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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

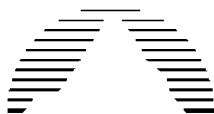
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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ENJOYING GOD'S BEST

The above title embodies and expresses our "New Year's Wish" for our readers, that such may be the experience of each of them during 1946. In employing such language, perhaps it needs to be pointed out that we are not here accommodating one of the modern sayings of worldlings when they wish their friends, "All the best." No, indeed, we trust the time will never come when we adopt the slang of the street in these pages. Years before we ever heard that saying of the world's, we were accustomed to wish our friends "God's best." Surely, it should be the earnest longing of every Christian to enter into and enjoy God's best for him, and to diligently guard against everything which would hinder the same. But since the expression is probably new to some of our readers, let us explain what we signify by it. We mean God's best for the soul *and* for the body: In spiritual things and in temporal. We mean a personal experience of God's approbation, a real enjoying of His favour in grace, in providence, and in nature.

By enjoying God's best, we mean for the saint to have daily communion with Him, to walk in the light of His countenance, to have that "peace...which passeth all understanding" (Phi 4:7) garrisoning his heart and mind. To enjoy God's best is for an ungrieved Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, making them real and precious to the soul. It is for His Word to be sweet unto our taste, light unto our understanding, strength to the inner man. It is for prayer to be a delight, for answers of peace to be received without intermission, for the channel of blessing to remain unchoked, open. It is to have the mind stayed upon Him, to have a conscience void of offence, to have full assurance of our acceptance in Christ. It is to be the recipients of real and sweet foretastes of the everlasting bliss, awaiting the redeemed on High. It is for our graces to be kept healthy and vigorous, so that faith, hope, love, meekness, patience, and zeal are in daily exercise. *That* is what we long for ourselves and covet for our Christian friends.

The enjoyment of God's best is not limited to the reception of His special favours in our spiritual lives, but includes, as well, His particular interpositions on our temporal behalf. We have reference now not to the general course of His providence—though if that be *against* us, we have good reason to fear we have *missed* His best, for many of the wicked prosper for a season, both in their bodies and estates. No, we have in mind His unmistakable and signal interventions on our behalf, in a day when His judgments are abroad, or in situations where the use of means brings us to the end of our own resources, when He makes good those promises: "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee...There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling" (Psa 91:7, 10). So that when an epidemic strikes a community, we are spared; when falling bombs are destroying neighbours' houses, ours is untouched.

But is such a thing possible in this life? Absolutely so, no; relatively, yes. Uninterruptedly so, perhaps not; generally so, without a doubt, yes. Not a few of God's people experience the reality of it for themselves. But the mere wishing for, and desiring after, will not bring it to pass. More than that is needed: There are certain requirements we have to meet, specified conditions to be fulfilled. Take the promises cited above: To whom are they specifically addressed? Not unto the whole family of God in general, but to a particular character—namely, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High" (Psa 91:1), the one who can truthfully say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psa 91:2). To make this doubly plain, the Psalmist went on to say, "*Because* thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, *thy* habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh *thy* dwelling" (Psa 91:9-10). "*Because*"—for that very reason!

Perhaps the writer will be pardoned if he relates here a personal experience by way of illustration. Some fifteen years ago, a number of cases of small-pox caused quite a scare in the country, and the authorities were urging people to be vaccinated. My wife and I counted upon the Lord to preserve us from infection and declined any medical attention, as we have done since then. But then a more severe trial confronted us. I had received what I felt was a clear and pressing call from my Master to pull up our tent and journey to a distant land. The newspapers repeatedly emphasized the fact that none would be granted a passport at any consulate, unless they had been recently vaccinated. We spread our case before God and begged Him to undertake for us. And He did: Not only did He preserve us from the disease, but after a full examination by the medical officer, passports were given us and not a question was raised about vaccination! God honoured our simple faith in Him, as He has in many other instances since then.

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2Ch 16:9). *That* is what we understand by the enjoying of God’s best: To have God showing Himself strong in our behalf. But that is *conditioned* upon having a heart “perfect toward him.” A “perfect” heart does not mean a sinless one, for there is none such among the fallen sons of men; rather does it denote a sincere or upright one, one that beats true to Him. Yet that definition is scarcely sufficient. In relation to God Himself, a “perfect” heart is one which loves and reveres Him, which trusts and confides in Him, which has filial fear of Him, which honestly and resolutely seeks to please Him in all things. In relation to sin, a “perfect” heart is one which hates and resists all evil, which mourns over every inward working of it, which penitently confesses each yielding to it. It is not that which is perfect in itself, but which is perfect “toward the Lord,” on whose behalf He intervenes, puts forth His might, and delivers from situations from which we could not extricate ourselves.

“No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Psa 84:11). Observe well, this promise is made to those whose *walk* becometh saints, whose faces are turned Godwards: Unto such, no good thing is withheld. *That* is enjoying God’s best. To be regular recipients not only of His common mercies, but of His special favours: Enjoying the smile of His approval. To be blest with serenity of mind, a heart that rejoices in the Lord, our every need supplied: To have His *blessing* upon our lives in *all* their varied aspects and relations.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

25. *Ephesians 3:14-21*

Let the reader turn first to our present portion and note its contents. Is he not at once struck with the radical and immense difference there is between that prayer, and those he is accustomed to hear in public—and we may add, the tenour—of his own in private? Is it either useless or impertinent to inquire *why* this be the case? Must there not be a reason, some definite cause, why the petitions of most Christians today are so very different from those breathings of the apostle's? Undoubtedly, there must be. And is the explanation far to seek? Must it not be because so many of God's people are now living upon a much lower plane of spiritual experience? Surely, that cannot be gainsaid. And why is it that they dwell so much in the valleys, and so little on the mountains? Is it not because they have failed to apprehend the wonderful portion which is theirs in Christ, because they do not grasp and enjoy the inestimable privileges which are already theirs, because they possess not their possessions, because they are regulated so much by their frames and feelings, instead of living by faith on the One who loved and gave Himself for them? True, in varying degrees of all of us.

It has been rightly pointed out that, "The tenour and subject of our prayers will be in accord with our knowledge and apprehension of God, and of the relation in which we recognise Him as standing toward us and us to Him." That statement expresses a most important and practical truth; and yet, one that is understood by very few today. Let us illustrate. If our concept of God be virtually restricted to Him as our Maker, Lawgiver, and Judge, and we rarely view Him, or address Him in any other character than "the most High," then, while our hearts may be awed and our souls humbled before Him, yet there is likely to be very little freedom of approach or joy of heart in our communion with Him, and our requests from Him will be regulated accordingly. Or, if we regard Him as having given us only the *hope* of obtaining salvation by Jesus Christ, then naturally and necessarily, our constant desire before him will be for the strengthening and brightening of that hope—for that is what we shall feel is the one thing most needed for the comfort of our hearts and the peace of our minds. As to any further revelation, which God may have given of the purpose of His grace unto His people, we can feel but little interest therein.

So long as we entertain *a doubt* of our being personally concerned and having a portion therein, the riches of Divine grace can have no power upon our hearts. On the other hand, if the Christian realises that the first person in the blessed Trinity sustains to him precisely the same relation as He did, and does unto Christ—namely, his covenant God and personal Father—and if, in the undoubting simplicity of faith, he takes his stand upon the sure foundation which God has laid for *every* believing sinner in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation of His dear Son, then his desires will naturally and necessarily go forth after a fuller knowledge of what is the purpose of God, in connection with the manifestation of the glory of Him, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance" (Eph 1:11). And thus, it is in the prayer, we are about to ponder: It is made unto the Father, with request that, by the strengthening operation of the Spirit and the dwelling of Christ in their hearts by faith, the saints may know the "mystery" (previously described), learn by deeper experience, the unsearchable love of Christ, and so be filled with all the fulness of God. O that our souls may be so quickened that these petitions will become our own breathings.

It will help us not a little unto an understanding, both of the scope of this prayer and the meaning of its petitions, if we duly observe *the place* which it occupies in this epistle—namely, at the close of the doctrinal section and as introductory to the practical portion—for it is a turning into supplication the contents of the former, and a preparation of heart for obedience unto the precepts of the latter. When doctrine be rightly apprehended, it exerts a powerful effect upon the heart and influences our devotional life. Likewise, when both the affections and the conscience are stirred by the exhortations God addresses to His people, they are brought to their knees before Him seeking grace. It is those two features or elements which throw light upon our present passage. An analysis of the prayer itself indicates the following general divisions. First, the *occasion* of it, as indicated by, "For this cause I bow my knees" (Eph 3:14). Second, its *Object*, namely, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15). Third, its *appeal*: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory" (Eph 3:16). Fourth, its *petitions*, which are four in number (Eph 3:16-19). Fifth, its *doxology* (Eph 3:20-21). We shall use those divisions for our outline, and turn now to consider.

First, *the occasion* of this prayer: "For this cause I bow my knees" (Eph 3:14). In those words, the apostle tells us what it was that moved him to so address the throne of grace on this occasion, for the obvious meaning of them is, "On this account, for this reason, I now approach the mercy-seat." We must therefore seek an answer to the inquiry, "For *what* case?" This requires us to examine the context and note the contents of the preceding verses. The attentive reader will observe that the same clause is also found at the beginning of the chapter: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles" (Eph 3:1). Scholars have pointed out that there is no verb there of which, "I Paul" is the nominative; and hence, there has been considerable diversity of opinion as to the probable construction of the passage, though the most natural one seems to be that the sentence begun in verse 1 is recommenced and completed in verse 14. That is the view taken by the best of the commentators, and which we personally adopt. Thus, what the apostle intended to say at the beginning of the chapter—but was interrupted by the flowing of other thoughts into his mind—he now says in verse 14.

"For this cause, I Paul..." (Eph 3:1)—namely, in view of the wondrous and blessed truth which has engaged his pen throughout chapter 2—"...bow my knees unto the Father" (Eph 3:14). But he was interrupted from immediately doing so, for as soon as he added, "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles" (Eph 3:1), the realisation of his "bonds" awakened a fresh train of ideas, which—as a digression—he expanded to the end of verse 13. Consequently, the "for this cause" of Ephesians 3:14 has a *double* reference: Immediately to the Divine revelation made in verses 2-13, which chiefly concerns an unfolding of "the mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4)—that is, of the *mystical* Christ, the spiritual Body of which He is the Head; that Body in which the elect of God from the Hebrews and from the Gentiles have been made fellow-members, fellow-heirs, and fellow-partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel. More remotely, the "for this cause" of Ephesians 3:14 looks back to Ephesians 3:1 and makes known the breathings of Paul's soul as evoked by what had occupied his mind throughout chapter 2, where he had expounded the grand doctrine of regeneration and reconciliation—the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, and of both unto God.

"For this cause." Combining the double reference in Ephesians 3:1 and 14, and what each looks back to, we understand it thus: Since the saints have been Divinely quickened, reconciled to God, made members of the mystical body of Christ, I long to have them living and acting as becometh those so highly favoured of God and made partakers of such inestimable privileges; and therefore, I supplicate God on their behalf unto that end. It is both interesting and instructive to closely compare this prayer with that found at the close of chapter 1: The principal difference between them is not to be accounted for so much by the different aspects of truth presented in Ephesians 1 and 2, as it is by the different effects which the apostle desired might be wrought in those to whom he wrote. There are indeed different branches of doctrine unfolded in those two chapters—and undoubtedly, that difference determined the keynote in each of the prayers—yet, that is neither the sole, nor main, reason which explains their varied tones. The variation in the petitions of those respective prayers expressed the particular quickenings they needed in order to respond suitably unto the glorious revelations he had set before them.

In Ephesians 1, we have a wonderful opening up of the eternal purpose of God's sovereign grace concerning His elect, of those spiritual blessings with which He has blessed them in the heavenlies in Christ, having chosen them, accepted them, and given them an inheritance in the Beloved. So transcendent and amazing are those riches of the Divine grace, so entirely different from anything which man had conceived, the apostle makes request that the Father would vouchsafe "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph 1:17), so that with eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we might *know*, etc. It is of great importance, and also his privilege, that the saint should apprehend that it is the sovereign grace of God, which has brought him into the place of unchanging blessing in Christ, for he has been made "the righteousness of God in him" (2Co 5:21). This is the first thing that the converted soul needs to learn: That he has been reconciled to God by the blood of the cross; and thereby, established in peace with Him for evermore; that he has been justified once and for all by the obedience of Christ; that he has been perfected forever and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. There can be no lasting peace within, no growth in grace, no loving and grateful obedience, until that be laid hold of by an intelligent faith.

But essential as it is for the believer to recognise the perfect standing which is his in Christ before the throne of God, it is no less necessary for the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and his own good that he should be exercised in his soul; that his affections should be set upon Christ; that he should be more and more conformed to His image, both experimentally and practically; that he should "grow up into him in all

things" (Eph 4:15). Accordingly, while in Ephesians 1, the apostle had unfolded what God hath purposed for us and prays that we may know the same, in Ephesians 2, he treats more of what God has wrought in the saints—and therefore, prays to Him to work in them that which will suitably answer unto the same! Thus, while we are to hold fast in our minds the perfect and unchanging *standing* which is ours in Christ, yet we need also to be deeply concerned about our *state*: About health being maintained in our souls, about Christ having His proper place in our hearts, about the whole household of faith being cherished in our affections, about being filled with all the fulness of God.

Thus, the prayer of Ephesians 3 is supplementary, or rather, complementary, to the one at the close of chapter 1; and as might be expected, the two together present a perfect balance between the principal aspects of the Christian's life: The objective, and the subjective—that is, faith being occupied with the riches of God's grace outside himself, and love being concerned with what is going on within himself. That wondrous portion which he has in Christ allows of no change, for it is perfect and entire; but that which has been wrought within him, needs perfecting unto the day of redemption. His justification can never be more complete than it was the moment he first believed, but he may and should, obtain a better understanding of it. Hence, in Ephesians 3, the apostle prays not merely that the saints should know what Divine grace had wrought for and given to them, but what God would now work by His Spirit in them. The first petition is that they might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16)—that is, renewed by Him day by day. And what would be the evidence of that? This: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph 3:17)—our hearts fixed on Him as their Object, their supreme Attraction. But we must not anticipate too much what is yet (D.V.) to come before us.

Second, its *Object*. The One whom Paul addressed is here styled, "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15). God is *our* "Father" first as He is the Author of our beings—and in this sense, we are His "offspring" (Act 17:28); and second, as we are formed after His natural image: God is spirit (Joh 4:24), and therefore, "Father of spirits" (Heb 12:9). In both those senses, God is the Father of angels, and therefore, they are designated "the sons of God" (Job 1:6; 38:7). But third, in a higher sense, He is our Father spiritually, having by regeneration made us partakers of His nature or moral likeness (Jam 1:18; 2Pe 1:4). He is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:14) as the God-man Mediator, by covenant relation, and was owned by Him as such all through His life (Luk 2:49; Joh 5:17, 20:17). It is because God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He is our Father in the spiritual and highest sense of the term, as John 20:17 intimates. All mercies flow to us through Christ from the Father; and all our petitions ascend through Christ to the Father. It is because God is the Father of the Redeemer that He is the Father of the redeemed; and therefore, we have accesses to Him by faith in prayer. Thus, it is the relation which God sustains to the Lord Jesus as His Father, which is made the ground of the apostle's appeal: Blessed truth for us to lay hold of.

The attentive reader will note the change of address of this prayer of the apostle. In chapter 1, he approached Him as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:17), which still more distinctly views Him in the covenant relationship in which He stands both to Christ and to us. That is the foundation of His being "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:14) and "our Father" (note the order in John 20:17), as it is the ground on which we have access to Him. "We can approach Him in no other character than as the God who sent the Lord Jesus to be our propitiation and Mediator. It is, therefore, by faith, as reconciled, that we address Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). Thus, we see again how the doctrinal contents of those chapters give tone to the details of their respective prayers. It is not in Ephesians 1, but in Ephesians 2 that the fact of God's reconciliation to us is brought out; and therefore, it is in the prayer which follows that doctrinal revelation that He is addressed as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Just as the wonders of God's handiwork in creation are made more apparent under the microscope, so the more closely we examine the Word, are its perfections revealed in every detail. That Word which He has magnified above all His name will not only bear the most minute examination, but only as we so examine it shall we perceive its excellence in every jot and tittle (Mat 5:18).

Our appreciation of the titles by which God is addressed (and described) will be determined by the measure of our apprehension of the doctrinal expositions which occasioned those prayers. In chapter 1, the apostle had desired for the saints of both light and knowledge that, as the conscious objects of Almighty power and grace, they might understand the nature, reality, and blessedness of their calling. But now he requests for them an enlarged ability to taste with a fuller and more sensible perception of its blessedness the *communion* of that love, which had been so unreservedly lavished upon them in making them partici-

pants of the unsearchable riches of Christ. God, in the majesty of His government, is fully glorified to the eye of faith as the just Awarder of all honour in the exaltation of Christ. His will, His wisdom, and His power has each its own exemplification in giving to the Lord Jesus the seat of pre-eminence. But the One who thus magnified the Mediator is also the Father of His beloved Son; and in Him, too, of those whom He is not ashamed to own as “brethren” (Heb 2:11)—and that is what regulated the apostle in his choice of this particular address here.

It was with a particular regard unto the foregoing doctrine in chapter 2 that Paul now addressed God as “Father.” Note carefully how our special relation unto Him who begat us is there brought out. We are spoken of as “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” by Himself (Eph 2:10). We are viewed as reconciled unto Him (Eph 2:16). It is declared that “we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). We are spoken of as “the household of God” (Eph 2:19); yea, as a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). The same blessed fact also gave colour to the particular requests, which the apostle here made. Without too much anticipating what we hope to be occupied with in the articles immediately to follow, it will be seen that that which occupies the central place in the petitionary part of this prayer is our apprehension of the surpassing love of Christ. This request for an increased enjoyment of Divine *love* is most suitably made to the *Father*, as that is the believer’s privilege by virtue of his filial relationship—even as the hope of glory is his righteous expectation as a justified heir of salvation (Rom 5:1-2).

“Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15). Concerning the precise meaning of that clause, there is perhaps room for difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of its terms. First, as to the antecedent of the “of whom,” whether it be “the Father” or “our Lord Jesus Christ.” Grammatically, the antecedent is a double one; but personally, we prefer to take the *nearest* and understand it of the latter. Second, as to what is “the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15). Most, though not all, of the commentators restrict it unto the Household of faith: Those who have finished their earthly pilgrimage, and those who are still left in this scene. But in view of Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 12:22-23, we would not so limit its scope, but rather understand by “the whole family” the entire company of the redeemed, plus the holy angels. Third, the word “named”: It does not mean that all are *called by* the same name, that the designation “Christian” is given to angels; but as one writer says, “the expression is taken from the custom in a family, where all bear the same name as the head of the family.” All God’s elect among angels and men are gathered together under one Head and constitute one community.

Perhaps the following explanation will make clearer to the reader what has just been pointed out. “Our English word ‘family’ takes its derivation from the lowest in the household—*famulus*—the servant or slave. The Latin *familia* was sometimes used of the household of servants and sometimes of all the members of a family under the power of a *pater familias*. But the idea of ‘patria’ is Hebrew, a group or class of families all claiming descent from one pater (father)—e.g. the twelve tribes of Israel. ‘Joseph...was of the house and lineage (‘family’: Greek ‘patria’) of David’ (Luk 2:4). The word occurs only in Luke 2:4, Acts 3:25, Ephesians 3:15, and denotes a clan of all descended from a common stock” (from “the Companion Bible,” Vol. 6, page 1771). And thus, the word was well suited to express that community which is headed up in Christ.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

5. *The Great Commission (1:1-9), Part 2*

It is scarcely possible to overstate the importance of the book of Joshua. Its contents are an intrinsic part of “the children’s bread,” which is essential to their well-being. It is of incalculable value to us, both doctrinally and practically. Doctrinally, it casts clear light on a subject which has deeply exercised the best theologians throughout the centuries—namely, the relation which the Gospel sustains to the Law; yet, so far as we are aware, none has ever appealed to this portion of the Word as providing a solution to that problem. Surely, it is clear that if we can ascertain what was the precise relations which Joshua bore to Moses, we shall discover the relations which the Gospel sustains to the Law. It has indeed been recognised by many that the relation of those men unto each other indicated, in a general way, one of the chief distinctions between the Law and the Gospel: That as Joshua—rather than Moses—was the one who led Israel into Canaan, so it is the merits of Christ—and not the works of the Law—to which the sinner must look for his justification. But there, they stopped. Instead of starting at the beginning and tracing through the subject, they began in the middle and drew a single conclusion.

The very first thing told us about Joshua in the book which bears his name is that he was “Moses’ minister” (Jos 1:1)—a statement that looks back to Exodus 24:13. Thus, Joshua is not set before us as antagonistic to Moses, but as his attendant and supporter. Apply that to the antitype, and it should at once be evident that it is a serious mistake to regard the Gospel and the Law as being mutual enemies. Perhaps some will object, but is it not derogatory to the Son of God to view Him as subservient to the Law? Our reply is, “What saith the Scriptures?” Upon that point, there is no room for uncertainty: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal 4:4). It was in order to prevent any mistake upon this point, to allay any fears they might entertain about it, that Christ said to His disciples, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Mat 5:17)—to “fulfil” it by rendering thereto a perfect obedience—and then to endure, on behalf of His sinful people, its unremitting penalty.

But second, it is quite clear from the book of Deuteronomy that the mission of Joshua was to *complement* that of Moses, to bring to a successful issue what he began. Moses had led Israel out of Egypt, and he had been their leader all through the wilderness journeyings, but it was left unto Joshua to induct Israel into their promised inheritance. Here, too, we find no antagonism between Joshua and Moses, but rather the one augmenting the other. Therein, we have a blessed and striking adumbration of the relation which the Gospel sustains to the Law: It is not its adversary, but its handmaid; not its destroyer, but its fulfiller. Christ has not only honoured and magnified in the affections and lives of His redeemed: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Joh 1:17). “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

Under Moses, the Law obtained not its due, because of the weakness of the flesh in those who received it. They declared unto Moses, “speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it” (Deu 5:27). Nor was the Lord displeased at such an avowal. So far was He from condemning them for a presumptuous boast, we are told, “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” (Deu 5:28). Nevertheless, there *was* a “weakness” of which they were ignorant—but of which He was cognizant—for He went on to say, “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 5:29). There we learn what their “weakness” consisted of: They *lacked a heart* for the Lord Himself. That is the lack of the natural man the world over. Until he is born again, no man has either any filial fear of God, nor love for Him—and where those be absent, there is neither desire, nor sincere effort to keep them.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Inexpressibly solemn are those words: True of writer and reader alike, until a miracle of grace was wrought within him. The carnal mind is not subject to the Law of God, nor is it capable of being so. It is utterly *lawless*, determined only on pleasing self and having its own way. The reason for this insubjection of the carnal mind to the Divine Law is that it is “enmity against God”: It is alienated from Him, it hates

Him—abhorring His ineffable holiness, and despising His sovereign authority. But at regeneration, the love of God is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 5:5). A contrary principle is implanted which opposes that enmity, and its reigning power is destroyed. Hence, there is on the part of the regenerated person, a radically changed disposition and attitude to the Divine Law, so that he declares, “For 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).

Third, not only was Joshua originally “Moses’ minister” (Jos 1:1), not only did he supplement his ministry and bring his mission to successful completion, but when commissioned by Jehovah to conduct His people into Canaan, he was bidden, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Jos 1:7-8). Here again, we see that so far from the work assigned, Joshua being inimical to that of his predecessor, he was enjoined to honour and magnify it. That commission concerned not so much Joshua personally, as it did the people entrusted to his charge. If Israel were to “possess their possessions” (Oba 1:17), then under the leadership of Joshua, they must regulate their conduct by the Divine Law. God has not regenerated those for whom Christ died that they might live as they please, but that they “might *serve him* without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:74-75).

Herein lies the triumph and glory of the Gospel: Not merely that transgressors are pardoned and sinners delivered from the wrath to come, but that they are “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24), given a nature which delights in the Law, and sincerely serves it. The Law is written on their hearts (Heb 8:10), enshrined in their affections; and under the leadership of the antitypical Joshua, their conduct is governed by it. Christ has left them an example that they should follow His steps (1Pe 2:21), and *He* respected, honoured, and fulfilled the Law. True, they do not *perfectly* obey the Law—though they long to and honestly endeavour so to do—and where there is that honest endeavour, God accepts the will for the deed. So far from the Law’s being set aside, New Testament saints are “under the law to Christ” (1Co 9:21); and just so far as they act in accordance with that fact is “good success” theirs, in the spiritual life (Jos 1:8).

Here, then, is the relation between the Law and the Gospel. First, as Moses preceded Joshua, so God employs the Law and an instrument for convicting the sinner of his need of Christ, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). Second, as Joshua was “Moses’ minister” (Jos 1:1), so Christ was made under the Law and satisfied its every requirement—both preceptive and penal—that a perfect righteousness might be provided for His people. Third, as the mission of Joshua supplemented and complemented that of Moses, so when the Gospel of Christ is made the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, there is a communicating to that soul a nature which loves the Law and is subject to it. Fourth, as the success of Israel in Canaan turned upon their obedience to Joshua—who was to be regulated wholly by the Law of Moses—so the Christian enters into possession of his possessions only so far as he is subject to the Law in the hands of the Mediator. This will be made increasingly evident if we are permitted to continue our meditations upon this book of Scripture.

In our last, we dwelt a little on Joshua 1:1-3. With verse 4, it should be compared to Genesis 15:18, Exodus 23:31, Numbers 34:3-12, and Deuteronomy 11:24. Turning now to verse 5, we have the blessed promises, which the Lord made unto Joshua as the basis of the great commission he then received. “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5). In seeking to ponder them in the light of what immediately follows, we need to bear in mind that the terms of the commission were made with Joshua not simply as a private person, but *as leader* of the Nation; that what God required from him, He required from them; and that what He promised him, He promised them. We saw this when looking at verse 2, wherein Jehovah said unto Joshua, “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, *and* all this people” (Jos 1:2). That “therefore” is most significant and suggestive: So far from the loss of their former leader inclining them to sit down in dejection and despair, it was all the more necessary why they should go forward under their new commander.

“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee” (Jos 1:5). That this promise was made unto the Nation as here represented by Joshua is clear from a comparison with Deuteronomy 7:24. There we find Moses addressing the whole congregation, assuring it of what the Lord God would do for them when He brought them into the land (see verse 1): “And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt

destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee" (Deu 7:24). Thus, as Joshua 1:2 gave the Divine call of duty unto Israel—"arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them"—so in verse 5, we see the Divine encouragement given them unto the discharge of their duty. Moses had to face the haughty monarch of Egypt—then the mightiest kingdom on earth—and confront his wise men and magicians; yet, none were able to stand before him. Powerful nations were in possession of Canaan—among them, the giant Anakim (Deu 9:2)—but none shall be able to withstand Joshua and those under him: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Jos 1:5).

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Jos 1:5). But was that blessed assurance designed only for Joshua and the Israelites of that day? Is it not recorded also for *our* sakes (Rom 4:23-24)? Then are we making practical use of it? Do we frequently remind ourselves of the same? Do we plead it before the throne of grace in time of need and ask God to make it good in our experience? Realising that we are called upon to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12), conscious of our weakness and the might of our foes, have we put God in mind of this word? If not, why not? Is not our failure at this point the explanation of many other failures? It is not enough that we should long to enter more fully into our heritage in Christ, we should also appropriate unto ourselves this blessed assurance and beg God to overthrow whatever is standing in the way and hindering us from a present and personal enjoyment of our spiritual portion. We should be daily and confidently entreating Him to teach us to vanquish the Anakim which are usurping our rightful heritage.

Should any doubt the dispensational validity of what we have just pointed out and demur at the idea of Christians today applying to themselves a specific promise made to Joshua thousands of years ago, then all room for a questioning of the same should at once be removed by the final clause of that verse: "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Jos 1:5). Let the reader very carefully observe that that very promise is quoted in Hebrews 13 and a most important conclusion drawn from it: "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb 13:5-6). The very fact that the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to apply unto Christians that promise made unto Joshua, is a clear proof that they err grievously who follow the Scofield Bible in this matter. The practice of those who partition off the Scriptures under the pretence of "rightly dividing the word" (2Ti 2:15)—who insist that what God said unto His people in one dispensation does not pertain to those who live in another era—is here exposed as nothing less than an effort of Satan's to rob the children of a rightful and needful portion of their Bread.

What has just been mentioned ought to be so obvious that it requires no further amplification; but since some of our readers have been wrongly instructed therein, we must labour the point a little further. Are not the needs of believers the same in one age as another? Does not God bear the same relation to them, and is He not affected alike unto all of His children? Does He not bear them the same love? If He would not fail or forsake Joshua, then He will not us. Are not Christians today under the same everlasting covenant of grace as were the Old Testament saints? Then they have a common charter: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Act 2:39). Let us not forget that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that *we* through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Then let this principle be held tenaciously by us: The Divine promises which were made on special occasions to particular individuals are of general use for *all* the members of the Household of Faith.

"I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Jos 1:5) is one of the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God (2Pe 1:4), which is addressed to me now, as much as it was to Joshua of old, and therefore, is available for my faith to lay hold of and enjoy. Note the use which the apostle made of the same: "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb 13:6). Those words "so that" point an inference drawn from the promise: A double conclusion is thereby reached—confidence in God and courage against man. That intimates the various and manifold *use* we should make of God's promises. The conclusion drawn by the apostle was based upon the character of the Promiser, and similarly should faith ever reason. Since God is infinitely good, faithful, all-powerful, and immutable, we may boldly or confidently declare with Abraham, "God will provide" (Gen 22:8); with Jehonathan, "There is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few" (1Sa 14:6); with Jehoshaphat, "None is able to withstand thee" (2Ch 20:6); with Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Rom 8:31).

“So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6). Note attentively the change in number from the plural to the singular: General principles are to be appropriated by us in particular, as general precepts are to be taken by us individually—as the Lord Jesus individualized the “*Ye* shall not tempt the LORD your God” of Deuteronomy 6:16 when assailed by Satan (Mat 4:7)! It is only by taking the Divine promises and precepts unto ourselves personally that we mix faith with the same and make a proper and profitable use of them. It is further to be observed that “The Lord is my helper” (Heb 13:6), etc., is a citation from Psalm 118:6. In that quotation, the apostle teaches us again that the language of the Old Testament is exactly suited unto the case of Christians now, and that they are fully warranted in appropriating the same “*we* may boldly say”—just what the Psalmist did! It was in a season of sore distress that David expressed his confidence in the Lord, at a time when it appeared that his enemies were about to swallow him up; but contrasting the omnipotence of Jehovah with the feebleness of the creature, his heart was strengthened and emboldened.

Ah, but does the reader clearly perceive what *that* involved? It meant that David turned his mind away from the seen to the unseen. It means that he was regulated by faith, rather than by sight or reason. It means that his heart was occupied with the omnipotent One. But it means much more: He was occupied with the relationship of that omnipotent One unto himself. It means that he recognised and realised the spiritual bond there was between them, so that he could rightly and boldly say, “The Lord is *my* helper” (Heb 13:6). If He be my God, my Redeemer, my Father, then He can be counted upon to undertake for me when I am in sore straits, when my foes would devour me, or when my barrel of meal is well-nigh empty. But that “*my*” is the language of *faith* and “my helper” is the conclusion which faith’s assurance unhesitatingly drew. Often God so orders His providences and places us in trying circumstances that there may be suitable opportunity for our exercise of faith, and that He may be glorified by the same. Nothing honours Him more than the unquestioning confidence of our hearts when everything outward seems thoroughly against us.

Yes, David turned away his eyes from his numerous and powerful enemies unto the omnipotent One, and so should we. God will not disappoint us if we do: He never fails those who really trust Him. Consider another example which illustrates the same principle. On one occasion, “the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle” (2Ch 20:1). The king was quickly informed that “there cometh a great multitude against thee” (2Ch 20:2), and we are told that he “feared.” But that was not all he did: He “set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2Ch 20:3). Then in the presence of the whole congregation, he prayed and pleaded with Jehovah, concluding with, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are *upon thee*” (2Ch 20:12). Nor did they look unto Him in vain. Read the sequel—verses 14-26: Without themselves striking a blow, the Lord smote their enemies with such a spirit of confusion that they fell upon one another and completely destroyed themselves.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

II. Its Recovery

We shall attempt little more here than seeking to show *the necessity* for recovery from a spiritual decline. Nor will that be an easy task—not because of any inherent difficulty in this aspect of our subject, but owing to the variety of cases which require to be considered, and which should be dealt with separately. There are some physical ailments, which, if handled promptly, call for comparatively mild treatment; but there are others that demand more drastic means and remedies. Yet, as any doctor will testify, many are careless about what are deemed trifling disorders, and delay so long in attending to the same, that their condition so deteriorates as to become dangerous and often fatal. In our last, we pointed out that every spot was not leprosy; yet, it should be remembered that certain spots which resembled that disease aroused suspicion, and required that the patient be examined by the priest, isolated from others, and kept under his observation, until the case could be more definitely determined—depending upon whether there was a further deterioration or spreading of the spot (Lev 13:4-8).

It is much to be doubted if there is any Christian on earth who so retains his spiritual vitality and vigour that he *never* stands in need of a “reviving” of his heart (Isa 57:15), that there is no time when he feels it requisite to cry “quicken thou me according to thy word” (Psa 119:25). Yet, it must not be concluded from this statement that every saint experiences a definite relapse in his spiritual life, and still less, that a life of ups and downs, decays and recoveries, backslidings and restorations, is the best that can be expected. The experiences of others are *not the Rule* which God has given us to walk by. Crowded dispensaries and hospitals do indeed supply a warning, but they certainly do not warrant my lapsing into carelessness, or fatalistically assuming that I, too, shall ere long be physically afflicted. God has made full provision for His people to live a holy, healthy, and happy life; and if I observe many of them failing to do so, it should stimulate me to greater watchfulness against the neglect of God’s provision.

After what has been dwelt upon in previous articles, it should scarcely be necessary to remind the reader that unless the Christian maintains close and steady communion with God, daily intercourse with the drawing from Christ’s fulness, and regular feeding on the Word, the pulse of his spiritual life will soon beat more feebly and irregularly. Unless he meditates oft upon the love of God, keeps fresh before his heart the humiliation and sufferings of Christ, and frequents the throne of grace, his affections will soon cool, his relish for spiritual things will decrease, and obedience will neither be so easy, nor pleasant. If such a deterioration be ignored or excused, it will not be long ere his heart glides imperceptibly into carnality and worldliness: Worldly pleasures will begin to attract, worldly pursuits absorb more of his attention, or worldly cares weight him down. Then, unless there be a return unto God and humbling of the heart before Him, it will not be long—unless providence hinder—before he be found in the ways of open transgression.

There are degrees of backsliding. In the case of a real child of God, it always commences in the heart’s departure from Him, and where that be protracted, evidences thereof will soon appear in the daily walk. Once a Christian becomes a backslider outwardly, he has lost his distinguishing character—for then, there is little or nothing to distinguish him from a religious worldling. Backsliding always presupposes a profession of faith and adherence unto Christ, though not necessarily the existence or reality of the thing professed. An unregenerate professor may be sincere, though deluded; and he may, from various considerations, persevere in his profession to the end. But more frequently, he soon wearies of it; and after the novelty has worn off, or the demands made upon him become more intolerable, he abandons his profession, and like the sow, returns to his “wallowing in the mire” (2Pe 2:22). Such is an apostate, and with very rare exceptions—if indeed there be any at all—his apostasy is total and final.

Up to the beginning of this article, we have confined ourselves unto the spiritual life of the regenerate, but we have now reached the stage where faithfulness to souls requires us to enlarge our scope. Under our last division, we dwelt upon spiritual decline: Its nature, its causes, its insidiousness, and its symptoms. It is pertinent, therefore, to enquire now, “What will be *the sequel* to such a decline?” A general answer cannot be returned, for as the decline varies considerably in different cases—some being less, and some more, acute, and extended than others—the outcome is not always the same. Where the relapse of a Christian be marked—if not to himself yet, to onlookers—he has entered the class of “backsliders,” and that will cause

the spiritual to stand in doubt of him. It is this consideration which requires us to enlarge the class to which we now address our remarks. Otherwise, unregenerate professors who have deteriorated in their religious life would be likely to derive false comfort from that which applies only to those who have been temporarily despoiled by Satan.

Unless spiritual decline be arrested, it will not remain stationary, but become worse; and the worse it becomes, the less are we justified in regarding it *as* a "spiritual decline," and the more does Scripture require us to view it as the exposure of a worthless profession. Hence, it is in that, that any degree of spiritual deterioration is to be regarded not complacently, but as something serious; and if not promptly corrected, as highly dangerous in its tendency. But Satan will attempt to persuade the Christian that though his zeal has abated somewhat, and his spiritual affection cooled, there is nothing for him to worry about—that even if his health has begun to decline, yet seeing he has not fallen into any great sin, his condition is not at all serious. But every decay is dangerous, especially such as the mind is ready to excuse and plead for a continuance therein. The nature and deadly tendency of sin is the same in itself, whether it be in an unregenerate, or a regenerate person; and if it be not resisted and mortified, repented of, and forsaken, the outcome will be the same: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren" (Jam 1:15-16).

Three stages of spiritual decline are solemnly set before us in Revelation 2 and 3. First, to the Ephesian backslider, Christ says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4). That is the more striking and searching, because there was much here that the Lord commended: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience...and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Rev 2:2-3). Yet, He adds, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." In this case, things were still all right in the external life, but there was an inward decay. Observe well that this Divine indictment, "I have somewhat *against thee*, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4) is an unmistakably plain intimation that Christians are held accountable for the state of their love Godwards. There are some who seem to conclude from those words, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom 5:5), that they have no personal responsibility in connection therewith, and who attribute to the sovereignty of God their coldness of heart, rather than blaming themselves for the waning of their affections. But that is highly reprehensible, being an adding of insult to injury.

It is as much the duty of a saint to maintain a warm and constant affection to Christ, as it is to preserve his faith in regular exercise; and he is no more warranted in excusing his failure in the one than in the other. We are expressly bidden, "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jud 1:21) and "Set your affection on things above" (Col 3:2); and it is a horrible perversion and abuse of a blessed truth if I attribute my *not* doing so unto God's sovereign withholding from me the inclination. Those words of Christ's—"I have somewhat against thee" (Rev 2:4)—is the language of censure because of failure; and He certainly had not used it unless he was to blame. Observe, He does not merely say, "thou hast *lost* thy first love," as it is so frequently misquoted—man ever tones down what is unpalatable! No, "thou hast *left* thy first love" (Rev 2:4)—something more serious and heinous. One may "lose" a thing involuntarily, but to *leave* it is deliberate action! Finally, let us duly note that our Lord regarded that departure not as an innocent infirmity, but as a culpable sin, for He says, "repent"!

In his faithful sermon on Revelation 2:4, Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) pointed out that we ought to feel alarmed if we have left our first love, and ask the question, "Was I ever a child of God at all?" going on to say: "Oh, my God, must I ask *myself* this question? Yes, I will. Are there not many of whom it is said, 'They went out from us...' because '...they were not of us' (1Jo 2:19)? Are there not some whose goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew—may that not have been *my* case? I am speaking for you all. Put the question: 'May I not have been impressed under a certain sermon, and may not that impression have been a mere carnal excitement? May it not have been that I thought I repented, but did not really repent? May it not have been the case that I got a hope somewhere, but had not a right to it? and never had the loving faith that unites me to the Lamb of God? And may it not have been that I only thought I had love to Christ, and never had it; for if I really had love to Christ, should I be as I now am? See how far I have come down! May I not keep on going down until my end shall be perdition and the fire unquenchable? Many have gone from heights of a profession to the depths of damnation, and may I not be the same? Let me think, if I go on as I am, it is impossible for me to stop; if I am going downwards, I may go on doing so. And O, my God, if I go on backsliding for another year—who knows where I may have backslidden to?"

Perhaps into some gross sin. Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace! Perhaps I may backslide totally. If I am a child of God, I know I cannot do that; but still, may it not happen that I only thought I was a child of God?"

Searching as is the complaint of Christ to the Ephesian backslider, His word to the Sardinian is yet more drastic: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev 3:1). That does not signify that He was here addressing an unregenerate person, but rather, one whose conduct belied his name. His life did not correspond with his profession. He had a reputation for piety, but there was no longer evidence to justify it, no fruit to any longer warrant it. Not only had there been deterioration within, but also *without*. The salt had lost its savor, the fine gold had become dim; and hence, his profession brought no honour and glory to Christ. He bids him, "Be watchful"—for that was the very point at which he had failed—"and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die" (Rev 3:2), which shows that the "art dead" of verse 1 does not mean "dead in sins." "For I have not found thy works perfect before God"—not "complete" or "full." Good works were not yet totally abandoned, but many of them were lacking. Part of his duty was listlessly performed; the other part, neglected; and even the former was "ready to die."

Thus, it will be seen that the case of the Sardinian backslider is much worse than that of the Ephesian. There is no remaining stationary in Christianity: If we do not advance, we retrograde; if we be not fruit-bearing branches of the Vine, we become cumberers of the ground. Decay of grace is not a thing to be regarded lightly, and treated with indifference. If it be not attended to and corrected, our condition will grow worse. If we do not return to our first love—by heeding the injunctions laid down in Revelation 2:5—then we may expect to become like the Sardinian backslider: One whose witness for Christ is marred. Unless our hearts be kept right, our affection to Christ warm, then the life will soon deteriorate—our works will be deficient, both in quality and quantity, and those around us will perceive it. Ere long a "name to live" is all we shall have: The profession itself will be invalid, worthless, "dead."

But worst of all is the Laodicean professor (Rev 3:15-20). What makes his case so fearfully solemn is that we are to a loss where to place him, how to classify him—whether he be a real Christian who has fearfully backslidden, or naught but an empty professor. To him, Christ says, "Thou art neither cold nor hot" (Rev 3:15)—neither one thing, nor the other; but rather, an unholy mixture. Such are those who vainly attempt to serve two masters, who are worshippers of God one day, but worshippers of mammon the other six. To him, Christ goes on to say, "I would thou wert cold or hot"—that is, either an open and avowed enemy; or a faithful and consistent witness of Me. Be one thing, or the other: A foe, or a friend; an utter worldling, or one who is in Spirit and in Truth, a "stranger and pilgrim" in this scene. Corrupt Christianity is more offensive to Christ than is open fidelity. If he who bears His name does not depart from iniquity, *His* honour is affected. "Because thou art lukewarm...I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev 3:16): In thy present condition, thou art an offence to Me, and I can no longer own thee.

It is the figure of an emetic which Christ there uses: The mingling together of what is hot and cold, thus producing a "lukewarm" draught which is nauseating to the stomach. And that is exactly what an "inconsistent Christian" is to the Holy One. He who runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds, who is one man inside the church and a totally different one outside, he who seeks to mix godliness with worldliness: "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev 3:16)—instead of confessing his name before the Father and His holy angels. But observe what follows: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3:17). Exactly opposite is this estimation of his from Christ's. No longer "poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3), he declares himself to be "rich." No longer coming to the throne of grace as a beggar to obtain help, he deems himself to be "increased with goods." No longer sensible of his ignorance, weakness, and emptiness, he feels himself to "have need of nothing." That is what makes his case so dangerous and desperate: He has no sense of personal need.

"And have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). As carnality and worldliness increase, so also does pride and complacency; and where they dominate, spiritual discernment becomes non-existent. Phariseism and self-sufficiency are inseparable. It was to those who prayed, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers" (Luk 18:11), and who asked Christ, "Are we blind also?" (Joh 9:40)—to whom He said, "ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (Joh 9:41). The Pharisee boasted, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luk 18:12): In his own esteem and avowal, he was "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3:17)—and for that very reason, he knew not that he was "wretched, and miserable, and poor" (Rev 3:17). That, too, is another form of the nauseating mixture which is so abhorrent to Christ: Orthodox in doctrine, but corrupt in practice. One who is loud in claiming to be

sound in the Faith, but who is tyrannical and bitter toward those who differ from him—who holds “high doctrine,” but cannot live in peace with his brethren—is as offensive to Christ, as if he were thoroughly worldly.

Can such a character as the one who has just been before us be a real—though a backslidden—Christian? Frankly, we know not, for we are unable to say just how far a saint may fall into the mire and foul his garments before God recovers him, by answering him with “terrible things in righteousness” (Psa 65:5). Before He made good that awful threat and spued out the Laodicean professor, Christ made a final appeal to him: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev 3:18). But though we do not feel capable of deciding whether or not “the root of the matter” (Job 19:28) really be in him, two things are plain to us. First, that if I have left my first love (Rev 2:4), it will not be long before my profession will become “dead;” and unless it be revived, I shall soon be a Laodicean. Second, that while any person be in a Laodicean state, he has no Scriptural warrant to regard himself as a Christian, nor should others consider him as such.

There are many professing Christians who have declined in their practice of piety to a considerable extent, yet who comfort themselves with the idea that they will be brought to repentance before they die. But that is not only an unwarrantable comfort, but is presumptuously tempting God. As another has pointed out, “Whosoever plunges into the gulf of backsliding, or continues easy in it under the idea of being recovered by repentance, may find himself mistaken. Both Peter and Judas went in, but only one of them came out! There is reason to fear that thousands of professors are now lifting up their eyes in torment, who, in this world, reckoned themselves good men, who considered their sins as pardonable errors laid to their accounts as being brought to repentance: But, ere, they were aware, the Bridegroom came, and they were not ready to meet Him. They of whom it is said, they are “slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return” (Jer 8:5) are the ones “who draw back unto perdition” (Heb 10:39). And my reader, if you have left your first love, you have departed “from the living God” (Heb 3:12); and until you humbly and penitently return to Him, you can have no guarantee that you will not be a “*perpetual backslider*.”

We should carefully distinguish between the sin which indwells us, and our falling into sin. The former is our depraved nature, which God holds us accountable to make no provision for, to resist its workings, and refuse its solicitations. The latter is when—through lack of watching against indwelling corruptions—sin breaks forth into open acts. It is an injurious thing to fall into sin—whether secretly or openly—and sooner or later, the effects will certainly be felt. But to *continue* therein is much more evil and dangerous. God has denounced a solemn threatening against those who persist in sin: He “shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as *goeth on still* in his trespasses” (Psa 68:21). For those who have known the way of righteousness to pursue a course of sin is highly offensive to God. He has provided a remedy (Pro 28:13); but if instead of confessing and forsaking our sins, we sink into hardness of heart, neglect prayer, shun the company of the faithful, and seek to efface one sin by the committal of another, we are in imminent danger of being abandoned by God and are “nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb 6:8).

Let us return to the point where we almost began and ask again, “What will be the *sequel* to a decline?” It should now be still more evident that a general answer cannot be returned. Not only does God exercise His sovereignty here, using His own good pleasure and not acting uniformly, but differences from the human side of things have also to be taken into account. Much will depend upon whether it be the spiritual decline of a real Christian, or simply the religious decay of a mere professor. If the former, the sequel will vary according to whether the decline be internal only, or accompanied, or followed by falling into open sin. So, too, there is a doctrinal departure from God—as well as practical—as was the case with the Galatians. However, whatever be the type of case, this is certain, the one who lapses into a state of torpor needs to respond to that call, “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep...let us therefore cast off the works of darkness,” etc. (Rom 13:11-12).

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

9. *Its Reception*

This brings us to the *manward* side of the subject, and that will present more or less a difficulty unto some of our readers—not because of its abstruseness, but in seeking to ascertain its consistency and harmony with some other aspects presented previously. It concerns the ever-recurring problem of adjusting in our minds the conjunction of the Divine and human elements. Because that conjunction cannot always be stated with mathematical exactitude, or in language fully intelligible to the average mind, the great majority are inclined to cut the knot and reject either the one, or the other, of those elements or factors. But if both be clearly set forth in the Word—whether or not we can perceive the precise relation between them, or the definite point at which they meet—it is our bounden duty to believe and hold fast to both. If, on the one hand, Scripture teaches that *Christ* has effected reconciliation with God, Scripture just as plainly calls upon us to “be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) and speaks of *our* receiving the reconciliation. It is this latter aspect, we must now be occupied with: What God requires from the sinner if he is to enter into the good of what Christ did for sinners.

There ought to be no need to labour this point at any length, and there had been none, had not certain men—true servants of God, we doubt not, who were thoroughly sound on almost every other part of that Faith once delivered to the saints, and whose ministry has deservedly been held in high esteem by the generations who succeeded them—departed from the Truth thereon, and influenced many since their day to perpetuate a serious error. As we have previously pointed out, mutual alienation requires mutual reconciliation. The reconciliation of God to us, and of us to God, must answer the one to the other—for unless each party lay aside his enmity, no real amity is possible. If peace were on one side only, and hostility on the other, there would still be a breach. *God* must be propitiated; *we* must be converted: The one is as requisite as the other. As we have already shown at length how Christ reconciled God unto us, we must now enter into some detail of how we may be reconciled to God. That we are not about to depart from “the old paths” (Jer 6:16) will appear from the following quotations.

“Although God the Father hath transacted all these things from eternity and Jesus Christ hath long since performed all that which might pacify and reconcile His Father and procure our atonement with His Father, yet it was withal agreed mutually then by Them that not a man—no, not any elect man—should have benefit by either, until *they* came to be reconciled...He that will be reconciled to God must part with and forsake all other friends and lovers, renounce and break off all interests and correspondence with them, and choose God for his sole Friend and Portion—he must choose God forever, to cleave to Him with full purpose of heart” (Thomas Goodwin, 1600-1680, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 122, 129). “We are *actually* justified, pardoned, and reconciled when we repent and believe. Whatever thoughts and purposes of grace God in Christ may have towards us from all eternity, yet we are under the fruits of sin till we become penitent believers...That these are conditions which alone make us capable of pardon is evident” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677, *Works*, vol. 13, p. 266).

“This reconciliation, purchased by the blood of Christ, is offered unto men by the Gospel upon certain articles and conditions, upon the performance whereof it actually becomes theirs, and without which, notwithstanding all that Christ hath done and suffered, the breach still continues between them and God. And let no man think this a derogation from the freeness and riches of grace, for those things serve singularly to illustrate and commend the grace of God to sinners. As He consulted His own glory in the terms on which He offers us our peace, so it is His grace which brings our souls to these terms of reconciliation. And surely, He hath not suspended the mercy of our reconciliation upon unreasonable or impossible conditions. He hath not said, If you will do as much *for* Me as you have done *against* Me, I will be at peace with you; but the two grand articles of peace with God are repentance and faith” (John Flavell, 1627-1691, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 476).

“To make perfect reconciliation (which Christ is said in many places to do), it is required, first, that the wrath of God be turned away, His anger removed, and all the effects of enmity on His part toward us. Secondly, that we be turned away from our opposition to Him and brought into voluntary obedience. Until *both* these be effected, reconciliation is not perfected” (John Owen, 1616-1683, *The Death of Death*, from *Works*, book 3, chapt. 6, para. 2 on “Reconciliation”).

“A mediator must be accepted by both parties that are at variance, and they must stand to what the mediator doth. As where two princes are at difference, and a third interposes to make an agreement between them, they must both consent to accept of that prince for mediator, and both put their concerns in his hand: He can be no mediator for him that does not accept of him in that relation...God hath declared Himself fully contented and hath complied with all the conditions of the first agreement (the everlasting covenant); it only remains now that man will accept of Him for those purposes for which God did constitute Him and *comply with those conditions* which God hath settled. This is necessary: God saves no man against his will” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 164).

Those excerpts supply a clear, if brief, idea of what was the almost uniform teaching of the Puritans on this subject. Probably, they will come as a real surprise unto a considerable number of our readers who are wont to regard those men as the champions of orthodoxy, and as the best-instructed scribes of the Gospel since the days of the apostles. If so, it is because they have imbibed subversive teaching, which came from *other men* that followed the Puritans in the eighteenth century—men who, though they upheld the banner of truth previously erected, yet, in other things, departed from the foundations laid down by their better-balanced predecessors. Though we highly respect these men, too, and freely acknowledge our indebtedness to many good things in their writings, yet, we dare not—and cannot—follow them in those things wherein they relied more on logical reasoning than on the teaching of Holy Writ. And for the sake of those who have been misled by the errors of men who otherwise taught the Truth, it devolves upon us to at least make an attempt to lead them back into “the good way” (Jer 6:16).

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20). That is the ringing call of the Gospel, as it is addressed unto the unsaved. “Be ye reconciled to God”: Cease your hostility against Him, throw down the weapons of your rebellion, turn from your wicked ways, abandon your idols, repent of your sins, pursue mercy in the name of Christ, and receive forgiveness through His blood. But in certain more or less influential circles, that is flatly rejected. It is blankly denied that the Gospel calls upon the unsaved to be reconciled to God, or that He requires anything from sinners in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins. Nay, it is argued that such an assertion as ours repudiates the free grace of God and denies the finished work of Christ, by inculcating salvation by works and making man in part his own Saviour. *If* that were so, then it would necessarily follow that the most eminent and godly of the Puritans (quoted above) were guilty of those very crimes! But we deny that any such conclusion follows.

“Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) is both the demand of Divine holiness and the enforcement of human responsibility. But because that Gospel call clashed with the views of certain men, they attempted to *explain away* its real force, insisting that those words are addressed to *saints* and not to the unconverted. A certain air of plausibility is given to that view by an appeal to the fact that this verse is found in a *church epistle*, but if due attention be paid to its setting, and the scope of the apostle in the whole passage be rightly ascertained, then the seeming “plausibility” disappears, and the untenability of such an interpretation is at once exposed. But in order to discover and exhibit the scope or design of the apostle here, careful attention has to be paid to the context, and considerable ground must be covered by the expositor to make the same clear. We fear this may prove rather tedious to some of our friends, yet beg them to bear with us for the sake of others who need—and for those who earnestly long for—the opening-up of this passage.

Let us give first, in few and simple words, what we are convinced is the force of 2 Corinthians 5:20, and then state *why* we so understand it, setting forth the grounds on which our conviction rests. When the apostle wrote those words, “Be ye reconciled to God,” he was *not exhorting* saved or unsaved. Rather was he giving a brief *account of* the evangelical message, which he had been called to deliver to the latter. In the light of the immediate context, we can come to no other conclusion. In the second half of verse 18, the apostle expressly declares that there had been given to him and his fellow-evangelists “the ministry of reconciliation” (2Co 5:18); and then in verses 19-21 (and 2 Corinthians 6:1-2!), he tells us—as the opening “to wit” unequivocally shows—*what* that “ministry of reconciliation” consisted of, what were its principal elements and contents. Before proceeding further, let the reader carefully ponder verses 18-21 for himself, and see if he does not concur. If the meaning of verse 20 is still not clear to him, let him read again from verse 18, and *omit* the repeated “you” in verse 20, which is in *italic* (not in the original!), and all should be plain. But we will attempt a more thorough analysis of the passage.

As we pointed out in the opening paragraphs of the October and November 1944 articles on “The Prayers of the Apostles,” certain false teachers were very active against Paul at Corinth, seeking to undermine his apostolic authority and destroy his influence and usefulness. It is *that* which accounts for what he

says in 1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:1-5; 15:9-11, and 2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 10:2; 11:5, 12-16. It is *that* which explains why he was forced (by his adversaries) to vindicate his apostleship and point out that in authority, knowledge, and effective grace, none excelled him—see 2 Corinthians 11:22-23 for his credentials. It seems quite evident from a close reading of those two epistles that his enemies had succeeded so far as to shake confidence in himself of some of his own converts there; and hence, his appeals in 1 Corinthians 4:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:1-4, 13:3, etc. From those passages, it will be seen that Paul was on the defensive and obliged to justify himself and do what his modesty and humility detested—say much about himself and appear to resort unto boasting and self-laudation (2Co 11:16-18). In the light of those references, the apostle's scope in the epistle should be more easily perceived.

Throughout the third chapter, he gives an account of how he had discharged the commission which he had received from his Master, acknowledging, tacitly, that he was no Judaiser (as were his opponents), but rather an able minister of the new testament or covenant (2Co 3:6). In the fourth, he continues the same subject, and makes mention of some of the trials which a faithful discharge of his commission had entailed (2Co 4:1, 8-14). Then, as was so often the case, his heart and mind (so to speak) ran away with him, and he digressed to describe the rich compensation which God had provided for His servants and people in general—their afflictions being abundantly counterbalanced and recompensed by the glory awaiting them, which he continues to chapter 5, verse 10. But in 2 Corinthians 5:11, he returns to the subject of his own ministerial labours, making known the springs from which they issued. Having alluded to “the judgment seat of Christ” (2Co 5:10), he declared, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2Co 5:11). Nothing is more calculated to stir the soul of Christ's minister and make him earnest and faithful in dealing with his fellows, than the solemn realisation that naught but the “everlasting burnings” (Isa 33:14) await all who die out of Christ. It is that which makes him cry to his hearers, “flee from the wrath to come.”

(1) “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord...” (2) “...we persuade men”: The one was the cause; the other the effect. The “terror of the Lord” was not something of which the apostle stood in any doubt of, but a thing he *knew*—of which he was fully assured. And therefore, he “persuaded men” at large, reasoning with, pleading with, urging them to flee for refuge and personally lay hold of the hope which he set before them in the Gospel. An illustration that this *was* the course which he followed is supplied us in Acts 24:25, where we are told that, even when before one of his judges, “he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” so that “Felix trembled.” Alas, how little of such zeal and fidelity is there today on the part of those who profess to be the servants of God; how little is there in their preaching which makes the hearer “tremble”! How little does the twentieth-century evangelist resemble those of the first. If the reader of this paragraph be a preacher, let him honestly measure himself by this verse and ask, “Is the awful truth of the eternal punishment of the wicked in the Lake of Fire impelling me to so preach that in the day to come, I shall be ‘pure from the blood of all men’ (Act 20:26), or am I deliberately withholding what I know would be unpalatable unto my congregation?”

“But we are made manifest unto God” (2Co 5:11). That was a solemn appeal by the apostle unto the Searcher of hearts of his sincerity and fidelity. And then he added, “and I trust also are made manifest in *your* consciences” (2Co 5:11): I cherish the hope that such zeal and honest dealing with souls will make it evident, to your conscience at least, that I am indeed, and in truth, an accredited servant of God. Can the reader, if he be a preacher, make the same appeal both to the Omniscient One and the conscience of his auditors? “For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart” (2Co 5:12). It was not that the apostle would seek to ingratiate himself in the esteem of these unstable Corinthians, but that he reminded them of what they had already witnessed and experienced when he laboured among them—and that, in order that they could effectually close the mouths of his detractors, who sought to take advantage of his absence by destroying the confidence of those who were his own children in the Faith.

“For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause” (2Co 5:13). Here, he replies to one of the charges which his adversaries had brought against him—that he was a wild fanatic. Says the apostle, even if I be mad, it is for God's glory that I have been so zealous; and if I had restrained myself within the bounds of sobriety, it was for your sakes. Whether he succeeded the limits of discretion as his enemies asserted, or whether he conducted himself decorously as men judged, it was not for himself—he had in mind only the glory of God and the good of His Church. “For the love of Christ constraineth” me (2Co 5:14)—that was the second dynamic or motive-power of his ministry. That was what caused him to set aside all considerations of ease or self-aggrandizement and made him willing to be counted “the filth of the world,...the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1Co 4:13). Here again, we see

a blessed *balance*: The “terror of the Lord” (2Co 5:11) and “the love of Christ” (2Co 5:14) inspiring him in all his ministerial labours. The love of Christ for sinners for himself: The love of Christ filling his heart and engendering a love for sinners made him willing to “spend and be spent” (2Co 12:15), “in labours more abundant” (2Co 11:23)—and to get little more than misunderstanding and misrepresentation, jealousy, and bitter persecution for his pains.

Cannot the impartial reader see for himself the drift, the scope, the line of things of Paul in this passage? Having mentioned “the love of Christ” (2Co 5:14) as constraining him to diligence in the ministry of the Gospel, he went on to enlarge upon the nature of that love: It was the One dying for the all (2Co 5:14); and then, to the end of verse 17, he describes some of the consequences and fruits of that love—upon which we must not now enlarge, as originally intended. The final fruits of Christ’s love here enumerated are that God “hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2Co 5:18). What that “ministry” consisted of, he tells us in verses 19-21. It “consists of two parts. 1. A reconciliation wrought on God’s part toward us, in the effecting of which Christ was concurrent with Him (2Co 5:19). 2. A reconciliation on our parts, enforced from what God and Christ had done (2Co 5:21), and this is equally necessary unto man’s salvation as that reconciliation on God’s part and Christ’s part” (T. Goodwin, vol. 6, p. 117). “The end of the ministry is to reconcile us to God, to prevail with us to lay down our enmity against Him and opposition to Him” (J. Owen, on 2 Corinthians 5:20).

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20). We trust it is now clear that in those words, the apostle was “evidently *giving an account* of his commission and general ministry” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). That he should here do so is quite in accord with what he had done in the previous epistle—see 1 Corinthians 2:2 and 15:1-3. Thus, in this instance, we believe that that most able expositor, John Gill (1697-1771), erred in his interpretation of this verse—following as he did James Hussey rather than the earlier Puritans. So far from exhorting the saints unto “submission to providence and obedience to the discipline and ordinances of God,” the apostle was stating how he exhorted the unsaved when preaching the Gospel to them. Had Gill’s interpretation been valid, the twice italicised “you” *had been* in the text! If any supplement be needed, it should be “men.” “Be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20) is the imperative demand of the Gospel to all who hear it, being parallel with, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him” (Isa 55:7).

The apostle continues the *same* subject in 2 Corinthians, chapter 6. “In this chapter (vv. 1-10), the apostle gives an account of his general errand to all whom he preached to, with several arguments and methods he used” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). It should be carefully noted that not until 2 Corinthians 6:11 did the apostle directly address himself to the Corinthians! Now, if Paul had been addressing the saints in 2 Corinthians 5:20, then in the opening verses of chapter 6, he must have been addressing their ministers, which is how Mr. Gill understood him. But in such case, he would *not* have said, “approving *ourselves* as the ministers of God” (2Co 6:4), but “yourselves”! Hence, it is manifest he was still vindicating himself and his fellow-apostles against the Judaisers. Not only were all who heard him preach the Gospel exhorted, “be ye reconciled to God,” but to “receive not the grace of God in vain” (2Co 6:1)—urging them not to procrastinate with the overtures of Divine mercy, but to recognise and realise that “now is the accepted time” (2Co 6:2). Having been favoured with the Gospel, let them not spurn it.

On 2 Corinthians 6:1, J. Owen said, “The grace of God may be considered two ways. 1. *Objectively* for the revelation or doctrine of grace, as in Titus 2:11, 12. So we are said to ‘receive’ when we believe and profess it, in opposition unto those by whom it is rejected. And this is the same with receiving the Word preached, so often mentioned in the Scriptures: Acts 2:41, James 1:21, which is by faith to give it entertainment in our hearts, which is the meaning of the word in *this* place.” The “we” of 2 Corinthians 6:1 is the “we are ambassadors” of 2 Corinthians 5:20; and the “ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2Co 6:1) (His gracious overture in the Gospel) are the same “ye” as “be ye reconciled to God.” The meaning of “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God” (2Co 6:3-4) is that the apostles comported themselves in such a manner that there was nothing in their conduct which would hinder their Gospel preaching.

