second, this title intimates the church’s glory is superior to that of the celestial spirits—redeemed sinners and not fallen angels are God’s “firstborn ones.” Third, this points a further contrast from Judaism, Israel was God’s “firstborn” (Exo 4:22) among the nations of the earth, but the church is His “firstborn” among the inhabitants of heaven!

The church is raised to the highest created dignity—superior privileges and a nobler dignity of sonship pertains to its members than to the holy angels. This is solely due to their union with Christ, the original “Firstborn,” Psalm 89:26, 27; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6. Christians have been made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:6), which comprises the whole right of the inheritance. The entire election of grace, by God’s gratuitous adoption, are not only members of His family, but “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), and thus given an inalienable title to the heavenly inheritance. This was equally true of the saints of all generations from the foundation of the world, yet a much clearer and fuller revelation thereof has been made under this Christian economy, “which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, *as it is now* revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:5).

“Which are written in heaven” (Heb 12:23), announcing that they are genuine Christians—in contrast from mere professors, whose names are recorded only upon the church-scrolls of earth. Just as the registering of men’s names on the rolls of corporations, etc., assures them of their *right* to the privileges thereof (for example, to vote—which we believe is something that no child of God should do), so our names being written in heaven is the guaranty of our title to the celestial heritage. It was to this Christ referred when He said, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luk 10:20). The apostle Paul also speaks of those “whose names are in the book of life” (Phi 4:3), that Book of Life (cf. Rev 3:5 and 13:8) is none other than the roll of God’s elect, in His eternal and immutable designation of them unto grace and glory. “Written in heaven” points another contrast from Judaism (Heb 12:23). The names of Jews (as such) were only written upon the synagogue scrolls.

“And to God the judge of all” (Heb 12:23). The reference here is not (as some recent writers have supposed) unto the person of Christ, but rather unto God the Father in His rectoral office as

the high Governor of all. Does this seem to spoil the harmony of the passage? had we not much preferred it to read “and to God our Father”? No, coming to “God the judge of all” in nowise conflicts with the other privileges mentioned. It is a vastly different thing to be brought before a judge to be tried and sentenced as a criminal, from having a favourable access to him as our occasions and needs may require. Such is the meaning here. We are come not only to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the church, but also the supreme *Head* of the heavenly society—the Author and End of it.

“And to God the judge of all” (Heb 12:23), that is, the Majesty of heaven itself. It was God as Judge who appointed Christ to death, and it was God as Judge who accepted His sacrifice and raised Him from the dead. To God as “judge” believers have been reconciled and by Him they were justified (Rom 8:33). Concerning Christ our Exemplar, we read, “when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him *that judgeth righteously*” (1Pe 2:23). The apostle reminded the saints that “it is a righteous thing with God (as “judge”) to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2Th 1:6). Now it was as Judge that God ascended His awful tribunal at Sinai, and *that* the people could not endure. But Christians draw nigh to Him with holy boldness because His law has nothing against them—the requirements of His justice were fully met by Christ. How great is the privilege of that state which enables poor sinners, called by the Gospel, to approach the Judge of all upon His “bench” or throne without fear! Only by *faith* is this possible.

“And to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). It is blessed to note that this comes immediately after mention of “the judge of all”—to show us the saints had nothing to fear from Him, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ” (Rom 8:1). The reference is to the Old Testament believers, who have passed through death, that New Testaments saints are “come” to *them* is clear from Ephesians 2:19. Of course that “made perfect” is relative and not absolute, for their resurrection and full glorification is yet future. As Owen defined it—first, they had reached the end of the race wherein they had been engaged, with all the duties and difficulties, temptations and tribulations connected therewith. Second, they were completely delivered from sin and sorrow, labour and trouble, which in this life they had been exposed to. Third, they had now entered their rest and reward and were, according to their present capacity, in the immediate presence of God and perfectly happy.

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 12:24). His personal name is used here because it is *in this* character He *saves* His people from their sins—compare our exposition of Hebrews 9:15-17. Here again a contrast is drawn from that which obtained under the old covenant. Moses was the middle person between Israel and God—chosen by the people (Exo 20:19, etc.) and appointed by Him to declare His mind unto them, unto him they were all baptised (1Co 10:2). But Moses was merely a man, a fallen descendant of Adam. He delivered God’s law to the people, but was incapable of magnifying and making it honourable by a perfect personal obedience. Nor was he that “surety” of the covenant unto God for the people, as Christ was. He did not confirm the covenant by offering himself as a sacrifice to God, nor could he give the people an interest in heavenly privileges. How far short he came of Christ!

By being brought into “Sion” (Heb 12:22), Christians are come to all the mercy, grace, and glory prepared in the new covenant and presented in the promises of it. Herein lies the supreme blessedness and eternal security of the church, that its members are taken into *such* a covenant that they have a personal interest in the Mediator of it, who is able to save them unto the uttermost. This is the very substance and essence of Christian faith, that it has to do with *the Mediator of the new covenant*, by whom alone we obtain deliverance from the old covenant and

the curse with which it is accompanied. It is both the privilege and wisdom of faith to *make use* of this “Mediator” in all our dealings with God. He it is who offers to God our prayers and praises, and brings down the favour of God upon His people.

“And to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24). The blood of Christ is referred to thus in allusion unto the various sprinklings of blood divinely instituted under the old covenant, the three most signal instances of which are recorded in Exodus 12:22; 24:6-8; Leviticus 16:14, the principal reference here being to Exodus 24, where the old covenant was thus ratified. All of those instances were eminent types of the redemption, justification, and sanctification of the church by the blood of Christ. The specific thing denoted by the “sprinkling” (in contrast from its “shedding”) is *the application to believers* of its virtues and benefits. The more the Christian exercises repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the more will he experience the peace-speaking power of that precious blood in his conscience. The blood of Christ “speaketh” to God as a powerful Advocate, urging the fulfillment of the Mediator’s part of the everlasting covenant, His perfect satisfaction to divine justice, the full discharge from condemnation purchased for His people.

The contrast here is very impressive—the blood of Abel called for vengeance (Gen 4:10), whereas the blood of Christ calls for blessing to be bestowed on those for whom it was shed. Even the blood of the wicked if unrighteously shed, calls to God for it to be recompensed. But Abel was a saint, the first martyr, and *his* blood cried according to the worth that was in him, for “precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psa 116:15). If then the blood of a saint speaks so forcibly to God, how infinitely more powerfully must the blood of *the “King of saints”* (Rev 15:3) plead! If the blood of a single member of Christ’s body so speaks to God, what will the blood of the Head Himself! Moreover, Abel’s blood only cried to God “from the ground,” where it was shed, but Christ’s blood speaks in heaven itself (Heb 9:12).

THE LIFE OF DAVID

52. His Terrible Sin

In the Psalms of David, two very different characters come before us again and again. In some of those Psalms, there is expressed the sorrows of one who is consciously *righteous*, suffering the reproaches of the wicked, yet assured of strength in God, and looking forward to that fullness of joy which is at His right hand. In other Psalms, we hear the sobbing of a *convicted* conscience, a heart deeply exercised over personal transgression, seeking after divine mercy, and being granted a blessed sense of the infinite sufficiency of divine grace to meet his deep need. Now, those two characters in the Psalms correspond to the two principal stages in David’s life as portrayed, respectively, in the 1st and 2nd books of Samuel. In 1st Samuel, we see him brought from obscurity unto honour and peace, upheld by God in righteousness amid the persecution of the wicked. In the latter, we behold him descending from honour, through sin, into degradation and

turmoil, yet there learning the amazing riches of divine grace to bear with and pardon one who fell into such deep mire.

Solemn indeed is the contrast presented of David in the two books of Samuel. In the former, he is conqueror of the mighty Goliath, in the latter, he is mastered by his own lusts. Now the sins of God's servants are recorded for our instruction, not for us to shelter behind and use for palliating our own offences, but for us to lay to heart and seek with all our might to avoid. The most effectual means against our repeating their sins is to keep from those things which lead up to or occasion them. In last month's article, we pointed out that David's fearful fall was preceded by three things—the laying aside of his armour at the very time it was his duty to gird on the sword, the indulging in slothful ease in the palace, when he should have been enduring hardness as a soldier on the battlefield, the allowing of a wandering eye to dwell upon an unlawful object, when he should have turned it away from beholding vanity.

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mat 26:41). Prayer of itself is not sufficient. We have not fully discharged our duty when we have asked God to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We must “watch,” be on alert, noting the direction of our desires, the character of our motives, the tendency of things which may be lawful in themselves, the influence of our associations. It is our *inner man* which we most need to watch, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). Then, if we are faithful and diligent in “watching,” out of a sense of our personal weakness and insufficiency, it is in order to “pray,” counting on the help of our gracious God to undertake for us. To “pray” *without* “watching” is only to mock God, by seeking to shelve our responsibility.

Prayer was never designed by God as a substitute for personal effort and diligence, but rather as an adjunct thereto—to seek divine grace for enabling us to be dutiful and faithful. “Continue in prayer, *and watch* in the same with thanksgiving” (Col 4:2). Not only does God require us to “watch” *before* we pray, but we are also to “watch” immediately after. And again we say, that which we most need to watch is *ourselves*. There is a traitor within our own breast, ever ready and desirous of betraying us if allowed the opportunity of so doing. Who had thought that such a one as David would ever experience such a fearful fall as he had! Ah, my reader, not even a close walk with God, or a long life of eminent piety, will eradicate or even change the sinful nature which still abides in the saint. So long as we are in this world, we are never beyond the reach of temptation, and nought but watchfulness and prayer will safeguard us from it.

Nor is it easy to say how low a real child of God may fall, nor how deeply he may sink into the mire, once he allows the lusts of the flesh their free play. Sin is insatiable. It is never satisfied. Its nature is to drag us lower and lower, getting more and more daring in its opposition to God, and but for His recovering grace, it would carry us down to hell itself. Look at Israel—unbelieving at the Red Sea, murmuring in the wilderness, setting up the idolatrous calf at Sinai. Look at the course of Christendom as outlined in Revelation 2 and 3—beginning by leaving her first love, ending by becoming so mixed up with the world that Christ threatened to spew her out of His mouth. Thus it was with David—from lazing on his bed to allowing his eyes to wander, from gazing on Bathsheba to committing adultery with her, from adultery to murder, and then sinking into such spiritual deadness that for a whole year he remained impenitent, till an express messenger from God was needed to arouse him from his torpor.

“And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child” (2Sa 11:5). Sooner or later the man or woman who deliberately defies God and tramples His laws underfoot finds from painful experience that “the way of transgressors is hard” (Pro 13:15). It is true that the

final punishment of the wicked is in the next world, and it is true that for years some daring rebels appear to mock God with impunity, nevertheless, His government is such that, even in this life, they are usually made to reap as they have sown. The pleasures of sin are but “for a season” (Heb 11:25), and a very brief one at that, nevertheless “at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Pro 23:32). Make no mistake on that point, dear reader, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23). It did so with David and Bathsheba, for now the day of reckoning had to be faced.

The penalty for adultery was death, “And the man that committeth adultery with another man’s wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev 20:10). Bathsheba now had good cause to fear the righteous wrath of her husband and the enforcing of the dread sentence of the law. David, too, was faced with serious trouble—the one with whom he had had illicit intercourse was pregnant, and her own husband had been away from home for some time. The hidden works of darkness must soon be forced into the light, for when Uriah returned the unfaithfulness of his wife would be discovered. This would give him the right to have her stoned, and though David, by virtue of his high position as king, might escape a similar fate, yet it was likely that his guilt would be proclaimed abroad and a general revolt be stirred up against him. But sad as was the predicament in which David now found himself, still sadder was the measures he resorted to in seeking to extricate himself.

Before taking up the doleful details in the inspired narrative, let us first seek to obtain a general idea of what follows—asking the reader to go over 2 Samuel 11:6-21 ere continuing with our comments. There was no thirsting for Uriah’s blood on the part of David. It was only after all his carnal efforts had failed to use Uriah in covering his own sin, that the king resorted to extreme measures. Another before us has pointed out the awful parallel which here obtains between David and Pilate. The Roman governor thirsted not for the blood of the Saviour, rather did he resort to one expedient after another so as to preserve His life, and only after those had failed, did he give his official sanction to the crucifying of the Lord Jesus. Alas that the sweet Psalmist of Israel should here find himself in the same class with Pilate, but the flesh in the believer is no different from the flesh in the unbeliever, and when allowed its way it issues in the same works in both.

But the analogy between David and Pilate is even closer. What was it that caused David to sacrifice Uriah in order to shield himself? It was his love of the world, his determination to preserve his place and reputation among men at all costs. Love of his fair name in the world, resolved that under no circumstances would he be branded as an adulterer, so whatever stood in the way must be removed. He contrived various expedients to preserve his character, but these were baffled, so just as the lust of the eye led him to adultery with Bathsheba, now the pride of life goaded him to the murder of her husband. And was it not the same with Pilate? He had no murderous designs against Christ, but he put his own credit in the eyes of men before everything else—he was Caesar’s friend—the world’s friend—and rather than risk any breach in that friendship, Jesus must die.

“And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David” (2Sa 11:6). It was not unto the Lord that David now turned. *He* seems not to have been in his thoughts at all. Nor is He when sin has gained the ascendancy over the saint. Alas that we are so slow, so reluctant, to put things right with God—by sincere repentance and humble confession—when we have displeased and dishonoured Him. No, David was far more anxious to conceal his crime and escape the temporal consequences of it, than he was to seek the forgiveness of the Lord his God. This too is recorded for our instruction. It is written, “He that covereth his sins shall not

prosper” (Pro 28:13), and there is no exception to that rule—O that divine grace would cause each of us to lay it to heart and *act upon it*. Only God knows how many of His own people are now under His chastening rod, are lean in their souls and joyless in their hearts, because of failure at this very point.

Refusal to put things right with God and our fellows, by confessing our sins to the One and (so far as lies in our power) making restitution to the other, gives Satan a great advantage over us. A guilty conscience estranges the heart from God, so that it is no longer able to count upon His protection. The Spirit is grieved and withholds His grace, so that the understanding is unable to see things in His light. The soul is then in such a state that Satan’s lies are acceptable to it, and then the whole course of conduct is more or less regulated by him. Carnal scheming takes the place of seeking wisdom from on high, stealth and trickery supplant openness and honesty, and self-interests absorb all the energies instead of seeking the glory of God and the good of others. This comes out very plainly in the deplorable sequel here—all of David’s actions now show that he was actuated by Satan rather than dominated by the Holy Spirit.

“And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered” (2Sa 11:7). Having been summoned back from the scene of fighting, Uriah was given an audience with David under the pretence of supplying his royal master with an accurate account of how the hostilities were proceeding. In reality, those inquiries of the king were merely a blind to cover his real desire in having sent for Bathsheba’s husband. Seemingly, David wished to convey to Uriah the impression that he had more confidence in *his* word concerning the progress of the war than of any one else in Israel. But it is quite clear from what follows that David had called Uriah home for a very different purpose. How little *we* know of the motives of those who ask us questions, and how it behooves us to heed that exhortation “*put not your trust in princes*” (Psa 146:3).

“And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet” (2Sa 11:8). This makes clearer the secret design of the king in summoning Uriah to Jerusalem. David was determined to spare himself the shame of its becoming known that he was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba, and the only way in which that could be avoided was by getting her husband back to spend a night or two at home, so that the child might be fathered on him. “And Uriah departed out of the king’s house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king” (2Sa 11:8). David was anxious that the one whom he designed to act as a cloak for his own sin should feel free to enjoy to the full the brief furlough now granted him. Again we say, how ignorant we often are of the subtle designs of some who may express good will toward us by their presents.

“But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house” (2Sa 11:9). How often the best-laid schemes of men meet with disappointment. It was so with Abraham’s attempt in getting Sarah to pose as his sister. It was so with Jonah’s efforts to avoid preaching to the Ninevites. It was so here. David was balked. He had failed to estimate aright the stirring qualities of the man he was dealing with. Uriah was not the one to give way to self-indulgence while his brethren were enduring the hardships of a military campaign. And should not this speak loudly to our hearts? Are the days in which *we* are living such that Christians are justified in seeking ease and fleshly gratification?

“And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house?” (2Sa 11:10). Instead of commending Uriah for his noble unselfishness, the king half reproved him. But David could not approve his conduct without condemning his own. Ah, my reader, they who criticise those who *live as* “strangers and pilgrims” in this scene (and they are few in number

in this degenerate generation), calling them “strict,” “strait-laced,” “extremists,” “puritanic,” do but give themselves away. They who practice self-denial are thorns in the sides of those who wish to “make the most of both worlds” by pandering to their carnal desires.

“And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing” (2Sa 11:11). What a rebuke was this! The Lord and His people in the open fields, engaging the foes of Israel, David at home in his palace, enjoying his ease and indulging the desires of nature. How those noble words of Uriah should have melted David’s heart! How they should have smitten his conscience for having yielded so vilely to his sinful passions and for so grievously wronging, in his absence, such a loyal subject! But alas, where the heart is no longer concerned for *God’s* glory, it is incapable of receiving correction or rebuke from a fellow-creature. David was filled with pride of reputation and the fear of man, and was determined to make Uriah serve for him as a screen from the public eye.

“And David said to Uriah, Tarry here today also, and tomorrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow” (2Sa 11:12). When the heart is fully set upon doing evil, it refuses to be daunted by difficulties. If one method of obtaining the coveted end fails, it will try another. Alas that the same persistent determination does not characterize us when we are seeking that which is good, how easily we are discouraged then! Patience is a virtue, but it is prostituted to a base end when used in an evil course. Thus it was now, David refused to admit defeat, and hoped that by keeping Uriah in Jerusalem a little longer, his base desire might be realised.

“And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk” (2Sa 11:13). To what awful lengths can sin carry a saint once he enters upon the downward path. The plan which David now resorted to was horrible indeed, deliberately endeavouring to make the faithful Uriah break his vow in verse 11. How sad to now see David the tempter of Uriah unto drunkenness—hoping that while his blood was heated, he would go home to his wife. But again he failed, “And at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, *but went not down to his house*” (2Sa 11:13). How this baffling of his plans should have aroused David’s sleeping conscience, for, manifestly, God’s providences were working *against* him. Worse was yet to follow. This we must leave for our next, D.V.

THE DIVINE COVENANTS

4. The Abrahamic (Continued)

The grand *promises* of the Abrahamic Covenant, as originally given to the patriarch, are recorded in Genesis 12:2-3, 7. The covenant itself was solemnly *ratified* by sacrifice, thus making it inviolable, in Genesis 15:9-21. The “seal” and “sign” of the covenant, circumcision, is brought before us in Genesis 17:9-14. The covenant was *confirmed* by divine oath in Genesis 22:15-18,

which provided a ground of “strong consolation” (Heb 6:17-19). There were not two distinct and diverse covenants made with Abraham (as the older Baptists argued), the one having respect to spiritual blessings and the other relating to temporal benefits. The covenant was one, having a special spiritual object, to which the temporal arrangements and inferior privileges enjoyed by the nation of Israel were strictly subordinated, and necessary only as a means of securing the higher results contemplated.

It is true that the contents of the covenant were of a *mixed* kind, involving both the natural descendants and the spiritual “seed” of Abraham, its promises receiving a minor and major fulfillment. There was to be a temporary accomplishment of those promises to his natural offspring here on earth, and there was to be an eternal realisation of them to his spiritual children in heaven. Unless this twofoldness of the contents of the covenant be steadily borne in mind, it is impossible to obtain a right and clear view of them. Nevertheless it is highly essential that we distinguish sharply between the two, lest we fall into the error of others who insist that the spiritual blessings belonged not only to the natural seed of Abraham, but to the offspring of Christians as well. Spiritual blessings cannot be communicated by carnal propagation.

Nothing could more clearly establish what has just been pointed out than, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the *seed* of Abraham, are they all CHILDREN: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Rom 9:6-8). All of Abraham’s descendants did not participate in the spiritual blessings promised to him, for to some *of them* Christ said, “Ye shall die in your sins” (Joh 8:24), which was shadowed forth in the fact that Ishmael and Esau were excluded from even the temporal privileges enjoyed by the offspring of Isaac and Jacob. Nor do all the children of Christians enter into the spiritual privileges promised to Abraham, but only those which were eternally chosen unto salvation; and *who they are* cannot be known until they *believe*, “Know ye therefore that they which are *of faith*, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7).

Let us point out in the next place that Abraham’s covenant was strictly *peculiar to himself*, for neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is it ever said that the covenant with Abraham was made on behalf of all believers or that it is given to them. The great thing that the covenant secured to Abraham was that he should *have a seed*, and that God would be *the God* of that seed, but Christians have no divine warrant that He will be the God of their “seed,” nor even that they shall have any children at all. As a matter of fact, many of them have no posterity, and therefore they cannot have the covenant of Abraham. The covenant of Abraham was as peculiar to himself as the one God made with Phinehas, “And he shall have it, *and his seed* after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood” (Num 25:13), and as the covenant of royalty which God made with David *and his seed* (2Sa 7:12-16). In each case a divine promise was given *securing a posterity*, and had no children been born to those men, then God had broken his covenant.

Look at the original promises made to Abraham, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3). Has God promised every Christian that He will make *of him* a “great nation”? or that He will make *his* “name great”—celebrated like the patriarch’s was and is? or that in *him* “all the families of the earth be blessed”? Surely there is no room for argument here—the very asking of such questions answers them. Nothing could be more extravagant and absurd than to suppose that any such promises as these were made *to us*.

If God fulfills the covenant with Abraham and his seed to every believer and his seed, then He does so in accord with the terms of the covenant itself. But if we turn to and carefully examine its contents, it will at once appear that they were not to be fulfilled in the case of all believers, in addition to Abraham himself. In that covenant, God promises that Abraham should be “a father of many nations,” that “kings shall come out of thee,” that “I will give thee, *and to thy seed* after thee, *the land* wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:5-8). But Christians are not made the fathers of many nations, kings do not come out of them, nor do their descendants occupy the land of Canaan, either literally or spiritually. How many a godly believer has had to mourn with David, “*although my house be not so with God*; yet he hath made with *me* an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all *my* salvation” (2Sa 23:5).

The covenant established *no spiritual relation* between Abraham and his offspring, still less does it establish a spiritual relation between every believer and his babes. Abraham was not the *spiritual* father of his own natural offspring, for spiritual qualities cannot be propagated by carnal generation. Was he the spiritual father of Ishmael? Was he the spiritual father of Esau? No indeed, instead, Abraham was “the father of *all them that believe*” (Rom 4:11). So far as his natural descendants were concerned, Scripture declares that Abraham was, “the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also *walk in the steps of that faith* of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised” (Rom 4:12). What could be plainer? Let us beware of *adding* to God’s Word. No theory or practice, no matter how venerable it be or how widely held, is tenable, if no clear Scripture can be found to warrant and establish it.

The question may be asked, but are not Christians *under* the Abrahamic covenant? In the entire absence of any word in Scripture affirming that they *are*, we answer, *No*. The “blessing of Abraham” has indeed “come on the [believing] Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:14), and what this “blessing” is, the very same verse tells us, namely “that we might receive the promise of the Spirit *through faith*.” That “blessing” consists not in creating spiritual relations between believers and their infant offspring, but is *for themselves*, in response to the exercise of their faith. Plainer still is Galatians 3:9 in defining for us *what* the “blessing of Abraham” is which has come upon the Gentiles, “So then they which be of faith are *blessed with faithful Abraham*.” And again, “Know ye therefore that they which are *of faith*, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7)—the only *spiritual* “children” of Abraham are such as have FAITH.

We must now turn to and consider *the seal* of the covenant. “And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be *a token* of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant” (Gen 17:9-14).

In seeking to ascertain the significance of the above passage, we cannot do better than throw upon it the light of the New Testament. There we are told, “And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that

righteousness might be imputed unto them also” (Rom 4:11). The first observation we would make upon this verse is that it definitely establishes the *unity* of the Abrahamic covenant, for in Romans 4:3 the apostle had quoted from Genesis 15—where the word “covenant” occurs for the first time in connection with Abraham, and now he refers us to Genesis 17, thereby intimating it is one and the same covenant in both chapters. The main difference between the two chapters is that the one gives us more the divine side (ratifying the covenant), the other the human side—the “keeping of” the covenant or obedience to the divine command.

The next thing we would observe is that circumcision was “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had.” Again we would say, Let us be on our guard against *adding to* God’s Word, for nowhere does Scripture say that circumcision was a “seal” to anyone but to Abraham himself, and even in his case, so far was it from communicating any spiritual blessing, it simply confirmed what was already promised to him. As a “seal” from God, circumcision was a divine pledge or guaranty that from him should issue that “seed” which would bring blessing to all nations, and that, on the same terms as justifying righteousness had become his—by faith alone. It was not a seal of his faith, but of that righteousness which, in due time, was to be wrought out by the Messiah and Mediator. Circumcision was not a memorial of anything which had already been actualised, but an earnest of that which was yet future, namely, of that justifying righteousness which was to be brought in by Christ.

But did not God enjoin that all the males of Abraham’s household, and in those of his descendants, should also be circumcised? He did, and in that very fact we find definite confirmation of what has just been said above. What did circumcision “seal” to Abraham’s servants and slaves? Nothing. “Circumcision neither signed nor sealed the blessings of the covenant of Abraham to the individuals to whom it was by divine appointment administered. It did not imply that they who were circumcised were accounted the heirs of the promises, either temporal or spiritual. It was not applied to mark them individually as heirs of the promises. It did not imply this even to Isaac and Jacob, who are by name designated heirs with Abraham. *Their* interest in the promises was secured *to them* by God’s expressly giving *them* the covenant, but was *not* represented in their circumcision. Circumcision marked no character, and had an individual application to no man but Abraham himself. It was the token of this covenant—and as a token or sign, no doubt applied to every promise in the covenant, but it did not designate the individual circumcised as having a personal interest in these promises. The covenant promised a numerous seed to Abraham—circumcision, as the token of that covenant, must have been a sign of this, but it did not sign this *to any other*. Any other circumcised individual, except Isaac and Jacob, to whom the covenant was given by name, might have been *childless*.

“Circumcision did not impart to any individual that any portion of the numerous seed of Abraham should descend through *him*. The covenant promised that all nations should be blessed in Abraham—that the Messiah should be his descendant. But circumcision was no sign *to any other* that the Messiah should descend from him—even to Isaac and Jacob this promise was peculiarly given, *and not implied in their circumcision*. From some of Abraham’s race, the Messiah, according to the covenant, must descend and circumcision was a sign of this, but this was not signed by circumcision to any one of all his race. Much less could circumcision ‘sign’ this to the strangers and slaves who were not of Abraham’s posterity. To such, even the temporal promises were not either ‘signed’ or sealed by circumcision. The covenant promised Canaan to Abraham’s descendants, but circumcision could be no sign of this to the strangers and slaves who enjoyed no inheritance in it” (Alexander Carson, 1776-1844).

That circumcision did *not* “seal” anything to anyone but to Abraham himself, is established beyond shadow of doubt by the fact that circumcision was applied to those who had *no personal interest* in the covenant to which it was attached. Not only was circumcision administered by Abraham to the servants and slaves of his household, but in Genesis 17:23, we read that he circumcised *Ishmael*, who was expressly excluded from that covenant! There is no evading the force of that and it is impossible to reconcile it with the views so widely pervading upon the Abrahamic covenant. Furthermore, circumcision was not submitted to voluntarily, nor given with reference to faith, it was *compulsory*, and that in every instance, “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, *must* needs be circumcised” (Gen 17:13)—those refusing, being “cut off from his people” (Gen 17:14)—how vastly different was *that* from Christian baptism!

It may be asked, if, then, circumcision “sealed” nothing to those who received it, except in the one case of Abraham himself, then *why* did God ordain it to be administered to all his male descendants? First, because it was the mark He selected to distinguish from all other nations that people from whom the Messiah was to issue. Second, because it served as a continual reminder that from the Abrahamic stock the promised “seed” would spring—hence, soon after He appeared, circumcision was set aside by God. Third, because of what it typically foreshadowed. To be born naturally of the Abrahamic stock gave a title to circumcision and the earthly inheritance, which was a figure of their title to the heavenly inheritance of those born of the Spirit. The servants and slaves in Abraham’s household “bought with money,” beautifully adumbrated the truth that those who enter the kingdom of Christ are “bought” by His blood.

It is a mistake to suppose that baptism has come in the place of circumcision. As that which supplanted the Old Testament sacrifices was the one offering of the Saviour, as that which superseded the Aaronic priesthood was the High Priesthood of Christ, so that which has succeeded circumcision is the *spiritual* circumcision which believers have in and by *Christ*, “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11)—how simple! how satisfying! “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him” (Col 2:12) is *something additional*. It is only wresting the Scriptures to say these two verses mean, “Being buried with him in baptism ye are circumcised.” No, no, verse eleven declares the Christian circumcision is “made *without* hands,” and baptism is administered *by* hands! The circumcision “made without hands in putting off (judicially, before God) the body of the sins of the flesh” has taken the place of the circumcision made *with* hands. The circumcision *of Christ* has come in the place of the circumcision of the law. Never once in the New Testament is baptism spoken of as the “seal” of the *new covenant*, rather is *the Holy Spirit* the seal, see Ephesians 1:13, 4:30.

To sum up. The grand design of God’s covenant with Abraham was to make known that through him should come the One who would bring blessing to all the families of the earth. The promises made to him were to receive a lower and a higher fulfillment, according as he was to have both natural and spiritual children—for “*kings* shall come out of thee” (Gen 17:6) compare Revelation 1:6! For “thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” (Gen 22:17) compare Colossians 2:15, Romans 8:37, 1 John 5:4! Abraham is called a “father” neither in a federal nor in a spiritual sense, but because he is the head of the faith-clan, the prototype to which all believers are conformed. Christians are not “under” the Abrahamic covenant, though they are “blessed with him” by having their faith counted unto righteousness. Though New Testament believers are not under the Abrahamic covenant, they are, because of their union with Christ, heirs of its spiritual inheritance.

It only remains for us now to point out wherein the Abrahamic covenant adumbrated the everlasting covenant. First, it proclaimed the international scope of the divine mercy—some out of all “nations” were included in the election of grace. Second, it made known the ordained stock from which the Messiah and Mediator was to issue. Third, it announced that faith alone secured an interest in all the good God had promised. Fourth, in Abraham’s being the “father” of all believers was shadowed forth the truth that Christ is the Father of His own spiritual seed (Isa 53:10-11). Fifth, in Abraham’s call from God to leave his own country and become a sojourner in a strange land, was typed out Christ’s leaving heaven and tabernacling upon earth. Sixth, as the “heir of the world” (Rom 4:13) Abraham foreshadowed Christ as the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). Seventh, in the promise of Canaan to his seed we have a figure of the heavenly inheritance which Christ has procured for his people.

N.B. It seems a sad tragedy that the people of God are so divided on the subject of baptism. Though the editor has strong conviction on the subject, for fourteen years he has refrained from pressing (or even presenting) them in this magazine—mainly because of its inter-denominational character. But it seemed impossible to deal faithfully with the Abrahamic covenant without making some slight reference thereto. We have sought to write temperately in the above article, avoiding harsh expressions and needless reflections. We trust the reader will kindly receive it in the spirit in which it is written, weighing all before God. If he disagrees with what has been said, please bear with us. We do not expect to return to the subject.

UNION AND COMMUNION

8. Practical

Our practical union and communion with Christ grows out of our having cleaved to Him for salvation. A union to Christ by faith is designed by God to issue in a practical conformity to the image of His Son. We are “delivered out of the hand of our enemies” (sin, Satan, the world, the curse of the law, the wrath of God) in order that we might “serve [be in subjection to and obey] him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:74-75). God does not save us in order that we may henceforth indulge in the lusts of the flesh without fear of fatal consequences, but He brings us to Christ in order that we should take His “yoke” upon us, and live for His pleasure and glory. Our initial salvation is but a means to an end—to melt our hard hearts, that out of gratitude we may gladly render Him love’s obedience, and be the monuments and witnesses of His transforming power.

The union which exists between the Redeemer and the redeemed is not a simple, but a compound one—that which binds us to Him is not a single strand, but made up of several combined together. In a previous article, we likened the bond of union between the believer and Christ to a golden chain, possessing a number of distinct links, yet inseparably welded together. That chain is let down all the way from God Himself, through Christ, to each of His people on earth. As the hand of faith lays hold of each separate link, the one immediately above it is

revealed in turn. In this series of articles we have followed that chain, link by link, as it descended from above, but in our actual experience, *we*, of necessity, apprehend them in their inverse order—grasping first the lowest link and then ascending higher. From the position we now occupy, we can only discern the higher links by means of the lower. Let us try to make this fact yet plainer.

It is only by means of our *practical* union with Christ that we have personal evidence of our *saving* union with Him—if I am not in personal subjection to Him, walking with Him in the path of obedience to God’s revealed will, then I have no Scriptural warrant for supposing that *my* sins have been pardoned. Again, it is only by means of our saving union with Christ that we obtain evidence of our vital oneness with Him—if I have not forsaken all other claimants to my heart, surrendered to Christ’s Lordship, and put my whole trust in His sacrifice for my acceptance with God, then I have no Scriptural warrant to conclude that I have ever been born again. Once more, it is only by means of our vital union with Christ that we obtain evidence of our federal and mystical oneness with Him—if I cannot clearly perceive (by means of new sensibilities, new desires, new purposes, and efforts) that I have passed from death unto life spiritually, then I have no Scriptural warrant to believe that Christ acted as *my* Surety.

From what has just been pointed out, it should be quite evident that we are now treating of *the most important aspect* of our many-sided subject—the most important so far as the peace of our souls is concerned, and that we were fully justified in devoting a further article to its specific consideration. To be deceived at *this* point is a most serious thing, for it is very liable to have *fatal* consequences. If it is only by means of *practical* union and communion with Christ that I can rightly determine whether or not I have any *saving* union with Him, then how it behooves me to seriously and carefully inquire into my present *practical relations* to the Lord Jesus, and make sure whether I have really taken His yoke upon me, whether I am truly in subjection to His will and am being conformed to His holy image—whether it is my natural inclinations or His exhortations which are really regulating my daily life.

Now taking them in their deepest meaning and fullest scope, all the exhortations of Christ (expressing His claims upon us and His will for us) may be summed up in two words, “*Come unto me*” and “*Abide in me.*” The first of these calls is what we have to comply with in order to become *savingly* united to Christ, the second is what we must heed if *practical* union with Him is to be secured and maintained. As to what is signified and included in the sinner’s “coming to” Christ, we sought to show in a series of articles thereon in the 1933 “Studies.” To “come to” Christ implies the turning of our backs upon all that is opposed to Him, the abandoning of every idol and all other dependencies, the heart going out to Him in full surrender and trustful confidence. To “come to” Christ denotes the turning of the whole soul to a whole Christ, as Prophet, Priest, and King. It is the mind, heart, and will being supernaturally drawn to Him so as to love, trust, and serve Him.

“Coming to” Christ is a far, far different thing from raising your hand to be prayed for, or coming forward and taking the evangelist’s hand, or signing some “decision” card, or uniting with some “church,” or any other of the “many inventions” (Ecc 7:29) of men. Before any one will or can truly come to Christ, the understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, the heart must be supernaturally changed, the stubborn will must be supernaturally broken. The things of this world have the first place in the affections of the natural man—the pleasing of self is his paramount concern. Christ is too holy to suit the natural man’s love of sin. His claims are too exacting to please his selfish heart. His terms of discipleship (Luk 14:26-27) too severe to suit his fleshly ways. The unregenerate *will not* submit to His Lordship.

Christ must be crowned Lord of all or He will not be Lord at all. He will brook no rival. There must be the complete heart-renunciation of all that stands in competition with Him, whatever pertains to the flesh must be renounced. The “cross” is the badge of Christian discipleship—not a golden one worn on the body, but the principle of self-denial and self-sacrifice controlling the heart. We must come to Christ as Prophet, to be instructed by Him, as Priest, whose atonement and intercession are to be relied upon, as King, to be ruled by Him. Coming to Christ is a going out of self, so as no longer to rest on anything in self. It is the will bowing to His Lordship, accepting His yoke, taking up the cross, and following Him without reserve. O how very few really do this! To the great majority Christ has to say, “*Ye will not come to me*, that ye might have life” (Joh 5:40).

Now as a Scriptural “coming to Christ” is a vastly different thing from how it is represented from the majority of church-pulpits and mission-platforms today, so “serving Christ” is something entirely different from the popular idea which now prevails. That we are saved to serve is a truth writ large in the Word, “Ye turned to God from idols to *serve* the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). But serving God *does not mean* that, primarily and mainly, we are called upon to be “*personal workers*” and “*soul winners.*” We are to serve *Christ*, not our fellows. What is a *servant*? He is one that is in subjection to a master. He is one who sinks his own desires and ideas, and carries out the orders of the one who employs him. A “servant” is one who is in the place of subjection, of obedience, regulating his conduct according to the will of another. And *that* is what Christian service consists of—submitting to the authority of Christ, doing His bidding, walking according to His commandments, seeking to please Him in all things—whether He appoints us to plow the ground, mine coal, scrub floors, or preach the Word.

Now *that* is exactly what *practical union* with Christ consists of. It is being taken into His blessed *service*, walking together with Him in the path of obedience to God, with our hearts, minds, and wills one with His. Practical union with Christ is but the *wearing of* the yoke which we *took upon us* when we came to Him for salvation. As the married life is the actual carrying out of the solemn vows by the husband and wife at the time of their wedded union, so the Christian life is the maintenance of that relationship which was entered into by the soul when it surrendered to the claims of Christ. At conversion, we passed through the “strait gate” of full surrender to Christ, henceforth to tread the “narrow way” that leadeth unto life for the rest of our earthly pilgrimage. Having come to Christ, our duty and our privilege now is to “abide in him,” for only thus will we discharge our responsibilities, promote our wellbeing, and glorify Him.

The very essence of the Christian life is *to continue as we began*—all spiritual declension, all backsliding, is due to failure at this point. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk ye in him*” (Col 2:6). It is in His essential character as *the Lord* that the world refuses to “receive” Christ Jesus. Like Pharaoh of old, the unregenerate still say, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” (Exo 5:2). Like the Jews during the days of His flesh, the unconverted declare, “*We will not have this man to reign over us*” (Luk 19:14). But those who are drawn to Him by the Father (Joh 6:44) throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and give themselves up to be ruled by Him. Christ is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey him*” (Heb 5:9). Having surrendered to His claims and received Christ Jesus as “the Lord,” the Christian is now to submit to His sceptre—just so far as we do so, is a practical union with Him maintained by us.

“To whom coming, as unto a living stone” (1Pe 2:4). Let it be duly noted that this is predicated of the Lord’s people, and that it is not simply said they “came” to Christ, but “to whom *coming*”! We are to “come to Christ” not once and for all, but frequently, daily. In other words,

we are *to continue as we began*. Christ is the only one who can minister to our deepest needs and to Him we must constantly turn for the supply of them. In our felt emptiness, we must draw from “his fullness” (Joh 1:16). In our weakness we must turn to Him for strength. In our ignorance, we must apply to Him for wisdom. In our falls into sin, we must seek from Him a fresh cleansing. *All* that we need for time and eternity is stored up for us in Christ. If we have backslidden, let us “repent, and do the *first* works” (Rev 2:5)—cast ourselves upon Christ anew, as self-confessed sinners, seeking His mercy and forgiveness, renewing our covenant to serve and obey.

“Abide in me, and I in you” (Joh 15:4). We must cultivate fellowship with Christ—by subordinating our hearts, minds, and wills to Him—if He is to have fellowship with us, for a holy Christ will not commune with any who follow a course of unholiness. The same order is laid down again in the next verse, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that [1] abideth in me, and [2] I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Very searching is this. We need to lay it to heart and translate into earnest daily prayer. Then the Lord added, “If ye abide in me, and *my words abide in you*” (Joh 15:7). Here we are told *how* our practical union with Christ is maintained, namely, by our cherishing His words in our hearts, meditating upon them in our minds, submitting to them with our wills, being regulated by them in our actions. Thus, we “abide” in Christ by being in subjection to Him, by obeying Him.

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (Joh 15:10). How blessedly this illustrates His declaration, “when he putteth forth his own sheep, *he goeth before them*” (Joh 10:4), and again, “leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21). Christ requires nought from His followers but what He first submitted to Himself. Christ subordinated Himself in all things to God—submitting Himself to God, committing Himself to God. He did not seek His own glory, do His own will, save His own life, plead His own cause, or avenge His own wrong. Self was never a consideration with Him. His only concern was obedience to the Father’s commandments, the promotion of the Father’s glory, abiding in the Father’s love. “I delight *to do thy will*, O my God” (Psa 40:8) summed up His life.

Christ walked in perfect unison with God. He was of one mind and heart with Him. He had no separate interest from His Father and no separate joy. His declaration, “I and my Father are one,” applied as truly to His human walk on earth as it did to the unity of the divine nature. Whatever touched the Father, equally and in the same way affected Him. “The zeal of *thine* house,” He said, “hath eaten *me* up” (Psa 69:9). He pleased not Himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of them that reproached *thee* are fallen upon *me*” (Psa 69:9). There was perfect harmony of sentiment, unity of desire, oneness in aim between Him and the Father. At the beginning it was, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luk 2:49). In Gethsemane it was, “Father, thy will be done” (see Luk 22:42). At the finish it was “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luk 23:46). And to His people He says, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in *my* love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in *his* love” (Joh 15:10).

It was by the keeping of God’s commandments that Christ abode in the Father and the Father in Him. Of course, that mutual indwelling never could, through all His perfect lifelong obedience, become more full and complete, in principle and essence, than it was before the incarnation. But to His human consciousness and in His human experience, the sense of that fellowship must have grown more intense and more precious, as His doing of God’s will went on and on to its terrible yet triumphant close. Among the things that the man Christ Jesus learned about obedience through the things which He suffered, must have been the fact that subjection to God carried with it a mighty power to promote and intensify the indwelling of God in man and man in God. And

though He learned the griefs and pain which such obedience as He had undertaken to render involved, yet He learned too of its compensating pleasure and joy of abiding in the Father's love.

Let, then, *our* keeping of God's commandments be, in our measure (by the Spirit helping us), like Christ's. In our case, like His, submission to the divine authority may involve a bitter cup to be drunk and a heavy cross to be borne—for, like Him, we have to learn obedience *by suffering*. But let the obedience we thus learn be of the same sort as His—the giving up of our own wills, always, everywhere. Then, and only then, shall we find how “good, and acceptable, and perfect, the will of God” (Rom 12:2). We abide in Christ, then, when our will is merged in His will, when His thoughts become our thoughts, when our ways are His. It is only as we enter in a practical way into His mind and heart, that He enters, experimentally, into ours. This is the secret of rest and repose, of peace and joy, of fruitfulness and usefulness.

That our practical union with Christ, our “abiding” in Him, consists of and is maintained by *obedience*, is also clear from, “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him” (1Jo 3:24). There can be no such mutual indwelling if there is on our part disobedience to the divine commandments. A course of sinning is altogether incompatible with communion with the Holy One. To abide in Christ is to have our wills merged in His, as His was in the Father's. Thus it is a combination of outward movement and inward repose—the feet acting, the hands busy, yet the heart resting in Him. It is to think, feel, and act as Christ does with regard to God and His law, sin and righteousness, holiness and grace—to entertain the same sentiments with reference to all things.

It only remains for us to glance at another aspect of practical union, and that is, as it concerns *our dealings with the Lord's people*. As the mystical and spiritual union which exists between Christ and His people is evidenced by their practical communion with Him, so the mystical and spiritual union which exists between Christians is to be manifested by a *practical* communion with them. There is a blessed union existing between the saints, as saints, which nothing can sever. They have been made partakers of the same new and spiritual birth, they are partakers of the same heavenly calling (Heb 3:1). They are partakers of like precious faith (2Pe 1:1). One God is their Father, one Christ is their Lord, one Spirit is their Comforter. They are members of one body and they have one hope of their calling. Therefore are they exhorted to be “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). So eminently was that unity evidenced at the beginning we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” (Act 4:32). How should it be otherwise, seeing that, “They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Act 2:42).

But alas, what an entirely different state of affairs do we now behold in Christendom. We will not say among the Lord's own people, but among those bearing His name. What division, what strife, what jealousy! What sectarian walls and barriers exclude some of Christ's sheep from other members of His flock! “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7) is the divine injunction. That does not mean “receive” into church-fellowship (the Roman saints were already in *that* relationship, Rom 12:4-8), but “receive” each Christian brother and sister *into your hearts*, so that you interest yourself in their welfare, and do all in your power to promote their temporal and eternal interests. But today, Baptists, for the most part, will “receive” none but a “Baptist,” the Presbyterians none but a “Presbyterian,” those known as the “Brethren,” none but one who is “identified” with them. That is one reason why—as a protest against sectarianism—the writer remains unattached.

O what a lack of brotherly kindness, tender sympathy, and Christian affection now obtains. Instead of bearing each other's burdens, some seem most pleased when they can add to them. O

for grace to sink our petty differences, and seek a practical union and communion with the whole family of God—loving those whom the Lord loves, and walking in affection with those whom He has redeemed with His precious blood. But this too often calls for self-denial and self-sacrifice—not sacrificing God’s truth, not sacrificing any Christian principle, but mortifying our carnal pride which loves to have the pre-eminence. O for grace to “know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isa 50:4), to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom 12:15), to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb 12:12). If we do not, Christ will yet say to us, “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye *did it not to me*” (Mat 25:45).

What a word is this, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: FOR we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). What a *motive* is here presented for Christians being truthful toward their fellow-Christians! By lying to one another they *injure* the union and communion which the members of the mystical body of Christ have with each other in Him! As another has said, “If I lie to my brother, I do the same thing spiritually, as if I used my right hand to stab my left, or as if I used my eye to thrust my leg into a dirty ditch.” What high and holy ground is this! O what a spirit of loving communion there should be—*manifested* in a PRACTICAL way—between those who are united to Christ their common Head, and in Him to one another. The Lord be pleased to grant all-needed grace to both writer and reader to act accordingly.

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

8. Its Procurer

There is a perfect sanctification in Christ which became ours the moment we first believed in Him—little though we *realised* it at the time. There will also be perfect *conformity* to this *in us*, an actual making good thereof, when we shall be glorified and enter that blessed realm where sin is unknown. In between these two things is the believer’s present life on earth, which consists of a painful and bewildering commingling of lights and shadows, joys and sorrows, victories and defeats—the latter *seeming* to greatly preponderate in the cases of many, especially so the longer they live. There is an unceasing warfare between the flesh and the spirit, each bringing forth “after its own kind,” so that groans ever mingle with the Christian’s songs. The believer finds himself alternating between thanking God for deliverance from temptation and contritely confessing his deplorable yielding to temptation. Often is he made to cry, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24). Such has been for upwards of twenty-five years the experience of the writer, and it is still so.

Now just as in the commercial world there are a multitude of medical charlatans announcing sure remedies for the most incurable diseases, and filling their pockets at the expense of those who are foolish enough to believe their fairy-tales, so there are numerous “quacks” in the religious world, claiming to have a cure for indwelling sin. Such a paragraph as we have just

written above would be eagerly seized by these mountebanks, who, casting up hands and eyes of holy horror, would loudly express their pity for such “a needless tragedy.” They would at once affirm that such an experience, so largely filled with defeat, was because the poor man has never been “sanctified,” and would insist that what he needed to do was to lay his all on the altar and “receive the second blessing,” the “baptism of the Spirit,” or as some call it “enter into the victorious life” by fully trusting Christ for victory.

There are some perverters of the Gospel who, in effect, represent Christ as only *aiding* sinners to work out a righteousness of their own. They bring in Christ as a mere make-weight, to supply their deficiency, or they throw the mantle of His mercy over their failures. Some of the religious quacks we have referred to above would be loud in their outcry against such a travesty of the grace of God in Christ, insisting that we can be justified by nought but His blood. And yet *they* have nothing better to set before their dupes when it comes to “perfect sanctification” or “full salvation through fully trusting Jesus.” Christ they say will *aid* us in accomplishing what we have vainly attempted in our own strength, and by fully trusting Him we now shall find easy what before we found so arduous. But *God’s* Word supplies no warrant to expect sinless perfection in this life, and such teaching can only tend to fatal deception or bitter disappointment.

Those we have referred to above generally separate justification and sanctification both in fact and in time. Yea, they hold that a man may pass through the former and yet be devoid of the latter, and represent them as being attained by two distinct acts of the soul, divided it may be by an interval of years. They exhort Christians to seek sanctification very much as they exhort sinners to seek justification. Those who attain to this “sanctification” they speak of as being inducted into a superior grade of Christians, having now entered upon “the *higher* life.” Some refer to this experience as “the second blessing”—by the first, forgiveness of sins is received through faith in the atonement; by the second, we receive deliverance from the power (some add “the presence”) of sin by trusting in the efficacy of Christ’s Name—a dying Saviour rescues from hell, an ever-living Saviour now delivers from Satan.

The question may be asked, but ought not the Christian to “present his body a living sacrifice unto God?” Most assuredly, yet *not* for the purpose of *obtaining* sanctification, nor yet for the improving or purifying of “the flesh,” the sinful nature, the “old man.” The exhortation of Romans 12:1 (as its “therefore” plainly shows—the “mercies of God” pointing back to 5:1-2; 6:5-6; 8:30, etc.) is a call for us to live in the power of what *is* ours in Christ. The presenting of our bodies “a living sacrifice to God” is the practical recognition that we *have been* sanctified or consecrated to Him, and we are to do so *not* in order to get our bodies sanctified, but in the gracious assurance that they are already “*holy*.”

The Christian cannot obtain a right view of the truth of sanctification so long as he separates that blessing from justification, or while he confines his thoughts to a progressive work of grace being wrought within him by the Holy Spirit. “But ye are washed, but ye *are* sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:11). Observe that we are “sanctified” just as we are “justified”—in the Name of Another! “That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith” (Act 26:18). When we receive the “forgiveness” of our sins, we also receive “an inheritance among them *which are* sanctified by faith.” The prayer of Christ, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17), is fulfilled as we obtain a spiritual *knowledge* of the truth by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not by self-efforts, by any “consecration” of our own, by attempts to “lay our all on the altar” that we enter into what Christ has procured for His people, but *by faith’s appropriation* of what God’s Word sets before us.

In Christ, and in Him alone, does the believer possess a perfect purity. Christ *has* consecrated us to God by the offering of Himself unto Him for us. His sacrifice has delivered us from defilement and the ensuing estrangement, and restored us to the favour and fellowship of God. The Father Himself views the Christian as identified with and united to His “Holy One.” There are no degrees and can be no “progress” in *this* sanctification—an unconverted person is absolutely unholy and a converted person is absolutely holy. God’s standard of holiness is not what the Christian becomes by virtue of the Spirit’s work in us here, but what Christ is as seated at His own right hand. Every passage in the New Testament which addresses believers as “saints”—holy ones—refutes the idea that the believer is not yet sanctified and will not be so until the moment of death.

Nor does the idea of a progressive sanctification, by which the Christian “more and more dies unto sin,” agree with the recorded experience of the most mature saints. The godly John Newton (author of “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds,” etc.) when speaking of the expectations which he cherished at the outset of his Christian life, wrote, “But alas! these my golden expectations have been like South Sea dreams. I have lived hitherto a poor sinner and I believe I shall die one. Have I, then, gained nothing? Yes, I have gained that which I once would rather have been without—such accumulated proof of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart as I hope by the Lord’s blessing has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean when I say, ‘Behold I am vile!’ I was ashamed of myself when I began to serve Him, I am more ashamed of myself now, and I expect to be most ashamed of myself when He comes to receive me to Himself. But oh! I rejoice in Him, that He is not ashamed of me!” Ah, as the Christian grows in grace, he grows more and more *out of love with himself*.

“And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon *his* forehead, that *they* may be accepted before the LORD” (Exo 28:36-38). These verses set before us one of the most precious typical pictures to be found in the Old Testament. Aaron, the high priest, was dedicated and devoted exclusively to the Lord. He served in that office on the behalf of others, as their mediator. He stood before God as the representative of Israel, bearing their names on his shoulders and on his heart (Exo 28:12, 29). Israel, the people of God, were both represented by and *accepted in* Aaron.

That which was set forth in Exodus 28:36-38 was not a type of “the way of salvation” but had to do entirely with the approach unto the thrice holy God of His own sinning and failing people. Though the sacrifices offered on the annual day of atonement delivered them from the curse of the law, godly individuals in the nation must have been painfully conscious that *sin* marred their very obedience, and defiled their prayers and praises. But through the high priest, their service and worship was acceptable to God. The inscription worn on his forehead, “Holiness to the Lord,” was a solemn appointment by which Israel was impressively taught that holiness became the house of God, and that none who are unholy can possibly draw near unto Him. In Leviticus 8:9, the golden plate bearing the inscription is designated “the holy crown,” for it was set over and above all the vestments of Aaron.

Now Aaron foreshadowed Christ as the great High Priest who is “over the house of God” (Heb 10:21). Believers are both represented by and accepted in Him. The “Holiness to the LORD” which was “*always*” upon Aaron’s head, pointed to the essential holiness of Christ, who “*ever* liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25). Because of our legal and vital union with

Christ, *His* holiness is *ours*. The perfections of the great High Priest is the measure of our acceptance with God. Christ has also “borne the iniquity of our holy things”—made satisfaction for the defects of our worship—so that they are not laid to our charge, the sweet incense of His merits (Rev 8:3) rendering our worship acceptable to God. By Him not only were our sins put away and our persons made acceptable, but our service and worship is rendered pleasing too, “To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God *by Jesus Christ*” (1Pe 2:5).

Here, then, is the answer to the pressing question, how can a moral leper be fitted for the presence of God? We need a perfect holiness as well as a perfect righteousness, in order to have access to Him. The Holy One cannot look upon sin, and were we to approach Him in a way wherein He could not look upon us as being perfectly holy, we could not draw nigh unto Him at all. *Christ* is the all-sufficient answer to our every problem, the One who meets our every need. The precious blood of Jesus has separated the believer from all evil, removed all defilement, and made him nigh unto God in all the acceptableness of His Son. How vastly different is this from that conception which limits sanctification to our experiences and attainments! How infinitely better is God’s way to man’s way, and how far are His thoughts on this above ours!

Now it is in the New Testament epistles that we are shown most fully the reality and substance of what was typed out under Judaism. First, we read, “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one” (Heb 2:11). Christ is both our sanctification and our sanctifier. He is our sanctifier, first, by His blood putting away our sins and cleansing us from all defilement. Second, by the operations of the Holy Spirit, for whatever He doth, He does it *as* “the Spirit of Christ” who procured Him (Psa 68:18 and Act 2:33) for His people. Third, by communicating a holy life unto us (Joh 10:10), the whole stock of grace and holiness is in His hands, He communicating the same unto His people (Joh 1:16). Fourth, by appearing in heaven as our representative. *He* being “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” (Exo 28:36) *for us*. Fifth, by applying and blessing His Word to His people, so that they are washed thereby (Eph 5:26). He is our sanctification because the holiness of His nature, as well as His obedience, is imputed to us (1Co 1:30).

“We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). The Christian will never have right thoughts on this subject until he perceives that his sanctification *before God* was accomplished at Calvary. As we read, “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you *holy* and unblameable and unproveable in his sight” (Col 1:21-22). By His work at the cross, Christ presents the church unto God in all the excellency of His perfect sacrifice. In these passages it is not at all a question of any work which is wrought *in us*, but of what Christ’s oblation has secured *for us*. By virtue of His sacrifice, believers have been set apart unto God in all Christ’s purity and merits, a sure title being accorded them for heaven. God accounts us holy according to the holiness of Christ’s sacrifice, the full value of which rests upon the least instructed, the feeblest, and most tried Christian on earth.

So infinitely sufficient is Christ’s oblation for us that, “By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). As we read again, “Ye are *complete* in him” (Col 2:10), and this, because His work was complete. *All* true believers are in the everlasting purpose of God, and in the actual accomplishment of that purpose by the Lord Jesus, perfectly justified and perfectly sanctified. But all believers are not *aware* of that blessed fact, far from it. Many are confused and bewildered on this subject. One reason for that is that so many are looking almost entirely to human teachers for instructions, instead of relying upon the Holy Spirit to guide them into the truth, and searching the Scriptures for a knowledge of the same. The religious world

today is a veritable “Babel of tongues,” and all certainty is at an end if we turn away from the Word (failing to make *it* our *chief* study) and lean upon preachers. Alas, how many in professing Protestantism are little better off than the poor Papists, who receive unquestioningly what the “priest” tells them.

It is only as we read God’s Word, mixing faith therewith (Heb 4:2) and appropriating the same unto ourselves, that the Christian can enter into *God’s* thoughts concerning him. In the sacred Scriptures, and nowhere else, can the believer discover what God has made Christ to be unto him and what He has made him to be in Christ. So too it is in the Scriptures, and nowhere else, that we can learn the truth about *ourselves*, that in the flesh (what we are by nature as the depraved descendants of fallen Adam) there “dwelleth *no* good thing” (Rom 7:18). Until we learn to distinguish (as God does!) between the “I” and the “sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom 7:20) there can be no settled peace. Scripture knows nothing of the sanctification of “the old man,” and as long as we are hoping for any improvement in him, we are certain to meet with disappointment. If we are to “worship God in the spirit, and *rejoice* in Christ Jesus” we must learn to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phi 3:3).

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:12). The precious blood of Christ has done more than simply make expiation for their sins, it has also set them apart to God as His people. It is that which has brought them *into fellowship* with the Father Himself. By the shedding of His blood for us, Christ made it consistent with the honour and holiness of God to take us as His peculiar people. It also procured the Holy Spirit who has (by regeneration) fitted us for the privileges and duties of our high calling. Thus, Christ has sanctified His people both objectively and subjectively. We are “sanctified with his own blood,” first, as it was an *oblation* to God, second, as its *merits* are imputed to us, third, as its *efficacy* is applied to us.

Christ’s blood “cleanseth us from all sin” (1Jo 1:7) in a threefold way. First, Godwards, by blotting out our sins and removing our defilement from His view (as Judge). Second, by procuring the Holy Spirit, by whom we receive “the *washing* of regeneration” (Ti 3:5). Third, by our consciences being “purged” *as faith lays hold of* these blessed facts, and thus we are fitted to “serve the living God”! (Heb 9:14). Herein we may perceive how God puts the fullest honour on His beloved Son, by making Him not only the Repairer of our ruin and the triumphant Undoer of the serpent’s work (1Jo 3:8), but also giving us His own perfect standing before God and communicating His own holy nature unto His people—for a branch cannot be in the true Vine without partaking of its life.

In the person of Christ, God beholds a holiness which abides His closest scrutiny, yea, which rejoices and satisfies His heart, and whatever Christ is before God, He is for His people—“whither the forerunner is *for us* entered” (Heb 6:20), “*now* to appear in the presence of God *for us*” (Heb 9:24)! In Christ’s holiness we are meet for that place into which divine grace has exalted us, so that we are made to “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). This is not accomplished by any experience, separated by a long process from our justification, but is a blessed fact since the moment we first believed on Christ. We are in Christ, and how can anyone be *in Him*, and yet not be perfectly sanctified? From the first moment we were “joined unto the Lord” (1Co 6:17), we are “*holy* brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). *This* is what the Christian’s faith needs to lay hold of and rest on, upon the authority of Him that cannot lie. Nevertheless, the best taught, the most spiritual and mature Christian, apprehends the truth but feebly and inadequately, for now “we see through a glass, darkly” (1Co 13:12).

True, there *is* such a thing as a growth *in the knowledge of* our sanctification, that is, providing our thoughts are formed by the Word of God. There is an experimental entering into the practical enjoyment of what God has made Christ to be unto us, so that by faith therein our thoughts and habits, affections and associations are affected thereby. There is such a thing as our apprehending the glorious standing and state which divine grace has given us in the Beloved, and exhibiting the influence of the same upon our character and conduct. But *that* is not what we are *here* treating of. That which we are now considering is the wondrous and glorious fact that the Christian was as completely sanctified in God's view the first moment he laid hold of Christ by faith, as he will be when every vestige of sin has disappeared from his person, and he stands before Him glorified in spirit and soul and body.

But the question may be asked, What provision has God made to meet the needs of His people sinning *after* they are sanctified? This falls not within the compass of the present aspect of our subject. Yet briefly, the answer is, the ministry of Christ on high as our great High Priest (Heb 7:25) and Advocate (1Jo 2:1), and their penitently confessing their sins, which secures their forgiveness and cleansing (1Jo 1:9). The sins of the Christian mar his communion with God and hinder his enjoyment of His salvation, but they affect not his standing and state in Christ. If I judge not myself for my sinful failures and falls, the chastening rod will descend upon me, yet, wielded not by an angry God, but by my loving Father (Heb 12:5-11).

We are not unmindful of the fact that there is not a little in this article which worldly-minded professors may easily pervert to their own ruin—what truth of Scripture is not capable of being “wrested”? But that is no reason why God's people should be *deprived* of one of the choicest and most nourishing portions of the Bread of Life! Other articles in this series are thoroughly calculated to “preserve the balance of truth.”

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We wish to take this opportunity of thanking many Christian friends for their *prayers* and kindly efforts to secure new readers. The Lord has graciously granted much encouragement during the last three months [written by Brother Pink in 1936]. Our circulation is still below one thousand, so we trust that those who are interested in the continuance of these “Studies” will neither cease praying daily nor relax their efforts to make the magazine known to others likely to welcome and be helped by its contents. Only those who are willing to *take the time* to promote their soul's interest would profit, for our articles are not designed for hurried and superficial reading. The best method is *not* to read right through each issue singly, but to take the *two* cover-page articles together, then the two on Hebrews, then the two on David, and so on [still a very good suggestion—60 years later!] May the Lord bless us and make us an increasing blessing to His dear people both by pen and mouth.

# GRADUAL CONQUEST

“I will not drive them [the Canaanites] out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. *By little and little* I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land” (Exo 23:29-30). Thus it is with the children of God. If they had not enemies without and within, and oppositions in their way, there are some dangerous “beasts” that would be ready to “increase” upon them.

For instance, there is a beast which is called *pride*, that might grow upon you if you had no enemies to fight with, and while (experimental—A.W.P.) sanctification is incomplete. Hence, a thorn in the flesh was given to Paul that he might not be exalted above measure. Is not the thorn in the flesh well ordered that prevents confidence in the flesh? There is a beast called *security*, that might grow upon you. But now there are enemies on all hands of you, to prevent your falling asleep, to keep you watching and waking, and constantly on your guard. There is a beast called *presumption*, that might grow upon you, and make you think you were able to go forward to heaven upon your own legs and in your own strength, if you found no such enemies in the way. There is another beast called *worldly-mindedness*, that might grow upon you, if you had no adversaries and adversities to vex you, and wean you from the world. You would be in danger of saying, It is good to be here. But now the wars and battles in your way to heaven make you say with your heart, O! it is better to be there.

There is a beast, a filthy brute beast, called *sensuality*, that might grow upon you, believer, that might make you lukewarm and formal in all your duties, as well as carnal and light in the intervals of duties. But the sight of your spiritual enemies on the field will make you see a need to be spiritual, zealous, earnest, and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. There is also a filthy dumb beast which is called *forgetfulness*, that would certainly grow upon you, and be very dangerous to your soul and spiritual welfare, if your enemies were all destroyed. Therefore God says, “Slay them not, lest my people forget” (Psa 59:11). If the execution were quick and hasty, the impressions of it would not be deep and durable. Swift destructions startle men for the present, but they are soon forgotten, therefore, when we think that God’s judgments upon the nations of our spiritual enemies come on but very slowly, we must conclude that God hath wise and holy ends in that gradual procedure. “Slay them not, lest my people forget”—extract from a sermon by Ralph Erskine, 1760.

Yes, Christian reader, God has a good reason for permitting the lusts of the flesh to rage, at times, within you. All His ways are marked by infinite wisdom, even though very often we are unable to discern it. So it is here. How often has a saint wondered why God has withheld that victory over indwelling sin, for which he has prayed so long and so earnestly. There is a needs-be for failure as well as victory, for sorrow as well as joy. In the dust before Him is our proper place, and if we leave it, He suffers us to be *tripped up* by Satan, to fling us back there! Moreover, as Mr. Erskine points out, our graces must be *exercised* if our “enemies” are to be prevented from having dominion over us. One day we shall perceive more clearly why God permitted us to experience so many falls, and to “go halting” all our days, and *why* it was that “by little and little” He vanquished our spiritual foes.

# May

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 33. The Spirit Witnessing (Part 3)

Rightly did Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) affirm, “Many have been the mischiefs that have arisen from that false and delusory notion of the witness of the Spirit, that it is a kind of inward voice, suggestion, or revelation from God to man, that he is beloved of Him, and that his sins are pardoned—sometimes accompanied with, sometimes without, a text of Scripture, and many have been the false and vain (though very high) affections that have arisen from hence. It is to be feared that multitudes of souls have been eternally undone by it.” Especially was this so in the past, when fanaticism made much of the Spirit witnessing *to* souls.

An affectionate and dutiful child has within his own bosom the proof of the peculiar and special relationship in which he stands to his father. So it is with the Christian—his filial inclinations and aspirations after God prove that he is His child. In addition to this, the Holy Spirit gives assurance of the same blessed fact by shedding abroad in his heart the love of God (Rom 5:5). The Holy Spirit’s indwelling of the Christian is the sure mark of his adoption. Yet the Spirit cannot be discerned by us in His essence, only by means of His operations is He to be known. As we discern His work, we perceive the Worker, and *how* His work in the soul can be *ascertained* without diligent examination of our inward life and a careful comparison of it with the Scriptures, we know not. The Spirit reveals Himself to us by that spirit which He begets in us.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). Let it be carefully noted that this verse does not say the Spirit bears witness *to* our spirit (as it is so often misquoted), but “*with*”—it is a single word in the Greek (a compound verb) “beareth witness with.” It is deeply important to notice this distinction. The witness of the Spirit is not so much a revelation which is made to my spirit, considered as the recipient of the testimony, as it is a *confirmation* made in or with my spirit, considered as co-operating in the testimony. It is not that my spirit bears witness that I am a child of God, and that then the Spirit of God comes in by a distinguishable process with a separate testimony, to say Amen to my assurance, but it is that there is a single testimony which has a conjoint origin.

The “witness” of the Spirit, then, is *not* by means of any supernatural vision nor by any mysterious voice informing me I am a child of God—for the devil tells many a hypocrite that. “This is not done by any immediate revelation or impulse or merely by any text brought to the

mind (for all these things are equivocal and delusory), but by coinciding with the testimony of their own consciences, as to their uprightness in embracing the Gospel, and giving themselves up to the service of God. So that, whilst they are examining themselves concerning the reality of their conversion, and find Scriptural evidence of it, the Holy Spirit from time to time shines upon His own work, excites their holy affections into lively exercise, renders them very efficacious upon their conduct, and thus puts the matter beyond all doubt” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

First, the Spirit’s witness is in strict accord with the teaching of Holy Writ. In the Word He has given certain marks by which the question may be decided as to whether or not I am a child of God. He has described certain features by which I may identify myself—see John 8:39, Romans 4:12 and 8:14, and contrast John 8:44 and Ephesians 2:2-3. It is by the truth that the Spirit enlightens, convicts, comforts, feeds, and guides the people of God, and it is by and through the truth that He bears witness with their spirit. There is a perfect harmony between the testimony of Scripture and the varied experiences of each renewed soul, and it is by revealing to us this harmony, by showing us the correspondency between the history of our soul and the testimony of the Word that He persuades us we are born again, “Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1Jo 3:19).

Second, He works such graces in us as are peculiar to God’s children and thereby evidences our interest in the favour of God. He makes the Christian to feel “poor in spirit,” a pauper dependent upon the charity of God. He causes him to “mourn” over much which gives the worldling no concern whatever. He bestows a spirit of “meekness” so that the rebellious will is, in part, subdued, and God’s will is submitted unto. He gives a “hunger and thirst after righteousness” and gives the soul to feel that the best this perishing world has to offer him is unsatisfying and but empty husks. He makes him “merciful” toward others, counteracting that selfish disposition which is in us by nature. He makes him “pure in heart” by giving him to pant after holiness and hate that which is vile (Mat 5:3-8, etc.). By His own fruit in the soul, the Spirit makes manifest His indwelling presence.

Third, He helps us to discern His work of grace in our souls more clearly. Conscience does its part, and the Spirit confirms the same. The conjoint witness of the Spirit gives vigour and certainty to the assurance of our hearts. When the flood-waters of a land mingle themselves with a river, they make one and the same stream, but it is now more rapid and violent. In like manner, the united testimonies of our own conscience and of the Spirit make but one witness, yet it becomes such as to break down our fears and overcome our doubts. When the blessed Spirit shines upon His own work of grace and holiness in our souls, then in His light we “see light” (Psa 36:9). Inward holiness, a filial spirit, an humble heart, submission to God, is something that the devil cannot imitate.

Fourth, He helps us not only to see grace, but to judge of the sincerity and reality of it. It is at this point many honest souls are most sorely exercised. It is much easier to prove that we believe, than to be assured that our faith is a saving one. It is much easier to conclude that we love Christ, than it is to be sure that we love Him in sincerity and for what He is in Himself. Our hearts are fearfully deceitful, there are such minglings of faith and unbelief (Mar 9:24), and grace in us is so feeble that we hesitate to pronounce positively upon our state. But when the Spirit increases our faith, rekindles our love, strengthens us with might in the inner man, He enables us to come to a definite conclusion. First He sanctifies and then He certifies.

The deceits of Satan, though often plausible imitations up to a point, are, in their tendency and outcome, always opposed to that which God enjoins. On the other hand, the operations of the Spirit are ever in unison with the written Word. Here, then, is a sure criterion by which we may

test *which* spirit is at work within us. The three truths of Scripture which more directly concern us are, our ruin by nature, our redemption by grace, and the duties we owe by virtue of our deliverance. If then, our beliefs, our feelings, our assurance, tend to exalt depraved nature, depreciate divine grace, or lead to a licentious life, they are certainly not of God. But if they have quite the opposite tendency, convincing us of our wretchedness by nature, making Christ more precious to us, and leading us into the duties He enjoins, they are of the Holy Spirit.

It only remains for us to ask, why does not the Holy Spirit grant unto the Christian a strong and comforting assurance of his divine sonship *at all times*? Various answers may be given. First, we must distinguish between the Spirit's *work* and His *witness*. Often it is His office to convict and make us miserable, rather than to impart comfort and joy. Second, His assuring consolation is often withheld because of our slackness. We are bidden to "make your calling and election sure" and "*be diligent* that ye may be found of him in peace" (2Pe 1:10 and 3:14)—the comforts of the Spirit drop not into lazy souls. Third, because of our sins, "The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (Act 10:44)—not while they were walking in the paths of unrighteousness. His witness is a *holy* one. He will not put a jewel in a swine's snout (Pro 11:22). Keep yourselves in the love of God (Jude 1:21) and the Spirit's witness will be yours.

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 101. The Call to Hear (12:25-26)

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" (Heb 12:25). In these words we find the Holy Spirit moving the apostle to make a practical application unto his readers of what he had just brought before them in the previous verses. The degree or extent of the privileges enjoyed, is the measure of our responsibility—the richer the blessing God grants us, the deeper is our debt of obligation to Him. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luk 12:48). It was of this principle and fact the Hebrews were now reminded.

The apostle had just completed drawing his final contrast between Judaism and Christianity (Heb 12:18-24), in which he had again shown the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former, and now he uses this on which to base an exhortation unto faith and obedience, or faithfulness and perseverance. Herein we have another example of the apostolic method of ministry—all their teaching had a *practical* end in view. Their aim was something more than enlightening the mind, namely, the moving of the will and ordering of the walk. Alas that there is so very little of this in present-day teaching and preaching. The design of the pulpit now seems to be entertaining the people, and rarely does it go further than instructing the mind—that which searches the conscience or calls for the performance of duty, that which is solemn and unpalatable to the flesh, is, for the most part, studiously avoided. May it please the Lord to grant His servants all needed grace for deliverance from a compliance with this "speak unto us *smooth* things."

The grander the revelation which God is pleased to make of Himself, the more punctual the attendance and the fuller the response which He requires from us. In the verses which are now before us, we find the apostle improving his argument by pointing out the weighty implications of it. Therein he returns to his main design, which was to urge the professing Hebrews unto steadfastness in their Christian course and conflict, and to steadily resist the temptation to lapse back into Judaism. This deeply important and most necessary exhortation he had urged upon them again and again, see Hebrew 2:1, 3; 3:12-13; 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26-29; 12:1, 15. Therein the servant of God may learn another valuable lesson pointed by the example of the apostle, namely, how God requires him to go over the same ground again and again where the *practical duties* of the Christian are concerned and hesitate not to frequently repeat the *exhortations* of Holy Writ! This may not increase his popularity with men, but it will meet with the Lord's approval, and no faithful minister can have both!

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (Heb 12:25). The Greek word for "See" is rendered "take heed" in Hebrews 3:12. The word for "refuse" signifies "deprecate"—do not disregard, still less reject. Now not only is this argument based upon the statement made in the preceding verses, but *the motive* for complying with it is to be drawn therefrom. It is because we "are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire" (Heb 12:18), that is, unto that order of things wherein the divine righteousness was so vividly displayed in *judicial* manifestation, but because we "are come unto mount Sion" (Heb 12:22), which speaks of pure *grace*, that we are now thus exhorted, for holiness ever becometh God's house. It is in the realization of God's wondrous grace that the Christian is ever to find his most effectual incentive unto a godly walk, see Titus 2:11-12.

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (Heb 12:25), which is the negative way of saying "*Hear Him*"—*Heed Him*, by believing and yielding obedience to what He says. This exhortation looks back to, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not *hearken* unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him" (Deu 18:18-19), c.f. Acts 3:22; 7:37. This is what the apostle now reminded the Hebrews of. Take heed that ye hear Him, for if you fail to, God will consume you with His wrath. A similar charge was given by God after Christ became incarnate, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; *hear ye him*" (Mat 17:5).

"This is the foundation of all Gospel faith and obedience, and the formal reason of the condemnation of all unbelievers. God hath given command unto all men to hear, that is, believe and obey His Son Jesus Christ. By virtue thereof, He hath given command unto others to preach the Gospel unto all individuals. They who believe them, believe in Christ, and they who believe in Christ through Him, believe in God (1Pe 1:21), so that their faith is ultimately revolved into the authority of God Himself. And so they who refuse them, who hear them not, do thereby refuse Christ Himself; and by so doing, reject the authority of God, who hath given this command to hear Him, and hath taken on Himself to require it when it is neglected, which is the condemnation of all unbelievers. This method, with respect unto faith and unbelief, is declared and established by our Saviour, 'He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me' Luke 10:16" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (Heb 12:25)—note carefully the *present* tense—not "that spoke." Christ is still speaking through His Gospel, by His Spirit, and instrumentally through His own commissioned servants, calling upon all who come under the sound of His voice to serve and obey Him. There are many ways in which we may "refuse" to hear and heed Him.

First, by neglecting to read daily and diligently the Scriptures through which He speaks. Second, by failing to attend public preaching where His Word is faithfully dispensed—if so be we live in a place where this holy privilege is obtainable. Third, by failing to comply with the terms of His Gospel and yield ourselves unto His authority. Fourth, by forsaking the narrow way of His commandments and going back again to the world. Fifth, by abandoning the truth for error, which generally ends in total apostasy. How we need to pray for an *hearing ear*, that is, for a responsive heart and yielded will.

“For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him speaketh from heaven” (Heb 12:25). In these words, the apostle continues to emphasise the contrast which obtains between Judaism and Christianity. What we have here is an echo from the keynote struck in the opening words of our epistle, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past *unto the fathers* by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken *unto us* by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). It is in the light of that statement our present verse is to be read and interpreted. The *Speaker* throughout is one and the same, namely, God (the Father), but the mouthpieces He employed differed greatly. Under Judaism, He spoke through mere men, the “prophets,” but in connection with Christianity, He speaks in and by His own beloved “Son.”

This difference in the respective mouthpieces employed by God was in accord with and indicative of the relative importance of the two revelations given by Him. Judaism was but a religion for earth, and a temporary arrangement for the time being—accordingly, human agents were God’s instruments in connection therewith. But Christianity is a revelation which concerns a *heavenly* calling, heavenly citizenship, a heavenly inheritance, and exhibits *eternal* relations and realities. Appropriately, then, was the everlasting Son, “the Lord from heaven,” the One by whom its grand secrets were disclosed. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Joh 1:18). The primary reference there is a *dispensational* one. Under Judaism, God dwelt behind the veil, but under Christianity, “we all, with open face” behold, as in a glass, “the glory of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). Under the old covenant men were unable to go into God, but under the new covenant God has, in the person of Christ, come out to men.

But blessed and glorious as is the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, equally solemn and terrible is the contrast between *the punishment* meted out to those who refuse God’s revelation under each. God speaks now from a higher throne than the one He assumed at Sinai, that was on earth, the one He now occupies is in heaven. Therefore it must inevitably follow that the guilt of those who refuse to heed Him today is far greater and their punishment must be the more intolerable. Not only do higher privileges involve increased obligations, but the failure to discharge those added obligations necessarily incurs deeper guilt and a heavier penalty. *This* is what the apostle presses here, as he had in, “For if the word spoken by angels [at Sinai] was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great salvation”? (Heb 2:2-3). If, then, we in anywise fear God’s vengeance or value His favour how it behooves us to most seriously heed the grace proffered in the Gospel!

Though Christianity has in it far less of what is terrifying than had Judaism and far more in it which exhibits the grace and mercy of God, nevertheless, apostasy from the one cannot be less terrible in its consequences than was apostasy from the other. There is as much to be dreaded in disregarding the authoritative voice of God now as there was then. Yea, as we have pointed out, the rejection of His message through Christ involves a worse doom than despising of His Word



through Moses and the prophets. “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much *sorer* punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God” (Heb 10:28-29). True, God does not now speak amid thunderings and lightnings, but rather by a tender appeal to our hearts, yet the rejection of the latter is fraught with more direful consequences than was the refusal of the former.

Alas that this weighty truth is so feebly apprehended today, and so little emphasised by the pulpit. Is it not a fact that the idea now generally prevailing is that the God of the New Testament is far more amiable and benevolent than the God of the Old Testament? How far from the truth is this. “I change not” (Mal 3:6) is the Lord’s express avowal. Moreover, it is under the new covenant (and not the old) that we find the most awe-inspiring and terror-provoking revelation of the righteous wrath of a sin-hating God. It was not through Moses or the prophets, but by the Lord Jesus that the everlasting fires of hell were most vividly depicted. He it was who spoke the plainest and the most frequently of that fearful place wherein there is “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” If Christ was the One to most fully reveal God’s love, He was also the One who most fully declared His wrath.

“They escaped not who refused him that spake on earth” (Heb 12:25). No, even though they had enjoyed such unparalleled privileges. They had been brought out of the house of bondage, delivered from the enemy at the Red Sea, ate of the heavenly manna, and drank of the water from the smitten rock, yet we are told, “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (1Co 10:5). The apostle had already reminded the Hebrews that it was of them God had declared, “They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest” (Heb 3:10-11). And this was because, “They *refused* him that spake” to them. They were disobedient at Sinai, where, so far from submitting to the divine authority to have “no other gods,” they made and worshipped the golden calf. They were unbelieving at Kadesh Barnea, when they listened to the scepticism of the ten spies.

“Much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb 12:25). Again we say, how greatly at variance with this is the idea which now obtains so generally. The great majority of professing Christians suppose there is much *less* danger of those bearing the name of the Lord being severely dealt with under the milder regime of Christianity, than there was for renegades in the days of Moses. But our text says, “much *more* shall not we escape”! Though it be true that Christianity is essentially a system of *grace*, nevertheless the requirements of *holiness* and the claims of *justice* are not thereby set aside. The despisers of grace must be and will be as surely punished as were the despisers of law, yea, “much more” so because *their* sin of refusal is more heinous. It is “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:17) which the despisers of the Gospel—its invitations and its requirements—will have to reckon with. So far as Mount Sion excels Mount Sinai so will the punishment of Christ-scorners exceed that of those who despised Moses.

Ere passing on to our next verse, we must anticipate a “difficulty” which our passage is likely to raise in the minds of some readers—How are we to harmonize the eternal security of the saints with this “much more shall not *we* escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven”? Alas, that such a question needs answering. Those who frame it betray a lamentable ignorance of *what* the “security of saints” consists of. God has never promised any man to preserve him in the path of self-will and self-pleasing. Those who reach heaven are they who follow (though stumblingly and with many falls) the only path which leads there, namely, the “narrow way” of *self-denial*. Or to put it another way, the only ones who escape the everlasting burnings are they

who *heed* Him that speaketh from heaven, for “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* him” (Heb 5:9).

The writer believes firmly in the blessed truth of “the eternal security of the saints,” but by no means all who profess to be Christians are “saints.” This raises the question, how may I know whether or not I am a saint? The answer is, by impartially examining myself in the light of Holy Writ and ascertaining whether or no I possess *the character and conduct of* a “saint.” The Lord Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (Joh 10:27). A “saint” or “sheep” of Christ, then, is one who *hears* HIS voice above all the siren voices of the world, above all the clamourings of the flesh, and gives evidence that he does so by *following* Him, that is, by heeding His commandments, being regulated by His will, submitting to His Lordship. And to them, and to none other, Christ says, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Joh 10:28).

Should it be asked, but was not the apostle addressing the “saints,” “sheep,” “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1) here in Hebrews 12:25? And if so, *why* did he present before *them* such an awful threat? First, these solemn words were addressed to *all* who come under the sound of the Gospel, and the response made by the hearer or reader serves as an admirable *test*. The proud and self-confident, who rely wholly upon a profession made by them years ago, ignore it to their own undoing, supposing those words have no application *to them*. Whereas the lowly and self-distrustful lay it to heart with trembling, and are thereby preserved from the doom threatened. Second, in the preservation of His people from destruction, God uses warnings and threatenings, as well as promises and assurances. He keeps His people in the narrow way by causing them to *heed* such an exhortation as this, “Be not highminded, but fear...For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not *thee*” (Rom 11:20-21).

What is meant by *turning away from* “him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb 12:25)? First, it describes the attitude of that large class who come under the sound of the Gospel and dislike its exacting terms—Christ is far too holy to suit their carnal hearts, His call for them to “forsake all and follow him” pleases not their corrupt nature—so He is “despised and rejected” (Isa 53:3) by them. Second, it depicts the conduct of the stony-ground hearers, who under the emotional appeals of high-pressure evangelists “receive the word with joy” (Luk 8:13), yet have “no *root*” in themselves, and so they quickly “fall away,” the scoffing of their godless companions or the appeal of worldly pleasures are too strong for them to continue resisting. Third, it denotes the lapse of those who having “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome” so that “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2Pe 2:20). Fourth, it announces the apostasy of those who, under pressure of persecution, renounce the faith.

“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). There are some points about this verse and the one immediately following which are far from easy to elucidate, yet their main purport is not difficult to determine. In ceasing to “speak on earth” and in now “speaking from heaven,” God gave therein intimation that the old covenant had been *supplanted* by the new, that He had done with Judaism and established the “better thing” in its place. This it was which the pious Hebrews found so hard to receive, for Judaism had been instituted by God Himself. Nevertheless, He only designed it to fulfill a temporary purpose “until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10), and that time had now arrived. It was to demonstrate and establish this important fact that God moved His servant to write this epistle.

Once more we would call attention to the method employed. Paul did not simply press his apostolic authority, though that had been sufficient of itself, instead, he referred his readers to *the written Word of God*, quoting from Haggai—in this too he has left an admirable example for all ministers of the Gospel to follow. The words of God Himself are far more weighty than any of ours. At every vital stage of his argument the apostle had referred the Hebrews to the Old Testament Scriptures. When he affirmed that Christ was superior to the heavenly hosts, he quoted, “Let all the angels of God worship him” (Heb 1:6). When he warned of the danger of apostasy, he referred them to Psalm 95 (Heb 3:7-11). When he insisted that Christ’s priesthood excelled Aaron’s, he cited, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek” (Heb 7:17). When he declared that the old covenant was an imperfect and temporary one, he reminded them that Jeremiah had foretold the “new covenant” (Jer 31:31-33).

When he dwelt upon Christ coming to earth with the express purpose of supplanting all the Levitical sacrifices by offering Himself unto God, the apostle showed that Psalm 40 had fore-announced (Heb 10:5-7) this very truth. When he called upon the Hebrews to walk by faith, He quoted Habakkuk 2:4, and then devoted the whole of the eleventh chapter to illustrate the fact that all of the Old Testament saints had so walked. When he admonished them for fainting under the chastening rod of God, he bade them remember the exhortation of Proverbs 3:11 (Heb 12:5). When he would prove to them the inferiority of Judaism to Christianity, he dwelt upon the Exodus record of the terrifying phenomena which accompanied the appearing of the Lord at Sinai, where He entered into covenant with their fathers (Heb 12:18-21). And now that he affirmed that God no longer spake to them “on earth,” but rather “from heaven,” he appeals again to their own Scriptures to show this very change had been divinely predicted.

What an amazing knowledge of the Scriptures Paul possessed! And what a splendid use he made of it! He did not entertain his hearers and readers with anecdotes or by relating some of the sensational experiences through which God had brought him, still less did he descend to “pleasantries” and jokes in order to amuse them. No, he constantly brought them face to face with the Holy Word of the thrice Holy God. And that, by grace, is the unvarying policy we have sought to follow in this magazine. Not only do we sedulously avoid any cheapening of the glorious Gospel of Christ, but we endeavour to furnish a proof text for every statement we make, for we ask no one to believe any doctrine or perform any duty on *our* mere say so. Some may complain that there is “too much repetition” in our articles, or that they are “too introspective,” or “too Calvinistic,” but their quarrel is not with us, but with Him whose Word we expound and enforce.

“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). The simplest and surest way of discovering the meaning of this verse and the force of citing Haggai 2:6, is to keep in mind the particular design which the apostle had before him. That was twofold—to enforce the exhortation he had just given in the previous verse, and to continue emphasising and demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. We will consider its terms, then, from each of these viewpoints. First, Paul aggravates the terribleness of turning away from God in Christ—if He who “shook” the earth is to be feared, much more so is He who “shakes” heaven! Then let us beware of ignoring His voice, by inattention, by unbelief, by disobedience, by apostasy.

“Whose voice then shook the earth” (Heb 12:26) is a figurative reference to God’s omnipotence, for His “voice” here has reference to the mighty power of God in operation. Let the reader carefully compare Psalm 29:3-9, where he will find the wondrous effects of providence ascribed to the “voice” of God. In particular, the apostle here alludes to the declaration of God’s

authority and the putting forth of His great strength at the time the law was given. Sinai itself was convulsed, so that “the whole mount quaked greatly” (Exo 19:18). Yet more than the earthquake is included in the words of our text. The entire commotion involved, with all the particulars enumerated in Hebrews 12:18-21, is comprehended therein. It is designated “shook the *earth*” because it was all on the earth, and involved only earthly things—it did not reach to heaven and eternal things.

“But now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). This clause has presented a hard riddle to the commentators, and scarcely any two of them, ancient or modern, agree in the solutions they have offered. Personally, we think they created their own difficulties. First, through failing to perceive that the “but *now*” is to be understood in connection with *the subject* the apostle was then discussing, and not as something God was *then* promising to make good in the future. Second, through failing to give proper attention and weight to the term “promised,” which is surely enough to show that the final destruction of this scene (when the doom of the wicked will be sealed) cannot be the subject of which Haggai was prophesying. Third, through a slavish adherence to literalism—recent writers especially—which caused many to miss the meaning of “the earth” and “heaven” in this passage. But these are points of too much importance to dismiss hurriedly, so we must leave their consideration till the next article.

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### 53. His Terrible Sin

David’s fearful fall into committing adultery with Bathsheba was now followed by a crime yet more odious. His unlawful child, soon to be born, he had sought to father upon Uriah, but his efforts had failed. A desperate situation now confronted him. He knew that if Uriah lived, he must discover his wife’s unfaithfulness, and this the king was determined to prevent at all costs. Even though it meant adding sin to sin and sinking more deeply into the mire of evil, David must preserve his reputation before men. Here, again, we see the likeness between him and Pilate—each sought to preserve innocent blood *and* the world (a position of honour in it) for himself at the same time, and surrendered the former for the latter when they could not both be retained—the “pride of life” was so strong that to maintain it, the death of another was not scrupled at.

Once a man, even though he be a believer, disregards the claims of God, he is very liable to ignore the claims of human friendship. It was so in the sad case here before us. David now shrank not from going to any length. First, he had tempted Uriah to break his vow (2Sa 11:11). Second, he had made him drunk, thinking that would cause him to break it (2Sa 11:13). And now he deliberately plotted the death of his devoted subject. He had rather that innocent blood be shed, and his whole army be threatened with defeat, than that his *own* good name should be made a scandal. See to what incredible lengths sin will urge even a child of God once he yields to its

clamourings—adultery now occasioned murder! Oh my reader, what very real need there is for begging God to enable you to “pass the time of your sojourning here *in fear*” (1Pe 1:17).

“When a man has so far given place to the devil as not only to commit scandalous sins, but to use disingenuous and base means of concealing them, and with sure prospect of having the whole exposed to public view, what would prevent his being pushed forward, by the same influence and from the same motives, to treachery, malice, and murder, till crimes are multiplied and magnified beyond computation, and till every nobler consideration is extinguished?” (Thomas Scott). Thus it was here. No matter what happened, David was resolved to maintain *his own* reputation. Sure proof was this that, at the time, he was completely dominated by Satan, as is shown by those words, “lest being lifted up with *pride* he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1Ti 3:6). How we need to pray that God would mercifully “*hide pride from*” us (Job 33:17)!

Further proof that David was then thoroughly in the toils of Satan may be seen in the subtle and vile tactics which he now resorted to. Thoroughly determined to cover his awful sin of adultery by committing still greater wickedness, he resolved to have poor Uriah put out of the way. “That innocent, valiant, and gallant man, who was ready to die for his prince’s honour must die by his prince’s hand” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Yes, but not directly. David was too cunning for that, and too anxious to preserve his own good name before men. He would not kill Uriah by his own hand, nor even bid his servants assassinate him, for his reputation had been destroyed by such a step. He therefore resorted to a more serpentine measure, which, though it concealed his own hand, was none the less heinous. The bravery of Uriah and his zeal for this country, suggested to the king the method of dispatching him.

“And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die” (2Sa 11:14-15). With cold-blooded deliberation David penned a note to the commander of his army, commanding him to station his faithful soldier in the place where he would be the most exposed to the assaults of the foe, and then leave him to his cruel fate. The king’s letter, decreeing his death, was carried by Uriah himself and delivered to Joab. The general did as his master had bidden and Uriah was slain. David’s abominable plan succeeded and he whose accusations he so much feared now lay silent in death—committed to an honourable grave, while his murderer’s honour was sullied as long as this world lasts.

This terrible sin of David’s was more laid to his charge by God than any other he committed, not only because of its gravity, and because it has given occasion to so many of His enemies to blaspheme, but also because it was more a deliberate and premeditated crime than an involuntary infirmity acting suddenly. How many of his failures are left on record—his lie to Abimelech (1Sa 21:2), his dissimulation before the king of Gath (1Sa 21:12), his rash vow to destroy Nabal (1Sa 25:33), his unbelieving, “I shall now perish one day at the hand of Saul” (1Sa 27:1), his injustice in the matter of Mephibosheth and Ziba (2Sa 16:4), his indulgence of Absalom (2Sa 14), his numbering of the people (2Sa 24), yet after his death God said, “David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite*” (1Ki 15:5).

The immediate sequel is as sad and awful as is what had just been before us. When he received the tidings that his vile plot had succeeded, David callously said to the messenger, “Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another” (2Sa 11:25). There was no compunction that a loyal supporter had been cruelly murdered, no horror of heart at his own guilt in connection therewith, no grief that others besides

Uriah had been sacrificed for his crime. Instead, he pretended that it was but “the fortunes of war,” and to be taken stoically. Disregarding the massacre of his soldiers, David complimented Joab on the execution of his abominable order, and bade the messenger return “and encourage thou him.”

“And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband” (2Sa 11:26). What a vile mockery! Only God knows how often the outward “mourning” over the departed is but a hypocritical veil to cover satisfaction of heart for being rid of their presence. Even where that be not the case, the speedy re-marriage of weeping widows and widowers indicates how shallow was their grief. “And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2Sa 11:27). David had pleased himself, but he had grievously displeased the Lord! “Let none therefore encourage themselves in sin by the example of David, for if they sin as he did, they will fall under the displeasure of God as he did” (Matthew Henry).

The question has been asked, “Can a person who has committed such atrocious crimes, and so long remains impenitent, be indeed a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and an heir of everlasting glory? Can one spark of divine life exist unextinguished in such an ocean of evil?” Were we left to our own unaided judgment to make reply, most probably every last one of us would promptly answer, *No*, such a thing is unthinkable. Yet in the clear light of Holy Writ, it is plain that such things *are* possible. Later, David made it manifest that he was a truly regenerated person by the sincerity and depth of his contrition and confession. Yet, let it be said that, no man while guilty of such sins, and before he *genuinely* repents of the same, can have any warrantable evidence to conclude that *he* is a believer, yea, everything points to the contrary. Though grace be not lost in such an awful case, divine consolation and assurance is suspended.

But now the question arises, *Why did God permit* David to fall so low and sin so terribly? The first answer must be, To display His high and awe-inspiring *sovereignty*. Here we approach ground which is indeed difficult for us to tread, even with unshodden feet. Nevertheless it cannot be gainsaid that there is a marvelous and sovereign display of the Lord’s grace toward His people in this particular respect, both before their calling and after. Some of the elect are permitted to sin most grievously in their unconverted state, whilst others of them, even in their unregenerate days, are wondrously preserved. Again, some of the elect after their conversion have been divinely allowed to awfully fall into the most horrible impieties, whilst others of them are so preserved as never to sin willfully against their consciences from the first conviction to the very close of their lives (Condensed from S. E. Pierce, 1746-1829, on Hosea 14:1).

This is a high mystery, which it would be most impious for us to attempt to pry into—rather must we bow our heads before it and say, “Even so, Father, for *so* it seemeth good in thy sight.” It is a solemn fact, from which there is no getting away, that some sin more before their conversion, and some (especially those saved in early life) sin worse after their conversion. It is also a plain fact that with some saints God most manifests His *restraining grace* and with others His *pardoning grace*. Three things are to be steadily borne in mind in connection with the sins of the saints. God never regards sin as a trifle. It is *ever* that “abominable thing which he hates” (see Jer 44:4). Second, it is never to be excused or extenuated by us. Third, God’s *sovereignty* therein must be acknowledged—whatever difficulties it may raise before our minds, let us hold fast the fact that God does as He pleases, and “giveth not account of any of his matters” (Job 33:13).

A second answer to the question, why did God permit David to fall so fearfully and sin so grievously? may be that we might have set before our eyes the more clearly the awful fact that

“the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). Unmistakably plain as is the meaning of those words, uttered by Him who cannot lie, yet how very slow we all are to *really* receive them at their face value, and acknowledge that they accurately describe the natural state of every human heart—that of the Man Christ Jesus alone excepted. But God has done more than make this bare statement. He has placed on record in His Word illustrations, exemplifications, demonstrations of its verity—notably so in allowing us to see the unspeakable wickedness that still remained in the heart of *David*!

Third, by suffering David to fall and sin as he did, God has graciously given a most solemn warning to believers in middle life—and elder Christians also. “Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against sin. David was so. His great surprisal into sin was after a long profession, manifold experiences of God, and watchful keeping himself from his iniquity. And hence, in particular, hath it come to pass that the profession of many hath declined in their old age or riper time. They have given over the work of mortifying sin *before* their work was at an end. There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit. The command God gives in Colossians 3:5 is *as necessary* for them to observe who are toward the end of their race, as those who are but at the beginning of it” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

Fourth, the fearful fall of David made way for a display of the amazing grace of God in recovering His fallen people. If we are slow to receive what Scripture teaches concerning the depravity of the human heart and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, we are equally slow to *really* believe what it reveals about the covenant-faithfulness of God, the efficacy of Christ’s blood to cleanse the foulest stain from those for whom it was shed, and the superabounding grace of Him who is “the Father of mercies.” Had David never sinned so grievously and sunken so low, he had never known those infinite depths of mercy which there are in the heart of God. Likewise, had his terrible sin, his subsequent broken-hearted confession, and his *pardon* by God, never been placed upon divine record, not a few of God’s people throughout the centuries had sunk in abject despair.

Fifth, to furnish a fatal stumbling-block to blatant rebels. “It is certain that thousands through succeeding generations have, by this fall of ‘the man after God’s own heart,’ been prejudiced against true religion, hardened in infidelity, or emboldened in blasphemy, while others have thence taken occasion to commit *habitual wickedness* under a religious profession, and with presumptuous confidence, to the still greater discredit of the Gospel. It should, however, be considered, that all these have been, previously, either open enemies to true religion, or hypocritical pretenders to it. And it is the righteous purpose of God, that stumbling-blocks should be thrown in the way of such men, that they may ‘stumble, and fall, and be snared, and taken, and perish.’ It is His holy will thus to detect the secret malignity of their hearts, and to make way for the display of His justice in their condemnation. On the other hand, thousands, from age to age, have by this awful example been rendered more suspicious of themselves, more watchful, more afraid of temptation, more dependent on the Lord, and more fervent in prayer; and by means of David’s fall, have, themselves, been preserved from falling” (Thomas Scott).

God, then, had wise and sufficient reasons, both for permitting David to sin so heinously and for placing the same upon imperishable record. Nor has any opposer or despiser of the truth any just ground to sneeringly ask, are *those* the fruits of grace and faith? We answer, no, they are not. Instead, they are the horrible works of the flesh, the filth which issues from corrupt human nature. How strong must those inclinations be to evil, when they, at times, succeed in overcoming the oppositions of truth and grace dwelling in the heart of an eminent saint of God! And in the light of the context (2Sa 11:1-2) how it behooves us to watch against the *beginnings* of negligence and

self-indulgence, and keep at the utmost distance from that precipice over which David fell, begging God that it may please Him to deliver us from all forbidden objects.

But this incident presents another difficulty to some, namely, how to harmonize it with the declaration made in 1 John 3:15, “Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” It is really surprising that so many have experienced trouble in reconciling this with the case of David—as usual, the difficulty is self-created through ignoring the context. In 1 John 3:1, the apostle takes up the subject of the Christian’s love one for another, whereby they make it manifest that they are *brethren* in Christ. The world (1) loves them not, (2) hates them, (3) will murder them whenever they dare—as Cain did Abel. But no real Christian has *such* a hatred in his heart against any “brother” in Christ. Nor had David. Uriah was not an Israelite, but an “*Hittite*” (2Sa 11:3, 1Ki 15:5)!

In conclusion, let us point out some of the solemn lessons which we may learn from this sad incident. 1. Beware of the *beginnings* of sin. Who had imagined that taking his ease when he should have been at the post of duty on the battlefield had led to adultery and ended in murder. 2. See how refusal to put one serious wrong right, preferring concealment to confession, gives Satan a great advantage over us, to lead into yet worse evil! 3. Learn therefrom that there is no security in years, and that no *past* communion with God will safeguard us against temptations when we are careless in *the present*. 4. How fickle is poor human nature. David’s heart smote him when he cut off Saul’s skirt, yet later he deliberately planned the murder of Uriah. 5. Mark what fearful lengths pride will go to in order to maintain a reputation before men. 6. Behold how callous the heart will become once the strivings of consciences are disregarded. 7. Though he may succeed in escaping the wrath of our fellows, sin always meets with the displeasure of the Lord.

## UNION AND COMMUNION

### 9. Experimental

We have now arrived at the last, and in some respects, the most blessed aspect of our theme. For what does our mystical, legal, vital, saving, and practical union with Christ amount to, unless it issues in experimental, intimate, precious oneness of heart with Him? This is really the simplest branch of our many-sided subject, yet not a few find it the most difficult—not because of its intellectual intricacy, but because they find it so hard to believe and harder still to carry out into practice. It seems too good to be true, too blissful for realisation in this life, too far above the reach of poor worms of the dust wriggling in the mire. Was it not thus when, as an awakened and convicted sinner, you first heard that Christ was an all-sufficient Saviour?—ah, but *not for ME*. Later, what difficulties presented themselves to your mind—your vileness, your utter unworthiness, your unbelief! What penances, reformations, labours, you supposed were necessary to qualify you for His salvation! But when the Spirit communicated faith, you were amazed at the simplicity of what before had baffled you.



It is much the same in the history of many Christians concerning experimental union and communion with Christ—a conscious, intimate, joyous fellowship with Him who is Altogether Lovely. When they hear or read of this, they conclude that such a blissful experience is not for *them*. Sin is too powerful, too active within, to ever hope for close fellowship with the Holy One in this life. Others may be more favoured, their corruptions may be more divinely subdued, but as for *me*, I can only expect to go halting and mourning the rest of my earthly pilgrimage. At best, I can only hope that God will not utterly cast me off, that He will mercifully preserve me from open transgressions, which would bring dishonour upon His cause, that He will graciously bear with my innumerable failures, and at last take me to heaven for *Christ's sake*, but that He should grant me any more than an occasional smile, a sip of His love by the way, is too much for me to expect.

“Ye were called unto the *fellowship* of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1Co 1:9). To whom were those words first addressed? To those who in their unregenerate days had been preserved from flagrant sins? No indeed, some of them had been guilty of the grossest crimes, but they were “washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (see 1Co 6:9-11). Were they, then, now living unblemished lives, walking in flawless obedience to God’s commands? No, far from it. Read through the epistle and observe the many offences which the Corinthian saints had committed. Nevertheless, to them the apostle was moved to say, “Ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son” (1Co 1:9), and if *they* were, rest assured Christian readers, that *we* are, too. Though so utterly unworthy in ourselves, still having the flesh unchanged within us, sin ever harassing and tripping us up, *yet* “called unto the fellowship of his Son” (1Co 1:9)!

Alas that so few understand of what that “fellowship” should consist of. Alas that any Christian should conclude that indwelling sin, with its daily activities, outbursts, and defilements, make “fellowship” with Christ an *impossibility*. Alas that so many suppose that this “fellowship” consists only of an ecstatic experience on the mountain-tops, enjoyed solely by those who gain a constant victory over indwelling corruptions and outward temptations. Were *that* the actual case, the writer would not be penning these lines, rather would he completely despair of attaining unto such “fellowship” with Christ in this life. Ah, my reader, it is those who are still vile sinners in themselves, who find *no* good thing dwelling in their flesh, who are called unto fellowship with God’s Son! Surely *that* is indeed “good news.” Blessed be His name, the Lord is “a very present help *in trouble*” (Psa 46:1)—for those who are troubled by their futile efforts to heal the plague of their own hearts, troubled over un-answered prayers for grace to subdue their iniquities. Yes, divine love has made full provision for *such* to enjoy experimental fellowship with Christ in this life.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*; of whom I [not “was,” but] *am* chief (1Ti 1:15), and it is equally true, blessedly true, that He has *fellowship* with SINNERS. If it were not so, there would be none in this world with whom He could have fellowship, for “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc 7:20). True, the ineffably holy Christ will not have any fellowship with us in our *sins* and no renewed heart would desire Him to do so. Nevertheless, it is equally true that He *does* have “fellowship” with sinners—saved sinners, yes—but *sinners* all the same. Did He not have the most intimate fellowship with the apostles? and were they not men of like passions with us?—very far from sinless perfection were they.

But let us now attempt to define *the nature* or character of experimental union and communion with Christ. “There is a friend that *sticketh closer* than a brother” (Pro 18:24) makes

known *His* side of this union. “There was *leaning on Jesus’ bosom* one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved” (Joh 13:23) exhibits *our* side of this communion. The first of these remarkable and inexpressibly blessed Scriptures presents to us an aspect of truth which some find it difficult to lay hold of and enjoy. In certain circles the exalted dignity of Christ’s person has received such emphasis, that a proportionate presentation has not been given of the intimate relations which He sustains to His people—a balance has not been preserved between that in Christ which *awes* and that which *melts* the heart. It is possible to become so occupied with the Lordship of Christ, as to almost (if not quite) lose sight of His friendship, to be so engaged in rendering to Him the honours which are due Him as God, as to overlook the tender sympathy and compassion which He has for His people as Man.

We are not unmindful of the fact that, in other circles, there has been a deplorable lack of the reverence and homage to which Immanuel is entitled, a fearful cheapening of the truth concerning Him, a light and unbecoming alluding to Him as “Jesus,” “our Friend,” “our elder Brother,” which grates upon the ears and grieves the hearts of those who have been better taught. Yet in our revolt from this unholy familiarity with the Lord of Glory and the almost total absence of giving to Him the worship which is His due, there is no sufficient reason why we should swing to the opposite extreme, and view Christ as so far above us as to preclude free approaches to and intimate fellowship with Him. He *is* our Lord, and as such we must prostrate ourselves before Him in the dust and address Him with holy awe. He is *also* our Friend, and as such we should open our hearts to Him with the utmost freedom, casting all our care upon Him, knowing that He careth for us (1Pe 5:7).

Experimental union with Christ is made possible by and is to issue from our *practical* union with Him, that is, our “walking together” in agreement with His revealed will. Experimental communion with Christ is exercised in happy subjection to Him as our Lord, and in intimate intercourse with Him as our Friend. Christ Himself is that “Friend which sticketh closer than a brother.” This term “Friend” tells of the *closeness* of that relationship which divine grace has established between the Redeemer and the redeemed. It reveals the warm throbbings of His heart unto His own. It gives them full warrant for the fullest confidence and the most unreserved dealings with Him, as it assures of His loving sympathy and deep interest in all that concerns them. There is no aloofness on His part and there should be no reserve on our part. There should be a readier unburdening of ourselves *to Him* than to our dearest earthly friend or nearest relative.

There are three things requisite in order to our having close communion with one of our fellows. First, that person must be real and present to us—fellowship is not possible with one we know not or who is far removed from us. Second, we must have a free access to that person, with confidence and boldness toward him—fellowship is not possible where formalities bar our approach, and where fear or awe dominates the soul. Third, there must be mutual affection and esteem. Fellowship is not possible where loves exists not or where it has cooled off. Now apply all of this to our present subject. If the soul is to enjoy real experimental union and communion with Christ, He must be a living reality to the heart. Faith must bring Him near and give freedom of approach to Him, and the affections must be kept warm and active toward Him. Otherwise our religion will quickly degenerate into a mechanical routine, devoid of reality and joy.

In the next place, let it be as definitely insisted upon that, our communion with God and His Christ must be *in the light*. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1Jo 1:5-7). We cannot now give an exposition of

this important passage, but must confine ourselves to that which bears directly upon what we are now treating of, namely, the character of experimental communion with Christ. What is it “to walk in darkness”? and what is it to “walk in the light”? The question is one, though viewed from both the negative and positive sides.

The first and most obvious answer must be that, to “walk in darkness” is to conduct ourselves unholily, to follow a course of sin. The works of darkness are the works of the flesh. But we must press the matter more closely home to our consciences. In order to do this, let us consider the leading characteristic of light. The most prominent property of light is its transparency and translucency. It is patent, open, always and everywhere so, as far as its free influence extends. The entrance of light spreads reality all around. Clouds and shadows are unreal. They breed and foster unreality. Light, then, is the naked truth. It makes manifest, it exposes things. Thus the chief conception which this metaphor of “light” conveys is, that of *openness*, clearness, transparency, reality. And that is what God is—that is what Christ—“the light of the world” (Joh 8:12)—is. That is what the Word of truth is—“a light shining in a dark place” (see 2Pe 1:19).

“The light shineth in darkness” (Joh 1:5). He who is the Light came to seek and to save those who “sat in darkness” (Mat 4:16). “For ye were sometimes darkness” (Eph 5:8). What a word is that!—not only that in our unregenerate days we dwelt in darkness, but we *were* in ourselves “darkness.” By the fall we lost that element of clearness, brightness, openness, in which we were created at first. Sin entered, and with sin, shame. The clear and open sunshine of the presence and countenance of Him who is Light became intolerable. The covering of fig leaves and the hiding-place of the trees of the garden was preferred. Henceforth, to fallen and unregenerate man, light became offensive. Darkness is upon the face of the deep of his heart. Henceforth, darkness is his element. He loves darkness rather than light (Joh 3:19). Therefore, deception, insincerity, hypocrisy, concealment, characterize him in his attitude toward God.

But at regeneration a miracle of grace takes place. Divine light shines in the heart (2Co 4:6), and the consequence is “but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8). The result of this is revolutionizing. Not only is the soul now enabled to see things, and to see itself, in God’s light, but he renounces the works of darkness, “the hidden things of dishonesty” (2Co 4:2). He throws off his cloak of pretense, he comes out into the open and truthfully confesses to God what he is. He no longer attempts to cover his sins, or pose as a good and righteous person, but honestly owns himself to be a polluted leper, an incorrigible rebel, an inveterate transgressor, a hell-deserving sinner! “An *honest and good heart*” (Luk 8:15) is now his. Previously he thought highly of himself and wished others to flatter him, now, he loves *the truth*, and abhors deception and hypocrisy. And as pointed out in the last article, the believer must *continue* as he began.

It is into the fellowship of Him who is “light” the believer has entered, and if real communion is to be preserved, there must be openness and genuineness on his part. Christ will not tolerate any deception. Any attempt at concealment or disguise is certain to displease Him. It is both our madness and our loss to try and hide anything from Him. But He is no hard taskmaster, instead, He is full of love and tender mercy. It is written, “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench” (Isa 42:3). His ears are ever open unto the cries of His erring people, and their tears of repentance are precious in His sight (Psa 56:8). Perfect openness and transparent honesty in our dealings with Him, is what He requires. Deceit and insincerity He will not tolerate. We cannot walk in the darkness of pretense and have fellowship with Him who is the Light!

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1Jo 1:7). Note it is not now “as he *is* light” (as in 1Jo 1:5), but “as he is *in* the light.” The thought here

is that, the same clear and transparent atmosphere surrounds them both. We walk in the light in which God is. It is the light of His own pure truth, His own nature, of absolute reality. The light in which God dwells is His own light. The light which He *is* Himself. In that light He sits enthroned, in that light He sees and knows, surveys and judges all things. And the light in which we are to walk is identically the same light as that in which God is. The same pure medium of vision is given to us, “In *thy* light shall *we* see light” (Psa 36:9). In other words, we must measure everything by God’s pure truth and judge ourselves in the light of His holiness.

The same clear-shining, transparent atmosphere of holiness, truth, and love is to surround us, penetrating our inner man and purging our mind’s eye, our soul’s eye, our heart’s eye, that it may see sin as *God* sees it—as “this abominable thing that I hate” (Jer 44:4), that we may see holiness as *God* sees it—as the inestimable thing which He loves. That all things, all events, all men, all our motives, thoughts, words, deeds, may appear exactly to us as what they appear to Him. It is into a fellowship of *light* we are invited to walk. If there is to be a *real* fellowship, it must be a fellowship of *light*, where there is no compromise, no pretense, no insincerity. Where the things of darkness and dishonesty are renounced. But can I, who am so full of sin and corruption, go forth into that light, which is so pure and piercing? Not apart from the cleansing blood of Christ! Thank God for the perfect and ever-availing provision of divine grace, providing for the removal of every obstacle which my depravity might interpose against walking in the light.

Experimental communion with Christ is the blessed goal towards which all the other unions lead—that the Lord’s people may have personal, conscious, intimate, joyous union with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them—an experience beginning in this life, continuing (more perfectly) throughout the endless ages of eternity. The grand end of our vital, saving, and practical union with Christ is to bring us into *experimental oneness* with Him, that we may drink into His spirit, have His mind, share His joy. Of all the experiences of God’s saints on earth, *this* approximates nearest to the heavenly bliss. Experimental union consists of knowing, loving, enjoying Christ. It is having plain, practical, personal dealings with Him. A deeper and fuller knowledge of Christ will increase our confidence and joy in Him. The more we are enabled to realise Christ’s relation to us and His changeless love for us, the easier and freer will be our approaches to Him.

Experimental union is based upon *faith’s realisation* of Christ’s relation to us and of our relation to Him, enabling the soul to say, “my beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song 2:16). It is faith, and nothing but faith, which makes God in Christ real, yea, present, to the soul, “*seeing* him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). It is faith, and faith alone, which brings Christ down unto us, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17). It is faith which gives freedom of approach to Him, “We have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph 3:12)—the faith of which He is both the Author and the Object. It is only by faith we can enjoy the fact that we were loved by Him from all eternity, and that He now bears us on His heart in the immediate presence of God. “*I live by the faith* of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20) contains the sum total of all spiritual life and spirituality.

Yet the cementing band of this union is *love*. Faith unites savingly—love, experimentally. Love is as truly a uniting grace as is faith, though it does not unite in the same way. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1Jo 4:16). Where two persons really love each other, their mutual affection makes them to be one. They are wrapped up in each other. So there is a mutual, hearty, reciprocal love, between Christ and believers. He loves them and they Him, and by virtue of that mutual love there is an intimate, experimental union between them. The husband and wife are one not merely by the marriage covenant—the legal tie and

external relationship—but also and chiefly because of the love and affection there is between them. So it is betwixt Christ and His saints—love, stronger than death, knits them together.

Experimental communion with Christ, then, consists in basking in the sunshine of His conscious presence, sitting at His feet and receiving from Him as Mary did (Luk 10:39), leaning upon His bosom as John did (Joh 13:23). The more we are engaged in contemplating and resting in His wondrous and changeless love for us, the more will our poor hearts be warmed and our affections drawn out unto Him. Our daily aim should be a more full and free acquaintance with the Lover of our souls, and this, not so much in a doctrinal way, as in a personal and experimental way, in actual communion with Him. It is in real intercourse with our friends, and in their converse with us, that we get most and best acquainted with them. It is even so with the Lord Jesus Christ, our best Friend. Open your heart freely to Him and beg Him to graciously open His heart freely to you. Humbly remind Him of His words, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you *friends*; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (Joh 15:15).

# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## 9. Its Securer

The Christian has been sanctified by the triune JEHOVAH. Infinite wisdom and fathomless grace so ordered it that he is indebted to each of the Eternal Three. The Lord God designed that all the Persons in the blessed Trinity should be honoured in the making holy of His people, so that each of them might be distinctively praised by us. First, the Father sanctified His people by an eternal decree, choosing them in Christ before the foundation of the world and predestinating them unto the adoption of children. Second, the Son sanctified His people by procuring for them a perfect and inalienable standing before the Judge of all, the infinite merits of His finished work being reckoned to their account. Third, God the Spirit makes good the Father’s decree and imparts to them what the work of Christ procured for them. The Spirit is the actual securer of sanctification, *applying it* to their persons. Thus the believer has abundant cause to adore and glorify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

It is very remarkable to observe the perfect harmony there is between the different operations of the Eternal Three in connection with the making holy of the elect, and the threefold signification of the term “sanctification.” In an earlier article, we furnished proof that the word “to sanctify” has a threefold meaning, namely, to separate, to cleanse, to adorn. First, in Scripture a person or thing is said to be sanctified when it is consecrated or set apart from a common to a sacred use. So in the eternal decree of the Father, the elect were separated in the divine mind from the countless millions of our race which were to be created, and set apart for His own delight and glory. Second, where those persons and things are unclean, they must be purified, so as to *fit* them for God’s pleasure and use. That was the specific work assigned to the Son. His precious blood

has provided the means of our purification. Third, the persons or things sanctified need to beautified and adorned for God's service. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

It is also striking and blessed to note the relation and order of the several acts of the Holy Three in connection with our sanctification. The *source* of it is "the eternal purpose" or decree of God, "by the which *will* we are sanctified" (Heb 10:10). The *substance* of it was brought forth by Christ, when He fully accomplished God's will on our behalf, "that he might sanctify the people with his own blood" (Heb 13:12). The *securer* of it is the Holy Spirit, who by His work of grace within applies to the individual the sanctification which the Church has in its Head, "being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom 15:16). It is not until the Comforter takes up His abode in the heart that the Father's will begins to be actualised and the Son's "work" evidences its efficacy toward us. This glorious gift, then, is let down to us from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.

If we consider the nature of Christ's work for His people and the perfection of their standing in Him before God, it could not for a moment be supposed that this having been accomplished by the grace, wisdom, and power of God, that their *state* should be left unaffected—that their position should be so gloriously changed, yet their condition remain as sinful as ever, that they should be left in their sins to take comfort from their immunity to divine wrath. The degradation, pollution, and utter ruin of our nature, our estrangement from God, spiritual death, and our whole heritage of woe, are the immediate consequences of *sin*. And what would forgiveness, justification, and redemption in Christ mean, if *deliverance from* all those consequences did not directly and necessarily follow? Our being made the righteousness of God in Christ (2Co 5:21) would be but an empty name, if it does not imply and entail recovery from all that sin had forfeited and deliverance from all that sin had incurred. Thank God *that*, in the end (when we are glorified), will be perfectly effected.

It is true that when Christ first seeks out His people He finds them entirely destitute of holiness, yea, of even desire after it, but He does not leave them in that awful state. No, such would neither honour Him nor fulfill the Father's will. Glorious as is the triumph of divine grace in the justification of a sinner, through the work of Christ as Surety, yet even that must be regarded as a means to an end. See how this is brought out in every Scriptural statement of the purpose of grace concerning the redeemed, or the design of the mission and sufferings of the Redeemer, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Joh 10:10). "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Ti 2:14). "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2Pe 1:4). "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1Jo 3:1).

Since we are made the righteousness of God *in Christ*, the result of this *in the Christian*, must, ultimately, correspond with that perfection. In other words, nothing short of perfect fellowship with the Father, and with His Son can answer to His having died on account of our sins and risen again on account of our justification, and having risen, become the Head and Source of an entirely new life to all who believe on Him. The aim of the Father's love and of the Son's grace was not only that we might have restored to us the life which we lost in Adam, but that we should have "*life more abundantly*" (see Joh 10:10), that we should be brought back not merely to the position of servants—which was the status of unfallen Adam—but be given the wondrous place of *sons*, that we should be fitted not simply for an earthly paradise, but for an eternity of joy in the immediate presence of God in heaven.

Now it is on the ground of what Christ did and earned for His people, and with a view to the realization of the Father's purpose of their glorification, that the Holy Spirit is given to the elect, and it makes much for His praise and for their peace that they obtain a clear and comprehensive view of His work within them, nor can that be secured by a hurried or superficial study of the subject. As our cover-page articles for the last three years indicate, His operations are very varied and manifold, yet all proceeding from one foundation and all advancing toward one grand end. That which we are now to consider is the "sanctification of the Spirit," an expression which is found both in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:2. The connection in which the expression occurs in the two passages just mentioned, clearly intimates that the sanctification of the Spirit is an integral part of our salvation, that it is closely associated with our "belief of the truth," and that it precedes our practical obedience.

John Owen's (1616-1683) definition of the Spirit's sanctification, based on 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is as follows, "Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly—it is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit, into the image of God, through Jesus Christ." Full and clear though this definition be, we humbly conceive it is both inadequate and inaccurate. Inadequate, because it leaves out several essential elements. Inaccurate, because it confounds the effects with the cause. Later, he says, "In the sanctification of believers the Holy Spirit doth work in them, in their whole souls—their minds, wills, and affections—a gracious supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God, wherein the substance or essence, the life and being, of holiness doth consist."

In an article thereon (published in *Studies*, May 1930) S. E. Pierce (1746-1829) said, "Sanctification, or Gospel-holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, comprehends the whole work of the Spirit of God within and upon us, from our regeneration to our eternal glorification. It is the fruit and blessed consequence of His indwelling us, and the continued effect of spiritual regeneration, i.e., in begetting within us a nature suited to take in spiritual things, and be properly affected by them. Regeneration is the root, and sanctification is the bud, blossom, and fruit which it produces. In our regeneration by the Holy Spirit we are made alive to God, and this is manifested by our faith in Christ Jesus. Our lusts are mortified because we are quickened together with Christ. And what we style the sanctification of the Spirit, which follows after regeneration hath taken place within us, consists in drawing forth that spiritual life which is conveyed to our souls in our new birth, into acts and exercise on Christ and spiritual things, in quickening our graces, and in leading us to walk in the paths of holiness, by which proof is given that we are alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." This, we believe is preferable to Owen's, yet still leaving something to be desired.

Exactly what is the sanctification of the Spirit? Personally we very much doubt whether that question can be satisfactorily answered in a single sentence, for in framing one, account needs to be taken of the change which is produced in the believing sinner's relationship to God, his relationship to Christ as the Head of the Church, his relationship to the unregenerate, and his relationship to the divine law. *Positionally*, our sanctification by the Spirit results from our being vitally united to Christ, for the moment we are livingly joined to Him, His holiness becomes ours and our standing before God is the same as His. *Relatively*, our sanctification of the Spirit issues from our being renewed by Him, for the moment He quickens us, we are set apart from those who

are dead in sins. *Personally*, we are consecrated unto God by the Spirit's indwelling us, making our bodies His temples. *Experimentally*, our sanctification of the Spirit consists in the impartation to us of a principle ("nature") of holiness, whereby we become conformed to the divine law. Let us consider each of these viewpoints separately.

Our *union to Christ* is the grand hinge on which everything turns. Divorced from Him, we have nothing spiritually. Describing our unregenerate condition, the apostle says, "at that time ye were *without Christ*," and being without *Him*, it necessarily follows, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having *no hope*, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). But the moment the Holy Spirit makes us livingly one with Christ, all that He has becomes ours, we are then "joint-heirs with him" (see Rom 8:17). Just as a woman obtains the right to share all that a man has once she is wedded to him, so a poor sinner becomes holy before God the moment he is vitally united to the Holy One. Everything which God requires from us, everything which is needed by us, is treasured up for us in Christ.

By our union with Christ, we receive a new and holy nature, whereby we are capacitated for holy living, which holy living is determined and regulated by our practical and experimental fellowship with Him. By virtue of our federal union with the first Adam, we not only had imputed to us the guilt of his disobedience, but we also received from him the sinful nature which has vitiated our souls, powerfully influencing all our faculties. In like manner, by virtue of our federal union with the last Adam, the elect not only have imputed to them the righteousness of His obedience, but they also receive from Him (by the Spirit) a holy nature, which renews all the faculties of their souls and powerfully affects their actions. Once we become united to the vine, the life and holy virtue which is in Him flows into us and brings forth spiritual fruit. Thus, the moment the Spirit unites us *to Christ*, we are "sanctified *in Christ Jesus*" (1Co 1:2).

It is axiomatic that those whom God separates unto Himself must be suited to Himself, that is, they must be *holy*. Equally clear is it from the Scriptures that whatsoever God does, He is determined that the crown of honour for it should rest upon the head of Christ, for *He* is the grand centre of all the divine counsels. Now both of these fundamental considerations are secured by God's making us partakers of *His own* holiness, through creating us anew in Christ Jesus. God will neither receive nor own anyone who has the least taint of sin's defilement upon him, and it is only as we are made new creatures in Christ that we can fully measure up to the unalterable requirements of God. Our *state* must be holy as well as our *standing*, and as we showed in the last three articles, Christ Himself *is* our sanctification, so now we seek to point out that we are actually sanctified *in Christ*—personally and vitally.

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus" (1Co 1:30)—"of him" by the power and quickening operation of the Spirit. Christians are supernaturally and livingly incorporated with Christ. "For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 2:10)—that new creation is accomplished in our union with His person. *This* is our spiritual *state*—a "new man" has been "*created* in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24), and this we are exhorted to "put on" or make manifest. *This* is not at all a matter of progress or attainment, but is true of every Christian the moment he is born again. The terms "created in righteousness [our justification] and true holiness" (our sanctification) describe what the "new man" is in Christ. It is not simply something which we are to pursue—though that is true, and is intimated in the "put ye on," but it is what all Christians actually *are*—their sanctification in Christ is an accomplished fact—it is just because Christians *are* "saints" they are to lead saintly lives.

The believer *begins* his Christian life by having been perfectly sanctified in Christ. Just as both our standing and state were radically affected by virtue of our union with the first Adam, so



*both* our standing and state are completely changed by virtue of our union with the last Adam. As the believer has a perfect standing in holiness before God, because of his federal union with Christ, so his state is perfect before God, because he is now vitally united to Christ. He is in Christ, and Christ is in him. By the regenerating operation of the Spirit, we are “joined unto the Lord” (1Co 6:17). The moment they were born again, *all* Christians were sanctified in Christ with a sanctification to which no growth in grace, no attainments in holy living, *can add one iota*. Their sanctification, like their justification, is “complete in him” (Col 2:10), Christ Himself is their “life” and He becomes such by a personal union to Himself which nothing can dissolve. From the moment of his new birth, every child of God is a “*saint* in Christ Jesus” (see Rom 1:7), one of the “*holy brethren*” (Heb 3:1), and it is just because they *are* such, they are called upon to live holy lives. O what cause we have to adore the grace, the wisdom, and the power of God!

When one of God’s elect is quickened into newness of life a great change is made *relatively*, that is, in connection with his relation to his fellow-men. Previously, he too was both in the world and of it, being numbered with the ungodly, and enjoying their fellowship. But at regeneration he is born into a new family, even the living family of God, and henceforth his standing is no longer among those who are “without Christ,” “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13). Thus, when one is made alive in Christ by the Holy Spirit, he at once becomes *separated* from those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore this is another aspect of the “sanctification of the Spirit.” This was typed out of old. When the Lord was revealed unto Abraham, the word to him was, “*Get thee out* of thy country, and from thy kindred” (Gen 12:1). So again it was with Israel—no sooner were they delivered from the angel of death by the blood of the lamb, than they were required to leave Egypt behind them.

*Personally* we are sanctified or consecrated unto God by the Spirit’s indwelling us and making our bodies His temples. As He came upon Christ Himself (“without measure”) so, in due time, He is given to each of His members, “Ye have an unction [the Spirit] from the Holy One”—Christ. “The anointing [the Spirit] which ye have received of him [Christ] abideth in you” (1Jo 2:20, 27)—it is from this very fact we receive our name, for “Christian” means “an *anointed* one,” the term being taken from the type in Psalm 133:2. It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit which constitutes a believer a holy person. That which made Canaan the “holy” land, Jerusalem the “holy” city, the temple the “holy” place, was *the presence* and appearing of the Holy One there! And that which makes any man “holy” is the perpetual abiding of the Spirit within him. Needless to say, His indwelling of us necessarily produces *fruits* of holiness in heart and life—this will come before us in the sequel.

Amazing, blessed, and glorious fact, the Holy Spirit *indwells* the regenerate so that their bodies become the temples of the living God. “The Holy Spirit descends on them and enters within them, *in consequence of* their union with Christ. He comes from heaven to make known this union between Christ and them. He is the divine *Manifester* of it. He dwells in us as a well of water springing up into everlasting life. He abides with us as our divine Comforter, and will be our Guide even unto death, and continue His life-giving influences in us and dwell in us, filling us with all the fullness of God in heaven forever” (S. E. Pierce).

This indwelling of the Spirit is, in the order of God, subsequent to and in consequence of our being sanctified by the blood of Jesus, for it is obvious that God could not “dwell” in those who were standing under the imputation of their guilt. The Holy Spirit, therefore, from the very fact of making our bodies His temples, attests and evidences the completeness and perpetuity of the sanctification which is ours by the sacrifice of Christ. He comes to us not to procure blessings

which Christ hath already purchased for us, but to make them known to us, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1Co 2:12). He comes to sustain those in whom the life of Christ now is.

## GRACE PREPARING FOR GLORY

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:11-13). The opening “For” looks back to verse 10. In the immediate context, the apostle had exhorted servants to walk amiably and faithfully, so that they “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Ti 2:10). It is deeply important that we should be *sound* in doctrine, for error acts upon the soul the same as poison does upon the body. Yes, it is very necessary that we be sound in the faith, for it is dishonouring to God and injurious to ourselves to believe the devil’s lies, for that is what false doctrine is. Then let us not despise *doctrinal* preaching, for “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine” (2Ti 3:16).

But there is something else which is equally important as being sound in doctrine, namely, that we *adorn* it by our conduct. The sounder I am in doctrine, the more loudly I advertise my orthodox views, the more do I bring that doctrine into reproach if my life be worldly and my walk carnal. How earnestly we need to pray for divine enablement that we may “adorn the doctrine in all things.” We need the doctrine of Scripture written upon our hearts, molding our character, regulating our ways, influencing our conduct. We “adorn” the doctrine when we “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4), when we live each hour as those who must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And we are to “adorn the doctrine in *all* things”—in every sphere we occupy, every relation we sustain, every circle God’s providence brings us into.

The apostle now enforces what he said in Titus 2:10 by reminding us that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Ti 2:11). This is in blessed contrast from the law, which brings naught but “condemnation.” But the grace of God bringeth *salvation*, and that in a twofold way—by what Christ has done *for* His people, and by what He works *in* them. “He shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21)—save from the guilt and penalty of sin, and from the love or power of sin. This grace of God “hath appeared.” It has broken forth like the light of the morning after a dark night. It has “appeared” both objectively and subjectively—in the Gospel and in our hearts, “When it pleased God...to reveal his Son *in* me” (Gal 1:15-16), “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined *in our hearts*” (2Co 4:6).

The grace of God—His lovingkindness, His goodwill, His free favour—hath appeared “to all men.” That expression is used in Scripture in two different senses. Sometimes it means all *without exception*, as in, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” In other passages it signifies all *without distinction*, as it does here—to the bondsmen, as well as the free, to the servant as the master, to the Gentiles as to the Jews—to all kinds and conditions of men. But how

may I know that the grace of God which bringeth salvation has appeared to *me*? A vitally important question is that, one which none who really values the eternal interest of his or her soul will treat lightly or take for granted. There are many who profess to be “saved” but they give *no evidence* of it in their lives. Now here is the inspired answer.

“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Ti 2:12). Divine grace teaches its favoured recipients subjectively as well as objectively, effectually as well as theoretically. Grace in the heart prevents us from abusing grace in the head. It delivers us from making grace the lackey of sin. Where the grace of God brings salvation to the soul, it works effectually. And *what is it* that grace teaches? *Practical holiness*. Grace does not eradicate ungodliness and worldly lusts, but it causes us to *deny* them. And what but “divine grace” can? Philosophy cannot, nor ethics, nor any form of human education or culture. But grace *does*, by the impulsive power of gratitude, by love’s desire to please the Saviour, by instilling a determination to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called” (Eph 4:1).

Alas, many who are glad to hear of the grace which brings salvation, become restless when the preacher presses the truth that God’s grace teaches us to DENY. That is a very unpalatable word in this age of self-pleasing and self-indulgence. But turn to Matthew 16:24, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him *deny* himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” And again, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luk 14:27). That is the unceasing demand of Christ, and naught but divine grace working within can enable any one to meet it.

Grace teaches *negatively*—it teaches us to renounce evil. Dagon must first be cast down before the ark of God can be set up. The heaven must be excluded from our houses before the Lamb can be fed upon. The old man has to be put off if the new man is to be put on. Grace teaches a Christian to *mortify* his members which are upon the earth, “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Ti 2:12). Grace teaches the believer to resist these evils by preventing the flesh from *ruling* over him, and that, by refusing to allow sin to dominate his heart.

“Ungodliness” is failing to give *God* His due place in our hearts and lives. It is disregarding His precepts and commands. It is having preference for the creature, loving pleasure more than holiness—being unconcerned whether my conduct pleases or displeases the Lord. There are many forms of “ungodliness” besides that of open infidelity and the grosser crimes of wickedness. We are guilty of “ungodliness” when we are prayerless. We are guilty of “ungodliness” when we look to and lean upon the creature, or when we fail to see God’s hand in providence—ascribing our blessings to “luck” or “chance.” We are guilty of “ungodliness” when we grumble at the weather.

“And worldly lusts” (Ti 2:12)—these are those affections and appetites which dominate and regulate the man of the world. It is the heart craving worldly objects, pleasures, honours, riches. It is an undue absorption with those things which serve only a temporary purpose and use. “Worldly lusts” cause the things of heaven to be crowded out by the interests and concerns of earth. This may be done by things which are quite lawful in themselves, but through an immoderate use they gain possession of the heart. “Worldly lusts” are “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1Jo 2:16).

Now divine grace is teaching the Christian to “*deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts.” It does this by putting upon him “the fear of the Lord,” so that he departs from evil. It does this by occupying the heart with a superior Object. When Christ was revealed to the heart of the Samaritan woman, she “*left* her waterpot” (Joh 4:28). It does this by supplying powerful motives and incentives to personal holiness. It does this by the indwelling Spirit resisting the flesh (Gal

5:17). It does this by causing us to subordinate the interests of the body unto the higher interests of the soul.

Grace teaches *positively*. It is not sufficient that we “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” we must also “*live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*” “Soberly” comes first because we cannot live righteously or godly without it. He who takes to himself more than is due or meet will not give men or God their portion. Unfortunately the word “sober” is now generally restricted to the opposite of inebriation, but the Christian is to be sober in *all* things. Sobriety is the moderation of our affections in the pursuit and use of earthly things. We are to be temperate in eating, sleeping, recreation, dress. We need to be sober-minded and not extremists. Only divine grace can effectually teach sobriety, and if I am growing in grace, then I am becoming more sober. Grace does not remove natural inclinations and affections, but it *governs* them—it bridles their excess. The first thing, then, that grace teaches us positively is *self-control*. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that *ruleth his spirit* than he that taketh a city” (Pro 16:32).

“Righteously.” This concerns our dealings with our fellows. It is giving to each his due, dealing honourably with all—injuring none, seeking the good of all. To live “righteously” is doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. It is being truthful, courteous, considerate, kind, helpful. “Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10) must be our constant aim. This is the second half of the law’s requirement, that we should “love our neighbor as ourselves” (see Mar 12:31). Only divine grace can effectually “teach” us this. Naught but divine grace can counteract our innate *selfishness*.

“Godly.” This is the attitude of our hearts towards God, ever seeking His glory. Godliness is made up of three ingredients, or more accurately, it issues from three springs—faith, fear, love. Only by *faith* can we really apprehend God, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of *unbelief*, in *departing from* the living God” (Heb 3:12). Forty years ago we often heard the expression, so and so is “a God-fearing man.” The fact we rarely hear this now is a bad sign. Now there are two kinds of *fear*, a servile and a filial—a dread of God and an awe of God. The first kind was seen in Adam when he was afraid of the Lord and hid himself. The second kind was exemplified by Joseph when tempted by the wife of Potiphar—reverential fear restrained him. Only divine grace can “teach” us this. While *love* constrains unto obedience, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Joh 14:15). It is only love’s obedience which is acceptable unto God—the heart melted by His goodness, now desiring to please Him.

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13). Now this must not be divorced from its context, for there we are shown the necessary pre-requisite—*Grace preparing for glory*. The passage as a whole is made up of three parts. In the past, the grace of God brought salvation to the believer. In the present, divine grace is teaching him, both negatively and positively, how to live acceptably unto God. Third, in the future, the work of divine grace will be perfected in the believer, at the return of Christ.

Verse 13, then, is the necessary *sequel* to what has been before us in verses 11-12. My head may be filled with prophecy, I may be an ardent Pre-millenarian, I may think and say that I am “looking for that blessed hope,” *but* unless divine grace is teaching me to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,” then I am *deceiving myself*. Make no mistake upon that point. To be *truly* “Looking for that blessed hope” is a *spiritual* attitude. It is the longing of those whose hearts are right with God. Thus, our text may be summed up in three words—grace, godliness, glory.

Now our “hope” is something more than a future *event*, concerning the details of which there may be room for considerable difference of opinion. Our hope is something more than the *next item* on God’s prophetic program. It is something more than a *place* in which we are going to spend eternity. The Christian’s hope is a PERSON. Have you noticed how prominently and emphatically that fact is presented in the Scriptures? “I will come again, and receive you *unto myself*” (Joh 14:3). “This *same Jesus*, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner” (Act 1:11). “We look *for the Saviour*” (Phi 3:20). “The coming *of the Lord* draweth nigh” (Jam 5:8)—not the great tribulation draweth nigh, not the millennium draweth nigh, nor even the rapture draweth nigh, but the *coming of the Lord*. It is with His own blessed person that our poor hearts need to be occupied.

Here is a poor wife whose husband has been away for many months in distant lands, whose duty required him to go there. News arrives that he is coming back home. The devoted wife is filled with joy at the prospect of the return of her husband. Is she puzzling her brains as to what will be his program of action after he arrives? No, the all-absorbing thing for her is *himself*—her beloved is soon to appear before her. Now do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that the plan of prophecy holds little of interest, or that it matters nothing to us what course Christ will follow, but that which I am seeking to emphasise is that the primary and grand point of the whole subject is having our prepared hearts fixed upon Christ Himself. God would have us occupied not so much with prophetic details, as with the blessed person of His dear Son.

That “blessed hope,” then, which the Christian is “looking for” is not an event, but a person—Christ Himself. “And this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6)—the Lord is our righteousness. “For he is our peace” (Eph 2:14)—the Lord is our peace. “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear” (Col 3:4)—the Lord is our life. “By the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope” (1Ti 1:1)—the Lord is our hope. To me “that blessed hope” is summed up in three things. First, that Christ is coming to receive me unto Himself. Second, that Christ will then make me like Himself—for nothing less than *that* will satisfy Him or the renewed heart. Third, that Christ is going to have me forever with Himself—an eternity of bliss spent in His own immediate presence. Then will be answered His prayer, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24).

Now “*looking for* that blessed hope” (Ti 2:13) for Christ Himself, is *an attitude of heart*. The Christian “looks” with the eyes of *faith*, and faith always rests alone upon God and His Word. Faith is not influenced by sensational items from the newspapers about the latest doings of Hitler and Mussolini, etc. Scripture says, “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (Jam 5:8) and faith believes it. The Christian “looks” with the eyes of *hope*, joyously anticipating perfect fellowship with its Beloved. The Christian “looks” with the eyes of *love*, for nothing but His personal presence can satisfy him. It is an attitude of *anticipation*. Christ has given His sure promise that *He is coming*, but the exact *time* is withheld—that we may be in constant readiness. It is an attitude of *expectation*, for we do not “look for” something we know will never happen. It is an attitude of *supplication*, the heart’s response “Even so, *come*, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

A final word upon Christ’s title here, “The glorious appearing of *the great God* and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13), or as Bagster’s Interlinear more correctly renders it, “And appearing of the glory, the great God and Saviour, of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Three things are suggested to us by Christ’s being here called “the great God.” First, it points a contrast from His first advent, when He appeared in humiliation and lowliness as the “servant.” Second, it shows us

He is called “God” not by way of courtesy, but by right of His divine nature. Third, it evidences the fact that the Saviour is in no wise inferior to the Father, but His co-equal, “the great God.”

N.B. The above is an address recently given by the editor in the Berkeley Hall of Glasgow, under the auspices of the Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement.

## DUTY FAITH

It is the bounden duty of all who hear the Gospel to savingly trust in Christ, otherwise their rejection of Him would be no *sin*. Many of our readers will be surprised to hear that this self-evident truth is denied by some who are, otherwise, sound in the faith. They *reason* that it is “inconsistent” to call upon the spiritually dead to perform spiritual duties. A certain denomination in England have the following among their Articles of Faith, “We deny duty-faith and duty-repentance—these terms signifying that it is every man’s duty to spiritually and savingly repent and believe (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Mat 15:19; Jer 17:9; Joh 6:44, 65). We deny also that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever. So that we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God (Joh 12:29, 40; Eph 2:8; Rom 8:7-8; 1Co 4:7). Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Spirit, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power and on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption.”

As some of our readers have imbibed this error, we are anxious to be of help to them. We have therefore decided to follow the article by John Newton on “Ministerial Address to the Unconverted” in the March issue by first giving brief quotations from the writings of the Reformers and Puritans, to show how the framers of those Articles of Faith *departed from* the path and policy followed by so many eminent saints of God who preceded them.

“The mercy of God is *offered equally* to those who believe and to those who believe not, so that those who are not divinely taught within are rendered inexcusable” (John Calvin—1552—“The Eternal Predestination of God” p. 95). “A slight acquaintance with Paul will enable anyone to understand, without tedious argument, how easily he reconciled things which they pretend to be repugnant to each other. *Christ commands men to believe* in Him, yet His limitation is neither false nor contrary to His command when He says ‘No man can come to me except it were given him of my Father.’ Let preaching therefore have its force to bring men to faith” (Calvin’s “Institutes” Book 3, chap. 18, par. 13).

“The first part then of Christianity is the preaching of repentance, and the knowledge of ourselves...A man, therefore, is made a Christian not by working but by hearing; wherefore, he that will exercise himself to righteousness must first *exercise himself* in hearing the Gospel. Now, when he hath heard and received the Gospel, let him give himself to God with a joyful heart, and afterwards let him exercise himself in those good works which are commanded in the law” (Martin Luther—1540—on Galatians, pp. 104 and 185).

“When we meet with a precept, we should simply endeavour to obey it, without inquiring into God’s hidden purpose....Notwithstanding God’s predestination is most certain and unalterable, so that no elect person can perish, nor any reprobate be saved, yet *it does not follow* from thence that all reproofs and exhortations on the part of God, or prayers on the part of men, are *useless*” (J. Zanchius—1562—“The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination,” pp. 49 and 120).

“With the promises there is joined an exhortation or command to believe, which is more general than the promise; because the promise is only made to believers; but the commandment is given to believers and unbelievers also. For the elect are mingled with the wicked in the same assemblies, and therefore the ministers of the Gospel ought indiscriminately *to exhort all and every one to repent*.” “In very truth, if thou goest forth of this world being no repentant sinner, thou goest damned to hell: *wherefore delay not one minute* of an hour longer, but with all speed repent and turn unto God” (W. Perkins—1595—Vol. 1, p. 379; Vol. 2, p. 692).

“Let us be stirred up *to repent immediately*. Doth not God now warn you? Is it not dangerous living one hour in a state that we would not die in? May God justly strike us on the sudden? Do but purpose to live in sin one quarter of an hour; may we not be taken away in that quarter?” (R. Sibbes—1620—Vol. 6, p. 212).

“We are expressly commanded to believe, and that upon the highest promises, and under the greatest penalties. This command is that which makes believing formally a duty. Faith is a grace as it is freely wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, the root of all obedience and duties, as it is radically fixed in the heart. But as it is *commanded* it is a *duty*; and these commands, you know, are several ways expressed, by invitations, exhortations, propositions” (John Owen—1650—Vol. 14, p. 223).

“I say there is no simulation at all of God in this: that which He proposeth is but this, ‘Whosoever believeth shall be saved, and whosoever believeth not shall be damned.’ He sends His ministers to preach this, and *to beseech them* to believe, and to be reconciled unto God, yea, *all* they meet with.” “He commands them to preach promiscuously unto all, persuade all, exhort all, unto faith and repentance” (W. Twisse—1653—“The Riches of God’s Love” pp. 73 and 169).

“My counsel (to his unsaved hearers) is this: Stir up your souls to lay hold on the Lord Jesus and look up to Him, wait on Him from whom every good and perfect gift comes, and give Him no rest till He hath given thee that jewel *faith*” (Thomas Brooks—1653—Vol. 1, p. 144).

“This condition of faith and repentance is suited to the consciences of men. The law of nature teaches us that we are bound to believe every revelation from God when it is made known to us; and not only to assent to it as true, but *embrace it* as good.” “Our rejection of Christ, and the way of His appointing, is a high contempt of God....It is a ‘making light’ of a rich feast of God’s providing” (Stephen Charnock—1660—Vol. 3, pp. 68 and 469).

John Bunyan (1675) in his “The Heavenly Footman” or a “Description of the man that gets to heaven,” which is addressed to “All the slothful and careless people,” being an exposition and application of “So run, that ye may obtain” (1Co 9:24), closes with, “If thou dost not know the way, inquire at the Word of God; if thou wantest company, cry for God’s Spirit; if thou wantest encouragement, entertain the promises. But be sure thou *beginnest betimes*; get into the way, run apace, and hold out to the end, and the Lord give thee a prosperous journey.”

“Preach the Gospel to every creature: yet this is not the Gospel to be preached—that God hath promised to save every creature; though upon promulgation of them, it becomes *the duty of everyone* to come to Christ, and a command is laid upon men to do it” (Thomas Goodwin—1680—Vol. 8, p. 245).

“Fire burneth where it meeteth with matter combustible, but a reasonable creature needeth *to be exhorted* to perform acts agreeable to his principles” (Thomas Manton—1670—Vol. 19, p. 247).

“It is our duty to endeavour what is impossible by our own endeavours to attain—so sin has made it; to avoid all sin, to perform perfect obedience, to love with all the heart” (David Clarkson, associate pastor with John Owen—1682—Vol. 2, p. 131).

“But you will say, if unregenerate men be dead men, to what purpose is it to persuade them to arise and stand up? This difficulty is solved in this very text (Eph 5:14): *though the duty is ours*, yet the power is God’s” (John Flavell—1680—Vol. 2, p. 423).

“It is the known duty of a sinner under the Gospel to turn to God through Christ; and it is also declared in the same Gospel that none can of themselves turn to God and believe in His Son without the help of special efficacious grace; it must hereupon be a man’s *duty* also to pray for that grace which may enable him thereto” (J. Howe—1690—Vol. 2, p. 346).

“This (Gospel) call contains the command of faith by which all men without exception, to whom God vouchsafes the same, are enjoined to believe in Christ, in that way and manner which is revealed in the Gospel: ‘look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth’: Isaiah 45:22” (H. Witsius—1690—Vol. 3, p. 353).

“Neither will this assertion make it a vain thing to preach the Gospel to *natural* people, and to exhort them to true repentance and faith in Christ for their conversion and salvation” (Walter Marshall—1692—“The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification,” so highly commended by James Hervey, p. 121).

“And even not coming to Christ, and believing in Him in this *spiritual* manner, when He is revealed in the external ministry of the Word, as God’s way of salvation, *is criminal* and blameworthy, notwithstanding men’s want of both will and power” (John Gill—1735—“The Cause of God and Truth,” p. 87).

We could add quotations from others, but the above are from well-known, representative, sound, Calvinistic divines—several of them *high* Calvinists. Yet their holding firmly to the spiritual inability of the natural man, to unconditional election, particular redemption, and the effectual call of the Spirit, *did not tie their hands* in preaching the Gospel freely, pressing upon their hearers their responsibility, and calling upon them to repent and believe.



# June

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 34. The Spirit Sealing

Closely connected with the Spirit's work of witnessing with the Christian's spirit that he is a child of God, is His operation in sealing. This appears clearly from 2 Corinthians 1:19-22 and Ephesians 1:13.

The riches of the Christian are found in the promises of God, and these are all “Yea and Amen” in Christ—unless, then, our faith be built up on *them*, it is worthless. It is not sufficient that the promises be sure, we must be “established” upon them. No matter how firm the foundation (be it solid rock), unless the house be connected therewith, actually built thereon, it is insecure. There, must then be a *double* “Amen”—one in the promises and one in us. There must be an echo in the Christian's own heart—*God* says these things, so they must be true. Faith appropriates them and says they *are for me*. In order to assurance and peace it is indispensable that we be established in and on the divine promises.

The Christian's *riches* lie in the promises of God—his *strength and comfort* in his faith being built upon them. Now the same divine power, which delivered the Christian from the kingdom of Satan and brought him into a state of grace, must also deliver him from the attacks of the enemy upon his faith and *confirm* him in a state of grace. Only God can produce stability. Only He can preserve that spark of faith amid the winds and waves of unbelief, and this He is pleased to do—“He which hath begun a good work in you *will perform it*” (Phi 1:6). Therefore we are told, “Now he which *stablisheth* us with you in Christ...is God” (2Co 1:21). Observe carefully it is *not* “hath stablished,” but “stablisheth”—it is a continuous process throughout the Christian's life on earth.

In what follows, the apostle shows us what this “stablishing” consists of, or how it is accomplished, “and hath *anointed* us...who hath also *sealed* us, and given the *earnest* of the Spirit in our hearts” (2Co 1:21-22). Each of these figures refers to the same thing, and has to do with the “stablishing” or assuring of our hearts. Under the Old Testament economy, prophets, priests, and kings were authorised and confirmed in their office by “anointing” (Lev 8:11; 2Sa 5:3; 1Ki 19:16). Again, contracts and deeds of settlement were ratified by “sealing” (Est 8:8; Jer 32:8-10). And a “pledge” or “earnest” secured an agreement or bargain (Gen 38:17-18; Deu 24:10). Thus *the sure estate* of the Christian is first expressed under the general word “stablisheth,” and then it

is amplified under these three figurative terms “anointed, sealed, earnest.” It is with the second of them we are now concerned.

It may be asked, But what need has the Christian of attestation or confirmation of his state in Christ—is not faith itself sufficient proof? Ah, often our faith and the knowledge we have of our believing in Christ is severely shaken—the activities of indwelling sin stir up a thick cloud of doubt, and Satan avails himself of this to tell us our profession is an empty one. But in His tender grace, God has given us the Holy spirit, and from time to time He “seals” or *confirms* our faith by His quickening and comforting operations. He draws out our hearts anew unto God and enables us to cry, “Abba, Father.” He takes of the things of Christ, shows them unto us, and brings us to realise that we have a personal interest in the same.

The same blessed truth is found again in Ephesians 1:13. It is important to note the order of the three things there predicated of saints—they “heard,” they “believed,” they were “sealed.” Thus the sealing is quite distinct from and follows the believing, as the believing does the hearing. There are two things, and two only, upon which the Spirit puts His seal, namely, two mighty and efficacious works. First, the finished work of Christ, whereby He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and second, upon His own work in the hearts of those who believe. In legal documents the writing always precedes the witnessing and sealing. So here—the Spirit writes God’s laws on the heart (Heb 8:10), and then He seals the truth and reality of His own work to the consciousness of the recipient.

The main intent of “sealing” is to assure, to certify, and ratify. First, the Holy Spirit conveys an assurance of the *truth* of God’s promises, whereby a man’s understanding is spiritually convinced that the promises are from God. Neither the light of reason nor the persuasive power of a fellow-mortal can bring any one to rest his heart upon the divine promises. In order to that, there must be the direct working of the Holy Spirit—“Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1Th 1:5). The “much assurance” comes last! Second, He gives the believer an assurance of his own *personal interest* in those promises—and this again is something which none but the Spirit can impart. We do not say that this sealing excludes all doubting, but it is such an assurance as *prevails* over doubts.

There are many uses of a “seal” such as proprietorship, identification, confirmation, secrecy, security, but in Ephesians 1:13, the immediate thing stated is *the sealing of an inheritance*. We have obtained an inheritance by faith and having believed we are “sealed.” What is the specific use of a “seal” in connection with an inheritance? It may either be the making of the inheritance *sure* to a man in itself, or making the man *know* that it is *his*—assuring him of the fact. Now it cannot be the former, for nothing is needed to make heaven sure once a sinner truly believes—the moment he lays hold of Christ, the inheritance is certain. So it must be the latter—to make *us* sure, to persuade our hearts the inheritance is ours. It is this the Spirit accomplishes in His “seal.”

The Holy Spirit is never called a “seal” as He is an “earnest” (2Co 5:5). It is only in relation to an *act* of sealing that this figure is associated with Him. Thus it is a distinct operation of His “in our hearts” (2Co 1:22). It is not the stamping of God’s image upon the soul (as many of the Puritans supposed) that is referred to in Ephesians 1:13, for that is done *before* believing and not after. The order of truth in that verse is very simple and decisive. In the Gospel salvation is offered—it *may* be mine. Faith accepts that offer so as to *make* salvation mine. The Spirit seals or confirms my heart that salvation *is* mine. Thus in “sealing” the Spirit authenticates, certifies, ratifies.

Observe that He does this in His special character as “the Spirit of promise.” He is so designated because, first, the Spirit was the great and grand promise of the New Testament (Joh

14:26; 15:26, etc.) as Christ was of the Old. Second, because He works by means of the promises. Third, because in His whole work He acts according to the everlasting covenant, which, as it respects the elect, is a covenant of promise (Eph 2:12). When He seals home a sense of the love of God and gives the soul a view of its interest in Christ, it is done by means of the word of promise. It was so when He “sealed” Christ (Joh 6:27) and consecrated Him to the work of redemption. The Father said by an audible voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17). This was repeating what had been pronounced in the purpose of JEHOVAH the Father concerning the Mediator (Isa 42:1). This the Holy Spirit brought home in power or “sealed” upon the mind of Jesus at that time.

The “sealing” or assuring operations of the Spirit are known to the believer in two ways. First, *inferentially*—by enabling him to perceive His work in the soul, and from it conclude his regeneration. When I see smoke I must infer a fire, and when I discern spiritual graces (however feeble) I reason back to the Producer of them. When I feel a power within combating my corruptions, and often thwarting my intentions to indulge the lusts of the flesh, I conclude it is the Spirit resisting the flesh (Gal 5:17). Second, *intuitively*—by a divine light in the heart, by a divine authority felt, by the love of God shed abroad therein. If I have any hope wrought in me, either by looking to Christ’s blood or perceiving grace in me, it is by the power of the Spirit (Rom 15:13).

The Spirit brings to the mind of the Christian the sacred promises. He shows him the good contained in them, the grace expressed in them, the perfection and freeness of Christ’s salvation declared by them, and thereby He seals them on his mind and enables him to rest thereon. He shows him the veracity and faithfulness of God in the promises, the immutability of the everlasting covenant, the eternity of God’s love, and that He hath by two immutable things (His word and His oath) in which it is impossible for Him to lie, given us a firm foundation for strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us in the Gospel (Heb 6:18). It is in this way that “the God of all grace” doth, by the Spirit, “stablish, strengthen, settle” us (1Pe 5:10). It is by the Spirit’s operations that the Christian’s fears are quietened, his doubts subdued, and his heart assured that a “good work” (Phi 1:6) has been divinely begun *in him*. The Spirit indwelling us is Christ’s seal (mark of identification) that we are His sheep—the Spirit authenticating His own blessed work in our souls, by revealing to us our “title” to heaven, is His *sealing* us.

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 102. The Passing of Judaism (12:26-27)

It is exceedingly difficult, if not quite impossible, for us to form any adequate conception of the serious obstacles presented to the mind of a pious Jew, when any one sought to persuade him that Judaism had been set aside by God and that he must turn his own back upon it. No analogy or parallel exists in our own experience. It was not merely that the Hebrews were required to turn away from something which their ancestors had set up, and around which twined all their own

sentiments and affections of national patriotism, but that they were called upon to abandon a religious system that had been appointed and established by JEHOVAH Himself. That institution, a theocracy, was unique, sharply distinguished from all the idolatrous systems of the heathen. It was God's outstanding witness in the earth. It had been signally honored and favoured by Him. It had existed for no less than fifteen centuries, and even when Christ appeared, He acknowledged the temple—the centre and headquarters of Judaism—as “My Father's house” (Joh 2:16).

We cannot but admire the tender grace of God in the gentle and gradual way in which He “broke the news” to His people, little by little preparing their minds to receive the truth that His purpose in Judaism had been completely accomplished. Intimations were given through the prophets that the order of things with which they were connected would give place to another and better. To the same effect, the Lord Jesus dropped one hint after another—as, for example, when He pointed out that the old bottles were incapable of receiving the new wine, or when He declared, not that which enters into a man defileth him (as the ceremonial law had taught), but that which issues from the heart, or when He announced, “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father” (Joh 4:21). And finally, when He solemnly affirmed “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Mat 23:38).

The rending of the temple veil by a divine hand was full of deep meaning for those who had eyes to see. The word given through Stephen that “the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Act 7:48), was another clear ray of heavenly light on the same subject. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the commissioning of him as an apostle to the Gentiles, intimated the direction in which the stream of divine mercy was now flowing—it had burst the narrow banks of Judaism! The vision granted to Peter (Act 10) and his message to Cornelius (Act 10:35) was a further advance along the same line. The important decision of the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem in Acts 15:23-29, not to bind the ceremonial law upon the Gentile converts, was another radical step in the same direction.

Yet Jerusalem still survived, the temple was yet intact, and its services continued. Moreover, the leaders of the nation had rejected Christ and denounced Christianity as a device of Satan's. Many of the Jewish Christians were sorely puzzled and deeply exercised, for the Roman yoke had not been removed. As yet the followers of Christ were but few in number, and for the most part, poor and despised. The Hebrew believers were being hotly persecuted by their unbelieving brethren, and God had made no manifest interposition on their behalf. They were therefore almost ready to conclude that, after all, they had made a dreadful mistake in forsaking the religion of their fathers, and that the sore afflictions they were passing through were a divine judgment upon them. It was to allay their fears, to more thoroughly instruct their minds, to establish their hearts, that God moved the apostle to write this particular epistle to them—the great theme of which is a display of the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and its chief design being a call to perseverance and a warning against apostasy.

But even in this epistle the apostle did not come right out and say plainly “God has discarded Judaism.” No, the path of *faith* is never an easy one. Faith can only thrive while it *fights* (1Ti 6:12). There must be that which deeply exercises the heart if the soul is to be kept in the place of complete dependence upon God! Nevertheless, God always grants sufficient light unto a truly exercised soul to indicate the path which is to be followed. He always provides a foundation for faith to rest upon. Though He may not remove the chief obstacle (as He did not for the Hebrews while the temple still stood!) and grant a complete solution to our difficulties, yet He graciously furnishes the humble soul sufficient help to circumvent them. Thus it was in this epistle. *Though no explicit statement is made* that God had done with Judaism, yet sufficient proof was furnished

that He *had* set up something better in its place. This comes out again and again in almost every chapter, notably so in the passage now before us.

What has been pointed out in the last paragraph presents a principle and a fact which it is deeply important for true Christians to lay hold of today. Not a few of the Lord's people are now confronted with similar problems, which if not so acute as the Hebrews faced, are just as real to them—problems relating to church-fellowship, baptism, the Lord's supper, Sabbath observance. For over thirty years a situation existed in Israel which produced two parties, neither of which could convince the other, and as usual, the larger party was in the wrong. On the one hand was the long-established Judaism, which contained the great majority of the nation. On the other hand was the handful of God's faithful servants with the few who had sufficient grace to receive their teachings and walk by faith. Had the latter been regulated by ancient custom, or by mere numbers, or by the logic of circumstances (the outward providences of God), they had missed God's will for them and had "forsaken their own mercy" (see Jon 2:8).

The little company of converted Hebrews who had left Judaism for Christ were faced with a perplexing and trying situation. No doubt in the case of many of them, their loved ones still adhered reverently and vigorously to the religion of their fathers. Nor could either party convince the other of its error by a simple and direct appeal to Holy Writ. Each side had some Scripture to support it! Nowhere in the Old Testament had God *expressly said* that He would yet do away with Judaism, and nowhere in the New Testament had He *openly declared* that He had now set Judaism aside. No, dear reader, *that* is rarely God's way! In like manner, Christendom is now divided on various points both of doctrine and of duty, and each side is able to make out a real "case" by an appeal to Scripture, and often neither can cite one decisive verse proving the other to be wrong. Yet *one is* wrong! Only by earnestly waiting *upon God* individually can *His* mind be discovered.

But *why* has God ordered things thus? Why are not the Scriptures so worded that there would be no room for controversy? *To try our hearts.* The situation which confronted the converted Hebrews was a real test as to whether they would be followers of *men* or pleasers of *God*. The self-righteous Pharisees could appeal to a long-established system of religion in justification of their rejection of Christ. And there are those in Christendom today who vindicate their adherence to what *God* has never commanded and which is dishonouring to His Son, by an appeal to a long line of godly men who have believed and practiced these very things. When others seek to show that an *opposite* course is required by Scripture, they profess to be "unable to see" what is quite clear to simple and humble souls, and ask for some verse which expressly *forbids* what they are doing—which is like those who, in the face of His miracles, said, "If thou be the Christ tell us *plainly*" (Joh 10:24).

No doubt it *had* made matters much easier for the Hebrews if the apostle said plainly, "God has completely finished with Judaism"—*that* had "settled the matter" for hesitating ones who were halting between two opinions—and poor fallen human nature loves to have things so "settled" that there may be an end to perturbation of mind and exercise of heart. Moreover, the converted Hebrews would then have had a clear proof-text which *must* have silenced those who differed from them—and we love to have a verse which will close the mouths of those who agree not with us, do we not? Or God could have allowed the Romans to capture Jerusalem and destroy the temple thirty years sooner than they did—*that* also had "settled the matter"—yes, and left the Hebrews to walk by sight, instead of faith! Instead, He gave them this epistle, which called for prayer, study, meditation, and for *more prayer*.

Let us now very briefly review the line of the apostle's argument in 12:18 and onwards. First, he informs the believing Hebrews, "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched" and which was so "terrible" that even Moses quaked "exceedingly" (Heb 12:18-21). No, divine mercy had delivered them from that system. Second, Paul assures them, "But ye are come unto mount Sion" (Heb 12:22-24). God had brought them unto an order of things where the throne of grace predominated. It is ever the Lord's way to reserve the best wine for the last. Third, the apostle reminds them that increased privileges involve additional obligations, and that failure to discharge those obligations incurs greater guilt. Therefore does he urge them to take heed unto God speaking to them in the Person of Christ, warning them that failure so to do would bring down upon them the divine wrath more surely than did the disobedience of Israel of old (Heb 12:25).

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Heb 12:26). This verse has occasioned much difficulty to the commentators, scarcely any two of them (ancient or modern) agreeing in their interpretation of it. Many of them suppose that the ultimate, if not the prime reference in the quotation here made from Haggai, relates to the final destruction of the earth and the heavens connected with it, as it is described in 2 Peter 3:10-12. But to suppose that Paul here made a declaration which concerned the then far-distant future, is not only to break the unity of this passage, but is to charge him with making a quotation which had no real relevancy to the immediate subject he was discussing. In pondering Hebrews 12:26-29, our first concern must be to trace their connection with the context.

Now in the context, the apostle had been treating of two things—the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and what this involved concerning the responsibility of those who were the subjects of this higher and grander revelation. These same two things *are still before* the apostle in the closing verses of our chapter. He *continued* to show how immeasurably the new covenant excels the old and he *continued* to enforce the pressing call which he had made in verse 25. First, he had intimated the vast difference which obtained between the *mouthpieces* which God employed in connection with the two revelations (Heb 12:25), namely, "Moses" (Heb 10:28) and "His Son" (Heb 1:2). Second, he had shown the great disproportion between those two teachers, by pointing out the respective *positions* they occupied (Heb 12:25). "Moses' seat" (Mat 23:2) was "on earth," whereas Christ speaks as seated upon His mediatorial throne "from heaven."

Two things were intimated by God in the different seats or positions occupied by the messengers He had employed. First, inasmuch as He now spake through the Son from heaven, God denoted that He had finished with Judaism, which was entirely a thing of the earth. Second, that Christianity was of divine origin and had to do solely with celestial things. From one angle, this call in Hebrews 12:25 was very similar to that exhortation, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:1-2). Before their conversion, the affections of the Hebrews had been centered upon the temple—notice how the disciples, just before the crucifixion, came to Christ "for to shew him the buildings of the temple" (Mat 24:1-2), but *they* were to be "thrown down"!—Christ had returned to heaven and thither their hearts must follow Him. Thus, the *heavenly* calling (Heb 3:1), heavenly citizenship (Phi 3:20), heavenly inheritance (1Pe 1:4), instead of the earthly concerns of Judaism, were now to engage the hearts and minds of the regenerate in Israel.

Next, in the verses now before us, the apostle brings out the vastly different *effects* produced through the two messengers. *This* is the *central* fact in verses 26-27. The voice "from heaven" produced proportionately greater *results* than did the voice which spake "on earth." God through

Christ speaks more powerfully and effectually than He did through Moses. Let us be careful not to lose sight of this *general* idea when pondering the details. A much greater and more far-reaching “shaking” was produced by the latter than was the case with the former. We believe that Matthew Henry was on the right track when he said, “It is by the Gospel from heaven that God shook to pieces the civil and ecclesiastical state of the Jewish nation, and introduced a new state of the church, that cannot be removed, shall never be changed for any other on earth, but shall remain till it be made perfect in heaven.” The apostle is still supplying proof that the Hebrew believers were no longer connected with Judaism, but were come to the antitypical Zion.

“Whose voice *then* shook the earth.” Here is the connecting link with the context—the “then” referring to the instituting of Judaism. “But now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). The “but now” is not so much a time-mark as it is an adverbial expression, relating to *the theme* under immediate discussion, namely, the establishment and super-excellency of Christianity. Thus, to show once more the infinitely surpassing and glorious effects of power and majesty which issued from the voice of Christ, speaking from heaven by the Gospel, and so as to give a more lively representation of the same, the apostle compares them with the greatly inferior effects that accompanied the deliverance of the law. As the right understanding of this “but now” has an important bearing upon all that follows, we subjoin the comments of another thereon.

“The word *now* does not denote the period when the promise was made, but the period to which the promise referred, which was *now*, opposed to *then* when the law was established. It was equivalent to, ‘But with regard to the present period, which is the commencement of a new order of things, He has promised, saying.’ This use of the word *now* in the apostle’s writings is common, Romans 3:21; 16:26, etc.” (John Brown, 1784-1858). There is, then, an opposition of the “but now” from what occurred at the “then” at the beginning of the verse. It is to be carefully noted that Paul *did not* say, “He hath now promised,” i.e., that in the apostle’s day God had announced He was going to do something in the far-distant future. Instead, it is, “But now he hath promised”—the “now” relating to the *fulfillment* of what Haggai had foretold, and not to some promise given through the apostle.

“But now he hath promised, saying” (Heb 12:26). This “saying” which the apostle at once quotes from Haggai he styles a “promise,” and that for at least three reasons. First, because what was but a prophecy in Haggai’s day had received its actual accomplishment in the apostle’s time, in connection with the establishment of Christianity. Second, because this was therefore something for *faith to lay hold of*, and that is what he was seeking to persuade the Hebrew believers to do. Third, to prevent any misconception on *our* part. Had the apostle been pointing out that the prophecy of Haggai contained a yet deeper meaning and more ultimate reference, even to predicting the final destruction of this world and all its works, he had surely been very far from designating such an unparalleled divine judgment as that, by the term “promise”! A “promise” always refers to something that is *good* and never to a calamity!

“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). Let us now inquire, *What is denoted* by this “shaking” of earth and heaven? This is a figure which is used in the Old Testament quite frequently to express *a great change*, produced by the providences and power of God in the affairs of men. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though *the earth be removed*, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Psa 46:1-2), which is explained in, “The heathen raged, *the kingdoms were moved*: he uttered his voice, the earth melted” (Psa 46:6). “Thou hast made *the earth* to tremble; thou hast

broken it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh” (Psa 60:2). What is signified by that metaphorical language is indicated in the next verse, “Thou hast showed *thy people* hard things: Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.” “Therefore I will *shake the heavens*, and the earth shall remove out of her place” (Isa 13:13)—language which signifies a tremendous commotion among the nations—compare Joel 3:16. Such vivid imagery is common in the prophets.

“He stretched out his hand over *the sea*,” which is interpreted in the next sentence “He shook *the kingdoms*” (Isa 23:11). “Behold, the LORD maketh *the earth* empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down” (Isa 24:1)—words, we need hardly say, which are not to be taken literally. “At his wrath *the earth* shall tremble,” explained in the following clause, “and *the nations* shall not be able to abide his indignation” (Jer 10:10). “Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD’S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth” (Mic 6:1-2). Such language is not to be understood literally, as the next clause shows, “For the LORD hath a controversy with *his people*.” “For the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luk 21:26). Even Mr. Darby admitted (in his “Synopsis”), “This shaking of all things—whether here (Heb 12:26-27) or in the analogous passage in 2 Peter—evidently goes beyond Judaism, *but has peculiar application to it*”—italics ours.

“Whose voice then shook the earth” (Heb 12:26). The immediate reference is to Sinai at the time the law was given. But as we have seen, that material mount was emblematic of the entire economy which was then established. Thus the “shaking” of the “earth” denoted the great outward *change* which took place in the days of Moses. The *external* state of Israel was then greatly altered, they were organised into a kingdom and church-state (Act 7:38), into a theocracy. Yet glorious as was that change, it reached not to “heaven,” that is to say, it affected not the *inner* man and was not concerned with *spiritual and eternal* relations. “The economy established at Sinai, *viewed by itself*, was a temporal covenant with a worldly nation, referring to temporal promises, an earthly inheritance, a worldly sanctuary, a typical priesthood, and carnal ordinances” (John Brown).

“But now [in relation to Christianity] he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). The careful reader will observe that the prophet had said, “I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land” (Hag 2:6), whereas the apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to word it—for the sake of emphasis—“I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26), hence a shaking of *both* “earth” and “heaven” was here in view. “The voice in heaven produces more extensive and more permanent effects. It shakes both earth and heaven—effects a change both on *the external and spiritual* circumstances of those who are under it, and it effects a *permanent* change, which is to admit of no radical essential change forever” (John Brown).

Though a great change had been produced in connection with the giving of the old covenant, a far greater change had been effected in the establishing of the new covenant. *That* had affected but one nation only, and that, merely in its external and temporal circumstances. *This* reaches unto God’s people among all nations, and affects their spiritual and eternal interests. It was reserved for God’s *Son* to bring this about, for in all things *He* must have the pre-eminence. A much greater commotion and convulsion in human affairs has been brought in by Immanuel, yea, it was then as though the very universe was shaken to its centre. In order to the establishing of that kingdom of Christ’s, which shall never be moved, there were tremendous revolutions, both in connection with Judaism and the idolatrous systems of the heathen—“These that have turned the world upside down” (Act 17:6) was the charge preferred against the apostles.



Now as the great change in the temporal affairs of Israel at the instituting of Judaism had been adumbrated by the quaking of Sinai, so the far greater alterations introduced by the establishing of Christianity were also shadowed forth in the various physical phenomena and angelic appearances. “At His birth, a new star appeared in the heavens, which filled the generality of men with amazement, and put those who were wise to diligent inquiries about it. His birth was proclaimed by an angel from heaven, and celebrated by a ‘multitude of the heavenly hosts’ (Luk 2:13). In His ministry, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the shape of a dove. These things may answer that mighty work in heaven which is here intimated. On the earth, wise men came from the east to inquire after Him. Herod and all Jerusalem were shaken at the tidings of Him. In the discharge of His work He wrought miracles in heaven and earth, sea and dry land, on the whole creation of God. Wherefore in the first coming of Christ the words had their literal accomplishment in an eminent manner.

“Take the words metaphorically for great changes, commotions and alterations in the world, and so also were they accomplished in Him and His coming. No such alteration made in the world since the creation of it as was then, and in what ensued thereon. All the ‘heavens’ of the world were then shaken, and after a while removed, that is, all their *gods* and all their worship, which had continued from time immemorial, which were the ‘heavens of the people,’ were first shaken, and then utterly demolished. The ‘earth’ also was moved, shaken, and changed—for all nations were stirred up, some to inquire after Him, some to oppose Him, whereon great concussions and commotions did ensue, till all the most noble parts of it were made subject to Him.

“But, as we observed before, it is the dealing of God with *the church*, and the alteration which He would make in the state thereof, concerning which the apostle treats. It is therefore the ‘heaven’ of Mosaic worship and that Judaical church-state, with the ‘earth’ of their political state belonging thereunto, that are here intended. These were they that were ‘shaken’ at the coming of Christ, and so shaken as shortly after to be removed and taken away, for the introduction of the more heavenly worship of the Gospel and the immovable evangelical church-state. This was the greatest commotion and alteration that God ever made in the ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ of the church. This was far more great and glorious than the shaking of the ‘earth’ at the giving of the law. Wherefore, not to exclude the senses before mentioned, which are consistent with this, and may be respected in the prophecy as *outward signs* and indications of it, *this* is that which is principally intended in the words, and which is proper to the argument in hand” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb 12:27). This is the apostle’s inspired commentary on Haggai’s prophecy. He points out that the “yet once more” denoted there had previously been a great change wrought in Israel’s fortunes, and also that now another radical alteration had been made therein. He insists that the “shaking” was in order to a *removal* of what was only transient, and this, *that the permanent might be fixedly established*—the great change was only in order that that which is unchangeable might remain.

# THE LIFE OF DAVID

## 54. His Conviction

An interval of some months elapsed between what is recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and that which is found at the beginning of chapter 12. During this interval David was free to enjoy to the full that which he had acquired through his wrongdoing. The one obstacle which lay in the way of the free indulgence of his passion was removed. Bathsheba was now his. Apparently, the king, in his palace, was secure and immune. So far there had been no intervention of God in judgment, and throughout those months David had remained impenitent for the fearful crimes he had committed. Alas, how dull the conscience of a saint may become. But if David was pleased with the consummation of his vile plans, there was One who was displeased. The eyes of God had marked his evil conduct and the divine righteousness would not pass it by. “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence” yet He adds, “but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (Psa 50:21).

God may suffer His people to indulge the lusts of the flesh and fall into grievous sin, but He will not allow them to remain content and happy in such a case—rather are they made to prove that “the way of transgressors is hard” (Pro 13:15). In the twentieth of Job, the Holy Spirit has painted a graphic picture of the wretchedness experienced by the evil-doer. “Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth: Yet his meat in his bowels is turned, *it is the gall of asps within him*. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper’s tongue shall slay him....shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle. The heaven shall reveal his iniquity” (Job 20:12-16, 26-27). Notably is this the case with backsliders, for God will not be mocked with impunity.

The coarse pleasures of sin cannot long content a child of God. It has been truly said that, “Nobody buys a little passing pleasure in evil at so dear a rate, or keeps it so short a time, as a good man.” The conscience of the righteous soon reasserts itself and makes its disconcerting voice heard. He may yet be far from true repentance, but he will soon experience keen remorse. Months may pass before he again enjoys communion with God, but self-disgust will quickly fill his soul. The saint has to pay a fearfully high price for enjoying “the pleasures of sin for a season.” Stolen waters may be sweet for a moment, but how quickly his “mouth shall be filled with gravel” (Pro 20:17). Soon will the guilty one have to cry out, “He hath made my chain heavy....He hath made me desolate....He hath filled me with bitterness....Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace” (Lam. 3:7, 11, 15, 17).

Though the inspired historian has not described the wretchedness of David’s soul following his murder of Uriah, yet we may obtain a clear view of the same from the Psalms penned by him after his conviction and deep contrition. Those Psalms tell of a sullen closing of his mouth, “when I kept silence” (Psa 32:3). Though his heart must frequently have smitten him, yet he would not speak to God about his sin, and there was nothing else he could speak of. They tell of inward perturbation and tumult that filled him, “My bones waxed old through *my roaring* all the day long” (Psa 32:3)—groans of remorse were wrung from his yet unbroken heart. “For day and night

thy hand was heavy upon me” (Psa 32:4)—a sense of the divine holiness and power oppressed him, though it did not melt him.

Even a palace can afford no relief unto one who is filled with bitter remorse. A king may command his subjects, but he cannot quieten the voice of outraged conscience. No matter whether the sun of the morning was shining or the shades of even were falling, there was no escape for David. “Day and night” God’s heavy hand weighted him down, “My moisture is turned into the drought of summer” he declared (Psa 32:4)—it was as though some heated iron was scorching him—all the dew and freshness of his life was dried up. Most probably he suffered acutely in both body and soul. “Thus he dragged through a weary year—ashamed of his guilty dalliance, wretched in his self-accusation, afraid of God, and sulking in the recesses of his palace from the sight of the people.

“David learned what we all learn (and the holier a man is, the more speedily and sharply the lesson follows on the heels of his sin), that every transgression is a blunder, that we never get the satisfaction which we expect from any sin, or if we do, we get something with it which spoils it all. A nauseous drug is added to the exciting, intoxicating drink which temptation offers, and though its flavour is at first disguised by the pleasanter taste of sin, its bitterness is persistent though slow, and clings to the palate long after that has faded away utterly” (Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1929). With equal clearness does this appear in the 51st Psalm. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (v. 12) he cries, for spiritual comforts had entirely deserted him. “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise” (Psa 51:15). The dust had settled upon the strings of his harp because the Spirit within was grieved.

How could it be otherwise? So long as David refused to humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God, seeking from Him a spirit of true repentance, and freely confessing his great wickedness, there could be no more peace for him, no more happy communion with God, no further growth in grace. O my reader, we would earnestly press upon you the great importance of *keeping short accounts with God*. Let not guilt accumulate upon thy conscience. Make it a point *each* night of spreading before Him the sins of the day and seeking to be cleansed therefrom. Any great sin lying long upon the conscience, unrepented of, or not repented of as the matter requires, only furthers our indwelling corruptions—neglect causes the heart to be hardened. “My wounds stink and are corrupt *because of my foolishness*” (Psa 38:5). It was his foolish neglect to make a timely application for the cure of the wounds that sin had made, which he there laments.

At the end of 2 Samuel 11 we read, “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (v. 27), upon which Matthew Henry says, “One would think it should be followed that the Lord sent enemies to invade him, terrors to take hold on, and the messengers of death to arrest him. No, He sent *a prophet* to him”—“And the LORD sent Nathan unto David” (2Sa 12:1). We are here to behold the exceeding riches of divine grace and mercy—*such* “riches” that legal and self-righteous hearts have murmured at, as a making light of sin—so incapable is the natural man of discerning spiritual things—they are “foolishness” unto him. David had wandered far, but he was not lost. “Though he fall,” (the righteous) yet it is written “he *shall not be* utterly cast down” (Psa 37:24). O how tenderly God watches over His sheep! How faithfully He goes after and recovers them, when they have strayed! With what amazing goodness does He heal their backslidings and continue to love them freely!

“And the LORD sent Nathan unto David” (2Sa 12:1). It is to be duly noted that it was not David who sent for the prophet, though never did he more sorely need his counsel than now. No, it was *God* who took the initiative. It is ever thus, for we never seek Him, until He seeks us. It was thus with Moses when a fugitive in Midian, with Elijah when fleeing from Jezebel, with

Jonah under the juniper tree, with Peter after his denial (1Co 15:5). O the marvel of it! How it should melt our hearts. “If we believe not, yet *he* abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2Ti 2:13). Though He says, “I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes,” it is at once added, “Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail” (Psa 89:32-33). So it was here—David still had an interest in that everlasting covenant “ordered in all things, and sure” (2Sa 23:5).

“And the LORD sent Nathan unto David.” Probably about a year had elapsed from what is recorded in the beginning of the preceding chapter, for the adulterous child was already born (2Sa 12:14). Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, “Though God may suffer His people to fall into sin, He will not suffer His people to lie still in it.” No, God will exhibit His holiness, His righteousness, and His mercy in connection therewith. His holiness, by displaying His hatred of the same and by bringing the guilty one to penitently confess it. His righteousness, in the chastening visited upon it, His mercy, in leading the backslider to forsake it, and then bestow His pardon upon him. What a marvelous and blessed exercise of His varied attributes! “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners” (Isa 57:17-18).

“And the LORD sent Nathan unto David” (2Sa 12:1). The prophet’s task was far from being an enviable one—to meet the guilty king alone, face to face. As yet, David had evinced no sign of repentance. God had not cast off His erring child, but He would not condone his grievous offences. All must come out into the light. The divine displeasure must be made evident. The culprit must be charged and rebuked. David must judge himself and then discover that where sin had abounded grace did much more abound. Wondrous uniting of divine righteousness and mercy—made possible by the cross of Christ! The righteousness of God required that David should be faithfully dealt with. The mercy of God moved Him to send Nathan for the recovery of His strayed sheep. “Mercy and truth are *met together*; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa 85:10).

Yes, Nathan might well have quailed before the commission which God now gave him. It was no easy matter to have to rebuke his royal master. Varied indeed are the tasks which the Lord assigns His servants. Often are they sent forth with a message which they well know will be most unpalatable to their hearers, and the temptation to tone it down, to take off its sharp edge, if not to substitute another which will be more acceptable, is both real and strong. Little do the rank and file even of God’s people realise what it costs a minister of the Gospel to be *faithful* to his calling. If the apostle Paul felt his need of requesting prayer “that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth *boldly*” (Eph 6:19), how much more do God’s servants today need the support of the supplications of their brethren and sisters in Christ! for on every side the cry now is “speak unto us *smooth* things!”

On a previous occasion God had sent Nathan to David with a message of promise and comfort (2Sa 7:4-5, etc.), now he is ordered to charge the king with his crimes. He did not decline the unwelcome task, but executed it faithfully. Not only was his mission an unenviable one, but it was far from easy. Few things are more difficult and trying to one with a sensitive disposition than to be called upon to reprove an erring brother. In pondering the method here followed by the prophet—his line of approach to David’s slumbering conscience—there is valuable instruction for those of us who may be called upon to deal with similar cases. *Wisdom* from on high (we do not say “tact,” the *world’s* term, for more often that word is employed to denote the serpentine subtleties of the serpent than the honest dealings of the Holy Spirit) is sorely needed if we are to

be a real help to those who have fallen by the wayside—lest we either condone their offences or make them despair of obtaining pardon.

“And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him” (2Sa 12:1-4).

Nathan did not immediately charge David with his crimes. Instead, he approached his conscience indirectly by means of a *parable*—clear intimation that he was out of communion with God, for He never employed *that* method of revelation with those who were walking in fellowship with Him. The method employed by the prophet had the great advantage of presenting the facts of the case before David *without* stirring up his opposition of self-love and kindling resentment against being directly rebuked, yet causing him to pass sentence against himself without being aware of it—sure proof that Nathan had been given wisdom from above! “There scarcely ever was any thing more calculated, on the one hand, to awaken emotions of sympathy, and on the other, those of indignation, than the case here supposed, and the several circumstances by which the heart must be interested in the poor man’s case, and by which the unfeeling oppression of his rich neighbour was aggravated” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

The prophet began, then, by giving an oblique representation of the vileness of David’s offence, which was conveyed in such a way that the king’s judgment was *obliged* to assent to the gross injustice he was guilty of. The excuselessness, the heartlessness, and the abominable selfishness of his conduct was depicted, though Uriah’s loyal service and the king’s ingratitude and treachery, and the murder of him and his fellow-soldiers, was not alluded to—is there not a hint here that, when reproofing an erring brother we should *gradually* lead up to the worst elements in his offence? Yet obvious as was the allusion in Nathan’s parable, David perceived not its application unto himself—how this shows that when one is out of touch with God, he is devoid of spiritual discernment. It is only in God’s light that we can see the light!

“And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die” (2Sa 12:5). David supposed that a complaint was being preferred against one of his subjects. Forgetful of his own crimes, he was fired with indignation at the supposed offender, and with a solemn oath condemned him to death. In condemning the rich man, David unwittingly condemned himself. What a strange thing the heart of a believer is! what a medley dwells within it!—often filled with righteous indignation against the sins of others, while blind to its own! Real need has each of us to solemnly and prayerfully ponder the questions of Romans 2:21-23. Self-flattery makes us quick to mark the faults of others, but blind to our own grievous sins. Just in proportion as a man is in love with his own sins and resentful of being rebuked, will he be unduly severe in condemning those of his neighbours.

Having brought David to pronounce sentence upon a supposed offender for crimes of far less malignity than his own, the prophet now, with great courage and plainness, declared, “*Thou art the man*” (2Sa 12:7), and speaks directly in the name of God, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel.” First, David is reminded of the signal favours which had been bestowed upon him (2Sa 12:7-8), among them the “wives” or women of Saul’s court, from which he might have selected a

wife. Second, God was willing to bestow yet more (v. 8) had he considered anything was lacking, he might have asked for it, and had it been for his good the Lord had freely granted it—cf. Psalm 84:11. Third, in view of God’s tender mercies, faithful love, and all-sufficient gifts, he is asked “Wherefore hast thou *despised* the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight?” (2Sa 12:9). Ah, it is contempt of the divine authority which is the occasion of all sin—making light of the law and its Giver, acting as though its precepts were mere trifles and its threats meaningless.

The desired result was now accomplished. “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD” (2Sa 12:13). Those words were not uttered lightly or mechanically, as the sequel shows, but this we must leave (D.V.) till our next.

## THE DIVINE COVENANTS

### 5. The Siniatic

We have now arrived at a stage of our subject which we fear is not likely to be of much interest to many of our readers, yet we would ask them to kindly bear with us for the sake of those who *are* anxious to have a systematic exposition thereof. We write, therefore, for those who desire answers to such questions as the following: What was the precise nature of the covenant which God entered into with Israel at Sinai? Did it concern only their temporal welfare as a nation or did it also set forth God’s requirements for the individual’s enjoyment of eternal blessings? Was a radical change now made in God’s revelation to men and what He demanded of them?—was an entirely different “way of salvation” now introduced? Wherein is the Siniatic covenant *related to* the others, particularly to the everlasting covenant of grace and to the Adamic covenant of works?—was it in harmony with the former or a renewal of the latter? Was the Siniatic covenant a simple or a mixed one? did it have only a “letter” significance pertaining to earthly things or a “spirit” as well, pertaining to heavenly things? What specific contribution did it make unto the progressive unfolding of the divine plan and purpose?

We deem it of great importance that a clear conception be obtained of the precise nature and meaning of that august transaction which took place at Sinai, when JEHOVAH proclaimed the Ten Commandments in the hearing of Israel. No one who has given any due attention thereto can fail to perceive that it marked a memorable epoch in the history of that people. But it was far more than that—it possessed a much deeper and broader significance—it was the beginning of a new era in the history of *the human race*, being a momentous step in that series of divine dispensations toward fallen mankind. Yet it must be frankly acknowledged that the subject is as difficult as it is important. The great diversity of opinion which prevails among the theologians and divines who have studied the subject is proof thereof. Yet this is no reason why *we* should despair of obtaining light thereon, rather should it cause us to cry to God for help, and to prosecute our inquiry cautiously, humbly, and carefully.

What was the precise character of the transaction which JEHOVAH entered into with Israel at Sinai? That there *was* a bona fide “covenant” made on that occasion cannot be gainsaid. The term

is actually used in Exodus 19:5, “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my *covenant*, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.” So again we read, “And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the *blood of the covenant*, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words” (Exo 24:7-8). Years after, when rehearsing God’s dealings with Israel, Moses said, “The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb” (Deu 5:2). Not only is the *word* “covenant” used, but the transactions at Sinai contained all the *elements* of a covenant—the contracting parties were the Lord God and Israel, the condition was, “If ye will obey my voice indeed,” the promise was, “Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exo 19:6). The penalty was the “curses” of Deuteronomy 28:15, etc.

But *what was* the nature and design of that covenant? Did God mock His fallen creatures by formally renewing the (Adamic) covenant of works, which they had already broken, under the curse of which all by nature lay, and which He knew they could not keep for a single hour? Such a question answers itself. Or did God do with Israel then as He does with His people now—first redeem, and then put under law as a rule of life, a standard of conduct? But if *that* were the case, *why* enter into this formal “covenant?” Even Fairbairn (Patrick, 1805-1874) virtually cuts the knot here by saying that the form of a covenant is of no consequence at all. But this *covenant-form* at Sinai is the very thing which requires to be accounted for. Christians are *not* put under the law *as* a “covenant,” though they are *as* a rule. No help is to be obtained by dodging difficulties or by denying their existence. They must be fairly and prayerfully grappled with.

There is no doubt in the mind of the writer that many have been led astray when considering the *typical* teaching of Israel’s history and the antitype in the experience of Christians, by failing to duly note *the contrasts* as well as the comparison between them. It is true that God’s deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt blessedly foreshadowed the redemption of His elect from sin and Satan, yet let it not be forgotten that the majority of those who were emancipated from Pharaoh’s slavery perished in the wilderness, *not* being suffered to enter the promised land. Nor are we left to mere reasoning at this point. It is placed upon inspired record that, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a *new* covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: NOT *according to* the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord” (Heb 8:8-9). Thus we have divine authority for saying that God’s dealings with Israel at Sinai *were not a parallel* with His dealings with His people under the Gospel, but *a contrast*!

Hermann Witsius (1636-1708) took the view that the Siniatic compact was neither, *formally*, the covenant of grace nor the covenant of works, but a *national* covenant which presupposed them both, and that it promised “not only temporal blessings....but also spiritual and eternal.” So far so good. But when he states (book 4, section 4, paragraphs 43-45) that the *condition* of this covenant was “a sincere, though not, in every respect, a perfect obedience of His commands,” we certainly cannot agree. Witsius held that the Siniatic covenant differed from the covenant of works—which made no provision or allowance for the acceptance of a sincere though imperfect obedience, and that it differed from the covenant of grace, since it contained no promises of strength to enable Israel to render that obedience. Though plausible, his position is not only erroneous, but highly dangerous. God *never* promised eternal life to men on the condition of an imperfect but sincere obedience—that would overthrow the whole argument of Romans and Galatians.

Thomas Bell (1814) in his heavy work on “The Covenants” insists that “The covenant of works was delivered from Sinai, yet as subservient to the covenant of grace.” Such an accurate thinker was bound to feel the pressure of those difficulties which such a postulate involves, yet he took a strange way of getting out of them. Appealing to Deuteronomy 29:1, Bell argued that God made “two distinct covenants with Israel,” and that “the one made in Moab was the covenant of grace,” and that “the two covenants mentioned in Deuteronomy 29:1 are as opposite as the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith.” We will not here attempt to show the unsatisfactoriness and untenability of such an inference—suffice it to say there is less warrant for it, than to conclude that God made two totally distinct covenants with Abraham (in Gen 15 and 17). The covenant at Moab was a *renewal* of the Sinaitic, as the ones made with Isaac and Jacob were of the original one with Abraham.

Quite a different idea has been advanced by those known as “The Plymouth Brethren.” Mr. Darby (J. N., 1800-1882) (who had quite a penchant for novelties) advanced the theory that at Sinai, Israel made a fatal blunder, deliberately abandoning the ground of receiving all from God on the basis of pure grace, and in their stupidity and self-sufficiency agreeing to henceforth *earn* His favours. The idea is that when God rehearsed His merciful dealings with them (Exo 19:4) and then added, “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people” (Exo 19:5), that Israel was guilty of perverting His words, and evidenced their carnality and pride by saying, “All that the LORD hath spoken, we will do” (Exo 19:8). Those are regarded as most disastrous words, leading to most disastrous results, for it is supposed that, from this time, God entirely changed His attitude toward them.

In his “Synopsis,” Mr. Darby concludes his remarks on Exodus 18 and opens 19 by saying, “But having thus terminated the course of grace the scene changes entirely. They do not keep the feast on the mount, whither God, as He had promised, had led them—had ‘brought them, bearing them as on eagles’ wings to Himself.’ He proposes a condition to them: If they obeyed His voice, they should be His people. The people—instead of knowing themselves, and saying, ‘We dare not, though bound to obey, place ourselves under such a condition, and risk our blessing, yea, make sure of losing it’—undertake to do all that the Lord has spoken. The blessing now took the form of dependence, like Adam’s on the faithfulness of man as well as of God....The people, however, are not permitted to approach God, who hid Himself in the darkness.”

Mr. Charles Henry Mackintosh (1820-1896) ( in his comments upon Exodus 19, says, “It (the scene presented at the end of 18) was but a brief moment of sunshine in which a very vivid picture of the kingdom was afforded; but the sunshine was speedily followed by the heavy clouds which gathered around that ‘palpable mount,’ where Israel, in a spirit of dark and senseless legality, abandoned His covenant of pure grace for man’s covenant of works. Disastrous movement! A movement fraught with the most dismal results. Hitherto as we have seen no enemy could stand before Israel—no obstacle was suffered to interrupt their onward and victorious march. Pharaoh’s hosts were overthrown, Amalek and his people were discomfited with the edge of the sword, all was victory, because God was acting on behalf of His people in pursuance of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

“In the opening verses of the chapter now before us, the Lord recapitulates His actions toward Israel in the following touching and beautiful language, see Exodus 19:3-6. Observe, it is ‘*My voice*’ and ‘*My covenant*.’ What was the utterance of that ‘voice’? and what did that ‘covenant’ involve? Had JEHOVAH’s voice made itself heard for the purpose of laying down the rules and regulations of a severe and unbending lawgiver? By no means. It had spoken to demand freedom for the captive, to provide a refuge from the sword of the destroyer, to make a way for the



ransomed to pass over, to bring down bread from heaven, to draw forth water out of the flinty rock—such had been the gracious and intelligible utterance of JEHOVAH's 'voice' up to the moment at which 'Israel camped before the mount.'

"And as to His 'covenant,' it was one of unmingled grace. It proposed no condition, it made no demands, it put no yoke on the neck, no burden on the shoulder. When 'the God of glory appeared unto Abraham' in Ur of the Chaldees, He certainly did not address him in such words as Thou shalt do this, and thou shalt not do that, ah, no—such language was not according to His heart. It suits Him far better to place 'a fair mitre' upon a sinner's head than to put a 'yoke upon his neck.' His word to Abraham was '*I will give.*' The land of Canaan was not to be purchased by man's doings, but to be given by God's grace. Thus it stood, and in the opening of the book of Exodus we see God coming down in grace to make good His promise to Abraham's seed....However, Israel was not disposed to occupy this blessed position."

As so many have been misled by this teaching, we will digress for a moment and show how utterly unscriptural it is. It is a serious mistake to say that in the Abrahamic covenant God "proposed no conditions, and made no demands, it put no yoke on the neck." As we pointed out in our articles thereon when studying the Abrahamic covenant, attention is *not* to be confined unto one or two particular passages, but *the whole* of God's dealings with that patriarch are to be taken into consideration. Did not God say to Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect. *And I will make my covenant between me and thee*" (Gen 17:1-2)? Did He not say, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; *that* [in order that] the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen 18:19)? Abraham had to "keep the way of the LORD," which is defined as "to *do* justice and judgment," this is, to walk obediently, in subjection to God's revealed will, if he was to receive the fulfillment of the divine promises.

Again, did not the Lord expressly confirm His covenant to Abraham by oath in saying, "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for *because* thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I *will* bless thee," etc., (Gen 22:16-17). It is true, blessedly true, that God dealt with Abraham in pure *grace*, but it is equally true that He dealt with him as a *responsible* creature, as subject to the divine authority and placed him under law. At a later date, when JEHOVAH renewed the covenant to Isaac, He said, "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed [the original covenant promise]; BECAUSE that Abraham *obeyed* my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my *laws*" (Gen 26:4-5). That is clear enough, and nothing could be plainer that God introduced *no change* in His dealings with Abraham's descendants when He said to Israel at Sinai, "Now therefore, if ye will *obey* my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, *then* ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Exo 19:5).

Equally clear is it from Scripture that the nation of Israel was itself *under law before* they reached Sinai, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to *his commandments*, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee" (Exo 15:26). Is it not strange to see men ignoring such plain passages? Lest the quibble be raised that the reference to God's "commandments and statutes" in that passage was *prospective*, i.e., in view of the law which was shortly to be given them, note the following, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in *my law*, or no" (Exo 16:4). The meaning of this is explained in, "Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the

LORD” (Exo 16:23). Alas for their response, “There went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather” (Exo 16:27). Now mark carefully God’s complaint, “*How long* refuse ye to keep my commandments and *my laws?*” (Exo 16:28)—so the reference in Exodus 16:4 was not prospective, but *retrospective*—Israel WAS *under law* long before they reached Sinai!

But in further rebuttal of the strange theory mentioned above, we would ask, was it not the Lord Himself who took the initiative in this so-called abandonment of the Abrahamic covenant? for it was *He* who sent Moses to the people with the words (Exo 19:5) which manifestly sought to evoke an affirmative reply! Again, we ask, If their reply proceeded from carnal pride and self-sufficiency, if it displayed an intolerable arrogance and presumption, why did it call forth no formal rebuke? So far from the Lord being displeased with Israel’s promise, He said unto Moses “Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and *believe thee forever*” (Exo 19:9). Again, why at the rehearsal of this transaction, did Moses say, “The LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have *well* said *all* that they have spoken,” and then He breathed the wish, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deu 5:28-29).

How utterly excuseless and untenable is this theory (which has been accepted by many and echoed in the “Scofield Bible”) in the light of the plain facts of Holy Writ. Had Israel acted so madly and presumptuously, would the Lord have gone through all the formalities of a covenant-transaction (Exo 24:3-8)? Had the words uttered by Him, and responded to by the people, been based on impossible conditions on the one side, and palpable lies on the other, a *covenant* would be unthinkable. Finally, let it be carefully observed that so far from God pronouncing a judgment upon Israel for their promise at Sinai, He declared that, on their performance of the same, they would be peculiarly honoured and blessed, Exodus 23:27-29; Deuteronomy 6:18.

## UNION AND COMMUNION

### 10. Experimental

In seeking to define and describe the nature and character of our *experimental* union and communion with Christ, it has been pointed out, first, that it consists in a ready submission to Him as our Lord and an intimate intercourse with Him as our Friend. There is no aloofness on His part and there should be no reserve on ours. Second, it is a walking with Him in the light—where all is open, real, honest, with no concealment or pretense. Third, it is a knowing, loving, enjoying Christ, having plain, practical, personal dealings with Him. Fourth, it is based on *faith’s* realisation of Christ’s relation to us and of our relation to Him—only the exercise of faith will make Him real and consciously near us. Fifth, *love* is the cementing bond of this union. There is a reciprocal affection between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Sixth, it consists of a sitting at the feet of our Lord and receiving from Him, a leaning upon the bosom of our Friend and enjoying

His love. Seventh, it is exercised in a real personal intercourse with Him, opening our hearts freely to Him, and receiving free communications from Him.

The great thing for the Christian is to realise that Christ not only gave Himself *for* him, but that He has given Himself *to* him. Christ Himself is mine, my very own! Wondrous, blessed, glorious fact. Oh, for faith to realise it more fully. Oh for grace to act more consistently with it. Yes, Christ Himself is mine—to live upon, to lean upon, to consult, to confide in, to *make use of* in every way I need Him, to have the freest possible dealings with Him. Christ is *mine* to enjoy to the utmost extent of my heart, to commune with, to delight in. He is ever with me, and under no conceivable (or unconceivable) circumstances will He ever leave or forsake me. He is ever the same. His love for me never varies. He has my best interests at heart. He can satisfy every longing of the soul as nothing else and none other can. He is ready to share with me His peace and joy. O what a happy soul I should be!

What a change it would make in the experience of both writer and reader if we could more fully grasp the amazing and precious truth that the Lord Jesus has not only given Himself for us, but that He has done much more—He has given Himself *to* us. CHRIST is ours! Most blessedly is that fact brought out in the wonderful type of Exodus 12. The selfsame lamb whose blood sheltered the Israelites from the Avenger, was theirs to feed upon, to draw strength from, to enjoy (Exo 12:7-11). Alas how feebly do any of us apprehend the Antitype of this evidenced in the complaints of our feebleness, leanness, fruitlessness. There is an infinite sufficiency in Christ for time and eternity, and that sufficiency or “fullness” is for us *to draw upon*, but alas, how little we do so. Surely our deepest experimental need is to be taught by the Spirit—for He alone *can* teach us this blessed secret, as He ever *does* where there is a heart really longing to know it—of HOW to make a right and full *use* of Christ.

It is only as we really live *upon* Christ that we can truly live *for* Him. Nor is this the vague, intangible, mysterious thing which human “religion” and Protestant priestcraft would make of it. It is to the Spirit-taught the most simple, natural, and practical thing for us. First, it is *faith’s* realisation that Christ is truly and actually mine—my very own—mine in an infinitely nearer and dearer way than a mother or wife is mine. Second, it is faith’s realisation that Christ is *with* me, near me, right by my side, “a very *present* help in trouble” (Psa 46:1), the Friend who “sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:18-24). Third, it is faith’s realisation that *all He has is mine*—IS, not shall be! We are even now “heirs of God, and *joint-heirs* with Christ” (Rom 8:17). His wisdom, His righteousness, His holiness, His love, His peace, are *ours*. Fourth, it is faith’s *appropriation* of all this—ah, words easily written, easily understood at their letter-meaning—which enables me to draw from Him, share with Him, and enjoy what is mine in Him. *That* is “fellowship” with Christ!

Real and personal *fellowship* with Christ should be made the chief aim of our souls in all our approaches to Him—in ordinances, means, and privileges. In public worship, in private reading of the Word, in our meditation, in prayer, in spiritual conversation with our brethren and sisters in Christ, free and intimate communion with Him should be our definite quest. “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, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple” (Psa 27:4)—that was the Old Testament way of expressing this truth. To “dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life” (Psa 24:4). did not signify to spend all his time in the literal tabernacle or temple, but to abide in conscious communion with Him, enjoying His perfections. *This* the Psalmist “desired” above everything else, and this he “sought after.” So also must we.

Let us now anticipate an objection—What you have described in the above paragraphs is indeed a beautiful ideal, but alas, it is utterly impracticable for one in such circumstances as I am in. It might be realised by those who are free from the carking cares of this life, who have not to battle with the world for daily bread for themselves and those dependent upon them, for such who have time and leisure for holy contemplation and spiritual luxuriation. But for a poor soul like I, who scarcely knows where the next meal is coming from, delighting one's self in the Lord is not to be attained unto in this life. First we would say, Be not unduly occupied with God's temporal dealings with you, for His way in providence is often a great deep. Meditate upon the everlasting covenant of His grace and His boundless love to you. All God's dealings, even in the most dark and trying dispensations, are in mercy and truth. He has sworn, "I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jer 32:40).

If you will but attend to that same word of promise, meditate upon it, and pray over it, your faith will be strengthened, and you will triumph in the Lord and rejoice in the God of your salvation. Remember the faith of Habakkuk. He said, "*Although* the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: *yet* I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength" (Hab 3:17-19). On God's Word the prophet relied. Even though all outward things should, *in appearance*, make against God's Word, yet we should believe, with joyful hope, in its sure accomplishment. It will be your wisdom and comfort to leave yourself and every concern with the Lord, committing all, by simple faith, into His hands. "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee" (Psa 55:22).

We can well imagine other readers saying, *That* is not my difficulty—*my* trouble lies deeper than being occupied with and worried over temporal circumstances, sorely trying though they often are. Such blissful communion with Christ as you have depicted above is impossible for me. How can one so depraved, such a mass of rottenness within, such a spiritual leper, such a miserable failure in everything, ever attain unto intimate intercourse with the Lord of Glory? Ah, *that* is the real problem which weighs so heavily on the hearts of the great majority of truly regenerated souls. Nor can the complacent, self-righteous religionists of the day understand such cases, still less can they minister any help and comfort. Being strangers themselves to the plague of their own heart, having such low conceptions of sin, and still lower of the ineffable holiness of God, being blinded by pride and self-deception, it is utterly impossible that *they* should be able to enter into the anguish of those groaning under sin.

Permit a fellow-groaner to try in his feeble way to point you to "the balm of Gilead." It is *with sin-harassed souls* that Christ holds communion! Ah, *that* is what the haughty Pharisees of the days of His flesh could not understand. They murmured at Him, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luk 15:2). It shocked their ideas of religious propriety that He should make so free with those whom *they* considered were so far beneath them spiritually. And if this book falls into the hands of their many successors, we would be much surprised if they did not throw up hands of horror against the writer, and denounce such teaching as "dangerous," as "Antinomian," as "making light of sin." But this would move us not. It would indeed be deplorable did we receive the approval and commendation of such people. But as of old "the *common people*" heard Christ "gladly" (Mar 12:37), so today those who are poorest in spirit will most readily receive His glad tidings.

The Gospel is, that it is the LAMB which is given us to feed on. *That* precious title speaks of Christ in His *sacrificial* character. It tells of His amazing grace and matchless love to give

Himself to die the death of the cross for hell-deserving sinners. It tells also of His giving Himself to His sinful people, for communion, nourishment, strength, and joy. But more particularly it reveals the perfect *suitability* of Christ for *sinners*. The blacker and viler we see ourselves to be, the better fitted are we for Him whose name is called “Wonderful”—wonderful in His compassion, in His condescension, His readiness to bind up the broken-hearted, His power to heal lepers. His unfailing promise is “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). Nothing honours Christ more than to come to Him *in faith* while feeling our wretchedness, filthiness, and utter unworthiness.

The precious blood of Christ is the only sufficient antidote for a wounded conscience. It is by new acts of faith in His blood that we experience afresh its virtue and efficacy. True, the believer feels the plague of his heart and groans under a body of sin and death, but this should not hinder him from believing—rather should it be an argument to encourage him in believing. The more conscious we are of our polluted condition, the more deeply should we realise our need of that open fountain “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1). The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day, and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away. To it we should be constantly resorting. There is no danger whatsoever to be afraid of trusting that blood too much or of having recourse to its cleansing too often—rather should we be afraid of trusting it too little. The more frequently we plead that blood before God the more Christ is honoured.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us *therefore* come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15-16). What a precious word is this for sin-harassed souls! First, we are reminded that Christ is our “high priest,” the One who maintains our interests before God. Second, we are assured of His unfailing sympathies. He is One who has “compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way” (Heb 5:2). Third, in view of Christ’s official relation to and personal interest in us, we are invited to “come boldly [unhesitatingly, confidently, freely pouring out our hearts] unto the throne of grace”—the mediatorial throne, upon which the eternal Lover of our souls is seated. Fourth, we are to come to that throne, not only as worshippers to present our offerings of praise, but as sinners “that we may obtain *mercy*.” Finally, access there is given that we may “find *grace* to help in time of need.”

What other assurance from Him could we ask for? What further revelation of His heart is needed? A sense of our misery and wretchedness, filthiness and unworthiness, so far from acting as a deterrent, should prove a stimulus for us to come unto “the friend of publicans and sinners.” Christ is not like a “fair weather” friend, who fails in the hour of direst need, who turns his back on you when his love, counsel, and help are the most needed. No, no! Christ is that Friend who “loveth at *all* times,” that Brother who is “born for *adversity*” (Pro 17:17). Troubled soul, did you but know Him better, you could not doubt, that—would you but put Him to the proof more, you would obtain fuller evidence thereof in your own experience. Instead of reproving you, He will cordially receive you. It is *faith* which He asks for—faith in His love, His grace, His mercy, His readiness to welcome, to hear our complaints, to heal, to cleanse you.

*Faith*, dear reader, is neither encouraged nor discouraged by anything we find in ourselves. It is neither encouraged by our graces, nor discouraged by our sinfulness, for faith *looks out of self unto Another*. Nothing will afford such encouragement to believing prayer as a sight of *the Lamb* on His mediatorial throne (Rev 5:6). No matter how desperate may be our case, how often we have failed and fallen, how low we are sunk, it is *always* the believer’s privilege to turn unto his Redeemer and say, “Look thou upon me, and be merciful *unto me*, as thou usest to do unto those

that love thy name” (Psa 119:132). Oh what incentives, what encouragements He has given us in His Word to pray thus, “very great are his mercies” (1Ch 21:13). Therein we read of “the multitude of thy tender mercies” (Psa 69:16), of “his abundant mercy” (1Pe 1:3), that He is “plenteous in mercy” (Psa 86:5), and that “the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him” (Ps 103:17).

Very similar as the expressions are in sound, yet there is a vast difference between “Christian experience,” and the “experience of a Christian.” Real and normal “Christian experience” is for the heart to be occupied with Christ, delighting itself in Him. But “the experience of the average Christian” consists largely of an increasing knowledge of sin and self, and *that* fills him with misery and loathing, and with a sense of emptiness and helplessness. Nevertheless, that only *fits* him the more for Christ—all the fitness He requireth is to feel our need of Him. But alas, only too often *Christ* is excluded from our thoughts and then the state of our poor minds is very variable, dark, and uncomfortable, afflicted with many disquietudes and sorrows. As we feel sin at work within, we cannot but sorrow, and as we feel sorrow, we are often distracted. Yea, this is ever the case where God leaves us to *reason* about ourselves, to exercise our thoughts on what *we* are in ourselves.

It is in seasons of despondency and sorrow that we most need to turn to Christ and say, “Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name” (Psa 119:132). *This* is to “make use” of Him, to honour Him, to own Him as our loving Friend. When everything appears to be hopeless, go to the throne of grace, for Christ is exactly suited to thee and is all-sufficient for thee. Our desperate case will only serve to draw out His heart, to show forth His grace, to display His compassion, to exercise His mercy, to manifest His all-sufficiency, to endear Himself to our hearts. His heart is ever toward us, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, *they* may forget, yet *will I not* forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are *continually* before me” (Isa 49:15-16) He declares. Then why should you doubt His love, or question His willingness to receive you graciously, hear you patiently, and cleanse you effectually?

Oh, my sin-stricken brother, my sin-mourning sister, return unto Him who first sought you out when there was none other eye to pity. Say unto Him, Hast Thou not loved me “with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3); “wast Thou not wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities, so that the chastisement of my peace was upon Thee, that by Thy stripes I might be healed” (see Isa 53:5)? Hast Thou not said, “O, Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously,” and hast Thou not promised, “*I will* heal their backsliding, *I will* love them freely” (Hos 14:1-4). Ah, my Christian friend, cannot you see that the Lord permits these sad falls, with the sorrow of soul which they occasion us, to make way for the discovery of His gracious heart, that we may *prove for ourselves* that He *IS* a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother! Earthly friends may fail and leave us; one day soothe, the next day grieve us; but there’s One who’ll ne’er deceive us, *O how HE loves*.

Experimental communion with Christ requires that we be continually *cleansed by Him*—a fuller consideration of this we must leave (D.V.) for the future, in the meanwhile, let it be pointed out that divine grace has made full provision for this, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). Note well that this comes immediately after, “If we say that we *have no sin*, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1Jo 1:8). Sometimes the newly converted soul is favoured with such grace, with

such communion with Christ, that iniquity hides its evil face, and it seems as though sin in us has been slain. But indwelling corruption soon reasserts itself, yet pride is unwilling to *acknowledge it*, and the temptation is to gloss it over and call it by some pleasanter name than SIN. But *that*, dear friend, is Satan's effort to draw us back again to "walk in darkness"—in deception and dishonesty, and it must be steadfastly resisted.

"If we *confess* our sins" (1Jo 1:9)—*that* is to "walk in *the light!*" (1Jo 1:7). To "confess our sins" to Him, is to open our hearts to Him. It is to spread our case before Him, concealing, palliating nothing. It is to fully tell Him of all that damps our zeal after holiness, that quenches our love, that makes us miserable in ourselves. It is a laying bare of the whole of our inner man to the loving and wise Physician, who alone knows how to deal with us. And *He* is to be trusted with all the secrets of your soul. He is "faithful and just": He will not heal your wound slightly. He will set your sins before Him in the light of His countenance and cause you to loathe them. As you *continue* this frank and open dealing with Him, He will not only "*forgive*" but "cleanse you from all *unrighteousness*"—deliver from deceit and guile, purge from reticence and reserve.

The more we walk in God's light, the more clearly will we see what vile creatures we are, and how far, far short we come of God's glory. The more we cultivate intimate communion with Christ, the more will He cause us to see that what we deemed "trifles" are grievous sins. But if we "confess" them, honestly, penitently, daily, He is "faithful and just to forgive us." Ever remember that He requires *truth* in the "*inward* parts," and lies and pretense He will not tolerate. Probably you say, *I have* confessed my sins to Him until now I am thoroughly ashamed to do so any more. *That* is pride and unbelief. When Peter asked if he was to forgive his erring brother seven times, the Lord answered, "Till seventy times seven" (Mat 18:22)—*that* is what GRACE does! Oh my Christian reader, come to this Friend of sinners more frequently, rely upon His promise more fully, and He will not repulse you.

## THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

### 10. Its Securer

"Sanctification of the Spirit" (2Th 2:13) is a comprehensive expression which has a fourfold significance at least. First, it points to that supernatural operation of the Spirit whereby a sinner is "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:10), made vitally one with Him, and thereby a partaker of His holiness. Second, it tells of the vital change which this produces in his relation to the ungodly—having been quickened into newness of life, he is at once separated from those who are dead in sins, so that both as to his standing and state he is no longer with them common to Satan, sin, and the world. Third, it speaks of the Spirit Himself taking up His abode in the quickened soul, thereby rendering him personally holy. Fourth, it refers to His bringing the heart into conformity with the divine law, with all that that connotes. Before taking up this last point, we will offer a few more remarks upon the third.

The coming of this divine and glorious Person to indwell one who is depraved and sinful is both a marvel and a mystery—a marvel that He *should*, a mystery that He *would*. How is it possible for Him who is ineffably holy to dwell within those who are so unholy? Not a few have said it is impossible, and were it not for the plain declarations of Scripture thereon, probably all of us would come to the same conclusion. But God's ways are very different from ours, and His love and grace have achieved that which our poor hearts had never conceived of. This has been clearly recognised in connection with the amazing birth, and still more amazing death of Christ, but it has not been so definitely perceived in connection with the descent of the Spirit to indwell believers.

There is a striking analogy between the advent to this earth of the second Person of the Trinity and the advent of the third Person, and the marvel and mystery of the one should prepare us for the other. Had the same not become an historical fact, who among us had ever supposed that the Father had suffered His beloved Son to enter such depths of degradation as He did? Who among us had ever imagined that the Lord of Glory would lie in a manger? But He *did*! In view of that, why should we be so staggered at the concept of the Holy Spirit's entering our poor hearts? As the Father was pleased to allow the glory of the Son to be eclipsed for a season by the degradation into which He descended, so in a very real sense He suffers the glory of the Spirit to be hid for a season by the humiliation of His tabernacling in our bodies.

It is on the ground of Christ's work that the Spirit comes to us. "Whatever we receive here is but the result of the fullness given to us in Christ. If the Spirit comes to dwell in us as the Spirit of Peace, it is because Jesus by His blood, once offered, hath secured for us that peace. If the Spirit comes as the Spirit of Glory, it is because Jesus has entered into and secured glory for us. If the Spirit comes as the Spirit of Sonship, it is because Jesus has returned for us to the bosom of the Father and brought us into the nearness of the same love. If the Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of Life, it is because of the life hidden for us in Christ with God. The indwelling of the Spirit therefore being a result and evidence of the *abiding* relation to God into which the resurrection and ascension of our Lord has brought us, must of necessity be an abiding presence. Consequently, the sanctification which results from the fact of His presence in us and from the fact of the new man being created in us, must be a complete and abiding sanctification—as complete and as abiding as the relation which Christ holds to us in redemption as the Representative and Head of His mystical body" (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899).

Yet let it be pointed out that the blessed Spirit does not allow our hearts to remain in the awful condition in which He first finds them—and this brings us to our fourth point. In Titus 3:5, we read, "according to his mercy he saved us, by the *washing* of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." All that is comprehended in this "washing" we may not be able to say, but it certainly includes the casting of all idols out of our hearts, to such an extent that God now occupies the throne of it. By this "washing of regeneration," the soul is so cleansed from its native pollution that sin is no longer loved, but loathed. The divine law is no longer hated, but delighted in and the affections are raised from things below unto things above. We are well aware of the fact that *this* is the particular point which most exercises honest consciences, yet, God does not intend that our difficulties should be so cleared up in this life that all exercise of heart should be at an end.

Though it be true that the flesh remains unaltered in the Christian, and that at times its activities are such that our evidences of regeneration are clouded over, yet it remains that a great change *was* wrought in us at the new birth, the effects of which abide. Though it be true that a sea of corruption still dwells within, and that at times sin rages violently, and so prevails that it seems a mockery to conclude that *we* have been delivered from its dominion, yet this does not alter the



fact that a miracle of grace *has* been wrought within us. Though the Christian is conscious of so much filth within, he *has* experienced the “washing of regeneration.” Before the new birth, he saw no beauty in Christ that he should desire Him, but now he views Him as “the fairest among ten thousand” (see Song 5:10). Before, he loved those like himself, but now he “loves the brethren” (see 1Jo 3:14). Moreover, his understanding has been cleansed from many polluting errors and heresies. Finally, it is a fact that the main stream of his desires runs out after God.

But the “washing of regeneration” is only the *negative* side—*positively* there is “the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Though this “renewing” falls far short of what will take place in the saint at his glorification, yet it is a very real and radical experience. A great change and renovation is made in the soul, which has a beneficial effect upon all its faculties. This “renewing of the Holy Spirit” has in it a transforming power, so that the heart and mind are brought into an obedient frame toward God. The soul is now able to discern that God’s will is the most “good, and acceptable, and perfect” (Rom 12:2) of all, and there is a deep desire and a sincere effort made to become conformed thereto. But let it be carefully noted that the present and not the past tense is employed in Titus 3:5—not ye were washed and renewed, but a “washing” and “renewing”—it is a *continual* work of the Spirit.

Ere proceeding to show further the nature of the Spirit’s work in the soul of His sanctifying operations, let it be pointed out that what our hearts most need to lay hold of and rest on is that which has been before us in the last few articles on sanctification. The believer has already been perfectly sanctified in the decree and purpose of the Father. Christ has wrought out for him that which, when reckoned to his account, perfectly fits him for the courts of God’s temple above. The moment he is quickened by the Spirit he is “created in Christ,” and therefore “sanctified in Christ”—thus both his standing and state are holy in God’s sight. Furthermore, the Spirit’s indwelling him, making his body His temple, constitutes him perfectly holy—just as the presence of God in the temple made Canaan the “holy land” and Jerusalem the “holy city.”

It is of the very first importance that the Christian should be thoroughly clear upon this point. We do not become saints by holy actions—that is the fundamental error of all false religions. No, we must first be saints before there can be any holy actions, as the fountain must be pure before its stream can be. The tree good if its fruit is to be wholesome. The order of Scripture is, “Let it not be once named among you, *as becometh SAINTS*” (Eph 5:3), and “but now are ye light in the Lord: *walk as children of light*” (Eph 5:8); “in behaviour as becometh holiness” (Ti 2:3). God first sets our hearts at rest, before He bids our hands engage in His service. He gives life, that we may be capacitated to render love. He creates in us a sanctified nature, that there may be sanctified conduct. God presents us spotless in the Holiest of all according to the blood of sprinkling, that, coming forth with a conscience purged from dead works, we may seek to please and glorify Him.

It is the creating of this holy nature within us that we must next consider. “It is something that is *holy*, both in its principle, and in its actions, and is superior to any thing that can come from man, or be performed by himself. It does not lie in a conformity to the light of nature, and the dictates of it, nor is it what may go by the name of *moral virtue*, which was exercised by some of the heathen philosophers, to a very great degree, and yet they had not a grain of holiness in them, but were full of the lusts of envy, pride, revenge, etc., nor does it lie in a bare, external conformity to the law of God, or in an *outward reformation* of life and manners. This appeared in the Pharisees to a great degree, who were pure in their own eyes, and thought themselves holier than others, and disdained them, and yet their hearts were full of all manner of impurity.

“Nor is it what is called *restraining grace*. Persons may be restrained by the injunction of parents and masters, by the laws of magistrates, and by the ministry of the Word, from the grosser

sins of life, and be preserved, by the providence of God, from the pollutions of the world, and yet not be sanctified. Nor are *gifts*, ordinary or extraordinary, sanctifying grace. Judas Iscariot no doubt had both, the ordinary gifts of a preacher, and the extraordinary gifts of an apostle, yet he was not a holy man. Gifts are not graces. A man may have all gifts and all knowledge, and speak with the tongue of men, and angels, and not have grace. There may be a silver tongue where there is an unsanctified heart. Nor is sanctification a restoration of the lost image of *Adam*, or an amendment of that image marred by the sin of man, or a new vamping up of the old principles of nature” (John Gill, 1697-1771).

Having seen what this holy nature, imparted by the Spirit, *is not*, let us endeavour to define what *it is*. It is something entirely new—a new creation, a new heart, a new spirit, a new man, the conforming of us to another image, even to that of the last Adam, the Son of God. It is the impartation of a holy principle, implanted in the midst of corruption, like a lovely rosebush growing out of a dung-heap. It is the carrying forward of that “good work” begun in us at regeneration (Phi 1:6). It is called by many names, such as “the inward man” (2Co 4:16) and “the hidden man of the heart” (1Pe 3:4), not only because it has its residence in the soul, but because our fellows can see it not. It is designated “seed” (1Jo 3:9) and “spirit” (Joh 3:6) because it is wrought in us by the Spirit of God. It is likened to a “root” (Job 19:28), to “good treasure of the heart” (Mat 12:35), to “oil in the vessel” (see Mat 25:4)—by “oil” there is meant *grace*, so called for its illuminating nature in giving discernment to the understanding, and for its supplying and softening nature, taking off the hardness from the heart and the stubbornness from the will.

It is in *this* aspect of our sanctification that we arrive at the third meaning of the term. The blessed Spirit not only separates us from the common herd of the unregenerate, cleanses our hearts from the pollution of sin, but He suitably adorns the temple in which He now dwells. This He does by making us partakers of “the divine nature” (2Pe 1:4), which is a positive thing, the communication of a holy principle, whereby we are “renewed after the image of God.” When the Levites were to minister in the holy place, not only were they required to wash themselves, but to put on their priestly attire and ornaments, which were comely and beautiful. In like manner, believers are a holy and royal priesthood (1Pe 2:5), for they have not only been washed from the filth of sin, but are “all glorious within” (Psa 45:13). They have not only had the robe of imputed righteousness put upon them (Isa 61:10), but the beautifying grace of the Spirit has been implanted in them.

It is by the reception of this holy principle or nature that the believer is freed from the dominion of sin and brought into the liberty of righteousness, though not until death is he delivered from the plague and presence of sin. At their justification, believers obtain a relative or judicial sanctification, which provides for them a perfect standing before God, by which they receive proof of their covenant relationship with Him, that they are His peculiar people, His “treasure,” His “portion.” But more, they are also inherently sanctified in their persons by a gracious work of the Spirit within their souls. They are “renewed” throughout the whole of their beings—for as the poison of sin was diffused throughout the entire man, so is grace. It helps not a little to perceive that, as Thomas Boston (1676-1732) pointed out long ago (in his “Fourfold State”), “Holiness is not one grace only, but *all* the graces of the Spirit. It is a constellation of graces. It is all the graces in their seed and root.”

Yet let it be pointed out that, though the whole of the Christian’s person is renewed by the Spirit, and all the faculties of his soul are renovated, nevertheless, there is no operation of grace upon his old nature, so that its evil is expelled—the “flesh” or principle of indwelling sin is neither eradicated nor purified or made good. Our “old man” (which must be distinguished from

the soul and its faculties) is “corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” and remains so till the end of our earthly pilgrimage, ever striving against the “spirit” or principle of holiness or “new man.” As the soul at the very first moment of its union with the body (in the womb) became sinful, so it is not until the moment of its dissolution from the body that the soul becomes inherently sinless. As an old divine quaintly said, “Sin brought death into the world, and God, in a way of holy resentment, makes use of death to put an end to the very being of sin in His saints.”

Many readers will realise that we are here engaged in grappling with a difficult and intricate point. No man is competent to give such a clear and comprehensive description of our inward sanctification that all difficulty is cleared up. The most he can do is to point out what it is not and then seek to indicate *the direction* in which its real nature is to be sought. As a further effort toward this, it may be said that this principle of holiness which the Spirit imparts to the believer consists of spiritual *light*, whereby the heart is (partly) delivered from the darkness in which the fall enveloped it. It is such an opening of the eyes of our understandings that we are enabled to see spiritual things and discern their excellency, for before we are sanctified by the Spirit we are totally blind to their reality and beauty. Such passages as John 1:5; Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9 (*read them!*) make this clear.

Further, that principle of holiness which the Spirit imparts to the believer consists of spiritual *life*. Previous to its reception, the soul is in a state of spiritual death, that is, it is alienated from and incapacitated toward God. At our renewing by the Spirit, we receive a vital principle of spiritual life. Compare John 5:24; 10:11, 28; Romans 8:2; Ephesians 2:1. It is by this new life we are capacitated for communion with and obedience to God. Once more—that principle of holiness consists of spiritual *love*. The natural man is in a state of enmity with God, but at regeneration there is implanted that which delights in and cleaves to God. Compare Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:24. As “light,” this principle of holiness affects the *understanding*, as “life” it influences and moves the *will*, as “love” it directs and molds the *affections*. Thus also it partakes of the very nature of Him who *is* Light, Life, and Love. “Let *the beauty of the LORD our God* be upon us” (Psa 90:17) signifies “let this principle of holiness (as light, life, and love) be healthy within and made manifest through and by us.”

But we must now turn to the most important aspect of all, of the nature of this principle of holiness, whereby the Spirit sanctified us inherently. Our experimental sanctification consists in *our hearts being conformed to the divine law*. This should be so obvious that no laboured argument is required to establish the fact. As all sin is a transgression of the law (1Jo 3:4), so all holiness must be a fulfilling of the law. The natural man is not subject to the law, neither indeed can he be (Rom 8:7). Why? Because he is devoid of that principle from which acceptable obedience to the law can proceed. The great requirement of the law is *love*—love to God and love to our neighbour. But regarding the unregenerate it is written, “Ye have not the love of God in you” (Joh 5:42). Hence it is that God’s promise to His elect is, “The LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to *love* the LORD thy God with all thine heart” (Deu 30:6)—for “love is the fulfilling of the law.”

This is the grand promise of the covenant, “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10), and again, “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Eze 36:27). As we said in last month’s article, when Christ comes to His people He finds them entirely destitute of holiness and of every desire after it, but He does not leave them in that awful condition. No, He sends forth the Holy Spirit, communicates to them a sincere love for God, and imparts to them a principle or “nature” which delights in His ways. “They that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). Why? Because any work to be pleasing to Him MUST

proceed from a right *principle* (love to Him), be performed by a right *rule* (His law or revealed will), and have a right *end* in view (His glory), and this is only made possible by the sanctification of the Spirit.

Experimental holiness is conformity of heart and life to the divine law. The law of God is “holy, just and good” (see Rom 7:12), and therefore does it require inward righteousness or conformity as well as outward. And this requirement is fully met by the wondrous and gracious provision which God has made for His people. Here again we may behold the striking and blessed co-operation between the Eternal Three. The Father, as the King and Judge of all, gave the law. The Son, as our Surety, fulfilled the law. The Spirit is given to work in us conformity to the law—first, by imparting a nature which loves it. Second, by instructing and giving us a knowledge of its extensive requirements. Third, by producing in us strivings after obedience to its precepts. Not only is the perfect obedience of Christ *imputed* to His people, but a nature which delights in the law is *imparted* to them. But because of the opposition from indwelling sin, perfect obedience to the law is not possible in this life, yet, for Christ’s sake, God accepts their sincere but imperfect obedience.

We must distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the principle of holiness which He implants at regeneration. The Creator and the nature He creates must not be confounded. It is by His indwelling the Christian that He sustains and develops, continues and perfects, this good work which He has begun in us. He takes possession of the soul to strengthen and direct its faculties. It is from the principle of holiness which He has communicated to us that there proceeds the *fruits* of holiness—sanctified desires, actions, and works. Yet that new principle or nature has no strength of its own, only as it is daily renewed, empowered, controlled, and directed by its Giver, do we act “as becometh holiness.” His *continued* work of sanctification within us proceeds in the twofold process of the mortification (subduing) of the old man and the vivification (quickening) of the new man.

The fruit of the Spirit’s sanctification of us experimentally appears in our separation from evil and the world. But because of the flesh within, our walk is not perfect. Oftentimes there is little for the eye of sense to distinguish in those in whom the Spirit dwells from the moral and respectable worldlings. Yea, often they put us to shame. “It *doth not yet appear* what we shall be” (1Jo 3:2). “The world knoweth us not” (1Jo 3:1). But the heart is washed from the prevailing love of sin by the tears of repentance which the Christian is moved to frequently shed. Every new act of faith upon the cleansing blood of Christ carries forward the work of experimental sanctification to a further degree. As Naaman was required to dip in the Jordan again and again, yea, seven times, till he was wholly purged of his bodily leprosy, so the soul of the Christian—conscious of so much of the filth of sin still defiling him—continues to dip in that “fountain opened...for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1). Thank God, one day Christ will “present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph 5:27).

# GOD'S USE OF A TRACT

Some years ago we sent a copy of our tract, “God’s Call to Separation” (based upon 2Co 6:14) to a brother in the Lord whom we have never met. Not long since we received a letter from him which, though not intended for publication, we hope may prove a blessing to others.

“‘Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come’ (1Ti 4:8). In the story which I am about to tell, I had no thought of the profitableness of my obedience to the Word. In fact I had not this text in mind. I was ruled and governed by 2 Corinthians 6:14—‘Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.’ Your illuminating tract drew my attention to this Scripture and God the Holy Spirit used it to arouse my conscience.

“Now to my story. I was in partnership with a Roman Catholic and an alleged Congregationalist, who was an ardent Spiritualist. Our business was a growing and prosperous one, and its future alluring. I had a young and large family and step-children dependents, and my wife made large demands on my purse, so I required a good income to carry on. Some years after forming this partnership, I found the Lord. I had been a backslider, and had feared I had committed the unpardonable sin, so the joy of my salvation—after six years’ seeking—was deep and lasting. How near I had been to the unpardonable sin, only eternity will disclose. Even now I can scarcely realise that a man could be so enlightened and so near to the kingdom as I must have been, and fall for twenty-five years, and yet be recovered. O praise the Lord with me for His mercy to a very chief of sinners. I bless God that I do feel an abject, hateful, and slimy creature, every time I think of my backsliding. What *can* God see in such?

“Some time after conversion your tract became effective. At first reading it did not do the work, but lay in my conscience as a good seed that finally sprang forth. I decided to leave the partnership. My partners tried to alter my decision, and failing, I secured a settlement on terms. That was four and a half years ago. Within three months the firm was in the maelstrom, and commenced to go down hill, and today it is in the melting-pot. I did not receive a cash settlement, but am being paid out of the assets, and the Receiver says I will get every penny, he thinks. My late partners will lose many thousands, and will receive nothing, or very little.

“In leaving them I acted against worldly judgment. I was driven by conscience. My only thought was to please the Lord, being willing to suffer loss by my act. But the Lord has shown me that, ‘Godliness is profitable unto all things: having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.’ Today I am in bad health, and over sixty, but the money the Lord gave, and will give, has kept me, and with care will keep me until I am able to work again. When I think what might have happened had I disobeyed God, I realise how good He has been in making me *willing* and causing all things to work together for His wayward one’s good. Lest I might be thought ‘wise’ in the above, I must add that I have had many losses since retiring from the firm, and looking back, I can see selfishness, a want of calm meditative prayer before entering into matters, and much rashness in consequence in my affairs. Truly, our loving heavenly Father is a God of patience and forbearance in His dealings with His children.

“The above will encourage you, beloved, to scatter more Seed in tracts and to continue the work you are doing. I am not sending this for publication of course, as it is not written with that in view, but if you care to make a digest of it in your thanksgiving extracts later on, you may.”

“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters” (Isa. 32:20). “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Eccl. 11:1). May the above encourage and stimulate both writer and reader to heed these Scriptures.

# July

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 35. The Spirit Assisting (Part 1)

A child of God oppressed, suffering sorely, often driven to his wit's end—what a strange thing! A joint-heir with Christ financially embarrassed, poor in this world's goods, wondering where his next meal is coming from—what an anomaly! An object of the Father's everlasting love and distinguishing favour tossed up and down upon a sea of trouble, with every *apparent* prospect of his frail barque capsizing—what a perplexity! One who has been regenerated and is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit daily harassed by Satan and frequently overcome by indwelling sin—what an enigma! Loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, his body made the temple of the Holy Spirit, yet left in this world year after year to suffer affliction and persecution, to mourn and groan over innumerable failures, to encounter one trial after another, often to be placed in far less favourable circumstances than the wicked; to sigh and cry for relief, yet for sorrow and suffering *to increase*—what a mystery! What Christian has not felt the force of it and been baffled by its inscrutability.

Now it was to cast light upon this pressing problem of the sorely tried believer that the eighth chapter of Romans was written. There the apostle was moved to show that “the sufferings of this present time” (Rom 8:18) are *not inconsistent* with the special favour and infinite love which God bears unto His people. First, because by those sufferings the Christian is brought into personal and experimental fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (Rom 8:17 and cf. Phi 3:10). Second, severe and protracted as our afflictions may be, yet there is an immeasurable disproportion between our present sufferings and the future glory (Rom 8:18-23). Third, our very sufferings provide occasion for the exercise of hope and the development of patience (Rom 8:24-25). Fourth, divine aids and supports are furnished us under our afflictions (Rom 8:26-27) and it is *these* we would now consider.

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities” (Rom 8:26). Not only does “hope” (a sure expectation of God's making good His promises) support and cheer the suffering saint, leading him to patiently wait for deliverance from his afflictions, but the blessed Comforter has also been given to him in order to supply help to this very end. By His gracious aid, the believer is preserved from being totally submerged by his doubts and fears. By His renewing operations, the spark of faith is maintained, despite all the fierce winds of Satan which assail. By His mighty

enabling, the sorely harassed and groaning Christian is kept from sinking into complete skepticism, abject despair, and infidelity. By His quickening power, hope is still kept alive and the voice of prayer is still faintly heard.

And how is the gracious help of the Spirit *manifested*? Thus—seeing the Christian bowed down by oppression and depression, His compassion is called forth and He strengthens with His might in the inner man. Every Christian is a living witness to the truth of this, though he may not be conscious of the divine process. Why is it, my afflicted brother, my distressed sister, that you have not made shipwreck of your profession long ere this? What has kept you from heeding that repeated temptation of Satan's to totally abandon the good fight of faith? Why has not your manifold "infirmities" annihilated your faith, extinguished your hope, and cast a pall of unrelieved gloom upon the future? The answer is, because the blessed Spirit silently, invisibly, yet sympathetically and effectually *helped* you. Some precious promise was sealed to your heart, some comforting view of Christ was presented to your soul, some whisper of love was breathed into your ear, and the pressure upon your spirit was reduced, your grief was assuaged, and fresh courage possessed you.

Here, then, is real light cast upon the problem of a suffering Christian, the most perplexing feature of that problem being how to harmonise sore sufferings with the love of God. But if God had ceased to care for His child, then He had deserted him, left him to himself. Very far from this, though, is the actual case—the divine Comforter is given to help his infirmities. Here, too, is the sufficient answer to an objection which the carnal mind is ready to make against the inspired reasoning of the apostle in the context—How can we who are so weak in ourselves, so inferior in power to the enemies confronting us, bear up under our trials which are so numerous, so protracted, so crushing? We could not and therefore divine grace has provided for us an all-sufficient Helper. Without His aid, we had long since succumbed, mastered by our trials. Hope looks forward to the glory to come. In the weary interval of waiting, the Spirit supports our poor hearts and keeps grace alive within us.

"Our infirmities"—note the plural number, for the Christian is full of them, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Frail and feeble are we in ourselves, for "*All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field*" (Isa 40:6). We are "compassed with infirmity" (Heb 5:2) both within and without. When trials and troubles come, we are often bewildered by them and faint beneath them. When opposition and persecution break out against us, because of our cleaving to the truth and walking with Christ, we are staggered. When the chastening rod of our Father falls upon us, how we fret and fume. What a little thing it takes to disturb our peace, stifle the voice of praise, and cause us to complain and murmur. How easily is the soul cast down, the promises of God forgotten, the glorious future awaiting us lost sight of. How ready are we to say with Jacob, "All these things are against me" (Gen 42:36), or with David, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1Sa 27:1).

The "infirmities" of Christians are as numerous as they are varied. Some are weak in faith and constantly questioning their interest in Christ. Some are imperfectly instructed in the truth and therefore ill-prepared to meet the lies of Satan. Some are slow travelers along the path of obedience, frequently lagging in the rear. Others groan under the burden of physical afflictions. Some are harassed with a nervous temperament which produces a state of perpetual pessimism, causing them to look only upon the dark side of the cloud. Others are weighed down with the cares of this life, so that they are constantly depressed. Others are maligned and slandered, persecuted and boycotted, which to those of a sensitive disposition is well-nigh unbearable. "Our infirmities" include all that cause us to groan and render us the objects of the divine compassion.



But “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities” (Rom 8:26). Here is a divine revelation, for we had known nothing about it apart from the Scriptures. We are not left alone to endure our infirmities. We have a helper, a divine Helper—One not far off, but with us, nay, *in* us. The Greek word here for “helpeth” is a striking one. It signifies to “take part with” or to “take hold with one.” It occurs in only one other passage, namely, bid Mary “therefore that she help me” (Luk 10:40), where the obvious thought is that Martha was asking for her sister’s assistance, to *share* the burden of the kitchen, that she might be eased. The Spirit “helpeth” the Christian’s infirmities not only by a sympathetic regard, but by personal participation, supporting him beneath them, like a mother “helps” her child when learning to walk, or a friend gives his arm to an aged person to lean upon.

In his comments on this clause Calvin says, “The Spirit takes on Himself a part of the burden by which our weakness is oppressed, so that He not only succours us, but lifts us up, as though He went under the burden with us.” Oh how this should endear the blessed Spirit of God to us. We worship the Father, whence every mercy has its rise. We adore the Son, through whom every blessing flows, but how often we overlook the Holy Spirit, *by whom* every blessing is actually communicated and applied. Think of His deep compassion, His manifold succourings, His tender love, His might power, His efficacious grace, His infinite forbearance—all these challenge our hearts and should awaken praises from us. They *would* if we meditated more upon them.

The Spirit does not remove our “infirmities,” any more than the Lord took away Paul’s thorn in the flesh, but He enables us to bear them. Constrained by a love which no thought can conceive, moved by a tenderness no tongue can describe, He places His mighty arm beneath the pressure and sustains us. Though He has been slighted and grieved by us a thousand times, receiving at our hands the basest requital for His tenderness and grace, yet when a sword enters our soul or some fresh trouble bows us down to the ground, He again places beneath us the arms of His everlasting love and prevents our sinking into hopeless despair.

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 103. The Establishing of Christianity (12:27)

The divine incarnation was not some sudden, isolated, and unexpected event. The advent of our blessed Lord, and with it the dawn of Christianity, marked a climax and consummation. The world was prepared through long processes for the coming of the One and the preaching of the other. From Eden to Bethlehem, the centuries were preparing for the appearing of Immanuel. As the process of creation fitted the earth for man to live upon it, so all history paved the way for the birth of the God-man. The Holy Scriptures focused the divine preparation in one race, yet all peoples shared in the process. Outside of the elect nation, God was at work and all streams converged to a single centre. The march of events was both slow and complicated, yet eventually the stage was fully set and a suitable background made for the appearing of the promised Saviour.

“*When the fulness of the time was come*, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal 4:4). This signifies much more than that the time appointed by the Father had now arrived when He would put an end to the Mosaic economy and replace the shadows and types by the substance and Antitype. It denoted that conditions were peculiarly suitable for the introduction of a new and enlarged dispensation, that everything was now ripe for the execution of God’s great purpose. All the foundations had been laid. The long night of preparation had now run its course. The chrysalis was ready to burst its bonds. The fields were white unto the harvest. The olive tree was ready for the grafting of other branches into it (Rom 11). The “fulness of time” intimates both ripeness of opportunity and consummation of need. The advent of God’s Son to this earth and the proclamation of the Gospel far and wide, not only introduced a new era, it also marked the climax of the old.

In its relation to the immediate context, this expression, “the fullness of time” signifies that the church on earth had been prepared for the coming of God’s Son by having now outgrown the conditions of her childhood and minority, making her feel the irksomeness of the bonds upon her and to long for the liberty of maturity. The legal economy was merely a “schoolmaster unto Christ,” and it had now served its purpose. The old economy had decayed and waxed old, and was “ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). Aged Simeon was a representative of that godly remnant who were “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” for there was a divinely prepared company that then “looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luk 2:25, 38). The favoured nation as a whole had lost its liberty, being under the yoke of the Romans, and seemed on the point of relinquishing its mission. The need for the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies was real and pressing.

There was a remarkable combination of circumstances tending to prepare the world for the Gospel and a fearful climax in the world’s need of redemption. The breakup of old heathen faiths and the passing away of the prejudices of antiquity, disposed men for a new revelation which was spiritual, humane, non-provincial. The utter failure of Pagan religion from immorality, and of Pagan philosophy from its impotency to cure that immorality and the miseries it entailed, called loudly for some new faith, which should be both sure and powerful. The century immediately preceding our Lord’s advent was probably the most remarkable in all history. Everything was in a state of transition—old things were passing away—the fruit of the ancient order was rotting upon the tree, though without yielding the seeds of a new order. There were strange rumours afloat of coming relief, and singular hopes stirred the hearts of men that some Great One was about to appear and renovate the world.

“The fullness of the time was come” (Gal 4:4). First, *the world had reached its climacteric of sin*. History has given a faithful record of the terrible moral conditions which obtained among men in the century that immediately preceded our Lord’s advent. At Rome, which was the metropolis of the world, the Court of Caesar was steeped in luxury and licentiousness. To provide amusement for his senators, six hundred gladiators fought a hand to hand conflict in the public theatre. Not to be outdone, Pompey turned five hundred lions into the arena to engage an equal number of his braves, and “delicate ladies” sat applauding and gloating over the blood that flowed. Children were the property of the state, to be disposed of as was deemed best for the public interests. The aged and infirm were banished to an island in the Tiber. Marriage was wholly a matter of sensual caprice. Divorce was so frequent, it was customary for women to count them by the number of rings worn on their fingers. About two thirds of the entire civilized world were slaves, their masters having absolute power over them.

Conditions in Greece were even worse. Sensual indulgence and every species of cruelty were carried to the highest pitch. Gluttony was an art. Fornication was indulged without restraint.

Parents were at liberty to expose their children to perish from cold and hunger, or to be eaten up by wild beasts—such exposure being practised frequently, and passed without punishment or censure. Wars were carried on with the utmost ferocity. If any of the vanquished escaped death, slavery of the most abject kind was the only prospect before them, and in consequence, death was considered preferable to capture. “The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty” (Psa 74:20). The world had reached its climacteric of sin and this provided a dark background from which could shine forth the Light. Oftentimes a disease cannot be treated until it “comes to a head.” In view of the above conditions, the world was ready for the appearing of the great Physician.

“The fullness of the time was come.” (Gal 4:4). *The world had reached its consummation of want.* It had been predicted of old that the Messiah should be “the desire of all nations”—to this end there must be a complete exposure to the failure of all human plans for deliverance. This time had arrived when Christ was born. Never before had the abject misery and need of humanity been so apparent and so extensive. Philosophy had lost its power to satisfy men and the old religions were dead. The Greeks and Romans stood at the head of the nations at the time our Lord appeared on earth, and the religious state of those peoples in that age is too well-known to require any lengthy description of them. Polytheism and Pantheism were the popular concepts. Innumerable deities were worshipped and to those gods were attributed the most abominable characteristics. Human sacrifices were frequently offered upon their altars.

Judaism was also fully ripe for the accomplishment of Messianic prophecy. Sadduceeism had leavened the ruling classes and affected the nation with rationalism and skepticism. Phariseeism, which represented the ideas and ideals of the popular party, was too often only formal and hypocritical, and at best was cold and hard, “binding heavy burdens” and laying on men’s shoulders a load which they refused to touch with their fingers (see Mat 23:4). The nation was under the government of Rome and were thoroughly discouraged. Was there, then, no eye to pity, no arm to save? Was God unmindful of the tragic condition of mankind? No, blessed be His name, the “fullness of time was come”—a platform was then ready on which the glories of divine grace might be exhibited, and now arose “the Sun of righteousness...with healing in his wings” (Mal 4:2).

“The fullness of the time was come” (Gal 4:4). *The needed preparations were completed* and the high-water mark was reached. Side by side with the preliminary movements in Israel, divine providence had also been at work in heathendom, making ready the world for the dawn of Christianity. Political conditions were singularly favourable for the coming of the Gospel. Most of the then known earth was within the bounds of the Roman empire. Everywhere the Romans went good roads were made, along which went the soldier, and after him the merchant and scholar. In a short time, commercial intercourse fused various peoples. Previously, old national distinctions had bound up religious prejudices, each country having its own gods, and any attempt to foist a foreign religion upon a nation was bitterly resented. But national barriers were now broken down by Roman prowess and international intercourse, and religious exclusiveness was greatly weakened. All of this facilitated the task of missionaries of the cross. The Roman roads became highways for the evangelists, and Roman law afforded them protection.

Parallel with the growth of the Roman empire was the spread of Grecian culture. The Grecian tongue was the one most extensively used as the language of learning. All educated people were supposed to understand it. This was a most suitable medium by which the Christian messengers could speak to a great multitude of peoples, without enduring the tedious delay of learning new languages. In Syria, Egypt, Phrygia, and Italy, as well as Greece and Asia Minor, the heralds of

Christ could make themselves understood everywhere by using the common tongue employed by all teachers of that day. Moreover, this language was so delicately modulated as to surpass all other forms of speech in its capacity for expressing *new* ideas. It was therefore exactly what was needed for the setting forth of a new revelation to the world at large.

It was the same with Judaism. Now had arrived the time for the fulfillment of its mission—the giving to the world of the Old Testament Scriptures and the realisation of the hope which they presented. Judaism was to give birth to Christianity—out of the old soil the new order was to spring. The position of the Jews at that time wonderfully facilitated the spread of the Gospel, for they were already dispersed abroad everywhere. In the days of Augustus, there were forty thousand Jews at Rome, and by the time of Tiberius, double that number. The Jewish synagogues furnished a means of communication between Christian Gospellers and the heathen world. A synagogue was to be found in almost every town throughout the Roman empire, and to it the evangelists first went, and thus a suitable language was provided for communicating with all peoples, and centres of work were to be found in every city.

In such a striking conjunction of favourable providences, we cannot but behold and admire the controlling hand of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. They served to greatly lessen the severe shock with the displacing of the old order of things and the introduction of the new order was bound to bring, for the claims of Christ are of a very radical nature and His demands revolutionizing. Even so, the establishing of Christianity is spoken of as a *shaking* of “not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb 12:26). Though such language be figurative, nevertheless it refers to that which was intensely real and drastic. Our assertion that the last clause of verse 26 is *not* to be understood in a material sense (as is now widely supposed), calls for some further expository remarks thereon, particularly concerning its setting here, its original, and its connection.

At verse 25, the apostle began an exhortation which was based upon what had been pointed out in verses 18-24, and which he re-enforces by additional considerations. The exhortation consists of a call to hear and heed God’s message to us through Christ. God is the Author of Old and New Testaments alike. In the former, He spoke through Moses and the prophets. In the latter, by the Son, His final Spokesman. The manifestation which God made in Christ and the message He has given us through Him completes the revelation of His will. This final message was declared neither by man nor angel, but by the only begotten Son. Then let us beware of treating *such* a revelation in a manner ill-fitting its high character. The superior dignity of the Messenger and the supreme importance of His message must ensure severer punishment to those who despise and reject Him.

The urgency of this call for us to hear Christ is intimated by pointing out that since those who had disregarded God’s message through Moses escaped not, a far worse punishment must be the portion of those who turn a deaf ear unto Him speaking through the Son (Heb 12:25). The superiority of God’s revelation by the Son to the message given through Moses was evidenced by the phenomena which attended each, and the different effects which followed their appearing. The Voice “from heaven” (by Christ) produced proportionately greater results than did the Voice which spake by Moses, “on earth.” The Voice through each produced a “shaking,” but that through the latter was far more extensive than that through the former (Heb 12:26). In proof of this declaration, the apostle quoted and commented upon a striking prediction found in Haggai, the pertinency and scope of which we would now consider. For a better understanding thereof we will turn to its original setting.

In chapter 1, Haggai *rebukes* the indifference of the Jewish remnant (who had returned to Palestine from the Babylonian captivity) for their neglect to rebuild God's house. This stirred them up to proceed therewith. In chapter 2 the prophet *comforts* them. The rebuilding of the temple had then proceeded far enough for it to be made manifest that in its *outward* glory it was far inferior to Solomon's. A great lamentation ensued and the prophet asks, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Hag 2:3). The people greatly feared that JEHOVAH had deserted them and to reassure them Haggai declared, "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabal, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: according to the word that I *covenanted* with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not" (Hag 2:4-6), and then it was that he set before them the grand hope of the Messiah's appearing.

"For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in *this* place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts" (Hag 2:6-9). Here was a message of comfort to the sorrowing remnant of the prophet's day, and from it the apostle quotes in Hebrews 12.

The first thing we would note in the above prediction is the statement "*a little while* and I will shake," which makes it evident that the "shaking" *did not* look forward to the final and universal convulsion of nature at the end of time, rather was the reference to that which preceded and was connected with the establishing of Christianity, which was comparatively an impending event in Haggai's day. Second, the "shaking" was not to occur in the material world, but in the political and religious realms, as is clear from the closing verses of this very chapter. "I will shake the heavens and the earth" (v. 21) is at once defined as "and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen" (v. 22)—this commenced shortly afterwards, for the axe lay at the root of the Persian empire. Third, there was the express promise that the glory of the temple built in Haggai's day should exceed that of Solomon's.

That third item needs to be very carefully weighed by us, for it is of great importance. *This* was the chief point of *comfort* in Haggai's prediction. His fellows were deeply distressed (see Ezr 3:12) at the comparative meanness of the house of God which they were erecting, but he assures them it should yet possess a glory that far excelled that of Solomon's. That greater glory was not a material one, but a *spiritual*. It was expressly said to be the coming to it of "the desire of all nations" (Hag 2:7). It was by the appearing of the Messiah that the *real* "glory" would accrue unto the second temple, and that must be while *it* still stood! Haggai's temple was enlarged and beautified by Herod three hundred years later, but the original structure was never destroyed, so that it continued one and the same "house," and to *it* Christ came! The "little while," then of Haggai 2:6 was parallel with the "suddenly" of Malachi 3:1.

The fourth and last thing was "and in this place will I *give peace*, saith the LORD of hosts" (Hag 2:9). That also was *spiritual*: referring to the peace which Christ should make "through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20) between God and His people, and the amity which should be established between believing Jews and believing Gentiles (see Eph 2:14-16) in the same worship of God. *This* was the principal work of Christ—to put away sin (which was the cause of enmity and strife) and to bring peace. Finally, the manner in which all this was to be effected was by a

great “shaking,” not only in the midst of Israel, but also among the Gentiles. Observe carefully the “yet once” of Haggai 2:6. There had been a great “shaking” when the first covenant was instituted, but there would be a still greater at the establishing of the new covenant. Thus the “yet once” signifies, first, once more; and secondly, once for all—finally.

Now from the above prophecy of Haggai, Paul quotes in Hebrews 12:26. The apostle’s object was a double one—to supply additional proof for the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and to give further point to the exhortation he had made in verse 25. Evidence is here given from the Old Testament to show that the voice of God speaking by Christ had produced far greater effects than His word had through Moses. The contrasts, then, between the old and new covenants, and the excelling of the latter over the former, may be summed up thus—the one was connected with Sinai, the other brings us unto Sion (Heb 12:18-24); the one was inaugurated by Moses, the other by the Son; the one was God speaking “on earth,” the other “from heaven”; the one “shook the earth,” the other “heaven” itself (v. 26); the one is “removed” the other “remains” (v. 27); therefore, HEAR *the Son!*

How far astray, then, are those commentators who suppose that Haggai’s prophecy refers to the final judgment at the Last Day, when the whole fabric of nature shall shake and be removed! First, such a terrifying event was altogether alien to the scope of Haggai’s purpose, which was to *comfort* his sorrowing brethren. Second, such a prediction had been entirely irrelevant to the apostle’s scope, for he was comparing not the giving of the law with the day of judgment, but the giving of the law with the promulgation of the Gospel by Christ Himself—for his whole design was to exhibit the preeminence of the evangelical economy. Third, nor would such a dreadful doom be designated a “promise” (Heb 12:26). Fourth, the apostle clearly intimated that Haggai’s prophecy was now fulfilled (v. 28). Finally, there is no reason whatever why we should regard the shaking of heaven and earth here as a *literal* one. It was *spiritual* things of which the apostle was discoursing—such as issue in that unshakable kingdom which believers receive in this world.

Let us admire *the striking appropriateness* of Haggai’s prophecy to the purpose the apostle then had in hand. Haggai’s prediction concerned the Person and appearing of Christ, “the desire of all nations shall come” (Hag 2:7). There it was announced that God would do greater works than He had performed in the days of Moses (Hag 2:5-7). God shook Egypt before He gave the law, He shook Sinai at the giving of it, He shook the surrounding nations (especially in Canaan) just after it. But in “a little while” (Hag 2:6). He would do greater things. The prophet’s design was to fix the eyes of the Jews upon the *first advent of Christ*, which was their great expectation, and to assure them that their temple would then possess a glory far excelling that of Solomon’s. Meanwhile, God would overthrow “the throne of kingdoms, and...destroy the strength...of the heathen” (v. 22), as the forerunning signs of Christ’s advent during the short season which intervened before His appearing.

How pertinent and well-suited, then, was Haggai’s prophecy to the subject Paul was developing! That prediction had been fulfilled. Christ had come and made good its terms—conclusive proof of this is found in the *changing* of the verb—the prophet’s, “I will shake” (Hag 2:7) being altered to “I shake” (Heb 12:26), for the apostle regarded the “shaking” as present and *not future*. A promise had been given that a greater work of divine power, grace, and glory should be wrought at the appearing of the Messiah than what took place in connection with the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the law, and this was now accomplished. How clearly and how forcibly did this demonstrate the *preeminency* of the new covenant above the old. So far as the glory of the second temple excelled that of the first was Christianity superior to Judaism! Finally,

how well did this “shaking” of heaven intimate the permanency and finality of Christianity, for the shaking was in order that the unshakable might abide (Heb 12:27).

It now remains for us to weigh *the comment* which the apostle made upon this citation from Haggai, “And this word, Yet once more, *signifieth* the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb 12:27). Incidentally, let it be pointed out that here we have a helpful illustration of the province and task of *the teacher*—in expounding God’s Word he not only compares passage with passage and defines the meaning of its terms, but he also indicates what legitimate *inferences and conclusions* may be drawn, what its statements *imply* as well as directly affirm. This is exactly what the apostle does here. He *argues* that the word “once” (used by the prophet) not only signified “once more,” but that it also denoted the setting aside of the order of things previously existing.

There is a fullness in the words of Holy Writ which can only be discovered by prolonged meditation and careful analysis. The prophecy of Haggai had said nothing expressly about the “removing” of anything, yet what was not stated explicitly *was* contained therein implicitly. The apostle insists that a “removing” was necessarily implied in the terms of Haggai’s prediction. The very fact that God had “shaken” the Mosaic economy to its very foundations—the preaching and miracles of Christ (and later by His apostles) had caused thousands to leave it. The Lord’s denunciation of the religious leaders and His exposure of their hypocrisy had undermined the confidence of the masses, while the rending of the temple veil by a divine hand had clearly and solemnly signified the end of the Levitical system—was plain intimation that He was on the eve of setting the whole aside, and that, for the purpose of setting up something better in its place. What that something is, we must leave for our next.

N.B. Had some of our twentieth century Christians been present, they would have taken issue with the apostle and said, “Paul, you are taking undue liberties with the Word of God, which we cannot consent to. The Holy Spirit through Haggai spoke of a “shaking,” whereas *you* change it to “removing.” Had the apostle replied, “I am simply pointing out what the prophet’s language clearly implies, drawing an obvious inference from his statement.” The rejoinder would be, “We do not need to do any *reasoning* upon the Word. Moreover, any simple soul can see that shaking and removing are very different things, and had the prophet *meant* the latter he would have said so, and not used the former.” An expositor of Scripture often encounters such quibbling today. It is worse than ignorance, for it deceives not a few into supposing that such slavish adherence to the letter of Scripture (being occupied with its *sound*, instead of seeking its *sense*) is *honouring* the same.

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### 55. His Repentance

“The emperor Arcadius and his wife had a very bitter feeling towards Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople. One day, in a fit of anger, the emperor said to one of his courtiers, ‘I would I

were avenged of this bishop!’ Several then proposed how this should be done. ‘Banish him and exile him to the desert,’ said one. ‘Put him in prison,’ said another. ‘Confiscate his property,’ said a third. ‘Let him die,’ said a fourth. Another courtier, whose vices Chrysostom had reproved, said maliciously, ‘You all make a great mistake. You will never punish him by such proposals. If banished from the kingdom, he will feel God as near to him in the desert as here. If you put him in prison and load him with chains, he will still pray for the poor and praise God in the prison. If you confiscate his property, you merely take away his goods from the poor, not from him. If you condemn him to death, you open heaven to him. Prince, do you wish to be revenged on him? Force him to commit sin. I know him—*this man fears nothing in the world but sin.*’ O that this were the only remark which our fellows could pass on you and me, fellow-believer” (From the Fellowship magazine).

We recently came across the above in our reading and thought it would form a most suitable introduction to this article. What cause have we *to fear* SIN!—that “abominable thing” which God hates (Jer 44:4), that horrible disease which brought death into the world (Rom 5:12), that fearful thing which nailed to the cross the Lord of Glory (1Pe 2:24), that shameful thing which fouls the believer’s garments, and so often brings reproach upon the sacred Name which he bears. Yes, good reason has each of us to *fear* sin, and to beg God that it may please Him to work in our hearts a greater horror and hatred of it. Is not this one reason why God permits some of the most eminent saints to lapse into outrageous evils, and place such upon record in His Word—that we should be more distrustful of ourselves, realising that *we* are liable to the same disgracing of our profession. Yea, that we certainly shall fall into such unless upheld by the mighty hand of God.

As we have seen, David sinned, and sinned grievously. What was yet worse, for a long season he refused to acknowledge unto God his wickedness. A period of months went by ere he felt the heinousness of his conduct. Ah, my reader, it is the inevitable tendency of sin to deaden the conscience and harden the heart. Therein lies its most hideous feature and fatal aspect. Sin suggests innumerable excuses to its perpetrator and ever prompts to extenuation. It was thus at the beginning. When brought face to face with their Maker, neither Adam nor Eve evidenced any contrition, rather did they seek to vindicate themselves by placing the blame elsewhere. Thus it was with each of us whilst in a state of nature. Sin blinds and hardens, and nought but divine grace can illumine and soften. Nothing short of the power of the Almighty can pierce the calloused conscience or break the sin-petrified heart.

Now God will not suffer any of His people to remain indefinitely in a state of spiritual insensibility. Sooner or later He brings to light the hidden things of darkness, convicts them of their offences, causes them to mourn over the same, and leads them to repentance. God employs a variety of means in accomplishing this, for in nothing does He act uniformly. He is limited to no one measure or method, and being sovereign He acts as seemeth good unto Himself. This may be seen by comparing some of the cases recorded in the Scriptures. It was a sense of God’s awe-inspiring majesty which brought Job to repent of his self-righteousness and abhor himself (Job 42:1-6). It was a vision of the Lord’s exalted glory which made Isaiah cry out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa 6:1-5). A sight of Christ’s miraculous power moved Peter to cry, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luk 5:8). Those on the day of Pentecost were “pricked in their heart” (Act 2:37) by hearing the apostle’s sermon.

In the case of David, God employed *a parable* in the mouth of His prophet to produce conviction. Nathan depicted a case where one was so vilely treated that any who heard the account of it must perforce censure him who was guilty of such an outrage. For though it is the very nature of sin to blind its perpetrator, yet it does not take away his sense of right and wrong.



Even when a man is insensible to the enormity of his own transgressions, he is still capable of discerning evil in others. Yea, in most instances it seems that the one who has a beam in his own eye is readier to perceive the mote in his fellow's. It was according to this principle that Nathan's parable was addressed to David. If the king was slow to confess his own wickedness, he would be quick enough to condemn like evil in another. Accordingly, the case was spread before him.

In the parable (2Sam. 12:1-4), an appeal is made to both David's affections and his conscience. The position of Uriah and his wife is touchingly portrayed under the figure of a poor man with his "one little ewe lamb," which was dear to him and "lay in his bosom." The one who wronged him is represented as a rich man with "exceeding many flocks and herds," which greatly heightened his guilt in seizing and slaying the one lone lamb of his neighbour. The occasion of the offence, the temptation to commit it, is stated as, "There came *a traveller* unto the rich man." It was to minister unto *him* that the rich man seized upon the poor man's lamb. That "traveler" which came to him pictures the restless flesh, the active lusts, the wandering thoughts, the roving eyes of David in connection with Bathsheba. Ah, my reader, it is at *this* point we most need to be upon our guard. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2Co 10:5).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Pro 4:23). Part of that task lies in our thoughts and repelling unlawful imaginations. True it is that we cannot prevent wandering thoughts from entering our minds, nor evil imaginations from surging up within us, but we *are* responsible to resist and reject them. But this is what David failed to do. He *welcomed* this "traveler," he *entertained* him, he *feasted* him, and feasted him upon that which was *not lawful*—with that which belonged to another—pictured in the parable by the lamb belonging to his neighbour. And my reader, it is when we give place to our sinful lusts, indulge our evil imaginations, feed our wandering thoughts upon that which is unlawful, that we pave the way for a sad fall. "Travelers" *will* come to us—the mind will be active—and our responsibility is to see that they are fed with that which is lawful. Ponder Philipians 4:8 in this connection.

Nathan, then, traced the trouble back to its source, and showed what it was which occasioned and led up to David's fearful fall. The details of the parable emphasised the excuselessness, the injustice, the lawlessness, the wickedness of his crime. He already had wives of his own, why, then, must he rob poor Uriah of his! The case was so clearly put, the guilt of the offender so evidently established, the king at once condemned the offender, and said, "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die" (2Sa 12:5). Then it was that the prophet turned and said to him, "*Thou art the man*" (2Sa 12:7). David did not flame forth in hot resentment and anger against the prophet's accusation. He made no attempt to deny his grievous transgression or proffer any excuses for it. Instead, he frankly owned, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2Sa 12:13). Nor were those words uttered mechanically or lightly as the sequel so clearly shows, and as we shall now see.

David's slumbering conscience was now awakened and he was made to realise the greatness of his guilt. The piercing arrow from God's quiver, which Nathan had driven into his diseased heart, opened to David's view the awfulness of his present case. Then it was that he gave evidence that, though woeful had been his conduct, nevertheless, he was not a reprobate soul, totally abandoned by God. "The dormant spark of divine grace in David's heart now began to rekindle, and before this plain and faithful statement of facts, in the name of God, his evasions vanished, and his guilt appeared in all its magnitude. He therefore was far from resenting the pointed rebuke of the prophet, or attempting any palliation of his conduct, but, in deep

humiliation of heart, he confessed, ‘I have sinned against the LORD’ (2Sa 12:13). The words are few, but the event proved them to have been the language of genuine repentance, which regards sin as committed against the authority and glory of the Lord, whether or not it has occasioned evil to any fellow-creature” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

In order to fully obtain the mind of God on any subject treated of in His Word, Scripture has to be diligently searched and one passage carefully compared with another—failure to observe this principle ever results in an inadequate or one-sided view. It is so here. Nothing is recorded in the historical account of Samuel about the deep exercises of heart through which David now passed. Nothing is said to indicate the reality and depth of his repentance. For *that* we must turn elsewhere, notably to the penitential Psalms. There the Holy Spirit has graciously given us a record of what David was inspired to write thereon, for it is in the Psalms we find most fully delineated the varied experiences of soul through which the believer passes. There we may find an unerring description of every exercise of heart experienced by the saint in his journey through this wilderness scene, which explains why *this* book of Scripture has ever been a great favourite with God’s people—therein they find *their own* inward history accurately described.

The two principal Psalms which give us a view of the heart exercises through which David now passed are the 51<sup>st</sup> and the 32<sup>nd</sup>. The 51<sup>st</sup> is evidently the earlier one. In it, we see the fallen saint struggling up out of “the horrible pit and miry clay” (see Psa 40:2). In the latter, we behold him standing again on firm ground with a new song in his mouth, even the blessedness of him “whose sin is covered” (Psa 32:1). But both of them are evidently to be dated from the time when the sharp thrust of God’s lancet in the hand of Nathan pierced David’s conscience, and when the healing balsam of God’s assurance of forgiveness was laid by the prophet upon his heart. The passionate cries of the sorely-stricken soul (Psa 51) are really the echo of the divine promise—the efforts of David’s faith to grasp and appropriate the merciful gift of pardon. It was the divine promise *of* forgiveness which was the basis and encouragement of the prayer *for* forgiveness.

It is to be noted that the title affixed to the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm is, “A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” Beautifully did Spurgeon point out in his introductory remarks, “When the divine measure had aroused his dormant conscience and made him see the greatness of his guilt, he wrote this Psalm. He had forgotten his psalmody while he was indulging in the flesh, but he returned to his harp when his spiritual nature was awakened, and he poured out his song to the accompaniment of sighs and tears.” Great as was David’s sin, yet he repented and was restored. The depths of his anguish and the reality of his repentance are evident in every verse. In it, we may behold the grief and the desires of a contrite soul pouring out his heart before God, humbly and earnestly suing for His mercy. Only the day to come will reveal how many sin-tormented souls have from this Psalm—“all blotted with the tears in which David sobbed out his repentance” found a path for backsliders in a great and howling desert.

“Although the Psalm is one long cry for pardon and restoration, one can discern an order and progress in its petitions—the order, not of an artificial reproduction of a past mood of mind, but the instinctive order in which the emotion of contrite desire will ever put itself forth. In the Psalm, all begins (v. 1), as all begins in fact, with the grounding of the cry for favour on ‘Thy lovingkindness,’ ‘the multitude of thy tender mercies’—the one plea that avails with God, whose love is its own motive and its own measure, whose past acts are the standard for all His future, whose own compassions, in their innumerable numbers, are more than the sum of our transgressions, though these be ‘more than the hairs of our head’ (see Psa 40:12). Beginning with God’s mercy, the penitent soul can learn to look next upon its own sin in all its aspect of evil” (Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1929).

The depth and intensity of the Psalmist's loathing of self is clearly revealed by the various terms he uses to designate his crime. He speaks of his "transgressions" (Psa 51:1-3) and of his "iniquity" and "sin" (vv. 2, 3). As another has forcibly pointed out, "looked at in one way, he sees the separate acts of which he had been guilty—his lust, fraud, treachery, murder; looked at in another, he sees them all knotted together in one inextricable tangle of forked, hissing tongues, like the serpent-locks that coil and twist around a Gorgon head. No sin dwells alone; the separate acts have a common root, and the whole is matted together like the green growth on a stagnant pond, so that, by whatever filament it is grasped the whole mass is drawn towards you."

A profound insight into the essence and character of sin is here exhibited by the accumulated synonyms. It is "transgression," or as the Hebrew word might be rendered, "rebellion"—not merely the breach of an impersonal law, but the revolt of a subject's will against its true King—disobedience to God, as well as contravention of a standard. It is "iniquity"—perversion or distortion—acting unjustly or dealing crookedly. It is "sin" or "missing the mark," for all sin is a blunder, shooting wide of the true goal, whether regard be had for God's glory or our own well-being and happiness. It is pollution and filth, from which nothing but atoning blood can cleanse. It is "evil" (v. 4), a vile thing which deserves only unsparing condemnation. It is a fretting leprosy, causing him to cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa 51:7).

"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psa 51:4). In these words, David gives evidence of the sincerity of his contrition and proof that he was a regenerate man. It is only those possessing a spiritual nature that will view sin in the presence of God. The evil of all sin lies in its opposition to God, and a contrite heart is filled with a sense of the wrong done unto Him. Evangelical repentance mourns for sin, because it has displeased a gracious God and dishonoured a loving Father. David, then, was not content with looking upon his evil in itself, or in relation only to the people who had suffered by it. He had been guilty of crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah, and even Joab whom he made his tool, as well as against all his subjects, but dark as those crimes were, they assumed their true character only when seen as committed *against God*.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5). Many have been puzzled by this verse in the light of its setting, yet it should occasion no difficulty. Certainly it was not said by David in self-extenuation, rather was it to emphasise his own excuseless guilt. From the second half of verse 4, it is plain that he was vindicating God—*Thou* hadst nothing to do with my sin, it was all *mine* own—out of the proneness unto evil of my depraved nature. It was not Thou, but my own evil lusts, which tempted me. David was engaged in making *full* confession, and therefore did he acknowledge the defilement of his very nature. It was to humble himself, clear God, and magnify the divine grace, that David said verse 5.

In the clear light of Psalm 51, we cannot doubt the reality, the sincerity, nor the depth of David's repentance and broken-hearted contrition. We close, then, with a brief quotation from Thomas Scott, "Let not any vile hypocrite, who resembles David in nothing but his transgressions, and who adds the habit of allowed sin to all other aggravations, buoy up his confidence with *his* example. Let him first imitate David's humiliation, repentance, and other eminent graces, before he thinks himself, or requires others to consider him, as a backslider."

# UNION AND COMMUNION

## 11. Experimental

Having sought to describe at some length the nature or character of the intimate and precious experimental communion which it is the right and privilege of the believer to have with the everlasting Lover of his soul, we will now pass on to consider the *maintenance* of the same. The Lord has graciously provided full and adequate means for this, and it is entirely our own fault if we fail to avail ourselves of them. Neglect of those means produces the same effects upon the spiritual life as neglect of natural means does upon the physical and mental. The body cannot thrive if the laws of health be despised. The mind cannot be developed if its education and discipline be ignored, and the soul cannot be preserved in a healthy state if those things which make for our well-being be slighted. God's blessing rests upon *the use of* those means of His appointing, but He places no premium on slothfulness—and if we are indifferent and careless, then we must expect to be lean and sickly, joyless and fruitless.

Each of us needs to honestly face and seriously answer this question. *How highly* do I *really* value communion with Christ? I am deeply concerned about my temporal prospects. I give much thought to my earthly circumstances. I am at great pains to obtain a living in the world, so that I may have a roof over my head and food and raiment. I am anxious to have a few close friends and do all in my power to maintain good-will with them. I seek to do my duty by my family. Yes, all well and good, all right in their place. But *their* place is a subordinate one—*Christ* has the FIRST claims upon me. Do I *realise* this? Am I acting accordingly? Am I making it my chief concern to cultivate closer communion with Him? Am I—amidst all the problems, frictions, trials of this life—making *Him* my principal Confident, Counselor, Helper? Is it *He* I am most seeking to please, honour, and glorify? If not, is it not high time that I did so?

Do I not owe far, far more to the Lord Jesus than to all my earthly associates and friends, yea, than to my nearest and dearest relatives? And is He not desirous of my treating Him *as the* "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother?" Has He not invited me to the most intimate dealings with Him? Is it not my privilege, yea, my bounden duty, *to* give Him the *first* place, each day, in my affections, my thoughts, my plans? Has He not supplied the utmost encouragement for me to cast *all* my care upon Him? Has He not given me promises exactly suited to every circumstance, every difficulty, every need, I may get into? Has He not plainly revealed the *means* which will promote my fellowship with Him? Has He not shown me that neither the presence of indwelling sin nor its breakings forth into activity, need make communion with Him a practical impossibility?

But alas, what vile ingrates we are! what incorrigible wretches! How often have we given the Lord cause to say, "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer 2:13)? None but Christ can satisfy the heart, yet we are terribly slow in really believing it. We grasp at shadows, pursue phantoms, seek to feed on ashes, and then wonder why we are so miserable. God will not long allow His people to rest in *things* or find contentment in their circumstances. He it is who both gives and takes away, who gratifies or thwarts our wishes. We brought nothing into the

world, and it is certain we shall carry nothing out of it, therefore, there is nothing in the world which deserves a single anxious thought from us, for we shall soon be at the end of our journey through it.

None but Christ will be sufficient for us when we are called upon to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, and none but Christ can do us any real good now—what we need is to really *believe* that truth. And does not God take abundant pains to prove the truth of it to us? He removes this and withholds that, because He sees that our hearts are too much set upon them. We imagine that a certain thing would be very pleasant and profitable, and fancy that we cannot do without it. If we could but obtain it, we promise ourselves much satisfaction from it. If God grants it to us, do we not find that it is *not* what we expected? We dream dreams, build air castles, live in many a fancied paradise, only to be bitterly disappointed. God's purpose in those disappointments is to wean us from the world, to make us sick of it, to teach us that all down here is but "vanity and vexation of spirit" (Ecc 1:14).

O my reader, it would make much for our peace and blessedness if we committed the management of the whole of our affairs into the hands of Christ. We need to continually pray Him to save us from having any will of our own, to work in us complete subjection to and satisfaction with His holy will. By nature, we are full of restlessness, covetousness, discontent—never satisfied with what we do have, ever lusting after what we do not have. But by grace we may live more happily than a prince, even though we possess nothing more down here than bare food and raiment—yea, *shall* do so if we seek and find all our satisfaction in Christ alone. Here is the key to the extraordinary history of Paul and Silas, Bunyan and Rutherford, Madame Guyon and many others. Why were they so contented and joyful while lying—some of them for many years—in prison? No doubt God favoured them with a double portion of His grace and comfort, yet the real explanation is that their hearts were completely absorbed with Christ.

Now the gracious provisions which the Lord has made for the maintaining of personal and experimental communion with Himself are revealed, first, in the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly in what is recorded therein of His dealings with Israel—and we lose much if we fail to give our best attention thereto. There we see the Lord taking unto Himself a peculiar people out of all the nations of the earth. That which moved Him thereto was His own sovereign grace, for there was nothing in them, more than in others, to commend them to His favour. They were a poor and afflicted people, enslaved, in cruel bondage to the Egyptians. They were an unbelieving and stiff-necked people, slow to appreciate the mercy of God toward them, and slower still to walk worthily of His goodness unto them. They were a self-willed and murmuring people, for after the Lord had wrought marvelously for them, each fresh testing they encountered found them full of distrust and grumbling. Nevertheless, the Lord patiently bore with their waywardness and ultimately brought them into the promised inheritance.

First, the Lord manifested His unfathomable *love* for them. He showed that, when there was none other eye to pity them in their low estate, *His* did, and that when there was no other arm to save them, *His* would. He heard their cries as they groaned under the lash of their cruel taskmasters, was moved with compassion toward them, and sent a deliverer. Second, He manifested His all-mighty *power*, working such wonders on their behalf as were never witnessed on earth before or since. Pharaoh withstood Him, but he and his hosts were swallowed up in the Red Sea, as though they had been so many impotent ants. Wondrously did the Lord work, baring His arm, exhibiting His strength, and demonstrating that with Him all things are possible. Such displays of God's love unto and of His might on behalf of Israel, was well-calculated to draw

their hearts unto Him, establish their confidence in Him, and lead them to covet the high privilege of communion with Him. Such was the case—nor were they disappointed, as Exodus 15 shows.

Third, the Lord undertook to graciously act as their Guide, Protector, and Provider. On their journey unto the promised land, a wilderness had to be crossed, but they were not left to their own poor resources—the Lord Himself cared for them. A pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night conducted them across the trackless desert. A supply of angel's food was given for the sustenance of their bodies. This fell within their own camp, so that no arduous journey was required to obtain it, and no charge was made for it. An unfailing supply of fresh water was provided for them by the living stream which gushed from the smitten rock. Infallible assurance was given that while they remained in obedience to God, no enemy should stand before them, that *He* would fight their battles for them. No sickness came upon them, their feet did not swell, nor did their clothes become old and worn. Full proof did they have that, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Psa 33:12).

The Lord was pleased to reveal Himself on the most intimate terms. Their leader, Moses, was permitted to speak with Him face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend. Yea, it is recorded that "Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel...*saw* the God of Israel....and upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand [in judgment]: also they saw God, and *did eat and drink*" (Exo 24:9-11) at perfect ease in His presence. Furthermore, God graciously acted as the Legislator of the nation, giving them a complete set of laws, which covered every aspect of their life, social, political, and religious. No other people were so wondrously provided for, "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD" (Psa 147:19-20). Those commandments were not grievous, but just, merciful and spiritual, and were designed for the good and well-being of His dear people. In keeping of them there is great reward.

Finally, complete provision was made for Israel's *failures*. Those laws were not given to sinless creatures, and divine wisdom devised a method whereby an erring people might continue in communion with Himself, and this in such a way that both His justice would be satisfied and His amazing grace evidenced. This method was a series of oblations and ablutions, sacrifices and cleansings. A priesthood was appointed to serve for God on behalf of the people, and a high priest as their special representative before Him. Peace offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings (Lev 3-5) were appointed to cover the varied offences of individuals, while atonement was made for all the iniquities of the whole nation on one particular day in the year (Lev 16). Most blessed of all was the provision made for those who had been defiled by contact with death—here the value of sacrificial atonement was *applied to* them. Obviously, the blood of a slain animal could not be preserved, so its "ashes" were laid up, placed in a vessel, and running water put therein, and then sprinkled upon the one needing cleansing (Num 19).

Full provision, then, was made for the removing of everything unsuited to the holy presence of the Lord. The appointed means were at hand for His people to approach Him without tarnishing the purity of His sanctuary. In the above type (Num 19), "water" was *not* a figure of the Word, rather was it *the means* for applying the death of the atoning sacrifice. As long as a child of God continues in this sin-cursed world, where everything is defiling and under the sentence of death, and as long as the evil nature remains in him, will pollution be contracted and offenses be committed, and therefore will he need a daily pardon. Therefore, in addition to the general remission of sins which he received at his conversion, he requires a constant application to his conscience—by the Spirit—of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The blood of the lamb was *shed*

once for all at the cross, but it is *sprinkled* on the believer (i.e., the efficacy of it is applied to him) as often as he needs and his faith appropriates it.

The above type is such a beautiful one that we cannot forbear dwelling on it a little longer. The sacrificial animal was to be a *red* heifer (Num 19:2)—the color of guilt (Isa 1:18), yet it must be “without spot or blemish” (see Num 9:2). It had to be one on which a yoke had never been bound, for Christ came to be the Sacrifice of His people of His own free will. It had to be led forth “without the camp” (cf. Heb 13:11). It was slain before the priest, but not by the priest himself—so our Saviour was slain by others. The heifer was burned and its ashes mixed with pure water. Now when an Israelite became ceremonially defiled, he was excluded both from the tabernacle and the congregation. But here was the gracious provision made to *restore* him and maintain him in communion with God. Those ashes mixed with water were sprinkled upon him—so it is by the Spirit’s re-application of the blood of Christ that those out of communion with the Lord are restored.

Now to His Old Testament people God gave a wondrous manifestation of His love, a full exhibition of His all-sufficiency and readiness to meet their every need, a complete revelation of His will for them in all the details of their daily lives, and then made a most gracious provision to meet their failures and maintain them in fellowship with Himself. Thereby God showed that He was infinitely worthy of their love, confidence, and obedience. But it is in the New Testament that we find the *fullest* occasion for the drawing out of our hearts unto Him, the revelation of the means which He has provided for our personal and experimental communion with Himself, and of the provisions He has made for the maintaining of the same. He has done far, far more for us than He ever did for the nation of Israel. They had but the shadows and the types, whereas He has given us the substance and the antitype. Abundant cause, then, is there for the assuring of our hearts and the drawing out of them in adoring gratitude and praise.

We have received a more signal proof of God’s love than did the Hebrews. Instead of providing an animal to shelter us from the avenging angel, He gave His own precious Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. He has granted us a more remarkable exhibition of His power. Instead of swallowing up Pharaoh and his hosts in death, He has triumphantly brought Christ out of death. So, too, the provisions He has made for us while here in this wilderness-world far excels theirs. We have His completed Word for a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, and the Spirit Himself indwelling to guide and govern our wills. Far more intimately has God revealed Himself to us than ever He did to Israel, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined *in* our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). Even more perfect provision has been made for our failures than was for theirs, for Christ Himself has gone, “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24), and there “He ever liveth to make intercession” for us (Heb 7:25).

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1Jo 1:1-4). We will not give an exposition of these verses, but ask the reader to note well *the order* of truth presented in them. Verse 4 speaks of fullness of joy—and of what is that the outcome? Verse 3 tells us—it is based upon “fellowship” with the Father and His Son. And in what does that fellowship consist? Verses 1-2 tell us—in a personal, intimate, experimental knowledge of

Christ Himself—seeing, hearing, *handling* Him—you only “handle” one close by your side, and one who is dear to you.

It is in intimate fellowship with Christ that real communion with Him consists. It is by the mind being daily engaged with the knowledge-passing love of Christ—meditating thereon, believingly—that the heart is drawn out unto Him. The Christian should seek, above all else, to be occupied with Christ’s *love* for him, to value that love far above his own enjoyment of it—the one being the cause, the other but the effect of it. We should esteem Christ’s love beyond all the benefits and blessings that flow from it. We should labour to apprehend, from the Scriptures, the freeness, the eternity, the immutability of that love. It is our contemplation of His *love* which admits us into the freest and fullest heart-communion with Him. *That* was the source and spring of Christ’s own joy and blessedness—His occupation with the Father’s love to Him. Note how often He dwelt upon it, John 3:35; 5:20; 15:9; 17:26. The Father’s love was precious to Christ, and Christ’s should be unto us.

Now all our *enjoyment* of Christ’s love is the fruit of knowing and resting in the same, just as it is the true spiritual *knowledge* of Christ which makes way for the exercise of faith in Him. Our deepest need is to know Christ as He is *exactly suited to us*—as the tender mother is suited to her wailing child, as the physician is suited to a suffering patient, as a firm anchor is suited to a storm-tossed ship, as a guide is suited to a traveler who knows not the way, as food is suited to a starving man. Christ, dear reader, is exactly suited to the Christian—suited to everything which concerns him, suited to his every need, his every problem and trial, his every state or case. O to *live on* Christ exactly as He is revealed in the Word. O to *bring in* Christ continually, to make Him our closest Confident, our constant Counselor, our All in all. He is received into our minds by spiritual meditation in our hearts.

As another has said, “I simply address the Lord Jesus, inwardly in my mind, saying Lord Jesus, look upon me, take notice of all within me, exercise Thy compassion upon me, exactly as my necessities require. Keep, O keep me, bless, O bless, me. Defend me for Thy mercies’ sake, from sin, the world, and Satan. Let me be content to be nothing, do Thou be my all. I call this *communion*. If this be so, then I find it to be more or less my constant practice, because as I cannot live but I must feel sin, so I cannot live but I must look to Jesus for salvation from it, and call on Him to exercise His grace and pity towards me, so long as I am the subject of it. Indeed, I think the greatest communion with Christ, and the Father in Him, through the Spirit, in this present state, is, and doth principally consist in a total renunciation of self, and in a real and actual dependence on the Lord, and the more *simple* this dependence, so much the better.”

The *helps* to the promotion of an increased knowledge of, communion with, and joy in Christ, are the reading of the Word—regarding the same as a series of love letters from Him to me personally—spiritual meditation upon what I have read, turning the same into simple prayer. But our space is exhausted.



# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## 11. Its Rule

Having considered the distinct acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of the church, we must now carefully inquire as to the rule by which all true holiness is determined, the standard by which it is weighed, and to which it must be conformed. This is also of deep importance, for if we mistake the line and plummet of holiness, then all our efforts after it will be wide of the mark. On this aspect of our subject, there also prevails widespread ignorance and confusion today, so that we are obliged to proceed slowly and enter rather lengthily into it. If one class of our readers sorely needed—for the strengthening of their faith and comfort of their hearts—a somewhat full setting forth of the perfect sanctification which believers have in Christ, another class of our readers certainly require—for the illumination of their minds and the searching of their conscience—a setting forth in detail of the divinely-provided “Rule.”

In previous articles, we have shown that *holiness is the antithesis of sin*, and therefore as “sin is the transgression [a deviation from or violation] of the law” (1Jo 3:4), holiness must be *a conformity to the law*. As “sin” is a general term to connote all that is evil, foul, and morally loathsome, so “holiness” is a general term to signify all that is good, pure, and morally lovely. Holiness, like sin, has its root in *the heart*—external actions are virtuous or vicious, praiseworthy or blameworthy, as they express the desires, designs, and choices of the heart. As all sin is a species of *self-love*—self-will, self-pleasing, self-gratification—so all holiness consists of disinterested or *unselfish love*—to God and our neighbour. 1 Corinthians 13 supplies a full and beautiful delineation of the nature of holiness. Substitute the term “holiness” for “charity” (or love) all through the chapter. As sin is the transgressing of the law, so love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).

The spirituality and religion of man in his original state consisted in a perfect conformity to the divine law, which was the law of his nature (for he was created in the image and likeness of God), with the addition of positive precepts. But when man lost his innocence and became guilty and depraved, he fell not only under the wrath of God, but also under the dominion of sin. Consequently, he now needs both a Redeemer, and a *Sanctifier*—and in the Gospel *both* are provided. Alas that so often today only a half Gospel, a mutilated Gospel, is being preached—whereby sinners are made “twofold more the children of hell” than they were before they heard it! In the Gospel a way is revealed for our obtaining both pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace. The Gospel presents Christ not only as a Deliverer from the wrath to come (1Th 1:10), but also as the Sanctifier of His church (Eph 5:26).

In His work of sanctifying the church, Christ *restores His people unto a conformity to the law*. Before supplying proof of this statement, let us carefully observe *what it is* which the law requires of us. “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mat 22:37-40). Christ here summed up the ten commandments in these two, and *every*

duty enjoined by the law and inculcated by the prophets is but a deduction or amplification of these two, in which *all* are radically contained. Here is, first, the duty required—love to God and our neighbour. Second, the ground or reason of this duty—because He is the Lord *our* God. Third, the measure of this duty—with all the heart.

The grand reason why God, the alone Governor of the world, ever made the law, requiring us to love with all our hearts, was because it is, in its own nature, infinitely just and fitting. The law is an external and unalterable Rule of Righteousness, which cannot be abrogated or altered in the least iota, for it is an unchanging expression of God's immutable moral character. To suppose that He would ever repeal or even abate the law—when the grounds and reasons of God's first making it remain as forcible as ever, when that which it requires is as just and meet as ever, and which it becomes Him as the moral Ruler of the universe to require as much as ever—casts the highest reproach upon all His glorious perfections. Such a horrible insinuation could have originated nowhere else than in the foul mind of the Fiend, the arch-enemy of God, and is to be rejected by us with the utmost abhorrence.

To imagine God repealing the moral law, which is the rule of all holiness and the condemner of all sin, would be supposing Him to release His creatures from giving unto Him the full glory which is His due, and allowing them to hold back a part of it at least. It supposes Him releasing His creatures from that which is right and allowing them to do that which is wrong. Yea, such a vile supposition reflects upon God's very goodness, for so far from it being a boon and benefit to His creatures, the repealing or altering the law, which is so perfectly suited to their highest happiness, would be one of the sorest calamities that could happen. If God had rather that heaven and earth should pass away than that the least jot or tittle of the law should fail (Mat 5:18), how steadfastly should we resist every effort of Satan's to rob us of this divine rule, weaken its authority over our hearts, or prejudice us against it.

In the light of what has been pointed out, how unspeakably horrible, what vile blasphemy, to imagine that the Son Himself should come from heaven, become incarnate, and die the death of the cross, with the purpose of securing His people a rescinding or abating of the law, and obtain for them a lawless liberty. What! Had He so little regard for *His Father's* interests and glory, for the honour of His law, that He shed His precious blood so as to persuade the great Governor of the world to slacken the reins of His government and obtain for His people an impious license? Perish the thought. Let all who love the Lord rise up in righteous indignation against such an atrocious slur upon His holy character and loathe it as a Satanic slander—no matter by whom propagated. Any Spirit-taught reader must surely see that such a wicked idea as the affirming that Christ is the One who has made an end of the law, is to make Him the friend of sin and the enemy of God!

Pause for a moment and weigh carefully the implications. How could God possibly vindicate the honour of His great name were He to either repeal or abate that law which requires love to Him with all our hearts? Would not this be clearly tantamount to saying that He had previously required more than was His due? Or to put it in another form, that He does not now desire so much for His creatures as He formerly did? Or to state the issue yet more boldly; should God (since the cross) relinquish His *rights* and freely allow His creatures to despise Him and sin with impunity? Look at it another way—to what purpose should Christ die in order to secure an abatement from that law? What need was there for it? or what good could it do? If the law *really* demanded too much, then justice required God to make the abatement—in such case the death of Christ was needless. Or if the law required what *was* right, then God could not in justice make any abatement, and so Christ died in vain.

But so far from Christ coming into this world with any such evil design, He expressly declared, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:17-19). This is the very thing He condemned the Pharisees for all through this chapter. They, in effect, taught this very doctrine, that the law *was* abated, that its exacting demands *were* relaxed. They affirmed that though the law did forbid some external and gross acts of sin, yet it did not reprehend the first stirrings of corruption in the heart or lesser iniquities.

For instance, the Pharisees taught that murder must not be committed, but there was no harm in being angry, speaking reproachfully, or harbouring a secret grudge in the heart (Mat 5:21-26). That adultery must not be committed, yet there was no evil in having lascivious thoughts (Mat 5:27-30). That we must not be guilty of perjury, yet there was no harm in petty oaths in common conversation (Mat 5:33-37). That friends must not be hated, yet it was quite permissible to hate enemies (Mat 5:43-47). These, and such like allowances, they taught were made in the law, and therefore were not sinful. But such doctrine our Saviour condemned as erroneous and damning, insisting that the law requires us to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mat 5:48), and declaring that if our righteousness exceeded not that of the scribes and Pharisees, we could not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mat 5:20). How far, then, was our holy Lord from abating God’s law or lessening our obligations to perfect conformity to it!

The fact of the matter is (and here we will proceed to adduce some of the proofs for our statement at the beginning of the fourth paragraph) that Christ came into the world for the express purpose of giving a practical demonstration, in the most public manner, that God is worthy of all that love, honour, and obedience which the law requires, and that sin *is* as great an evil as the punishment of the law implies, and thereby declared God’s righteousness and hatred of sin, to the end that God might be just and yet the Justifier of every sincere believer. This Christ did by obeying the precepts and suffering the death-penalty of the law in the stead of His people. The great design of the incarnation, life, and death of our blessed Lord was to maintain and magnify the divine government, and secure the salvation of His people in a way that placed supreme honour upon the law.

The chief object before the beloved Son in taking upon Him the form of a servant was *to meet the demands* of the law. His work here had a prime respect to the law of God, so that sinners should be justified and sanctified without setting aside its requirements or without showing the least disregard to it. First, He was “made under the law” (Gal 4:4)—amazing place for the Lord of glory to take! Second, He declared, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is *within my heart*” (Psa 40:7-8)—enshrined in His affections. Third, He flawlessly obeyed the commands of the law in thought, and word, and deed—as a child He was subject to His parents (Luk 2:51); as man He honoured the Sabbath (Luk 4:16), and refused to worship or serve any but the Lord His God (Luk 4:8). Fourth, when John demurred at baptizing Him, He answered, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Mat 3:15)—what a proof of His *love* for the lawgiver in submitting to His ordinance! What proof of His *love* for His people in taking His place alongside of them in that which spake of death!

The truth is that it was God’s own infinite aversion to the repeal of the law, as a thing utterly unfit and wrong, which was the very thing which made the death of Christ needful. If the law might have been repealed, then sinners could have been saved without any more ado, but if it

must not be repealed, then the demands of it must be answered by some other means, or every sinner would be eternally damned. It was because of this that Christ willingly interposed, and “magnified the law and made it honourable” (see Isa 42:21), so securing the honour of God’s holiness and justice, so establishing His law and government, that a way has been opened for Him to pardon the very chief of sinners without compromising Himself to the slightest degree. “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse....Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:10, 13).

Christ loved His *Father’s* honour far too much to revoke His law, or bring His people into a state of insubordination to His authority, and He loved *them* too well to turn them adrift from “the perfect law of liberty.” Read carefully the inspired record of His life upon earth, and you will not discover a single word falling from His lips which expresses the slightest disrespect for the law. Instead we find that He bade His disciples do unto men whatsoever we would that they should do unto us *because* “this is the law and the prophets” (Mat 7:12). In like manner, Christ’s apostles urged the performance of moral duties by the authority of the law, “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: *for* he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: *for* this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)” (Eph 6:1-2). The apostle John exhorted believers to love one another as “an old commandment which ye had from the beginning” (1Jo 2:7). And, as we shall yet show at length, the law is the great means which the Spirit uses in sanctifying us.

Here, then, is a “threefold cord” (Ecc 4:12) which cannot be broken, a threefold consideration which “settles the matter” for all who submit to the authority of Holy Scripture. First, God the Father honoured the law by refusing to rescind it in order that His people might be saved at less cost, declining to abate its demands even when His own blessed Son cried, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mat 26:39). God the Son honoured the law by being made under it, by perfectly obeying its precepts, and by personally enduring its awful penalty. God the Spirit honours the law by making quickened sinners see, feel, and own that it is “holy, and *just*, and good” (Rom 7:12) even though it condemns them, and that, before ever He reveals the mercy of God through Jesus Christ unto them. So that the law is magnified, sin is embittered, the sinner is humbled, and grace is glorified all at once!

There are some who will go with us this far, agreeing that Christ came here to meet the demands of the law, yet who insist that the law being satisfied, believers are now entirely freed from its claims. But this is the most inconsistent, illogical, absurd position of all. Shall Christ go to so much pains to magnify the law in order that it might now be dishonoured by us! Did He pour out *His* love to God on the cross that *we* might be relieved from loving Him! It is true that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4)—for “righteousness” (for our *justification*), yes, but not for our sanctification. Is it not written that “he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1Jo 2:6), and did not Christ walk according to the rule of the law? The great object in Christ’s coming here was to conform His people to the law, and not to make them independent of it. Christ sends the Spirit to write the law in their hearts (see Heb 8:10) and not to set at nought its holy and high demands.

The truth is that God’s sending His Son into the world to die for the redemption of His people, instead of freeing them from their obligations to keep the law, binds them the more strongly to do so. This is so obvious that it ought not to require arguing. Reflect for a moment, Christian reader, upon God’s dealings with us. We had rebelled against the Lord, lost all esteem for Him, cast off His authority, and practically bid defiance to both His justice and His power. What wonder, then, had He immediately doomed our apostate world to the blackness of darkness forever? Instead, He

sent forth His own dear Son, His only Begotten, as an Ambassador of peace, with a message of good news, even that of a free and full forgiveness of sins to all who threw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and who took His easy yoke upon them.

But more—when God’s Son was despised and rejected of men, He did not recall Him to heaven, but allowed Him to complete His mission of mercy, by laying down His life as a ransom for all who should believe on Him. And now He sends forth His messengers to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, inviting His enemies to cease their rebellion, acknowledge the law by which they stand condemned to be holy, just, and good, and to look to Him through Jesus Christ for pardon as *a free gift*, and to yield themselves to Him entirely, to love Him and delight themselves in Him forever. Is not this fathomless love, infinite mercy, amazing grace, which should melt our hearts and cause us to present our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” which is indeed your “reasonable service” (Rom 12:1)?

O my Christian reader, that God out of His own mere good pleasure, according to His eternal purpose, should have stopped thee in thy mad career to hell, made thee see and feel thy awful sin and guilt, own the sentence just by which thou wast condemned, and bring thee on thy knees to look for free grace through Jesus Christ for pardon, and through Him give up thyself to God forever. And that now He should receive thee to His favour, put thee among His children, become your Father and your God, by an everlasting covenant, undertake to teach and guide, nourish and strengthen, correct and comfort, protect and preserve, and while in this world supply all thy need and make all things work together for thy good, and finally bring thee into everlasting glory and blessedness. Does not *this* lay thee under infinitely deeper obligations to LOVE the Lord thy God with all thine heart? Does not *this* have the greatest tendency to animate thee unto obedience to His righteous law? Does not *this* engage thee, does not His love constrain thee, to seek to please, honour, and glorify Him?

## DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The providence of God is His care of and provision He makes for His creatures, with His supervision and superintendence of them. The providence of God in His government of the world is a subject of deep importance to the Christian, for by proper views thereof he will learn to see God’s activities in the daily works of His hands. The depravity of the human heart, especially as it is evidenced in “vain philosophy,” makes a veil out of the physical laws by which God usually conducts His government, a veil which *hides* Him in His own workings. But the Scriptures represent all physical laws as having their *efficacy* from the *immediate agency* of Almighty power and view God as working in His providence as truly as He wrought in His works of creation. Yet, though Christians assent to this truth, nevertheless they are prone to overlook it *in exercise*, and thereby to be deprived in great measure of that poise of mind and comfort of heart which a deep and constant improvement of this doctrine is calculated to impart.

Nothing is more strengthening to faith, stabilizing to the mind, and tranquilizing to the heart of a Christian, than for him to be enabled to discern *the Father’s hand* guiding, shaping, controlling all that enters his life. And not only so, but that He is also *governing* this world, and all persons

and events in it. Alas, we are living in an age of terrible skepticism, when most of what happens is attributed to natural causes, while God is more and more banished from the world in the consideration of His creatures. Now it is not only a fact that God *governs* the world in a general sense, but He also regulates *all* its affairs, controls all creatures in it, working “all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). Fully is this truth brought before us in the Scriptures, not only in specific statements, but by innumerable exemplifications and demonstrations.

At such a time as this, when truth is fallen in the streets, and error abounds on every hand, the believer is supported by the knowledge that it is the sovereign will of God heresies *should* enter and many be perverted by them. Without *this* view of divine providence, there is no real consolation for the Christian, as he considers the awful ravages which error has made and the sad state poor Christendom is now in. Philosophy combines with agnosticism, superstition with idolatry, to oppose the Lord’s Anointed, while “religion” is now as corrupt as the general morals of the masses. The increasing worldliness of the “churches” (?), the spiritual deadness which prevails even where the truth is largely maintained, the absence of genuine conversions, combine to disturb and distress, but “The Lord God omnipotent *reigneth*” (Rev 19:6), supplies a sure resting place for the heart, for this means that even God’s opposers are executing His secret counsels.

God is not shaken by the situation which now confronts our view, nor does the pride, blatancy, and blasphemy of His enemies occasion Him any uneasiness. To the contrary, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision” (Psa 2:4). It is written, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa 76:10), but only FAITH can receive this grand truth and enjoy in the heart the precious fruits thereof. That divine “restraint” of man’s “wrath” is exercised in God’s providence or government of this world, and this is what we wish the reader to be occupied with (D.V.) in what follows. God is not perturbed by anything that is now taking place in this world—either in its political, social, or religious sphere, nor should we be. The helm is still in *His* hand and Satan himself cannot so much as touch a hair of our heads without His direct permission.

The *advantages* of a clear grasp of this foundation truth of divine providence are many. First, it delivers the Christian from being carried away by the tide of public opinion. Few things have a greater tendency to lead Christians into error than its apparent success. People in general judge of a cause by its seeming success and often Christians are greatly influenced by this pernicious principle. Opinions spread by infection, rather than by *a thorough investigation* of the evidence. But an accurate acquaintance with the ways of Providence, as revealed in Scripture, is calculated to deliver from this prejudice. *There* we discover that God has often granted much “success” to His *enemies* and by it they were hardened in their rebellion. Mere success is *no proof* of truth and lack of success is neither evidence of error nor of God’s displeasure.

Second, a proper acquaintance with the grand truth of divine Providence should also be of real help in guarding us against having recourse to artifice and craft, in the propagation of the truth. The apostle Paul, in spite of all his zeal for the Gospel, *disdained all worldly wisdom* in his efforts to advance its progress. He commended the truth to every man’s *conscience* in the sight of God. Then let *us stick* to the means of God’s ordering and rigorously eschew all human inventions. Temptations to compromise, to lower the standard, to bring in fleshly devices so as to “draw the young people,” are multiplying today. While in Glasgow, recently, the writer seriously offended “a Christian brother,” because we asked a personal favour that there should be no special “solo” sung the night we preached in his Hall. Even though it appeared that Christianity were in real danger of being banished from the earth, that *would not* justify our attempting to assist it by

worldly methods, carnal devices, or any means which God has not appointed. We are to fight the Lord's battles with the weapons which He has put into our hands and leave the "success" to Him! All the ingenuity of man cannot and will not extend the Gospel one inch beyond the limits which our sovereign God has assigned. It is at *this* point faith is so often tested—faithful preaching being sparsely attended, "churches" with worldly attractions crowded.

Third, a proper acquaintance with this blessed doctrine of divine Providence provides consolation amid so much that distresses. The more a true believer ponders the character of the times in which his lot is cast, the more is his heart saddened. The affairs of this world appear to be completely under the dominion of the prince of darkness, but in the grand truth of God's government, there is real comfort and solid support for the heart. From it we learn that even the very opposition which is made to the kingdom of Christ is part of the plan of divine wisdom, and will be overruled for the glory of God and of His Son. It is true that "The whole world lieth in wickedness" (1Jo 5:19), yet *not* in the sense that God has relinquished its *government*. The wrath of Satan shall be obliged to praise God, and any device of it which has not that tendency, He will "restrain" and not suffer to be manifested.

Two or three years ago, we published a series of most excellent papers on the Book of Esther by the late Alexander Carson, which God was pleased to bless to quite a number. In His goodness, there has recently come into our hands another volume from his pen, entitled, "History of Providence as manifested in Scripture; or facts of Scripture illustrative of the government of God" (1854). As we have personally enjoyed its perusal so much, we desire others to have the same opportunity. It is too lengthy for us to reproduce verbatim, but we trust our selections from it will edify our friends. The first one immediately follows this introductory word.

# THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

## *1. The Entangled Ram*

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son" (Gen 22:13). This was a very extraordinary occasion, and as the nature of the case did not allow Abraham to be provided with a beast for a sacrifice, we might have expected that God would provide one for him by a miracle. He could as easily have caused a ram to come of himself from any part of the adjacent country, as He had formerly brought the animals to Noah in the ark. But not so. He did not choose to do the thing by miracle. He furnished the sacrifice by His *Providence*. "A ram caught in the thicket by his horns" (Gen 22:13). What could be more purely accidental than this? Was there anything wonderful that a ram should happen to be entangled in the brambles where he was feeding? What could be more natural? Why should it be thought that Providence was concerned in the matter? It is, indeed, a very trifling thing and a fact easily to be accounted for. But *why* did it happen on *this* occasion? Why was not the ram caught yesterday? Or why did it happen before tomorrow? Why was it on this day—in this hour—in this



minute? A day sooner, or a day later, would not have answered the purpose. The ram must be caught, and held inextricably fast, at the moment that Abraham needed him.

Why was the ram caught here? Had it been at a distance or out of the view of Abraham, it might as well not have been caught at all. It is caught at this moment, at this very spot where it is needed. Why was the caught beast a ram, and not a deer, or some other horned animal? Because such an animal would not have answered for the sacrifice that was to be offered. Why was it not a he-goat? Because, though such an animal was a suitable sacrifice in some circumstances, a ram was most suitable on the present occasion. Why was it a male and not a female? Because, though in some circumstances female animals were employed in sacrifice, yet a male is that usually employed for a good typical purpose. This, then, is the work *of God*, as much as even the creation of the world. It is a miracle of Providence and shows us how to read the book of Providence. We ought to see the hand of God in the most trifling things. Nothing is too great for His Providence to effect—nothing is so small as to be below His attention. This fact teaches us also that what God *requires* from us for His worship, He will *supply* to us by His Providence.

## *2. Hagar Expelled.*

“Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac” (Gen 21:10). In her design of expelling Hagar from the house of Abraham, Sarah was excited and influenced by her own private feelings and interest alone. She uttered her own sentiments in her own language. Yet she uttered the truth of God, in God’s words, in a figure. What she said with respect to Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, and herself, was all providentially adapted to express the Gospel in an allegory. The Spirit of God by Paul, in the epistle to the Galatians, expounds this transaction in this sense. The word of Sarah, with respect to her own private affairs, are quoted as the words of inspiration with respect to the nature of the Gospel, “Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” (Gal 4:30). Here the words of Sarah are expounded as referring to the Gospel, as fully as if they had no primary reference. It is not said, “What saith Sarah?” But “What saith the Scripture?” (Gal 4:30).

The words employed providentially by Sarah in her own affairs are, in another point of view, the words of Scripture with reference to the way of salvation. In the inscrutable wisdom of God, the words are the words of Sarah and of God—of Sarah, in her own sense—of the Spirit, as a symbolic expression of the Gospel. Men who receive the truth of God no further than they can comprehend the nature of the thing testified, cannot believe that the allegorical meaning taken out of the expression by Paul was really in the design of the Holy Spirit when the words were used by Sarah and recorded by Moses. They view the historical document as merely casually adapted to illustrate the point in hand, and as such, ingeniously employed by the apostle. But these men wrest the Scriptures and deny the palpable testimony of the Holy Spirit. Paul does not use the historical fact as casually adapted to illustrate the Gospel, but expressly expounds it as the testimony of the Spirit in the ancient Scriptures—“What saith the scripture?” (Gal 4:30). It is used as an argument to convince and not as an illustration to explain. “Tell me,” says he, “ye that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?” Is not this proof from the law? After this introduction, he proceeds to relate the history in its allegorical meaning. “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are



the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal 4:27-31).

What a wonderful combination of *providential* events was necessary to fit this history to the shadowing of the Gospel! Abraham must have a wife, a free woman. He must also have a wife who was a slave. He must have a son by this slave and a son in a peculiar manner by his wife. The slave and her son must be cast out and not only excluded from the inheritance, but from a residence in the family. The wife must express, with regard to her own affairs, in her own language, language that the Holy Spirit adapts to an allegorical declaration of the Gospel. This surely is divine wisdom. And this both illustrates and proves the inspiration of the Scriptures. The very words of Scripture, with respect to historical details and circumstances which, in themselves, have no direct concern with the Gospel, are adapted, in the most wonderful manner to express a secondary meaning, known at the time only to the Holy Spirit. The unfeeling demand of Sarah, with respect to her domestic concerns, is, from another point of view, the language of the Spirit figuratively expressing the nature of the Gospel. (Alexander Carson, 1776-1844).

## WELCOME TIDINGS

“It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23). As we have stated in these pages before, this is the editor's favourite passage. It has come before us now as we take up our pen to write our annual report of the Lord's goodness and grace upon us.

The Lord's mercy is manifold, hence the use of the plural number here. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are “not consumed,” first, by the condemnation of the law—our Surety having been made a curse for us. Second, “not consumed” by the reigning power of sin—divine grace subduing its fatal ragings. Third, “not consumed” by Satan, who goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour—divine power protecting and preserving us. Fourth, “not consumed” by the trials and sorrows of this life—divine love keeping the head of faith just above the flood which threatens to overwhelm.

The reason why we are not consumed is “because his compassions [note again the plural number!] fail not” (Lam 3:22). Sometimes the compassions of those nearest and dearest to us “fail.” Often the compassion of friends and acquaintances—especially when most needed—“fail.” There are seasons when our own compassion fails—when we are our own worst enemies. But the compassions of the Lord “fail not.” Hallelujah! Having loved us with an everlasting love, He loves us unto the end. Here, dear tried, fellow pilgrim, is a welcome pillow to rest upon. No matter what the future may hold, how tight a corner you may be driven into, how lamentable your failures and desperate your case, the Lord's compassions will “fail not.”

“They are new every morning” (Lam 3:23). The compassion of our fellows soon wears out, but that of JEHOVAH is like Himself, having “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam

1:17). Each day that dawns brings with it fresh proofs of the unfailing compassions of Him with whom we have to do. In view of which, we are constrained to exclaim, “great is thy faithfulness” (Lam 3:23). Yes, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2Ti 2:13). Many fresh proofs of this have we received during the past twelve months, which more than once or twice have made us ashamed of our own wretched unbelief. A few out of the many tokens of the Lord’s goodness will be recorded in what follows.

First, we would mention that God was pleased to speak loudly to a number of friends through our Annual Letter in the December 1935 issue, when we stated that unless more of the readers co-operated and endeavoured to introduce us to new readers there was grave danger we should soon have to cease publishing. Though the number on our mailing-list is still below what it was twelve months ago, yet we are thankful to say that, through the efforts of those who appreciate this monthly messenger, we have been brought into contact with quite a number of the Lord’s people, who are now enjoying with us some of the riches of His amazing grace. We trust that *others* will be stirred up to do what they can in making known this magazine unto those likely to value it. It is sent to many who are not in a position to contribute anything, but those who *are* able are expected to gladly send in at least 3/6 (one dollar) per year, which is what it actually costs to send to each person for twelve months.

“I just read your Annual Letter in the December issue. I was so touched, the tears prevented me finishing it, until I had gone into my bedroom and prayed for you” (Brother in Missouri). “Your Annual Letter causes me some concern—no other publication is so exclusively filled with the finest of wheat as the ‘Studies,’ and there would be so much disappointment when (and if) it is discontinued” (A Preacher). “What will we do, who have been with you from the beginning, should you drop the Studies? To me it would be quite a calamity. You have fed us with meat—to turn us adrift with the frothy shallow stuff that is being poured out on all sides today, is a prospect far from pleasant” (Friend in Australia). While God grants us health, messages, the financial means (we take not a penny from the magazine for our own labours—our own needs are provided for) and *a sufficient number of readers* to justify publishing, we shall continue.

“The Studies have been such a blessing in my life that I am concerned very much to hear the circulation is falling off” (Scotland). “The copies that I have received have been wonderfully helpful to me, and I pray that this work may continue” (Alabama). “I have been blessed another year through your good work in the Studies” (Wales). “Studies are a great help and inspiration to me. I find so much real soul food in them” (California). “I have enjoyed and been blessed in the reading of Studies” (Lawyer). “My wife joins me in heart-felt thanks for the Studies. We are particularly grateful for the articles on ‘The Spirit Leading’” (Sussex). “Your publication was much blessed to my soul during the past year” (Iowa). “Your articles on Divine Chastisement have been a source of great blessing to us” (Australia).

“We unite in thanking you for your magazine. We enjoy them so much, but O they make me tremble often, yet I thank God for it—it is much needed in my life” (Canada). “Your articles on the Spirit have done much to open my eyes. This subject is so little known today” (Washington). “I have thanked God from a full heart for His long-suffering goodness and mercy to me, and write to say what a great blessing your Studies are to me, especially the articles on Sanctification. The patient method you have of explaining the meaning of words and phrases is of much help” (England).

“I have been much refreshed by your Studies. I am sure you cannot have much time left to yourself, according to the high standard of the articles” (Scotland). “Yours are truly *Studies*—one cannot simply read them. I ponder them with a pencil in one hand and my Bible in the other”

(California). “I thoroughly appreciate your articles. As we realise the responsibility of having to do with the thrice Holy God, how we need to be searched by Him” (Herts). “Poverty of words prevent my expressing how much the Studies have meant to me” (New York). “The bound volumes of Studies are among my most cherished possessions. I read them again and again” (England).

“In these days when Romanist idolatry, superstition and blasphemy, Protestant indifference and apathy, with worldwide unconcern in spiritual things are so prevalent, it is indeed like an oasis in a desolate desert to receive and prayerfully peruse such sound religious periodicals as your own. Your expositions of Scripture are evangelically sound, and calculated by the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit to be spiritually edifying and comforting” (Australia). “We as a family have certainly in the past, and are now, greatly indebted to God, who has wrought mightily through you for our instruction, warning, and cheer. We thank you and pray God will increase your usefulness. We have been miraculously preserved from error as well as from apostacy largely by your teaching; recognising God’s hand in bringing it to us as He commanded the ravens to feed Elijah” (Michigan). “Your writings have been sent to me in answer to a desire that has been in my heart since a child, for explanation of some parts of Scripture that I could not take in. The articles on David have been a great blessing to me” (Bedridden from Paralysis).

“I find your articles most instructive and beneficial in every way. To read them is to know real heart-searching. I must admit being brought to my knees in tears, for they do not spare one. There is nothing sentimental or artificial about their composition. They are an inspiration to holiness of life” (Australia). “How do I praise Him for having brought me under your teaching. How my spiritual life has been strengthened as the blessed Holy Spirit has led you to exalt His Person and work. I used to read ‘victorious life’ literature, but it remained for your teaching to show me that a life of victory is only obtainable by implicit obedience to God’s Word” (Ohio).

“Your articles on the covenant are filled with much blessing to any student of the Word” (Preacher). “Your articles on the covenants are unfolding precious truth” (Pennsylvania). “I have derived great comfort of mind in meditating upon the riches of God’s truth which you have so fearlessly, so clearly, so convincingly presented to the glory of God and the comfort of believers in Christ Jesus; so I believe the Spirit has borne witness with me that these things are true. I thank God for such a gift as He has bestowed upon you. Surely in this dark age your ministry is sorely needed” (Preacher in New York).

“Let me assure you again that your magazine has been of much profit to me. I have also been able to take from the Studies not a few sermons and give them to the people here” (Missionary in Central America). “In reading your Studies I find greater illumination than from any other literature or preaching. I often wonder why it is that preachers and teachers of the Bible are able to give so little help on the Scriptures [they are too lazy to *study*—A.W.P.]. I have looked for the truth a long time, and I am certain that because of your teachings I am in closer harmony with God” (Ukrainian Brother). “This year I was much blessed and enjoyed reading about the work of the blessed Holy Spirit. May the Lord enable you to be led always by His Spirit, through the Word, in everything” (Brother in Syria).

We trust the above extracts, which might be greatly multiplied, will provoke hearty praise and thanksgiving to our gracious God. Those who send us part of their tithes to be used in sending this magazine to “the poor of the flock” must feel grateful to the Lord for so signally blessing these pages to many who are cut off from all preaching services. It is sent to some in Aged People’s Homes, to those in the prairies of Canada, the bush of Australia, the lonely Islands of the sea. We

beg for continuation of your daily prayers for God's blessing to remain on the editor and his wife and their labours for Him. Gifts have come in freely, so that as we write there is no shortage of funds, but we do so long for an enlarged circulation. With hearty Christian love to all fellow sinners redeemed by precious Blood. Yours by God's abounding mercy.—Arthur W. and Vera E. Pink.

# August

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 35. The Spirit Assisting (Part 2)

It is a great infirmity or weakness for the Christian to faint in the day of adversity, yet such is often the case. It is a sad thing when, like Rachel of old weeping for her children, he “refuses to be comforted” (see Jer 31:15). It is most deplorable for all when he so gives way to unbelief that the Lord has to say to him, “How is it that ye have no faith?” (Mar 4:40). Terrible indeed would be his end if God were to leave him entirely to himself. This is clear from what is said in Mark 4:17, “When affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended,” or as Luke says, “Which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luk 8:13). And *why* does the stony-ground hearer apostatise? Because he is *without* the assistance of the Holy Spirit! Writer and reader would do the same if no divine aid were forthcoming!

But thank God, the feeble and fickle believer is not left to himself, “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities” (Rom 8:26). That “help” is as manifold as our varied needs, but the apostle singles out one particular “infirmity” which besets all Christians, and which the blessed Spirit graciously helps, “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us.” How this divine declaration should humble us into the dust—so depraved is the saint that in the hour of need he is incapable of asking God aright to minister unto him. Sin has so corrupted his heart and darkened his understanding that, left to himself, he cannot even discern *what* he should ask God for. Alas, that pride should so blind us to our real condition and our deep, deep need.

In nothing do the saints more need the Spirit’s presence and His gracious assistance than in their addresses of the throne of grace. They know that God in His Persons and perfections is the object of their worship. They know that they cannot come unto the Father but by Christ, the alone Mediator, and they know that their access to Him must be by the Spirit (Eph 2:18). Yet such are their varying circumstances, temptations, and wanderings, so often are they shut up in their frames and cold in their affections, such deadness of heart is there toward God and spiritual things, that at times they know not what to pray for as they ought. But it is *here* that the Spirit’s love and grace is most divinely displayed. He helpeth their infirmities and maketh intercession for them!

One had thought that if ever there is a time when the Christian would really *pray*, earnestly and perseveringly, and would know what to ask for, it should be when he is sorely tried and oppressed. Alas, how little we really know ourselves. Even a beast will cry out when suffering severe pain and it is *natural* (not spiritual!) that we should do the same. Of degenerate Israel of old, God said, “They have not cried unto me with their *heart*, when they *howled* upon their beds” (Hos 7:14). No, *relief* from their sufferings was all they thought about. And by nature, *our* hearts are just the same! So long as we are left to ourselves (to try us and manifest what we are, 2Ch 32:31), when the pressure of sore trial comes upon us, we are concerned only with *deliverance* from it, and not that God may be glorified or that the trial may be sanctified to our souls.

Left for himself, man asks God for what would be curses rather than blessings, for what would prove to be snares rather than helps to him spiritually. Have we not read of Israel that, “They tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust” (Psa 78:18). And again, “He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Psa 106:15)! Perhaps someone replies, but they were not regenerate souls. Then have we not read in James, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye *ask amiss*, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (Jam 4:3). Ah, my reader, this is a truth which is very unpalatable to our proud hearts. Did not Moses “ask” the Lord that he might be permitted to enter Canaan (Deu 3:26-27)? Did not the apostle Paul thrice beseech the Lord for the removal of his thorn in the flesh? What *proofs* are these that “We *know not* what we should pray for as we ought!”

“The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities” (Rom 8:26). This being so, surely the least that we can do is to *seek* His aid, to definitely ask Him *to* undertake for us. Alas, how rarely we do so. As intimated above, when the pressure of trouble first presses upon us, usually it is *nature* which cries out for relief. At other times, the soul is so cast down that even the voice of natural “prayer” is stifled. Often there is so much rebellion at work in our hearts against the providential dispensations of God toward us that we feel it would be mockery to seek *His* face—yea, we are ashamed to do so. Such at least has been the experience of the writer more than once, and that not long ago, though he blushes to acknowledge it. O the infinite patience and forbearance of our gracious God.

“We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26). And why? First, because we are so blinded by *self-love* that we are unable to discern what will be most for God’s glory, what will best promote the good of our brethren (through some of the dross being purged out of us), and what will advance our own spiritual growth. O what wretched “prayers” (?) we put up when we are guided and governed by *self-interests*, and what cause do we give the Lord to say, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luk 9:55). Alas, how often we attempt to make God the servant of our carnal desires. Shall we ask our heavenly Father for worldly success! Shall we come to Him who was born in a stable and ask Him for temporal luxuries or even comforts!

*Why* is it that “we know not what we should pray for as we ought”? Second, because our minds are so discomposed by the trial and the suffering it brings, and then we have to say with one of old, “I am so troubled that I cannot speak” (Psa 77:4). So you see, dear “brother, and companion in tribulation” (Rev 1:9) that *you* are not the first to experience spiritual dumbness! But it is most blessed to link with this such a promise as “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (Luk 12:12). *Why* is it that “we know not what we should pray for as we ought”? Third, because oftentimes our tongues are tied as the result of leanness of our souls. It is “out of the abundance of the heart” that “the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34), and if the Word of Christ be not dwelling in us “richly” (Col 3:16), how can we expect to have the right petition to present to God in the hour of our need!

“The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities” (Rom 8:26), but He does so silently and secretly, so that we are not conscious of His assistance at the time He renders it. That gracious and effectual help is manifested to us by *the effects* which it has produced in us—though so perverse are our hearts and so great is our pride, we often attribute those effects to our own will-power or resolution. Have we suddenly, or even gradually, emerged from the slough of despond? It was *not* because *we* had “come to our senses” or “regained our poise,” rather was it solely due to the Spirit’s renewing us in the inner man. Has the storm within us—which God’s crossing of our will occasioned—been calmed? It was because the Spirit deigned to subdue our iniquities. Has the voice of true prayer again issued from us? It was because the Spirit had made intercession for us.

Lord God the Spirit, to whom divine honour and glory belongeth, equally as to the Father and the Son, I desire to present unto Thee unfeigned praise and heartfelt thanksgiving. O how deeply am I indebted to Thee. How patiently hast Thou borne with me, how tenderly hast Thou dealt with me, how graciously hast Thou wrought in me. Thy love passeth knowledge, Thy forbearance is indeed divine. O that I were more conscientious and diligent in seeking not to slight and grieve Thee.

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 104. The Kingdom of Christ (12:28)

We hope that we made clear in the preceding articles the general idea contained in the citation from the Old Testament which the apostle made in Hebrews 12:26, namely, that under the proclamation of the Gospel there would be a more radical and far-reaching effect produced, than was the case at the giving of the law, thereby manifesting the superiority of one over the other. The more specific meaning of Haggai’s prediction (Hag 2:6) was that the *Jewish* church and state would be dissolved, for both the ecclesiastical and civil spheres of Judaism (“heaven and earth”) were “shaken.” Its wider significance comprehended the convulsions which would be produced in *heathendom* (the “sea” of Hag 2:6, and cf. vv. 21, 22). The great design of God in the divine incarnation was the setting up of *Christ’s kingdom*, but before it could be properly established, there had to be a mighty shaking in order that the shadows in Judaism might give place to the substance, and that sinners among the Gentiles be made spiritual.

The appearing of the Messiah introduced and necessitated a total dissolution of the entire Judaic economy—the Levitical institutions being fulfilled in Christ, they had now served their purpose. This was solemnly signified by the divine rending of the temple veil and forty years later by the total destruction of the temple itself. But in the meanwhile, it was difficult to persuade the Hebrews that such was the case, and therefore did the apostle clinch the argument he had made in Hebrews 12:18-24, and the exhortation he had given in verse 25, by quoting a proof-text from their own Scriptures. Haggai’s language that the Lord would “shake the heavens” referred, as we have seen, *not* the starry heavens or celestial planets, but to the Judaical constitution under the ceremonial law—called the “heavens” because they typed out heavenly things! Ultimately God

would “shake” and remove all dominions, thrones, and powers which were opposed to the kingdom of Christ—as, for example, He later did the Roman empire.

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28). The design of the Holy Spirit in the whole of this passage (Heb 12:18-29) was to enhance in the Hebrews’ estimation the supremacy and excellency of Christ’s kingdom, which His Gospel has “brought to light,” and which has given believers the right and assurance of, for it was *to make way for* the establishment of Christ’s kingdom that those mighty “shakings” occurred. Paul insists that God’s “shakings” were in order to “remove” that which hindered the manifestation and development of Christ’s kingdom. Here, then, is further proof that, so far from Haggai’s prophecy looking forward to the universal convulsion of nature at the last day, it has already had its fulfillment. Believers *now* actually obtain the fruit of that “shaking,” for they “receive” the unshakable kingdom, namely the kingdom of Christ which cannot be moved. We trust this is now so plain to the reader that further effort on our part to establish the same is unnecessary.

But not only did the prophecy of Haggai announce the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and the necessary setting aside of the one for the other, but it also clearly intimated *the finality* of the Christian dispensation. This is plain from the words of Hebrews 12:27, “yet once more.” According to modern dispensationalists, Paul *should* have said, “yet *twice* more,” for their view is that just as the Mosaic dispensation was followed by the Christian, so the Christian will be succeeded by a revival and glorified Judaism in “the Millennium.” But “*once* more” means only once, and then *no* more. Christianity is the *final* thing which God has for this earth. The *last* great dispensational change was made when the Gospel was given to all the world, hence Peter could say, “the *end* of *all* things is at hand” (1Pe 4:7), for God has now spoken His last word to mankind. Hence also John said, “It is the *last* time” (1Jo 2:18), which had not been true if another dispensation is to follow the one we are now in.

“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb 12:27). Here the apostle *explains* Haggai’s, “Yet once it is a little while [cf. the “now” of Heb 12:26] and I will shake the heavens,” etc. (Hag 2:6). When Paul refers to the things shaken and removed “as of things that are *made*,” (Heb 12:27), he was far from adding a superfluous clause—it emphasised again the contrast he was drawing. The phrase “as of things that are made” is elliptical, needing the added words “made [by hands]” to bring out its sense. Everything connected with Judaism was made by human hands—even the tables of stone on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments, God commanded Moses to “hew” (Exo 34:1), while the tabernacle and all connected with it were to be “made” accordingly to “the pattern” God showed him (Exo 25:8-9). In sharp and blessed contrast, the immaterial and spiritual things of Christianity are “*not* made with hands” (2Co 5:1), but are “made *without* hands” (Col 2:11).

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God” (Heb 12:28). The apostle here draws an inference from what had just been pointed out concerning the shaking and removing of Judaism and the establishing of Christianity. First, here is a great privilege into which Christians have entered, namely, *a spiritual state* under the rule of Jesus Christ—whom God anointed and set as king upon His holy hill of Zion (Psa 2:6)—here called a “kingdom.” Second, the essential character of this kingdom, in contrast from all others, namely, its immovability—its finality and permanency. Third, the way of the believer’s participation of it—we “receive” it. “This kingdom, then, is the rule of Christ in and over the Gospel-state of the church, which the apostle hath proved to be more excellent than that of the law” (John Owen, 1616-1683). This kingdom we must now consider.



At the beginning of human history, God's kingdom was realised on this earth, so that there was no need to pray, "Thy kingdom come." God's kingship was established in Eden, and all the blessings that flow from subjection to His dominion were then enjoyed. The supremacy of God was gladly and spontaneously acknowledged by all His creatures. But sin entered and a radical change ensued. Man repudiated the kingship of God, for by transgressing His commandments, Adam rejected His sovereignty. By so doing, by heeding the suggestions of the serpent, the "kingdom of Satan" (see Mat 12:26) was set up in this world. Shortly afterwards, God established His mediatorial kingdom. Abel being its first subject.

Since the fall, there have been two great empires at work on this earth—the "world" and the "kingdom of God." Those who belong to the former own not God, those who pertain to the latter, profess subjection to Him. In Old Testament times, the Israelitish theocracy was the particular sphere of God's kingdom on earth, the domain where His authority was manifested in a special way (Judg 8:23, 1Sa 12:12, Hos 13:9-10, etc.). But subjection to Him, even there, was, on the part of the nation as a whole, but partial and brief. The time soon came when JEHOVAH had to say to His servant, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not *reign over* them" (1Sa 8:7). Then it was that the Lord appointed human kings in Israel as *His representatives*, for while the Sinaitic covenant (Exo 19:6) continued in force JEHOVAH remained their King—it was the "*King* which made a marriage for his Son" (Mat 22:2)! Though Saul, David, and his successors bore the regal character, and thus partly *obscured* the divine government, yet it was *not abolished* (see 2Ch 13:8). The throne on which Solomon sat was called, "The throne of the kingdom of the LORD" (1Ch 28:5).

Through Israel's prophets, God announced that there should yet be a more glorious display of His government than had been witnessed by their fathers of old, and promised that His dominion would take a more *spiritual* form in the establishing of the Messianic kingdom. This became the great theme of the later predictions of the Old Testament, though the nature and character of what was to come was necessarily depicted under the figures and forms of those material things with which the people were familiar, and by those objects of Judaism which were most venerated by them. The setting up of the spiritual and immovable kingdom of Christ was the issue and goal of all the prophets declared, see Luke 1:69-70 and cf. Daniel 2:44. "The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: the world [i.e. the "world to come" of Heb 2:5, the *new* "world" brought in by Christ] also is stablished, that it *cannot be moved*" (Psa 93:1, which is parallel with "we receiving a kingdom which *cannot be moved*" (Heb 12:28).

But though it had been clearly revealed through the prophets that the Lord Messiah should be a King and have a universal empire, yet the bulk of Abraham's natural descendants entertained a grossly mistaken conception of the true design of Christ's appearing and the *real nature* of His kingdom, and this mistake produced a most pernicious influence upon their tempers and conduct when the gracious purpose of His advent was fulfilled. The sense which *they* affixed to the Messianic prophecies was one that flattered their pride and fostered their carnality. Being ignorant of their *spiritual needs* and puffed up with a false persuasion of their peculiar interests in JEHOVAH's favour on the ground of their fleshly descent from Abraham (Joh 8:39-41), the lowly life and holy teaching and claims of the Lord Jesus were bitterly opposed by them (Joh 8:48, 59; Luk 19:14).

Though God had made many announcements through Israel's prophets that the Messiah should occupy the regal office, yet clear intimation was given that *He* would be very different from the monarchs of earth (Isa 53:2). Though the Messiah's dominion and reign had been

described under material symbols, yet was it made plain that *His* kingdom would *not* be “of this world.” Through Zechariah it was announced, “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; *lowly*, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zec 9:9). How different was *that* from the imposing splendour assumed by earth’s sovereigns! What a contrast was His ass from their magnificent chariots and state-coaches! How plainly did the poverty and meanness of Christ’s regal appearance intimate that *His* kingdom was *not* of a temporal kind! The Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of angels, disdained such things as are highly esteemed among men.

The fatal mistake made by the Jews respecting *the true nature* of the kingdom of the Messiah lay at the foundation of all the opposition with which they treated Him, and of their own ultimate ruin. How it behooves *us*, then, to prayerfully seek *right* views of Christ’s kingdom, and to resist everything which tends to secularize His holy dominion, lest by corrupting the evangelical economy we dishonour the blessed Redeemer, and be finally punished as enemies of His government. As the main cause of the Jews’ infidelity was their erroneous notion of a *temporal* kingdom of the Messiah, so the principal source of the corruption of Christianity has been the attempt made by Rome and her daughters to turn the spiritual kingdom of Christ into a temporal one by uniting church and state and seeking to extend it by earthly means.

In John’s Gospel (which gives the *spiritual* side of things more than do the first three Gospels, being specially written to and for believers), there is a most significant word after the account of our Lord’s regal entry into Jerusalem on the back of an ass, “These things *understood not* his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him” (Joh 12:16). So prejudiced were the apostles by the erroneous teaching of the Pharisees, that even they did not rightly apprehend *the nature of* Christ’s kingdom till *after* His ascension. They, too, were looking for a *material* kingdom, expecting it to appear in external pomp and glory, and hence they were at a complete loss to apprehend those Scriptures which spoke of Christ’s kingdom as of a mean and lowly appearance. Well did Matthew Henry (1662-1714) say, “The right understanding of the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom, of its powers, glories, and victories, would prevent our misinterpreting and misapplying of the Scriptures that speak of it.”

Alas, how blind men still are as to *what* constitutes the true *glory* of Christ’s kingdom, namely, that it is a spiritual one, advanced by spiritual means, for spiritual persons, and unto spiritual ends. “To subdue hearts, not to conquer kingdoms; to bestow the riches of His grace to poor and needy sinners, not, like Solomon, to heap up gold and silver and precious stones; to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, not to spread ruin and desolation over countless provinces [as did Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon—A.W.P.]; to be surrounded with an army of martyrs, not an army of soldiers; to hold a court where paupers, not princes, are freely welcome” (J. C. Philpot, 1802-1869). Only those favoured with true spiritual discernment will be able to perceive *what* the real honours and glories of the Lamb consist of.

The Mediatorial King must of necessity have a kingdom—even at His birth He was proclaimed as “Christ *the* Lord” (Luk 2:11), and the first inquiry made of Him was “where is he that is born *King* of the Jews?” (Mat 2:2). Christ’s Kingship and kingdom follow from a twofold cause. First, His sovereignty *as God* is essential to His divine nature, being underived, absolute, eternal, and unchanging. Second, His sovereignty *as Mediator* is derived, being given to Him by the Father as the reward of His obedience and sufferings. It has two distinct aspects. First, in its wider and more general application, it embraces all the universe. Second, in its narrower and more specific administration, it is restricted to the church, the election of grace. In addition to

these distinctions, it is important to note Christ never affirmed that the setting up of His kingdom on this earth was in any way dependent upon the attitude of the Jews toward Him. No, the eternal purpose of God was never left contingent upon the conduct of worms of the dust. "When the Jews refused Jesus as the Messiah, He did not say that the founding of the kingdom would be postponed until His second coming, but He did say the kingdom should be taken from them and given to the Gentiles!" (W. Masselink (1897-1973), "Why the Thousand Years?"). "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? *Therefore* say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Mat 21:42-43). Moreover, every passage in the epistles which speak of Christ's kingdom as a *present* reality, refutes the theory that His kingdom has been postponed until His second advent, see Colossians 1:13, Revelation 1:9—Christ's kingdom existed in the days of John and he was *in it*! Christ is *now* "the prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5). He has already been "*crowned* with glory and honour" (Heb 2:9).

In the consequence of the entrance of sin, God has set up a kingdom in antagonism to the kingdom of Satan. It is essentially different from the kingdoms of the world, in its origin, nature, end, method of development, and continuance. It is essentially a kingdom of righteousness and its central principle is the loyalty of heart of its subjects to the King Himself. It is not a democracy, but an absolute monarchy. The special agency for the extension of it is the organized churches of Christ with their regular ministry. By His providential operations, the Lord Jesus is working in every sphere and causing all the historic movements of peoples and nations; civilised and uncivilised, to further its interests and advance its growth, though at the time of such movements this is hidden from carnal sense. Its consummation shall be ushered in by the return of the King, when His servants shall be rewarded and His enemies slain.

"There is but one kingdom or spiritual realm in which Christ reigns forever, and which in the end shall be eternally glorious in the perfect glory of her King. Yet in Scripture there are three distinct names used to set forth the excellencies and the blessedness of that realm in various aspects, namely, the Kingdom, the Church, and the City of God" (Archibald A. Hodge, 1823-1886). Of the three terms, the word "kingdom" is the most flexible and has the widest range in its New Testament usage. It designates, first, a *sphere* of rule, a realm over which the government of Christ extends. It signifies, second, a *reign* or the exercise of royal authority. It denotes, third, the *benefits* or blessings which result from the benevolent exercise of Christ's regal authority. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink"—the reign of Christ does not express itself in that kind of activity, "but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17)—*these* are the characteristics of His realm.

That Christ's kingdom is of an altogether *different* nature and character from the kingdoms of this world is clear from His own teaching, "But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be *among you*: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your *minister*: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be *servant* of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but *to minister*, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mar 10:42-45). And again, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Joh 18:36). Observe He did not say, "My kingdom is not *in* this world," but "*not of it*." It is not a provincial thing, nor a political institution. It is not regulated by territorial or material considerations, nor is it governed by carnal policy. It is not made up of unregenerate subjects, nor is it seeking mundane aggrandizement. It is purely a *spiritual* regime, regulated by *the truth*. This

is seen from the *means* He used at its first establishment, and His appointments for its support and enlargement—not physical force, but gracious overtures.

Some men, who are fond of drawing innumerable distinctions and contrasts under the guise of “rightly dividing the word of truth,” draw a sharp line between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. But this is clearly confuted by, “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 5:5), and again, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15 and cf. 12:10). Its spiritual nature is plainly seen from JEHOVAH’s statement, “They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (1Sa 8:7): His throne and sceptre was an *invisible* one. In like manner when the Jews said of Christ, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14), they intimated that they were unwilling to surrender their hearts to His moral sway. So too when Paul said, “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but *the power*. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1Co 4:19-20), he obviously meant, “the spiritual power thereof felt in your hearts.”

The reign of Christ has a twofold application. First, He sustains the relation of a gracious Sovereign to His redeemed people, ruling them in love, maintaining their interests, supplying their needs, restraining their foes, training them for His service now, and for the glory awaiting them in heaven. Second, He is the moral Governor over the world, for however unconscious they may be of His operations, all men are controlled by Him and their schemings and actions overruled by His own ends. Even earth’s potentates are obliged to obey His secret will, “*By me* kings reign, and princes decree justice” (Pro 8:15). “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1). His government over the world, yea, over the entire universe, is administered by a wisely adapted series of means, appointed and directed by Him.

It is important to recognise this twofold scope of Christ’s reign. To the Father He said, “As thou hast given him power over *all flesh*, that he should give eternal life to *as many as thou hast given him*” (Joh 17:2). The kingdom of Christ, as it is spiritual and inward, is peculiar to the elect, but His kingdom, as it is judicial and outward, is universal. The two things are distinguished again in Psalm 2, “Yet have I set my king upon my *holy hill of Zion*” (Psa 2:6), and “Ask of me, and I shall give thee *the heathen* for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psa 2:8). Christ is not only “King of saints” (Rev 15:3), but He is also “King of nations” (Jer 10:7). He reigns over all mankind, and those who do not submit themselves to Him as Redeemer, shall yet stand before Him as Judge. “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psa 2:9). This speaks of the judiciary acts of His power. Joseph in Egypt typed out the same—the power of all the land was made over to him (Gen 41:43), but his brethren had a special claim upon his affections.

Now this kingdom of Christ, considered in its spiritual and inward aspect, believers are said to “receive,” that is, they participate in its privileges and blessings. As Christ’s kingdom is “not of the world” but “heavenly” (2Ti 4:18), so its subjects are not of the world but heavenly. From the divine side, they enter by means of the Spirit’s quickening, for “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3). From the human side, they enter when they throw down the weapons of their rebellion and take Christ’s yoke upon them, for “except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 18:3). It was when we transferred our allegiance from Satan to Christ that it could be said the Father “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of

his dear Son” (Col 1:13). They who have received the Gospel into an honest and good heart have been admitted into and made participants of the kingdom of Christ.

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28). In seeking to define more closely the “we receiving,” let us remember the threefold meaning of the term “kingdom.” First, it signifies that we are admitted into that *realm* or sphere where Christ is owned as Supreme. Second, it signifies that we have surrendered to the *reign* or sceptre of Christ, for Him to rule over our hearts and lives. Third, it signifies that we now participate in the *blessings* of Christ’s government. This word “receiving” also denotes that we have this kingdom *from Another*, “Walk worthy of God, who hath *called you unto* his kingdom and glory” (1Th 2:12). “Hath not God *chosen* the poor of this world rich in faith, and *heirs* of the kingdom?” (Jam 2:5). “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom *prepared for you* from the foundation of the world” (Mat 25:34)—all bring out this thought.

In affirming that this is a kingdom “which cannot be moved,” the apostle emphasised once more the great superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and also showed wherein the kingdom of Christ differs from all the kingdoms of earth, which are subject to commotions and convulsions. This “kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28) is but another name for “those things which cannot be shaken” that “remain” of verse 27. It is the substance and reality of what was typed out under the Mosaic economy. “We have received a kingdom that shall never be moved, never be removed, nor give way to any new dispensation. The canon of Scripture is now perfected, the Spirit of prophecy is ceased, the mystery of God is finished. He hath put His last hand to it. The Gospel-church may be made more large, more prosperous, more purified from contracted pollution, but it shall never be altered for another dispensation. They who perish under the Gospel, perish without remedy” (Matthew Henry).

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### 56. His Forgiveness

The inward experience of a believer consists very largely of growing discoveries of his own vileness and of God’s goodness, of his own excuseless failures and of God’s infinite forbearance, with a frequent alternation between gloom and joy, confession and thanksgiving. Consequently, the more he reads and meditates upon the Word, the more he sees how exactly suited it is to his case, and how accurately his own checkered history is described therein. The two leading themes of Scripture are *sin and grace*—throughout the Sacred Volume each of these is traced to its original source, each is delineated in its true character, each is followed out in its consequences and ends, each is illustrated and exemplified by numerous personal examples. Strange as it first sounds, yet it is true that, upon these two, *sin and grace*, do turn all the transactions between God and the souls of men.

The force of what has just been said receives clear and striking demonstration in the case of David. Sin in all its hideousness is seen at work within him, plunging him into the mire, but grace

is also discovered in all its loveliness, delivering and cleansing him. The one serves as a dark background from which the other may shine forth the more gloriously. Nowhere do we behold so unmistakably the fearful nature and horrible works of sin than in the man after God's own heart, so signally favoured and so highly honoured, yet failing so ignominiously and sinking so low. Yet nowhere do we behold so vividly the amazing grace of God as in working true repentance in this notorious transgressor, pardoning his iniquity, and restoring him to communion. King Saul was rejected for a far milder offence—ah, *he* was not in the covenant! O the awe-inspiring sovereignty of divine grace.

Not only has the Holy Spirit faithfully recorded the awful details of David's sin, He has also fully described the heart-affecting repentance of the contrite king. In addition thereto, He has shown us how he sought and obtained divine forgiveness. Each of these is recorded for our learning, and we may add, for our comfort. The first shows us the fearful tendency of the flesh which still indwells the believer, with its proneness to produce the vilest fruit. The second makes known to us the lamentable work which we make for ourselves when we indulge our lusts, and the bitter cup we shall then be obliged to drink. The third informs us that grievous though our case be yet it is not hopeless and reveals the course which God requires us to follow. Having already considered the first two at some length, we will now turn to the third.

As it is in the Psalms that the Spirit has recorded the exercises of David's broken heart, so it is therein we learn of how he obtained the divine pardon for the aggravated offences. We will begin by turning to one of the last of the "penitential" Psalms, which we believe was probably penned by David himself. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD" (Psa 130:1). There are various "depths" into which God suffers His people, at times, to fall—"depths" of trial and trouble over financial losses, family bereavements, personal illness. There are also "depths" of sin and guilt, into which they may plunge themselves, with the consequent "depths" of conviction and anguish, of darkness and despair—through the hidings of God's face—and of Satanic opposition and despondency. It is these which are here more particularly in view.

The design of the Holy Spirit in this 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm was to express and represent in the person and conduct of the Psalmist the case of a soul entangled in the meshes of Satan, overwhelmed by the conscious guilt of sin, but relieved by a discovery of the grace of God, with its deportment upon and participation of that grace. We quote the helpful paraphrase of John Owen in its opening verses, "O Lord, through my manifold sins and provocation, I have brought myself into great distresses. Mine iniquities are always before me, and I am ready to be overwhelmed with them, as with a flood of waters, for they have brought me into the depths, wherein I am ready to be swallowed up. But yet, although my distress be great and perplexing, I do not, I dare not, utterly despond and cast away all hopes of relief or recovery. Nor do I seek unto any other remedy, way, or means of relief, but I apply myself to Thee, JEHOVAH, to Thee alone. And in this my application unto Thee, the greatness and urgency of my troubles make my soul urgent, earnest, and pressing in my supplication. Whilst I have no rest, I can give Thee no rest. Oh, therefore, attend and hearken unto the voice of my crying!"

When the soul is in such a case—in "the depths" of distress and despondency—there is no relief for it *but in God*, fully unburdening the heart to Him. The soul cannot rest in such a state and no deliverance is to be obtained from any creature helps. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for *in thee* the fatherless [the grief-stricken and helpless] findeth mercy" (Hos 14:3). In God alone is help to be found. The vain things which deluded Romanists have invented—prayers "to the Virgin," penances, confession to "priests," fastings, masses, pilgrimages, works of

compensation—are all “cisterns which hold no water.” Equally useless are the counsels of the world to sin-distressed souls—to try a change of scenery, diversion from work, music, cheerful society, pleasure, etc. There is no peace but in the God of Peace.

Now in his very lowest state, the Psalmist *sought help* from the Lord, nor was his appeal in vain. And this is what *we* need to lay hold of when in similar circumstances. It is recorded to this very end. Dear Christian reader, however deplorable may be your condition, however dire your need, however desperate your situation, however intolerable the load on your conscience, your case *is not hopeless*. David cried, and was heard. He sought mercy, and obtained it, and the divine promise to you and me is, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). David was not the only one who cried unto God out of “the depths.” Think of the prophet Jonah. Following a course of self-will, deliberately fleeing from God’s commandment, then cast into the sea and swallowed by the whale. Yet of him too we read, “I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou *hearest* my voice” (Jon 2:2).

It was his hope in the plenitude of divine grace that moved David to seek unto the Lord. “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth *wait*, and in his word do I *hope*” (Psa 130:3-5). In the third verse, he owns that he could not stand before the thrice Holy One on the ground of his own righteousness, and that if God were to “mark iniquities,” that is, impute them unto condemnation, then his case was indeed hopeless. In the fourth verse, he humbly reminds God that there *was* forgiveness with Him, that He might be revered and adored—not trifled with and mocked, for divine pardon is not a license for future self-indulgence. In the fifth verse, he hopefully waits for some “token for good” (Psa 86:17), some “answer of peace” (Gen 41:16) from the Lord.

But it is in the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm that we find David most definitely and most earnestly suing for God’s pardon. The same intensity of feeling expressed in the use of so many words for sin is revealed also in his reiterated synonyms for pardon. This petition comes from his lips again and again, not because he thought to be heard for his much speaking, but because of the earnestness of his longing. *Such* repetitions are signs of persistence of faith, while those which last, like the prayers of Baal’s priests “from morning till the time of evening sacrifice” (see 1Ki 18:29), indicate only the suppliant’s doubts. The “vain repetition” (Mat 6:7), against which the Lord warned, is not a matter of repeating the same form of request, but of mechanically multiplying the same—like the Romanist with his “pater noster’s”—and supposing there is virtue and merit in so doing.

David prayed that his sins might be “blotted out” (see Psa 51:1), which petition conceives of them as being recorded against him. He prayed that he might be “washed” (see Psa 51:2) from them, in which they are felt to be foul stains, which require for their removal hard scrubbing and beating—for such is, according to some of the commentators, the force of the Hebrew verb. He prayed that he might be “cleansed” (see Psa 51:7), which was the technical word for the priestly cleansing of the leper, declaring him clear of the taint. There is a touching appropriateness in this last reference, for not only lepers, but those who had become defiled by contact with a dead body, were thus purified (Num. 19)—and on whom did the taint of this corruption cleave as on the murderer of Uriah? The prayer in the original is even more remarkable, for the verb is formed from the word for “sin,” and if our language permitted it, would be rendered “Thou shalt *un-sin* me.”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10). His sin had made manifest his weakness and sensuality, but his remorse and anguish evidenced that above and beyond all other desires was his abiding longing after God. The petitions of this Psalm clearly demonstrate that, despite his weakness and Satan’s victory over him, yet the root of the divine matter was in David. In asking God to *create* in him a clean heart, David was humbly placing himself on a level with the unregenerate. He realised too his own utter inability to quicken or renew himself—God alone can create either a new heart or a new earth. In asking for a right spirit, he was owning that God takes account of the state of our souls as well as the quality of our actions—a “*right spirit*” is a loving, trustful obedient, steadfast one, that none but God can either impart or maintain.

In the midst of his abased confessions and earnest cries for pardon, there comes with wondrous force and beauty the bold request for restoration to full communion, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psa 51:12). How that request evidenced a more than ordinary confidence in the rich mercy of God, which would efface all the consequences of his sin! But note well *the position* occupied by this petition—it *followed* his request for pardon and purity—apart from *those*, “joy” would be nought but vain presumption or insane enthusiasm. “And uphold me with thy free spirit” (Psa 51:12). First, he had prayed, “Take not thy holy spirit from me” (Psa 51:11)—an obvious reference to the awful judgment which fell upon his predecessor, Saul. Here, assured that the previous petition is granted, and conscious of his own weakness and inability to stand, he asks to be supported by that One who alone can impart and maintain holiness.

Ere passing on to consider the gracious answer David received, perhaps this is the best place to consider the question, Was he justified in asking God *for* forgiveness? Or to put it in a form which may better satisfy the critical, Are we warranted in supplicating God for the pardon of our sins? For there are those today who insist that *we* occupy a different and superior relation to God than David did. It will no doubt surprise some of our readers that we raise such a question. One would naturally think it was so evident that we *ought* to pray for forgiveness, that none would question it—that such a prayer is so well founded upon Scripture itself, is so agreeable to our condition as erring believers, and is so honouring to God that we *should* take the place of penitent supplicants, acknowledging our offences and seeking His pardoning mercy, that no further proof is required. But alas, so great is the confusion in Christendom today, and so much error abounds, that we feel obliged to devote one or two paragraphs unto the elucidation of this point.

There is a group, more or less influential, who argue that it is dishonouring to the blood of Christ for any Christian to ask God to pardon his sins, quoting “*Having forgiven you all trespasses*” (Col 2:13). These people confuse the impetration of the atonement with its application, or in less technical terms, what Christ purchased for His people, with the Holy Spirit’s making good the same to them in the court of their conscience. Let it be clearly pointed out that, in asking God for forgiveness, we do *not* pray as though the blood of Christ had never been shed, or as though *our* tears and prayers could make any compensation to divine justice. Nevertheless, renewed sins call for renewed repentance. True, we do not then need another Redeemer, but we *do* need a fresh exercise of divine mercy toward us (Heb 4:16), and a fresh application to our conscience of the cleansing blood (1Jo 1:7, 9).

The saints of old prayed for pardon, “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psa 25:11). The Lord Jesus taught His disciples *to pray* “Forgive us our debts” (Mat 6:12), and that prayer is assuredly for Christians today, for it is addressed to “*our Father!*” In praying for forgiveness, we ask God to be gracious to us for *Christ’s* sake. We ask Him *not* to lay such sins to our charge—“enter not into judgment with thy servant” (Psa 143:2). We ask Him for



a gracious *manifestation* to us of His mercy to our conscience—"Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice" (Psa 51:8). We ask Him for the comforting proofs of His forgiveness, that we may again have "the joy of his salvation."

Now it is in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm that we learn of the answer which "The God of all grace" (1Pe 5:10) granted unto His erring but penitent child. In his introductory remarks thereon, Spurgeon said, "Probably his deep repentance over his great sin was followed by such blissful peace that he was led to pour out his spirit in the soft music of this choice song." The word "Maschil" at its head, signifies "Teaching." "The experience of one believer affords rich instruction to others, it reveals the footsteps of the flock, and so comforts and directs the weak." At the close of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm, David had prayed, "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise" (Psa 51:15). Here the prayer has been heard and this is the beginning of the fulfillment of his vow.

"*Blessed* is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psa 32:1-2). In the former Psalm, David had begun with the plaintive cry for mercy. Here he opens with a burst of praise, celebrating the happiness of the pardoned penitent. There we heard the sobs of a man in the agonies of contrition and abasement. Here we have an account of the blessed issue. There we had the multiplied synonyms for sin and for the forgiveness which was desired. Here is the many-sided preciousness of forgiveness *possessed*, which runs over in various yet equivalent phrases. The one is a psalm of wailing—the other, to use its own words, a "song of deliverance" (Psa 32:7).

The joy of conscious pardon sounds out in the opening, "*Blessed* is the man" (Psa 32:2) and the exuberance of his spirit rings forth in the melodious variations of the one thought of forgiveness in the opening words. How gratefully he draws on the treasures of his recent experience, which he sets forth as the taking away of sin—the removal of an intolerable load from his heart; as the "covering" (Psa 32:1) of sin—the hiding of its hideousness from the all-seeing eye of the blood of Christ; as the "imputing not" (see Psa 32:2) of sin—a debt discharged. How blessed the realisation that his own forgiveness would encourage other penitent souls—"For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee" (Psa 32:6). Finally, how precious the deep assurance which enables the restored one to say, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance" (Psa 32:7)!

Here, then, is hope for the greatest backslider, if he will but humble himself before the God of all grace. True sorrow *for* sin is followed by the pardon *of* sin, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9). "Is it possible that such a backslider from God can be recovered and admitted afterwards to comfortable communion with Him? Doubtless it is, 'for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption' (Psa 130:7), and He will never cast out one humble penitent believer, whatever his former crimes have been, nor suffer Satan to pluck any of His sheep out of His hand. Let then those who are fallen return to the Lord without delay and seek forgiveness through the Redeemer's atoning blood" (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

# UNION AND COMMUNION

## 12. Experimental

*Christ Himself* is mine! *Christ Himself* is thine, dear Christian reader. O that our poor finite hearts could apprehend a little of what that means. Think for a moment of *whom He is*—the Brightness of God’s glory, the express image of His Person—Immanuel, God manifest in flesh. In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. What then cannot He do! All power in heaven and earth is His. Think too of *what He has done* for His people. He became poor that we might become rich, He came to earth that we might go to heaven, He died that we might live. What must be His love for us! Think of His *present relationship* to us—His righteousness is imputed to our own account, His blood is our purity before God, His fullness is ours to draw upon (Joh 1:16), His Spirit indwells us, He is our great High Priest on high, ever living to make intercession for us.

Christ is the “*friend* that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24). He would have us *come to Him continually* (1Pe 2:4) with all our wants, cares, sins, and sorrows. He is able to lift our hearts above them all. None outside Christ is worth a serious thought. O to bask in the sunshine of His conscious presence, to rejoice in His love, to dwell upon the perfect righteousness He has wrought out for us, to be daily occupied with the sufficiency of His atoning blood, to find in Him all that we need for time as well as for eternity. O to *live upon* Christ continually, no matter what you feel or experience in yourself. Let nothing hinder you, my brother, my sister, from keeping up an unbroken communion with your precious Lord and Saviour. This is your right, your privilege, your portion.

*Nothing* should hinder the Christian from experimental communion with Christ. He should turn *everything* he experiences with regard to circumstances, temptations, sins, friends, and enemies, into seeking unto Christ, and finding in *Him* the opposite of all that grieves him in *them*. O to live freely, fully, wholly, on Christ. We shall do so in heaven, why not do so on earth! Only as the heart is fixed steadfastly on Him is peace and joy our conscious portion. It is only by living *out of* our wretched selves that we can enjoy the Person, the work, the fullness of the Lord Jesus. This is the secret of true happiness and only so far as we find our happiness in Him is practical holiness promoted. His eye is ever upon us, why is not ours ever upon Him? He is the Sum of perfection, the “Altogether Lovely” One. Whilst we view Him in His peerless excellency, our souls cannot but be enamoured of Him.

The greatest loss and misery which can befall us this side of eternity is to be looking off from Christ. None other can do us any real good. But the trouble is in our own proud, legal, self-righteous, deceitful hearts. We are not content to be *nothing* in ourselves and for Christ to be *everything*. WE want to be something, spiritual “Somebodies.” We want to experience something within which will feed our pride and give us satisfaction. We want to feel that we are *better* than when we first came to the Saviour as hopelessly lost, utterly undone, woe-begone, despairing sinners. We may not be quite conscious of this subtle working of pride, but that is what it is, nevertheless. All the fitness He requireth is to feel my need of Him, is as true now as when I first fell at His feet owning myself to be a foul leper.

The whole of practical godliness is summed up in the *denial* or repudiation of SELF. We cannot make Christ our all in all till self be loathed and renounced—by which we mean *all* that pertains to self, good, bad, and indifferent. But this is only possible by the exercise of *faith*, for faith consists in going outside of ourselves to Christ for everything—for strength, for wisdom, for holiness, for peace, for joy. The whole of our salvation is in Him. O to be able to truly say, “My soul shall make her boast *in the LORD*” (Psa 34:2) not in my “consecration,” not in my growth in grace, not in my knowledge of spiritual mysteries, not in my “service,” not in my “victory over sin,” not in my spiritual attainments, not in the number of souls I have “won,” but IN THE LORD. O to be done with *religious self*!

Having sought, then, to show again wherein experimental communion with Christ consists, and dwelt upon the means and maintenance thereof, we must now turn to the darker side of our subject and consider the interruption and severance of the same. And in this connection, we cannot do better than devote the remainder of this chapter to a careful examination of our Lord’s words in Revelation 2:4, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” As an assembly is but the aggregate of its members and officers, the rebuke to the Ephesian church applies directly unto individual Christians who are in the condition here described. It is one in which *the heart* is not so deeply affected as it once was with the love of God in Christ, nor is there now such devotion toward nor delight in Him, and in consequence, there is a feebleness of resistance to sin and slackening pursuit of holiness.

It is to be carefully noted that the charge which is here preferred by Christ is not “thou hast *lost* thy first love” (as it is frequently misquoted), but “thou hast *left* thy first love,” which is a more definite act and emphasizes the failure of responsibility. The sad state here depicted signifies a decay in grace, a declension in spirituality, a waning of affection, with the resultant loss of relish for divine things, growing carelessness in the use of means, and formality in the performance of duty. It is a state of heart that is here in view, which may or may not be accompanied by outward backsliding. The fine gold has become dim. Christ no longer holds the first place in the soul’s affections. Some are conscious of this decay in love, while others aware of it draw the erroneous conclusion they have never sincerely loved Christ at all.

Genuine Christians may find their love for Christ languishing. Just as the body will soon be chilled if, on a winter’s day, it leaves the fireside, so the soul’s ardour and fervour will quickly wane if the things of time and sense are allowed to crowd out close communion with Christ. But though grace may decay, it is never utterly destroyed, hence the error of speaking about “losing” our first love. The “seed” of God (1Jo 3:9) remains in His people even when they backslide. It did in David and in Peter. There is a vital principle communicated in regeneration which is indestructible. So, then, though the Christian’s love may suffer a sad abatement, it is never totally extinguished. The acts and fruits of it may be few, its measure may greatly diminish, but the root of it is still present.

That we may the better understand this spiritual disease (and thus be fortified against Satan’s lies) let us point out *what it is not*. First, not every distemper or ailment which the renewed heart perceives and mourns over, is a leaving of our first love. Every act of known sin is not apostasy, nor even a degree of it—as every rise of bodily temperature after a meal is not a fever. There are infirmities and failures in the most spiritual saints. As said an old writer, “Alas for the generation of the just, if every vain thought, idle word, or distempered passion, were a decay of love.” Nothing is so uncertain as to judge ourselves by particular acts, for in every act love does not put forth itself so strongly as at other times. Some obstructions of love there may be for the present, which the soul takes notice of and retracts with sorrow, but still we hold on our course.

Second, every abatement or absence of transports of soul and mountain-top elations, is not a leaving of first love. At conversion, there are strong joys and liftings up of soul upon our first acquaintance with God in Christ, but such an experience is not sustained, nor meant to be so. A healthy person will regularly relish his food, yet he must not expect it to produce such sensations of pleasure as does the first meal to a starving man. At conversion our love shows itself in sensitive expressions, for as yet it is not dispersed and diffused in the several channels of obedience, but when the Christian learns how many ways he is to express his love to God, he may have a true zeal and affection for Him, and become “rooted and grounded” in love, without those ravishments of soul which he experienced when first realising that his sins were all pardoned and that he was accepted in Christ.

Third, nor must the Christian conclude that his love has decayed because he no longer experiences those conscious goings forth of heart to God as he had *in special seasons*, when God granted him a high day in His courts. There are occasions when God feasts the soul so that it is constrained to say, “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and with fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Psa 63:5). There are times when we are favoured with rich experiences of God’s love, to which all the pleasures of the creature are no ways comparable. Such are very great mercies, but they are never intended for us to try our state by. A settled calm, a quiet peace of soul, is an even greater mercy than occasional transports of joy. If we preserve our relish for spiritual things, it is a surer proof of our standing in grace than in any spasmodic or sporadic raptures.

Though Christians ought not to lightly or rashly judge themselves guilty of a decay in their love, yet on the other hand, they should not readily acquit themselves of it, for it is a great evil. The highest degree of love does not answer to the infinite worthiness of Christ, nor to what we owe Him for having rescued us from hell and secured for us an eternity with Himself in heaven. But when a believer falls from that measure of love whereunto he had already attained, it is the more grievous, because to now seek his happiness in things, to settle down with a measure of contentment in his backslidden state, is tantamount to saying that he had formerly loved Christ too much, and had been more earnest and diligent in seeking to please Him than was necessary. Thereby he condemns his former love and disesteems Christ as not worthy to be loved with *all* his heart, mind, and strength. Moreover, as love decays, so do all our other graces, with their fruits and works. Nor will Christ, who is jealous of His peoples’ affection, ignore their growing coldness, but will make them smart for their sin and folly.

It is not without reason then that Christians are exhorted to “keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 1:21). The healthy Christian is still apt to remit something of his delighting himself in the Lord, and his constant duty to honour Him in all things, and at no point does he need to be more upon his guard than in *the preserving of his love*. There is much of self-pleasing in us, love of our own ease and carnal gratification, much lusting after the things of this world, and such a continual opposition of the flesh to the Spirit which ever seeks to draw off from God and heavenly things, that we cannot be sufficiently watchful against everything which has a tendency to quench that spiritual fire which should always be burning in our hearts. Unless we daily heed that exhortation, “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23), we shall quickly lapse into that careless and cold state which is the case with the great majority of professing Christians. How much we need to pray for one another, “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God” (2Th 3:5).

Many who have left their first love *are little sensible* of the sad fact. One reason for this is that spiritual ailments are not laid to heart till they openly appear in their effects and fruits. A believer

may be active in external duties, while his love has become cold. The life of his duties may be decayed, though the duties themselves be not left off—as the Pharisees were scrupulous in tithing mint and cumin, but omitted “the love of God” (Luk 11:42). A correct outward deportment is no proof that the affections are still warm toward Christ. As the glory of God is seen leaving the temple of Ezekiel by degrees—first from the holy place, then to the outer court, then to the city, then resting on one of its encircling hills, so it is when Christians grow cold to God. The Lord no longer has the throne of the heart, then secret prayer is neglected, then family worship declines, then public duties become irksome, and then sin begins to lead us into practices dishonouring to Christ—and all because we did not observe and judge the *first declinings*.

Now *the decay of love* is seen in two things—first, in the diminishings of its degree. That love which we are required to give unto the Lord consists in valuing and esteeming Him above all else. And this is to be manifested by us in a constant care to please Him, a fear to offend Him, a desire to enjoy Him, a steady delighting in Him. When any of these are abated, as to any considerable degree, then our love is chilling or growing cold. Where love is healthy and the favour of God is highly valued, there is a sincere effort made “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10). But when the heart grows more or less indifferent whether our conduct is honouring to God, and we are more set upon gratifying the flesh, then love is decayed. While His fear be truly upon us we will say, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9).

Now there is in the Christian a yearning to enjoy God in Christ and a strong tendency of heart toward Him argues a healthy love. When we cannot regard ourselves as happy apart from Him, and count all else as dung and dross (Phi 3:7-9), when we desire a sense of His love and are deeply affected by a lack thereof, we cry, “My soul followeth hard after thee” (Psa 63:8). The Christian longs for sanctifying grace, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and the perpetual vision of Christ hereafter. But as these desires decrease, so there is a diminishing in the degree of our love. The soul esteems communion with God above all else, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (Psa 4:7); “I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches” (Psa 119:14). But when we mourn not for the absence of the light of God’s countenance shining upon us, when we cease to esteem His Word more than our necessary food, then our love is waning.

Second, the decay of love is evidenced by the intermission of its acts or effects, for when the heart grows cold and listless, it becomes unfruitful. Let us consider some of the principal workings of love *Godward*. These are seen in our thinking and speaking of Him, “I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches” (Psa 63:6). “My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa 104:34). As the wicked are described as those who seldom think upon Him (Psa 10: 4), contrariwise, it is the pleasure of a renewed soul to be much occupied with God’s perfections. But when our hearts and minds swarm with vain imaginations and idle dreamings, and thoughts about God are repelled as unwelcome guests, love has decayed. The less our love for God, the less we shall think upon and speak of Him. Again, where love is vigorous, communion with God in prayer and holy duties is ardently desired and earnestly sought, “Seven times a day do I praise thee” (Psa 119:164). But when communion is neglected, and a sense of God’s presence is not our main object in the use of means, He has to say, “My people have forgotten me days without number” (Jer 2:32).

Consider the effects of love with respect to *sin*. When the sense of our deep obligations to Christ are warm upon the heart, we are constrained to strive against sin, to resist the lustings of the flesh, and turn with loathing from the temptations of Satan. When overtaken by a fault, we

bewail it, as she who loved much, wept much (Luk 7:47). The more vigorous our love for God, the stronger our hatred of all which is opposed to Him. But when the conscience has lost its tenderness, evil imaginations are tolerated without remorse, the heart is no longer diligently kept, nor the tongue bridled—then spiritual decay has set in. When a believer makes light of the things which once deeply distressed him, when he grows careless and vain, is venturesome upon temptations and snares, and ceases to groan over his corruptions, then he has left his first love.

Consider the effects of love with regard to the *duties of obedience*. Where it retains its strength, love works self-denial, so that the impediments of obedience are more easily overcome. Love begrudges not some expense for the one beloved and will serve God whatever it costs (2Sa 24:24). But when every trifle is made an excuse, and that which God requires is deemed too much and exacting, love has waned—an unwilling heart is soon turned out of the way. Again, love makes actions easy and pleasant, and says, “His commandments are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3). Therefore when obedience has become a burden and the doing of God’s will a hard task, the affections must have cooled off. Finally, love puts life into duties, “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11). Without this, His worship is performed perfunctorily, sin is confessed without remorse, and praise is offered without any spiritual melody in our hearts.

In conclusion, let us mention some of *the causes* of love’s decay. The evil times in which we live, is one, “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Mat 24:12). But though it be hard to maintain our spiritual fires when the world is pouring cold water on them, yet the darker the night the more brightly should real Christians shine. Again, multiplied privileges cloy. The Israelites wearied even of heaven’s manna, “A full stomach loatheth a honey comb.” When we were first acquainted with the things of Christ and communion with God, we were greatly enamoured, but now they no longer charm. But this should not be—while healthy, the babe wearies not of the breast. Again, neglect and carelessness. The Christian life is a race, a wrestling, a warfare. It calls for diligence and pains. If we neglect prayer, meditation, watchfulness against the encroachments of the world, love will quickly wane. Again, allowed sins—neglect is like not blowing the fire hid in the ashes, sinning is like pouring on oil. To dally with the pleasures of sin soon brings a deadness upon the heart.

N.B. For much in the latter part of the above, we are indebted to a sermon by the Puritan Thomas Manton (1620-1677).

## THE DIVINE COVENANTS

### 5. The Siniatic

In approaching the study of the Siniatic covenant several things need attending to. First, it is to be viewed in connection with all that had preceded it (particularly the earlier “covenants”), rather than regarded as an isolated transaction—only thus can its details be seen in their proper perspective. Second, it is to be pondered in relation to the eternal purpose of God, and the gradual and progressive unfolding thereof which He gave unto His people. There was something more in

it than what is merely temporal and evanescent. Third, the full light of the later communications from God must not be read back into it, nevertheless, the direct references to the Mosaic dispensation in the New Testament are to be carefully weighed in connection therewith.

Let us start, then, by considering what had preceded the Siniatic covenant. Confining ourselves to that which relates the closest to our present inquiry, let us remind ourselves that under the preceding covenant God had made it known that the promised Messiah and Redeemer should spring from the line of Abraham. Now, clearly, that necessitated several things. The existence of Abraham's descendants as *a separate people* became indispensable, so that Christ's descent could be undeniably traced, and the leading promise of that covenant clearly verified. Moreover, the isolation of Abraham's descendants, Israel, from the heathen, was equally essential for the preservation of the knowledge and worship of God in the earth, until the fullness of time should come, and a higher dispensation succeed. In pursuance of this, to Israel were committed the living oracles, and amongst them the ordinances of divine worship were authoritatively established.

It was not until the large family of Jacob had developed (seventy-five souls, Acts 7:14) that the Abrahamic covenant, in its *natural* aspect, began to bud toward fulfillment. There was then a fair prospect of their progressive increase, yet some considerable time would be required before they could attain their augmentation in numbers which would justify their political organization as a separate nation and put them into a condition to occupy the promised inheritance. In order for that, the providence of God gave them a temporary settlement in Egypt, which was greatly to their advantage. A season in the midst of the most learned nation of antiquity afforded the Israelites an opportunity of obtaining instruction in many important branches of knowledge, of which they took advantage, as their subsequent history shows. While the fact that "every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians" (Gen 46:34) kept the two nations apart religiously, so that to a considerable extent the Hebrews were preserved from idolatry. Later, the cruel bondage they experienced there, made them glad to leave.

In Egypt, the descendants of Abraham had multiplied so extensively that by the time of the great Exodus there were probably at least two million souls. If, then, they were to be organised into a nation, and be brought into proper subjection to God, it was necessary that He should make a full revelation of His will for them, giving them laws and precepts for the regulation of all phases of their corporate and individual lives, and above all, prescribe the nature and requirements of the divine worship. This is what JEHOVAH graciously did at Sinai. There, God gave Israel a full declaration of His claims upon them and what He required of them, providing a "Constitution," which had in view naught but their own good and the glorifying of His great name—the whole being ratified by a solemn covenant. This was a decided advance on all that had gone before and marked another step forward in the unfolding of the divine plan.

But at this point we are faced with a formidable difficulty, namely, the remarkable *diversity* in the representation found in the later Scriptures respecting the tendency and bearing of the law on those who were subject to it. On the one hand, we find a class of passages which represent the law as coming expressly from Israel's Redeemer, conveying a benign aspect and aiming at happy results. Moses extolled the condition of Israel as, on this very account, surpassing that of all other people, "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD *our* God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all *this law*, which I set before you this day?" (Deu 4:7-8). The same sentiment is echoed in various forms in the Psalms. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, *his statutes* and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his

judgments, they have not known them” (Psa 147:19-20). “Great peace have they which *love thy law*: and nothing shall offend them” (Psa 119:165).

But on the other hand, there is another class of passages which appear to point in the very opposite direction. In these the law is represented as a source of trouble and terror—a bondage from which it is true liberty to escape. “The law worketh wrath” (Rom 4:15). “The strength of sin is the law” (1Co 15:56). In 2 Corinthians 3:7, 9, the apostle speaks of the law as “the ministration of *death*, written and engraven in stones,” and as “the ministration of *condemnation*.” Again, he declares, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under *the curse*” (Gal 3:10). “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with *the yoke of bondage*. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law” (Gal 5:1-3).

Now it is very obvious that such diverse and antagonistic representations could not have been given of the law in the *same* respect, or with the same regard to its direct and *primary* aim. We are obliged to believe that *both* these representations are true, being *alike* found in the Volume of Inspiration. Thus it is clear that the Scriptures require *us* to contemplate the law from more than one point of view, and with regard to *different* uses and applications of it. *What* those different viewpoints are, and *what* the varied uses and applications of the law, will (D.V.) be pointed out by us later on. For the present, we confine ourselves unto a consideration of the place which the law holds in the *Mosaic* economy. This is surely the only logical order to follow, for it is the happier class of representation which are found in the Pentateuch, occupying the foreground, while the others come in afterward and must be noticed by us subsequently.

“The *national covenant* with Israel was here (see Exo 19:5) meant—the charter upon which they were incorporated, as a people, under the government of JEHOVAH. It was an engagement of God, to give Israel possession of Canaan, and to protect them in it; to render the land fruitful, and the nation victorious and prosperous; and to perpetuate His oracles and ordinances among them—so long as they did not, as a people, reject His authority, apostatize to idolatry, and tolerate open wickedness. These things constitute a forfeiture of the covenant, as their national rejection of Christ did afterwards. True believers among them were *personally* dealt with according to the covenant of grace, even as true Christians now are, and unbelievers were under the covenant of works, and liable to condemnation by it, as at present. Yet, *the national covenant* was not strictly either the one or the other, but had something in it of the nature of each.

“The national covenant *did not* refer to the final salvation of individuals, nor was it broken by the disobedience, or even idolatry, of any number of them, provided this was not sanctioned or tolerated by public authority. It was indeed *a type* of the covenant made with true believers in Christ Jesus, as were all the transactions with Israel, but like other types, it ‘had not the very image,’ but only ‘a shadow of good things to come’ (Heb 10:1). When therefore, *as a nation*, they had broken this covenant, the Lord declared that He would make ‘a *new* covenant with Israel, putting his law,’ not only in their hands, but ‘in their inward parts’ and ‘writing it,’ not upon tables of stone, ‘but in their hearts; forgiving their iniquity and remembering their sin no more’ (Jer 31:32-34; Heb 8:7-12, 10:16-17). The Israelites were under a dispensation of mercy, and had outward privileges and great advantages in various ways for salvation. Yet, like professing Christians, the most of them rested in these, and looked no further. The outward covenant was made with the nation, entitling them to outward advantages, upon the condition of outward national obedience; and the covenant of grace was ratified *personally* with true believers, and sealed and secured *spiritual* blessings to them, by producing a holy disposition of heart, and



spiritual obedience to the divine law. In case Israel kept the covenant, the Lord promised that they should be to Him ‘a peculiar treasure.’ ‘All the earth’ (Exo 19:5) being the Lord’s, He might have chosen any other people instead of Israel, and this implied that, as His choice of them was gratuitous, so if they rejected His covenant, He would reject them, and communicate their privileges to others, as indeed He hath done, since the introduction of the Christian dispensation” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

The above quotation contains the most lucid, comprehensive, and yet simple analysis of the Siniatic covenant which we have met with in all our reading. It draws a clear line of distinction between God’s dealings with Israel as a nation, and with individuals in it. It shows the correct position of the everlasting covenant of grace and the Adamic covenant of works in relation to the Mosaic dispensation. All were born under the condemnation of the federal head (Adam), and while they continued unregenerate and in unbelief, were under the wrath of God. Whereas God’s elect, upon believing, were treated by Him then, as *individuals*, in precisely the same way as they are now. Mr. Scott brings out clearly the character, the scope, the design, and the limitation of the Siniatic covenant—its character was a supplementary combination of law and mercy. Its scope was national. Its design was to regulate the temporal affairs of Israel under the divine government. Its limitation was determined by Israel’s obedience or disobedience. The *typical* nature of it—the hardest point to elucidate—is also allowed. We advise the interested student to re-read the last four paragraphs.

Much confusion will be avoided and much help obtained if the Siniatic economy be contemplated *separately* under its two leading aspects, namely, as a system of religion and government designed for the immediate use of the Jews during the continuance of that dispensation. And then as a scheme of *preparation* for another and better economy, by which it was to be superseded when its temporal purpose had been fulfilled. The first design and the immediate end of what God revealed through Moses was to instruct and order the life of Israel, now formed into a nation. The second and ultimate intention of God was to prepare the people, by a lengthy course of discipline, for the coming of Christ. The character of the Siniatic covenant was, in itself, neither purely evangelical nor exclusively legal. Divine wisdom devised a wondrous and blessed co-mingling of righteousness and grace, justice and mercy. The requirements of the high and unchanging holiness of God were clearly revealed, while His goodness, kindness, and longsuffering were also as definitely manifested. The moral and ceremonial law, running together side by side, presented and maintained a perfect balance, which only the corruption of fallen human nature failed to reap the full advantage of.

The covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai required outward obedience to the letter of the law. It contained promises of *national* blessing if they, as a people, kept the law, and it also announced national calamities if they were disobedient. This is unmistakably clear from such a passage as the following, “Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: and he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee. And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee” (Deu 7:12-16).

In connection with the above passage, notice, first, the definite reference made to God's "mercy," which proves that He *did not* deal with Israel on the bare ground of exacting and relentless law, as some have erroneously supposed. Second, observe the reference which the Lord here made unto His oath to their fathers, i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—which show that the Siniatic covenant was based upon, and not divorced from, the Abrahamic—Israel's occupation of Canaan being the "letter" fulfillment of it. Third, if, as a nation, Israel rendered unto their God the obedience to which He was entitled as their King and Governor, then He would love and bless them—under the Christian economy there is no promise that He will love and bless any who live in defiance of His claims upon them! Fourth, the specific blessings here enumerated were all of a temporal and material kind. In other passages, God threatened to bring upon them plagues and judgments (Deu 28:15-65) for disobedience. The whole was a compact promising to Israel certain outward and national blessings on the condition of their rendering to God a general outward obedience to His law.

The *tenor* of the covenant made with them was, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exo 19:5-6). "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries" (Exo 23:20-22). Nevertheless, *a provision of mercy was made* where true repentance for failure was evidenced, "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham....These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses" (Lev 26:40-42, 46).

The Siniatic covenant in no way interfered with the divine administration of either the everlasting covenant of grace, (toward the elect) nor the Adamic covenant of works (which all by nature lie under). It being in quite another region. Whether *the individual* Israelites were heirs of blessing under the former, or under the curse of the latter, in no wise hindered or affected Israel's being *as a people* under this national regime, which respected not inward and eternal blessings, but only outward and temporal interests. Nor did God in entering into this arrangement with Israel mock their impotency or tantalise them with vain hopes, any more than He does so *now*, when it still holds good that "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Pro 14:34). Though it be true that Israel miserably failed to keep their national engagements and brought down upon themselves the penalties which God had threatened, nevertheless, the obedience which He required of them *was not* obviously and hopelessly impracticable. Nay, there were bright periods in their history when it *was* fairly rendered and the fruits of it were manifestly enjoyed by them.

# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## Its Rule

We trust it has now been clearly proved to the satisfaction of every *truth-loving* reader that the great object in Christ's coming here was to magnify the law and satisfy its righteous demands. In His fulfilling of the law and by His enduring its penalty, the Lord Jesus laid the foundation for the conforming of His people to it. This is plainly taught us in, "For what the law could not do [namely, justify and sanctify fallen sinners—neither remit the penalty, nor deliver from the power of sin], in that it was weak through the flesh [unable to produce holiness in a fallen creature, as a master musician cannot produce harmony and melody from an instrument that is all out of tune], God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: *that* [in order that] the righteousness of the law [its just requirements] might be *fulfilled in us*" (Rom 8:3-4).

*This* was the design of God sending His Son here. "That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him [be in subjection to Him] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luk 1:74-75). "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Ti 2:14). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should *live unto righteousness*" (1Pe 2:24). These and similar passages are so many different ways of saying that Christ "became obedient unto death" (Phi 2:8) in order that His people might be recovered to obedience unto God, that they might be made personally holy, that they might be conformed to God's law, both in heart and life. Nothing less than this would or could meet the requirements of the divine government, satisfy God's own nature, or glorify the Redeemer by a triumphant issue of His costly work.

Nor should it surprise any to hear that nothing short of heart-conformity to the law could satisfy the thrice Holy One. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh *on the heart*" (1Sa 16:7). We have read the Old Testament Scriptures in vain if we have failed to note what a prominent place this basic and searching truth occupies—anyone who has access to a complete Hebrew-English concordance can see at a glance how many *hundreds of* times the term "heart" is used there. The great God could never be imposed upon or satisfied with mere external performances from His creatures. Alas, alas, that *heart religion* is rapidly disappearing from the earth, to the eternal undoing of all who are strangers to it. God has never required less than the hearts of His creatures, "My son, give me *thine heart*" (Pro 23:26).

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy *soul* diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy *heart* all the days of thy life" (Deu 4:9). "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your *heart*, and be no more stiffnecked" (Deu 10:16 and cf. Jer 9:25-26). "Keep thy *heart* with *all* diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Pro 4:23). "Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and *rend your heart*, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:12-13). The regenerate in Israel

clearly *recognised* the high and holy demands which the law of God made upon them, “Behold, thou desirest truth in the *inward* parts” (Psa 51:6), and therefore did they pray, “Search me, O God, and know my *heart*: try me, and know my *thoughts*: and see if there be any wicked way *in* me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa 139:23-24).

Now as we pointed out in our last, the Lord Jesus affirmed that the full requirements of the law from us are summed up in, “Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with *all thy heart*, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind....Thou shalt *love* thy neighbour as thyself” (Mat 22:37, 39). It was to restore His people to this that Christ lived and died—to recover them *to God*, to bring them back into subjection to *Him* (from which they fell in Adam), to recover them to the Lawgiver. Christ is the Mediator between God and men, and by Christ is the believing sinner brought *to God*. When He sends His ministers to preach the Gospel, it is “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan *unto God*” (Act 26:18). “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us *to himself* by Jesus Christ” (2Co 5:18). To the saints Paul wrote, “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). Of Christ it is written, “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come *unto God* by him” (Heb 7:25), and again, “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us *to God*” (1Pe 3:18)—to the God of the Old Testament, the Lawgiver!

Let us consider *how* Christ recovers His people unto a conformity to the law, *how* He restores them unto the Lawgiver. Since that which the law requires is that we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, it is evident, in the first place, that we must have *a true knowledge of God Himself*. This is both requisite unto and implied in the having our affections set upon Him. If our apprehensions of God be wrong, if they agree not with the Scriptures, then it is obvious that we have but a false image of Him framed by our own fancy. By a true knowledge of God (Joh 17:3) we mean far more than a correct theoretical notion of His perfections—the demons have *that*, yet they have no *love* for Him. Before God can be loved, there must be a spiritual knowledge of Him, a heartfelt realisation of His personal loveliness, moral excellency, ineffable glory.

By nature, none of us possess one particle of genuine love for God. So far from it, we *hated* Him, though we may not have realised the awful fact, and had we done so, would not have acknowledged it. “The carnal mind is *enmity* against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7)—those are equivalents, convertible terms. Where there is enmity toward God, there is insubjection to His law. Contrariwise, where there is love for God, there is submission to His law. The reason why there is no love for God in the unregenerate is because they have no real knowledge of Him. This is just as true of those in Christendom as it is of those in heathendom—to the highly privileged and well-instructed Jews, Christ said, “Ye neither *know* me, nor my Father” (Joh 8:19). A miracle of grace has to take place in order to this, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, *to give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, *that we may* know him that is true” (1Jo 5:20).

This true knowledge of God consists in our spiritually perceiving Him (in our measure) to be just such a One *as He actually is*. We see Him to be not only Love itself, the God of all grace and the Father of mercies, but also Supreme, infinitely exalted above all creatures—Sovereign, doing as He pleases, asking no one’s permission, and giving no account of His actions. Immutable, with whom there is no variableness or shadow in turning. Ineffably holy, being of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity. Inflexibly just, so that He will by no means clear the guilty. Omniscient, so that no secret can be concealed from Him. Omnipotent, so that no creature

can successfully resist Him. The Judge of all, who will banish from His presence into everlasting woe and torment every impenitent rebel. THIS is the character of the true God. Do you *love* HIM, my reader?

Second, *a high esteem for God* is both requisite unto and is implied in loving Him. This high esteem consists of exalted thoughts and a lofty valuation of Him, from the sight and sense we have of His own intrinsic worthiness and excellency. To the unregenerate He says, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psa 50:21), for their concepts of God are mean, low, derogatory. But when the Spirit quickens us and shines upon our understandings, we discern the beauty of the Lord, and admire and adore Him. We join with the celestial hosts in exclaiming, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts.” As we behold, as in a glass, His glory, we see how infinitely exalted He is above all creatures, and cry, “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), yea, we confess “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25).

Now this high estimate of God not only disposes or inclines the heart to acquiesce, but to *exult* in His high prerogatives. From a consciousness of His own infinite excellency, His entire right thereto, and His absolute authority over all, occupying the throne of the universe, He presents Himself as the Most High God, supreme Lord, sovereign Governor of all worlds, and demands that all creatures shall be in a perfect subjection to Him—deeming those who refuse Him this as worthy of eternal damnation. He declares, “I am the LORD, and beside me there is no God: My glory will I not give to another: thus and thus shall ye do, because I am THE LORD.” (See Isa 42:8, 44:6, etc.) As it would be the utmost wickedness for the highest angel in heaven to assume any of this honour to himself, yet it perfectly becomes the Almighty so to do. Yea, so far above all is He, that God is worthy of and entitled to infinitely more honour and homage than all creatures together can possibly pay to Him.

When the eyes of our hearts are open to see something of God’s sovereign majesty, infinite dignity, supernal glory, and we begin to rightly esteem Him, then we perceive how thoroughly right and just it is that such a One *should* be held in the utmost reverence, and esteemed far above all others, and exulted in, “Sing unto the LORD, all the earth” (Psa 96:1). A spiritual sight and sense of the supreme excellency and infinite glory of the Triune JEHOVAH will not only rejoice our hearts to know that He *is* King of kings, the Governor of all worlds, but we are also thankful and glad that *we* live under His government, and are *His* subjects and servants. We shall then perceive the grounds and reasons of His law—how infinitely right and fit it is that we *should* love Him with all our hearts and obey Him in everything. How infinitely unfit and wrong the least sin is and how just the threatened punishment. We shall then also perceive that all the nations of the earth are but as a drop in the bucket before *Him*, and that we ourselves are less than nothing in *His* sight.

Third, *a deep and lasting desire for God’s glory* is both requisite unto and is implied in our loving Him. When we are acquainted with a person who appears very excellent in our eyes and we highly esteem him, then we heartily wish him well and are ready at all times to do whatever we can to promote his welfare. It is thus that love to God will make us feel and act toward *His* honour and interests in this world. When God is spiritually beheld in His infinite excellency, as the sovereign Governor of the whole world and a sense of His infinite worthiness is alive in our hearts, a holy benevolence is enkindled, the spontaneous language of which is, “Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name” (Psa 96:7-8). “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens;

let thy glory be above all the earth” (Psa 57:5). As self-love naturally cause us to seek the promotion of our *own* interests and self-aggrandisement, so a true love to God moves us to put *Him* first and seek His glory.

This holy disposition expresses itself in earnest longings that God would glorify Himself and honour His great name by bringing more of our fellow-creatures into an entire subjection to Himself. The natural longing and language of true spiritual love is, “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (see Luk 11:2). When God is about to bring to pass great and glorious things to the magnifying of Himself, it causes great rejoicing, “Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad....He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth” (Psa 96:11, 13). So too when God permits anything which, as it seems to us, tends to bring reproach and dishonour upon His cause, it occasions acute anguish and distress—as when the Lord threatened to destroy Israel for their stiffneckedness, Moses exclaimed “What will become of *thy* great name? What will the *Egyptians* say!” See Numbers 14:13-19, Joshua 7:9.

From this disinterested affection arises a free and genuine disposition to give ourselves entirely to the Lord forever, to walk in His ways, and keep all His commandments. For if we really desire that *God* may be glorified, *we* shall be disposed to *seek* His glory. A spiritual sight and sense of the infinite greatness, majesty, and excellency of the Lord of lords, makes it appear to us supremely fit that we should be wholly devoted to Him, and that it is utterly wrong for us to live to ourselves and make our own interests our last end. The same desire which makes the godly earnestly long to have God glorify Himself, strongly prompts them to live unto Him. If we love God with all our hearts, we shall serve Him with all our strength. If God be the highest in our esteem, then His honour and glory will be our chief concern. To love God so as to *serve Him*, is what the law requires—to love self so as to *serve it*, is rebellion against the Majesty of Heaven.

Fourth, *delighting ourselves in God* is both requisite unto and is implied in our loving Him. If there be a heartfelt realisation of God’s personal loveliness and ineffable glory, then the whole soul must and will be attracted to Him. A spiritual sight and sense of the perfections of the divine character draw out the heart in fervent adoration. When we “delight in” a fellow-creature, we find pleasure and satisfaction in his company and conversation. We long to see him when absent, rejoice in his presence, and the enjoyment of him makes us happy. So it is when a holy soul beholds God in the grandeur of His being, loves Him above all else, and is devoted to Him entirely—*now* he delights in Him supremely. His delight and complacency is as great as his esteem, arising from the same sense of God’s moral excellency.

From this delight in God, springs longings after a fuller acquaintance and closer communion with Him, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory...because thy lovingkindness is better than life....my soul followeth hard after thee” (Psa. 63:1-3, 8). There is at times a holy rejoicing in God which nothing can dim, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: YET I will *rejoice in the LORD*, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17-18). From this delight in God arises a holy disposition to renounce all others and to live wholly upon Him, finding our satisfaction in Him alone, “O LORD our God, other lords beside thee *have had* dominion over us: but by thee only *will we* make mention of thy name” (Isa 26:13), “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phi 3:8). As

the proud man seeks contentment in creature honours, the worldling in riches, the Pharisee in his round of duties, so the true lover of God finds his contentment in God Himself.

That these four things are a true representation of the nature of that love which is required in the first and great commandment of the law, upon which chiefly hang all the law and the prophets, is manifest, not only from the reason of things, but from this—that *such* a love lays a sure and firm foundation for all holy *obedience*. Only that love to God is of the right kind which effectually influences us to keep His commandments, “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1Jo 2:3-5). But it is evident from the very nature of things that such a love as this *will* effectually influence us so to do. As self-love naturally moves us to set up self and its interests, so *this* love will move us to set up God and His interests. The only difference between the love of saints in heaven and of saints on earth is one of *degree*.

Having shown that the great object in Christ’s coming to earth was to magnify the law (by obeying its precepts and suffering its penalty), and that by so doing He laid a foundation for the recovering of His people to the Lawgiver, it now remains for us to consider more specifically *how* He conforms them to the law. This, as we have just seen, must consist in His bringing them to lay down the weapons of their warfare against God, and by causing them to love God with all their heart. This He accomplishes by *the sending forth of His blessed Spirit to renew them*, for “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5). It is the special and supernatural work of the Spirit in the soul which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate.

In the cover-page articles of the 1934 issues, we showed at length that the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit is an orderly and progressive one, conducting the soul step by step in the due method of the Gospel—quickening, illuminating, convicting, drawing to Christ, and cleansing. That order can be best perceived by us *inversely*, according as is realised in our conscious experience, tracing it backward from effect to cause. (5) Without the Spirit bringing us to Christ, there can be no cleansing from His blood. (4) Without the Spirit working in us an evangelical repentance, there can be no saving faith or coming to Christ. (3) Without divine conviction of sin, there can be no godly sorrow for it. (2) Without the Spirit’s special illumination, there can be no sight or sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, wherein it consists—opposition to God, expressed in self-pleasing. (1) Without His quickening us, we can neither see nor feel our dreadful state before God—spiritual life must be imparted before we are capable of discerning or being affected by divine things.

It is by the Spirit we are brought from death unto life, given spiritual perception to realise our utter lack of conformity to the divine law, enabled to discern its spirituality and just requirements, brought to mourn over our fearful transgressions against it, and to acknowledge the justice of its condemning sentence upon us. It is by the Spirit we receive a new nature which loves God and delights in His law, which brings our hearts into conformity to it. The *extent* of this conformity in the *present* life, and the harassing difficulty presented to the Christian by the realisation that there is still so much in him which is *opposed* to the law, must be left for consideration in our next (D.V.).

# DUTY FAITH

“We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have, of the way in which the apostles, under the immediate direction of our Lord, addressed their hearers in certain special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely different circumstances. And we further believe that an assumption that others have been inspired as the apostles were, has led to the grossest errors among both Romanists and Protestants. Therefore, that for ministers in this present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and on the other to deny the doctrine of special redemption.”

The above are two of the “articles of faith” (quoted by us in full) of an English denomination which still has considerable membership and influence. With almost all their other Articles of Faith we are in hearty accord, as with their marked separation from the world and the simplicity of their worship. Nor have we one particle of sympathy with the delusive errors of creature ability or general redemption, rather do we unhesitatingly brand them both as lies of the devil. In his unregenerate state, fallen and depraved man is so completely the slave of sin and the captive of Satan, that he is altogether unable to deliver himself or take one step toward that deliverance. Yea, his heart is so corrupt and his mind so at enmity against God, that he has *no desire* to be brought out of darkness into His marvelous light. Not until the Holy Spirit performs a miracle of grace upon the soul, does its possessor have any spiritual appetite or aspirations, and that miracle He performs only in those for whom Christ died—God’s elect.

Now if we resort to human *reasoning*, it will logically follow that it is quite useless to exhort the unregenerate to turn unto God or come unto Christ. Yea, to exhort those who are utterly incompetent to respond, will appear to be most inconsistent and the height of absurdity. But my reader, the things of God cannot be encompassed by human *reason*, and the moment we attempt to measure them by the line of *our* “logic,” we open the door for Satan to deceive by his subtleties. He will tell us that if the Lord our God be *one* Lord then He cannot be a *plurality* of Persons, and that if we hold to three Divine Persons we are most “inconsistent” in affirming the unity of God. Satan will tell us that if God be *Love* then He will never banish any of His creatures to everlasting woe, and that if we hold to eternal punishment of the wicked, we are altogether “inconsistent” in believing in the divine benevolence.

What, then are we to do? This—*repudiate all reasoning* upon spiritual things as utterly worthless and believe with the simplicity of a child whatever God’s Word teaches. The apostles held firmly the revealed truth of a glorious and victorious Messiah, and they could not “harmonize” with that fact a humiliated Messiah that would be crucified—the two things appeared to be altogether “inconsistent” and contradictory. But to them Christ said, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken” (Luk 24:25). *That*, my reader, should be a lasting warning to us of the utter inadequacy of human logic and philosophizing upon divine things! We must turn from the vain reasonings of the Unitarian, and while holding fast to the unity of the divine nature, we must *also* believe there are three co-equal Persons in the Godhead. We must turn from the vain reasonings of the Universalist, and while holding fast to the love of



God, we must *also* believe in the eternal punishment of His enemies. And *why*? Because Holy Scripture teaches *both*!

In like manner, we must turn from the vain reasonings (as in the above Articles of Faith) of the hyper-Calvinist, and while holding fast to the total depravity and the spiritual inability of the natural man, we must *also* believe in his moral responsibility and accountability to God. It is the bounden duty of God's servants to tell the unregenerate that the reason why they cannot repent evangelically is because their hearts are so wedded to their lusts; that the reason why they cannot come to Christ is because their sins have fettered and chained them; that the reason why they hate the Light is because they love the darkness. But so far from this excusing them, it only *adds* to their guilt; that so far from rendering them objects of pity it exposes them as doubly deserving of damnation. It is the preacher's business to show *wherein* spiritual inability consists—not in the lack of soul faculties, but in the absence of any love for Him who is infinitely lovely. Far be it from us to *extenuate* the wicked unbelief of the unregenerate!

The compilers of the above Articles of Faith were very largely influenced by a piece written by William Huntington in 1791, "Excommunication: and the duty of all men to believe weighed in the balance." We have space to quote only one paragraph, "When Peter said, 'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out' (Act 3:19), He that is exalted to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins, sent His Spirit and grace with the Word to work repentance and conversion in His own elect. And though *they* spoke the Word, promiscuously to all, yet *He* only spake it to His own. It was sent with the power of the Spirit. It never was sent with the Spirit of faith to any but His own, 'When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed' (Act 13:48). This is the life-giving commandment of the everlasting God, in the mouth of Zion's King. But what effect has it, or what power attends it, from the mouth of Mr. Ryland or the mouth of Mr. Fuller, when they make it the rule of a dead man's duty? Just as much as the adjuration of the sons of Sceva the Jew, when they abused the name of the Lord Jesus in commanding the spirit, who left the man and mastered them. And so these labour for the unconverted till they get into the gall of bitterness themselves....Ye might just as well go to the gates of the grave and tell the sleeping dust it is their duty to come forth as Lazarus did. Mr. Ryland may just as well do the one as the other."

What a confused jumble is that! Confounding the word of power (Heb 1:3) on the lips of Christ, with the word of reconciliation (2Co 5:18-19) in the mouths of His servants. What *the Lord* does, is none of our business. The commission He has given His *servants* is to preach the Gospel to every creature, and they certainly have not fully obeyed until they bid their hearers "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15). *Whom* God quickens, is His own affair—*ours* is to faithfully warn the unsaved, to show wherein their sins consists (enmity against God), to bid them to throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, to call upon them to repent (Act 17:30), to proclaim the One who receives all who come to Him in faith. In allowing that Peter "spoke the word promiscuously *to all*," Mr. Huntington pulled down what he laboured so hard to build up.

To affirm that the ministry of the apostles (recorded in the Acts) furnishes no precedent for God's servants today, is as foolish, as "inconsistent," and unwarrantable, as it would be to say that Acts 6 supplies no present rule for deacons to be governed by! The physical condition of those in the cemetery is vastly different from the moral state of the unregenerate still upon the earth. The former cannot sin, cannot reject Christ, the latter *can* and do. The former cannot read their Bibles or call upon God for mercy, the latter should! It is because the natural man possesses

the same faculties of soul as does the regenerate that he is an *accountable* creature, responsible to use them *for* God instead of *against* Him.

# September

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 36. The Spirit Interceding (Part 1)

If left to himself, the believer would never see (by faith) the all-wise hand of God in his afflictions, still less would his heart ever honestly say concerning them “*Thy will be done*” (Luk 11:2). If left to himself, he would never seek grace to patiently endure the trial, still less would he hope that afterwards, it would produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb 12:11). If left to himself, he would continue to chafe and kick like “a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jer 31:18) and would curse the day of his birth (Job 3:1). If left to himself, he would have no faith that his sufferings were among the “all things” working together for his ultimate good, still less would he “glory in his infirmity that the power of Christ might rest upon him” (See 2Co 12:9). No, dear reader, such holy exercises of heart are not the product of poor fallen human nature—instead, they are nothing less than the immediate, gracious, and lovely fruits of the Holy Spirit—brought forth amid such uncongenial soil. What a marvel!

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26). At no one point is the Christian made more conscious of his “infirmities” than in connection with his prayer-life. The effects of indwelling corruption are such that often prayer becomes an irksome task, rather than the felt delight of a precious privilege. And strive as he may, he cannot always overcome this fearful spirit. Even when he endeavours *to* pray, he is handicapped by wanderings of mind, coldness of heart, the intrusion of carnal cares—while he is painfully conscious of the *unreality* of his petitions and *unfelt* confessions. How cold are the effusions of our hearts in secret devotions, how feeble our supplications, how little solemnity of mind, brokenness of heart. How often the prayer exercises of our souls seem a mass of confusion and contradiction.

“But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). It is particularly the help which the blessed Comforter gives the Christian in his prayer-life, in the counteracting of his “infirmities,” which is now to engage our attention. In Zechariah 12:10, He is emphatically styled, “The Spirit of grace and of *supplications*,” for He is the author of every spiritual desire, every holy aspiration, every outgoing of the heart after God. Prayer has rightly been termed “the breathing of the newborn soul,” yet we must carefully bear in mind that its respiration is wholly determined by the stirrings of the Holy Spirit within us. As the Person,

work, and intercession of Christ are the foundation of all our confidence in approaching the Father, so every spiritual exercise in prayer is the fruit of the Spirit's operations and intercession.

First, when the believer is most oppressed by outward trials and is most depressed by a sense of his inward vileness, when he is at his wit's end and ready to wring his hands in despair, or is most conscious of his spiritual deadness and inability to express the sinfulness of his case, the Spirit stirs him in the depths of his being, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). There has been some difference of opinion as to whether this refers directly to groanings of the Spirit Himself, or indirectly to the spiritual groanings of the Christian, which are prompted and produced by Him. But surely there is no room for uncertainty—the words "*cannot* be uttered" could not apply to a divine person. That which He *produces* in and through the believer, is *ascribed to* the Spirit—the "fruit" of Galatians 5:22, and Galatians 4:6 compared with Romans 8:15!

As it is the Spirit who illumines and gives us to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the depravity of our hearts, so He is the One who causes us to groan over the same. The conscience is pierced, the heart is searched, the soul is made to *feel* something of its fearful state. The conscious realisation of "the plague of our hearts" (See 1Ki 8:38) and its "putrifying sores" (Isa 1:6), produces unutterable anguish. The painful realisation of our remaining enmity against God, the rebellion of our wills, the woeful lack of heart-conformity to His holy law, so casts down the soul that it is temporarily paralysed. Then it is that the Spirit puts forth His quickening operations, and we "groan" so deeply that we cannot express our feelings, articulate our woe, or unburden our hearts. All that we can do is to sigh and sob inwardly. But such tears of the heart are precious in the sight of God (Psa 56:8) because they are produced by His blessed Spirit.

Second, when the soul is so sorely oppressed and deeply distressed, the Spirit reveals to the mind *what* should be prayed for. He it is who pours oil on the troubled waters, quietens in some measure the storm within, spiritualises the mind, and enables us to perceive the nature of our particular need. It is the Spirit who makes us conscious of our *lack* of faith, submissiveness, obedience, courage, or whatever it may be. He it is who gives us to see and feel our spiritual wants, and then to make them known before the throne of grace. The Spirit helps our infirmities by subduing our fears, increasing our faith, strengthening our hope, and drawing out our hearts unto God. He grants us a renewed sense of the greatness of God's mercy, the changelessness of His love, and the infinite merits of Christ's sacrifice before Him on our behalf.

Third, the Spirit reveals to cast-down saints that the *supplies of grace* for their varied needs are all expressed in the *promises* of God. It is those promises which are the measures of prayer and contain the matter of it, for what God has promised, all that He has promised, but nothing else are we to ask for. "There is nothing that we really stand in need of, but God hath promised the supply of it, in such a way and under such limitations as may make it good and useful unto us. And there is nothing that God hath promised but we stand in need of it, or are some way or other concerned in it as members of the mystical body of Christ" (John Owen, 1616-1683). But at this point also the help of the Spirit is imperative, "that we might *know* the things that *are* freely given to us of God" (1Co 2:12).

It is *thus* that the Spirit bears up the distressed minds of Christians—*by* directing their thoughts to those promises most suited to their present case, by impressing a sense of them upon their hearts, by giving them to discern that those precious promises contain in them the fruits of Christ's mediation, by renewing their faith so that they are enabled to lay hold of and plead them before God. Real prayer is in faith. Faith necessarily respects God's promises. Therefore if we understand not the *spiritual import* of the promises, the suitability of them to our varied cases,

and reverently urge the actual fulfillment of them to us, then we have not *prayed* at all. But for *that* sight and sense of the promises, and the appropriation of them, we are entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the Spirit helps the Christian to direct his petitions *unto right ends*. Many prayers remain unanswered because of our failure at this point, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (Jam 4:3). The “ask amiss” in that passage means to ask for something with a wrong end in view, and were we left entirely to ourselves, this would *always* be the case with us. Only three ends are permissible—that God may be glorified, that our spirituality may be promoted, that our brethren may be blessed. Now none but the Spirit can enable us to subordinate all our desires and petitions unto God’s glory. None but the Spirit can bring us to make our *advancement in holiness* our end—the reason why we ask God *to* grant our requests. This He does by putting into our minds a high valuation of conformity to God, a deep longing in the heart that His image may be more manifestly stamped upon us, a strong inclination of will to diligently seek the same by the use of all appointed means.

It is by the Spirit the sin-troubled Christian is helped to apprehend God as his Father, and his heart is emboldened to approach Him as such. It is by the Spirit we are granted a conscious access to the throne of grace. He it is who moves us to plead the infinite merits of Christ. He it is who strengthens us to pray in a holy manner, rather than from carnal motives and sentiments. He it is who imparts any measure of fervour to our hearts so that we “cry” unto God—which respects not the loudness of our voices, but the earnestness of our supplications. He it is who gives us a spirit of importunity, so that we are enabled (at times) to say with Jacob, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen 32:26). And He it is who *prepares the heart* to receive God’s answer, so that what is bestowed is a real blessing to us and not a curse.

In conclusion, let it be pointed out that the motions of the Spirit in the saint are a “help” *to* prayer, but *not* the rule or reason of prayer. There are some who say that they never attempt to pray unless conscious that the Spirit moves them to do so. But this is wrong. The Spirit is given to help us in the performance of duty and not in the neglect of it! God commands us to pray—that is our “rule”—“always to pray” (Luk 18:1), “in every thing by prayer and supplication” (Phi 4:6). For many years past, the editor had made it a practice of beginning his prayers by definitely and trustfully *seeking* the Spirit’s aid, see Luke 11:13. Do not conclude that lack of words and suitable expressions is a proof that the Spirit is withholding His help. Finally, remember that He is Sovereign, “The wind bloweth where it listeth” (Joh 3:8).

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 105. The Final Warning (12:28-29)

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29). A brief analysis of these verses reveal the following weighty points. First, the

inestimable blessing which believers have been made the recipients of—a kingdom which is eternal. Second, the obligation devolving upon them—to serve God with true veneration and pious devotedness. Third, the warning by which this is pointed—because there can be no escape from the divine wrath which overtakes apostates. In his helpful commentary, John Brown (1784-1858) pointed out that “to receive an immovable kingdom is but another mode of expressing what is meant by ‘ye are come to mount Sion’ (Heb 12:22). It is another descriptive figurative mode of expressing that the privileges and honours under the new covenant men obtain by the faith of the truth as it is in Jesus.” In support of this, “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever” (Psa 125:1).

Now there is a twofold “kingdom” which believers have “received”—a kingdom of grace, which is set up in the heart of the saint, where Christ reigns as supreme Sovereign, and a kingdom of glory, prepared for us in heaven, where we shall reign as kings with Christ forever. John Owen insisted that the former only is here intended, Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690) threw the emphasis almost entirely upon the latter. Personally, we believe that *both* are included, and shall expound it accordingly, condensing the main points from each of these writers.

Christians are already possessors of the kingdom of *grace*, for Christ has established His dominion over them. Though He sits personally upon the throne of heaven, yet He rules in believers by His Spirit (who has received commission from Him) and also by His Word energized in them by the Spirit. The *interest* of believers in this kingdom is called their “receiving” it, because they have it by gift or grant from their Father, Luke 12:32. First, they receive its doctrine, truth, and law. They own its reality and submit to its authority, Romans 6:17. Second, they receive it in the light, grace, and spiritual benefits of it. They enjoy its privileges of righteousness, peace, and joy, Romans 14:17. Third, they receive it in its dignities and securities. They are kings and priests unto God (Rev 1:6) and so safe are they as to be “kept by the power of God through faith” (1Pe 1:5). Fourth, they receive it by a supernatural initiation into its spiritual mysteries (1Co 4:20), the glory of which is immediate access to God and heart enjoyment of Him.

The privileges which Christians receive by their believing the Gospel are inconceivably grand. They are in the kingdom, the kingdom of God and Christ, a spiritual and heavenly kingdom, enriched with the inexhaustible treasures of spiritual and celestial blessings. Christians are not to be measured by their outward appearance or worldly circumstances, but rather by the interest they have in that kingdom which it was their Father’s good pleasure to give them. It is therefore their privilege and duty to conduct themselves and behave as those who have received such wondrous privileges and high dignities from God Himself. Far should they be from envying poor millionaires and the godless potentates of this earth. *Our* portion is infinitely superior to the baubles of time and sense. Though the world knows us not, unto God we are “the excellent of the earth” (See Psa 16:3), the crown-jewels of His Son, those whom angels serve or minister unto. O for grace to conduct ourselves as the sons and daughters of the Almighty.

In what sense or senses has the believer “received” the kingdom of *glory*? First, by the immutable word of promise. To the believer, the promise of God is as good security as the actual possession. The poor worldling cannot understand this and he regards the confidence of the Christian as naught but fanaticism. But the simple trusting soul already possesses the kingdom of glory, because God has infallibly assured him “in black and white” of the possession of it. It is the immutable word of promise which gives him the right and title *to* the inheritance, and therefore as it now belongs to him by right and title, he may well call it *his*. When God has promised anything, it is all the same to a believer whether He saith it *is* done or it shall be done.

Second, the believer has “received” the kingdom of glory by grace giving him the *earnest* and *firstfruits* of it. The comforts and graces of the Spirit are referred to again and again under these figures. Appropriately so, for an “earnest” is a part (an installment) of what is agreed upon, and the “firstfruits” are a sample and pledge of the coming harvest. Now grace and glory are one and the same in essence, differing only in degree. Grace is heaven brought down into the soul, glory is the soul conducted to heaven. Grace is glory commenced, glory is grace consummated. Probably one of the meanings of “Light is sown for the righteous” (Psa 97:11) is the “light” of everlasting life and bliss are now in the graces of regenerated souls as in their seed, and they shall certainly bud and blossom forth into perfect fruitage.

Third, the believer has “received” the kingdom of glory by the *realisation of faith*. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Here is a spiritual grace which brings distant things near and gives to the future present reality. Faith brings into the soul what lies altogether outside the reach of our natural senses. It is a supernatural faculty which is quite beyond the ken of natural man. Faith beholds what the eye cannot see, it grasps that made without hands. It supplies demonstration of proof of that which the infidel scoffs at.

Fourth, the believer has “received” the kingdom of glory by *the embraces of hope*. In Scripture, the grace of “hope” is something far better than a vague longing for something we do not yet possess. It is a sure expectation, a definite assurance of what God has promised. Hope supplies a present anticipation of the future realisation. Faith believes, hope enjoys those things which God has prepared for them that love Him. Therefore, hope is called the “anchor of the soul...which entereth into that within the veil” (Heb 6:19), for it lays hold on that glory which is there laid up for us. Hope is *the taster* of our comforts, and excites the same delight and complacency as the fruition itself will impart—the same kind, though not in degree.

The particular property of this kingdom which is here emphasised by the Holy Spirit (in accordance with the thought of the context) is that it “cannot be moved.” Therein does it differ from all the other kingdoms—here, as everywhere, does our blessed Redeemer have the “pre-eminence.” Owen pointed out that, “No dominion ever so dreamed of eternity, as did the Roman Empire, but it hath not only been shaken, but broken to pieces and scattered like chaff before the wind, see Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 27”—so terribly so, that today, the closest students of history are unable to agree as to its actual boundaries. But nothing like that shall ever happen to the Saviour’s dominion. Therefore do we read of “the *everlasting* kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:11). No internal decays can ruin it. No external opposition shall overthrow it. Yet the language of our verse goes even further than that. *God Himself* will not remove it.

“That which is here peculiarly intended is that it is not obnoxious unto such a shaking and removal as the church-state was under the old covenant. That is, God Himself would never make any alteration in it, nor ever introduce another church-state or worship. God hath put the last hand, the hand of His only Son, unto all revelations and institutions. No addition shall be made unto what *He* hath done, nor alteration in it. No other way of calling, sanctifying, ruling, and saving of the church, shall ever be appointed or admitted, for it is here called an immovable kingdom, in opposition unto that church-state of the Jews which God Himself first shook, and then took away—for it was ordained only for a season” (John Owen). Here again we perceive the superiority of Christianity over Judaism—the one was mutable, the other immutable; the one was evanescent, the other eternal; the one was founded by Moses, the other is established by Him who is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

The fact that Christ’s kingdom is an “everlasting” one (2Pe 1:11), that it “cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28), and that “of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luk 1:33), has occasioned difficulty

to some, in the light of “then cometh the end, when he shall have *delivered up* the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1Co 15:24). But the difficulty is at once removed if we bear in mind the distinctions pointed out in our last article. The sovereign dominion, which Christ has over all creatures as a divine Person, is something of which He can never divest Himself. Likewise, that dominion over His own people, which belongs to Him as the incarnate Son, is also eternal. He will remain forever the Head and Husband of the church, nor can He relinquish the mediatorial office. But that dominion to which He was exalted after His resurrection, and which extends over all principalities and powers (Joh 17:2; Mat 28:18), *will be* relinquished when its design is accomplished. This is clearly seen in the remaining words of 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, “When he shall have *put down* all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” Thus, the “kingdom” which Christ delivers up to the Father is that rule of His over His *enemies*.

The immovability and eternality of Christ’s kingdom holds good of it equally whether we consider it in its present grace aspect or its future glory aspect, for we have received “a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28). The kingdom of grace is so divinely fixed in the hearts of believers that all the efforts of sin and all the attacks of Satan are unable to overthrow it, “the foundation of God standeth sure” (2Ti 2:19). “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you *will* perform it” (Phi 1:6). It is absolutely impossible that one of Christ’s sheep should perish. In the day to come He will exclaim, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb 2:13). If this be true of the kingdom of grace, then much more so of the kingdom of glory, when sin shall be no more and Satan shall never again tempt the redeemed.

Now from the glorious nature of this “kingdom,” the apostle proceeds to draw an inference or point a practical conclusion, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably” (Heb 12:28). As John Brown pointed out, to “receive a kingdom” is to be *invested with royalty*, to be “made kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:6). Since, then, royalty is the most exalted form of human life, the most dignified honour known upon earth, how it behooves us to seek from God that aid which shall enable us to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.” Once again we are reminded of the inseparable connection between privilege and duty, and the greater the privilege the stronger the obligation to express our gratitude in a suitable and becoming manner—not merely in emotional ecstasies or fulsome words, but by obedience and worship, that we may “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

The commentators differ considerably as to what is denoted by “let us have grace,” yet it seems to us its meaning is quite simple and obvious. Its signification may be ascertained by three considerations involved in what immediately follows. First, this “grace” is essential unto the serving of God “acceptably” and as we shall see, this “service” has a principal reference to our worshipping of Him. Second, this “grace” is the root from which proceeds “reverence and godly fear,” so that it must point to something more than simple *gratitude* for what God has already done for us—which is how many of the writers limit it. Third, this “grace” is imperative if we are not to be consumed by divine wrath—the “consuming fire” of Hebrews 12:29. We therefore understand this expression to mean, let us *persevere* in the faith and duties of the Gospel, whereby we are alone enabled to offer acceptable worship to God. Let us endeavour after an *increase* of divine aid and succour. Let us strive after a continual *exercise* of the grace He has given us. Let us seek to bring our hearts more and more under its sanctifying power.



We believe the key to our present passage is found in Exodus 19:10-11, 15. Under the old covenant, the way and means in which Israel was to make a solemn approach unto God in worship was specifically defined. They were to reverently prepare themselves by purification from uncleanness and separation from fleshly indulgences. That was an outward adumbration of the *spiritual* purity which God now requires from us both internally and externally. Because God has revealed Himself in Christ in a far more glorious manner to us than He manifested Himself before Israel at Sinai, we ought to earnestly endeavour after a more eminent preparation of heart and sanctification of our whole persons in all our approaches to the Most High. There must be in us the spiritual counterpart of what was shadowed out in them ceremonially. The fear of God was wrought in Israel by the terrors of His law—though our fear be of another kind, it ought to be none the less real and effectual in us to its proper ends.

The great end in view is that “we may serve God acceptably” (Heb 12:28). In this particular epistle, the Greek word used here signifies that service unto God which consists in His *worship*, in prayer and praise, and the observance of all the institutions of divine worship. For example, “in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did *the service* perfect, as pertaining to the conscience” (Heb 9:9). And again, “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which *serve* the tabernacle” (Heb 13:10), while in Hebrews 10:2, the word is actually rendered “worshippers.” Nor is the meaning in the Greek word peculiar to the Hebrews epistle, “She was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but *served* God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luk 2:37); “who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom 1:25). The specific reference, then, is had unto the worship of God according to the Gospel, as superseding the institutions under the old economy. Needless to say, such worship cannot proceed from any who are not walking in Gospel obedience.

Now it is in order to our being fitted for the divine service that we may worship God “*acceptably*,” that the exhortation comes, “Let us have grace.” There is a double reference—that our persons may be acceptable and that our worship may be pleasing in His sight. An intimation is hereby given that there may be a performance of the duties of divine worship when neither the persons who perform them, nor the duties themselves, *are* accepted by Him. So it was with Cain and his sacrifice, as it is with all hypocrites always. The principal things required unto this acceptance are, first, that the persons of the worshippers be accepted in the Beloved. Second, that the actual performance of worship must, in all the duties of it, be in strict accord with what God (and none other) has appointed. Third, that our spiritual graces be in actual exercise, for it is in and by *this*, in the discharge of all our religious duties, that we give glory unto God. How can our worship be pleasing unto Him if we be in a backslidden state.

That which is here specifically singled out as necessary unto our worship being acceptable is that we serve God “with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28). As John Owen wisely pointed out, these “may be learned best from what they are *opposed unto*. For they are prescribed as contrary unto some such defects and faults of divine worship, as from which we ought to be deterred, by the consideration of the holiness and severity of God, as is manifest from the next verse, ‘for our God is a consuming fire.’” The sins from which we ought to be deterred by a consideration of these divine perfections are, first, the want of a due sense of the awe-inspiring majesty of Him with whom we have to do. God provided against this evil under the old economy by the terror wrought in the people at the giving of the law, by the many restrictions interposed against their approaches to Him (none being allowed to enter the holy of holies), and by all the outward ceremonies appointed. And though all these are now removed, yet a deep spiritual sense

of God's holiness and greatness should be retained in the mind of all who draw nigh to Him in worship.

Second, the lack of a due sense of our own vileness, and our infinite distance from God both in nature and state, which is always required to be in us. The Lord will never accept the worship of a Pharisee—while we are puffed up with a sense of our own importance and filled with self-righteousness or self-complacency, He will not accept our approaches unto Him. And nothing is more calculated to hide pride from us and fill our hearts with a sense of our utter insignificance as a sight and realisation of the ineffable purity and high sovereignty of God. When Isaiah beheld Him “high and lifted up,” he exclaimed “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isa 6:5). When Job beheld the Almighty, he cried, “Behold, I am vile” (Job 40:4).

Third, carnal boldness in a formal performance of sacred duties, while neglecting an earnest endeavour to exercise grace in them, which is something which God abhors. O the daring impiety of worldly professors taking upon their polluted lips the ineffable name of God and offering unto Him “the sacrifice of fools” (Ecc 5:1). What a marvel it is that He does not strike dead those blatant and presumptuous souls who vainly attempt to deceive Him with their lip service while their hearts are far from Him. It is to prevent these, and other like evils, that we are here exhorted to worship God “with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28), that is, with a holy abasement of soul, having our minds awed by a sense of the infinite majesty of God, our hearts humbled by a consciousness of our vileness and with our creature nothingness.

No exhortation in this epistle is more needed by our perverse generation than this one. How this imperative requirement “with reverence and godly fear” rebukes the cheap, flippant “worship” (?) of the day. O what unholy lightness and ungodly familiarity now marks the religion of Christendom. Many address the great deity as though they were His equals and conduct themselves with far less decorum than they would show in the presence of an earthly monarch. The omission of bowing the head in silent prayer when we take our place in the congregation, the vulgar glancing around, the unseemingly whispering and chattering, the readiness to smile or laugh at any remarks of the preacher's which may be wrested, are all so many instances of this glaring and growing evil. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psa 89:7).

The Greek word for “reverence” is rendered “shamefacedness” in 1 Timothy 2:9. This, in extraordinary instances, is called a “blushing,” a “being ashamed,” a “confusion of face” (Ezr 9:6; Dan 9:7), yet, the essence of it ought always to accompany us in the whole worship of God. “Godly fear” is a holy awe on the soul when engaged in sacred duties, and this from a consideration of the great danger there is of our sinful miscarriages in the worship of God and of His severity against such heinous offences. God will not be mocked. A serious soul is hereby moved unto watchfulness and diligence not to provoke so great, so holy, so jealous a God, by a neglect of that reverence and godly fear which He requires in His service, and which is due unto Him on account of His glorious perfections. If the seraphim veil their faces before Him (Isa 6:2), how much more should we do so!

“For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). This is the reason given why we must serve God with reverence and fear. The words are taken from Deuteronomy 4:24, where they are used to deter Israel from idolatry, for that is a sin God will not tolerate. The same description of God is here applied by the apostle unto those lacking grace to worship Him with the humility and awe which He demands. If we are graceless in our persons, and devoid of reverence in our worship, God will deal with us accordingly. As a fire consumes combustible matter cast into it, so God will destroy sinners. The title “our God” denotes a *covenant* relationship, yet though Christians are

firmly assured of their interest in the everlasting covenant, God requires them to have holy apprehensions of His majesty and terror, see 2 Corinthians 5:10-11.

The twin graces of love and fear, fear and love, should be *jointly* active in the believer, and it is in preserving a balance between them that his spiritual health largely consists. So it is here. Observe the remarkable conjunction, “our God,” in covenant relationship, our Father, and yet “a consuming fire,” to be trembled at! The first is to prevent despair from considering God’s ineffable purity and inflexible justice. The latter is to check a presumptuous irreverence unto which a one-sided occupation with His grace and love might embolden us. Thus, the principal exhortation, “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably” (Heb 12:28). is urged by two widely different motives, because we have “received a kingdom” and because God is “a consuming fire.” Carnal reason would ask, If we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved, why should we fear? But if God be such “a consuming fire,” how can we ever expect such a kingdom, since we are but as stubble? But the Spirit-taught have no difficulty in perceiving why the apostle joined together these two things.

The Christian’s interest in His favour is no warrant for casting off a solemn fear of God, though He has laid down His enmity against him, He has not cast off His majesty and sovereignty over him. “Even those who stand highest in the love and favour of God, and have the fullest assurance thereof and of their interest in Him as *their* God, ought, notwithstanding, to fear Him as a sin-avenging God and a consuming fire” (Ezekiel Hopkins, 1680). Though God has taken His redeemed into intimate nearness to Himself, yet He requires that they always retain a due apprehension of the majesty of His Person, the holiness of His nature, the severity of His justice, and the ardent jealousy of His worship. If we truly dread falling under the guilt of this awful sin of irreverence, our minds will be influenced unto godly fear. The grace of *fear* is in nowise inconsistent with or an impediment to a spirit of adoption, holy boldness, or godly rejoicing. See Psalm 2:11, Matthew 28:8, Philippians 2:12.

“Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably,” (Heb 12:28), for without it there will be neither “reverence” nor “godly fear.” Without divine aid and unction, we cannot serve God at all, for He accounts not that *worship* which is offered by graceless persons. Without grace in actual operation, we cannot serve God acceptably, for it is in the *exercise* of faith and fear, love and awe, that the very life and soul of spiritual worship consists. O how earnestly do we need to seek an increase of divine “grace” (2Co 9:8; 12:9), and keep it operative in all duties of the worship of God—that in view of His awful wrath, we may have a dread of displeasing Him. In view of His majesty, our hearts may be humbled, and in view of His love, we may seek to honour, please and adore Him. “Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread” (Isa 8:13 and cf. Mat 10:28).

# THE LIFE OF DAVID

## 57. His Chastenings

It may strike some readers as strange that our last article upon David's *forgiveness* should be immediately followed by one upon his *chastenings*. Surely if God had pardoned his transgressions we would not expect to hear of His rod now being laid upon him. But there will be no difficulty if we carefully distinguish between two of the principal offices which God sustains, namely, the character of moral *Ruler* of the world, and that of the *Judge* of His creatures—the one relating to His dealings with us in time, the other pertaining to His passing formal sentence upon our eternal destiny; the one concerning His governmental actions, the other His penal verdict. Unless this distinction be plainly recognised and given a constant place in our thoughts, not only will our minds be closed with confusion, but our peace will be seriously undermined and our hearts brought into bondage. Worst of all, we shall entertain erroneous ideas of God and sadly misinterpret His dealings with us in providence. How we need to pray that our “love may abound yet more and more *in knowledge* and in all judgment; that ye may try things *that differ*” (Phi 1:9-10 margin).

“And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (2Sa 12:13-14). Here are the two things to which we have just called attention and placed moreover in immediate juxtaposition. The first exhibits to us the Lord in His character as *Judge*, declaring that David had been pardoned for his great transgression—such a word (spoken now by the Spirit in power to the conscience of a penitent believer) is *anticipatory* of God's verdict at the Great Assize. The second manifests the Lord in His character of *Ruler*, declaring that His holiness required Him to take governmental notice of David's wickedness, so that demonstration might be made that His laws cannot be broken with impunity. Let us proceed to follow out this double thought a little further.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psa 103:10). Here is a verse which no believer will hesitate to set to his seal that it is true, for he has abundant evidence thereof in his own personal experience, and therefore will he positively affirm, If I received my just deserts, I had been cast into hell long ago. Rightly did Spurgeon say on this passage, “We ought to praise the Lord for what He has *not done*, as well as for what He has wrought for us.” O what cause has each Christian to marvel that his perverseness and sottishness have not utterly exhausted God's patience. Alas that our hearts are so little affected by the infinite forbearance of God. O that His goodness may lead us to repentance.

Have we not abundant reason to conclude, because of our base ingratitude and vile behaviour, that God would withhold from us the communications of His Spirit and the blessings of His providence, cause us to find the means of grace profitless, and allow us to sink into a state of settled backsliding? Is it not a wonder that He does not so deal with us? Truly, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” And why? Because He dealt with Another “after our sins” and exacted from Him full satisfaction to His justice. And payment

God cannot *twice* demand—first at my bleeding Surety’s hand, and then again at mine. God rewarded Christ according to our iniquities, and now He rewards us according to Christ’s merits. Hallelujah! Heaven be praised for such a Gospel. May this old, old truth come with new power and sweetness into our souls.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psa 103:10). This is true *penally* (i.e. God’s dealings with us as Judge) and with respect to the *eternal* consequences of our sins. Yet this does *not* mean that the sins believers commit are ignored by God as the moral Ruler of this world, that He refrains from dealings with us governmentally. The whole of His dealings with His people Israel (who were in covenant relationship with Him) shows otherwise. The New Testament also forbids such a conclusion, see Galatians 6:7, 1 Corinthians 11:29-30! Yet it must be remembered that God exercises His sovereignty in this, as in all things—the extent to which and the manner in which God makes His people smart for their “inventions” is determined by His own mere good pleasure.

Though God forgives His people their sins, yet He frequently gives them plain proof of His holy abhorrence of the same, and causes them to taste something of the bitter fruits which they bring forth. Another Scripture which brings out this dual truth is, “Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions” (Psa 99:8). What could possibly be plainer than this—God pardoning His people yet also manifesting His sore displeasure against their transgressions. A striking case in point—obviously included in Psalm 99:6-8—is recorded in Exodus 32. There we see Israel worshipping the golden calf in the lascivious manner of the heathen. In response to the intercession of Moses, they were forgiven, “The LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (Exo 32:14). Nevertheless, God took vengeance of their inventions, “And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made” (Exo 32:35).

Another example is seen in the case of the unbelief of Moses and Aaron at Meribah—though God pardoned the guilt of their anger as to eternal death, yet He took vengeance by not suffering them to conduct Israel into the promised land, see Numbers 20:12, 24. And so it is still, as many a Christian discovers from sorrowful experience when God takes him to task for his sinful “inventions” and visits upon him His governmental displeasure. Yet this in nowise clashes with the fact that, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psa 103:10). There is *mercy* in our chastenings, and no matter how heavily the rod may smite, we have good cause to say, “And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us *less* than our iniquities deserve” (Ezr 9:13).

Ere passing on, let us anticipate the objection of some tried saints, whose case may be quite extreme. There are some who are smarting so severely beneath the chastening rod of God that to them it certainly seems that He *is* dealing with them “after their sins” (Psa 103:10), and rewarding them “according to their iniquities” (Psa 99:8). The light of His countenance is withheld from them, His providential dealings wear only a dark frown, and it appears very much as though He has “forgotten to be gracious” (Psa 77:9). Ah, dear friend, if your heart is in any measure truly exercised before God, then your case is far from being hopeless, and to you apply those words, “Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth” (Job 11:6). My dear brothers and sisters, even your present *sufferings* are far, very far from being as great as your *sins*.

Now what we have sought to bring out above receives striking exemplification in the case of David. In a very real sense, God did not deal with him after his sins, nor reward him according to his iniquities, yet in another sense, He did. God sent a prophet to faithfully rebuke him, He

wrought conviction and repentance in David, He heard his cry, blotted out his transgressions, as the 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm so blessedly shows. Yet though God pardoned David, as to the guilt of eternal death, saved his soul, and spared his life, yet He “took vengeance on his inventions” (See Psa 99:8). There was a needs-be why sore afflictions came upon him—the divine holiness must be vindicated, His governmental righteousness must be manifested, as solemn warning must be given to wrongdoers, and David himself must learn that “the way of the transgressor is hard.” O that writer and reader may lay this to heart and profit therefrom.

Through Nathan God said to David, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun” (2Sa 12:9-11). What a solemn exhibition of God’s governmental righteousness. David must reap as he had sown. He had caused Uriah to be slain by the sword, and now God tells him, “the sword shall never depart from thine house.” He had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and now he hears that his own wives shall be defiled. How true are those words, “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Mat 7:2)!

God hath declared that “to the froward he will show himself froward” (See Psa 18:26), and frequently does He punish sin *in its own kind*. Upon the burning lusts of the Sodomites, He rained down fire and brimstone from heaven (Gen 19:24). Jacob deceived his father by means of the skin of a kid (Gen 27:16), and he in turn was thus deceived by his sons, who brought him Joseph’s coat dipped in the blood of a kid (Gen 37:31), saying he had been devoured by a wild beast. Because Pharaoh had cruelly ordered that the male infants of the Hebrews should be drowned (Exo 1:22), the Egyptian king and all his hosts were swallowed up by the Red Sea (Exo 14:28). Nadab and Abihu sinned grievously by offering “strange fire” unto the Lord, and accordingly they were consumed by fire from heaven (Lev 10:1-2). Adonibezek cut off the thumbs and toes of the kings he took in battle, and in like manner the Lord rewarded him (Jdg 1:6-7). Agag’s sword made women childless, and so his own mother was made childless by his being torn to pieces before the Lord (1Sa 15:33).

What proofs are these that “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro 15:3). What evidences are these of the inflexible justice of God—none need fear but what the Judge of all the earth will “do right.” What solemn intimations are they that in the day to come each one shall be judged “according to his works.” What warnings are these that God is not to be mocked. But let it not be forgotten that if it is written, “He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption,” it is also added (though not nearly so frequently quoted) that, “He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:8). The same principle of God’s granting an exact quid pro quo applies to the service of His ministers, “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2Co 9:6)—the harvest shall not only be answerable to the seed and the reward to the work, but it will be greater or less according to the quantity and quality of the work.

Nor does the last-quoted passage mean that God is going to reward His ministers according to the fruit and success of their work, but rather according to the labour itself, be it little or much, better or worse, “Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1Co 3:8). God in His sovereignty may set His servant over a blind and perverse people (as He did Ezekiel),

who so far from profiting from his ministry, add iniquity to their iniquity—nevertheless his work is with God (Isa 49:4). So too with the rank and file of Christians—the more bountifully they sow the seeds of good works, the more shall they reap, and the more sparingly they sow, the less will be the harvest. “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord” (Eph 6:8). What an incentive and stimulus should that be unto all of us, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we *shall* reap, if we faint not” (Gal 6:9).

But to return to David. “And Nathan departed unto his house” (2Sa 12:15). The prophet had faithfully delivered his message and now he withdrew from the court. It is very striking and blessed to see how God *honoured* His servant. He moved David to name one of his sons “Nathan” (1Ch 3:5), and it was from *him* that Christ, according to the flesh, descended (Luk 3:31). “And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick” (2Sa 12:15). The prophet’s words now began to receive their tragic fulfillment. Behold here the sovereignty of God—the parents lived, the child must die. See here too, God’s respect for His law. David had broken it, but He executes it, by visiting the sins of the father upon the son.

“David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth” (2Sa 12:16). It is touching to see this seasoned warrior so affected by the suffering of his little one—proof of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, for the penitent are pitiful. It is true that the prophet had said, “The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (2Sa 12:14), yet David seems to have cherished the hope that his threat was but a *conditional* one, as in the case of Hezekiah. His words “While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?” (2Sa 12:22) strongly appear to bear this out. In his fasting and lying all night upon the ground, David humbled himself before the Lord, and evidenced both the sincerity of his repentance and the earnestness of his supplication. What is recorded in verse 17, illustrates the fact that the natural man is quite incapable of understanding the motives which regulate the conduct of believers.

“And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died” (2Sa 12:18). It was on the eighth day that the male children of the Israelites were to be circumcised (Gen 17:12, etc.), thus in the death of his son before it could receive the sign of the covenant a further proof was given David of God’s governmental displeasure! Though it was a mercy to all concerned that the infant was removed from this world, yet inasmuch as its death had been publicly announced as a rebuke for their sin (2Sa 12:14), its decease was a manifest chastening from God upon David and Bathsheba.

“Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat” (2Sa 12:20). This is very beautiful, reminding us of Job’s bowing beneath God’s chastening rod and worshipping Him when he received tidings of the death of his children. How different was this from the disconsolate grief and rebellion against God which is so often displayed by worldlings when *their* loved ones are snatched away from them. Weeping should never hinder worshipping. “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray” (Jam 5:13). How the terms of this verse rebuke the personal untidiness of some who attend public worship!

“And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him” (2Sa 12:24). Having meekly bowed before God’s rod, humbled himself beneath His mighty hand, and publicly owned Him in worship, David now received a token of God’s favour, “Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days” (1Ch 22:9).

The birth and name given to Solomon was an evidence that God was *reconciled* to David, as it was also an earnest of the tranquility which would obtain in Israel during his reign. Solomon was also named “Jedidiah” which signifies “beloved of the Lord” (2Sa 12:25)—signal demonstration of the *sovereignty* of divine grace!

The chapter closes (2Sa 12:26-31) with a brief account of Israel’s capture of Rabbah, the royal city of the Ammonites. Further proof was this of God’s grace unto David. He prospered his arms notwithstanding his aggravated sins. The additional chastisements which came upon him under the governmental dealings with God will be considered by us (D.V.) in the articles which follow.

## UNION AND COMMUNION

### 13. Experimental

“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Pro 14:14). What a sad case is that of the Christian who has lost touch with the Lord, whose sins and iniquities have hidden His face from him (Isa 59:2)! Formerly, he walked in happy fellowship with Christ, but the light of His countenance no longer shines upon him. Once he was in possession of that peace which passeth all understanding, but now the joy of salvation is no more his portion. One who has “left his first love” has, of course, grieved the Holy Spirit, and hence He *withholds* His comforts from his heart, and consequently he is full of darkness, doubts, and fears as to his state, and can find no rest unto his soul. He has given place to the devil, only to find him as merciless as the Egyptian taskmasters. He has returned for a season to the pleasures of sin, and now he lies by the wayside, robbed, stripped, wounded, half-dead.

There is no sorrier object in this world than a backslidden believer. His communion with Christ is broken, he has lost his relish for the Word, the spirit of prayer in him is quenched. On the other hand, he has been spoilt for the world and cannot find that measure of satisfaction in carnal things which the ungodly do. Is, then, his case hopeless? Yes, so far as self-recovery is concerned, for a strayed sheep never finds its own way back again to the fold. The work of restoring backsliders from their spiritual decays is an act of sovereign grace, wrought in them by Him who is of infinite patience and abundant in mercy. When God designs to heal the backsliding of His people, He does so by giving them an effectual call to repentance, and by moving them to use, and by blessing unto them those means which He has appointed for their recovery.

To the backslider himself, his case appears, at first, desperate, for it is (alas) very much easier to depart from the Lord than it is to return to Him. Having turned his back upon God, it is difficult for him to now seek His face. Why so? Because his heart is so heavily oppressed, his conscience under such a load of guilt, his whole soul filled with shame, while a spiritual deadness seems to paralyze all his faculties. Moreover, severed as he is from communion with the Lord, unbelief is dominant within him, so that he is unable to apprehend the plentitude of divine grace and the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning blood. In such a state, he is fully prepared to listen to Satan’s lies, telling him that his case is hopeless, that it is quite useless to seek God’s forgiveness. Memory,



too, will remind him that he has so often in the past confessed his miserable failure to God, that to do so now would be worse than a mockery.

But presently, under the renewing operations of the blessed Spirit, a fresh hope is born within him, and he is made to feel that all is not irretrievably lost. Yet at this stage, it is of deep importance that no means of recovery from spiritual decays be sought unto, save those which, for the matter and manner of them, are of *divine* institution. Alas that so many are misled here. As is often the case with newly awakened souls—who betake themselves to physicians of no value and unto cisterns which hold no water—so not a few convicted backsliders enter upon a course which affords no remedy. It is at this point that Romanism so often gains power over souls who are seeking a relief from a conscience which gives them no respite, for unless the transgressor be under the actual guidance of *evangelical* light, he is easily imposed upon—his distress is so great, his burden so intolerable, that he is ready to listen to almost any comforter, be he a true or a false one.

There are numerous priests and preachers at hand who will counsel those whose conscience is causing them sore anguish to enter upon a course of duties which *God* has nowhere commanded—the confessional, bodily lacerations, pilgrimages, parting with large sums of money for charitable or religious enterprises, are advocated as sure sources of relief. While Protestant quacks will tell the suffering soul that he must quit this habit and give up that form of recreation, etc., etc., if he would obtain the ear of God. This same principle is illustrated in, “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn *for my transgression*, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Mic 6:6-7)—by such means they hoped to make reparation for their sins and be restored to their former condition. Let great care be taken, then, that the means used for recovery from backsliding be those prescribed *in the Scriptures*.

At no point does the amazing grace of our God appear more conspicuous than is His attitude toward His wayward and wandering children. Their base ingratitude against the inestimable favours they have already received, their wicked unfaithfulness in allowing the worthless things of time and sense to draw their hearts away from the Lord, and the grievous dishonour brought upon His name by their excuseless conduct, instead of causing Him to cast them off in utter disgust, only serve to bring out the changelessness, faithfulness, and abundancy of *His* love. O the superabounding mercies and lovingkindnesses of our blessed Lord unto such worthless wretches as we are. Because God knew how prone His people are unto grievous declensions and spiritual decays, He has graciously recorded in His Word “exceeding great and precious promises” (2Pe 1:4) which are exactly suited to their case, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer 3:22), “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hos 14:4).

Such promises are made good to us by faith’s appropriation and by our use of the duly appointed means. But right here a further word of counsel and warning is needed if the exercised backslider is not to miss the goal of his desires—beware of attempting to use those means, and discharge those duties which God requires, in *your own strength*. When backsliders perceive clearly that certain duties are appointed them by God, and they are convinced that they must perform them, they are very apt to act as though such duties were to be executed in their own might. Convicted of carelessness, realising their sinful neglect of prayer, the reading of the Word, the mortifying of their members, and other spiritual exercises, and knowing it was their failure to

use these means of grace which brought them into their present woeful state, they are now inclined to rush ahead and perform with a will those outward works wherein the duties consist.

Alas, what ignorant, erring creatures we are—how intractable and self-sufficient. When we should be using the strength God has given us, we pretend to have “no prompting of the Spirit,” and so rest on our oars. When we should be waiting on the Lord for fresh supplies of grace, we feverishly attempt to act in the energy of the flesh. How slow we are to really believe that humbling word of Christ’s, “without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). Ah, that does not accord with the pride of our hearts, does it, and hence God suffers us to experience many painful failures ere we are willing to receive its truth. Let us, then, seek to be much upon our guard against rushing ahead to perform the duties required unto our restoration, and *leaving the Lord out of* the whole of our efforts. Only God can “heal” us (Exo 15:26), only He can “restore” the soul (Psa 23:3). Faith, then, must humbly engage the assistance of Christ and His grace both unto and in those duties, otherwise no matter how earnestly we perform them or how zealously they be multiplied, they will not be effectual unto our recovery.

But it is time for us now to consider those duties which our blessed Lord has appointed for the recovery of His people. “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love: remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev 2:4-5). Having in the previous article dwelt upon what is signified by “leaving our first love,” we will now turn to the remedy here specified. This, it will be seen, is threefold, addressing the principal centers of our inner being—“remember” is a word for the understanding and conscience; “repent” is spoken to the affections; while “do the first works” is a call to the will. The whole man is guilty when we backslide, and the whole man (all the faculties of the soul) must be operative in returning to our Lord and Saviour. The way of recovery is here clearly defined, and though it involves that which is distasteful to the flesh, namely, the humbling of our proud hearts, yet there will be no restoration to real experimental communion with Christ, and no consequent peace, assurance, and joy, until he submits thereto.

First, “*Remember from whence thou art fallen*” (Rev 2:5)—this is a call to the backslider to seriously consider his condition, particularly to contrast his present sad case with his former happy one. Recollect what a difference there is between thee and thyself. Thyself living and acting in the consciousness and power of the love of Christ, and thyself now in bondage to the power of some worldly or fleshly lust. Call to remembrance that while communion with Christ was maintained that the “joy of the LORD” was thy “strength” (Neh 8:10), but now that communion is broken, you have neither joy nor strength. Consider what an advantage thou once hadst against the temptations of the devil and the solicitations of the flesh and the world when your love for Christ was fresh and vigorous, and how much the case is altered with thee now—how feeble thy present resistance of any sin. Surely you have cause to bemoan, “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; and when his candle shined upon my head” (Job 29:2-3).

“Remember from whence thou art fallen” (Rev 2:5). Recall the “mount of myrrh” and the “hill of frankincense” (Song 4:6) which once were trodden in fellowship with the eternal Lover of your soul. “In our returning we should have such thoughts as these—I was wont to spend some time every day with God. It was a delight to me to think of Him, or speak of Him, or to Him—now I have no heart to pray or meditate. It was the joy of my soul to wait upon His ordinances. The return of the Sabbath was welcome unto me, but now what a weariness is it! Time was when my heart did rise up in arms against sin, when a vain thought was a grief to my soul; why is it so

different with me now? Is sin grown less odious, or God less lovely?” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

Second, “*and repent.*” What is evangelical repentance? Its leading elements are conviction, contrition, and confession. Where real repentance is present in the heart there is a true sense of sin, a sincere sorrow for sin, a hearty loathing of sin, and a holy shame for sin. It is called by many names in Scripture, such as, the afflicting of our souls (Lev 16:29), humbling ourselves (2Ch 7:14), a broken heart (Psa 51:17), a contrite spirit (Isa 66:2), a smiting upon the thigh (Jer 31:19), mourning (Zec 12:10), weeping bitterly (Mat 26:75). “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom 2:4), which means, first, it is *by* His goodness that repentance is wrought in us by the gracious operations of His Spirit, and second, that it is *a sense of* His goodness which melts and breaks our hard and stubborn hearts.

The convicted conscience is made to feel how vilely I have requited God for His great goodness to me, and thus sin is embittered to my soul. Thereby I am brought to take sides with God against myself and condemn my wicked wanderings from Him. So far from excusing my iniquities, I now accuse them. The heart is deeply affected by the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and grieves for having offended my loving Lord, for disregarding and opposing my blessed Benefactor, for having so evilly repaid Him, for having so little concern for His pleasure and honour. The soul will now sincerely confess its transgressions, not in a cold and formal way, but out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will now speak. “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee” (Ezr 9:6) will be my language.

True Christian repentance is the heart turning from sin and returning to God. In the hour of penitence, sin is hated and self is loathed. The deeper the repentance, the fuller will be the confession. There will be a detailed acknowledgment of our wicked conduct, an emphasising of the enormity of the evil course we have followed. As examples of this, let the reader turn to Daniel 9:5-6 and Acts 26:9-11, and observe *how many aggravations* of the sinning is there mentioned! Further, genuine repentance is always attended with sincere desires and earnest endeavours after reformation of life, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth *and forsaketh them* shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13)—as sin is a forsaking of God, so repentance is a forsaking of sin. The language of a contrite soul is, “What have I to do any more with idols?” (Hos 14:8).

Deeply humbling though the work of repentance be unto us, it is *glorifying to God*. “And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him” (Jos 7:19). “And if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you” (Mal 2:2). “And they repented not to give him glory” (Rev 16:9). It must be so, for repentance is taking sides with God against sin. O how each of us needs to pray for a deeper repentance. Painful though the work of repentance be, yet it issues in pleasant fruits. As one of the Puritans said, “Groans unutterable make way for joys unspeakable.” If we sorrowed more for sin, we would rejoice more in the Lord. But let us add that, in cases where true penitents are so bound up within that they cannot pour out their souls in heart-melting confessions before the Lord, yet they can mourn over the hardness of their hearts, and grieve because their sorrow is so shallow.

“Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word?”

*What peaceful hours I then enjoy'd;  
How sweet their memory still;  
But now I find an aching void  
The world can never fill.*

*Return, O holy Dove! return,  
Sweet Messenger of rest!  
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,  
And drove Thee from my breast.  
The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be;  
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,  
And worship only Thee.”—(William Cowper, 1731-1800)).*

Third, “And do the first works” (Rev 2:5). Negatively this means, turn your back upon the world, re-enter the lists against Satan, resume the task of denying self, and mortifying your members which are upon the earth. Positively it means, return unto the One from whom you so grievously departed, surrender yourself afresh to His lordship, render to Him that whole-hearted obedience which He requires. Make the pleasing of Christ your chief concern, walking with Him your daily business, communing with Him your supreme joy. Re-engage in the fight of faith, take unto you the armour which God has appointed, and give no quarter to your foes. Be diligent in using the means of grace—prayer, the reading of the Word, spiritual meditation thereon, and communing with God’s people. Express your gratitude for the Lord’s pardoning mercy and restoring grace by now being out and out for Him. “He restoreth my soul” is at once followed by “He leadeth me *in the paths of righteousness* for his name’s sake” (Psa 23:3)!

“And do the first works” (Rev 2:5), then, signifies return to God in Christ. As our departure from the Lord was the cause of all our woes, so our case admits of no remedy till we repent and turn again unto Him. It is blessedly true that Christ purchased grace and pardon for His people, yet these are communicated to them in a way which is becoming to His holiness and wisdom. It would not be for His honour that we should be pardoned and restored without a penitent confession of past sins and an honest resolution of future obedience. Our case is not compassionable without it—who will pity those in misery that are unwilling to come out of it! The sincerity of our repentance is to be evidenced by a hearty determination for the future to live in obedience. In other words, it is not enough that we “cease to do evil,” we are also required to “learn to do well” (Isa 1:16-17).

“And do the first works” (Rev 2:5). It is not sufficient to bemoan the follies of the past—time present must be redeemed. As there are some sensible of their backslidings who do not actually repent thereof, so there are others who bemoan their sad case yet languish in idle complaints for their lack of love and make no efforts to recover the same by serious endeavours. Those who are guilty of spiritual decays must not rest until they regain their former mindfulness of God and devotedness to Christ. Spare no efforts in so yielding up thyself to the Lord that *His* interests may again prevail in your heart above all sinful solicitations and vile inclinations. Engage your heart afresh to Christ, make no reservation. Let your work be sin-aborring and sin-resisting each day.

“And do the first works” (Rev 2:5). When a Nazarite had broken his vow, he had to start all over again (Num 6:12). When we have forsaken the narrow way of obedience to and communion with Christ, God requires us to return to the point from which we wandered. Thus it was with the father of all who believe. Abraham’s descent into Egypt was a divergence from the path of faith and duty. And what was the consequence? This, the time he spent there was lost, and he had to return to the point from whence he swerved and begin over again, “And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been *at the beginning*, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there *at the first*” (Gen 13:3-4).

Observe well *the order* which God has specified for the recovery of those who had left their first love. Perhaps we may grasp the force of it better if we transpose it. “Do the first works” (Rev 2:5). “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col 2:6). Ah, but do not overlook the fact that “repent” must precede this renewed activity in the Lord’s service—*the past must be put right* before we can again enjoy real communion with Him! God will not gloss over our sins, nor will He suffer *us* to do so. They are to be judged, confessed, forsaken, before new obedience is acceptable to Him. And “repent” is, in turn, preceded by “remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.” The more we heed *this* injunction the quicker will our conscience be convicted and the deeper will be our contritions. O that it may please the Lord to bless this article to the recovery of some backsliders.

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

### 3. Jacob Deceiving His Father

How many providential circumstances are linked into one chain to confer the blessing of his father on Jacob! Among these we may recognise the blindness of Isaac. Had he not been afflicted with great dimness of sight, the scheme by which Jacob succeeded could never have taken place. We have no account of any such blindness in Abraham, when he had arrived at a much greater age. Why did not God prevent Jacob’s sin by continuing strength of eye-sight to his father? Why did a Sovereign Providence make way for this scheme, by inflicting on Isaac? God did not approve this scheme, and yet in His sovereignty it fulfilled His purpose. Who can comprehend this mystery? Who can fathom the depth of this wisdom? Silence, ye prating philosophers! You cannot by searching find out God. *Your* line cannot measure *His* conduct.

Another providential circumstance in this matter is that Isaac, though eminently a man of God, and by divine revelation, sufficiently informed of God’s preference of Jacob, yet attended not to this intimation so as to ask consent of the Lord before he acted. He either remained ignorant of what he might have known, or from partiality neglected to attend to it. The ignorance of the Lord’s people often fulfills the purposes of His will, as well as their knowledge. Yet, in all such cases, it is to *their* guilt and injury. Isaac did not add to his own happiness, or to that of his family, by his inattention to the revelation of the divine will with respect to his two sons. It would have been much better for all parties that he had asked counsel at the mouth of the Lord, before he had

attempted to transfer the blessing. His intention did not succeed, and he added to the guilt of Esau, by laying before him the occasion of intentional murder.

The coupling of the eating of the savoury meat with the conveying of the blessing, whether it was whim or wisdom, is another providential circumstance that was necessary as a foundation for the scheme of Jacob's mother. Had Isaac given the blessing without this previous step, the artifice of Rebekah could have had no place.

Another link in this chain is that Rebekah overheard Isaac when he addressed Esau about bringing him the savoury meat from the field. Had she not heard this, her plot could not have been formed. What placed her within hearing at that particular time? Why did not Isaac use precaution and whisper the matter to his son? The thing must be heard by Rebekah. The accident that placed her within hearing was a link in providence.

As was observed before, in order to transfer the blessing to Jacob, it was necessary that he should be the favourite son of his mother. This is another link in the chain. To the formation of this scheme, by which the blessing was transferred to Jacob, it was necessary that Rebekah and her son, both of whom were true servants of God, should be ignorant or regardless of their duty in an astonishing degree. Every feature of the plot is vile and wicked. Yet this mother, this servant of the Lord, invents that hypocritical device, which her son, so eminent a man of God, was base enough to execute. How is it that they combined to practice so shameful a deception? This conduct was not influenced by the faith of Abraham, but was the result of unbelief. Not relying on the power and wisdom of God to give effect to His own purposes, they foolishly, as well as impiously, took the accomplishment of the divine counsels into their own hands, and brought about the divine appointment by sinful means. Here we see that God can fulfill His will through the means even of the sins of His own people. Here is sovereignty. Here is the depth of divine wisdom. The result of the conduct of Jacob and his mother was a fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, yet their conduct is not the less sinful. A child may see the justness of this observation, but can an angel of God fathom this abyss? Be silent, proud Philosophy, and thou, vain Theology, who lovest to lisp in the phraseology of science. Can ye show the harmony of these two apparently opposite truths? God ordains what men's sin effects—yet man is guilty and God is just!

The sovereignty of God, with respect to Jacob and Esau is so offensive to the human mind, that it is not unusual, on the subject, to take revenge on the divine conduct, under the colour of lashing the misconduct of this favourite. A comparison of Esau with Jacob is made at great length, and greatly to the advantage of the elder brother. Esau is a plain, blunt, honest man, of great virtue and integrity, while Jacob is a deep, designing hypocrite. God says, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated," but the language of their heart is, Esau have I loved, and Jacob have I hated. And *why* do they love Esau, why do they hate Jacob? Just because they hate that divine sovereignty which preferred the younger to the elder. There is no reason to hide or palliate the sins of Jacob in this matter. By his misconduct, we see that it is not on account of works of our own righteousness that God chooses or saves us. The ground of God's preference of His people is His own free and sovereign good-will. We should not hide this by endeavouring to justify or excuse anything that is wrong in Jacob. But nothing but disaffection to God will prefer the character of Esau to that of Jacob. With all his faults, Jacob was a man of God. With all that the most partial affection can claim for Esau, he was a man who profanely undervalued his birthright. He was a carnal man, who had all his happiness in this world. When he was roused, he showed what was in his heart. He purposed to take revenge by murdering his brother. *This* is the virtue of the reprobate, who is so great a favourite with the enemies of God.

With all the ingenuity of Rebekah, her scheme would have been frustrated, had it not been assisted by an addition from the prudence of Jacob. The savoury meat might have been brought to Isaac by Jacob in the room of Esau, but though the blindness of the patriarch might not have been able to detect the imposture, his *hand* would have discovered the deceit. Here, then, there is another link added to the chain which connects Jacob with the blessing. Jacob thinks of the danger of detection, and his mother, by another contrivance, guards effectively against it! She covered his hands and his neck with the skins of the kids, and the smooth Jacob passes for the hairy Esau.

But, after all, what a hair's breadth escape from detection! Though Isaac was so dim of sight that he could not discover the difference between his sons by their external appearance, yet his ear is not so deficient but that it still recognises the difference between their voices, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." What prevents the whole plot from now being broken up? What makes Isaac, the guarded, suspicious Isaac, overlook this symptom? Why did he not put the matter to a further proof? Was anything more easy? Why did he not demand that both his sons should come into his presence? But the blessing is to be transferred to Jacob. This was God's eternal, unchangeable purpose. Isaac, then, with all his wariness, overcomes his well-founded suspicions, and boldly confers the blessing, when both affection and prudence cried out for delay. Men's wisdom and men's weakness both equally fulfill God's purposes!

Here is wisdom. Let those who are truly wise study and admire it. The language in which Isaac conferred the blessing was, no doubt, the immediate dictation of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, we cannot properly speak of this as a providential circumstance. But in this, inspiration is quite in keeping with the providence exhibited in this matter. In conferring the blessing, the Holy Spirit puts nothing into the mouth of the patriarch by which he could see that Jacob was the person to whom he was speaking. The blessing was conferred in language so general that there is no allusion whatever to anything peculiar in Jacob. Here is the wisdom of the manner of inspiration. It speaks suitably to the character and situations of the persons by whom it speaks. This fact, instead of being discovered by human wisdom, is so little understood by many Christians, that they have been led by it to invent theories of inspiration which made the Scriptures in a great measure the mere word of man and virtually divest them of inspiration.

After all the preparations of hypocrisy and prudence, after all his hardy falsehoods and acting, with his venison and kid's skins, and garments of Esau, Jacob was on the very point of being detected in time to disappoint him of the blessing. What a wonderful, what a providential escape! Jacob is scarcely gone out with the blessing when Esau comes in to receive it! "And it came to pass, *as soon as* Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting" (Gen 27:30). Who is so blind as not to see the hand of Providence here? Had Esau been a few minutes *sooner*, Jacob's scheme would have been frustrated! The sovereign God in His providence prospers the plan which was to fulfill His purposes, while His holy law utterly disdains that plan. Every link in this chain is inserted by an overruling Providence, while Jacob and his mother are solely the authors of their guilty conduct.

The transaction is finished. Jacob is blessed and blessed he *must* be. But the Lord of Providence must continually *protect* him and preserve him for the promised blessing. That providence is immediately at work to watch over him and defend him from his brother's malice. "And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen 27:41). What can prevent him from executing his wicked purpose? What then becomes of the

blessing? When Esau made this purpose, why did he not *keep it to himself*? He said this in his heart, why did he not keep it there? Why did he put it in words? *Why* did he make a confident or speak so as to be overheard?

Yet he did so. Some person was made aware of Esau's intention, and that person discovered the intention to Esau's mother. Was he entrusted with it by Esau? Why then was he not true to his trust? Did he merely learn the intention of Esau by overhearing him speaking to himself? In every light, the thing is *overruled by providence*. What a consolation does this afford to the Lord's people when they are threatened in life or property. God by His providence discovered and disappointed the murderous intention of Esau, even though the conduct of Israel, in provoking the wrath of his brother, was greatly to be blamed. Shall not the Lord be the Protector of His people when by obedience to His will they subject themselves and fortunes to danger? The wicked are not permitted to execute the thousandth part of the mischief which they design against the Lord's people. His providence watches over His children, and in due season manifests the plots of their enemies, or in one way or other prevents their execution.

In this wicked purpose of Esau, we see the hand of divine Providence also, in sending Israel to the land of his fathers, where God provided for him a wife, and where his life, in the house of Laban, might afford a fit emblem of Jesus, of whom this man of sorrows was an eminent type. Afflictive dispensations of providence are designed for the good of the Lord's people, as well as events that are direct blessings. All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose. (Alexander Carson, 1776-1844)

*“But O my soul, if truth so bright,  
Should dazzle and confound they sight,  
Yet still His written Word obey,  
And wait the great decisive day.” (Isaac Watts, 1674-1748)*

# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## Its Rule (Continued)

It has been pointed out in earlier articles that our practical sanctification by the Spirit is but His continuing and completing of the work which He began in us at regeneration and conversion. Now saving conversion consists in our being delivered from our depravity and sinfulness to the moral image of God, or which is the same thing, to a real conformity unto the moral law. And a conformity to the moral law (as we showed in our last article) consists in a *disposition* to love God supremely, live to Him ultimately, and delight in Him superlatively, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, with a *practice* agreeing thereto. Therefore a saving conversion consists in our being recovered from what we are by nature *to such* a disposition and practice.

In order to this blessed recovery of us to God, Christ, by His Spirit, applies the law in power to the sinner's understanding and heart, for “the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul”



(Psa 19:7). That effectual application of the law causes the sinner to see clearly and to feel acutely *how* he had lived—in utter defiance of it—*what* he is—a foul leper, what he *deserves*—eternal punishment, and how he is in the hands of a sovereign God, entirely at *His* disposal (See Rom 9:18). This experience is unerringly described in, “For without [the Spirit’s application of] the law sin was dead [we had no perception or feeling of its heinousness]. For I was alive without the law once [deeming myself as good as anyone else, and able to win God’s approval by my religious performances]: but when the commandment came [in power to my conscience], sin revived [became a fearful reality as I discovered the plague of my heart], and I died” [to my self-righteousness]—Romans 7:8-9.

It is then, for the first time, that the soul perceives “the law is *spiritual*” (Rom 7:14), that it requires not only outward works of piety, but holy thoughts and godly affections, from whence all good works must proceed, or else they are unacceptable to God. The law is “exceeding broad” (Psa 119:96), taking notice not only of our outward conduct but also of our inward state. “Love” is its demand and *that* is essentially a thing of the *heart*. As the law requires love, and nothing but love (to God and our neighbour), so all sin consists in that which is contrary to what the law requires, and therefore every exercise of the heart which is not agreeable to the law, which is not prompted by holy love, is opposed to it and *is sinful*. Therefore did Christ plainly declare, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mat 5:28).

God requires far more than a correct outward deportment, “Behold, thou desirest truth in the *inward* parts” (Psa 51:6). The law takes cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart, saying, “Thou shalt not *covet*” (Exo 20:17), which is an act of the soul rather than of the body. When a sinner is brought to realise *what* the high and holy demands of the law really are, and how utterly he has failed to meet them, he begins to perceive something of the new awfulness of his condition, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). Now it is that the awakened sinner realises how justly the law condemns and curses him as an inveterate and excuseless transgressor of it. Now it is that he has a lively sense in his own soul of the dreadfulfulness of eternal damnation. Now it is he discovers that he is *lost*, utterly and hopelessly lost so far as any self-help is concerned.

This it is which prepares him to see his dire need of Christ, for they that are whole (in their self-complacency and self-righteousness) betake not themselves to the great Physician. Thus the law (in the hands of the Spirit) is the handmaid of the Gospel. Was not this the divine order even at Sinai? The moral law was given first, and then the ceremonial law, with its priesthood and sacrifices—the one to convict of Israel’s need of a Saviour, the other setting forth the Saviour under various types and figures! It is not until sin “abounds” in the stricken conscience of the Spirit-convicted transgressor that grace will “much more abound” in the estimation and appreciation of his Scripture-opened heart. In exact proportion as we really perceive the justice, dignity, and excellency of the law, will be our realization of the infinite evil of sin. And in exact proportion to our sense of the exceedingly sinfulness of sin will be our wonderment at the riches of divine grace.

Then it is that “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). As an experimental sense of the glory of God’s *righteousness* in the law and of His *grace* in the Gospel is imparted to the soul by the Spirit, the sinner is moved to return home to God, through the Mediator, to venture his soul and its eternal concerns upon His free grace, and to give up himself to be *His* forever—to love Him supremely, live to Him entirely, and delight in Him

superlatively. Hereby his heart begins to be habitually framed to love his neighbour as himself, with a disinterested impartiality, and thus an effectual foundation is laid in his heart for universal external obedience, for nothing but a spontaneous and *cheerful* obedience can be acceptable to God, an obedience which is rendered without repining or grudging, as though it were a grievous burden to us.

It is *thus* that Christ, by His Spirit, conforms us to God's law. First, by enlightening our understanding, so that we perceive the spirituality of the law, in its high and meet demands upon our hearts. Second, by bringing us to perceive the holiness and justice of its requirements. Third, by convicting us of our lifelong trampling of the law beneath our feet. Fourth, by casing us to mourn over our wicked defiance of its authority. And fifth, by imparting to us a new nature or principle of holiness. Now it is that the Lord puts His laws into our minds and writes them in our hearts (Heb 8:10). Thus, so far from the grace of the Gospel "making void the law," it "*establishes*" it (See Rom 3:31) in our consciences and affections. A spiritual and universal obedience is what the law demands.

The principal duties of love to God above all, and to our neighbours for His sake, are not only required by the sovereign will of God, but are in their own nature "holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12), and therefore meet for us to perform. These are the two main roots from which issue all other spiritual fruits, and apart from them there can be no *holiness* of heart and life. And the powerful and effectual means by which this end is attained is the grand work of the Scripture in *sanctifying* us, for by *that* our hearts and lives are conformed to the law. He must bestow upon us an inclination and disposition of heart *to* the duties of the law, so as to fit and enable us unto the practice of them. For these duties are of such a nature as cannot possibly be performed while we have a disinclination from them.

As the divine life is thus begun, so it is *carried on* in the soul much after the same order. The Spirit of God shows the believer, more and more, what a sinful, worthless, hell-deserving wretch he is in himself, and so makes him increasingly sensible of his imperative need of free grace through Jesus Christ, to pardon and sanctify him. He has an ever-deepening sense of those two things all his days, and thereby his heart is kept humble, and Christ and free grace made increasingly precious. The Spirit of God shows the believer more and more the infinite glory and excellency of God, whereby he is influenced to love Him, live to Him, and delight in Him with all his heart, and thereby his heart is framed more and more to love his neighbour as himself. Thus "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

The last paragraph needs the following qualifications—the Spirit's operations *after* conversion are attended with two differences, arising from two causes. First, *the different state* the subject is in. The believer, being no longer under the law as a covenant, is not, by the Spirit, filled with those legal *terrors* arising from the fears of hell, as he formerly was (See Rom 8:15). Rather is he now made increasingly sensible of his *corruptions*, of the sinfulness of sin, of his base ingratitude against such a gracious God, and hereby the heart is broken. Second, from *the different nature* of the subject wrought upon. The believer, no longer being under the full power of sin nor completely at enmity against God, does not resist the Spirit's operation as he once did, but has a genuine disposition to join with Him against sin in himself, saying, Lord, correct, chasten me, do with me as Thou wilt, only subdue my iniquities and conform me more and more unto Thy image.

A few words now upon *the relation of the Gospel*. First, the grace of the Gospel is *not* granted to counterbalance the rigour of the law, or to render God's plan of government justifiable so as to sweeten the minds of His embittered enemies. The law is "holy, just, and good" in itself, and was

so before Christ became incarnate. God is not a tyrant, nor did His Son die a sacrifice to tyranny, to recover His injured people from the severity of a cruel law. It is utterly impossible that the Son of God should die to answer the demands of an unrighteous law. Second, the law, as it is applied by the Spirit, prepares the heart for the Gospel—the one giving me a real knowledge of sin, the other revealing how I may obtain deliverance from its guilt and power. Third, *the law*, and not the Gospel, is the rule of our sanctification—the one makes known what it is that God requires from me, the other supplies means and motives for complying therewith.

Fourth, the law and the Gospel are not in opposition, but in apposition, the one being the handmaid of the other. They exist and work simultaneously and harmoniously in the experience of the believer. Fifth, the high and holy demands of the law are *not* modified to the slightest degree by the Gospel, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48). “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1Pe 1:15) is *the standard* set before us. Sixth, thus the Christian’s rule of righteousness is the law, but in the hands of the Mediator, “Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ” (1Co 9:21)—beautifully typed out in the law being given to Israel at Sinai after their redemption from Egypt, through Moses *the typical Mediator* (Gal 3:19). Seventh, herein we may see the seriousness of the God-dishonouring error of all those who repudiate the moral law as the Christian’s rule of life.

“The holy law of God and the Gospel of His grace reflect the divine glory, the one upon the other reciprocally, and both will shine forth with joint glory eternally in heaven. The law setting forth, in the brightest light, the beauty of holiness, and the vileness and fearful demerit of sin, will show the abounding grace that hath brought the children of wrath thither, with the infinite lustre and glory; and grace will do honour to the law, by showing in sinners, formerly very vile and polluted, the purity and holiness of the law fully exemplified in their present sanctification; and Christ, the Lamb that was slain, by whom the interests of the law and of grace have been happily reconciled and inseparably united, will be glorified in His saints and admired by them who believe” (James Fraser, “The Scriptural Doctrine of Sanctification,” 1760).

It is, then by the regenerating and sanctifying work of His Spirit that Christ brings His people to a conformity unto the law and to a compliance with the Gospel. “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). The “glory of the Lord” is beheld by us, first, as it shines in the glass *of the law*—the glory of His justice and holiness, the glory of His governmental majesty and authority, the glory of His goodness in framing such a law, which requires that we love Him with all our hearts, and for His sake, as *His* creatures, our neighbours as ourselves. The “glory of the Lord” is beheld by us, second, as it shines forth in the glass *of the Gospel*—the glory of His redeeming love, the glory of His amazing grace, the glory of His abounding mercy. And as renewed creatures, beholding this, we are “*changed* (the Greek word is the same as Christ being “transfigured”) *into the same image*, from glory to glory (progressively, from one degree of it to another) by the Spirit of the Lord,” that is, into a real conformity to the law and a real compliance with the Gospel.

The Gospel calls upon us to *repent*, but there can be no genuine repentance until we see and feel ourselves to be guilty transgressors of the law, and until we are brought by the Spirit to realise that *we* are *wholly* to blame for not having lived in perfect conformity to it. Then it is we clearly realise that we thoroughly deserve to be damned and that, notwithstanding all our doings and religious performances. Yes, then it is that we perceive that all our previous religious performances were done not from any love for God, or with any real concern for His glory, but

formally and hypocritically, out of self-love, from fear of hell, and with a mercenary hope of gaining heaven thereby. Then it is that our mouth is stopped, all excuses and extenuations silenced, and the curse of the law upon us is acknowledged as just. Then it is that seeing God to be so lovely and glorious a Being, we are stricken to the heart for our vile enmity against Him and condemn ourselves as incorrigible wretches. *Such* are some of the elements of *genuine* repentance.

The Gospel calls upon us to *believe*, to receive upon divine authority its amazing good news—that a grievously insulted God has designs of mercy upon His enemies; that the Governor of the world, whose law has been so flagrantly, persistently, and awfully trampled upon by us, in His infinite wisdom, devised a way whereby we can be pardoned, without His holy law being dishonoured or its righteous claims set aside; that such is His wondrous love for us that He gave His only begotten Son to be made under the law, to personally and perfectly keep its precepts, and then endure its awful penalty and die beneath its fearful curse. But when a sinner has been awakened and quickened by the Holy Spirit, *such* a revelation of pure grace is “too good to be true.” To him it appears that *his* case is utterly hopeless, that he has transgressed beyond the reach of mercy, that he has committed the unpardonable sin. One in *this* state (and we sincerely pity the reader if he or she has never passed through it) can no more receive the Gospel into his heart than he can create the world. Only the Holy Spirit can bestow saving faith.

The Gospel calls upon us to *obey*, to surrender ourselves fully to the Lordship of Christ, to take His yoke upon us, to walk even as He walked. Now the yoke which Christ wore was unreserved submission to the will of God, and the rule by which He walked was being regulated in all things by the divine law. Therefore does Christ declare, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat 16:24), for He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. It is their refusal to comply with this demand of the Gospel which seals the doom of all who disregard its claims. As it is written, “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that *obey not* the gospel” (2Th 1:7-8). And again, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that *obey not* the gospel of God?” (1Pe 4:17). But such obedience as the Gospel requires can only be rendered by the sanctifying operations of the gracious Holy Spirit.

Marvelous indeed is the change which the poor sinner passes through under the regenerating and converting operations of the Spirit in his soul. He is made a new creature in Christ and is brought into quite new circumstances. Perhaps the closest analogy to it may be found in the experience of orphan children, left without any guardian or guide, running wild and indulging themselves in all folly and riot. Then being taken into the family of a wise and good man and adopted as his children. These lawless waifs are brought into new surroundings and influences. Love’s care for them wins their hearts, new principles are instilled into their minds, a new temper is theirs, and a new discipline regulates them. Old things have passed away, all things have become new to them. So it is with the Christian—from being without God and hope in the world, from running to eternal ruin, they are delivered from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ. A new nature has been communicated to them, the Spirit Himself indwells them, and a reconciled God now bestows upon them a Father’s care, feeding, guiding, protecting them, and ultimately conducting them into everlasting glory.

# OIL IN THE VESSEL

Recently a brother in the Lord wrote calling our attention to the comparisons and contrasts between the wise and foolish virgins of Matthew 25. The substance of his remarks was as follows. They have seven things in common. First, all the virgins were in “the kingdom of heaven,” by which we understand, the sphere of Christian profession. Second, they were all of them “virgins”—not five virgins and five harlots, by which we understand, they all claimed to belong unto Christ. Third, they all “went forth to meet the bridegroom.” They were one in purpose, having a single end in view. Fourth, they all had “lamps,” the same sort of lamps. Fifth, they all “slumbered and slept.” Sixth, they all heard the cry, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh.” Seventh, they all “arose and trimmed their lamps.”

There are six points of difference between them. First, five of them were “wise” and five of them were “foolish.” Second, the wise “took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (Mat 25:4), but the foolish ones did not do so. Third, at the crucial moment, the foolish virgins had to acknowledge “our lamps are [slowly but surely] gone out” (Mat 25:8 margin). Fourth, the foolish virgins “went to buy” oil (Mat 25:10), the wise ones had no need to do so. Fifth, the wise were shut in with the bridegroom, but the foolish were shut out (Mat 25:10.) Sixth, the foolish virgins were disowned by the Lord (Mat 25:11-12).

Commenting upon the above, our friend pointed out that, “There is a certain class today who differ not from the children of God as to their testimony—its purity, its orthodoxy, its sincerity. These are not Spiritists, Russellites, or the daughters of the Mother of Harlots, but ‘virgins’—*doctrinally they are pure*. They are pictured as going forth ‘to meet the bridegroom,’ not one to the ‘desert’ and another to the ‘secret chambers’ (See Mat 24:26), seeking a false Christ. The object of their service was the same Person which the wise virgins were occupied with. The vital point in their ‘foolishness’ was not that they ‘slumbered and slept,’ but that they had *no oil in their VESSELS*. There was oil in their ‘lamps’—the testimony or doctrine—but none in their vessels or souls.”

The above has deeply impressed the editor once more with the great importance of making sure individually whether there be oil in *my* vessel. The “vessel” is the soul, the “oil” is divine grace in it. Whatever may be the precise signification of “Behold the bridegroom cometh”—whether it refer to the hour of death, the “premillennial return of Christ,” or the day of judgment—one thing is clear, it points to the crucial testing time. As our friend further points out, Balaam had oil in his “lamp,” as also had Judas when Christ sent him forth with the other apostles to “preach” (Mat 10:5-7), yet their hearts were destitute of the saving grace of God! What a terrible discovery for the foolish virgins to make—“our lamps are gone out”—a discovery *made too late* to do them any good.

This parable of the “virgins” is indeed a searching and solemn one. It has deeply exercised many a sincere soul. It has caused not a few genuine saints to wonder if, after all, the “root of the matter” were in them. It has given real point to that exhortation, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2Co 13:5). On the other hand, vast numbers of professing Christians are quite unmoved by its pointed message, complacently assuming that they *are* numbered among the “wise” virgins and taking no trouble to seek *proof* that the oil is in their vessels. Strangest of all, perhaps, some of the Lord’s own people scarcely know *how* to set about

the task of ascertaining their state, and are so suspicious of themselves, they readily conclude that their vessels are devoid of the vital oil.

The key passage for the significance of this Scriptural figure is, “Thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psa 45:7), where the reference is to the Mediator, for God “giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (Joh 3:34). In consequence thereof, He is “fairer than the children of men: *grace is poured* into thy lips” (Psa 45:2). The holy “oil” was first poured upon the antitypical Aaron and then it runs down to all the “skirts of his garments” (Psa 133:2), that is, to the meanest and feeblest Christians. Just as the little finger or toe is animated by the same life and vitality as actuates the head and heart of a person, so every Christian is vitalized by the same Spirit as was given to Christ, the Head. As the Spirit sanctified the human nature of Christ by fitting and enriching it with all grace, so His grace is communicated to all His members.

The “oil,” then, in the vessels of the wise virgins refers to the life of the Spirit in the soul of a Christian. It is the presence of divine grace in the heart—in contrast from knowledge in the head or correctness of outward deportment—which distinguishes the actual possessor from the empty professor. How important then is it that we spare no efforts to ascertain whether or not that divine grace resides *in us*! Yet at this very point Christians encounter a real difficulty. As they honestly and diligently look within, they perceive such a sea of corruption, ever casting up mire and dirt, they are greatly distressed, and ready to conclude that divine grace surely cannot be present in such hearts as theirs. But this is a serious mistake. As genuine oil is distinguishable from counterfeits by its *properties*, so grace in the soul may be known by its characteristics and effects.

But the exercised soul should begin his search for indwelling grace with it definitely settled in his mind, that, in every heart where grace resides there is also an ocean of sin. And just as oil and water will not mix, but continue to preserve their distinct properties even when placed together in the same vessel, so the flesh and spirit will not combine in the Christian, but remain in opposition to each other unto the end. Admitting, then, a sea of depravity within, my object is to find out if there be any “oil” at all which the surgings of sin are unable to destroy. When I see smoke, I must infer fire (however flickering), and if I can discern in my heart any spiritual grace (however feeble), I *must* infer the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Be not unduly discouraged, then, dear Christian friend, because you discover so much filthy water in your “vessel” (the editor does the same), but rather confine your attention unto searching for the “oil” within you, and remember that the presence of the same is to be determined *by its properties and effects*. Let us name a few of these. First, oil *illuminates*, therefore are the blinded Laodiceans bidden to go to Christ for eye salve (anointing oil) that they may see (Rev 3:18). Now where divine grace has been bestowed that soul is enlightened. True, says a serious reader, but the point which exercises me so much is, Is my enlightenment a spiritual and supernatural one, or merely a natural and intellectual one, acquired by the mind being instructed through sitting under sound teaching? Those mentioned in Hebrews 6:4 were “once enlightened,” yet no saving work of grace had been wrought in them!

Some of our readers may be total strangers to all such distressing experiences, and wonder why any real Christian should call into question the exact character of his or her illumination, troubling themselves not at all whether *their* enlightenment be natural or supernatural. Poor souls, it is greatly to be feared that a rude awakening is awaiting them from their Satan-induced sleep. But what shall we say to those who *are* awake and deeply concerned about their eternal interests? How are such to determine the matter? We answer, *test* the point. Was there not a time when you “saw no beauty in Christ that you should *desire* him?” Is it so with you now? Or has He become

in your eyes the “altogether lovely” One? You may be afraid to call Him *yours*, yet if your heart truly yearns for Him, then you *must* have been spiritually enlightened—the “oil” *is* in your vessel.

Second, oil *softens*. Oil was much used by the ancients for medicinal purposes, and we moderns might well take a leaf out of their books. It will melt caked wax in the ear, make tender a calloused bunion. It is very useful for tumours—repeated applications softening, then causing to burst, and then healing. Thus it is in the operation of the Holy Spirit. He finds the elect hard and obdurate by nature, and swollen with pride and self-conceit, but divine grace softens them, melting their flinty hearts, bursting the tumours of self-righteousness, and imparting a contrite spirit. “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” (Eze 36:26).

When divine grace has been imparted the heart is supernaturally softened. But right here the sincere soul experiences still greater difficulty, and is ready to exclaim emphatically, Then I must still be in an unregenerate state, for *my* heart is “as hard as the nether millstone.” Wait a moment, dear friend, and *test* the matter. What are *the marks* of a “hard heart” as given in Scripture? Are they not a total absence of a *feeling* sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, an utter unconcern whether God be pleased or displeased with my conduct, no mourning in secret when Christ has been dishonoured by me? Is that true of *you*, who are so ready to conclude you are still in a state of nature? If it is not, if sin is your burden and your soul grieves over your lack of conformity to Christ, then your heart *must* have been spiritually softened—the “oil” *is* in your vessel.

Third, oil *heals*. Hence we find the great Physician, under the figure of the good Samaritan, having compassion on the assaulted traveler, binding up his wounds, and “pouring in *oil* and wine” (Luk 10:34). And He is still caring thus for His people through the gracious ministry of the Spirit. How often the blessed Comforter applies “the balm of Gilead” (See Jer 46:11) to the sin-afflicted people of God. What horrible bruises and putrefying sores do sin and Satan inflict upon the souls of the saints, yet how frequently and tenderly does the Spirit mollify and relieve them. First, He works repentance in the heart, which is a purging grace, carrying away the foul and poisonous love of sin. And then He strengthens hope, which is a comforting grace so that the joy of the Lord once more becomes his strength. Divine grace removes the load of guilt from the conscience, applies the cordial of the promises, and gives the weary pilgrim a lift by the way—“set him on his own beast” (Luk 10:34).

Here, then, is another property and effect of divine grace—it heals the soul. We can well imagine some fearful reader exclaiming, Alas, that cuts off my hope, for there is no soundness in me. Listen, dear friend, no Christian is completely and perfectly healed from the disease of sin in this life, but he *is* delivered from the most fearful and fatal effects of it. And it is at *this* point you are to examine yourself. What are the *worst* things which the fall has produced in man? Enmity against God, the love of sin, the idolizing of self. *Test* yourself by these things. Do you still hate God?—if so, would you repine because you love Him so feebly! Are you still in love with sin?—if so, why do you grieve over its workings! Is self now your idol?—if so, why do you, at times, loath yourself! Sin has not been eradicated, but its wounds are being healed—the “oil” *is* in your vessel.

The limited space now at our disposal prevents us doing more than barely mentioning a number of other features. Oil makes the joints flexible and nimble, and therefore was much used by athletes—so grace enables the Christian to “serve in newness of spirit” (Rom 7:6) and run the race set before him. It is an excellent thing for those who have stiff joints, for it penetrates to the bones (Psa 109:18). It makes the countenance fresh and comely (Psa 104:15). What is more attractive to the spiritual eye than a gracious character. It sweetens our persons, so that we are

unto God a “sweet savour of Christ” (2Co 2:15), whereas the wicked are a “smoke in his nostrils” (See Isa 65:5). It gladdens, and thus we read of “the oil of joy” (Isa 61:3). The heart is exhilarated when grace is active. It is an aid to digestion. So, only as grace is active within us, can we assimilate our spiritual food.

Oil and water will not intermingle. The old man is not bettered by the new, nor is the new corrupted by the old. Oil cannot be made to sink beneath the water, but always floats on top—so grace in the believer is indestructible and at the end it will be seen to have fully triumphed over sin. Oil is a super-eminent liquid, for it will not incorporate itself with anything lighter. It will have the highest place above all other liquids. So the graces of the Spirit are of a superior character—as far above the gifts of nature as spiritual blessings excel earthly things. Oil quietens troubled waters, giving relief to a ship in a storm. So grace often subdues the turbulent workings of sin. What a blessed promise is that in Psalm 92:10, “But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with *fresh* oil.” New supplies of grace, blessed revivings are granted God’s tried people. Yes, there *is* “oil in the dwelling of the *wise*”—virgins (Pro 21:20). The Lord be pleased to add *His* blessing to this little meditation.

N.B. This short article is not designed for the searching and exposing of empty professors, but for the establishing and comforting of “the living in Jerusalem.” If the latter will prayerfully re-read its paragraphs and honestly measure themselves by their contents, they should be able to “prove” themselves (2Co 13:5). It is not the absence of sin, nor the decreasing of its power within, which evidences regeneration, but the presence of a contrary and holy principle, which is known by its spiritual longings and efforts.



# October

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 36. The Spirit Interceding (Part 2)

God's Word is designed to have a twofold effect upon the Christian—a distressing and a comforting. As we appropriate the Scriptures to ourselves, pride will be abased and the old man cast down. On the other hand, faith will be strengthened and the new man built up. Our poor hearts first need humbling, and then exalting. We must be made to mourn over our sins and then be filled with praise at the realisation of God's amazing grace. Now in Romans 8:26-27, there is that which should produce *both* these effects upon us. First, we are reminded of "our *infirmities*" or weaknesses—not the plural number, for we are full of them—how our apprehension of this should "hide pride from us!" (See Job 33:17). Yet, second, here is also real ground for comfort and hope. "The Spirit also *helpeth* our infirmities." The frail and erring believer is not left to himself. A gracious, all-powerful, ever-present Helper is given to support and assist him. How this blessed fact should rejoice our hearts!

The tones of Scripture, then, fall upon the ear of God's children in ever alternating keys—the minor and the major. So it is in the passage before us, for next we read, "*We know not* what we should pray for as we ought." What a pride-withering word is that! One which is in direct variance with what is commonly supposed. The general belief is that men *do know* well enough what they should pray for, but they are so careless and wicked they do not discharge this duty, but God says, they "*know not*." Nor can the godliest saint or wisest minister help the unregenerate at this point, by drawing up for them a form of words, which suitably expresses their needs, for it is one thing to have Scriptural words upon our lips, but it is quite another for the soul to *feel* his dire need of what he asks for—it is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh in prayer or God will not hear.

But the words of our text are yet more searching and solemn. They refer not to the unregenerate (though of course it *is* of them), but to the regenerate, "*We [Christians] know not* what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26). And again, we say what a heart-humbling word is this. Now that we are partakers of the divine nature, now that a way has been opened for us into the presence of God, now that we access to the throne of grace itself, now that we are invited to "make known our requests" (see Phi 4:6)—yet so fearfully has sin darkened our judgment, so deceitful and wicked are our hearts, so blind are we as to what would truly promote

the manifestative glory of God and what would really be for our highest good, that “We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26). Do you actually *believe this*, my reader? If you *do*, it must bring you into the dust before the One with whom we have to do.

“We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26). No, we “know not” even with the Bible in our hands, in which are full instructions to direct praying souls—in which are so many inspired prayers for our guidance. No, we “know not” even after the Lord Himself has graciously supplied us with a pattern prayer, after which ours should be modeled. Sin has so perverted our judgments, self-love has so filmed our eyes, worldliness has so corrupted our affections, that even with a divine manual of prayer in our hands, we are quite incapable (of ourselves) of discerning *what* we should ask for—supplies of divine grace to minister to our *spiritual* needs, and are unable to present our suit in a spiritual manner, acceptable to God. How the recognition of this fact should empty our hearts of conceit! How the realisation of it should fill us with shame! What need have we to cry, “Lord, teach us *to* pray!”

But now on the other side, lest we should be utterly cast down by a sense of our excuseless and guilty ignorance, we are divinely informed, “The Spirit itself *maketh intercession for us*” (Rom 8:26). Wondrous indeed, unspeakably blessed, is this. Instead of turning away from us in disgust, because of our culpable ignorance, God has not only provided us with an Intercessor at *His* right hand (Heb 7:25), but what is to the writer even more remarkable, God has given His needy people a divine Intercessor at *their* right hand, even the Holy Spirit. How this glorious fact should raise our drooping souls, revolutionize our ideas of prayer, and fill our hearts with thanksgiving and praise for this unspeakable gift. If it be asked, Why has God provided *two* intercessors for His people, the answer is—to *bridge the entire gulf between Him and us*. One to represent *God* to us, the other to represent us before God. The one to *prompt* our prayers, the other to *present* them to the Father. The one to ask blessings *for* us, the other to convey blessings *unto us*!

It is indeed striking to observe this alternation between the minor and major keys running all through our passage, for next we are told, “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with *groanings* which cannot be uttered.” This, as we have seen, refers to the inward anguish which the Spirit produces in the believer. Here, then, is further ground for self-abasement. Even when a sense of need has been communicated to us, so sottish are we that our poor hearts are overwhelmed, and all we can do is to sigh and groan. Even when the Spirit has convicted us of our corruptions and imparted a deep yearning for divine grace, we are incapable of articulating our wants or expressing our longings. Rather is our case then like the psalmist’s, “I was *dumb* with silence” (Psa 39:2). If left to ourselves, the distress occasioned by our felt sinfulness would quite *disable* us to pray.

It may be objected, To what purpose is it that the Spirit should stir up such “groanings,” which the Christian can neither understand nor express? Ah, this brings us to the brighter side again, “He that searcheth the hearts *knoweth what is* the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27). *God* knows what those groanings mean, for He discerns the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. How comforting is this, to realise in prayer we are coming to One who thoroughly understands us! How blessed to be assured that God will rightly interpret every motion the Spirit prompts within us. God “knows” the “mind of the Spirit”—His intention in producing our anguish. God is able to distinguish between the moanings of mere nature and the “groanings” of which the Spirit is the Author.

There is a fourfold “spirit” which works in prayer. First, the natural spirit of man, which seeks his own welfare and preservation. This is not sinful, as may be seen from the case of Christ in

Gethsemane. The innocent desire of human nature to be delivered from the awful pressure upon Him, and then subjecting His will to the Father's. Second, a carnal and sinful spirit, "Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, *Let the LORD be glorified*" (Isa 66:5), but God did not answer them in the way they meant. Third, the new nature in the believer, which has holy aspirations, but is powerless of itself to express them. Fourth, "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 1:20)—by His prompting and power. Now God discerns between the motions of nature, the lustings of the flesh, the longings of grace, and the desires wrought by the Spirit. This it is which explains, "The LORD weigheth the spirits" (Pro 16:2)—the fourfold "spirit" mentioned above.

None but God *is able* to thus distinguish and interpret the "groanings" of the Spirit in the saint. A striking proof of this is found in, "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken" (1Sa 1:13)—even the high priest of Israel was incapable of discerning the anguish of her heart and what the Spirit had prompted within her. "He that searcheth the hearts *knoweth* what is the mind of the Spirit," (Rom 8:27), signifies far more than that He understands. God *approves* and *delights in*—for *this* use of the word "know" see Psalm 1:6; Amos 3:2; John 10:14; 1 Corinthians 8:3. And *why* is it that God thus finds perfect complacency in the mind of our Helper? Because as the Father and the Son are One, so the Father and the Spirit are *One*—one in nature, in purpose, in glory.

"Because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:27). Here is additional ground for our encouragement. The words "the will of" are in italics, which means they are not in the Greek, but have been supplied by our translators. They interpose a needless limitation. That which the Spirit produces in the saint is, first, in accord with God's *nature*—spiritual and holy. Second, it is according to God's Word, for the Spirit ever prompts us to ask for what has been revealed or promised. Third, it is according to God's *purpose*, for the Spirit is fully cognizant of all the divine counsels. Fourth, it is according to God's *glory*, for the Spirit teaches us to make *that* our end in asking. O what encouragement is here—the Spirit creates within us holy desires, the Son presents them, the Father understands and approves them! Then let us "*come boldly* unto the throne of grace" (Heb 4:16).

*"Come, Holy Spirit, come  
with energy divine;  
And on this poor benighted soul  
With beams of mercy shine."*

# THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

## 106. Brotherly Love (13:1)

Most of the commentators regard the final chapter of Hebrews as an appendix or postscript, containing sundry exhortations which have no direct relation to the body of the epistle. Personally, we regard it as a serious mistake, due to lack of perspicuity, to ignore the organic connection between the central theme of the apostle and the various duties which he here inculcates. Rather do we agree with John Owen (1616-1683) that in these closing verses there is exhibited an exemplification of “that divine *wisdom* wherewith he was actuated in writing of the whole, which the apostle Peter refers to in 2 Peter 3:15.” The more an anointed mind meditates on this fact, with the faith and reverence which the Holy Scriptures call for, the more will the divine inspiration of this portion be revealed. It is a great pity that so many writers become slack when they reach the final chapter of an epistle, seeming to imagine that its contents are of less importance and value than those of the earlier ones.

Unless we carefully bear in mind the *order* which the apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to follow in this treatise, we shall fail to learn some most vital and valuable lessons concerning the proper method and manner of setting forth the truth of God before the souls of men. Not only is the teacher of God’s Word to hold fast the system of doctrine contained therein (introducing no speculations of his own), to preserve a due balance of truth (not allowing personal preference to make him a hobbyist), but in order for his ministry to be most acceptable to God and profitable to his hearers or readers he must adhere strictly to *the order of Scripture*—for if the context and connections of a passage be ignored, there is great danger of perverting it, for its proper emphasis is then lost and the chain of truth is broken. Let preachers especially attend closely to the remarks which follow.

A careful reading through of our epistle at a single sitting will reveal the fact that throughout the first twelve chapters not a single moral or ecclesiastical duty is inculcated. It is true that here and there the apostle breaks in upon the orderly development of his thesis, by urging an exhortation unto obedience to God and perseverance in the faith, or by interspersing a solemn warning against the fatal consequences of apostasy. Nevertheless, never once does he formally press upon the Hebrews any of the duties enjoined by the second table of the law—those were reserved for his closing words. The course followed by the apostle was, first, to set forth the glorious Person, offices, and work of Christ, and then, having laid a firm foundation for faith and obedience, to exhort unto evangelical and moral duties. As we deem this a most essential consideration, we subjoin a paragraph from that master exegete John Owen.

“He prescribes by his own example, as he also doth in most of his other epistles, the true order and method of preaching the Gospel—that is, first, to declare the mysteries of it, with the grace of God therein, and then to improve it unto practical duties of obedience. And they will be mistaken, who in this work propose unto themselves any other method, and those most of all, who think one part of it enough without the other. For as the declaration of spiritual truths, without showing how they are the vital quickening form of obedience, and without the application of them thereunto, tends only unto that knowledge which puffeth up, but doth not edify. So the pressing of moral

duties, without a due declaration of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, which alone enables us unto them, and renders them acceptable unto God, with their necessary dependence thereon, is but to deceive the souls of men, and lead them out of the way and off from the Gospel.”

The divine mysteries unfolded and the great doctrines expounded in the Holy Scriptures are not mere abstractions addressed to the intellect, devoid of valuable fruits and effects. Where they are truly received into the soul and there mixed with faith, they issue, first, in the heart being spiritually molded thereby and drawn out Godwards, and second, they issue in practical results manward. If the Gospel makes known the infinite love and amazing grace of God in Christ, it also directs unto the performance of spiritual and moral duties. So far from the Gospel freeing believers from the duties required by the law, it lays upon us additional obligations, directs to their right performance, and supplies new and powerful motives to their discharge.

So much, then, for the *general* relation of the contents of Hebrews 13 to what preceded it. Now for the more *specific* connection. So far from there being a radical break between Hebrews 12 and 13, the closing verses of the former and the opening ones of the latter are closely linked together. There the apostle had mentioned the principal duties which believers are to perform Godwards, namely, to “hear” and to “serve Him acceptably” (see Heb 12:19, 25, 28). Here, he tabulates those duties which are to be performed manwards. He begins with what is really the sum and substance of all the rest, brotherly love. First, the loving of *God* with all our hearts, and then our *neighbour* as ourselves. Adolph Saphir (1831-1891) pointed out another link of connection which is not so evident at first sight. Having just reminded the Hebrews that “things that are made” shall be shaken and removed (Heb 12:27), he now exhorts them to let that *abide* which is of God, which is eternal, even *love*.

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). The first application in the case of the Hebrews would be, see to it that your having become Christians does not make you behave in a less kindly manner unto your brethren according to the flesh, the Jews. True, they are occasioning great provocation by their enmity and persecution, yet this does not warrant your retaliating in a like spirit, rather does it provide opportunity for the exercise and manifestation of divine grace. Remember the example left by your Master. The Jews treated Him most vilely, yet He bore patiently their revilings. Yea continued to seek their good—then do you follow His steps. Most blessedly did the writer of this epistle emulate his Lord, and practise what he here inculcated, see Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1. This lower application of our text holds good for any of us who may, in our measure, be circumstanced similarly to the Hebrews. Since yielding ourselves to the claims of the Lord Jesus, our relations and friends may have turned against us, and stirred up by Satan, are now opposing, annoying, ill-treating us. In such a case, the word comes to us “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). Avenge not yourself—answer not railing with railing, but exercise a spirit of true benevolence, desiring and seeking only their good. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:20-21).

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). The higher reference is, of course, to that special and spiritual affection which is to be cultivated between and among God’s children. “He calls love *brotherly*, not only to teach us that we ought to be mutually united together by a peculiar and inward feeling of love, but also that we may remember that *we cannot be Christians without loving the brethren*, for he speaks of the love which the household of faith ought to cultivate one towards another, as the Lord has bound them closely together by the common bond of adoption” (John Calvin, 1509-1564). Matthew Henry (1662-1714) well pointed out “the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of love.” “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22). “Faith which worketh

by love” (Gal 5:6). “Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1Jo 5:1). Love to the brethren is both the first indication and fruit of the Christian life (Act 16:33) and the final aim and result of divine grace (see 2Pe 1:7).

It is to be noted that these Hebrew believers were not exhorted, “let us *have* brotherly love,” but “let brotherly love *continue*.” Thus the apostle’s language clearly supposes that they already had love for each other, that he approvingly notices the same, and then calls upon them for a continuance of it. Like his Master, Paul combines exhortation with commendation—let all His servants do so whenever possible. He had already reminded them, “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of *love*, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10), and “Ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye *became companions* of them that were so used” (Heb 10:32-33). But the apostle felt there was danger of their brotherly love decaying, for there were disputes among them concerning the ceremonies of the Mosaic law and wrangling over religious differences bodes ill for the health of spiritual affection. He therefore puts them on their guard, and bids them live and love as “brethren.”

“All love hath its foundation in *relation*. While there is relation, there is love, or there ought so to be, and where there is no relation, there can be no love, properly so called. Hence it is here mentioned with respect unto a brotherhood....This brotherhood is religious. All believers have one Father (Mat 23:8-9), one elder Brother (Rom 8:29), who is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb 2:11), have one spirit, and are called in one hope of calling (Eph 4:4), which being a spirit of adoption interesteth them all in the same family (Eph 3:14-15)”—John Owen. Brotherly love we would define as that gracious bond which knits together the hearts of God’s children, or more definitely, it is that spiritual and affectionate solicitude which Christians have toward each other, manifested by a desiring and endeavouring after their highest mutual interests.

This duty was enjoined upon His disciples by the Lord Jesus, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (Joh 13:34). It was to this word of Christ’s that His apostle referred in, “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you” (1Jo 2:7-8 and cf. 3:11). Some have been puzzled by his, “I write no new commandment unto you....Again, a new commandment I write unto you,” yet the seeming ambiguity is easily explained. When a statute is *renewed* under another administration of government, it is counted a “new” one. So it is in this case. That which was required by the law (Lev 19:18) is repeated by the Gospel (Joh 15:12), so that absolutely speaking it is not a new, but an old commandment. Yet relatively, it *is* “new,” because enforced by new motives (1Jo 3:16) and a new Pattern (1Jo 4:10-11). Thus “Let us do good unto all men, *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), because the latter have peculiar claims upon our affections, being created in the same image, professing the same faith, and having the same infirmities.

The maintenance of brotherly love tends in various ways to the spiritual blessing of the church, the honour of the Gospel, and the comfort of believers. The exercise thereof is the best testimony to the world of the genuineness of our profession. The cultivation and manifestation of Christian affection between the people of God is a far more weighty argument with unbelievers than any apologetics. Believers should conduct themselves toward each other in such a way that no button or pin is needed to label them as brethren in Christ. “By this shall all men know that ye

are my disciples, if ye have *love one to another*" (Joh 13:35). It should be made quite evident that their hearts are knit together by a bond more intimate, spiritual, and enduring than any which mere nature can produce. Their deportment unto each other should be such as not only to mark them as fellow disciples, but as Christ says, "*My disciples*"—reflecting *His* love!

The exercise of brotherly love is not only a testimony unto the world, but it is also an evidence to Christians themselves of their regeneration, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1Jo 3:14). There should be a word of comfort here for those poor saints whose souls are cast down. At present they cannot "read their title clear to mansions in the sky," and are afraid to cry, "Abba, Father" lest they be guilty of presumption. But here is a door of hope opened to Christ's *little* ones. You may, dear reader, be afraid to affirm that you love *God*, but do you not love *His people*? If you do, you must have been born again, and have in you the same spiritual nature which is in them. But *do* I love them? Well, do you relish the company, admire what you see of Christ in them, wish them well, pray for them, and seek their good? If so, you certainly love them.

But not only is the exercise of Christian love a testimony unto the world of our Christian discipleship, and a sure evidence of our own regeneration, but it is also that which *delights God Himself*. Of course it does! It is the product of His own grace—the immediate fruit of His Spirit. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa 133:1) is what the Lord Himself declares. This also comes out very sweetly in Revelation 3. There we find one of the epistles addressed to the seven churches which are in Asia, namely, the Philadelphian, the church of "brotherly love," for that is the meaning of the word "Philadelphia," and in *that* epistle there are *no censures* or rebukes. There was that there which refreshed the heart of the Lord!

But our text refers not so much to the existence and exercise of brotherly love, as it does to its *maintenance*, "Let brotherly love *continue*" (Heb 13:1). or "abide constant" as some render it, for the word includes the idea of enduring in the face of difficulties and temptations. That which is enjoined is perseverance in a pure and unselfish affection toward fellow-Christians. Brotherly love is a tender plant which requires much attention—if it be not watched and watered, it quickly wilts. It is an exotic, for it is not a native of the soil of fallen human nature—"hateful, and hating one another" (Ti 3:3) is a solemn description of what we were in our unregenerate state. Yes, brotherly love is a very tender plant and quickly affected by the cold air of unkindness, easily nipped by the frost of harsh words. If it is to thrive, it must needs be carefully protected and diligently cultivated.

"Let brotherly love continue" (Heb 13:1). What a *needful* word is this! It was so at the beginning, and therefore did the Lord God make it a fundamental in man's duty, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." O what strife and bloodshed, suffering and sorrow had been avoided, had this commandment been universally heeded. But alas, sin has domineered and dominated, and where sin is regnant, love is dormant. If we wish to obtain a better idea of what sin is then contrast it with its opposite—*God*. Now God is Spirit (Joh 4:24), God is light (1Jo 1:5), God is love (1Jo 4:8). Whereas sin is fleshly, sin is darkness, sin is hatred. But if we have enlisted under the banner of Christ, we are called unto a warfare against sin—against fleshliness, against hatred. Then "let brotherly love continue" (Heb 13:1).

Yes, a most needful exhortation is this—not only because hatred so largely sways the world, but also because of the state of Christendom. Two hundred and fifty years ago, John Owen wrote, "It [brotherly love] is, as unto its lustre and splendour, retired to heaven, abiding in its power and efficacious exercise only in some corners of the earth. Envy, wrath, selfishness, love of the world,

with coldness in all the concerns of religion, have possessed the place of it. And in vain shall men wrangle and contend about their differences in faith and worship, pretending to design the advancement of religion by an imposition of their persuasion on others. Unless this holy love be again re-introduced among all those who profess the name of Christ, all the concerns of religion will more and more run into ruin. The very name of a brotherhood amongst Christians is a matter of scorn and reproach, and all the consequents of such a relation are despised.”

Nor are things any better today. O how little is brotherly love in evidence, generally speaking, among professing Christians. Is not that tragic word of Christ’s receiving its prophetic fulfillment, “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Mat 24:12). But my reader, Christ’s love has not changed, nor should ours, “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them *unto the end*” (Joh 13:1). Alas, have not all of us reason to hang our heads in shame! Such an exhortation as this is most needful today when there is such a wide tendency to value light more highly than love, to esteem an understanding of the mysteries of faith above the drawing out our affections unto each other. Here is a searching question which each of us should honestly face—Is my love for the brethren keeping pace with my growing (intellectual) knowledge of the truth?

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). What a *humbling* word is this! One had thought that those bound together by such intimate ties, fellow-members of the body of Christ, would spontaneously love each other and make it our constant aim to promote their interests. Ah, my reader, the Holy Spirit deemed it requisite *to* call upon us to perform this duty. What sort of creatures are we that still require to be thus exhorted! How this ought to hide pride from us. Surely we have little cause for self-complacency when we need *bidding* to love one another! “Hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). True, that was in our unregenerate days, nevertheless the *root* of that “hatred” still remains in the believer, and unless it be judged and mortified will greatly hinder the maintenance and exercise of Christian affection.

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). What a *solemn* word is this! Is the reader startled by *that* adjective?—a needful and humbling one, but scarcely a “solemn.” Ah, have we forgotten the context? Look at the verse which immediately precedes and remember that when this epistle was first written there were no chapter-breaks—12:29 and 13:1 read consecutively, without any hiatus—“Our God is a consuming fire: let brotherly love continue!” The fact that these two verses are placed in immediate juxtaposition strikes a most solemn note. Go back in your mind to the first pair of brothers who ever walked the earth. Did “brotherly love continue” with them? Far otherwise, Cain hated and murdered his brother. And did not *he* find our God to be “a consuming fire?” Most assuredly he did, as his own words testify, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen 4:13)—the wrath of God burned in his conscience and he had a fearful foretaste of hell before he went there.

But it may be objected to what has just been said, The case of Cain and Abel is scarcely a pertinent and appropriate one, for they were merely *natural* brothers whereas the text relates primarily to those who are brethren *spiritually*. True, but the natural frequently adumbrates the spiritual and there is much in Genesis 4 which each Christian needs to take to heart. However, let us pass on down the course of human history a few centuries. Were not Abraham and Lot brethren spiritually? They were—then did brotherly love continue between them? It did not. Strife arose between their herdsmen and they separated (Gen 13). Lot preferred the well-watered plains and a home in Sodom to fellowship with the father of the faithful. And what was the sequel? Did *he* find that “our God is a consuming fire”? Witness the destruction of all his property in that city when God rained down fire and brimstone from heaven!—another solemn warning is that for us.



“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). But what a *gracious* word is this! Consider its implications. Are they not similar to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, *forbearing one another in love*” (Eph 4:1-2)? That means we are to conduct ourselves not according to the dictates of the flesh, but according to the requirements of *grace*. If grace has been shown toward me, then surely I ought to be gracious to others. But that is not always easy. Not only has the root of “hatred” been left in me, but the “flesh” still remains in my brethren! And there will be much in them to test and try my love, otherwise, there would be no need for this exhortation “forbearing one another in love.” God has wisely so ordered this that our love might rise above the mere amiability of nature. We are not merely to govern our tempers, act courteously, be pleasant to one another, but *bear with* infirmities and be ready to forgive a slight, “Love suffereth long, and is kind” (see 1Co 13:4).

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). What a *comprehensive* word is this! Had we the ability to fully open it and space to bring out all that is included, it would be necessary to quote a large percentage of the precepts of Scripture. If brotherly love is to continue, then we must exhort one another daily, provoke unto good works, minister to each other in many different ways. It includes far more than dwelling together in peace and harmony, though unless *that* be present, other things cannot follow. It also involves a godly concern for each other, see Leviticus 19:17 and 1 John 5:2. It also embraces our praying definitely for each other. Another practical form of it is to write helpful spiritual letters to those now at a distance from us. You once enjoyed sweet converse together, but Providence has divided your paths. Well, keep in touch via the post! “Let brotherly love *continue*” (Heb 13:1).

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). What a *forcible* word is this, by which we mean, it should drive all of us to our knees! We are just as dependent upon the Holy Spirit to call forth *love* into action as we are our *faith*, not only toward God, but toward each other—“The Lord direct *your hearts into* the love of God” (2Th 3:5). Observe the forcible emphasis Christ placed upon this precept in His Pascal discourse, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another” (Joh 13:34). Ah, but the Saviour did not deem that enough, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (Joh 15:12). Why that repetition? Nor did *that* suffice, “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (Joh 15:17). In an earlier paragraph, we reminded the reader that the Philadelphian church is the church of “Brotherly love.” Have you observed the central exhortation in the epistle addressed to *that* church, “*Hold that fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev 3:11).

“Let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1). What a *divine* word is this. The love which is here enjoined is a holy and spiritual one, made possible “because the love of *God* is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 5:5), for until *then* there is naught but hatred. Love for the brethren is a love for the image of God stamped upon their souls, “Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1Jo 5:1). No man can love another for the grace that is in his heart, unless grace be in his own heart. It is *natural* to love those who are kind and generous to us. It is *supernatural* to love those who are faithful and holy in their dealings with us.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on LOVE, which is the bond of perfectness” (see Col 3:12-14).

# THE LIFE OF DAVID

## 58. His Son Absalom

The chastenings, which were the natural fruits of David's sins, quickly began to fall upon him. Though God had made with him a covenant "ordered in all things and sure" (2Sa 23:5), and though he was the man after His own heart, yet He was very far from regarding his sins lightly. The honour of JEHOVAH's name required that such transgressions as David's should be marked by no ordinary tokens of displeasure. He had "given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2Sa 12:14), and therefore did He proclaim His disapproval more loudly by suffering David to live and pass through one tremendous sorrow after another, than had He slain him instantly after his crime against Uriah. Yet we may also behold therein the faithfulness, wisdom, and grace of God towards His servant by using those very sorrows for the renewing of him in holiness—that this *was* accomplished appears blessedly in the sequel.

David was now to prove to the full the solemn truth of, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts" (Jer 2:19). It was through those nearest and dearest to himself that David was to experience what "an evil thing and bitter" it is to depart from the Lord. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of *thine own house*" (2Sa 12:11) the Lord had declared. What must have been the feelings of his poor heart with this dread threat hanging over his family! How often do we moralize upon the wisdom and mercy of God in withholding from us a knowledge of the future—how it would spoil our present peace and comfort if we were acquainted with the trials and sorrows lying ahead of us—the more so if it were now revealed to us the evils which would overtake the members of our household. But the case was otherwise with David, *he knew* that the sore judgments of God were about to fall within his family circle!

One can readily imagine with what trepidation David would now look upon his several children, wondering upon which of them the divine blow would first fall. The death of Bathsheba's infant was but the prelude of the fearful storm which was about to descend upon his loved ones. It seems quite clear from all that follows, one of the family-failings of David was that he had been too easy-going with and indulgent toward his children, allowing his natural affections to override his better judgment, instead of (as it should be) the judgment guiding the affections—it is not without reason and meaning that the head is set *above* the heart in our physical bodies! No doubt the fact that David had several wives made it much more difficult to rule his offspring as duty required—how one wrong leads to another!

As we have seen in earlier chapters, David was a man of strong natural passions, and the deep feelings he cherished for his children was in full accord therewith. The fear of his servants to tell him that his infant was dead (2Sa 12:18); the advice of Jonadab to Amnon, who had read David's disposition aright, to feign himself sick, that "when his father came to see him" (see 2Sa 13:5) he might proffer his requests; his "weeping so sore" for the death of this son, and then again, his anguish having subsided, "his soul longing to go forth" to the other son who had slain him (see 2Sa 13:39); and the final instructions to his officers touching the safety of Absalom, even when

he was in arms against his father—“deal gently for my sake with...Absalom” (2Sa 18:5)—being far more concerned with the care of his child than the outcome of the battle; are so many illustrations of this trait.

But that which throws light upon the doting fondness of David for his children, a fondness which caused him to set aside the claimant calls of duty, comes out in his failure to punish Amnon for his crime against Tamar, and his failure to punish Absalom for his murder of Amnon. What light is thrown upon this infirmity of David’s when, in connection with Adonijah’s rebellion, “his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?” (1Ki 1:6). Little wonder, then, that his own offspring were made a scourge to him. Alas, he followed far too closely the evil example of Eli, the high priest of Israel, of whom it is written, “His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1Sa 3:13). Wisely did Thomas Scott say, “children are always uncertain comforts, but *indulged* children surely prove trials to pious parents, whose foolish fondness induces them to neglect their duty to God”—who *requires* them to duly discipline their offspring.

Yet David’s children had been preserved from open wickedness in their early years: it was not until *their father* became guilty of aggravated crimes that the restraining hand of God was removed from *them*! How this should speak to the hearts of parents today: if *they* forsake the paths of righteousness, there is good reason to believe that God will chasten them by suffering *their offspring* to do likewise. Children in their youth naturally consider the evil example of their parents an excuse why they may follow in their steps; and grown up ones too are emboldened and confirmed in sin by the sinful conduct of fathers and mothers. “Let this be a warning to us to watch and pray against temptations, lest by the misconduct of one unguarded hour we should occasion such future consequences to our offspring, and such misery to ourselves throughout our future lives” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

It is both deeply instructive and unspeakably solemn to observe *the method* followed by the Lord in the execution of His awful threatenings through Nathan. It was not that David’s palace was now burned by fire from heaven or razed to the ground by a cyclone. Nor was it that one of his sons was killed by a flash of lightening and another swallowed up by an earthquake. No, *that* is not God’s customary way—not by physical miracles, but by the operation of moral laws, is the retribution meted out by His government conducted. “God denounced the most grievous afflictions against the house of David on account of his conduct toward Uriah. Those afflictions were all executed in a way of Providence....Every part of the divine sentence against David was executed by His providence without a miracle. Who can work like God?” (Alexander Carson, 1776-1844). This is exceedingly striking and worthy of our closest attention, for it casts much light upon God’s government over the world today.

Yes, the manner in which God’s awful threatenings were fulfilled is most noteworthy. It was done in a way of *natural consequence* from David’s own transgressions. The curse which God pronounced upon him corresponded exactly to the character of his iniquities. He had despised the commandment of the Lord (2Sa 12:9, namely, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”) by taking to himself the wife of another man, and now the women of his own household should be defiled. He had become a man of blood in the butchery of Uriah and now of blood his own family should be made to drink. He had yielded to his lusts, and by that same baneful passion in others was he to be scourged for the rest of his days. The *complexion* of his remaining years was set by his own conduct in the palace at Jerusalem! And though David himself was spared from the violent hand of the avenger, yet he was long made the spectacle of righteous suffering before the world.

In marked contrast from the opening of 2 Samuel 11, chapter 12 closes by showing us David occupying again his proper position. There he slighted the post of duty, but here he is seen at the head of his people fighting the battles of the Lord. In the previous case, David was made to pay dearly for his fleshly ease, but here God prospered his efforts by delivering Rabbah into his hands. After the victory David and his army returned to *Jerusalem*, yet only for him to suffer one calamitous grief after another. The chapter which is now to be considered by us chronicles two of the most horrible crimes which ever disrupted the harmony of a family circle. One of David's sons now dishonours David's daughter, while another of his sons, after biding his time, revenged the outraged honour of his sister by murdering her seducer. Thus, lust and fratricide now desolated the king's own household.

David's children had learned the lesson which the fall of their father had taught them. Tragic indeed was the harvest the king now reaped, for a parent can have no sharper pang than the sight of his own sins reappearing in his children. "David saw the ghastly reflection of his unbridled passion in his eldest son's foul crime (and even a gleam of it in his unhappy daughter), and of his murderous craft in his second son's blood revenge" (Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1929). There is little need for us to dwell upon the revolting details. First, Amnon had determined to commit the fearful sin of incest against his half-sister, who was "fair" or beautiful (2Sa 13:1). Ah, how many a young woman has grieved because she was not pretty. Alas, good looks often prove to be a fatal snare and those endowed with them need to be doubly cautious.

The most solemn features of this first calamity may be seen in tracing the workings of God's righteous retribution in it. First, we have the Spirit's time-mark in the opening words of our chapter, "And it came to pass after this," which, as we have intimated above, was when the king had returned to *Jerusalem*—where his own fearful fall had taken place! Second, Amnon was the king's oldest son (2Sa 3:2) and therefore the one in immediate line for the throne, and probably the one he loved the most. Third, Amnon was at a loss to think of means for the gratification of his base desires, but there was at hand a cunning counselor who promptly devised a plot whereby he succeeded, and that man was a nephew of David's (2Sa 13:3)! Fourth, the workings of Providence were such that David himself was made an unwilling accessory to his daughter's ravishment. When the king saw Amnon, who pretended to be sick, God not only withheld from him a discernment of his evil designs, but David was the one who sent for Tamar—as poor Uriah had been deceived by him, now he was deceived by his son!

After gross insult (2Sa 13:17) had been added to her grievous injury, Tamar found a home with Absalom, who was her full brother. His question to her (2Sa 13:20) indicates that the character of Amnon was well-known, which renders the more excuseless the king's consenting for his daughter to visit him. Yet "the counsel of the LORD, that *shall* stand" (Pro 19:21), and though it evidenced His "severity" (Rom 11:22), nevertheless it was what even this world would designate a case of "poetic justice," so far as David was concerned. The more closely the case be examined the more will appear the righteous retribution which characterises it. As Joab had been so far from refusing to execute David's wicked plan, but had been a willing party to the same (2Sa 11:15-16), so Jonadab instead of recoiling with horror from the vile design of Amnon, helped him to secure it!

"But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth" (2Sa 13:21). A severe testing of his character was now presented, for it must be remembered that as king he was the chief magistrate in Israel, and therefore under the highest obligations to see that the law of God was impartially enforced. Merely to be "very wroth" by no means met the requirements of the case. As head of the nation it was his bounden, though exceedingly painful, duty, to see that his

debauched son was punished. The law was very express concerning such a case (see Lev 20:17), yet there is no intimation that David inflicted this penalty. Was it the workings of his own guilty conscience (calling to remembrance his sin) or parental softness toward his offspring which deterred him? Whichever it was, a dangerous precedent was set, for mildness unto transgressors by magistrates only serves to encourage greater evils. But though the king failed in his public duty, later on, the Lord dealt with Amnon, and in such a way as to greatly add to David's domestic trials.

“And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar” (2Sa 13:22). The Holy Spirit now introduces to our notice one of the most despicable, vile, and God-abandoned characters whose record is chronicled in the Scriptures. The first thing that we learn about him is his antecedents—he issued from a heathenish stock! His mother was a Gentile, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2Sa 3:3). The Geshurites were a fierce and intractable people, and the stain of their lawlessness passed into his blood. In taking Maacah unto himself, David disobeyed a plain command of the Lord, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deu 7:3). Need we wonder then that, having sown the wind, David was made to reap the whirlwind? God will not be defied with impunity.

“To Maacah were born Tamar and Absalom. Both were fair; both attractive. ‘In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him’ (2Sa 14:25). David probably was proud of the attractiveness which adorned his house and was willing to forget the source from which it sprang. The attractiveness wrought its effects, and as might be expected from the attractiveness of nature, the resulting consequences were sin and sorrow. The beauty of Tamar was the cause of sin and destruction to Amnon, who fell beneath the revengeful hand of Absalom his brother; and the attractiveness of Absalom wrought on the hearts of the men of Israel till they were drawn away from David and his throne. Such were the results of an attractiveness derived from sources foreign and forbidden to God's people” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899).

Little wonder that Mr. Newton went on to ask, “Has Christianity profited by the lesson or has it also formed alliances with the stranger?” Alas, that these questions are so easily answered. One of the chief reasons why poor Christendom is in such a sad condition today is because she has been so largely attracted by that which makes an appeal to the flesh. Nor is this evil by any means restricted to Rome, with its ornate architecture, imposing ritual, appeal to the senses. The same thing, in varied forms, now blights the greater part of Protestantism. The plain exposition of the Scriptures is replaced by the popular topics of the day, congregational singing has been pushed into the background by professional vocalists in the choir, and all sorts of worldly devices are employed to “draw” the young people. All of this is but the present form of Israel being allured by the physical attractions of a godless Absalom.

Singularly enough, the meaning of “Absalom” is “the father of peace,” but his was the peace of a *deceiver*. He was the child of him that was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and he knew no other master—there is not a single intimation that *God* ever had any place in his thoughts. The deceitfulness and treachery of his character appears from the beginning. His words to Tamar were, “Hold now thy peace, my sister: he [Amnon] is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar *remained* desolate in her brother Absalom's house” (2Sa 13:20), apparently with no suspicion of his murderous intentions. Meanwhile, “Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar” (2Sa 13:22). The spirit of revenge consumed him and he only waited his time for a suitable opportunity

to exercise it. Absalom was the rod appointed by the Lord for the further chastening of David—a rod, as we have seen, taken out of his own stem, his own child. “The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small!”

## UNION AND COMMUNION

### 14. Experimental

We would ask our readers to please bear with us for writing further on the present aspect of our many-sided subject, namely, the restoration to fellowship with Christ of a backslidden believer. The need for it appears to us so pressing that we feel constrained to make another effort toward helping some of our brethren and sisters who have fallen by the wayside. How many there are who for a year or two seem very earnest and zealous in the Christian life, and then become cold and careless, semi-worldly or weighted down with the cares of this life. Frequently such cases settle down in a state of partial despair. They feel that they are “utter failures,” and conclude that daily communion with Christ is not for such as they. Instead of humbly confessing their failures to the Lord and trustfully seeking pardon and fresh supplies of grace, they go halting and mourning the rest of their days.

We greatly fear that there are not a few of God’s dear children who, to a greater or less degree, are held captives by the devil and are largely ignorant of the means for recovery. It is the duty of God’s servants to seek out such and acquaint them with the provisions of divine grace—not to make light of sin and excuse backsliding, but to faithfully and tenderly point out how much Christ is being dishonoured and what they are losing by their conduct, and then to set forth the means which God has appointed for their restoration, particularly emphasising the fact we have a great High Priest who has compassion on them that are out of the way (Heb 5:2), and is willing and able to save unto the uttermost them that come to God by Him (Heb 7:25).

Perhaps one of our readers says, But the Lord has turned away from me the light of His countenance, and therefore I have much reason to fear that I am not in His favour. Such an objection is answered in the charter of grace, “*I will not* turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer 32:40). The Lord has withheld from thee His smile, His comforts, and thou art troubled about it, but that very trouble is for good—it should put thee upon inquiring into the reason for His strangeness toward thee. It should humble thee. It should bring thee into the dust before Him in sincere and contrite confession. And then, thou shouldest exercise thy faith on such a Scripture as this, “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him” (Isa 57:17-18)—it was Fatherly chastisement which smote thee, but His love is unchanged, and He is ready to heal and comfort.

Perhaps another fears that God has not only hidden His face, but has quite forsaken him. He may have done so to thy sense and feeling, yet not so as to His own gracious purpose, which changeth not. Hear how He speaks to thee, distressed one, “For a small moment have I forsaken

thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer” (Isa 54:7-8)—how that should silence thy doubts. How gracious is thy God! How infinitely merciful was it that He should give thee such promises, so suited to thy needs, thy case. How well-fitted is such a word as this to preserve thee under the trials of faith and to bring thee out of them. Read it over and over until the clouds of unbelief are dispersed, and thou art again assured that God has a loving and royal welcome for every returning prodigal.

But possibly there is a reader who says, My case is much more desperate. God is incensed against me and justly so. He has cast me off and I can expect no more favour at His hands. Once, indeed, I thought that He loved me, and that I loved Him, but I have fouled my garments, fallen into great sin, disgraced my profession. My conscience accuses me of being a dog which has returned to his vomit. I deliberately flouted my privileges, sinned against light, and conviction, and I am verily guilty of that which is not to be found in the truly regenerate. Ah, dear friend, sad indeed as is such a case, yet your language is not that of a reprobate. Thou art fallen into the mire, but are you determined to remain there? You are under a load of guilt, but wilt thou *nurse it*, and so add sin to sin? No matter how vile thy fall, thou canst not be truly humbled for it until thou turnest to God and trustest the plenteous redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Let us anticipate a possible objection at this point—Is it altogether *wise* to speak so freely of the relief available for even a desperate case? None but a self-righteous Pharisee would ask such a question, therefore it is hardly deserving of any answer at all. But for the sake of any who may be perturbed by such a question, let it be pointed out, that there is no subject revealed in Scripture but that the wicked may pervert it (2Pe 3:16). No matter how carefully the truth be presented, how guarded the language used, how well balanced the presentation, those who are determined to do so will wrest it to their own destruction. It is a great pity that some of God’s servants do not recognise this fact more clearly and act accordingly. They are so afraid that a wrong use may be made of what they say or that their teaching may be denounced as “dangerous,” that they are muzzled, and often hold back a most needful and precious part “of the children’s bread.”

Let us not attempt to be wiser than the Holy Spirit. He hesitates not to tell forth the riches of divine grace unto the most notorious sinners and the worst backsliders. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jo 2:1). Here is a guide for us. First, there is a presentation of the exalted standard which God sets before His people, a pressing of the requirements of His holiness. Second, there is a plain declaration of God’s gracious provision for those who sadly fail to measure up to His standard, announcing the freeness of divine mercy. This is the order for us to follow and this is the “balance” which we are to observe. First, a stressing of God’s unchanging claims, with His hatred of all sin, and then the recounting of the gracious provision made for His failing people. “If any one [of His children] sin,” *not* they are cast off by God and forfeit their salvation, but “they have *an advocate* with the Father” (1Jo 2:1). Naught but the apprehension of this latter fact will melt the backslider’s heart.

So it is all through the Scriptures. Take the sixth chapter of Numbers, which treats of Nazarite dedication to God. There we have in type the *highest* form of separation from carnal delights and devotedness to the Lord, yet even here we find God anticipating *failure* and providing for it, “And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath *defiled* the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head” etc. (Num 6:9-12). God knows what we are even after our regeneration, and that there is never a day passes but what we need His pardoning mercy. He knows that while we are left down here, there will always be sin to be confessed, judged, forgiven, and put away. And

therefore, while He never lowers the requirements of His holiness, yet His grace is ever found amply sufficient for His failing peoples' need, even though that very need be the result of their sins. The preacher is never to excuse sin or lightly regard the declension of saints, yet he must not fail to make clear and present the rich and full provision which a gracious and compassionate God has made for those that wander from Him.

As a further example of what has just been said, let us for a while consider together the precious contents of Hosea 14:1-6. "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon." This passage belongs as truly unto spiritual Israel today, as it applied to natural Israel in the past, Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11.

The name "Israel" is used in Scripture with varying latitude. It has a wider scope when employed nationally and a narrower when used spiritually. It belongs to all the fleshly descendants of Jacob, but it had a special force unto the elect remnant among them. Inside the nation as a whole were "Israelites indeed" (see Joh 1:47), concerning whom it was said, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Psa 73:1). This distinction is clearly recognised in the New Testament, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly....but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly" (Rom 2:28-29), "Behold Israel *after the flesh*" (1Co 10:18), which clearly implies there is another Israel "after the spirit"! It has helped the writer much to perceive that the nation of Israel in Old Testament times was a type of Christendom as a whole and that the godly remnant in that nation foreshadowed the little flock of the regenerate amid the great mass of professing Christians.

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hos 14:1). These words, then, had a wider and a narrower application. They were addressed first to the nation as a whole. They were spoken secondly to saved individuals in the nation. Hosea prophesied in very dark times. He lived during the reign of wicked Jeroboam, of whom it is said so often, "he caused Israel to sin" (see 1Ki 14:16), and while Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahab were over Judah. Idolatry was rampant, yet seven thousand had been preserved from bowing the knee to Baal. History has repeated itself, for our lot is cast in a day when spiritual idolatry is sadly rife, and when many of God's own people are infected and affected by the evil spirit which is abroad. There is much in Hosea 14 which is truly pertinent and of great practical importance for us now. Once we get beneath the different figures there used, their spiritual significance will be readily seen.

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hos 14:1). How blessedly has God here revealed His desire for backsliders to return unto Himself! The manner in which this call is given is very impressive and heart-melting. "O" is a note of exclamation. It is like one who has done much to help an indigent friend, now surprised and grieved at his base requital, saying, "O John!"—or a devoted husband saying to his unfaithful spouse, "O wife!" So God says to those for whom He has done so much and whose waywardness He has borne with such patience, "O Israel." It is a note of exclamation addressed to their affections. God does not barely say, "Israel, return unto me," still less does He gruffly command



them so to do, but He tenderly entreats them, “*O Israel return*” (Hos 14:1). What *love* that expresses!

The backslider must seriously examine his condition and solemnly consider his sad plight. He has forsaken the paths of righteousness—unless he retraces his steps what will his end be! Let him heed, then, this divine injunction. “Return”—the Hebrew word is very emphatic, yet difficult to reproduce in English—“return *even* unto” or “*quite up to*” is the thought—no partial return will satisfy *His* heart. “Return unto the LORD *thy* God” (Hos 14:1)—unto Him who has taken thee into covenant relationship with Himself, who has shown thee such favours, unto Him who alone can do thee any real good. Return unto the One whom thou hast so grievously wronged, so excuselessly insulted, by allowing forbidden objects to draw away thy heart from Him. “For thou *hast fallen* by thine iniquity”—into spiritual sloth, into sickness of soul, into a joyless state, out of which none but God can lift you. Then return to Him, for none but He can pardon, cleanse, heal, deliver you from the toils of Satan.

But what is meant by “*return unto the LORD thy God*” (Hos 14:1)? First of all, it denotes that the backslider honestly and solemnly face the fact that he has departed from the Lord, that he has followed the evil devices of his own heart, yielded to the temptations of the devil, entered forbidden paths. Second, it signifies that he must now consider his ways and “cease to do evil.” Third, it implies that he judge himself unsparingly for his folly and wickedness, taking sides with God against himself. Fourth, it means that he must humble himself before God, acknowledging his transgressions, confessing his unworthiness, earnestly seeking the divine mercy. Finally, it includes the setting of his affections again on things above, diligently seeking grace to live as becometh a child of God.

It is not difficult for us to write down what is intended by a “return unto the LORD” (Hos 14:1), but it is far from easy for a backslider to carry it out. Satan will make a strenuous effort to retain his victim. If he can no longer allure him with his baits, he will seek to drive him to despair with his accusations, telling him that he has sinned away the day of grace, that he has committed the great transgression, that such high-handed rebellion as he is guilty of is beyond forgiveness—that his case is quite hopeless. Unto any such who may read these lines let us say, Abraham, the father of the faithful, fell into the same sin again and again. David transgressed very grievously. Peter, though definitely forewarned, denied his Master—yet *they* were recovered out of the snare of the devil. Remember it is written, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from *all* sin” (1Jo 1:7).

Read through Hosea 13 and note well the condition of Israel at that time. They were guilty of great wickedness, and under the threatening of divine wrath, yet to them came this tender appeal, “O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God” (Hos 14:1). How that shows us there are no seasons or circumstances which shall obstruct sovereign grace when God is pleased to exercise it toward His erring people. There is “A fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness” (Zec 13:1). That fountain possesses an infinite virtue to wash away every spot and stain of sin. It is a public fountain standing available for daily use, that befouled believers may wash therein. Does not God say to His erring people, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17), then why reject the comfort of such a promise. It is perfectly suited to thy present distress and is the remedy.

“Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously” (Hos 14:2). So desirous is God that His backslidden people turn to Him, He here dictates a prayer for their use—the injured One instructs them! Here God graciously makes known the means of recovery, for so ignorant are we of the way of return that we have to

be *told* what to do—“We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26)! Yet simple as the remedy appears, it is far from easy to carry out. As a child is slow to acknowledge its naughtiness, so pride of heart in a backslider makes him reluctant to own his iniquities. Alas, how many postpone their restoration by delaying their confession, yet it is to their own great loss and harm that they refuse to acknowledge their sins.

The worse be our case, the greater is our need of coming to Christ. On a bitterly cold day, the genial heat of a fire can only be enjoyed by our *drawing near to it*. We cannot bask in the warmth of Christ’s love while we determine to remain away from Him, hence the “O Israel, *return* unto the LORD thy God” of Hosea 14:1 is at once followed by, “Take with you words, and *turn to* the LORD.” No empty “words” will suffice—the whole soul must go out to God, so that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The one who is conscious that he has left his first love and has a real purpose to return to the Lord, must definitely look to the Holy Spirit to work in his heart the substance of this prayer, so that it truly voices his deep desires.

But why does God order that we “take with us words”? Is He not fully acquainted with the thoughts and intents of our hearts? Yes, but He requires us to humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand, to take unto ourselves the shame of our fall, to stir us up to *feel* the enormity of our crimes. Say unto Him, “Take away all *iniquity*.” This is what is to deeply exercise the penitent’s heart—that which has so grievously dishonoured the Lord, befouled his own garments, and occasioned such a stumbling block unto His fellows. Repentance is to act itself in prayer, requesting that God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves—either remove the guilt and defilement of our sins or subdue their raging within. “Take away” the love of, the bondage of, the pollution of, from heart, conscience, and life. “Take away *all* iniquity.” There must be no reservation—all sin is equally burdensome and hateful to a penitent soul.

“And receive us graciously” (Hos 14:2). Faith must individualize it and say, “Receive *me* graciously.” Deal with me not according to my evil deserts but according to Thine infinite mercy. Look upon the atoning blood and pardon me. Regard me no longer with displeasure, but grant me fresh tokens of Thy favour and acceptance. “*So* will we render the calves of our lips” (Hos 14:1), that is, offer praise unto Thee (Heb 13:15). The *order* is unchangeable. Only as the backslider returns to the Lord, humbles himself before Him, repents of his sins, seeks His forgiveness, is he experimentally fitted to be a *worshipper* once more. God will not accept the praise of rebels!

“Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy” (Hos 14:3). The force of these words can best be understood by reading Hosea 5:13; 7:11; 8:8, 9; 12:1—“horses” were what the unbelieving Hebrews put their trust in during times of war. Fleshly confidence and idolatry were *their* two worst sins, and here they are confessed and disowned. So we must acknowledge and renounce (in detail) *our* sins. The “fatherless” are those conscious of their deep need, helplessness, dependency. O turn to Him and find the Lord “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1).

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hos 14:4). This is ever God’s response to a returning backslider who penitently confesses his sins and truly desires to be delivered from a repetition of them. Sin is a disease which wounds the soul and only God can “heal” it. When He loves us “freely,” “He manifests himself to” us (see Joh 14:21). “I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily” (Hos 14:5). “Dew” comes from above, falls insensibly, cooling the air, refreshing vegetation, making fruitful. It is a beautiful figure of the Spirit’s *renewing* the restored believer, granting him fresh supplies of grace. The “lily” speaks of lowliness, purity, fragrance. “And cast forth his roots as Lebanon”

(Hos 14:5), that is, be more firmly fixed in the love of Christ, and so less easily swayed by the customs of the world and assaults of Satan. “His beauty shall be as the olive tree” useful and fruitful, “and his smell [the fragrance he emits] as Lebanon” (Hos 14:6). A restored Christian is a joy to God’s servants and an encouragement to his brethren—(Hos 14:7), others are encouraged to “return.” O what inducements are here set before the backslider *to* “turn unto the LORD,” yet *faith* must be exercised so as to *appropriate* the precious promises of verses 4-8.

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

### 4. Jacob Meeting Esau (Genesis 32)

Notwithstanding that Esau was determined on the murder of his brother, on account of the great provocations he had received from him, yet the eternal purpose of God secured his safety, as much as if he had been in heaven, under the throne of the Most High. But *how* does God preserve him? By his *providence* alone, in the use of ordinary means, in which the eye of human wisdom would see nothing of divine interference at all. No miracle appears in altering the purpose of the intended murderer. All is natural. Providence works through the prudence of his servant. Jacob proposes to meet his brother and disarm his wrath by the most consummate human wisdom. He avails himself of a deep knowledge of human nature, and connects such a series of conciliating circumstances, that the stubborn soul of Esau is broken to child-like tenderness. The patriarch sent messengers before him to apprise his brother of his approach, and charges them, in the first place, to inform him of his wonderful prosperity and riches. This in itself is a conciliating circumstance. Prosperity creates friends.

But in the case of these brothers, this was calculated to have a peculiar effect. Length of time might have cooled the passion of the discontented brother, but his *interest* still equally demands the murder. This alone can restore the inheritance and disappoint the subtlety of Jacob. Nothing was so well calculated to allay the suspicions of evil from Jacob, as the fact of uncommon wealth. Esau had no respect for the spiritual promises, and the great prosperity of Jacob would tend to convince him that he was in no danger of the machinations of his brother to deprive him of the wealth of Isaac. The messengers are instructed also to recognise, in Jacob’s name, the superiority of his elder brother. He uses the most honourable forms of address to Esau, recognising the lordship over him, and the most humiliating expressions with regard to himself. This was well-calculated to soothe the pride of Esau and soften his rugged heart.

In the answer of the messengers on their return from Esau, we may see a remarkable instance of providence. “And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him” (Gen 32:6). That this was with hostile intentions is most apparent. Jacob himself understood the matter in this light, “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed” (Gen 32:7). It was not to honour his brother that Esau would take such an escort to meet him. Yet there was no threatening. Not a word in reply, either good or bad. There is great cause for apprehension—there is some room for hope.

Here we see that divine providence brings His people into danger, and surrounds them with circumstances that create alarm, and keeps them for a time in suspense, in order to try and exercise their faith and patience. Providence might have instantly relieved Jacob, from apprehensions on the return of the messengers. Esau might have been moved instantly to mercy, and to use language that would relieve his brother from his anxiety. Why did he not do so? Does God take pleasure in the pain of His people? No, but it was in *wisdom* that Jacob was not instantly relieved. Had he got a favourable answer, he would not have had room to exhibit the admirable combination of faith and works which is now presented to our view. His suspense was good for him—it is good for us. For a like reason, Jesus did not instantly relieve the woman of Syro-Phoenicia. Let the Lord's people, then, in their distresses think of this. Let them hope against hope, and let them never cease to trust in God, and use the means that they may judge most prudent to avert any threatened evil or obtain any wished-for good. The dark clouds that thicken over their heads may burst in blessings. Providence may bring them to the brink of ruin and keep them trembling over the precipice, but He can prevent them from falling over and can draw them back when He pleases.

On the return of the messengers, Jacob was greatly alarmed, but he did not despair. He used every precaution of prudence, while he looked to the Lord for deliverance. It is plain that he expected deliverance only from the interposition of providence, and it is equally plain that he expected this interposition *in the use of means*. Indeed, though Jacob took the most effectual means of softening Esau, yet all these means would have been utterly ineffectual without the interposition of providence. Jacob, therefore, while he was planning and employing these means, still says, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hands of my brother" (Gen 32:11). Means succeed *by providence*, not without it. After all the preparations of Jacob, Esau might have remained obstinate and relentless. Human wisdom will say, "If God delivers, then leave it to Him. Why use means?" "If God says He will save, throw yourself in the river." So said Satan, "Cast thyself down, for it is written." But Christ replies, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Mat 4:7). The means are appointed by God as well as the end. God commanded Jacob to return and promised to be with him. But in returning Jacob is in great danger, both from Laban and from Esau, and he uses the means of defense that God put in his power. In the use of these means, God delivered him out of the hands of his enemies. Jacob, in faith, reminds God of His command and promise, "Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" (Gen 32:9). But while he looks to God for deliverance, he plans and executes a most consummate scheme of wisdom. He divides his flock with the two bands, that if the one should be taken the other might have a chance of escape. Then he selected a present for his brother from his flocks and herds, and divided them into several bands, that the effect on his brother's mind might be the greater—with orders to his servants how to express themselves on the occasion. All these things were well calculated to effect his purpose, and appease the wrath of Esau. But when Jacob had planned and put in train all that his prudence could contrive to appease his incensed brother, *he trusts not to his preparation*. His confidence was in the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. He spent the night in prayer, and his God gave efficiency to the means which His servant had employed.

How interesting is the meeting of the brothers! Jacob's only hope of safety is *in God*, for as yet he sees no instance nor symptom of reconciliation in his brother. He approaches him whom he had so greatly offended. He "bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother" (Gen 33:3). The God who has the hearts of all men in His hands was not forgetful of His servant. Esau is overcome. Not only does he not injure, but natural affection bursts in tears from

his eyes, “And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept” (Gen 33:4). How glorious does the providence of God appear in this interesting scene!—Alexander Carson, 1776-1844

# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## 10. Its Rule (Completed)

The unchanging moral law of God, which requires us to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves, is the believer’s rule of life, the standard of holiness to which his character and conduct must be conformed, the line and plummet by which his internal desires and thoughts as well as outward deeds are measured. And as has been shown, we are conformed to that law by the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit. This He does by making us see and feel the heinousness of all sin, by delivering us from its reigning power, and by communicating to us an inclination and disposition of heart *unto* the requirements of the law, so that we are thereby fitted and enabled to the practice of obedience. While enmity against God reigns within—as it does in every unregenerate soul—it is impossible to give that obedience which the law demands.

We concluded our last paper by showing something of the marvelous and radical change which a sinner passes through when he is truly converted to God. One who has really surrendered to the claims of God *approves* of His law, “I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way” (Psa 119:127-128). And why do not the unregenerate do likewise? Because they have no love for a holy God. But believers, loving a holy God in Christ, must love the law also, since in it the image of His holiness is displayed. The converted have a real inclination of heart *unto the whole* law, “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver....*All* thy commandments are faithful” (Psa 119:72, 86). There is in the regenerate a fixed principle which lies the same way as the holy law, bending away from what the law forbids and toward what it enjoins.

The converted habitually *endeavour to conform* their outward conduct to the whole law, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psa 119:5-6). They desire a *fuller knowledge* of and obedience to the law, “Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight” (Psa 119:33-35). Should any object that these quotations are all made from the *Old Testament* (waiving now the fact that such an objection is quite pointless, for regeneration and its effects, conversion and its fruits, are the same in *all* ages), we would point out that the apostle Paul described his own experience in identically the same terms, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man...with the mind I myself serve the law of God” (Rom 7:22, 25). Thus Christ conforms His people to the law by causing His Spirit to work in them an inclination toward it, a love for it, and an obedience to it.

But at this point a very real and serious difficulty is presented to the believer, for a genuine Christian has an *honest* heart, and detests lies and hypocrisy. That difficulty may be stated thus—If conversion consists in a real conformity to the holiness of God’s law, with submission and obedience to its authority, accompanied by a sincere and constant purpose of heart, with habitual endeavour in actual practice, then I dare not regard myself as one who is genuinely converted, for I cannot say that such is *my* experience. Nay, I have to sorrowfully and shamefacedly lament that very much is my case in the exact reverse. So far from the reigning power of sin being broken in me, I find my corruptions and lusts raging more fiercely than ever, while my heart is a cage of all unclean things.

The above language will accurately express the feelings of many a trembling heart. As the preceding articles upon the rule of our sanctification have been thoughtfully pondered, not a few, we doubt not, are seriously disturbed in their minds. On the one hand, they cannot gainsay what has been written, for they both see and feel that it is according to the truth, but on the other hand, it *condemns* them, it makes them realise how far, far short they come of measuring up to such a standard. Yea, it plainly appears to them that they do not in any sense or to any degree measure up to it at all. Conscious of so much in them that is opposed to the law, conscious of their lack of conformity to it, both inwards and outwards, they bitterly bewail themselves, and cry, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24).

Our first reply is, Thank God for such an honest confession, for it supplies clear evidence that you *are* truly converted. No hypocrite—except it be in the hour of death—ever cries, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24). No unregenerate soul ever mourns over his lack of conformity to God’s law! Such godly sorrow, dear Christian reader, will enable you to appropriate at least one verse of Scripture to your own case, “My tears have been my meat day and night” (Psa 42:3), and those words proceeded not from the bitter remorse of a Judas, but were the utterance of one who had exclaimed, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psa 42:1). Alas that so many today are ignorant of what constitutes the actual experience of a Christian—defeat as well as victory, grief as well as joy.

Whilst it be a fact that at regeneration a new nature is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit, a nature which is inclined toward and loves the law, it is also a fact that the old nature is *not* removed, nor its opposition to and hatred of the law changed. Whilst it be a fact that a supernatural principle of holiness is communicated to us by the Spirit, it is also a fact that the principle and root of indwelling sin remains, being neither eradicated nor sublimated. The Christian has in him two opposite and opposing principles, which produce in him a state of constant warfare, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). That “cannot” looks *both* ways—because of the restraining presence of the “Spirit,” the “flesh” is prevented from fully gratifying its evil desires, and because of the hindering presence of the “flesh,” the “Spirit” is unable to fully realise its aspirations.

It is the presence of and the warfare between these two natures, the “flesh” and the “Spirit,” the principles of sin and holiness, which explains the bewildering state and conflicting experience of the real Christian, and it is only as he traces more fully the teaching of Holy Scripture and carefully compares himself therewith, that light is cast upon what is so puzzling and staggering in his experience. Particularly it is in the seventh chapter of Romans that we have the clearest and most complete description of the dual history of a converted soul. Therein we find the apostle Paul, as moved by the Spirit, portraying most vividly and intimately his own spiritual biography. There are few chapters in the New Testament which the devil hates more than Romans 7, and

strenuously and subtly does he strive to rob the Christian of its comforting and establishing message.

As we have shown above, the Christian approves of the law and owns it to be “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). He does so, even though the law *condemns* many things in him, yea condemns all in him which is unholy or ungodly. But more, the Christian *condemns himself*—“For that which I do I *allow not*: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom 7:15). So far from sin affording him satisfaction, it is the Christian’s greatest grief. The more he perceives the excellency of God and what He is entitled to from His creatures, and the more he realises what a debtor he is to divine grace and the loving obedience he ought to render out of gratitude, the more acute is the Christian’s sorrow for his sad and continual failures to be what he ought to be and to live as he should.

Our second answer to one who is deeply distressed over the raging of his lusts and fears that he has never been soundly converted, is this—the fact is, that the more holy a person is, and the more his heart is truly sanctified, the more clearly does he perceive his corruptions and the more painfully does he feel the plague of his heart, while he utters his complaints in strong expressions and with bitterness of soul. In God’s light we see light! It is not that sin has greater control of us than formerly, but that we now have *eyes to see* its fearful workings, and our consciences are *more sensitive* to feel its guilt. An unregenerate person is like a sow wallowing in the mire. His impurities and iniquities afford him satisfaction, and give him little or no concern, no, not even the unholiness of his outward practice, much less the unholiness of his heart.

There is a notable difference between the sensibilities and expressions of the unconverted and converted. An unregenerate person, who indulges freely in a course of evil practice, will nevertheless give a *favourable* account of himself. He will boast of his good-heartedness, his kindness, his generosity, his praiseworthy qualities, and good deeds. On the other hand, persons truly holy, even when kept pure in their outward behaviour, yet conscious of their indwelling corruptions, will *condemn* themselves in unsparing language. The unholy fix their attention on anything good they can find in themselves, and this renders them easy in an evil course. But a truly sanctified person is ready to overlook his spiritual attainments and fruits, and fixes his attention, with painful consciousness, on those respects in which he *lacks* conformity to Christ.

A Christian will say, I thought I had tasted that the Lord is gracious and that my heart had undergone a happy change, with a powerful determination toward God and holiness. I concluded I had some sound evidence of true conversion and of a heart that was really regenerated. Yet I knew the effect should be to grow in grace, to advance in holiness, and to be more delivered from sin. But alas, I find it quite otherwise. If there is grace in me, it is becoming weaker, and even though my outward conduct be regulated by the precepts of the law, yet in my heart sin is becoming stronger and stronger—evil lusts, carnal affections, worldly desires, and disorderly passions, are daily stirring, often with great vehemence, defiling my spirit. Alas, after all, I fear my past experience was only a delusion and the dread of the final outcome often strikes terror throughout my whole soul.

Dear friend, it is true that there is much in every Christian which affords great cause for self-judgment and deep humbling of ourselves before God, yet this is a very different matter from sin obtaining fuller dominion over us. Where sin gains power, there is always a corresponding *hardening* of heart and spiritual *insensibility*. Sin is served *willingly* by the wicked, and is sweet and pleasant to them. But if *you* sorrow over sin, sincerely and vigorously oppose it, condemn yourself for it, then old things have passed away and all is become new. “Christians may be assured that a growing sensibility of conscience and heart sorrow for sin is among the chief

evidences of growth in grace and of good advances in holiness that they are likely to have on this side of heaven. For the more pure and holy the heart is, it will naturally have the more quick feeling of whatever sin remaineth in it" (James Fraser, 1760).

The *dual* experience of the Christian is plainly intimated in Paul's statement, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom7:25). But someone may reply, The opening verse of the next chapter says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who *walk not after the flesh*, but after the Spirit" (Rom 8:1). Ah, note the minute accuracy of Scripture—had it said, "who *act not according to the flesh*," we might well despair and conclude for a certainty we were not Christians at all. But "walking" is a *deliberate* course, in which a man proceeds *freely*, without force or struggle. It is the reverse of being dragged or driven. But when the believer follows the dictates of the flesh, it is *against* the holy desires of his heart, and with reluctance to the new nature! But does not Romans 8:4 affirm that Christ died in order that "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us?" (Rom 8:4). Again, we answer, admire the marvelous accuracy of Scripture, it does *not* say, "the righteousness of the law is *now* fulfilled in us." It is not so, perfectly, in this life, but it will be so at our glorification.

Perhaps the reader is inclined to ask, But *why* does God suffer the sinful nature to remain in the Christian. He could easily remove it. Beware, my friend, of calling into question God's infinite wisdom. He knows what is best, and *His* thoughts and ways are often the opposite of ours (Isa 55:8). But let me ask, *Which* magnifies God's *power* the more—to preserve in this wicked world one who still has within him a corrupt nature, or one that has been made as sinless as the holy angels? Can there be any doubt as to the answer! But why does God not *subdue* my lusts—would it not be more for His glory if He did? Again, we say, Beware of measuring God with *your* mind. He knows which is most for His glory. But answer this question—If your lusts *were* greatly subdued and you sinned far less than you do, would you appreciate and adore His *grace* as you now do?

Our third answer to the deeply exercised soul who calls into question the genuineness of his conversion, is this—Honestly apply to yourself the following tests. First, in seasons of retirement from the noise and business of the world, or during the sacred hours of the Sabbath, or in your secret devotions, *what* are your thoughts, what is the real temper of your mind? Do you *know* God, commune with and delight in Him? Is His Word precious, is prayer a welcome exercise? Do you delight in God's perfections and esteem Him for His absolute supremacy and sovereignty? Do you feel and lament your remaining blindness and ignorance, do you mourn over your lack of conformity to God's law and your natural contrariety to it, and hate yourself for it? Do you watch and pray and fight against the corruptions of your heart? Not indeed as you *should*, but do you really and sincerely do so at all?

Second, what are the *grounds* of your love to God? From what motives are you influenced to love Him? Because you believe He loves you? or because He appears infinitely great and glorious in Himself? Are you glad that He *is* infinitely holy, that He knows and sees all things, that He possesses all power? Does it suit your heart that God governs the world, and requires that all creatures should bow in the dust before Him, that He alone may be exalted? Does it appear perfectly reasonable that you should love God with all your heart, and do you loath and resist everything contrary to Him? Do you feel yourself to be wholly to blame for not being altogether such as the law requires? Third, is there being formed within you a disposition to love your neighbour as yourself, so that you wish and seek only his good? And do you hate and mourn over



any contrary spirit within you? Honest answers to these questions should enable you to ascertain your real spiritual state.

“The holiness which the Gospel requireth will *not* be maintained either in the heart or lives of men *without a continual conflict*, warring, contending, and that with all diligence, watchfulness, and perseverance therein. It is our *warfare*, and the Scripture abounds in the discovery of the adversaries we have to conflict withal, their power and subtlety, as also in directions and encouragements unto their resistance. To suppose that Gospel obedience will be kept in our hearts and lives without a continual management of a vigorous warfare against its enemies, is to deny the Scripture and the experience of all that believe and obey God in sincerity. Satan, sin, and the world, are continually assaulting of it, and seeking to ruin its interest in us. The devil will not be resisted, which is our duty to do (1Pe 5:8-9) without a sharp contest. In the management whereof, we are commanded to ‘take unto ourselves the whole armour of God’ (see Eph 6:13). Fleshly lusts do continually war against our souls (1Pe 2:11), and if we maintain not a warfare unto the end against them, they will be our ruin. Nor will the power of the world be any otherwise avoided than by a victory over it (1Jo 5:4), which will not be carried without contending.

“But I suppose it needs no great confirmation unto any who know what it is to serve and obey God in temptations, that the life of faith and race of holiness will *not* be preserved in *without a severe striving*, labouring, contending, with diligence and persistence—so that I shall take it as a principle (notionally at least) agreed upon by the generality of Christians. If we like not to be holy on *these* terms, we must let it alone, for on any other we shall never be so. If we faint in *this* course, if we give it over, if we think what we aim at herein not to be worth the obtaining or persevering by such a severe contention all our days, we must be content to be without it. Nothing doth so promote the interest of hell and destruction in the world as a presumption that a lazy slothful performance of some duties, and an abstinence from some sins, is that which God will accept as our obedience. Crucifying of sin, mortifying our inordinate affections, contesting against the whole interest of the flesh, Satan, and the world, and that in *inward* actings of grace, and all instances of outward duties, and that *always* while we live in this world, are required of us hereunto” (John Owen, 1660).

From all that has been said, it should be evident that the Christian needs to exercise the greatest possible care, *daily*, over the inward purity of his heart, earnestly opposing *the first motions* of every fleshly lust, inordinate affection, evil imagination, and unholy passion. The *heart* is the real seat of holiness. Heart-holiness is the chief part of our conformity to the spiritual law of God, nor is any outward work considered as holy by Him if the heart be not right with Him—desiring and seeking after obedience to Him—for He sees and tries *the heart*. Holiness of heart is absolutely necessary to peace of mind and joy of soul, for only a cleansed heart can commune with the thrice Holy God—then “Keep thy heart *with all diligence*; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23).

In the last paragraph we have said nothing which in anywise clashes with our remarks in the body of this article, rather have we emphasised once more another aspect of our subject, namely, the pressing duty which lies upon the Christian to bring his heart and life into fuller conformity with the law. It would be a grievous sin on the part of the writer were he to lower the standard which God has set before us to the level of our present attainments. Vast indeed is the difference between what we *ought to be* and what we actually *are* in our character and conduct, and deep should be our sorrow over this. Nevertheless, if the root of the matter be in us, there will be a longing after, a praying for and a pressing forward unto increased personal and practical holiness.

N.B. This aspect of our theme has been purposely developed by us somewhat disproportionately. The supreme importance of it required fullness of detail. The prevailing ignorance called for a lengthy treatment of the subject. Unless we know *what* the Rule of Sanctification is, and seek to conform thereto, all our efforts after holiness will and must be wide of the mark. Nothing is more honouring to God, and nothing makes more for our own true happiness than His LAW to be revered, loved, and obeyed by us.

# November

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 37. The Spirit Transforming (Part 1)

Just as there are certain verses in the Old Testament and the Gospels which give us a miniature of the redemptive work of Christ for God's people—such, for example, as Isaiah 53:5 and John 3:16—so in the epistles there are some condensed doctrinal declarations which express in a few words the entire work of the Spirit in reforming, conforming, and transforming believers. 2 Corinthians 3:18 is a case in point, “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.” This important passage supplies a brief but blessed summary of the progressive work of grace which is wrought in the Christian by the indwelling Spirit. It focuses to a single point the different rays which are emitted by the various graces which He communicates to them, namely, that wherein the saint is slowly but surely conformed unto and transfigured into the very image of the Lord.

There are many parts in and aspects of the Spirit's work in reforming, conforming, and transforming the believer, but they are here epitomised in one brief but most comprehensive statement, which we now propose to examine and expound. As an aid to this, let us proceed to ask our verse a number of questions. First, exactly what is meant by “the glory of the Lord,” into “the same image” of which all believers “are changed”?—*are*—not, “shall be.” Second, what is “the glass” in which we are beholding this glory? Third, what is denoted in the we are “changed into the same image from glory to glory.” Fourth, what is the force of “we all with open face” are beholding this glory? Finally, how does the Spirit of the Lord effect this great change in believers? Are they entirely passive therein or is there an active co-operation on their part?

Perhaps it will help the reader most if we first give brief answers to these questions and then supply amplifications of the same in what follows. The “glory of the Lord” here signifies His moral perfections, the excellencies of His character. The “glass” in which His glory is revealed, and in which those with anointed eyes may behold it, is the Holy Scripture. Our being “changed into the same image” has reference to our salvation, viewed from the experimental side—that it is here said to be “from glory to glory” intimates it is a gradual and progressive work. Our beholding that glory with “open face” means that the veil of darkness, of prejudice, of “enmity,”

which was over our depraved hearts by nature, has been removed, so that in God's light we now see light. The Spirit effects this great change both immediately and mediately, that is, by His direct actions upon the soul and also by blessing to us our use of the appointed means of grace.

"The glory of the Lord" (2Co 3:18). This we have defined as His moral perfections, the excellencies of His character. The best theologians have classified God's attributes under two heads—incommunicable and communicable. There are certain perfections of the divine Being which are peculiar to Himself, which in their very nature cannot be transmitted to the creature. These are His eternity, His immutability, His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence. There are other perfections of the divine Being which He *is* pleased to communicate, in measure, to the unfallen angels and to the redeemed from among men. These are His goodness, His grace, His mercy, His holiness, His righteousness, His wisdom. Now, obviously, it is the latter which the apostle has before him in 2 Corinthians 3:18, for believers are not, will not, and cannot be changed into the "same image" of the Lord's omniscience, etc. Compare "we beheld his glory...full of *grace and truth*" (Joh 1:14)—His *moral* perfections.

The "glass" in which the glory of the Lord is revealed and beheld by us is His written Word, as is clear by a comparison with James 1:22-25. Yet let it be carefully borne in mind that the Scriptures have *two* principal parts, being divided into two testaments. Now the contents of those two testaments may be summed up, respectively, in the law and the Gospel. That which is outstanding in the Old Testament is *the law*, that which is preeminent in the New Testament is *the Gospel*. Thus, in giving an exposition or explanation of the "glass" in which believers behold the Lord's glory, we cannot do better than say, It is in the law and the Gospel His glory is set before us. It is absolutely essential to insist on this amplification, for a *distinctive* "glory of the Lord" is revealed in each one and to *both* of them is the Christian conformed (or "changed") by the Spirit.

Should anyone say that we are "reading our own thoughts into" the meaning of the "glass" in which the glory of the Lord is revealed, and object to our insisting this signifies, first *the law*, we would point out this is fully borne out by the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 3:18, and what is found there *obliges* us to take this view. The apostle is there comparing and contrasting the two great economies, the Mosaic and the Christian, showing that the preeminence of the one over the other lay in the former being an *external* ministration (the "letter"), whereas the latter is *internal* (the "spirit"), in the heart. Nevertheless, he affirms that the former ministration "was *glorious*" (2Co 3:7), and "if the ministration of condemnation be *glorious*" (see 2Co 3:9), "for even that which is made *glorious*" (2Co 3:10), "if that which is done away was *glorious*" (2Co 3:11)—all being explained by the fact that the glory of the Lord was exhibited therein.

In the "glass" of the law, the Lord gave a most wondrous revelation of His "glory." The law has been aptly and rightly designated "a transcript of the divine nature," though (as is to be expected) some of our moderns have taken serious exception to that statement, thereby setting themselves in opposition to the Scriptures. In Romans 8:7, we are told "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and the proof furnished of this declaration is, "*for* it is not subject to *the law* of God," which, manifestly, is only another way of saying that the law is a transcript of the very character of God. So again, we read, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12)—what is that but a summarized description of the divine perfections! If God Himself is "holy and just and good" and the law be an immediate reflection of His very nature, then it will itself be "holy, and just, and good." Again, if God Himself be "love" (1Jo 4:8) and the law is a glass in which His perfections shine, then that which the law requires, all that is required, will be *love*, and that is exactly the case, Matthew 22:37-39.

What a word is that in Exodus 24:16, “And *the glory of the LORD* abode upon mount Sinai.” Yes, the glory of the Lord was as really and truly manifested at Sinai as it is displayed now at Mount Sion—that man in his present state was unable to appreciate the awe-inspiring display which God there made of His perfections, in nowise alters that fact, for He is a God to be feared as well as loved. In the “glass” of the law we behold the glory of the Lord’s majesty and sovereignty, the glory of His government and authority, the glory of His justice and holiness. Yes, and the “glory” of His *goodness* in framing such a law which requires us to love Him with all our hearts, and for His sake, His creatures, our neighbours, as ourselves.

But the “glory of the Lord” (2Co 3:18) is further manifested in the “glass” of the Gospel, in which God has made a fuller and yet more blessed revelation of His moral perfections than He did at Sinai. Now the Gospel necessarily implies or presupposes the following things. First, a broken law, and its transgressors utterly unable to repair its breach. Second, that God graciously determined to save a people from its curse. Third, that He purposes to do so without making light of sin, without dishonouring the law, and without compromising His holiness—otherwise, so far from the Gospel being the best news of all, it would herald the supreme calamity. How this is effected, by and through Christ, the Gospel makes known. In His own Son, God shines forth in meridian splendour, for Jesus Christ is the brightness of His glory, the express image of His Person. In Christ, the veil is rent, the holy of holies is exposed to fullest view, for now we behold “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6).

In the Gospel is displayed not only the amazing grace and infinite mercy, but also and mainly the “manifold *wisdom*” of God. Therein we learn how grace is exercised righteously, how mercy is bestowed honourably, how transgressors are pardoned justly. God did not deem it suitable to the honour of His majesty to sovereignly pardon sinners without a satisfaction being offered to Himself, and therefore did He appoint a Mediator to magnify the law and make it honourable. The great design of the incarnation, life, and death of Christ, was to demonstrate in the most public manner that God was worthy of all that love, honour, and obedience which the law required, and that sin was as great an evil as the punishment threatened supposed. The heart of the glorious Gospel of Christ is *the cross*, and *there* we see all the divine perfections fully displayed. In the death of the Lord Jesus, the law was magnified, divine holiness vindicated, sin discountenanced, the sinner saved, grace glorified, and Satan defeated.

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 107. Brotherly Love (13:1-3)

Brotherly love is that spiritual benevolence and affectionate solicitude which Christians have one toward another, desiring and seeking their highest interests. The varied characteristics of it are beautifully delineated in 1 Corinthians 13. In the opening verse of Hebrews 13, the apostle exhorts unto the maintenance of the same, “Let brotherly love *continue*.” Negatively, that means, Let us be constantly on our guard against those things which are likely to interrupt its flow.

Positively, it signifies, Let us be diligent in employing those means which are calculated to keep it in a healthy state. It is along these two lines that our responsibility here is to be discharged, and therefore it is of first importance that due heed be given thereto. We therefore propose to point out some of the main hindrances and obstacles to the continuance of brotherly love, and then mention some of the aids and helps to the furtherance of the same. May the blessed Spirit direct the writer's thoughts and give the reader to lay to heart whatever is of Himself.

The root hindrance to the exercise of brotherly love is *self-love*—to be so occupied with Number One that the interests of others are lost sight of. In Proverbs 30:15, we read, “The horseleech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give.” This repulsive creature has two forks in her tongue, which she employs for gorging herself in the blood of her unhappy victim. Spiritually the “horseleech” represents self-love, and her two daughters are self-righteousness and self-pity. As the horseleech is never satisfied, often continuing to gorge itself until it bursts, so self-love is never contented, crying “Give, give.” All the blessings and mercies of God are perverted by making them to minister *unto self*. Now the antidote for this evil is for the heart to be engaged with the example which Christ left us. *He* came not to be ministered unto, but to minister *unto others*. He pleased not Himself, but ever “went about doing good” (Act 10:38). He was tireless in relieving distress and seeking the welfare of all with whom He came into contact. Then “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi 2:5). If brotherly love is to continue, self must be denied.

Inseparably connected with self-love is *pride* and the fostering of pride is fatal to the cultivation of brotherly affection. The majority, if not all, of the petty grievances among Christians, are to be traced back to this evil root. Love “suffereth long” (1Co 13:4), but pride is terribly impatient. Love “envieth not” (1Co 13:4), but pride is intensely jealous. Love “seeketh not her own” (1Co 13:5), but pride ever desires gratification. Love “seeketh not her own,” but pride demands constant attention from others. Love “beareth all things” (1Co 13:7), but pride is resentful of the slightest injury. Love “endureth all things” (1Co 13:7), but pride is offended if a brother fails to greet him on the street. Pride must be *mortified*, if brotherly love is to flourish. Therefore, the first injunction of Christ to those who come unto Him for rest is, “Take *my* yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and *lowly in heart*” (Mat 11:29).

Another great enemy to brotherly love is *a sectarian spirit* and this evil is far more widespread than many suppose. Our readers would be surprised if they knew how often a sample copy of this magazine is despised by those who have a reputation for being stalwarts in the faith and as possessing a relish for spiritual things, yet because this paper is not issued by *their* denomination or “circle of fellowship,” it is at once relegated to the waste paper basket. Alas, how frequently is a spirit of partisanship mistaken for brotherly love, So long as a person “believes *our* doctrines” and is willing to “join our church,” he is received with open arms. On the other hand, no matter how sound in the faith a man may be, nor how godly his walk, if he refuses to affiliate himself with some particular group of professing Christians, he is looked upon with suspicion and given the cold shoulder. But such things ought not to be—they betray a very low state of spirituality.

We are far from advocating the entering into familiar fellowship with every one who claims to be a Christian—Scripture warns us to “lay hands suddenly on no man” (1Ti 5:22), for all is not gold that glitters, and perhaps there never was a day in which empty profession abounded so much as it does now. Yet there is a happy medium between being taken in by every imposter who comes along and refusing to believe that there are any genuine saints left upon earth. Surely a tree may be known by its fruits. When we meet with one in whom we can discern the image of Christ, whether that one be a member of our party or not, *there* should our affections be fixed.

“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7). It is our bounden duty to love all whom Christ loves. It is utterly vain that we boast of our orthodoxy or of the “light” we have, if brotherly love be not shown by us to the feeblest member of Christ’s body who crosses our path.

There are many other things which are serious obstacles to the maintenance of brotherly love, yet we must not do more than barely mention them. The love of the world, failure to mortify the lusts of the flesh in our souls, being unduly wrapped up in the members of our own family, so that those related to us by the blood of Christ have not that place in our affections which they ought. Ignorance of the directions in which it should be exercised and of the proper duties which it calls for, forgetfulness of the foundation of it, which is a mutual interest in the grace of God, that we are fellow-members of the household of faith. A readiness to listen to idle gossip, which in most instances is a “giving place to the devil” (see Eph 4:27), who accuses the brethren day and night. But there is one other serious hindrance to the continuance of brotherly love which we will notice in a little more detail, namely, *impatience*.

By impatience we mean *a lack of forbearance*. True brotherly love is a reflection of God’s love for us, and *He* loves His people not for their native attractiveness, but for *Christ’s* sake, and therefore does He love them in spite of their ugliness and vileness. God is “longsuffering to us-ward” (2Pe 3:9), bearing with our crookedness, pardoning our iniquities, healing our diseases, and His Word to us is, “Be ye therefore followers [emulators] of God, as dear children; and walk in love” (Eph 5:1-2). We are to love the saints for what we can see *of Christ* in them—yes, *love* them, and for *that* reason—in spite of all their ignorance, perverseness, ill-temper, obstinacy, fretfulness. It is the image of God in them—not their wealth, amiability, social position—which is the magnet that attracts a renewed heart toward them.

“Forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2). False love is glad of any specious excuse for throwing off the garb that sits so loosely and uncomfortably upon it. Ahithophel was glad of a pretext to forsake David, whom he hated in his heart, although with his mouth he continued to show much love. “Forbearing one another in love”—that love which a little silence or neglect can destroy never came from God—that love which a few blasts of malice from the lips of a new acquaintance will wither, is not worth possessing! Remember, dear brother and sister, God suffers our love for one another to be *tried and tested*—as He does our faith—or there would be no need for this exhortation “forbearing one another in love.” The most spiritual Christian on earth is full of infirmities, and the best way of enduring them is to frequently and honestly remind yourself that *you* also are full of faults and failings.

John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out that there are certain *occasions* (in addition to the *causes* we have mentioned above) of the decay and loss of brotherly love. “1. Differences in opinion and practice about things in religion [unless these be of a vital nature, they should not be allowed to affect our *love* for each other.—A.W.P.] 2. Unsuitableness of natural tempers and inclinations. 3. Readiness to receive a sense of appearing provocations. 4. Different and sometimes inconsistent secular interests. 5. An abuse of spiritual gifts, by pride on the one hand, or envy on the other. 6. Attempts for domination, inconsistent in a fraternity—which are all to be watched against.”

We sincerely trust that the reader is not becoming weary of our lengthy exposition of Hebrews 13:1. The subject of which it treats is of such deep practical importance that we feel one more aspect of it requires to be considered. We shall therefore elaborate a little on some of the sub-headings which Owen mentioned under the *means* of its preservation. First, “An endeavour to grow and thrive in the principle of it, or the power of adopting grace.” The three principle graces—faith, hope, love—can only thrive in a healthy soul. Just so far as personal piety wanes

will brotherly love deteriorate. If close personal communion with Christ be neglected, then there can be no real spiritual fellowship with His people. Unless, then, *my* heart be kept warm in the love of God, affection toward my brethren is sure to decay. Second, “A deep sense of the weight or moment of this duty, from the especial instruction and command of Christ.” Only as the heart is deeply impressed by the vital importance of the maintenance of brotherly love will serious and constant efforts be made thereunto.

Third, “Of the trial which is connected thereunto, of the sincerity of our grace and the truth of our sanctification, for ‘by this we know we have passed from death unto life.’” This is indeed a weighty consideration—if Christians were more concerned to obtain *proof* of their regeneration, they would devote far closer attention to the cultivation of brotherly love, which is one of the chief evidences of the new birth (1Jo 3:14). If I am at outs with my brethren and am unconcerned about their temporal and eternal interests, then I have no right to regard myself as a child of God. Fourth, “A due consideration of the use, yea, the necessity of this duty to the glory of God and edification of the church.” The greater concern we *really* have for the manifestative glory of God in this world, the more zealous shall we be in seeking to promote the same by the increase of brotherly love in our self and among the saints—the glory of God and the welfare of His people are inseparably bound together.

Fifth, “Of that breach of union, loss of peace, discord and confusion, which must and will ensue on the neglect of it.” Serious indeed are the consequences of a decay of brotherly love, yea, fatal if the disease be not arrested. Therefore does it behoove each of us to honestly and seriously face the question, How far is *my* lack of brotherly love contributing unto the spiritual decline in Christendom today? Sixth, “Constant watchfulness against all those vicious habits of mind, in self-love, love of the world, which are apt to impair it.” If *that* be faithfully attended to, it will prove one of the most effectual of all the means for the cultivation of this grace. Seventh, “Diligent heed that it be not impaired in its vital acts—such as are patience, forbearance, readiness to forgive, unaptness to believe evil, without which no other duties of it will be long continued.” Eighth, “Fervent prayer for supplies of grace enabling thereunto.”

After the opening exhortation of Hebrews 13—which is fundamental to the discharge of all mutual Christian duties—the Holy Spirit through the apostle proceeds to point out some of *the ways in which* the existence and continuance of brotherly love are to be evidenced. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers” (Heb 13:2). Here is the first instance given, among sundry particulars, in which the greatest of all the Christian graces is to be exemplified. The duty which is inculcated is that of *Christian hospitality*. That which was commanded under the old covenant is repeated under the new, “But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:34 and cf. Deu 10:19, etc.). The Greek word for “entertain” is rendered “lodge” in Act 10:18, 23, and 28:7.

There was a special urgency for pressing this duty by the apostles, arising from *the persecution* of the Lord’s people in different places, which resulted in their being driven from their own homes and forced to seek a refuge abroad. “At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria” (Act 8:1)—some traveled as far as “Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch” (Act 11:19). Therein did they obey the direction of Christ’s that “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Mat 10:23), removing to other parts where, for the present, peace obtained, for the providence of God so directs things it is very rare that persecution prevails universally—hence some places of quiet retirement are generally available, at least for a season.



Yet this being forced to leave their *own* habitations required them to seek refuge among strangers, and this it is which gives point to our present exhortation.

Moreover, “At that time there were sundry persons, especially of the converted Hebrews, who went up and down from one city, yea, one nation, unto another, on their own charges, to preach the Gospel. They went forth for the sake of Christ, taking nothing of the Gentiles unto whom they preached (3Jo 1:7), and these were only brethren, and not officers of any church. The reception, entertainment, and assistance of these when they came unto any church or place as strangers, the apostle celebrates and highly commends in his well-beloved Gaius (3Jo 1:5-6). Such as these, when they came to them as strangers, the apostle recommends unto the love and charity of the Hebrews in a peculiar manner. And he who is not ready to receive and entertain such persons, will manifest how little concern he hath in the Gospel or the glory of Christ Himself” (John Owen).

Though circumstances have altered (for the moment, for none can say how soon the restraining hand of God may be partly withdrawn and His enemies allowed to shed the blood of His people once more—such is even now the case in some parts of the earth), yet the principle of this injunction is still binding on all who bear the name of Christ. Not only are our hearts, but our homes as well, to be opened unto such as are really needy, “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Rom 12:13). An eminent and spiritual scholar points out that “the original word hath respect not so much to the exercise of the duty itself, as to the disposition, readiness, and frame of mind which is required in it and to it. Hence the Syriac renders it, ‘the *love* of strangers,’ and that properly; but it is of such a love as is *effectual*, and whose proper exercise consists in the entertainment of them, which is the proper effect of love towards them.”

In Eastern countries, where they traveled almost barefoot, the washing of the feet (1Ti 5:10), as well as the setting before them of food and giving lodgment for the night, would be included. The word for “strangers” is not found in the Greek. Literally it reads, “of hospitality not be forgetful”—be not unmindful of, grow not slack in, the discharge of this duty. It is to be observed that one of the necessary qualifications of a bishop is that he must be “a lover of hospitality” (Ti 1:8). Just as worldlings delight in entertaining their relatives and friends, so the Lord’s people should be eager and alert to render loving hospitality to homeless or stranded Christians, and as 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Use hospitality one to another *without grudging*.” The same applies, of course, to entertaining in our homes travelling servants of God—rather than sending them to some hotel to mingle with the ungodly.

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2). The second clause is to be regarded as supplying a *motive* for the discharge of this duty of Christian hospitality. Needless to say, these added words do not signify that we may expect, literally, to receive a similar honour, but it is mentioned for the purpose of supplying *encouragement*. The apostle here reminds us that in former days some had been richly rewarded for their diligent observance of this duty, for they had been granted the holy privilege of receiving angels under the appearance of men. How this consideration enforces our exhortation is apparent—had there not been a readiness of mind unto this, a spirit of real hospitality in their hearts, they had neglected the opportunity with which divine grace so highly favoured them. Let us, then, seek to cultivate the virtue of generosity, “the liberal deviseth liberal things” (Isa 32:8).

“For thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2). The special reference, no doubt, is unto the cases of Abraham (Gen 18:1-3) and of Lot (Gen 19:1-3). We say “special reference” for the use of the plural “some” is sufficient to bar us from ascribing it to them alone, exclusively of all others. It is quite likely that in those ancient times, when God so much used the

ministry of angels unto His saints, that others of them shared the same holy privilege. The real point for us in this allusion is that the Lord will be no man's debtor, that He honours those who honour Him—whether they honour Him directly or indirectly in the persons of His people. “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10). This too is recorded for our encouragement and when we have discharged the duty (as opportunity afforded—for God accepts the will for the deed!), if in indigent circumstances we may plead this before Him.

The Scriptures are full of examples where the Spirit has joined together duty and privilege, obedience and reward. Whenever we comply with such commands, we may count upon God recompensing those who exercised kindness unto His people. The cases of Rebekah (Gen 24:18-19, 22), of Potiphar (Gen 39:5), of the Egyptian midwives (Exo 1:17, 20), of Rahab (Jos 6:25), of the widow of Zarephath (1Ki 17:15, 23), of the woman of Shunem (2Ki 4:9, 13-14), of the inhabitants of Melita (Act 28:2, 8-9), all illustrate this. The resulting gains will more than repay any expense we incur in befriending the saints. Beautifully did Calvin (1509-1564) point out that “not merely angels, *but Christ Himself* is received by us, when we receive the poor of the flock in His name.” Solemn beyond words is the warning of Matthew 25:41-43, but inexpressibly blessed is Matthew 25:34-36.

*Compassion for the afflicted* is the next thing exhorted unto, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them” (Heb 13:3). Love to the brethren is to manifest itself in sympathy to sufferers. Most reprehensible and unChristlike is that selfish callousness which says, I have troubles enough of my own without concerning myself over those of other people. Putting it on its lowest ground, such a spirit ministers no relief. The most effectual method of getting away from our own sorrows is to seek out and relieve others in distress. But nothing has a more beneficial tendency to counteract our innate selfishness than a compliance with such exhortations as the one here before us—to be occupied with the severer afflictions which some of our brethren are experiencing will free our minds from the lighter trials we may be passing through.

“Remember them that are in bonds” (Heb 13:3). The immediate reference is unto those who had been deprived of their liberty for Christ's sake, who had been cast into prison. The “remember” signifies far more than to merely *think of* them, including *all the* duties which their situation called for. It means, first, feel for them, take to heart their case, have compassion toward them. Our great High Priest is touched with the feeling of their infirmities (Heb 4:15) and so must we be. At best their food was coarse, their beds hard, and the ties which bound them to their families had been rudely sundered. Often they lay, cruelly fettered, in a dark and damp dungeon. *They* felt their situation, their confinement, their separation from wife and children—then identify yourself with them and have a feeling sense of what they suffer. “Remember,” too, that for the sovereignty of God, and His restraining hand, *you* would be in the same condition as they!

But more, “remember” them in your prayers. Intercede for them, seeking on their behalf grace from God, that they may meekly acquiesce to His providential dealings, that their sufferings may be sanctified to their souls, that the Most High will so overrule things that this Satanic opposition against some of His saints may yet issue in the extension of His kingdom. Finally, do unto them as you would wish them to do unto you were you in their place. If you can obtain permission, visit them (Mat 25:36), endeavour to comfort them, so far as practicable relieve their sufferings, and leave no stone unturned to seek their lawful release. Divine providence so regulates things that, as a rule, while some of the saints are in prison, others of them still enjoy their liberty—thus allowing an opportunity for the practical exercise of Christian sympathy.

“And them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb 13:3). There is probably a double reference here—first, to those who were not actually in prison, but who had been severely flogged or were in sore straits because heavy fines had been imposed on them. Second, to the wives and children of those who had been imprisoned and who would suffer keen adversity now that the breadwinners were removed from them. Such have a very real claim upon the sympathy of those who had escaped the persecutions of the foes of the Gospel. If *you* are not in a financial position to do much for them, then acquaint some of your richer brethren with their case and endeavour to stir them up to supply their needs. “As being yourselves also in the body” is a reminder that it may be *your* turn next to experience such opposition.

John Owen, who lived in particularly stormy times (the days of Bunyan, 1628-1688), said, “Whilst God is pleased to give grace and courage unto some to suffer for the Gospel unto bonds, and to others to perform this duty towards them, the church will be no loser by suffering. When some are tried as unto their constancy in bonds, others are tried as unto their sincerity in the discharge of the duties required of them. And usually more fail in neglect of their duty towards sufferers, and so fall from their profession, than do so fail under and on account of their sufferings.” That the apostle Paul practised what he preached is clear from, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?” (2Co 11:29). For illustrations of the discharge of these duties, see Genesis 14:14; Nehemiah 1:4; Job 29:15-16; Jeremiah 38:7, etc. For solemn warnings read Job 19:14-16; Proverbs 21:13; Matthew 25:43; James 2:13.

We need hardly to say that *the principles* of verse 3 are of *general* application at all times and to all cases of suffering Christians. The same is summed up in, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). The sentiment of this verse has been beautifully expressed in the lines of that hymn so precious in its hallowed memories:

*“Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.*

*We share our mutual woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear,  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.”*

The Lord grant unto both writer and reader more of His grace so that we shall, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom 12:15).

# THE LIFE OF DAVID

## 59. His Son Absalom

Tamar, David's daughter, as we saw last month, found an asylum in the home of Absalom, following the vile treatment which she had received from Amnon—another of David's sons, but by a different wife. Her brother, we are told, "hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar" (2Sa 13:22). Nor did Absalom's enmity abate at all with the passing of time, but merely waited an occasion which he deemed would be most suitable for taking his revenge. This only served to make more apparent his real character. There is an anger which is sinless, as is clear from, "When he [Christ] had looked round about on them *with anger*, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mar 3:5). Yet there is so much of a combustible nature in the flesh of a Christian that he needs to turn into earnest prayer that exhortation, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph 4:26).

But the sun *had* gone down upon Absalom's wrath—a deadly fire burned in his heart which two full years had no power to quench, his crafty soul biding its time until a way opened to let out his rage on its victim. Implacable hatred burned in Absalom toward his half-brother as though it had been kindled but yesterday—and now his subtlety devised a sure passage for it. He was most manifestly a child of Satan and the lusts of his father he was ready to willingly execute. The guide of the "serpent" now ministered unto the fury of the "lion," for those are the two predominant characteristics in the arch-enemy of God and men. This is clear from the tactics he followed with our blessed Lord. First, we see his venomous guile in the temptation and then his fiendish cruelty at the cross. Similarly does he work now and thus it ever is with those whom he dominates.

"And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons" (2Sa 13:23). Corresponding to the old English custom of "Harvest-home," when a time of feasting and merriment followed the garnering of it, in Palestine the annual occasion of "sheepshearing" was made an event of festive celebration and of the coming together of relatives and friends. This is clear from Genesis 38:12-13 and 1 Samuel 25:4, 36—for in the one we read, "and Judah was comforted (after the death of his daughter), and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath," with his friend, while in the other we are told that "Nabal did shear his sheep....and, behold, he held *a feast* in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken."

During quite a lengthy interval, Absalom had concealed his bitter hatred against his half-brother under an appearance of indifference, for we read that he "spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad" (2Sa 13:22). But now Absalom deemed the time ripe for his murder. To cover his base design, he invites "all the king's sons" to his feast, which he had purposed should be the place of execution for his unsuspecting victim. Only the last great day will reveal how often treacherous designs have been cloaked by apparent kindness—Judas betrayed his Master not with a blow, but a kiss! In his long and varied experience, the writer has found in every instance that his worst enemies fawned upon and flattered him to his face, and then stabbed him behind his back—yet sufficient for the servant to be as his Lord.

But Absalom went to yet greater pains to hide his base intention. “And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant” (2Sa 13:24). That was downright hypocrisy, for Absalom could have had no desire that David himself should be on the ground to witness the treachery against his son. Nor was the success of his cunning plot endangered by this specious move, for he had good reason to believe that his father would decline the invitation. Such indeed was the case, “And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee” (2Sa 13:25). How that evidenced one of the many noble traits of David’s character—his unselfish thoughtfulness of others—his kindly consideration by refusing to put his son to unnecessary expense. “And he pressed him,” yet a little later sought to turn the hearts of all Israel against David and wrest the kingdom from his hand! “Howbeit he would not go, but blessed him” (2Sa 13:25), that is, pronounced a patriarchal benediction upon him.

“Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us” (2Sa 13:26). Here was the real design of Absalom in pressing the king to be present himself at the forthcoming family-union and feast. Having considerably declined his son’s invitation, it would be doubly difficult to refuse his second request. Yet how this pretended deference unto David’s parental authority exhibited the perfidy of Absalom! He was determined to get Amnon into his toils, yet veiled his bloodthirstiness under a pretence of affection and filial respect. “And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee?” (2Sa 13:26). David was evidently somewhat uneasy or at least wondered what lay behind the outward show of Absalom’s friendliness toward Amnon. But “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1) and so the sequel clearly demonstrated.

“But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king’s sons go with him” (2Sa 13:27). Absalom prevailed against the king’s better judgment. It may be that David yielded to his son’s urgency from the fond hope that a full reconciliation would be effected between the two brothers, but whether or not that be the case, we must look higher and behold the over-ruling hand of God accomplishing His own counsel. The Lord had declared that “the sword shall never depart from thine house” and “I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house” (2Sa 12:10-11), and from the execution of that judgment there was no escape. Divine providence so directed things that David, by giving his consent for Amnon to attend the feast, became an unwitting accessory to Amnon’s murder. How much heavier did this make the blow to the poor king’s heart! Yet how absolutely just were the divine dealings with him!

“Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant” (2Sa 13:28). Birds of a feather flock together. Absalom had succeeded in gathering around him unscrupulous menials who were ready to aid him in any villainy. They knew that the Lord God had commanded, “Thou shalt *not* kill” (Exo 20:13), yet were they ready to damn their souls in order to please their wicked master. The vilest characters are rarely at a loss to find those who will aid them in the blackest of crimes. The fearful impiety of the reprobate Absalom appears in “when *I* say unto you, Smite Amnon, then kill him; fear not”—either God or man, regardless of consequences. Such reckless abandon marks those who are given up by God.

But let us now observe how *the righteous retribution of God* appears in every detail of this incident. First, as David’s murder of Uriah was not a sudden surprisal into evil, but a thing deliberately premeditated in cold blood, so Absalom’s removal of Amnon was callously planned beforehand, as verse 28 shows. Second, as the slaying of Uriah was a means to an end—that

David might obtain Bathsheba, so the killing of Amnon was but a preliminary to Absalom's design of obtaining the kingdom—by removing his older brother who was heir to the throne. Third, as David did not slay Uriah by his own hand, but made Joab an accomplice, so Absalom involved his servants in the guilt of his crime—instead of striking the fatal blow himself. Fourth, as David made Uriah “drunk” before his death (2Sa 11:13), so Amnon was struck down while “his heart was merry with wine”! Who can fail to see the superintending government of God here.

“And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded” (2Sa 13:29). How little can we foresee when tragic calamity may smite a family reunion—“Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). How lightly we should hold the things of earth, for the most treasured of them are likely to be rudely snatched from us at any moment. The predicted “sword” is now drawn in David's house, and the rest of his sons knew not how soon *they* might fall victims to Absalom's bloodthirstiness. Therefore do we read, “Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled” (2Sa 13:29). What an ending to a time of festivity! How vain are the pleasures of this poor world! How slender is the thread upon which hangs the lives even of kings' sons!

“And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left” (2Sa 13:30). How often the bearers of evil tidings make bad matters worse by excuselessly exaggerating them! Things were now represented unto David as being much blacker than they really were. There is a warning for *us* here—not to credit reports of evil until they are definitely corroborated. “Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent” (2Sa 13:31). How ready we are to believe the worst! Poor David was now as sorely afflicted by the false news brought to him as though it had been authentic. But alas, how slow we are to believe the Good News—such is fallen man—ready to receive the most egregious lie, but rejecting the authority of divine truth.

“And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar” (2Sa 13:32). Jonadab appears to have had knowledge from the beginning that Absalom had definitely purposed to slay his brother, yet had he refrained from informing the king—so that he might use his influence to reconcile the two men or at least take steps to prevent murder being done. Great indeed was the guilt of Jonadab. But again, we perceive Providence overruling things. God sometimes permits the evil plots of men to come to light, so that their intended victims receive timely warnings (Act 9:23-25), while in other instances He seals the mouths of those possessing such knowledge, and this as best serves His own inexorable designs.

“But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur....and was there three years” (2Sa 13:37-38). By his foul crime the land of Israel had been defiled and his own life forfeited (Num 35:33). He was now a debtor to that law of which David was the guardian, for the king held his throne on the terms of reading the law continually and obeying the same (Deu 17:18-20). It is true that David had not executed punishment for Amnon's incest, but he could scarcely expect him to wink at barbarous fratricide. Nor could this abandoned wretch obtain protection in any of the “cities of refuge,” for they afforded no shelter unto those who were guilty of willful murder. Only one alternative, then, was left him, and that was to flee unto his mother's people, and there it was that he found asylum.

From the human side of things, it seems a great pity that this fugitive from justice did not continue at Geshur, the place of his heathen origin, but the sentimental heart of his father yearned

after him. “And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon” (2Sa 13:39). Time is a great healer, and after three years most of David’s horror at Absalom’s sin and grief over Amnon’s death had worn off. “At first he could not find in his heart to do justice on him—now he can almost find in his heart to take him into his favour again. This was David’s infirmity” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). One can understand David’s attitude, and his subsequent conduct, from a natural viewpoint, but from the spiritual side it betokened another sad lapse, for divine holiness requires us to *Crucify* “the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). Yes, dear reader, its “*affections*” as well as its “*lusts*.” The claims of God must prevail over all natural inclinations to the contrary, and when they do not, we have to pay dearly, as David did.

We read nothing of Absalom’s pining for a return unto his father, for he was devoid of even natural affection. Fierce, proud, utterly unscrupulous, he lacked any of the finer qualities of human nature. But “David longed to go forth unto Absalom” (2Sa 13:39), yet it seemed that this son on whom he wasted his affections was irredeemably lost to him. Absalom was guilty of murder and the unchanging law of God commands, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen 9:6). How, then, was it possible for David to restore his erring son without defying the divine requirements of *his* maintaining righteous government in Israel? It is to be duly noted that there is no word recorded of David seeking unto the Lord at this time. Ominous silence! The energies of nature now dominated him and therefore there was no seeking wisdom from above. This it is which casts light upon the dark scenes that follow.

The fourteenth chapter of 2 Samuel makes known to us how it came to pass that Absalom was brought back again to Jerusalem. The prime mover was Joab, who was what would be termed in present-day language an astute politician—an unprincipled man of subtle expediency. He was the leader of Israel’s armies, and anxious to curry favour both with the king and his heir apparent. He knew that David doted upon Absalom and reasoned that any plausible device to bring him back would be acceptable to the king, and at the same time, strengthen his own position in the royal favour. But the problem confronting him was, How might mercy rejoice against judgment? He knew too that while there might be a godly remnant who would oppose any open flouting of the law, yet he counted on the fact that with the generality of Israel Absalom was their idol—see 2 Samuel 13:25.

Joab therefore resorted to an artful subterfuge whereby David might be saved from disgracing the throne and yet at the same time regain his beloved son. He employed a woman to pose as a desolate widow and relate to the king a fictitious story, getting him to commit himself by passing judgment thereon. She is termed a “wise woman” (2Sa 14:2), but *her* wisdom was the guile of the Serpent. Satan has no initiative, but always imitates, and in the tale told by this tool of Joab, we have but a poor parody of the parable given through Nathan. The case she pictured was well-calculated to appeal to the king’s susceptibilities, and bring to mind his own sorrow. With artful design she sought to show that under exceptional circumstances *it would be permissible* to dispense with the executing of a murderer, especially when the issue involved the destruction of the last heir of an inheritance.

The story she related was far from being an accurate portrayal of the real facts of the case relating to Absalom. First, Absalom had not slain Amnon during a fit of sudden anger, nor had he murdered him when they were alone together (2Sa 14:6). Instead, he was slain by deliberate malice, and that in the presence of his brethren. Second, there was no cruel persecution being waged against Absalom by those who coveted his inheritance (2Sa 14:7), but the righteous law of God demanded his death! Third, Absalom was not the only remaining son of David (2Sa 12:24-

25), so that there was no immediate danger of the royal line becoming extinct, as the woman represented (2Sa 14:7). These half-lies clearly indicated *the source* of this woman's "wisdom," and had David been in communion with God at the time, he had not been imposed upon or induced to deliver such an unholy judgment.

But apart from these glaring inaccuracies, the tale told by this woman made a touching appeal to the king's sentiments and prevailed upon him. First, he hastily promised to protect her (2Sa 14:10), and then rashly confirmed the same by an oath (2Sa 14:11). Then she applied his concession to the case of Absalom and intimated that David was going against the interests of *Israel* (not displeasing *God*, be it noted!) in allowing his son to remain in exile (2Sa 14:13). Next, she argued that since God in His sovereignty has spared David's life (notwithstanding his murder of Uriah), it could not be wrong for him to show leniency unto Absalom (2Sa 14:13). Finally, she heaped flattery upon the king (2Sa 14:17). The sequel was that David willingly concluded his oath to this woman *obliged* him to recall Absalom (2Sa 14:21) and accordingly he gave orders to Joab for him to be brought back.

## UNION AND COMMUNION

### 15. Glory

This present life, with its continual mixture of good and evil, joy and sorrow, with its constant fluctuations and disappointments, naturally prompts a reflecting mind to the belief and hope of a future life that will be more perfect and permanent—yet that is as far as the unaided intellect can project us. A divine revelation is indispensable if we are to learn *how* heaven is to be reached and of *what* its blessedness consists. By the fall of the first Adam paradise was lost, and only through the last Adam can sinners be restored unto God, and only by the supernatural operations of the Spirit can the hearts of depraved men be fitted for and their steps be directed along the sole way which conducts to the mansions in the Father's house. Vain is human reasoning, worthless the efforts of imagination, when it comes to obtaining a knowledge of that antitypical Canaan which flows with spiritual milk and honey. How thankful, then, should we be for the Word of prophecy and the light it supplies while we are in this dark world.

That blessed light has been enjoyed by God's elect from earliest times. "As for me [said the Psalmist], I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa 17:15). Here was the blessed sequel to JEHOVAH's response unto Moses—"shew me thy glory" had been his request, "thou canst not see my face [in *this* life]: for there shall no man see me, and live" was the divine response (Exo 33:18-20). But what is, necessarily, denied the saints now, shall be granted them in the future. While in this world indwelling sin raises an insuperable barrier, incapacitating the soul to discern more than a few broken rays of the divine splendour. But when we "awake," on the resurrection-morn, and sin and the grave are left behind,



then will the soul be fitted for the beatific vision, for “the pure in heart...shall see God” (Mat 5:8), see Him then as they cannot now.

When David said, “I will behold thy face” (Psa 17:15) he had reference to an *objective* glory, and that, in its most perfect representation, for the “*face*” is the principal part of our persons wherein physical beauty and moral dignity are displayed. When he added, “I shall be satisfied with thy *likeness*,” a different concept is before him, another factor is introduced—one which must necessarily enter into the equation of soul *satisfaction*. The most vivid display of the divine glory, so far from satisfying, will only terrify those who are not *in inward harmony therewith*, as is evident from Revelation 6:16, etc. No sight of God can satisfy anyone unless and until his soul be conformed to the divine image and attuned thereto. Thus we understand the Psalmist to mean, “Hereafter I shall behold the blessed face of God, and be regaled thereby; not only by the vision itself, but because of its transfusing itself upon me, transforming me.” It is a divine glory both revealed and received.

The same wondrous truth is set forth in the New Testament. “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). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). The future glory of the saints, then, is not only a *realm* of light and bliss into which they are yet to be conducted, and an *objective* (outward) splendour which will rejoice their hearts, but it is also a glory to be “revealed *in them*,” a “weight of glory” *upon* them. “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)—the final and perfect degree of this occurring in their resurrection state, at their glorification. All of this is summed up in, “When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2).

There is a most striking and blessed parallel between the last-quoted verse and our opening Scripture. The Psalmist said, “When I awake,” the apostle declares, “when he shall appear”—the *same* time-mark or occasion. “I will behold thy face in righteousness” (i.e., none but a righteous person will enjoy this holy privilege)—“*we* shall see him”—the *same* persons, namely, the “sons of God,” of whom it is said in the context, “every one that doeth *righteousness* is born of him” (1Jo 2:29)! “I will behold thy face,” says David, “We shall see him as he is,” says John—the *same* blessed object. “I shall be satisfied with thy [transforming] likeness....we shall be like he”—the *same* blessed assimilation. What an example of the perfect unity of the Scriptures! What a proof that the Old Testament saints were favoured with the same light as we are!

Yet notwithstanding the revelation God has vouchsafed us of the life to come, how feebly do we grasp that revelation, how dimly do we comprehend its details, how infinitely it transcends the highest conceptions we can form of it. What we now know of God and His Christ is as nothing to what we shall yet know of Him, yea, in comparison with *that* it scarcely deserves to be called “knowledge.” “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1Co 13:12). The fact is that mere language cannot convey to us in our present state any adequate idea of the glory which God has provided for His people. But though a full discovery thereof is reserved till the time of actual possession, yet enough is hinted at to nourish our hopes and gladden our hearts. To make this the more evident unto the reader, let us endeavour to amplify our statement by a presentation of some considerations. We may now form some conception of the church’s future glory.

*From the contrast pointed by our present afflictions.* That the future bliss of believers is exceedingly great is clear from, “For our *light* affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for

us a far more exceeding eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). Now we know that the sufferings of God’s people in this world are, considered in themselves, *heavy* afflictions, yea, to some of them, grievously heavy. If, then, the trials and sorrows of the most afflicted among the saints are “light” when contrasted with their future happiness, how great must that happiness be! The paucity of human language to express the ineffable joys and pleasures awaiting us at God’s right hand, is seen in the piling up of one term upon another. It is a “weight,” it is an “exceeding weight,” it is a “far more exceeding weight,” it is an “eternal weight of glory.”

*From the reward promised the saints.* This is frequently exhibited under the animating figure of the *crowns* bestowed upon the victors in the Grecian games and upon the military conquerors when they arrived back home in triumph. In those games the great men of the times entered as competitors for the glory of victory, and even kings thought themselves honoured by obtaining the prize. The victor was rewarded with a crown of leaves and was received with unbounded honour by the vast multitudes assembled. Now, after all the self-denials in their training, the unwearied diligence in preparatory exercises, the toils and dangers endured in the arduous struggle, they deemed *this reward* a rich recompense, for it raised them to a pinnacle of glory to be viewed with admiration by all their fellows. Yet, *they* had in view “a corruptible crown,” whereas *we* are striving for an “incorruptible” one (1Co 9:24-25). Their crown was the greatest honour this world could bestow, and soon faded and withered. But the Christian’s crown shall be bestowed *by God*, and bloom with unfading freshness throughout eternity and its glory will be viewed by all the principalities of heaven.

*From the scattered hints of Scripture.* These are numerous—from them we select two, “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as *the stars* for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3). O ye despised followers of the Lamb, groaning under the reproach of the cross, lift up your eyes and view this glorious prospect. Behold the heavens studded with their scintillating gems. See those bright orbs darting forth their light and that is but a faint image of your future glory! “Then shall the righteous shine forth as *the sun* in the kingdom of their Father” (Mat 13:43). What object in nature is so glorious as the sun? Who can look on the brightness of his beams? Who can measure the extent and distance of his shining? Such shall be your glory, ye servants of the Lord, who despise the tinsel glory of this world through faith in the Word.

*From our relationship to God.* We may surely be assisted in estimating the future glory of Christians by the *titles* bestowed upon them from that connection. They are called the children and heirs of God, and it is not possible for the Almighty to invest created beings with a higher honour than that. There is a sense in which both angels and man are, by creation, the sons of God, but it is in a far more intimate and precious sense that believers are called God’s *children*. He hath “begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1Pe 1:3). We “are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). We are the children of God, then, as we are *the brethren* of His only begotten Son and that places us above the highest of the angels. And because we are children, we are the “heirs of God” (Rom 8:17). O ye tried and troubled saints, who are having such a sore struggle to make ends meet, it shall not always be thus with you. Estimate the inheritance of saints by the riches of God Himself!

*From what is said in Ephesians 2:6-7.* “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”—“shew” to the heavenly hierarchies. If, then, God intends to make a lavish display of the wealth of His love toward His people, how surpassingly glorious will be such an exhibition! “When the Monarch of the

Universe, the God of power and wisdom, declares His purpose of showing how much He loves His people, the utmost stretch of imagination will in vain struggle to form even a slight conception of their glory. All the thrones of heaven will be filled with wonder, when they behold in their glory ‘the men whom their King delights to honour’” (Alexander Carson (1776-1844) to whom we are also indebted for part of the above).

*From the love of Christ for them.* Surely that will enable us to form some estimate of the future condition of the saints in glory. Of His immeasurably great love for His people, we have the fullest proof in His humiliation and death. Read the history of it, ponder the depths of degradation and ignominy into which the Lord of Glory descended, behold Him despised and rejected of men, an outcast from society, and at last a willing sacrifice for His people’s sins, and that, even while they were enemies—and then ask yourself, what is *the extent* of His love? It defies description. It is beyond comprehension. Now if He loved us so while enemies, what will He not confer on us as His friends and brethren! Paul taught us to pray that we “might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” If, then, it is a matter of such importance to *know* His love, and if the extent of it is beyond knowledge, what is likely to be the height of glory to which its objects are elevated!

*From the reward bestowed on Christ.* In John 17:22, we hear Him speak of “the glory which thou gavest me.” What is the “glory” which the Father bestows upon the Mediator? It is *the divine reward* for His stupendous achievements. It is that whereby His infinite merits shall be suitably recompensed throughout eternity. And what a glory that must be—answerable to the dignity of His Person, answerable to the revenue of honour and praise which He has brought unto God, commensurate with the unspeakable sacrifice which He made and with the worth of Him that made it! And when *God* gives, He does so in accordance with who He is. O what a “glory,” then, must it be with which the Father has rewarded His beloved Son—a transcendent and supernal glory. And that “glory” Christ shares with His redeemed, “And the glory which thou gavest me I have *given them*” (Joh 17:22). Thus, there is a *union in glory* between the church and its Head.

This it is which is the most wondrous and blessed aspect of our many-sided subject. This it is which is the grand goal which all the other unions between the Redeemer and the redeemed had in view, namely, an everlasting union in glory. And this it is which best enables us to conceive of and estimate the marvel, the grandeur, the uniqueness, of this glory union, namely, that it is the very glory which the Father had given to the Darling of His bosom and which Christ will share with those whom He loved with a love that was stronger than death. “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of [not simply “glory,” but] *the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2Th 2:13-14)—*that* was what God had in mind for His people in eternity past—nothing less would satisfy His heart.

Of old it was revealed, “The LORD will give grace and glory” (Psa 84:11). Here upon earth the saints enjoy Christ in a way of real fellowship, but in heaven they shall enjoy Him in another and higher manner. Here Christ communicates Himself to them in a way of *grace*, so that their present communion with Him and communications from Him are suited to them as they are sinners in themselves. As thus considered, the Redeemer in His infinite goodness holds fellowship with His feeble and constantly-failing people, and as their *Head of grace* He ministers out of His fullness (Joh 1:16) every needed supply. But in heaven He will be our *Head of Glory*, communicating to us that which will be suited to our resurrection and sinless state. We shall be as

dependent on Him then for glory, as we now are for grace—*all* will be received *from Him*. The elect are “*vessels of mercy*” which God hath “afore prepared unto glory” (Rom 9:23), and it is out of Christ’s fullness they will be *filled*, so as to be perfectly blessed.

It is to be noted that in John 17:22, Christ employed the past tense—“the glory which thou gavest me I have given [not “will give”] them.” This may be understood as follows. First, Christ has given the church an unimpeachable *title* to the glory which has been bestowed upon Him. He has acquired the right of this glory for His people, “whither the forerunner is *for us* entered, even Jesus” (Heb 6:20). Thus it is as surely ours now as if we were in actual possession of it. Second, He has given His people the *knowledge* of it—here in John 17:22 and in such declarations as Colossians 3:4, etc.—“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” The promises Christ has given us in His Gospel are the root of our future blessings and in those promises we have a *lease* to show for it. Third, He has given us an *earnest* of the same, for by the indwelling Spirit we have received the “firstfruits” of our inheritance. This it was which enabled the apostle to say I am “a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a *partaker* of the glory that shall be revealed” (1Pe 5:1). Fourth, He gives an actual enjoyment of it to each of the saints as soon as they are absent from the body and present with Himself.

Finally, Christ in this remarkable verse (Joh 17:22) gives as the reason why He shares with His people the glory which the Father hath bestowed upon Himself, “that they may be one, even as we are.” Here our thoughts are directed to such a height that our poor minds turn dizzy. The very reading of those words should fill our hearts with holy amazement, as the actualization of them will fill us with admiration to all eternity. The oneness between the Father and the Son is such that they *partake of the same* ineffable blessedness, each enjoying it equally with and like the other. And *that* is the pattern and likeness, by way of similitude, of the glory union between the Redeemer and the redeemed! Ours will be like *theirs*! As the union between the Father and the Son is a real one, a spiritual one, a holy one, an indestructible one, an inexpressibly glorious one, so will be that between Christ and His church in heaven.

As we showed in our discussion on divine union, there is a real union of Persons in the Godhead and a communion amongst them, for the mutual converse between the eternal three are recorded again and again. Now just as the essential happiness of the three in JEHOVAH consists in the holy fellowship which they have with each other, so it will be by the church’s heavenly communion with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in and by the Person of the Mediator, that all true blessedness will be enjoyed by us throughout eternity. Even now the saints are admitted unto access to the Father, by the Spirit, through Christ (Eph 2:18), yet in our glory union with Christ this will be exalted to a far higher degree and we shall be advanced unto much closer and fuller communion with the triune God. “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (Joh 17:22).

“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (Joh 17:23). In these words, the nature and blessedness of the glory union between Christ and the church are further opened to us, its blessedness being indicated by the several effects and fruits which flow from the same. Three of these are here noted. First, as that union will affect believers themselves—they are “made perfect in one” body. Then will all the redeemed “come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). All differences of opinion, all animosities, all jealousies, shall have vanished forever, and there shall be perfect oneness between them in knowledge, love, and holiness. Second, as this union affects the church, in connection with the triune God. Being united

to Christ, the elect are necessarily united to and interested in all the Persons in JEHOVAH and as they now have a *grace union* with them, they shall yet have a *glory union* with them, which will issue in a communion that will constitute the fullness of their blessedness forever and ever.

Third, as it affects “the world of the ungodly.” Those who have no part or lot in this glory union shall, nevertheless, be given a glimpse of the same, as Dives (for the augmenting of his torment) was permitted to see “Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luk 16:23). The sight of Christ’s “Queen,” standing at His right hand (Psa 45:9 and cf. Mat 25:34) “in gold of Ophir”—figure of His glory—will be self-convicting to the reprobate that Christ is what He declared Himself to be. And as they behold the honour which God has put upon the church, it will openly appear that He has loved them as He loved their Head. And for having despised and rejected Christ, and reproached and persecuted His people, they will be filled with confusion and everlasting shame (Dan 12:2). But the church shall be filled with joy unspeakable and have everlasting proof of the wondrous love of God for them.

## THE DIVINE COVENANTS

### 5. The Siniatic

When God established His covenant with Abraham, He said to him, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance” (Gen 15:13-14). Accordingly, when the time approached for the execution of judgment on their oppressors, the servitude of Israel had reached its extreme point and the bitterness of their bondage had awakened in their minds an earnest desire for deliverance. Their discipline was an essential part of their preparation for the benefits which God designed to bestow upon them. Contemporaneously with those events, Moses was raised up as the instrument of their deliverance and was divinely qualified for the work assigned him.

Moses, acting under divine directions and by a series of remarkable judgments upon Egypt, extorted from Pharaoh a reluctant permission for their departure from his land, with all their possessions. Those judgments were designed not only to afford a practical confutation of the idolatry of the Egyptians and a retribution for their cruel oppression of God’s people, but more particularly an open vindication of the supremacy of JEHOVAH in the sight of the surrounding nations, and at the same time to influence the hearts of the people themselves so as to induce a heartfelt acknowledgment of God, and a prompt and cheerful obedience to Him. Assuredly, no course could have been more fitted to accomplish those ends. The manifestations of divine power Israel had witnessed, the marked separation between them and the Egyptians—being preserved from the plagues which smote their oppressors and their miraculous escape from the judgment which overwhelmed the Egyptians at the Red Sea—were well suited to create deep and lasting effects upon them.

Those impressive events all indicated in a manner to which it was impossible that even the blindest among them could have been insensible to God's interposition for their deliverance. They were well calculated to awaken a deep conviction of the divine presence in their midst in a special manner. Such manifestations of God's power, faithfulness, and grace on their behalf, ought to have produced in them a ready compliance with every intimation of His holy will. He had dealt with them as He had dealt with no other people. How much they needed those object lessons, and how little they really benefited from them, their future conduct shows.

Their moral conditions the Lord well knew—their faint-heartedness, their perversity, their unbelief. In order to more effectually prepare them for the immediate future, as well as of formally establishing that covenant by which He indicated the relation which He was graciously pleased to sustain toward them, and the principles by which His future dealings with them would be regulated, He led them through the wilderness and brought them to Sinai. There the Lord granted a fresh manifestation of His glory—amidst thunderings and lightnings, flames and smoke. He delivered to them the Ten Words. The object of God in that solemn transaction was clearly intimated in the language He addressed to them immediately before, see Exodus 19:5-6. But although the law of the Ten Commandments constituted the *leading* feature of the Siniatic Covenant, and gave to the entire transaction its *distinctive* character, we must not conclude that it was limited thereto.

It is true that God added no more to the Ten Commandments at that time, not because there was nothing more to be revealed, but because the people in terror entreated that Moses might be the medium of all further communications, Deuteronomy 5:24-27. Accordingly we find the law itself was followed by a number of statutes (Exo 21 to end of 23), which were in part explanatory of the great principles of the law, and in part enjoining the ordinances for the regulation of their worship—which later received much enlargement. Both the basic law and the subsidiary statutes were immediately put on permanent record, and the whole sealed by “the book of the covenant” being read in the audience of the people and blood being sprinkled on them, Exodus 24:4-8. It was to that solemn ratification of this covenant which the apostle makes reference in Hebrews 9:18-20—it was substantially a repetition of the same significant ceremony which attended the establishment of the earlier covenants.

Thus it is clear that while the Ten Commandments was the most prominent and distinctive feature of the Siniatic Covenant, yet it embraced the entire body of the statutes and judgments which God gave Moses for the government of Israel, as well in their civil as in their religious capacity. They formed one code, in which the moral law and the ceremonial law were blended in a way peculiar to the special constitution under which the nation of Israel was placed. Speaking generally, the civil had a religious and the religious a civil aspect, in a sense found nowhere else. All the particulars of that Code were not equally important—some things were vital to it, the violation of which involved the practical renunciation of the covenant. Others were subordinate, enjoined because necessary as means of attaining the grand end in view. Yet were they all parts of the one covenant, demanding a prompt and sincere obedience.

In the above paragraphs, we have purposely gone back to the beginning of God's dealings with Israel as a nation in order to show once more *how unique* was the Mosaic economy, that there was much connected with it which, in the very nature of the case, *has no parallel* under the present Gospel order of things. The Siniatic Covenant was the foundation of that *political constitution* which the people of Israel enjoyed. In consequence thereof, JEHOVAH sustained a *special* relation to them. He was not only the God of all the earth (Exo 19:5), but in a peculiar sense, the King and Legislator of Israel. Any attempt on their part to change the divinely-

instituted system of law, given for their government, was expressly forbidden, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God” (Deu 4:2). That Code was complete in itself, that is, as considered in relation to the particular condition of that people for whose government it was intended.

“It is of great importance to the right interpretation of many passages in the Old Testament, that this particular be well understood and kept in view. JEHOVAH is very frequently represented as the Lord and God of all the ancient Israelites, even when it is manifest that the generality of them were considered as destitute of internal piety, and many of them as enormously wicked. How, then, could He be called *their* Lord and *their* God, in distinction from His relation to Gentiles (whose Creator, Benefactor, and Sovereign He was), except on the ground of the *Sinaitic* Covenant? He was *their* Lord as being their Sovereign, whom, by a federal transaction they were bound to obey, in opposition to every political monarch who would at any time presume to govern them by laws of his own. He was *their* God, as the only Object of holy worship and whom, by the same national covenant, they had solemnly engaged to serve according to His own rule, in opposition to every pagan idol.

“But that national relation between JEHOVAH and Israel being long since dissolved, and the Jew having no prerogative above the Gentile, the nature of the Gospel economy and of the Messiah’s kingdom absolutely forbids our supporting that either Jews or Gentiles are warranted to call the Universal Sovereign *their* Lord or their God, if they do not yield willing obedience to Him and perform *spiritual* worship. It is, therefore, either for want of understanding, or of considering the nature, aspect, and influence of the Sinai Constitution, that many persons dream of the new covenant in great numbers of places where Moses and the prophets had no thought of it, but had the convention at Horeb directly in view. It is owing to the same ignorance, or inadvertency, that others argue from various passages in the Old Testament for justification before God by their own obedience, and against the final perseverance of real saints.

“Again, as none but real Christians are the subjects of our Lord’s kingdom, neither adults nor infants can be members of the Gospel church in virtue of an *external* covenant or a *relative* holiness. A striking disparity this, between the Jewish and the Christian church. A barely *relative* sanctity [that is, a sanctity occurring from belonging to the nation of God’s choice, A.W.P.] supposes its possessors to be the people of God in a merely external sense; such an external people supposes an external covenant, or one that relates to exterior conduct and temporal blessings; and an external covenant supposes an external king. Now an external king is a political sovereign, but *such is not* our Lord Jesus Christ, nor yet the divine Father.

“Under the Gospel dispensation, these peculiarities have *no* existence. For Christ has not made an external covenant with any people. He is not the king of any particular nation. He dwells not in a temple made with hands. His throne is in the heavenly sanctuary, nor does He afford His visible presence in any place upon earth. The petition-wall between Jews and Gentiles has long been demolished, and consequently, our divine Sovereign does not stand related to any people or to any person so as to confer a relative sanctity, or to produce an *external* holiness.

“The covenant made at Sinai having long been obsolete, all its peculiarities are vanished away: among which, relative sanctity [that is, being accounted externally holy, because belonging to the nation separated unto God, A.W.P.] made a conspicuous figure. That national constitution being abolished, JEHOVAH’s political sovereignty is at an end. The covenant which is now in force, and the royal relation of our Lord to the church, are *entirely spiritual*. All that external holiness of persons, of places, and of things, which existed under the old economy, is gone

forever, so that if the professors of Christianity do not possess a real, *internal* sanctity, they have none at all. The national confederation at Sinai is expressly contrasted in Holy Scripture with the new covenant (see Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:7-13), and though the latter manifestly provides for internal holiness, respecting all the covenantees, yet it says not a word about relative sanctity” (Abraham Booth, 1796).

JEHOVAH, then, was King in Israel. *His* authority was supreme. *He* gave them the land in which they dwelt, settled the conditions on which they held it, made known the laws they were required to obey, and raised up from time to time, as they were demanded, leaders and judges, who for a season exercised, under God, authority over them. *This* is what is signified by the term “theocracy”—a government administered, under certain limitations, directly by God Himself. Such a relation as JEHOVAH sustained towards Israel, condemning all idolatry and demanding their separation from other nations, largely regulated the legislation under which they were placed. So far as righteousness between man and man was concerned, there was of course much which admitted of a universal application, resting on common and unalterable principles of equity. But there were also many enactments which derived their peculiar complexion from the special circumstances of the nation. The most cursory examination of the Pentateuch suffices to show this.

The Books of Moses reveal the singular provisions made for a self-sustaining nation, carefully fenced around and protected from moral danger from without, so far as civil arrangements could effect this end. Encouragement was indeed given to such strangers as might, on the renunciation of idolatry, become converts to the faith of Israel, and settle amongst them, though they were not permitted to have any share in the earthly inheritance. But all connection and ensnaring alliances with any people beyond their own confines were rigorously guarded against. The law of jubilee, which secured to each family a perpetual interest in the property belonging to it; the restrictions on marriage; the practical discouragement of commerce; the hindrances placed in the way of aggressive warfare—in the prohibition of cavalry, then the chief strength of armies; were all of a restricted character and illustrated that special exclusiveness of Judaism.

The nature of God’s immediate government of Israel involved *a special providence* as essential to its administration. It is true that eternal rewards and punishments were not employed for this purpose, because nations, as such, have no hereafter. In the judgment, men will be dealt with not according to their corporate but in their individual capacity. Yet it must not be inferred that Israel had no knowledge of a future state, for they had—yet that knowledge could not be formally employed to enforce their civil obedience. Social relations are an affair of this world, and the laws which regulate them must find their sanctions in considerations bearing on the mere interests of this present life. Accordingly, God, as the political Head of Israel, by special and extraordinary providences, intimated His approval or displeasure as their conduct called for. Prosperity, peace, and an abundance of material things, were the rewards of national obedience. Wars, famines, pestilences, were the punishment of their sin. The whole history of the nation shows with what uniformity the course of this intimation was pursued toward them.

Such, then, was the nature and design of the constitution conferred upon Israel. Yet it must be remembered that the great benefits it involved were not the fruit of the Siniatic Covenant. True, their *continued* enjoyment of them depended on their obedience to that covenant, but their *original bestowment* was the effect of the Abrahamic Covenant. Of this fact they were definitely reminded by Moses, “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn *unto your fathers*” (Deu 7:7-



8). In keeping therewith, we find that when serious crises arose because of their sins, those who interceded before God in their behalf, sought forgiveness on the ground of the promises made *to Abraham*, see Exodus 32:13, Deuteronomy 9:27, 2 Kings 13:23.

By undeserved and sovereign grace, the Israelites were chosen to be the people of God, and their obedience was not intended to purchase advantages and immunities not already possessed, but rather *to preserve* to them the possession of what God had already bestowed. This it is which indicated the place which the moral law occupied in regard to the nation at large. It proceeded on the recognition of their *existing relation to God*. He had chosen, redeemed, and made them His people, and now it was their privilege and duty to live in subjection to Him. It set before them the character and conduct which that existing relation required from them, and on which its perpetuation, with all the advantages connected with it, depended. “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev 20:26). At the same time, it was the standard to which their political code was adjusted, so far as their circumstances allowed.

The place which the moral law occupied, the express terms in which love to God was enforced as its leading principle (Deu 6:5), and the solemn circumstances under which it was given, were all fitted to teach the people that something more was required from them than a mechanical performance of duties—something in their heart and *inward state*, without which no service they were capable of performing could meet the approval of the Holy One. To suppose that a mere external conformity to the law was all that was expected from the people, is to overlook the plainest statements and the most obvious facts recorded in the Old Testament. God required truth “in the *inward* parts” (Psa 51:6), and scores of passages revealed the fact that nothing but a right state of heart toward Him could secure the service He commanded. Nothing but the blindness which sin occasioned could have made the Israelites insensible to this basic truth, otherwise the charges brought against them by Christ had been quite groundless and pointless. It had been meaningless for Him to denounce them for making clean the outside while they were full of corruption within.

## HUMILITY

Observe O my soul what an honour God has put upon *this* grace, “Before honour is humility” (Pro 15:33)! Whom God honours, He humbles first. He gives grace to the humble, because the humble give Him all the glory. The highest throne which He has upon earth is in the humblest heart. To it He vouchsafes His constant presence and makes the greatest communications of His love, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15). O what an honour is here promised to the humble! The greatest they can have on this side of heaven. God will dwell with them—and what a blessing! And His temple shall be in the humble heart. The high and holy One passes by what is in the highest esteem amongst men. He stains the pride of human greatness and goodness. He does not vouchsafe to set up His throne with the princes, nor to give His honour to

the learned of the world. But He puts honour upon *the contrite and humble*. He condescends to visit them. Yea, He delights to dwell with them, and in them—the Highest above all heavens in the lowest hearts. There He communicates His choicest love and richest favours. O my God! bestow upon me this grace, which in Thy sight is so precious. Humble me, that I may be revived with Thy presence and refreshed daily with Thy love. Give me more humility and fit me for nearer fellowship with Thee. Bring down every high thought, and let me find it true, that You resisteth the proud, but giveth more grace unto *the humble*.

Thus the true poverty of spirit is needful, not only to bring the sinner to Christ, but also to preserve the believer in communion with Him, for so long as he walks by faith, everything will tend to promote this communion. In the daily sense of his wants, he will go to his bountiful Saviour for a supply. In the feeling of his misery, He will depend on his loving Saviour for relief—whereby he will be led to more intercourse with Him. What he finds wrong in himself will bring him to live more by faith, and as faith increases, so will his delight in God. He will grow more sensible of his weakness and that will make him stronger in the Lord. He will know more of his own heart, which will humble him, and keep him dependent on the grace of Jesus. He will see reason not to lean to his own understanding, but ever to pray, Lord guide me by Thy good Spirit. Viewing spots and blemishes in his best doings, his triumph will be, “I will make mention of thy righteousness,” Lord Jesus, even of Thine *only* (Psa 71:16). Thus everything will humble him and lead him to live more by faith, by which means he will get faster hold of Christ, live in nearer fellowship, and be receiving out of his fullness “grace for grace” (Joh 1:16)—two graces at once—the blessings needed and thankfulness for them. Hereby a sweet intercourse will be kept open.

To the humble, God delights to give grace, and they delight to return Him His glory. The more He gives, the more glory would they gladly return. And He does give more, and He receives it back again in thanks and praise. Blessed grace! by which this holy fellowship is maintained. Happy humility! by which the heart, being emptied of self, is made capable of receiving the fullness which is of God. Then is the promise fulfilled, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:3)—it is theirs now—not only in title, but also in possession, for the kingdom of God is within them and they are partakers *at present* of its blessings and glories as truly, though not so perfectly, as they will be in heaven. Meditate, O my soul, upon this divine grace. Thou seest the necessity of it. O pray earnestly for it and for more of it. The great idol *self* must be dethroned where God reigns. Thou canst not walk with Him unless thou art humble in heart. And if thou hast been walking with Him, thou wilt be taught to stop, whenever thou beginnest to look at self with admiration. O beg of the Lord, then, to give thee the true Gospel poverty of spirit. It is to be in constant practice and used for everything—for thou seest how it keeps up fellowship with God, who makes the greatest communications of Himself to the humblest. And the reason is plain, because they return Him all His glory. If therefore thou wouldest have much grace in exercise, pray for much *humility*. O my God! whatever Thou givest, give humility with it, that I may not seek self in it, but Thine honour, nor lay it out upon myself, but to Thy glory. Meek and lowly Jesus, make me like Thyself. Keep me learning of Thee, till I am perfectly like Thee. I would come always poor to Thee, to receive of Thy riches, and to receive with them *a humble heart* to praise Thee for them. O let Thy glory be mine end and aim. Let me and mine be Thine. I humbled, Thou exalted. Let Thy graces and gifts bring Thee in a constant revenue of praise. And may Thine increasing goodness be joined with a constant increase of humility, that my heart and all within me may bless and praise Thy holy name, today and forever. Amen.

And let this appear in my whole behaviour *to others*. This is another blessed fruit of humility. It has an influence over the believer's intercourse with mankind, and renders his tempers and manners loving and amiable. Pride was not made for man, and yet it is in all men, and is the chief parent of human woe. It sets people above their place, and makes them think they could support the greatest fortunes, and are able to manage the most difficult affairs. Others, as proud as they, deny them their fancied superiority. Hence come wars and fightings, public and private. The sweet grace of *humility* is sent from heaven to relieve those distresses—for into whatsoever bosom it enters, it renders men kind to one another, tender-hearted, ready to every good word and work. Thus runs the divine exhortation, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom 12:10). This is heart-humility, which the Holy Spirit requires, and which He bestows. He brings His disciples into humble subjection to God, then to one another—which has the most happy effects upon public, social, and private happiness. But would these flourish, if all men were of a meek and quiet spirit! But there is none of this among the unconverted, and alas, how little is there among believers! How often are they found in the proud spirit of the world! acting contrary to the lowly spirit of Jesus. And yet it is not for want of precepts, nor for want of promised help, but it is because they are not walking by faith, as becometh the Gospel, nor out of love to God's glory studying to recommend humility by their practice.

Observe, O my soul, *the remedy* provided of God for the subduing of all selfish tempers, and pray that it may be effectual in thy life and conversation. Do you think that the Scripture, saith in vain, “The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (Jam 4:5-6). This Scripture cannot speak in vain, for fallen man is certainly such as he is here described. The spirit that dwelleth in him, in his own nature, lusteth to envy—a passion made up of pride and discontent, offended with God, and displeased with the blessings which He bestows upon men. It is an enemy to the love both of God and man, and transgresses the law of both tables. Pride brought it into heaven and the fallen angels brought it into this world. Ever since it entered by sin, natural corruption breaks out very much in *envy*. But God giveth more grace to conquer this passion, than sinful nature has to put it forth. He not only gives grace to pardon it, but also more grace to subdue it, so that envy loses its dominion in the reign of grace. We cannot subdue it, any more than we can pardon envy, pride, and such passions, but grace is almighty. What ever so much, use ever so much, God has still more for you. And He gives more, when the creature *is humbled enough* to take it out of the hands of His mercy. Thus he overcomes envy, “for he resisteth the proud”—He is at open war with them and they with Him.

Pride lifts up the creature against the Creator, and puts it upon seeking happiness out of God. This is resisting His sovereignty, attacking His providence, and opposing His law. He is concerned to pull such rebels down and He says their pride goeth before destruction. But He “giveth grace unto *the humble*” (Jam 4:6). He gives them grace to humble them, and being emptied, He delights to fill them, for then they are disposed to receive His grace and to value it. Whatever God gives, the humble give it back again to Him. They have the blessing, He has the praise—which is the just tribute due to Him for His gifts. And He gives more grace where He can get more glory. Thus He subdues self-conceit, with its various proud workings. And as grace reigns over them, humility prevails, which has a friendly aspect towards mankind. It keeps brotherly love in the heart and tends mightily to the practice of every social virtue. Humility suffereth long and is kind; humility envieth not; humility vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up;

doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil.—William Romaine, 1770.

# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## 11. Its Instrument

Paul was sent unto the Gentiles “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are *sanctified by faith* that is in me [Jesus]” (Act 26:18). Two extremes are to be guarded against in connection with the precise relation that faith sustains to the various aspects of salvation—disparaging it and making too much of it. There are those who expressly deny that faith has any actual part or place in the securing of salvation, declaring that it simply obtains a knowledge and enjoyment of the same. On the other hand, there are some who virtually make a Saviour out of faith, ascribing to it what belongs alone to Christ. But if we adhere closely to Scripture and observe *all* that is said thereon (instead of restricting our attention to a few passages), there is no excuse for falling into either error. We shall therefore make a few remarks with the object of refuting each of them.

“But without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6). We are saved by faith (Luk 7:50). We are justified by faith (Rom 5:1). We live by faith (Gal 2:20). We stand by faith (2Co 1:24). We walk by faith (2Co 5:7). We obey by faith (Rom 1:5). Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17). We overcome the world by faith (1Jo 5:4). The heart is purified by faith (Act 15:9). All duties, for their right motive and end, depend upon it. No trials and afflictions can be patiently or profitably borne unless faith be in exercise. Our whole warfare can only be carried on and finished victoriously by faith (1Ti 6:12). All the gifts and graces of God are presented in the promises, and they can only be received and enjoyed by us in a way of believing. It is high worship to be strong in faith giving glory to God. In view of all this, we need not be surprised to read that we are “*sanctified by faith*.”

But *in what way* does faith sanctify us? To answer this question properly, we must carefully bear in mind the principal aspects of our subject, which have already been considered by us in the previous articles of this series. First, faith has nothing to do with the Father’s setting of us apart and blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ before the foundation of the world. It is one of the God-dishonouring and creature-exalting errors of Arminianism to affirm that Christians were elected on the ground that God foresaw they would believe. Second, our faith was in no sense a moving cause to Christ’s becoming the Surety of His people and working out for them a perfect holiness before God. Third, faith has no influence in causing the Holy Spirit to separate the elect from the reprobate, for at the moment He does this they are dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore totally incapable of performing any spiritual acts. Fourth, faith will not contribute anything unto the Christian’s glorification, for *that* is solely the work of God, the subject of it being entirely passive therein.

Thus faith, important though it be, plays only a secondary and subordinate part in sanctification. It is neither the originating, the meritorious, nor the efficient cause of it, but only the *instrument*. Yet faith *is necessary* in order to a saving union with Christ, and until that be effected none of the blessings and benefits which are in Him can be received by us. It seems strange that any who are well-versed in the Scriptures and who profess to be subject to their teachings, should question what has just been affirmed. Take such a declaration as “them that believe *to* the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39). True, we are not saved *for* our believing, yet equally true is it that there is no salvation for any sinner *without* his believing. Every blessing we receive from Christ is in consequence of our being united to Him, and therefore we cannot receive the holiness there is in Him until we are “sanctified by faith” (Act 26:18). Furthermore, faith is necessary in order to the reception of the purifying truth, in order to practical deliverance from the power of sin, and in order to progress or growth in personal holiness.

Before proceeding further let it be pointed out that the faith which the Gospel requires, the faith which savingly unites a sinner to Christ, the faith which issues in sanctification, is very much more than the bare assent to the mind to what is recorded in the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus. It is something far different from the mere adoption of certain evangelical opinions regarding the way of salvation. The day to come will reveal the solemn fact that thousands went down to hell with their heads filled with orthodox beliefs—which many of them contended for earnestly and propagated zealously, just as the Mohammedan does with the tenets and principles of *his* religion. Saving faith, my reader, is the soul’s surrender to and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a living, loving, all-sufficient Saviour, and that upon the alone but sure testimony of God Himself. When we say “an all-sufficient Saviour” we mean One in whom there is a spotless holiness as well as perfect righteousness for those who come to Him.

Faith lays hold of Christ as He is offered to sinners in the Gospel, and He is there presented not only for justification, but also for the sanctification of all who truly believe on Him. The glorious Gospel of grace not only heralds One who delivers from the wrath to come, but as giving title to approach now unto the thrice holy God. Moreover, faith accepts a *whole* Christ—not only as Priest to atone for us, but as King to reign over us. Faith, then, is *the instrument* of our sanctification. Faith is the eye which perceives the gracious provisions which God has made for His people. Faith is the hand which appropriates those provisions. Faith is the mouth which receives all the good that God has stored up for us in Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and without the *exercise* of faith it is impossible to make any real progress in the spiritual life.

Many of the Lord’s people rob themselves of much of their peace and joy by confounding faith with its fruits. They fail to distinguish between the Word of God believed and what follows from believing it aright. Fruit grows on trees and the tree must exist before there can be fruit. True obedience, acceptable worship, growth in grace, assurance of salvation, are what faith produces and not what faith itself *is*—they are the effects of faith working and not definitions of the nature of faith. Faith derives its being from the Word of God and all its fruits are the result of believing. What God has spoken in His Word demands belief from all to whom the Word comes. Faith and the Word of God, then, are related as the effect and the cause, because “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). When faith comes by the *inward* “hearing,” then we assent to what God has said, and we rely upon His faithfulness to make good what He has promised—until *that* has been effected there can be no fruits of faith.

It is, then, of much importance to correctly define what faith is, for a mistake at this point is not only dishonouring to God, but injurious to the soul and harmful to its peace. Faith is a child-

like taking God at His Word and a resting on what He has said. It is a depending on Christ to bestow those blessings and graces which He has promised to those who believe. How is a sin-defiled soul to become a partaker of the cleansing efficacy of the blood of the Lamb? Only by *faith*. The purifying virtue of Christ's blood, and the administration of the Spirit, for the application to make it effectual unto our souls and consciences, is exhibited in the promises of the Gospel. And the only way to be made a partaker of the good things presented in the promises is by faith. God Himself ordained this instrumental efficacy unto faith in the everlasting covenant, and nothing is more honouring to Him than the exercise of real faith.

Returning to our earlier question, In what way does faith sanctify us? We answer, first, *by uniting us to Christ*, the Holy One. Oneness with Christ is the foundation of all the blessings of the Christian, but it is not until he is actually united to Christ by faith that those blessings are really made over to him. Then it is that Christ is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1Co 1:30). It is faith which receives Christ's atonement, for God hath set forth Christ "a propitiation *through faith* in his blood" (Rom 3:25), and His infinitely meritorious blood not only justifies, but sanctifies too. Thus there is no intrinsic virtue in faith itself, instead, its value lies wholly in its being the hand which lays hold of Him who possesses infinite virtue. For this very reason faith excludes all boasting (Rom 3:27), and therefore any "believing" which produces self-gratification or results in self-satisfaction is most certainly not the faith of the Gospel.

Second, faith sanctifies the believer by enabling him *to enjoy now* what is his in Christ and what will be his in himself in heaven. Faith sets to its seal that the testimony of God is true when He declares that "we *are* sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). Faith assures its possessor that, though he is still a fallen creature in himself, and as such, a sinner to the end of his earthly course, yet in Christ he is perfectly holy, having the same immaculate standing before God as does his Head and Surety—for "as *he* is, so are *we* in this world" (1Jo 4:17). Thus faith is "the evidence of things *not seen*" (Heb 11:1) by the natural eye, nor felt by the natural senses. Faith projects us out of this scene entirely and carries the heart into heaven itself—not a natural faith, not a preacher-produced faith, but Gospel faith, imparted by the Holy Spirit.

But let us not be mistaken at this point. The faith of which we are here treating is not blind fanaticism. It does not ignore the presence of indwelling sin. It does not close its eyes to the constant activities of the flesh. It refuses to tone down the vile fruits which the flesh produces, by terming them shortcomings, ignorance, mistakes, etc. No, faith has clear vision and perceives the infinite enormity of all that is opposed to God. Faith is honest and scorns the hypocrisy of calling darkness light. But faith not only sees the total depravity of natural self and the horrible filth which fouls every part of it, but it also views the precious blood which has satisfied every claim of God upon those for whom it was shed, and which cleanses from all sin those who put their trust in it. It is neither fanaticism nor presumption for faith to receive at its face value what God has declared concerning the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

Third, faith sanctifies as it *derives grace from* the fullness which there is in Christ. God has constituted the Mediator the source of all spiritual influences and faith is the instrument by which they are derived from Him. Christ is not only a Head of authority to His church, but also a Head of influence. "But speaking the truth in love, *may grow up into him* in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, *maketh increase* of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16). That "effectual working in

the measure of every part” is by supplies of grace being received from Christ, and that grace flows through the appointed channel of *faith*. As the Lord Jesus declared unto the father of the demon-tormented son, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mar 9:23), and to the two blind beggars who cried unto Him for mercy, “According to your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29). How earnest and importunate should we be, in begging the Lord to graciously strengthen and increase our faith.

It is by faith laying hold upon a full Christ that the empty soul is replenished. All that we need for time as well as eternity is to be found in Him, but the hand of faith must be extended, even though it grasp but the hem of His garment, if virtue is to flow forth from Him into us. As Samson’s strength was in his locks, so the Christian’s strength is in his Head. This Satan knows full well, and therefore does he labour so hard to keep us from Christ, causing the clouds of unbelief to hide from our view the radiant face of the Sun of righteousness, and getting us so occupied with our miserable selves that we forget the great Physician. As it is by the sap derived from the root which makes the branches fruitful, so it is by the virtue which faith draws from Christ that the believer is made to abound in holiness. Hence the exhortation, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1).

Fourth, faith sanctifies because *it cleanses the soul*. “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by *faith*” (Act 15:8-9). It is by faith the heart is “sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb 10:22) by the blood of Christ. It is by faith the affections are lifted unto things above and thereby disentangled from the defiling objects of the world. It is by the exercise of faith that the “inward parts” (Psa 51:6) are conformed in some measure unto the rule of righteousness and holiness, for “faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), and “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10). It is to be duly noted that in Acts 15:9, the apostle did not say “there hearts *were* purified by faith,” instead, he used the present tense “purifying,” for it is a *continuous process* which lasts as long as the believer is here upon earth. This aspect of our sanctification is not complete till we are released from this world.

Fifth, faith sanctifies because it is by this we *hold communion with Christ*, and communion with Him cannot but nourish the principle of holiness within the regenerate. Thus faith is sanctifying in its own nature, for it is exercised upon spiritual objects. “But we all, with open face beholding [by faith] 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). Faith is a transforming grace because it causes the soul to cleave unto the Divine Transformer. As it was faith which made us to first lay hold of Christ, so it impels us to *continue* coming unto Him. And if the woman who touched the hem of His garment by faith secured the healing of her body, shall not those who cleave to Christ continue obtaining from Him the healing of their spiritual maladies?!

Sixth, faith sanctifies because it *appropriates the commandments* of God and produces obedience. We are sanctified “by the truth” (see Joh 17:17), yet the Word works not without an act on *our* part as well as of God’s. It is naught but blind enthusiasm which supposes that the Scriptures work in us like some magical charm. How solemn is that passage, “but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb 4:2). The Word avails us nothing if it be not received into a trustful heart and faith be acted upon it. Therefore do we read, “Seeing ye have purified your souls *in obeying* the truth through the Spirit” (1Pe 1:22). It is only as the truth is received upon the authority of God, given a place in our affections, and yielded to by the will, that our souls are “purified” by it. The more faith causes us

to run in the way of God's commandments, the more is the soul delivered from the defiling effects of self-pleasing.

Seventh, faith sanctifies because it *responds to the various motives* which God has proposed to His people—motives to stir them up unto their utmost endeavours and diligence in using those ways and means which He has appointed for preventing the defilements of sin and for cleansing the conscience when defilement has been contracted. As faith receives the Word *as God's*, its divine authority awes the soul, subdues enmity, and produces submission. The effects of faith are that the soul trembles at the divine threatenings, yields obedience to the divine precepts, and gladly embraces the divine promises. Herein, and in no other way, do we obtain unfailing evidence of the reality and genuineness of our faith. As the specie of a tree is identified by the nature of the fruit which it bears, so the kind of faith we have may be ascertained by the character of the effects which it produces. Some of those effects we have sought to describe in the last few paragraphs.



# December

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 37. The Spirit Transforming (Part 2)

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

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

From what has just been pointed out, then, it is plain when the apostle declares, “But we all, with open face *beholding* as in a glass the glory of the Lord” (2Co 3:18), that a miracle of grace had been wrought in them. As spiritual blindness consists in an absence of relish for holy beauty—which blindness is capable of being greatly increased and confirmed through the exercise and influence of the various corruptions of a wicked heart, and which Satan augments by all means in his power—so spiritual sight is the soul’s delighting itself in divine and spiritual things. In regeneration there is begotten in the soul a holy taste, so that the heart now goes out

after God and His Christ. This is referred to in Scripture in various ways. It is the fulfillment of that promise, “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, *to love the LORD thy God*” (Deu 30:6).

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

“But we all”—that is, all who have been supernaturally brought from death unto life, out of darkness into God’s marvelous light, “with open face,” or “unveiled face” as it is in the Greek and as the R.V. translates it—that is, with hearts from which “the veil” of prejudice (2Co 3:18) has been removed, from which that “covering cast over all people” (Isa 25:7), the covering of enmity against God, has been destroyed—“beholding”—note carefully the present tense, for it is a continuous action which is here in view, “as in a glass” or “mirror,” namely, the twofold glass of the law and the Gospel, “the glory of the Lord,” that is His communicable perfections, His moral character, “*are changed into the same image*” (2Co 3:18), this clause it is which must next engage our careful attention.

Following our usual custom, let us first give a brief definition and then amplify the same. To be changed into “the same image” (2Co 3:18) means that the regenerated soul becomes conformed unto the divine character, that answerable principles and affections are wrought in his heart, bringing him into harmony with the perfections of God. This *must* be the case, for since divinely enlightened souls have such a relish for holy beauty, for *such* beauty as there is in the character of God, then it necessarily follows that every divine truth as it comes into their view will appear beautiful, and will accordingly beget and excite holy affections corresponding with its nature. Or more specifically, as the heart is occupied with the several perfections of God exhibited in the law and in the Gospel, corresponding desires and determinations will be awakened in and exercised by that soul.

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

Universal experience teaches us that characters appear agreeable or disagreeable just as they suit our taste or not. To an angel, who has a taste for holy beauty, the moral character of God appears infinitely amiable, but to the devil, who is being of a contrary taste, God’s moral character appears just the reverse. To the Pharisees, no character was more odious than that of the

Lord Jesus, but at the same time Mary and Martha and Lazarus were charmed with Him. To the Jewish nation in general, who groaned under the Roman yoke and longed for a Messiah to set them at liberty, to make them victorious, rich, and honourable—a Messiah in the character of a temporal prince, who had gratified their desires—such a one had appeared glorious in their eyes, and they would have been changed into the same image—that is, every answerable affection had been excited in their hearts.

Now it is this moral transformation in the believer which is *the evidence* of his spiritual enlightenment—“beholding,” he is “changed” (2Co 3:18). Where a soul has been supernaturally illumined, there will issue a corresponding conformity to the divine image. But in so affirming, many of our Christian readers are likely to feel that we are thereby cutting off their hopes. They will be ready to exclaim, Alas, *my* character resembles the likeness of the devil far more than it does the image of God. Let us, then, ease the tension a little. Observe, dear troubled souls, this transformation is not effected instantaneously, but by *degrees*. This great “change” is not accomplished by the Spirit in a moment, but is a gradual work. This is plainly signified in the “*from glory to glory*” (2Co 3:18) which means, from one degree of it to another. Only as this fact is apprehended can our poor hearts be assured before God.

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

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### 108. Marriage (13:4)

From a prescription of duties towards others, the apostle next proceeds to give directions unto those which concern ourselves, wherein our own persons and walking are concerned. He does this in a prohibition of the two most radical and comprehensive lusts of corrupt nature, namely, uncleanness and covetousness—the first respecting the persons of men in a peculiar manner, the other their conversation or conduct. Acts of moral uncleanness are distinguishable from all other sins which are perpetrated in external acts, in that they are immediately against a man’s self and his own person, see 1 Corinthians 6:18 and therefore is chastity enforced under the means of preserving the same, that is, marriage, while the antidote for covetousness is given, namely, a

spirit of contentment. The connection between Hebrews 13:4-6 and 13:1-3 is obvious—unless uncleanness and covetousness be mortified there can be no real love exercised unto the brethren.

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

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

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

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

We will begin by pointing out *the excellency* of wedlock, “Marriage is honourable,” says our text, and it is so first of all because God Himself has placed special honour upon it. All other ordinances or institutions (except the Sabbath) were appointed of God by the medium of men or angels (Act 7:53), but marriage was ordained *immediately* by the Lord Himself—no man or angel

brought the first wife to her husband (Gen 2:19). Thus marriage had more divine honour put upon it than had all the other divine institutions, because it was directly solemnized by God Himself. Again, this was the *first* ordinance God instituted, yea, the first thing He did after man and woman were created, and that, while they were still in their unfallen state. Moreover, *the place* where their marriage occurred shows the honourableness of this institution, whereas all other institutions (save the Sabbath) were instituted outside of Paradise, marriage was solemnized in Eden itself—intimating how happy they are that marry in the Lord.

“*God’s crowning creative act* was the making of woman. At the close of each creative day, it is formally recorded that ‘God saw what he had made, that it was good’ (see Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). But when Adam was made, it is explicitly recorded that God saw it was ‘*not* good that the man should be alone.’ As to man the creative work lacked completeness, until, as all animals and even plants had their mates, there should be found for Adam also an help, meet for him—his counterpart and companion. Not until this want was met did God see the work of the last creative day also to be good.

“This is the first great Scripture lesson on family life, and it should be well learned...The divine institution of marriage teaches that *the ideal state* of both man and woman is not in separation but in union, that each is meant and fitted for the other, and that God’s ideal is such union, based on a pure and holy love, enduring for life, exclusive of all rivalry or other partnership, and incapable of alienation or unfaithfulness, because it is a union in the Lord—a holy wedlock of soul and spirit in mutual sympathy and affection” (A. T. Pierson, 1837-1911).

As God the Father honoured the institution of marriage, so also did God the Son. First, by His being “*born of a woman*” (Gal 4:4). Second, by His *miracles*, for the first supernatural sign that He wrought was at the marriage of Cana in Galilee (Joh 2:8), where He turned the water into wine, thereby intimating that if Christ be present at your wedding (i.e., if you “marry in the Lord”) your life shall be a joyous or blessed one. Third, by His *parables*, for He compared the kingdom of God unto a marriage (Mat 22:2) and holiness to a “wedding garment” (Mat 22:11). So also His teaching—when the Pharisees sought to ensnare Him on the subject of divorce, He set His imprimatur on the original constitution, adding, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mat 19:4-6).

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

There is no doubt that in a true marriage each party helps the other equally, and in view of what has been pointed out above, any who venture to hold or teach any other doctrine or philosophy join issue with the Most High. This does not lay down a hard and fast rule that *every* man and woman is obliged to enter into matrimony. There may be good and wise reasons for abiding alone, adequate motives for remaining in the single state—physical and moral, domestic and social. Nevertheless, a single life should be regarded as abnormal and exceptional, rather than ideal. Any teaching that leads men and women to think of the marriage bond as the sign of bondage, and the sacrifice of all independence, to construe wifehood and motherhood as drudgery

and interference with women's higher destiny, any public sentiment to cultivate celibacy as more desirable and honourable, or to substitute anything else for marriage and home, not only invades God's ordinance, but opens the door to nameless crimes and threatens the very foundations of society.

Now it is clear that marriage must have particular *reasons for the appointment of it*. Three are given in Scripture. First, *for the propagation of children*. This is its obvious and normal purpose. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen 1:27)—not both males or both females, but one male and one female. And to make the design of this unmistakably plain, God said, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). For this reason marriage is called "matrimony," which signifies *motherage*, because it results in virgins becoming mothers. Therefore it is desirable that marriage be entered into at an early age, before the prime of life be passed—twice in Scripture we read of "the wife of thy youth" (Pro 5:18; Mal 2:14). We have pointed out that the propagation of children is the "normal" end of marriage, yet there are special seasons of acute "distress" when 1 Corinthians holds good.

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

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

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

There are but two families in this world—the children of God and the children of the devil (1Jo 3:10). If, then, a daughter of God marries a son of the evil one, she becomes a daughter-in-law to Satan! If a son of God marries a daughter of Satan, he becomes a son-in-law to the devil!

By such an infamous step an affinity is formed between one belonging to the Most High and one belonging to His arch-enemy. “Strong language?!” Yes, but not too strong. O the dishonour to Christ by such a union. O the bitter reaping from such a sowing. In every case it is the poor believer who suffers. Read the inspired histories of Samson, Solomon, and Ahab, and see what followed *their* unholy alliances in wedlock. As well might an athlete attach to himself a heavy weight and then expect to win a race, as for one to progress spiritually after marrying a worldling.

Should any Christian reader be inclined or expect to become betrothed, the first question for him or her to carefully weigh in the Lord’s presence is, Will this union be with an unbeliever? For if you are really cognizant of, and your heart and soul are impressed with the tremendous *difference* which God, in His grace, has put between you and those who are—however attractive in the flesh—yet in their sins, then you should have no difficulty in rejecting every suggestion and proposal of making common cause with such. *You* are “the righteousness of God” (see 2Co 5:21) in Christ, but unbelievers are “unrighteous.” *You* are “the light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8), but they are darkness. *You* have been translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, but unbelievers are under the power of Belial. *You* are a son of peace, whereas all unbelievers are “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). Therefore “be ye separate, saith the Lord, and *touch not* the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2Co 6:17).

The danger of forming such an alliance is *before* marriage, or even betrothal, neither of which could be seriously entertained by any real Christian unless the sweetness of fellowship with the Lord had been lost. The affections must first be withdrawn from Christ before we can find delight in social intimacy with those who are alienated from God and whose interests are confined to this world. The child of God who is “keeping his heart with all diligence” (see Pro 4:23) will not, cannot, have a joy in intimacies with the unregenerate. Alas, how often is the seeking of the accepting of close friendship with unbelievers the first step to *open* departure from Christ. The path which the Christian is called upon to lead is indeed a narrow one, but if he attempts to widen it, or leave it for a broader road, it must be in contravention of the Word of God, and to his or her own irreparable danger and loss.

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

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

regulate our emotions. In the body the head is placed over the heart and not the heart over the head!

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

Now for the benefit of our younger readers, let us point out some of the *marks* by which a godly and fit mate may be *identified*. First, the *reputation*—a good man commonly has a good name (see Pro 22:1), none can accuse him of open sins. Second, the *countenance*—our looks reveal our characters, and therefore Scripture speaks of “proud looks” and “wanton looks”—“the shew of their countenance doth witness against them” (Isa 3:9). Third, the *speech*, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34)—“the heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Pro 16:23). “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Pro 31:26). Fourth, the *apparel*—a modest woman is known by the modesty of her attire. If the clothing be vulgar or showy the heart is vain. Fifth, the *company* kept—birds of a feather flock together—a person may be known by his or her associates.

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

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

Second, the *headship* of the husband. “The head of the woman is the man” (1Co 11:3). “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph 5:23). Unless this divine appointment be duly heeded there is sure to be confusion. The household must have a leader, and God has committed its rule unto the husband, holding *him* responsible for its orderly management—and serious will be the loss if he shirks his duty and turns the reins of government



over to his wife. But this does not mean that Scripture gives him license to be a domestic tyrant, treating his wife as a servant. His dominion is to be exercised in love toward the one who is his consort. “Likewise, ye husbands, *dwell with* them” (1Pe 3:7). Seek their society after the day’s labour is over. That divine injunction plainly condemns those who leave their wives and go abroad on the pretext of a “call from God.”

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

We have space for only one other matter, which is deeply important for young husbands to heed. “Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and *afterwards* build thine house” (Pro 24:27). The point here is that the husband is not to think of owning his own house before he can afford it. As Matthew Henry (1642-1714) says, “This is a rule of providence in the management of household affairs. We must prefer necessities before luxuries, and not lay that out for show which should be expended for the support of the family.” Alas, in this degenerate age so many young couples want to start where their parents ended, and then feel they must imitate their godless neighbours in various extravagances. Never go into debt or purchase on the “credit system.” “Owe no man any thing” (Rom 13:8)!

And now for a final word on our text. “Marriage is honourable *in all*” (Heb 13:4) who are called thereunto, no class of persons being precluded. This clearly gives the lie to the pernicious teaching of Rome concerning the celibacy of the clergy, as does also 1 Timothy 3:2, etc. “And the bed undefiled” (Heb 13:4) not only signifies fidelity to the marriage vow (1Th 4:4), but that the conjugal act of intercourse is not polluting. In the unfallen state, Adam and Eve were bidden to “multiply”—yet moderation and sobriety is to obtain here, as in all things. We do not believe in what is termed “birth control,” but we do earnestly urge *self-control*, especially by the husband, “But whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb 13:4). This is a most solemn warning against unfaithfulness. Those who live and die inpenitently in these sins will eternally perish, Ephesians 5:5.

# THE LIFE OF DAVID

## 60. His Son Absalom

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

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

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

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

Now in his ordering Joab to fetch back Absalom from Geshur, David acted according to the dictates of “natural affection,” and not out of any regard to the honour of the Lord. Joab knew how to work upon his weakness, as is evident from the success of his scheme through the woman of Tekoah. She so wrought upon his sentiments that he rashly gave a verdict in favour of the criminal depicted in her story, and then she persuaded him to restore his treacherous son. Yet nothing could possibly justify him in disregarding the divine law, which cried aloud for the avenging of Amnon. God had given no commandment for his son to be restored, and therefore *His* blessing did not attend it. David paid dearly for his foolish pity, as we shall see from the sequel, and *that* is recorded for *our* learning. God grant that some parents at least who read these lines will take this solemn lesson to heart.

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

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

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

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

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

“Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire” (2Sa 14:30). He was still the same self-willed character, “who is lord over us?” (Psa 12:4) being the language of all his actions. The three years he had spent at Geshur and his two years of isolation in Jerusalem had wrought no change in him. His heart was not humbled and his pride was not mortified. Instead of being thankful that his life had been spared, he deems himself sorely wronged for being secluded from the court. Instead of being grateful to Joab for bringing him back from Geshur, he now takes a mean revenge upon him because he refused his present request. Such conduct displayed a self-will that would brook no denial—a man of violence ready to go to any lengths in order to have his own way. The fear of God was not in him, nor had he any respect for his neighbour.

“Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?” (2Sa 14:31). At first sight it seems strange after twice refusing to see Absalom, that now, after being insulted and injured, Joab should grant his request, and mediate for him with the king, yet a little reflection will make it clear. Joab was a shrewd politician, with his finger on the public's pulse, and he knew full well that Absalom stood high in the favour of the people (2Sa 14:25), and now that he had further proof of the fury and power of the man—his servants being ready at his bidding to do violence unto the property of the general of the army!—he was afraid to further cross his will, and probably, with an eye to the future, he also wished to keep in his good books.

“And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me” (2Sa 14:32). What an arrogant and insolent attitude to assume toward his royal parent—one which manifested the grossest ingratitude, a contempt for the king's authority, and a deliberate challenge for him to enforce the law. Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, “His message was haughty and imperious, and very unbecoming either a son or a subject. He undervalued the favour that had been show him in recalling him from banishment, and restoring him to his own house. He denies his own crimes, though most notorious, and will not own that there was any iniquity in him, insinuating that, therefore, he had been wronged in the rebukes he had been under. He defies the king's justice, ‘Let him kill me, if he can find in his heart,’ knowing he loved him too well to do it.”

“So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom” (2Sa 14:33). Alas, notwithstanding his insulting rudeness, Absalom prevailed upon the king to yield. His better judgment blinded by intemperate affection for his son, David invited Absalom to the palace. By prostrating himself before the king, Absalom feigned submission to his authority, yet his heart was full of base designs to secure the throne for himself. David sealed his pardon with a kiss, instead of allowing the law to take its course. As another has well said, “David's inordinate tenderness only paved the way for Absalom's open rebellion. Terrible warning! Deal tenderly with evil, and it will, assuredly, rise to a head and crush you in the end. On the other hand, meet evil with a face of flint, and victory is sure. Sport not with the serpent, but at once crush it beneath your feet.”

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

Beautifully did Alexander Maclaren (1826-1929), in his little work "The Life of David As Reflected in His Psalms," throw light upon this particular stage of his career, and we feel we cannot do our readers a better service than close this article with a rather lengthy quotation therefrom. "It is not probable that many Psalms were made in those dreary days. But the *Forty-first* and *Fifty-fifth* are, with reasonable probability, referred to this period by many commentators. They give a very touching picture of the old king during the four years in which Absalom's conspiracy was being hatched. It seems from the 41<sup>st</sup> that the pain and sorrow of his heart had brought on some serious illness, which his enemies had used for their own purposes and embittered by hypocritical condolences and ill-concealed glee. The sensitive nature of the Psalmist winces under their heartless desertion of him, and pours out its plaint in this pathetic lament. He begins with a blessing on those who 'consider the afflicted'—having reference, perhaps, to the few who were faithful to him in his languishing sickness. He passes thence to his own case, and, after humble confession of his sin—almost in the words of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm—he tells how his sick bed had been surrounded by different visitors.

"His disease drew no pity, but only fierce impatience that he lingered in life so long. 'Mine enemies speak evil of me—when will he die, and his name have perished?' One of them, in especial, who must have been a man in high position to gain access to the sick chamber, has been conspicuous by his lying words of condolence. 'If he come to see me, he speaketh vanity' (Psa 41:6). The sight of the sick king touched no chord of affection, but only increased the traitor's animosity—'his heart gathered evil to itself' (Psa 41:6)—and then, having watched his pale face for wished-for unfavourable symptoms, the false friend hurries from the bedside to talk of his hopeless illness—'he goeth abroad, he telleth it' (Psa 41:6). The tidings spread, and are stealthily passed from one conspirator to another, 'all that hate me whisper together against me' (Psa 41:7). They exaggerate the gravity of his condition, and are glad because, making the wish the father to the thought, they believe him dying—'a thing of Belial [i.e., a destructive disease] say they, is poured out upon him, and now that he lieth, he shall rise up no more' (see Psa 41:8).

"We should be disposed to refer the Thirty-ninth Psalm also to this period. It, too, is the meditation of one in sickness, which he knows to be a divine judgment for his sin. There is little trace of enemies in it, but his attitude is that of *silent submission*, while wicked men are disquieted around him—which is precisely the characteristic of his conduct at this period. It consists of two parts (Psa 39:1-6 and 7-13), in both of which the subjects of his meditations are the same, but the tone of them different. His own sickness and mortality, and man's fleeting, shadowy life, are his themes. The former has led him to think of the latter.

"It may be observed that this supposition of a protracted illness, which is based upon these Psalms, throw light upon the singular passiveness of David during the maturing of Absalom's conspiracy, and may naturally be supposed to have favoured his schemes, an essential part of

which was to ingratiate himself with suitors who came to the king for judgment, by affecting great regret that no man was deputed of the king to hear them. The accumulation of untried causes, and the apparent disorganisation of the judicial machinery, are well accounted for by David's sickness."

## UNION AND COMMUNION

### 16. Glory

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

Christ's "I will" here at once arrests our notice—the only record we have of His ever addressing the Father thus, yet it was in as perfect keeping now as His "not my will" in Gethsemane. First, this "I will" was a note of *authority* which became Him who is God and man in one Person, to whom had been committed "power over all flesh" (John 17:2). Moreover, He had a perfect knowledge of the Father's will, and as the Surety of His people, Christ was here suing for the fulfillment of that covenant agreement which had been entered into before He embarked upon His great undertaking. Second, it was a *testamentary disposition*—Christ was about to die and therefore said, "I will." "When Christ made His will, heaven is one of the legacies which He bequeathed to us" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677). The same thought is found again in, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me" (Luk 22:29). Third, it also reveals His deep earnestness and full purpose of heart, as the "Master, we *would* that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire" (Mar 10:35).

"That they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (Joh 17:24). Nothing gives a lover such a joy and satisfaction as to be in the immediate presence of his beloved. Heaven will not be heaven to Christ until His glorified Bride is there by His side—then only will He "see of the travail of his soul, and shall *be satisfied*" (Isa 53:11). Nothing will content the heart of the Head but that His church should be brought unto the possession of the utmost blessedness, to be continued unto and enjoyed by them forever and ever. It was so that His people might have a clear and comforting knowledge of this that He gave them that exceeding great and precious promise, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Joh 14:2-3). How this reveals the heart-attitude of Christ unto us!

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (Joh 17:24). That is in sharp and solemn contrast from “where I am, thither ye cannot come” (Joh 7:34), spoken to the unbelieving Jews. The wicked have no title, no fitness, no heart to be where Christ is. Paradise is still closed against them by the flaming sword (Gen 3:24). But it will be the consummation of the believer’s happiness to be where Christ is. As the Psalmist declared, “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11). How utterly different is the attitude of Christ toward His own from that of many of this world, who, when they enter suddenly into earthly riches and honours, quickly forget the fellows and friends of former days. Not so the Lord Jesus. His heavenly glory does not cause His love to decay in the least degree or take His mind off His people. They are inexpressibly precious to Him and He cannot be content unless they are with Him.

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

“That they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24). This beholding is, first, *ocular*. The bodily senses have their happiness as well as the faculties of our souls, and this will be realised in a far nobler and purer degree hereafter. Job affirmed thus when he said, “Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold” (Job 19:26-27)—“see God” in the Person of the God-man Mediator. The saints shall then behold the Person who redeemed them, and that nature in which He suffered so much for them. The outward man will be regaled, as truly as the inner. There is a glory to charm our eyes in heaven—not only the beautiful mansions and the glorious inhabitants, but above all, *the face of the Lamb*. As it is now said of Christ Himself, so shall it yet be the experience of each of His people, “For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance” (Psa 21:6).

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

What an affecting sight it will be to behold the glory of Christ! How it will ravish the heart! Abraham was favoured with an anticipatory glimpse of it and “was glad” (Joh 8:56). If old

Simeon was contented with a view of Christ as an infant—“Lord, *now* lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luk 2:29-30)—what will be the effect on us when we stand before His very throne! Even now it fills the soul with joy unspeakable when faith and spiritual illumination beholds Him in the Word and through His ordinances, but words cannot express what it will be to behold the Lord in open vision. To behold the King in His beauty, to see the Lamb “as it had been slain” (Rev 5:6)—still bearing in His body the marks of the cross—will fill us with thanksgiving and praise.

But this glory which the saints are to behold is also a *divine* one. It will be the luster of the divine perfections which will be revealed to us through and by Christ, every attribute of God supplying a part, all combining to make up this supreme spiritual splendour. Then will God’s unsearchable *wisdom* be more completely opened to us, for in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Then will God’s illimitable *power* be more fully discovered to us—that power which created a universe out of nothing, that preserved His little flock in the midst of a world of wolves, that will make a footstool of all His enemies. Then will God’s *holiness* be known in all its loveliness, and joyfully shall we then unite with the angels in crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). Then will God’s *love* be seen without a veil. His smile shall never again be checked with a frown, nor the light of His countenance be obscured by any intervening cloud of sin.

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

From that love-union in glory will issue everlasting *communion*. “There is nothing there to hinder God and the holy soul of the most inward fruitions and enjoyments—no animosity, no strangeness, no unsuitableness on either part. Here the glorified spirits of the just have liberty to solace themselves amid the rivers of pleasure at God’s own right hand, without check or restraint. *They* are pure, and *these* pure. They touch nothing that can defile, they defile nothing they can touch. They are not now forbidden the nearest approaches to the once inaccessible Majesty. There is no holy of holies into which they may not enter, no door locked against them. They may have free admission into the innermost secret of the divine presence, and pour forth themselves in the most liberal effusions of love and joy, as they must be the eternal subjects of those infinitely richer communications from God, even of immense and boundless love and goodness” (John Howe [1630-1705], “The Blessedness of the Righteous,” 1668).

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24). In the last clause, Christ tells the Father *why* He wills that His elect should be with Him and behold His glory. As the God-man, the Man taken into personal union by the Son, and as such the “Fellow” (Zec 13:7) of JEHOVAH, He was, from all eternity, the object of the Father’s ineffable love. He was conceived in the divine mind before all worlds, being the



“firstborn” of all God’s thoughts, counsels, designs toward all beings, visible and invisible. Christ, as God-man, was the Centre and Circumference as it respected all God’s vast designs in grace, nature, and providence. Christ’s Person is infinitely precious in God’s sight, and therefore has He placed the highest honour of all upon Him as being the Medium through which the invisible God shall shine forth for all eternity, for *thereby* the church will perceive *how much* the Father loves Christ and that it is the overflowings of the same which falls on them.

“I will, therefore, that they may behold My personal glory, which Thou has given Me, that from that sight they may have the most enlarged views their minds are capable of, concerning Thy love to Me, and to them in Me, as this will be a perfecting them in the full enjoyment of Thine everlasting love. Thou hast possessed *My* mind with it from everlasting, Thou hast taken *Me* up into the mount of personal union and communion with Thee. I have shone forth before Thee in all My personal glory. I have been in Thy bosom, and been admitted into a full knowledge and enjoyment of all the love of Thine heart. Thou lovedst Me from everlasting, and My whole Person, God-man, is the object of Thine everlasting love. Thou lovedst Me as the Son of God, and as the Son of Man. Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world as the Head of the whole election of grace. Thou lovedst Me as Mediator. I am in every sense the object of Thy love. I would open Thy whole heart to these, Thine, and My beloved ones. I would express it unto them most freely. I would speak out in their hearing the secrets which have passed from everlasting between Thee and Me, that *they may have* the clearest evidence I can give them of it” (S. E. Pierce, 1746-1829).

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

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

Third, it is *at death* the believer approaches much nearer the goal so longed for by his soul, for then he not only leaves this world behind, but he is forever done with sin—he leaves *it* behind too. Welcome release! How that should reconcile him to the putting off of the body! Passing strange is it from the spiritual side of things—though not so from the natural—that the great

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

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

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

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

More than a hint of that marvelous change of the believer's body is found in the record of Christ's transfiguration, when “His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Mat 17:2), and when after His own resurrection He passed through closed doors (Joh 20:19), for it is written that He “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto

himself” (Phi 3:21). And if such a great and grand change is awaiting the believer’s body in the resurrection state, who can conceive the change *of the soul* when it is “glorified?” Who is so bold as to define the limits of the soul’s capacities and capabilities when freed from the burden of sin and made like Christ (1Jo 3:2)? Who can estimate the excellency of a glorified soul’s operations in connection with divine things?!

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

### *4. Jacob’s Meeting with Rachel (Genesis 29)*

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

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

appears that it was rather early for the flocks to come to water, and Rachel's flocks had not then arrived. Divine providence sent some of the flocks sooner than usual, in order that the shepherds might be in waiting to receive Jacob!

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

### *5. Jacob's Prosperity at Laban's (Genesis 30)*

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

This fact affords us a key to open to us the providence of God in conferring wealth or in diminishing possessions. Whatever may be the means by which prosperity and adversity are brought about, they are in all instances the work of providence. Divine providence, indeed, is as much concerned in the prosperity of the wicked as in that of the righteous, and in every instance in which it occurs, the providence of God has a design in it. In like manner, the poverty or adversity of the people of God is as much overruled by the hand of providence as is their prosperity. Men of God ought to see *His hand* in their gains and in their losses, in their prosperity and in their adversity.—Alexander Carson, 1776-1844.

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

# UNBELIEF

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

## 11. Its Instrument

Having presented an outline in our last article on sanctification, of the part which *faith* plays in sanctification, we shall now endeavour, under God, to offer consolation unto some of our sin-burdened, doubt-harassed, Satan-tormented brethren and sisters in Christ. “Comfort ye, comfort ye *my people*, saith your God” (Isa 40:1). And why? Because God’s children are *the most deeply distressed* people on the face of the earth! Though at times they experience a peace which passeth all understanding, revel in that love which passeth knowledge, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, yet for the most part their souls are much cast down, and fears, bondage, groans, constitute a large part of their experience. They may for a brief season be regaled by the wells and palm trees of Elim, but most of their lives are lived in the great “howling wilderness” (Deu 32:10), so that they are often constrained to say, “Oh that I had wings, like a dove! for then I would fly away, and be at rest” (Psa 55:6).

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

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

The *spiritual counterpart* of this is found in modern Laodicea. There is a generation of professing Christians who appear to enjoy great religious “prosperity.” They have considerable knowledge of the letter of Scripture. They are experts in “rightly dividing the Word.” They have great light upon the mysteries of prophecy and are most successful as “soul winners.” They have no ups and downs in their experience, no painful twistings and turnings, but go on in a straight course with light hearts and beaming countenances. Providence smiles upon them and they never have a doubt as to their acceptance in Christ. Satan does not trouble them, nor is indwelling sin a

daily plague to them. And the poor Christian, conscious of his weakness, his ignorance, his poverty, his vileness, is sorely tempted to be “envious” of them, for they seem to have “more than heart could wish,” while the longings of *his* heart are denied him, and that which he pursues so eagerly continues to elude his grasp.

Ah, but note well some of the other characteristics of this “prosperous” company. “*Pride compasseth them about as a chain*” (Psa 73:6). Yes, they are utter strangers to humility and lowliness. They are pleased with their peacock feathers, knowing not that God views the same as “filthy rags.” “Concerning oppression: they speak loftily” (Psa 73:8). God’s children *are* oppressed, sorely oppressed, by their corruptions, by their innumerable failures, by the hidings of the Lord’s face, by the accusations of Satan. They are oppressed over the workings of unbelief, over the coldness of their hearts, over the insincerity of their prayers, over their vain imaginations. But these Laodiceans, “speak loftily,” ridiculing such things, and prate of *their* peace, joy, and victory. “Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them” (Psa 73:10), for as *real* Christians listen to the “testimonies” of the “higher life” people, they conclude that it would be the height of presumption to regard themselves as Christians at all.

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

Then the Psalmist was checked and realised his wrong in giving way to such wicked sentiments. “If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children” (Psa 73:15). Yes, the generation of God’s children *will be* offended when they hear one of their brethren saying it is “vain” to use the appointed means of grace, because those have not issued in deliverance from indwelling sin. “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I *their end*. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction” (Psa 73:16-18). How unspeakably solemn! Instead of these prosperous Laodiceans having a spiritual experience high above those whose hearts plague them “all the day long,” they were total strangers to real spirituality. Instead of being among the chief favourites of God, they had been set by Him in the “slippery places” of error and false religion, to be eventually “cast down into destruction.”

What a warning is this, my sin-harassed brother, *not to envy* those who are strangers to the plague of their own hearts, who groan not “being burdened” (2Co 5:4) and who cry not, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom 7:24). Envy not the proud Laodiceans, who are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” and know not that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). Instead, be thankful if God has made you “*poor* in spirit” (Mat 5:3)—feeling that you are *destitute* of every spiritual grace and fruit; and to “mourn” over your barrenness and waywardness; for none other than Christ pronounces such characters “blessed.” And why should you think it strange if you are among that little company who are *the most distressed people* on earth? Have you not been called into fellowship with Christ, and was *He* not “The man of sorrows” (Isa 53:3) while He tabernacled in this world? If He sorrowed and suffered so much in enduring the penalty of sin, will you complain because God is now making you groan daily under the felt workings of the power of sin?



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

The great mistake made by most of the Lord's people is in hoping to discover *in themselves* that which is to be found in Christ alone. It is this, really, which causes them to become so envious and discontented when they behold the spurious holiness of some and the carnal attractiveness of others. There is such a thing as "the goodness" of the flesh, which is "as the flower of the field" (Isa 40:6), yet as the very next verse tells us, "The spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it" (Isa 40:7). But so easily are the simple deceived today they often mistake such "goodness" for godliness. Why, my reader, a man (or woman) in his personal make up may be as meek and tractable as a lamb, he may be constitutionally as kind and grateful as a spaniel, and he may be temperamentally as cheerful as a lark, yet there is not a grain of *grace* in these natural qualities. On the other hand, the Christian, in his natural temperament, is likely to be as gloomy as an owl or as wild as a tiger, yet that does not disprove grace within him.

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

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

Hundreds more of God's children, whose animal spirits are much quieter by nature and whose temperament is more even and placid, are plagued by a spirit of pride and self-righteousness, which is just as hateful in the sight of God as moral degeneracy is to respectable worldlings. Now unless the thoughts of such are formed from the Scriptures, they are sure to entertain erroneous conceptions which will destroy their peace and fill them with doubts and fears, for upon a fuller discovery and clearer sight of the sea of corruption within, they will conclude they have never passed from death unto life. But to call into question our regeneration because we fail to obtain deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, is a great mistake. The new birth neither removes



nor refines the flesh, but is the reception of a nature that feels sin to be an intolerable burden, and that yearns after holiness above everything else.

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

O my Christian reader, what a difference it would make were you to steadily realise the truth that, every temptation you encounter, every defeat you suffer, every distressing experience you pass through, is a call and a challenge for the exercise of *faith*. You complain that you are still the subject of sin, that it cleaves to you as the flesh does to your bones, that it mixes with your duties and defiles every act you perform. You often feel that you are nothing but sin. When you attempt to walk with God, inward evil rises up and stops you. When you read His Word or endeavour to pray, unbelieving thoughts, carnal imaginations, worldly lusts, seek to possess your soul. You strive against them, but in vain. Instead of improvement, things grow worse. You beg of God for humility, and pride rises higher. You cry to Him for more patience, but apparently His ear is closed. Ah, you are now learning the painful truth that in your flesh “dwelleth *no* good thing” (Rom 7:18).

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

Let it not be overlooked that we can no more take our place before God now as accepted worshippers without a perfect holiness, than we can enter heaven without it, but that perfect heaven is to be found *in Christ* alone—the practical holiness of the Christian is, at present, but a very, very faint reflection of it. The more I feel my utter unworthiness and total unfitness to approach unto God and call upon Him in my *own* name, the more thankful I should be for the Mediator, and the unspeakable privilege of calling upon God in *Christ's* name. And it is faith which counts the glorious fact that the thrice holy God *can* exercise His grace and goodness toward one so vile as I, and that, consistently with His majesty and justice—Christ has honoured the law infinitely more than my sins dishonour it. One who feels that, as a Christian, he is “an utter failure,” and who is conscious of his continued abuse of God's mercies, can only draw nigh to God with confidence as he *exercises faith* in the infinite merits of Christ.

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

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

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

Fellowship with God and walking in the light as He is in the light, so far from filling the Christian with self-satisfaction, causes him to groan because of his darkness and filthiness—the clearer light now making manifest what before was unperceived. Nothing is more perilous to the soul than that we should be occupied with *our* achievements, victories, enjoyments. If Paul was in danger of being exalted by the abundance of the revelations vouchsafed him, can the danger be less of *our* being puffed up with thoughts of spiritual progress, spiritual conquests, spiritual excellencies? And yet the cherishing of *such* thoughts is the very thing which is now being increasingly encouraged by the religious quacks of the day. No matter what fellowship with Christ be enjoyed, what growth in grace be made, it will ever remain true that “we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened” (2Co 5:4).

So far from what we have said in this article encouraging a real Christian to entertain low views of sin, it is only in the vital and experimental knowledge of the same that a life of holiness begins. Nothing will cause a renewed soul to hate sin so much as a realisation of God’s *grace*. Nothing will move him to mourn so genuinely over his sins as a sense of Christ’s dying love. It is *that* which breaks his heart—the realisation that there is so much in him that is opposed to Christ. But a life of holiness is a life of faith (the heart turning daily to Christ), and the fruits of faith are

genuine repentance, true humility, praising God for His infinite patience and mercy, pantings after conformity to Christ, praying to be made more obedient, and continually confessing our disobedience. Day-dreaming about complete deliverance from indwelling sin, seeking to persuade ourselves that the flesh is becoming less active, cannot counter-balance the humbling reality of our present state, but our corruptions should not quench a true Gospel hope.

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

## OUR ANNUAL LETTER

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

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

Third, “for I have *not* found thy works *complete* before God” (Rev 3:2). This is what most impresses the writer in connection with the present situation. Each of the leading denominations maintain certain aspects of the truth—some more than others, but we know of none which

contends earnestly for *the whole* of faith once delivered to the saints. A few are faithfully pressing the requirements of God's law, but very feebly herald the Gospel of His grace. Whereas others, whose Gospel trumpet gives forth no uncertain sound, totally reject the law as the believer's rule of life. A few are maintaining the "five points of Calvinism," but repudiate human responsibility. Some make much of Christ, but are silent about the work of the Spirit. Some are wrapped in speculations about the fulfillment of prophecy, yet place no emphasis on a godly walk. There is *incompleteness*, lack of symmetry, one-sidedness on every hand today. O what a need there now is for a full-orbed and balanced presentation of the truth.

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

Not a few readers of "Studies" sat regularly under our oral ministry in days gone by, and happy and intimate fellowship was enjoyed together. Many others whom we have not met personally have received this magazine for upwards of ten years, and considerable correspondence has passed between them and us, and a bond unites us to them which is far closer than that which exists between editor and subscriber—it is one of love and spiritual friendship. They are deeply interested in this little work and look for a yearly report of its progress. Excerpts from the letters of readers published in the "Welcome Tidings" of the July issue, gave intimation that the God of all grace is still pleased to bless these pages unto one and another of His scattered, needy, and tried people. We feel that we must quote here from one other letter:

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

"I had become so occupied with my own trials and problems that they obscured my spiritual vision, so that I was *not* 'looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith' (Heb 12:2). My faith therefore became weak and wavering. I was so harassed by Satan that I seemed to doubt my salvation. No message or blessing could I get from the Word, and when engaged in prayer, heaven seemed as brass over my head. I became so 'wearied and faint' in my mind that I was near giving up the race. But God in His great love and tender mercy to such an unworthy sinner lifted me from this low and perilous state, and your article was most helpful to me. Will you pray that this Scripture may be used to His glory in keeping me from plunging again into such awful depths of sin and despair?

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

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

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

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

The future remains with God. Our times are in His hands. An increasing number of our readers have been called to leave this earthly scene during 1936, and it is no easy matter to secure interested ones to fill their places. Our greatest problem continues to be the locating of those who welcome a publication of this type. Many will read nothing which is not published by *their* denomination. Others crave that which is light and frothy or sensational, and resent anything that

searches and strips. Not a few are finding the demands of modern business increasingly trying, but time spent in secret with God and in reading that which is a help to the soul is never lost. And it still remains true that “Where there is a will, there is a way.” No one can afford to neglect his *eternal* interests. Give more time to reading spiritual literature on the Sabbath Day, and less in running around to so many meetings.

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

But let our closing thoughts return to the passage with which we opened. Were we engaged in oral ministry, this would be one of our texts, as these columns now constitute our only pulpit, we have to do our sermonizing through their medium. “Be watchful,” dear reader. Watchful, of the state of your soul, of those things that hinder a growth in grace, against lapsing into a prayerless condition. “Be watchful” of your associations, against being imposed upon by frothy professors. Seek no familiarity with those who are not God-fearing, humble, and meek. Avoid the flippant, talkative, and boastful. Above all, “Be watchful” of displeasing the Lord and delay not to confess your sins when conscious of disobedience.

“And strengthen the things which remain” (Rev 3:2). Your own soul needs “strengthening” by more regularly feeding on the Word itself. Good books have their place, spiritual periodicals are not to be despised, sitting under sound preaching is a holy privilege, but none of these must supplant first-hand reading of and meditating upon the Scriptures—a portion *every* morning and evening. Those servants of God which still “remain” need “strengthening” *by your prayers*. Let not a day pass without your remembering them at the throne of grace and begging for them fresh supplies of the Spirit. Your brethren and sisters in Christ need “strengthening.” Would not some of them be aided by your sending this magazine, and then drop them a line asking them to read it because it has been a means of blessing to you? May the Lord graciously bless both reader and writer, preserving from all evil, and working in and through us that which is well-pleasing in His sight. With loving greeting, Yours by God’s abounding mercy.—A. W. and V. E. Pink.

# APPENDICES

## About Studies in the Scriptures

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote and published his monthly 28 page expository digest, *Studies in the Scriptures*, from 1922 to 1953. He mailed it worldwide by paid subscription to whomever desired the deeper truths of God. Each issue contained continuing serialized articles on six to eight subjects. When one subject was “completed” to the author’s satisfaction, another subject series began in its place in the next issue. In total, the 380 issues comprise a treasure of immense proportions.

By God’s grace, Chapel Library has republished the *Studies* beginning with the year 1932 through 1953. We also print many books and booklets gleaned from articles in the *Studies*. These may be ordered in print in North America, or downloaded from our website worldwide without charge:

Studies: [www.chapellibrary.org/periodicals](http://www.chapellibrary.org/periodicals)

Other literature: [www.chapellibrary.org/literature](http://www.chapellibrary.org/literature)

Today the various subjects are being gathered together by topic, and republished in paperbacks by several sources. *Chapel Library* offers the following at the time of this printing:

- |                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| - The Sovereignty of God          | 176 pages |
| - Comfort for Christians          | 79 pages  |
| - Profiting from the Word         | 96 pages  |
| - Seven Sayings of the Savior     | 94 pages  |
| - Spiritual Union and Communion   | 175 pages |
| - The Attributes of God           | 105 pages |
| - The Doctrine of Human Depravity | 241 pages |
| - The Doctrine of Revelation      | 214 pages |

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| - 1 John – An Exposition, Part 1 | 190 pages |
| - 1 John – An Exposition, Part 2 | 173 pages |
| - The Holy Spirit                | 196 pages |
| - The Life of Elijah             | 272 pages |
| - The Doctrine of Sanctification | 262 pages |
| - The Divine Covenants           | 312 pages |



# Biography of A.W. Pink

*by Erroll Hulse*

Concerning Calvinism<sup>1</sup> and Arminianism<sup>2</sup> during the first half of the Twentieth Century, a most interesting case study is the experience of Arthur W. Pink. He was a preacher and writer of outstanding talent who ministered in Britain, America, and Australia. When he died in 1952 in isolation on the Island of Lewis in north eastern Scotland, he was hardly known outside a small list of subscribers to his magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. Yet, by the 1970s, his books were in wide demand and his name was widely known among publishers and ministers. In fact, for that period it would be difficult to find a reformed author whose books were more widely read.

The preaching ministry of A. W. Pink had been remarkably blessed in the USA, but it was in Australia that he seemed to reach the apex of his public ministry, and there in particular that his preaching ministry reached great heights. He was then faced with accreditation by the Baptist Union and was rejected on account of his Calvinistic views. He then ministered in a Baptist church of Strict Baptist pedigree. There he came unstuck since they esteemed him an Arminian! A considerable group, however, appreciated Pink, recognised his worth, and seceded from that Strict Baptist Church to form a new church of 27 members. Then suddenly, in 1934, Pink resigned and returned to Britain. It is widely held that one rejection is enough to cripple a minister for life, but two in quick succession can destroy a pastor completely. So it proved for Arthur Pink. He never again found meaningful entrance into the ministry, though he tried his utmost. He sought openings in both the UK and the USA without success. He became increasingly isolated. He ended his days as an evangelical recluse in the Island of Stornoway off the coast of Scotland. It was rumoured that not more than ten souls attended his funeral.

There is much that we can learn from the life of A. W. Pink. Firstly, we will trace out his early life in broad outline. Secondly, we will describe his experience in Australia, and trace out the adverse effects of this on his life. Thirdly, we will the impact of his writing ministry.

## 1. Early Life

Arthur Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886. His parents were godly. They lived by the Bible and kept the Lord's Day holy. Arthur was the first of three children brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. To the grief of their parents, all three children drifted into lives

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<sup>1</sup> **Calvinism** – the doctrinal system developed from the teachings of the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), holding that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the “doctrines of grace”; these doctrines were the response of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) to the Arminians’ remonstrance (protest) and are commonly known by the acronym TULIP.

<sup>2</sup> **Arminianism** – (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) the doctrinal system that rejects the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

of unbelief. Worse was to come: Arthur embraced *Theosophy*, an esoteric cult that claimed powers of the occult! “Lucifer” was the name of the leading theosophy magazine. A natural feature of Arthur’s character was wholeheartedness, and he entered theosophy with zeal. A leadership role was offered him, which meant that he would visit India. At the same time a friend who was an opera singer, noted that Arthur possessed a fine baritone voice; he urged him to study for a career in opera. Then suddenly on a night during 1908, Arthur was converted. His first action was to preach the Gospel to the theosophist group.

Simultaneous with Pink’s conversion was a call to the Christian ministry. But the colleges were in the hands of liberals bent on the destruction of the Scriptures. Arthur, however, heard of the Moody Bible Institute, which had been founded by D. L. Moody<sup>3</sup> in 1889. In 1910, aged 24, Pink left for Chicago to begin a two-year course. His time at Moody lasted only six weeks, however. He decided that he was wasting his time, and that he should enter directly into a pastorate—and his professors agreed! He was not disgruntled, but rather frustrated, that the teaching was pitched at such a primary level that it did nothing for him.

During 1910, he began in his first pastorate in Silverton, Colorado, a mining camp in the San Juan Mountains. We possess little detail of this period, but we know that from Silverton, Pink moved to Los Angeles. He was always a hard worker, and this is illustrated by the fact that at one point in Oakland he was engaged in tent evangelism six nights a week for eighteen weeks!

From Los Angeles, he moved to Kentucky. It was here that he met and married Vera E. Russell. There could not have been a better gift from heaven. Vera was entirely committed to the Lord. She was hard working, gifted, intelligent, and persevering. She died just ten years after Arthur’s decease on the island of Stornoway.

The next move was to Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1917 to 1920. This church building consisted of a small and frail wooden structure, while he and Vera lived in a small wooden house standing on wooden columns. Heating was inadequate, and in the freezing winter it was like an ice box.

It was during this time Pink began writing books. There were two of significance: one with the title *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, and the second *The Sovereignty of God*, the foreword of which is dated June 1918. It was this book that was later taken up by The Banner of Truth publishers. The first edition, according to I. C. Herendeen, his first publisher at that time, was only 500 copies, and it was a struggle to sell that number. When the book came to Banner, it was edited by Iain Murray and vastly improved. It became one of the most popular of The Banner of Truth paperbacks. By 1980, 92,000 copies had sold.

After about a year at Spartanburg, Pink almost came to grief. He felt a strong conviction to give up the ministry and devote himself to writing only, and at one point was disconsolate. Vera wrote to a friend saying that her husband was even thinking of leaving the ministry and going into business, to make money for the Kingdom as a better way of serving God. In 1920, Arthur resigned the pastorate at Spartanburg. He and Vera moved and settled at Swengel, Pennsylvania, in order to be near the publisher I. C. Herendeen.

In the middle of July, 1920, he left to take a series of meetings in California. Large crowds gathered and numbers were saved. At one point 1,200 gathered to hear the Gospel. Other crusades and conferences followed; it was evident that Pink was eminently suited to this kind of ministry.

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<sup>3</sup> **D. L. Moody** (1837-1899) – American evangelist and publisher who founded the Moody Church, Northfield School and Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts (now the Northfield Mount Hermon School), the Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Publishers.

Looking back over his life, it is apparent that he experienced more blessing in the itinerant ministry than he did in a total of twelve years in pastoring churches. This had to do with his temperament; he preferred being in his study to visiting.

In 1921, Arthur and Vera were back in Pennsylvania. The monthly digest, the *Studies in the Scriptures*, first appeared in 1922. It ran continuously without interruption for 32 years, until Arthur's death in 1952. Initially, this was a 24 page magazine, with four to six articles as instalments in a series. To write expository material at a high standard at this rate every month is a tremendous testimony to his insight into the Scriptures, and to the Lord's blessing and enabling. All his articles had to be written by hand and finished for the printer at least two months before the date of publication. *Studies in the Scriptures* had about 1,000 circulation at the beginning, but for most of its existence the subscription level hovered at about 500. The financial side was always precarious, with only just enough to cover printing costs from one month to the next. Pink corresponded with some of his subscribers; eventually this formed his pastoral work. Throughout he was assisted by his very hard working wife, who acted as secretary. They never had a family, always lived very humbly, and managed always to make ends meet. This was made possible through a modest inheritance left to him by his parents and through gifts that he received from his readers.

During 1923, Arthur fell into a deep depression, which turned out to be a nervous breakdown. At this juncture a young couple that had been greatly blessed by Pink's ministry came to the rescue, and Arthur was nursed through a period of several months enforced rest, which brought him back to normal health.

In 1924, a major new direction came by way of letters of invitation from a publisher in Sydney, Australia. Before departing for Australia, no less than four months preparation had to be made for the *Studies*. On his way to Australia, Pink engaged in more Bible conference preaching in Colorado, then in Oakland, California, and also San Francisco—from where he and Vera took ship across the Pacific to Sydney.

## 2. *Pink's Experience in Australia*

The Pinks spent a total of three and half years in Australia. These times were for them the best, but also turned out to be the worst. Upon arrival Arthur had more invitations than he possibly fill. Initially his ministry in Australia was a great success. Crowds gathered; churches were filled; believers were revived; and souls were brought to the Saviour.

Attendance swelled in every place he preached. In the first year in Australia Arthur preached 250 times. He would often work until 2:00 in the morning to keep *Studies in the Scriptures* going. The Pinks truly must have felt that at last they had found the place of permanent fulfilment. There was an evident power in his ministry. One mature believer declared that he drew people "like a magnet," and that he preached the "whole counsel of God's Word," and was capable of preaching a sermon "from every word of the text."

This period proved to be one of great joy. Pink was now 40 years old. He was preaching almost daily for well over an hour. He would get home at 10:00 PM and then work until 2:00 AM. He wrote, "never before during our 16 years in the ministry, have we experienced such blessing and joy in our souls, such liberty of utterance, and such an encouraging response as we have done in this highly favoured portion of Christ's vineyard."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, by Iain H. Murray, The Banner of Truth Trust, p 49

We can be sure that a thrilling and powerful soul-saving ministry will arouse the fury of Satan. And so it proved to be in this case when that old serpent, the devil, mounted a cunning counterattack. The Baptist Union leaders were fundamentally opposed to Calvinism. These leaders invited Arthur Pink to read a paper on “Human Responsibility.” Sadly, Pink did not realise that this was a plot to demote him in the eyes of the public—and in his sincere earnestness he fell into the trap. Instead of declining this invitation, he presented the paper and then answered questions for over an hour. The result of this was that the BU of New South Wales published a statement that they agreed unanimously *not* to endorse his ministry. What they really meant (for they did not themselves clarify any doctrine) is that they did not agree with Pink’s Reformed doctrine. They were fundamentally Arminian. The effect of all this was that invitations dried up, and Pink’s wider effective ministry in Australia was drastically reduced.

It was at this juncture that one of three Strict and Particular Baptist Churches invited Pink to become its pastor. This church was known as the Belvoir Street Church. Here Pink was as busy as he had ever been in his life. He had preached 300 times in the year ending 1926. In addition to preaching three times a week at Belvoir Street, he preached in three different places in Sydney each week to an average of 200 at each meeting. He still managed to maintain *Studies in the Scriptures* by burning midnight oil.

Trouble however was in store. The early part of the Twentieth Century was a time of lack of clarity in doctrine. One of the evidences of this was confusion over Calvinism, Arminianism, and hyper-Calvinism.<sup>5</sup> Many churches polarized. The Baptist Union was Arminian, and the Strict and Particular Baptists tended to be hyper-Calvinist. This proved to be the case at Belvoir Street. Until about May 1927, the Pinks believed that they had found a permanent church home.

### 3. *Impact of Pink’s Writing Ministry*

If history had progressed normally, Arthur Pink would have been forgotten. There are several leaders in each generation who are well known, but it is unlikely that their names will be remembered for very long. When Arthur Pink died, he was known to a small circle of readers—about 500—who read his monthly periodical *Studies in the Scriptures*, which he had faithfully produced with the help of his wife Vera for 31 years. Yet, after his decease, as his writings were collected and published as books, his name became very well known in the English-speaking evangelical world. During the 1960s and ’70s, there was a dearth of reliable expository writing; Pink’s writings filled an important need. His expositions are God-centred, theologically compelling, and reliable—as well as practical and experimental. That was precisely what was needed during a period of spiritual drought. Publishers discovered the value of his writings. The outcome was dramatic.

For instance, Baker Book House published twenty-two different titles by Pink, with a combined total sales by 1980 of 350,000. By the same date just three books (*Sovereignty of God*, *Life of Elijah*, and *Profiting from the Word*) totaled 211,000. Yet as contemporary reformed authors have multiplied, so the demand for Pink’s books has lessened.

We must remember that with the dawning of the twentieth century, the mainline denominations had already suffered extensive losses to higher criticism and modernism. Such was the advance of modernism in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth

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<sup>5</sup> **hyper-Calvinism** – the doctrinal error that holds men need not evangelize, since God will save His elect children with or without the means of preaching the Word. This represents only one side of biblical truth; the other is that God is pleased to use human instruments as means to His work, and the preaching of the Word is uniquely marked out for this purpose (2Ti 4:2; 2Ti 3:16; Mat 28:19).

century, most Bible colleges and seminaries were lost to an agenda of unbelief and anti-Christianity. Instead of producing preacher/pastors for the churches, men were sent out who emptied the churches. The most striking example is Methodism. The aggregate membership in Methodism grew to be the highest of the non-conformist churches. Yet this denomination has been virtually annihilated by modernism.

The writings of Pink provided not only food for the spiritually hungry, but as Iain Murray asserts, “Pink has been immensely important in reviving and stimulating doctrinal reading at the popular level. The same can be said of few other authors of the twentieth century.”<sup>6</sup>

*Erroll Hulse served as Associate Pastor at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church in Leeds, England. Since 1970, he edited and wrote extensively for Reformation Today, a bi-monthly international digest. He authored numerous books and articles. Pastor Hulse studied theology at the London Bible College and benefited from the ministry of Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.*

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

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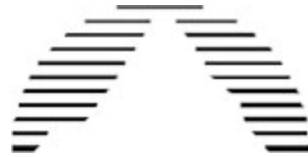
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