

# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

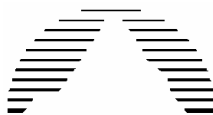
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*Studies in the Scriptures* appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to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

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## THE WORD OF FAITH

“The Word of Faith that we preach” (Rom 10:8). We shall not here attempt an exposition of that interesting passage, but rather deal with this expression topically, suggesting different reasons why the Word of God is so termed. First, because faith is the principal thing required by the Word. Being a Divine revelation nothing less than our hearty acceptance of it is its manifest due. Being the Word of Him that cannot lie it is fully entitled to our credence. It is not a mark of wisdom or superior mental acumen, but of spiritual imbecility, to discredit and disdain this celestial communication: “O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). The Scriptures are “worthy of all acceptance.” Faith in its simplest form is receiving “the witness of God” (1 John 5:9). God has spoken, and faith cannot doubt or question what He has said. The soul that reverently and confidently accepts the Divine testimony “hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33), and until he does so, his skepticism makes out God to be a liar (1 John 5:10). Faith, then, is its legitimate demand.

Second, because it is *the foundation* on which faith rests. However black may be my record, however vile I appear in my own eyes or those of my fellows, when faith appropriates that word “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37,38) it has firm ground to stand upon. Faith rests upon the promise of the faithful and immutable God. Faith builds upon His sure Word, knowing that He will never alter one thing which has gone forth from His mouth. Said David, “And now, O Lord God, Thou art that God and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant” (2 Sam 7:28): he knew that such an One would neither deceive nor fail him. “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be confounded” (Rom 9:33). When God has promised a thing it is infallibly certain of accomplishment, and we may rest thereon in the greatest perplexities and extremities. When faith “lays hold of the hope set before us” it becomes “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb 6:18,19).

Third, because it is *the sphere* in which faith operates. Faith has nothing to do with feelings, impulses, or the dictates of carnal reason: the Word of God is the realm in which it lives, moves, and has its being. Faith soars high above the opinions of the world, or “the voice of the Church”: it moves within the circle of Divine revelation. It recognizes no duty except what Holy Writ enjoins. It cherishes no desires save those which the Divine Oracles inspire. It realizes that to act without an express “thus saith the Lord” is to act either presumptuously or in blind credulity. In prayer its language is “Remember the word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope” (Psa 119:49): concerning which Matthew Henry pertinently said, “Those that make God’s promises their portion, may with humble boldness make them their plea.” However opposed its dictates to human wisdom, the language of faith is “nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net” (Luke 5:5). When God speaks that is enough; where He is silent, faith refuses to move.

Fourth, because it is *the means* by which faith is informed. Faith is not self-sufficient, but dependent. It is like a dutiful but ignorant child who desires to please his father, yet knows not how until his will is made known. If we had not the Word of God in our hand faith would be completely at a loss—like a mariner without chart or compass. This is not sufficiently realized. It is true that unless the Word be mixed with faith it profits us not; it is equally true that faith cannot function aright unless informed by the Word. Faith is the eye of the spirit: but something more than sight is needed—light is equally essential, for the keenest vision is useless in a darkened room. Hence the Psalmist declares “The entrance of Thy words giveth light: it giveth understanding unto the simple” (119:130), that is, to the one who receives them with childlike simplicity, which is exactly what faith does. The Scriptures, then, are the Word of Faith because they instruct it. “For the Commandment is a lamp and the Law is light” (Prov 6:23); “the Commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psa 19:8).

Fifth, because it is *the food* by which faith is nourished. Faith is a creature, or at any rate a part of the new creation, and like every other creature it stands in need of that which will minister to its maintenance. Since God be its Object, His words are what it feeds upon. Said one of the prophets, “Thy words were found, and I did *eat* them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer 15:16). That was not only the language of faith, but it describes both the means and the process by which faith is nourished. Faith makes a personal *appropriation*, taking unto itself what God has said. Faith proceeds to a *mastication* of what is placed before it. God’s Word is made up of words, and on them faith ruminates and meditates. Faith issues in *assimilation*, so that the Word is actually taken up into the soul, and strength and energy is supplied thereby. Thus will faith aver “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my

necessary food” (Job 23:12). And thus also do we read of being “nourished up in the words of faith” (1 Tim 4:6).

Sixth, because it is *the Rule* by which it is directed. Though this approximates closely to what was considered under our fourth point, yet it is to be distinguished from it. The Word of God is more than informative: it is authoritative, and therefore is it designated “The Faith which was once [for all] delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), which they are exhorted to “earnestly contend for.” The Word is the alone Rule which faith has to walk by. But is not the Christian also prompted and guided by the Spirit? Such a question betrays sad confusion of thought and much harm has been wrought among those giving place to it. How often we have heard different ones make the claim that the Spirit moved them to perform such and such an act—for example, a woman to preach to or lead in prayer before a mixed congregation, which is forbidden by 1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34. The Spirit quickens and empowers, but He never prompts to anything contrary to Scripture. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 2:7), i.e. as it is recorded in the alone Rule of Faith.

Seventh, because faith is *the key* which opens the Scriptures. Yet how little is this realized. The chief hindrance to our lack of perception of spiritual things is neither mental dullness nor lack of what the world terms “education.” Proof of that is seen in the fact that men endowed with the keenest of intellect and equipped by the highest standards of “modern scholarship” find the Word of God a sealed book to them. Many an illiterate rustic possesses far more spiritual understanding of the things of God than do thousands of those who possess a M.A. or D.D. degree. It is *unbelief* which prevents admittance into the Temple of Truth. The Word of God obtains no entrance into minds which are closed by self-conceit and prejudice, nor into hearts blocked by indifference or distrust. “The entrance of Thy words giveth light,” and it is faith which opens the door to admit them. When faith receives the first three chapters of Genesis it has more light upon creation and the course of human history than all the pseudo scientists and false philosophers put together. The miracles which stumble the sceptic present no difficulty to the humble believer. “Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). —AWP

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *26h. Profession Tested: Matthew 7:25, 27*

It now remains for us to ascertain what is signified by the hurricane which struck the "house" of the "wise" and of the "foolish" builder. Concerning that of the former it is said, "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (v. 25). Identically the same thing is narrated in connection with the latter, except in regard to the outcome: "it fell, and great was the fall of it." After having entered into such detail concerning the "wise" and the "foolish" man, the "digging deep" of the former and this fatal omission by the latter, the foundation of "rock" and that of "sand," and the "house" which each one erected, there should be little difficulty in discovering the general drift of what is denoted by the storm: though the language used be figurative, its purport is obvious. By means of the storm the strength and stability or the weakness and insecurity of the "house" was demonstrated.

The hurricane was that by which the work of each man was put to the proof and his wisdom or folly made evident. Thus it is clear that once more, what is here before us is the *testing of profession* and the making manifest of its worth or worthlessness. This had been the dominating theme of our Lord's Sermon from 7:13, onwards. The "strait gate" and "the narrow way" correspond to the "digging deep" and the foundation of rock, while the "wide gate" and "broad way" correspond to the omission of digging deep and the foundation of "sand." In like manner we may see in the "wise" builder the "good tree" which bringeth forth "good fruit," and in the "foolish" builder the "corrupt tree" with its "evil fruit." In the "he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" we have the one whose house stands firm, while in the many to whom Christ will say, "I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" we have those whose building is overthrown by the storm.

We must not, however, conclude that nothing more is signified by our Lord in this figure of the storm bursting upon the house than the testing of Christian profession, though scarcely any of the commentators seem to have seen anything further in it. Surely due attention to the immediate setting, to say nothing of the more remote or general context, requires us to enlarge our viewpoint. Consider the *outcome* of the storm. In the case of the "wise man" it beat upon his house in vain: in spite of all its fury, his building stood firm. And why? Because it was founded upon a "rock." And what did that purport? Why, that the wise man was something more than a hearer of the Word, namely, a *doer* of it, one who heeded its warnings, who responded to its exhortations, who performed its precepts, whose character and conduct was moulded and regulated by its teachings. This, and nothing but this, is what Christ insists upon at the beginning of our passage: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and *doeth* them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock."

Among the "sayings" of Christ are some peculiarly distasteful to flesh and blood, yea, at direct variance with the inclinations of fallen human nature. To pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands, to love our enemies, bless them which curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them which despitefully use and persecute us, is not so simple as it may sound—see, then, the appropriateness of our Lord's similitude of "digging deep" when portraying such tasks. To distribute our alms and perform our devotions in secret, to expressly ask the Father to forgive us our debts *as* we forgive our debtors—being told that if we forgive not neither shall we be forgiven; to take no anxious thought for the morrow but to have a heart freed from carking care, to have such confidence in the providential bounty of God that we trustfully count upon Him supplying our every need, are duties which will tax our abilities to the utmost. True, but we shall not be the losers by practicing such precepts.

"And it *fell not*, for it was founded upon a rock": that is what we desire to lay hold of in this connection. Here is *encouragement* indeed. Instead of being so occupied with the narrowness of the way, cast your eyes forward to the glorious goal to which it conducts you—even Life. Instead of being so concerned about the painfulness of the work of mortification, think rather of what it is the appointed means of saving you from—even from being "cast into *Hell*" (5:29). Instead of complaining about the difficulties of obedience, consider its rich compensation. God has definitely assured us that in the keeping of His commandments "there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11), such as "the answer of a good conscience," peace of soul, the enjoyment of His approbation. It is *this* aspect of the Truth which Christ is here pressing upon our attention: the

one who *does* His “sayings” is assured of *safety* in the day of testing and trial. The “house” of such an one will not, cannot be overthrown by the storm. Is not *that* a recompense well worth striving for?

Throughout this Sermon on the mount the Lord Jesus had presented a most exalted and unique standard of morality and spirituality, one which calls for real self-sacrifice on the part of those who sincerely endeavour to measure up to it and perform the duties it enjoins. But here He shows how great is the reward of those who submit themselves unto His yoke. In the stability and security of the wise man’s “house” we have depicted one of the principal fruits of an obedient walk: the actual doing of these “sayings” of Christ delivers from the fatal assaults of the Devil, the world and the flesh. This consideration ought to move us to perform obedience readily and gladly, for this is a benefit which no human monarch can bestow. Neither wealth, education nor social prestige can confer security on the soul—rather do such things generally occasion destruction to their possessors. Neither human wit nor strength of resolution can procure preservation in the hour of trial and tribulation: nothing but the keeping of Christ’s Word will obtain it, but that *does*. How this promise should encourage us and stimulate unto unreserved obedience!

The force of the figure which was here used by Christ would be more impressive to His immediate hearers than to those of us who live in strong houses and in those parts of the earth where devastating floods and tornadoes are seldom or never experienced. “In Judea, as in other oriental countries, the rains are periodical. When they descend, they often descend in torrents, and continue to do so, with unabated violence, for a number of days. In consequence of this the most trifling mountain brook becomes a mighty river—a deluge rushing down with dreadful impetus from the high grounds to the plains, converting them into one wide waste of waters. The huts of the inhabitants, generally formed of clay hardened in the sun, are exposed to great danger. They are often literally melted down by the heavy rains or overturned by the furious gusts of wind; and when not founded on the solid rock, undermined and swept away by the resistless torrent. In such a country, it is the part of a wise man to take good care that the foundation on which he builds his habitation be solid. He who attends to this precaution is likely to find the advantage of doing so, and he who neglects this precaution is likely to pay dear for his folly” (J. Brown).

Spurgeon was right when he said, “Whether your religion be true or false, it will be *tried*; whether it be chaff or wheat the fan of the great Winnower will surely be brought into operation upon all that lies on the threshing floor. If thou hast dealings with God, thou hast to do with a ‘consuming fire.’ Whether thou be really or nominally a Christian, if thou comest near to Christ He will try thee as silver is tried. Judgment must begin at the house of God, and if thou darest to come into the house of God, judgment will begin with thee.” It is God’s will that whosoever taketh upon him the profession of His name shall be tried and proved. Adam and Eve were tempted and tried by Satan. God made trial of Abraham when He bade him take his only and dearly-beloved son and offer him up for a burnt offering on mount Moriah (Gen. 22). For the trial of his faith and patience He gave Job and all that he had, except his life, into Satan’s hand. God left Hezekiah to himself to try him and make known what was in his heart, when the ambassadors of Babylon came to inquire of him what wonders God had done in the land of Israel (2 Chron. 32:31).

It will be gathered from the above that we do not accept the view of those who *restrict* this trial of the “house” to the hour of death or the day of judgment. It is true that at death “the spirit shall returneth unto God that gave it” (Eccl. 12:7) and that it then enters Paradise or is consigned to the abode of the damned. At the Grand Assize the worth or worthlessness of the profession will be made manifest to an assembled universe. But we can see nothing in our present passage which requires us to limit the meaning of this storm unto the final testing, while on the other hand there is much in Scripture which makes it clear that both real and empty profession is, in a variety of ways but in different degrees, put to the proof in *this* life. When our Lord announced of His apostle, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31), which desire was granted, He expressed that which applies to all His people. It is as requisite that the faith of the saints should be tried by afflictions as gold is tried in the fire (1 Pet. 1:7).

When the apostle said to believers, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet. 4:12), he was referring unto an experience which is met with in this life, and one which, as his language denotes is by no means exceptional. For example: for a Jew belonging to an orthodox family to make public profession of the Christian faith, has always involved dishonor and disgrace; his family disinherit and disown him, and in the sight of all his brethren he is regarded as “the offscouring of all things.” In the first two centuries A.D., being a Christian frequently involved forfeiture of citizenship, the “spoiling of his goods” and being cast unto the lions, or at

least, living in caves “destitute and afflicted.” Yet notwithstanding such trials, the faith of God’s elect remained unshaken. During the past century the Lord’s people, and especially His servants, have been tested in a more subtle manner: they have had to suffer the reproach of credulity and simple-mindedness, of being hopelessly behind the times, because they refused to believe the agnostic scientists and the theories of “modern scholarship”—sensitive natures find such reproaches harder to bear than physical sufferings. In this day, the test is to resist the seductions of an alluring world, to refuse to compromise.

Having generalized so much upon the verses before us, it is time that we turned to examine more closely their several details. First, “And the rain descended.” This may be taken as a figure of the providential trials and adverse dispensations by which those bearing the name of Christ are put to the proof. “These rains typify *afflictions from Heaven*. God will send you adversities like showers, tribulations as many as the drops of the dew. Between now and Heaven, Oh, professor, you will feel the pelting storm. Like other men, your body will be sick; or if not, you shall have trial in your house: children and friends will die, or riches will take to themselves wings and fly like an eagle. You must have trials from God’s hand, and if you are not relying on Christ, you will not be able to bear them. If you are not by real faith one with Christ, even God’s rains will be too much for you” (C. H. Spurgeon). The response of the heart, the manner in which we act in times of adversity, reveals our state: if unregenerate, our unbelieving heart will betray itself by acting as the worldling does—seeking to drown our sorrow amid carnal pleasures, or sinking in despair.

Second, “and the floods came,” or as Luke 6:48, says, “the floods *arose*.” Thus it is a thing of the earth which is here in view, namely *opposition from the world*. By this also must the professor be tested, to demonstrate whether or no his claim to being a Christian is genuine. It is true that in former days the floods of persecution raged more furiously than they do now; nevertheless, they are far from having totally subsided. The world’s opposition assumes many forms: sometimes it is ridicule—and how often have the gibes and sneers of the ungodly tumbled down the “house” of those who made a fair show in the flesh! Cruel mockings are still used against the people of God. In other cases it is reproach and slander, the “cold shoulder,” boycotting, and only those who have a rock foundation will bear up under them. Not that the ones exposed always drop their profession entirely: far from it—often they retain the *name* of Christian, but compromise and walk arm-in-arm with the world to escape its persecutions.

Third, “and the winds blew and beat upon the house.” Here it is “the Prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) who is at work: in other words, it is *Satan assaulting* the one who claims to be saved. At times he will cast a cloud of despondency over the human spirit, assailing with artful insinuations and blasphemous suggestions, particularly so when God’s providences seem to be all against us, seeking to fill the soul with doubts of the Divine goodness and faithfulness. At other times he seeks to beguile with error, and only those established in the Truth will withstand him. He employs various tactics, according as he approaches in the form of a serpent or seeks to terrify as the roaring lion. He attracts by the world, appeals to the carnal nature, and only those whose “treasure” is really in Heaven scorn his gilded baubles. He suggests a compromise, the making the best of both worlds, the serving of two masters, and none save they who have truly “received Christ Jesus *the Lord*” (Col. 2:6) resist him.

The Lord plainly teaches us in this passage that he who takes upon him the Christian profession must expect a stormy passage through this world. He who is Truth incarnate painted no false and flattering picture of what Christian discipleship involves, but faithfully warns us that severe testings and trials await those who profess to be His followers. So far from being carried to Heaven on “flowery beds of ease,” they may expect to meet with fierce opposition from the world, the flesh and the Devil. He who was despised and rejected of men, tempted of the Devil, hated by the world, opposed by the religious leaders, deserted by those who should have stood by Him, has said, “the disciple is not above his Master.” “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), and they who deny this are false prophets. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12), yet that very persecution shall be made to work together for their good.

“And it fell not.” Here are consolation and compensation indeed. Severely assaulted and shaken their “house” may be, but overthrown it shall not be. And why? “For it was founded upon a rock,” that is to say, the profession was a *genuine* one, and therefore one which endures and survives every testing. It is no comfortable thing to live through such an experience as this hurricane: ah, but dwell upon the happy issue. It is no pleasant experience to meet with the sneers of acquaintances, the loss of friends, the opposition of the world and the enmity of Satan, but is it not worth all these and much more if, like the three Hebrews, we

come forth from the fires unharmed? While I *do* Christ's "sayings," Satan can gain no advantage over me: while I practice the Divine precepts the world cannot overcome me: while I tread the path of obedience the "flesh" is denied and cannot bring about my ruin. Neither in this life, the hour of death, nor the day of judgment will the "house" of such an one fall.

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell, and great was the fall of it" (v. 27). Here is the solemn contrast. Here is the fearful outcome for the one who erects his house upon the sand. Here is the certain fate of all who rest their hope and base their confidence on a worthless foundation. Here is the fearful ruin which overtakes the empty professor. He who makes no conscience of Christ's "sayings," joins not practice to profession, who refuses to walk in the path of the Divine commandments, is headed for eternal damnation. An empty professor may withstand the lighter gusts of opposition in days of peace and prosperity, but he is not at all likely to survive the temptations of the times in which our lot is cast, as witness the multitudes now making shipwreck of the faith they once affirmed. And even those who continue to call themselves Christians but refuse the Master's yoke will find in the hour of death that they have no refuge from the judgment awaiting them.

Some times God exposes those who have made an eminent profession by sending them such anguish of conscience and foretastes of Hell that at the end they are exposed to all around them. A notable example of this was Francis Spira in the seventeenth century. For weeks he lay groaning on his couch, not from physical pain but from anguish of soul, and though numbers of God's servants spoke to and prayed with him, no relief was obtained. Said he to the ministers and friends around his bed, "Take heed of relying on that faith which worketh not a holy and unblamable life, worthy of a believer. Credit me, it will fail. I have tried it. I presumed I had gotten the right faith. I preached it to others. I had all places of Scripture in memory that might support it. I thought myself sure, and in the meantime lived impiously and carelessly. And behold now the judgment of God hath overtaken me: not to correction, but to damnation." He felt the fires of God's wrath burning in his soul as few have ever experienced them in this world, and expired thus. His house "fell" and great was the fall of it.

What has been before us should dispel the influence of the world, move us to self-judgment, and warn us against a superficial use of God's Word. If we allow Satan's world to so ensnare us that, for the sake of enjoying it, we consent to ignore Christ's rules for separation from evil and holiness of life, then dire will be the consequences. Such a passage as this ought to bring home to us both the heinousness and madness of our acts of disobedience, cause us contritely to confess the same, and entreat the Lord's pardon while it may yet be obtained. Finally, we would press upon our readers that the will of God, the standard He has appointed, cannot be known by mere casual and occasional glances at the Bible. Too many are but text-mongers, singling out favorite passages which appeal to them. It is only by carefully and earnestly searching the Scriptures, by a systematic and continuous pondering of them, that we can discover "all the counsel of God." Those who do so will have their souls sustained by grace and upheld by the power of Christ in the day of trial, and will have no regrets for so employing their time and energies when the hour of death is upon them. —AWP



## THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

### *11. Seventh Miracle*

In the last we dwelt, first, upon the *occasion* of this miracle, namely, the death of the “great woman’s” son. Second, upon the *mystery* of it. To all appearances, the child had been quite well and full of life in the morning, yet by noon he was a corpse. In her case such a disaster was doubly inexplicable, for the son had been given to her by the Divine bounty because of the kindness she had shown to one of God’s servants; and now, to carnal reason, it looked as though He was dealing most unkindly with her. Furthermore, the wonder-working power of God had been engaged in bestowing a son upon her, and now this miracle was neutralized by suddenly snatching him away. Third, upon its *expectation*. It is inexpressibly blessed to behold how this stricken mother reacted to the seeming catastrophe; throughout the whole narrative it is made evident that she regarded this affliction as a trial of her faith, and grandly did her confidence in God triumph over it. Continuing our study of the miracle which follows, we note.

Fourth, its *means*. “Then he said to Gehazi, gird up thy loins and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child” (2 Kings 4:29). Some think the prophet believed that the child was only in a swoon, yet we can hardly conceive of the mother leaving the boy under such circumstances—rather had she sent a message by one of her servants: nor is it likely that Elisha’s instructions to the servant would be so peremptorily expressed if such had been the case. Matthew Henry says “I know not what to make of this.” Another of the Puritans suggests that, “It was done out of pure conceit, and not by Divine instinct, and therefore it failed of the effect.” Thomas Scott acknowledged, “It is difficult to determine what the prophet meant by thus sending Gehazi. He had divided Jordan by using Elijah’s mantle, and perhaps he thought that his own staff would be sufficient.” Personally we are inclined to think that the prophet’s design was to teach Gehazi a much-needed lesson. However, this much seems clear from the incident: no servant of God should delegate unto another that which it is his own duty to do.

“And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her” (v. 30). It is clear from these words of hers, that, whatever was or was not the prophet’s design in ordering his servant to make all speed to where the child lay, she regarded his action as another testing of her faith. She evidently had no confidence in Gehazi, or in Elisha’s staff as such. She was not to be put off in this way. Her language was both impressive and emphatic, signifying, I swear that I will not return home unless thou dost personally accompany me: the situation is desperate, my expectation is in thee as the Lord’s ambassador, and I refuse to take any No. Here we behold the boldness and perseverance of her faith. Whether there was any unwillingness on Elisha’s part to set out on this journey, or whether he was only putting her to the test, we cannot be sure, but such earnestness and importunity won the day and now stirred the prophet to action.

“And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child: but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him saying, The child is not awaked” (v. 31). Young’s concordance gives as the meaning of the name Gehazi “Denier.” If the various references made to him be carefully compared it will be seen that his character and conduct were all of a piece and in keeping with his name. Why Elisha should have had such a man for his personal attendant we know not, yet in view of there being a Judas in the apostolate, we need not be unduly surprised. First, we see him seeking to officiously thrust away the poor mother when she cast herself at his master’s feet (v. 27). Here we note the absence of prayer unto the Lord, and the nonsuccess of his efforts. Later, we find him giving expression to selfish unbelief, a complete lack of confidence in the power of Elisha (v. 43). Finally, his cupidity masters him and he lies to Naaman, and is stricken with leprosy for his pains (5:20-27). Thus in the verse before us we have a picture of the unavailing efforts of an unregenerate minister, and his failure made manifest to others.

“And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, laid upon his bed” (v. 32). In previous paragraphs we have dwelt much upon the remarkable faith of the mother of the child, yet we must not allow it to so occupy our attention as to obscure the faith of the prophet, for *his* was equally great. It was no ordinary demand which was now made upon him, and only one who was intimately acquainted with

God would have met it as he did. The death of this child was not only quite unexpected by him, but must have seemed bewilderingly strange. Yet though he was in the dark as to the reason of this calamity, he refused to accept it as final. The mother had taken her stand upon the Divine bounty and kindness, expecting an outcome in keeping with God's grace toward her, and no doubt the prophet now reasoned in the same way. Though he had never before been faced with such a desperate situation, he knew that with God all things are possible. The very fact that the dead child had been placed upon his bed was a direct challenge to his faith, and nobly did he meet it.

"He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord" (v. 33). We are not quite clear whether "them twain" refers to himself and the child or to the mother and Gehazi who had most probably accompanied him, but whichever it was, his action in closing the door denoted his desire for privacy. The prophet practiced what he preached to others. In the miracle recorded at the beginning of our chapter, Elisha had bidden the widow "shut the door upon" herself and her sons (v. 4) so as to avoid ostentation, and here Elisha follows the same course. Moreover, he was about to engage the Lord in prayer, most urgent and special prayer, and *that* is certainly something which calls for aloneness with God. The minister of the Gospel needs to be much on his guard on this point, precluding everything which savors of advertising his piety like the pharisees did: see Matthew 6:5-6. Here, then, was the means of this miracle: the unfaltering faith of the mother and now the faith of the prophet, expressed in prayer unto his Master—acknowledging his own helplessness, humbly but trustfully presenting the need to Him, counting upon His all-mighty power and goodness.

Fifth, its *procedure*. "And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm" (2 Kings 4:34). The means used by the prophet and the policy he followed are so closely linked together that they merge into one another without any break, the faith of Elisha finding expression in prayer. Considering the extraordinary situation here, how that act of the prophet's serves to demonstrate that he was accustomed to count upon God in times of emergency, to look for wondrous blessings from Him in response to his supplications, that he was fully persuaded nothing was too hard for Jehovah and therefore no petition too large to present unto Him. The more faith looks to the infinite power and all-sufficiency of the One with whom it has to do, the more is He honored. Next, the prophet stretched himself on the body of the little one, which was expressive of his deep affection for him, and his intense longing for its restoration, as though he would communicate his own life and thereby revive him.

Those who are familiar with the life and miracles of Elijah will at once be struck with the likeness between Elisha's actions here and the conduct of his predecessor on a similar occasion, in fact so close is the resemblance between them it is evident the one was patterned after that of the other—showing how closely the man of God must keep to the Scripture model if he would be successful in the Divine service. First, Elijah had taken the lifeless child of the Zarephath widow, carried him upstairs and laid him on his own bed, thereby preventing any human eyes from observing what transpired. Next, he "cried unto the Lord" and then "he stretched himself upon the child" (1 Kings 17:19-21). In addition to what had been pointed out in the foregoing paragraph, we believe this stretching of the prophet on the one for whom he prayed signified an act of *identification*, and it was a proof that he was putting his whole soul into the work of supplication. If we are to prevail in interceding for another, we must perforce make his or her case *ours*, taking his need or burden upon our own spirit, and then spreading it before God.

"Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro" (v. 35). Let it be noted that even the prayer of an Elisha did not meet with an immediate and full answer: why then should *we* be so soon disheartened when Heaven appears to be tardy in responding to our crying! God is sovereign in this, as in everything else; by which we mean that He does not deal uniformly with us. Sometimes our request is answered immediately, at the first time of asking, but often He calls for perseverance and persistence, requiring us to "wait patiently for Him." We have seen how many rebuffs the faith of the mother met with, and now the faith of the prophet is tested too. It is true that he had been granted an encouragement by the "waxing warm" of the child's body—as the Lord is pleased to often give us "a token for good" (Ps. 86:17) ere the full answer is received; but as yet there was no sign of returning consciousness, and the form of the little one still lay silent and inert before him. And *that* also has been recorded for *our* instruction.

"Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro, and went up and stretched himself upon him" (v. 35). This pacing up and down seems to denote a measure of perturbation of mind, for the prophets were

“subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17) and compassed with the same infirmities. But even if Elisha was now at his wit’s end, he did not give way to despair and regard the situation as hopeless. No, he continued clinging to Him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and again stretched himself upon the child. Let us lay this important lesson to heart and put it into practice, for it is at this point so many fail: it is the *perseverance* of faith which wins the day: see Matthew 7:7. Scott has pointed out, “It is instructive to compare the *manner* in which Elijah and Elisha wrought their miracles, especially in raising the dead, with that of Jesus Christ. Every part of their conduct expressed a consciousness of inability and an entire dependence upon Another, and earnest supplication for His intervention; but Jesus wrought by His own power: He spake, and it was done: ‘Young man, I say unto thee arise; Talitha cumi; Lazarus come forth.’” In all things *He* has the pre-eminence.

Sixth, its *marvel*. This was nothing less than the quickening of the child, the restoring “a dead body to life” (8:5). After the prophet had again stretched himself upon the child we are told that he “sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (v. 35). See how ready God is to respond to the exercise of real faith in Himself! In this case neither the mother nor the prophet had any definite or even indefinite promise they could plead, for the Lord had not said the child should be preserved in health or recovered if he fell ill. But though they had no promise, they laid hold of the known *character* of God: since He had given the child unasked, Elisha would not believe He would now withdraw His gift and leave his benefactress worse off than she was before. Elisha knew that with the Lord there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17), and he clung to that. True, it makes prayer easier when there is some specific promise we can plead, yet it is a higher order of faith that lays hold of God Himself. There was no promise that God would pardon a penitent murderer, and no sacrifice was appointed for such a sin, yet David appealed not in vain to the “multitude of His tender mercies” (Ps. 51:1).

“And the child opened his eyes” (v. 35). See what a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God is ours! Hopeless as our case may be so far as all human aid is concerned, it is not too hard for the Lord. But we must “ask *in faith*, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed,” and therefore is it added let not that man think he shall obtain anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7). No, rather it is the one who declares with Jacob, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26) who obtains his request. What must have been Elisha’s delight when he saw the child revive and obtain this further experience of God’s grace in hearkening to his petition and delivering him from his grief! How great must have been his joy as he called for Gehazi and bade him summon the mother, and when he said to her, “Take up thy son”! Blessed is it to behold her silent gratitude—too full for words—as she “fell at his feet,” and in worship to God, “bowed herself to the ground.” “And she took up the son and went out” (v. 37), to get alone with God and pour out her heart in thanksgiving to Him.

Seventh, its *meaning*. Some help is obtained therein by noting that this passage which sets before us the seventh miracle of our prophet opens with the connective conjunction (v. 18). That “And” not only intimates the continuity of the narrative, notes a striking contrast between the two principal divisions of it, but also indicates there is an intimate relation between them. As we have pointed out on previous occasions, the word “and” is used in Scripture sometimes with the purpose of linking two things together, but at other times with the object of placing two objects or incidents in juxtaposition in order to display the contrasts between them. In the present instance it appears to be used for *both* reasons. As we hope to show, light is thrown on the typical significance of this miracle by carefully noting how it is immediately linked to the one preceding it. When we look at the respective incidents described, we are at once struck with the antitheses presented. In the former we behold Elisha journeying to Shunem, in the latter it is the woman who betakes herself to him. There it was the woman befriending the prophet, here he is seen befriending her. In that a son is miraculously given to her, in this he is taken away.

The typical meaning of that does not appear on the surface, and therefore it will not be a simple matter for us to make it clear unto the reader. Only the regenerate will be able to follow us intelligently, for they alone have experienced in their spiritual history that which is here set forth in figure. That which is outstanding in this incident is the mysteriousness of it: that a child should be miraculously given to this woman, and then that the hand of death should be laid upon him! That was not only a sore trial to the poor mother, but a most perplexing providence. To carnal reason it seemed as though God was mocking her. But is there not also something equally tragic, equally baffling, in the experience of the Christian? In the last miracle we were shown a picture of the fruit of redemption, and here death appears to be written on that

fruit. Ah, my reader, let it be clearly understood that we are as dependent upon God for the *maintenance* of that fruit as we were for the actual bestowal of it.

And *what is* the “fruit of redemption” as it applies to the individual? From the side which looks Godward: reconciliation, justification, sanctification, preservation. But from the selfward side, what a list might be drawn up. Peace, joy, assurance, fellowship with God and His people, delight in His Word, liberty in prayer, weanedness from the world, affections set upon things above. O the inexpressible sweetness of our “espousals” (Jer. 2:2) and of our “first love” (Rev. 2:4). But, in many cases, how soon is that joy dampened and that love is “left”! How wretched then is the soul: like Rachel mourning for her children, we “refused to be comforted.” How sore the perplexity! How Satan seeks to take advantage and persuade such an one that God has “ceased to be gracious.” How passing strange that such a blight should have fallen upon the “fruit of the spirit”! How deeply mysterious the deadness which now rests upon the garden of God’s planting, causing the soul to say with the poet,

*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 once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still,  
But now I feel an aching void  
The world can never fill.*

Yes, it does indeed seem inexplicable that the child of God’s own workmanship should pine away, and to a sense, lie cold and lifeless. Ah, but we must not stop there. We must not sit down in despair and conclude that all is lost. The incident before us does not end at that point: the death of the child was not the final thing! There is “good hope” for us here, important instruction to heed. That “great woman” did not give away to dejection and assume that all hope was gone. Very far from it. And if the Christian who is sensible of spiritual decays, of languishing graces, of his dire need of being renewed in the inner man, would experience a gracious reviving, then he should emulate this mother and do as she did. And again we would point out that she did not faint in the day of trouble and indulge in self-pity: she did not bemoan her helplessness and say, What can I do in the presence of death? And if *she* did not, why should *you*!

Mark attentively what this stricken woman did. 1. She regarded this inexplicable and painful dispensation as a testing of her faith, and she acted accordingly. 2. She moved promptly: without delay she carried the child upstairs and laid him on the prophet’s bed—in anticipation of the Lord’s showing Himself strong on her behalf. 3. She vigorously bestirred herself, going to some trouble in order to obtain relief, starting out on an arduous journey. 4. She refused to be deterred when her own husband half-discouraged her. 5. She sought unto the one who had promised the son in the first instance: the soul must turn to God and cry “quicken Thou me according to Thy Word” (Ps. 119:25). 6. She clung to the original promise and refused to believe that God had ceased to be gracious (v. 28). 7. She declined to be put off by the unavailing intervention of an unregenerate minister (vv. 29-30). 8. She persisted in counting upon the power of Elisha, who was to her the representative of God. And gloriously was her faith rewarded.

Regarding the typical meaning of this miracle in connection with Elisha himself, it teaches us the following points. 1. The servant of God must not be surprised if those in whose conversion he has been instrumental should later experience a spiritual decay, especially when he is absent from them. 2. If he would be used to their restoration, no half measures will avail, nor may he entrust the work to a delegate. 3. Prayers, believing, expectant, fervent prayer, must be his first recourse. 4. In seeking to revive a languishing soul, he must descend to the level of the one to whom he ministers (v. 34) and not stand as on some pedestal, as though he were a superior being. 5. He must not be discouraged because there is not an immediate and complete response to his efforts, but should persevere therein. 6. No cold and formal measures will suffice: he must throw himself into this work heart and soul. 7. The order of recovery was renewed circulation (v. 34), sneezing, eyes opened: the affections warmed, the head cleared (understanding restored), vision. —AWP

## DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE

### *9c. Its Opposition*

In our last two articles we sought to show how pointless is *the reasoning* of Arminians in the opposition which they make to this blessed article of the Faith: in this one and in that which follows we shall seek to demonstrate that their use of Scripture is equally unhappy. If the charges they bring against this doctrine be baseless, if the inferences they draw and the conclusions they make upon it are wide of the mark, certainly their interpretations and applications of Holy Writ concerning this subject are quite erroneous. Nevertheless they *do* appeal directly to God's Word and attempt to prove from its contents that one and another of the saints renounced the Faith, went right back again into the world, and died in their sins; that certain specific cases of such are there set before us of men who not only suffered a grievous fall by the way or entered into a backslidden state, but who totally, finally and irremediably apostatised. In addition to these specific examples, they quote various passages which they contend teach the same fearful thing. It is therefore incumbent upon us to examine attentively the cases they point to and weigh carefully the passages they cite.

Before entering immediately into this task, however, one or two general remarks need to be made that the issue between Calvinists and Arminians may be the more clearly drawn. First, it must be laid down as a broad principle that God's Word cannot contradict itself. It is human to err and the wisest of mortals is incapable of producing that which is without flaw, but it is quite otherwise with the Word of Truth. The Scriptures are not of human origin, but Divine, and though holy men were used in the penning of them, yet so completely were they controlled and moved by the Holy Spirit in their work that there is neither error nor blemish in the Sacred Volume. That affirmation concerns, of course, the original manuscripts: nevertheless we have such confidence in the superintending providence of God, we are fully assured He has guarded His own holy Word with such jealous care, that He has so ordered the translation of the Hebrew and Greek into our mother tongue that all false doctrine has been excluded. Since then the Scriptures are Divinely inspired, they cannot teach in one place it is impossible the child of God should be eternally lost, and in another place that he may be, and in yet another that some have been so.

Second, it has been shown at length in previous sections that God's Word clearly teaches the final perseverance of His saints, and that, not in one or two vague and uncertain verses but in the most positive and unequivocal language of many passages. It has been shown that the eternal security of the Christian rests upon a foundation that "standeth sure," which Satan and his emissaries cannot even shake; that his everlasting felicity depends, ultimately upon nothing in or from himself, but is infallibly secured by the invincibility of the Father's purpose, the immutability of His love, and the certainty of His covenant faithfulness; that it is infallibly secured by the Surety engagements of Christ, by the sufficiency of His atonement, and by the prevalency of His unceasing intercession; that it is infallibly secured by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, by His abiding indwelling, and by the efficacy of His keeping power. The very honor, veracity, and glory of the Triune Jehovah is engaged, yea, pledged in this matter. In order "more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel" the Most High has gone so far as to "confirm it by an *oath*" (Heb. 6:17). Thus, the indefectibility of the Church is made infallibly certain, and no "special pleading" of men, however subtle and plausible, can have the slightest weight in the balance against it.

Third, in view of what has been pointed out in the last paragraph it should be patent to all honest and impartial minds that the cases cited by Arminians as examples of children of God apostatising and perishing must be susceptible of being diagnosed quite differently, and that the Scriptures they appeal to in support of their contention must be capable of being interpreted in full harmony with those which clearly affirm the opposite. It is a basic principle of exegesis that no plain passage of the Word is to be neutralized by one whose meaning appears to be doubtful or ambiguous, that no explicit promise is to be set aside by a parable the significance of which is not readily determined, that no doctrinal declaration is to be nullified by the arbitrary interpretation of a figure or type. That which is uncertain must yield to what is simple and obvious, that which is open to argument must be subordinated to what is beyond any debate. True, the Calvinist must not resort to any subterfuges to avoid a difficulty, nor wrest a passage adduced by his opponents so as to make it teach what he wants. If he be unable to explain a verse he must honestly admit it, for no

single man has all the light; nevertheless, we must believe there *is* an explanation, and that, in full accord with the Analogy of Faith, we must humbly wait upon God for further light.

Fourth, in order to disprove the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints the Arminian is bound to do two things: produce the case of one who was truly born again, and then demonstrate that this person actually died in a state of apostasy, for unless he can do *both* his example is not to the point. It is not sufficient for him to bring forward one who made a credible profession and then repudiated it, for Scripture itself shows emphatically that such a person was never regenerate: the man who “dureth for a while” only, and then in a season of temptation or persecution is “offended” and falls away, is described by Christ as one who “hath not root in himself” (Matt. 13:21)—had the “root of the matter” (Job 19:28) been in him he had survived the testing. To the same effect the apostle declares of such “they went out from us, but they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (1 John 2:19). Nor is it sufficient for the Arminian to point to genuine children of God who backslide or meet with a grievous fall: such was the experience of both David and Peter, yet so far from being abandoned of God and suffered to die in that state, each was graciously brought to repentance and restored to communion with the Lord. Let us now look at the examples advanced.

1. *The case of Adam.* Here is one who was the immediate workmanship of God’s own hands, created in His image and likeness, “blessed” by the Lord and pronounced “very good” (Gen. 1:28,31). Here is one who had no sinful heredity behind him and no corruption within him, instated in the Divine favor, placed in a garden of delights and given dominion over all terrestrial creatures. Yet he abode not in that fair estate, but fell from grace, disobeyed his Maker, and brought upon himself spiritual death. When he heard the voice of the Lord God, instead of fleeing to Him for mercy, he hid himself; when arraigned before Him, instead of penitently confessing his sin he sought to brazen it out, seeking to throw the blame upon Eve and casting the onus upon God for giving her to him. In the sequel his awful doom is plainly intimated, for the Lord God “drove out the man” from Eden and barred his way back to “the tree of life” by stationing around it “cherubim and a flaming sword” (Gen. 3:24). Now, say our opponents, what could be more to the point! Adam certainly had “the root of the matter” within him, and it is equally certain that he apostatised and perished. If sinless Adam fell then obviously a Christian who still has sin indwelling him may fall and be lost.

How, then, is the fatal fall of Adam to be explained consistently with the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints? By calling attention to the immeasurable difference there was between him and them. What does the case of Adam make manifest? This: the defectibility of man when placed in the most favorable and advantageous circumstances. This: that creaturehood and mutability are correlative terms: “man being in honor abideth not” (Ps. 49:12). This: that if the creature is to be kept from committing spiritual suicide a power outside of himself must preserve him. The case of Adam supplies the dark background which brings out more vividly the riches of Divine grace which it is the glory of the Gospel to exhibit. In other words, it serves to demonstrate beyond any peradventure of a doubt the imperative necessity of *Christ* if the creature—be he fallen or unfallen—is to be saved from himself. *There* is the fundamental, tremendous, vital difference between the case of Adam and that of the Christian: he was never in Christ, whereas they are; he was never redeemed by blood of infinite worth, they have been; there was none to intercede for him before God, there is for them.

“Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual” (1 Cor. 15:46). Though the immediate application of these words be unto the bodies of believers, yet they enunciate a general and basic principle in the ways of God with men, in the manifestation of His purpose concerning them. Adam appears on the earth before Christ: Cain was given to Eve before Abel; Ishmael was born before Isaac and Esau before Jacob: the elect are born naturally before they are born again supernaturally. In like manner, the Covenant of Works took precedence over the Covenant of Grace, so far as its revelation was concerned. Thus Adam was endowed with a natural power, namely, that of his own free will, but the Christian is endowed with a spiritual and supernatural power, even God’s working in him “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure.” Adam was given no promise of Divine preservation, but the saints are. Adam stood before God in dependence upon his own creature righteousness, and when that was lost, all the blessings and virtues arising from it were lost; whereas the believer’s righteousness is *in Christ*: “in the Lord have I righteousness and strength” (Isa. 45:24) is his joyous confession, and since his righteousness is in Christ it is an unassailable and non-forfeitable one.

Adam was placed under a covenant of works: do this and thou shalt live, fail to do and thou must die. It was a covenant of strict justice, unmixed with mercy, no provision being made for any failure. The grace or strength or power with which Adam was endowed, was entrusted to himself and his own keeping. But with His saints God has made a "*better covenant*" (Heb. 8:6), of which Jesus is the "Surety" (Heb. 7:22) and *in Him* are treasured up inexhaustible supplies of grace for them to draw upon. This "*better covenant*" is one in which justice and mercy harmoniously blend together, wherein "*grace reigns through righteousness.*" In this "*better covenant*" God has promised to keep the feet of His saints, to put His fear in them so that they "*shall not depart from*" Him (Jer. 32:40). In this covenant God has made provision for our failures, so that "*if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Thus our state by redemption and regeneration is far, far better than was that of our first parents by creation, for we are given what unfallen Adam had not, namely, confirmation of our wills in holiness—though not every *act* is such—for He "*works in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ*" (Heb. 13:21), which He never did in Adam. We may add that most of what has been said above applies to the case of the angels who fell.

2. *The case of King Saul.* It is affirmed by Arminians that this king of Israel was a regenerate man. In support of this contention they appeal to a number of things recorded about him. First, that the prophet Samuel "*took a vial of oil and poured it upon his head and kissed him*" (1 Sam. 10:1). Second, because it is said that "*God gave him another heart*" (v. 9). Third, because we are told "*the Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied*" (v. 11). Then it is pointed out that Saul acted in fearful presumption and disobedience (1 Sam. 13:9,13), thereby displeasing the Lord so that it was announced the kingdom should be taken from him (vv. 13,14). That because of God's displeasure "*the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him*" (16:14). That later, when menaced by the Philistines, he "*enquired of the Lord*" but "*the Lord answered him not*" (28:6). Finally, how that he had recourse to a witch and ultimately fell upon the field of battle sorely wounded, and ended his life by taking a sword and falling upon it (31:4), thereby sealing his doom by the unpardonable act of suicide.

In reply thereto we would say: we grant the conclusion that Saul passed out into an eternity of woe, but we do not accept the inference that he was ever a regenerate man. At the outset it must be remembered that the very installation of Saul upon the throne expressed the Lord's *displeasure* against Israel, for as He declared to the prophet "*I gave thee a king in Mine anger* (cf. 1 Sam. 8:5,6) and took him away in My wrath" (Hos. 13:11). Concerning the three things advanced by Arminians to show that Saul was a regenerate man, they are no proofs at all. Samuel's taking of the vial of oil and kissing him were simply symbolic actions, betokening the official status that had been conferred upon Saul: this is quite clear from the remainder of the verse, where the prophet explains his conduct, "*Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?*" (10:1)—*not* because "*The Lord delighteth in thee*" or because thou art "*a man after His own heart.*" It is not said the Lord gave Saul "*a new heart,*" but "*another.*" Moreover, the Hebrew word (haphak) is never translated "*gave*" elsewhere, but in the great majority of instances "*turned*": it simply means the Lord turned his heart from natural timidity (see 1 Sam. 10:21,22) to boldness (cf. 1 Sam. 11:1-7; 13:1-4). That the Spirit of God came upon him so that he prophesied is no more than is said of Balaam (Num. 22:38; 24:2) and Caiaphas (John 11:51).

3. *The case of Solomon.* This is admittedly the most difficult one presented in Scripture, and it is our belief that God meant it to be such. His history is such a solemn one, his fall so great, his backsliding so protracted, that had his spiritual recovery and restoration to fellowship with the Lord been made unmistakably plain, a shelter would be provided for the careless and presumptuous. In Solomon the monarchy of Israel reached its zenith of splendor, for he reaped the harvest of glory for which David both toiled and suffered, entering into such a heritage as none else before or since has ever enjoyed. But in Solomon, too, the family of David entered *its decline*, and for his sins the judgments of God fell heavily on his descendants. Thus he is set before us as an awful *warning* of the fearful dangers which may surround and then overthrow the loftiest virtues and most dazzling mundane greatness.

That Solomon was a regenerate man we doubt not: that he enjoyed the favor of God to a most marked degree the inspired narrative makes plain. That he suffered a horrible decline in character and conduct is equally evident. Neither the special wisdom with which he was endowed, the responsibilities of the exalted position he occupied, nor the superior privileges which were his, rendered him proof against the temptations he encountered. He fell from his first estate and left his first love. His honor and glory were sadly eclipsed, and so far as the historical account of the books of Kings and Chronicles is concerned, he was

buried in shame, the dark shadows of a misspent life and wrecked testimony shrouded his grave. Over the fate of Solomon there rests such a cloud and silence that many good men conclude he was lost: on the other hand there are those who do not believe that he so fell as to lose the favor of God and perish eternally.

With others, it is our own conviction that before the end of his earthly pilgrimage Solomon was made to repent deeply of his waywardness and wickedness. We base this conviction upon three things. First, the fact that he was the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes (1:1) and that it was penned at a later period of his life than the Proverbs and Canticles (see 1 Kings 4:32). Now to us it seems impossible to ponder Ecclesiastes without being struck with its prevailing note of sadness and without feeling that its writer is there expressing the contrition of one who has mournfully returned from the paths of error. In that book he speaks out the bitter experiences he had gone through in pursuing a course of folly and madness and of the resultant "vexation of spirit"—see especially 7:2, 3, 26, 27 which is surely a voicing of his repentance. Second, hereby God made good His express promise to David concerning Solomon: "I will be his Father and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul" (2 Sam. 7:14,15). Third, centuries after his death the Spirit declared, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was *beloved* of his God" (Neh. 13:26).

4. *The case of Judas.* Though his be not nearly so difficult of solution, nevertheless it is admittedly a very mysterious one, and there are features about it which pertain to none other. But that which more immediately concerns us here is to show there is nothing in this awful example which militates in the least against the doctrine for which we are contending. That Judas is eternally lost there is no room to doubt: that he was ever saved there is no evidence whatever to show. Should it be said that the Lord would never have ordained a bad man to be one of His favored apostles, the answer is, that God is not to be measured by *our* standards of the fitness of things: He is sovereign over all, doing as He pleases and giving no account of His matters. Moreover, He has told us that our thoughts and ways are not as His. The mystery of iniquity is a great deep, yet faith has full confidence in God even where it cannot understand.

That Christ was in nowise deceived by Judas is clear from John 6:64, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him." Furthermore, we are told that He declared on this solemn occasion, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil" (v. 70). Notably and blessedly did that act make manifest the moral excellency of the Saviour. When the Son became incarnate He averred "Lo I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7), and God's will for Him was revealed "in the volume of the Book." In that Book it was written that a familiar friend should lift up his heel against Him (Ps. 41:9). This was a sore trial, yet the perfect Servant balked not at it, but complied therewith by calling a "devil" to be one of His closest attendants. Christ rendered full obedience to the Father's pleasure though it meant having the son of perdition in most intimate association with Him for three years, constantly dogging His steps even when He retired from His carping critics to be alone with the twelve.

Appeal is made by the Arminians to John 17:12, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Yet there is nothing here which supports their contention. Judas was "given to" Christ and "chosen" by Him as an *apostle*, but he was never given to Him by a special act of grace, nor "chosen in Him" and united to Him as a member of Him, as the rest of the apostles and as all the election of grace are. This is clear from His words in John 13:18, "I speak not of you all (cf. vv. 10,11): I know whom I have chosen"; that is chosen unto eternal life, for otherwise He had chosen Judas equally with the others. Let it be carefully noted that in John 17:12 Christ says *not* "none of them is lost *except* the son of perdition." In using the disjunctive "but" He sharply contrasted Judas from the rest, showing he belonged to an entirely different class: compare Matthew 12:4; Acts 27:22; Revelation 21:27, where the "but" is in direct opposition to what precedes.

Christ's statement in John 17:12 was designed to show that there had been no failure in the trust committed to Him, but rather that He had complied with His commission to the last detail. It also served to assure the eleven of this, that their faith might not be staggered by the perfidy of their companion. It gave further proof that He had not been deceived by Judas, for before he betrayed Him, He terms him "the son of perdition." Finally, it declared *God's* hand and counsel in it: Judas perished "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Among the reasons why God ordered that there should be a Judas in the apostolate, we suggest it was in order that an impartial witness might bear testimony to the moral excellency of Christ: though in the



closest possible contact with Him by day and night, he could find no flaw in Him, but confessed “I have betrayed the *innocent* blood” (Matt. 27:4). It was not from saving grace Judas “fell,” but from “ministry, and apostleship” (Acts 1:25). —AWP

## LOVE REPROVING

Some time ago we received the following inquiry from one of our readers: "Do you think it possible to be too critical of Christians (?) nowadays? The reason I put a question-mark after 'Christians' was because I wondered if some of them really are born again of the Spirit. We cannot always tell, can we? Are we not, at all events, to speak the Truth in love? This is a very practical question with us just now." It is a practical question for *all* who (by grace) really desire to conduct themselves according to the revealed will of God and follow the example which Christ Himself has left us. The wording of these questions indicates that the inquirer does not have in mind the matter of how I should act toward one who has wronged me personally, but rather, what is my duty unto professing Christians with whom I come into contact and whose ways grieve me and whose walk causes me to doubt their regeneration? As others of our readers may be exercised upon these points, we will here amplify the answer given to our friend.

First, let us turn the light of Holy Writ upon this matter: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev 19:17). There are three things which call for our prayerful response. First, this is a plain precept bidding us to rebuke an erring brother: it is not optional but obligatory; the words "in any wise" signify that this duty must not be omitted under any pretence. God requires His people to uphold the demands of righteousness. *He* will not wink at sin, nor must *they*. Second, God would also correct our innate self-centredness. We are so occupied with our own wellbeing as to be in danger of neglecting the good of our neighbour. This verse plainly denotes it is a lack of love for others if we see them commit sin with indifference and make no effort to bring them to repentance and forsake their evil course. A mild, plain, and seasonable reproof is the best way of expressing our solicitude for an erring brother, though it be distasteful to us and unwelcome to him. Third, the marginal rendering "that thou bear not sin for him" means that thou become not an accessory of the act. Silence gives consent: if I rebuke not, I condone evil and share the guilt.

The basic issue which is here raised narrows down to this: *what is it* for a Christian to "act in love" towards others, particularly the wayward? Few words have been employed more inaccurately and loosely in recent years than has "love." With a great many people it is but a synonym for moral laxity, weakness of character, a taking the line of least resistance, a quiet tolerating of what is felt to be wrong. Multitudes of parents have supposed they were treating their children "lovingly" when they overlooked their folly, made excuses for their wildness, and refused to discipline them for disobedience. They have prided themselves on being "kinder" toward their offspring than the "stern measures" which were meted out to them in their own youth. But it is *laxity* and not love which allows a child to have its own way: "he that spareth his rod *hateth* his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov 13:24). Let those of our readers who have young children ponder Proverbs 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15, 17, and remember those are the words of Him who *is* Love!

That which we have referred to in the above paragraph has been by no means confined to home life: the same evil has held sway in the "churches." Leniency and weakness have overridden righteousness and faithfulness. Instead of maintaining and enforcing the discipline which God's Word enjoins the great majority of the "churches" have winked at even glaring offences, refusing to deal with those who walk disorderly. And this reprehensible laxity was misnamed "love." A maudlin sentimentality which shrank from "hurting the feelings" of others ousted all concern for the glory of Christ and the honour of His "house." This was one of the inevitable effects of the one-sided preaching of the pulpit, where the love and grace of God were constantly proclaimed while His justice and wrath were studiously ignored. God is "light" (1 John 1:5) as well as "love" (1 John 4:8), holy as well as merciful, severe as well as good (Rom 11:22), and unless the balance be preserved between those *two sides* of the Divine character, not only will He be grievously misrepresented, but the most serious results will follow.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God" (1 John 4:7). Christian love is not a thing of nature, but is entirely supernatural. It is not a part of our "personality" or anything which issues from our "disposition," but is a Divine communication received at the new birth. It is neither a sentiment, emotion, nor passion, but a holy principle which is spiritual in its origin, its nature, its characteristics, its manifestations. But alas, many of God's own children are to-day so ill-taught, so ignorant, so carnal, that they are unable to recognize true brotherly love when they see it in exercise. Their thinking is so much coloured by the world, they are so much corrupted by mingling

with hollow professors, that they mistake pleasantries and cordiality for spiritual love. They forget that some who make no profession at all are naturally genial, kindly, warm-hearted, courteous, sympathetic. Christian love is neither the milk of human kindness nor creature good-will perfected by grace. Much that passes for it is merely the amiability and affability of the flesh.

How are we to know when we truly “love one another”? When we feel our hearts drawn out to them because of their affableness, their charming demeanour, their “sweet” ways? No, for appearances are deceptive. A winsome smile, a hearty hand-shake, a kiss, is no sign of the new nature, as Judas’ kissing of Christ demonstrated. Nor does a suave style or honeyed-mouth expressions prove anything to the point: rather does the Christian need to be doubly on his guard in the company of those who flatter him: ponder Proverbs 20:19; 26:28; Psalm 12:3. Then how are we to know when we “love one another” and when they love us? When we truly seek their highest good: when they aim at our spiritual wellbeing. The one who evidences the most spiritual love for me is he who is ever seeking to promote my eternal interests by wise counsels, by salutary warnings, by timely rebukes, by godly encouragements; and if I be spiritual I shall love him in return for his piety, his heavenly-mindedness, his faithfulness.

“Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov 27:5,6). Ah, my reader, little as you may like it, the one who “wounds” you the most may be the best friend you have, who has the most spiritual love for you. But the one who winks at your faults, is silent about your sins, and refuses to rebuke you for what is dishonouring to God, is your enemy and *hates* you! Alas, what a low plane even the people of God are now living upon. Many of them are so easily ruffled that, the least criticism of them and they are “hurt,” offended; which shows they have more self-love than the love of God in them. O for grace to say with the Psalmist, “Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (141:5). “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Prov 9:8)—how few of the “wise” are now left!

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments” (1 John 5:2). Go back to the previous verse for the connection: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him.” We love the brethren because they have been made “partakers of the Divine nature”: it is *that*, and nothing pertaining to the old creation, which is the uniting bond. How that lifts us entirely out of the realm of nature, into the spiritual sphere! It is love for God which produces love for those who bear His image. And what is the touch-stone of my love to God? Not rapturous feelings, nor beautiful words of devotion, nor heartily singing His praises, but by keeping His commandments: John 14:15, 21, 24; 15:10. The strength of my love for God is to be gauged by the measure of my obedience to His Word. The same principle holds good in my relations with the brethren: love to them will be manifested by efforts to encourage them in the path of obedience—and that necessarily involves rebuking them for disobedience.

To come more immediately to the opening questions. “Is it possible to be too critical of Christians (?) nowadays?” Why the qualifying “nowadays”? Has God lowered His standard to meet these evil times? Is it permissible or expedient for me to compromise because the present generation is so lax and carnal? Do not the days in which our lot is cast call for a clearer drawing of the line between the Church and the world? If so, should not this help to determine my conduct toward the individual? We are not unmindful that large numbers hold the view that God requires less from people in degenerate times, but we know of nothing in His Word which supports them. Rather are such days the very time when the Christian most needs to show his colours, when shallowness and hollowness marks the religious profession all around there is greater urgency for us to make manifest the reality that we are “strangers and pilgrims” in this scene. The Scriptures are just as much the Rule and the sole rule, for *us* to walk by, as they were for our more godly forebears and in the Day to come *we* shall be judged by them as truly as they will be. It is never right to do wrong—nor to condone wrong.

John, the apostle of love, began his third epistle with these words, “The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love *in the Truth*.” What a needed word is this for to-day, when so much that passes for love, even in avowedly Christian circles, is nothing but a sickly sentimentality at the expense of the Truth. One of the outstanding cries in the religious world is to this effect though we have differed in our beliefs and practices let us now sink our differences and come together in love. When pastor of a church in Sydney we were regarded as a narrow-minded bigot because on what Rome calls “good Friday” we refused to take part in a “united Communion service,” where Fundamentalists and Modernists, Trinitarians and Unitarians,

Creationists and Evolutionists were invited to gather together and thereby express “fraternal love” for one another. What a travesty and mockery! The wisdom which is from above is “*first pure, then peaceable*” (James 3:17). The more I am walking in the Truth and the more my brother is doing the same, the more cause have we to love one another.

It may be helpful to answer the opening question by changing the form of it: Is it possible to be too critical *of myself*? May I permit myself a certain amount of indulgence, exclude some part of my life from the control of God, be less strict about some matter than others? In the light of such verses as “Take us the foxes, the *little* foxes, that spoil the vines” (Song of Sol 2:15), “grow up into Him in *all* things, which is the Head, even Christ” (Eph 4:15), “*whatsoever* ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31) is there any difficulty in answering that question! If not, am I justified in countenancing a lower standard for others than I seek to apply to myself? Am I not required to love my neighbour as myself? And am I doing so if I gloss over something in him which I know to be against his or her spiritual interests and can only work ill for him? If it be my plain duty to warn him against physical evils, then on what ground am I justified in being silent when I see spiritual danger menacing him?

But let it be pointed out that I certainly am not warranted in being “critical” about the conduct of others, unless I am accustomed to unsparingly judge *myself*. It is the very worst species of hypocrisy to point the finger of condemnation at another while I am guilty of something equally bad. I must first cast out the beam from mine own eye before I am qualified to perform so delicate an operation as seeking to remove a mote from my brother’s eye. Since there has been a “beam” in mine own eye that is cause for humility, and if the humility be real and deep it will preserve me from acting proudly and haughtily when seeking not to “criticise,” but—*help* my brother. Nothing is more un-Christianlike than for me to berate an erring one in a spirit of self-righteousness and in tones of self-superiority, rather than in the spirit of “consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). If I am to wash my brother’s feet from the defilements of the way, then I must needs take the place of lowliness in order to serve him.

On the other hand, we must guard against going to an opposite extreme. If pride and haughtiness are to be reprehended, mock humility or even an undue occupation with our own frailty and faultiness is not to be commended. If we must wait until we are blameless then there are many precepts of Scripture we cannot act upon; if we must tarry until our own character and conduct be faultless then we are disqualified from rebuking anybody. We greatly fear that many have created their own difficulty or deterrent through a wrongful appropriation of those words “he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). How often have we heard professing Christians say, when it had become their manifest duty to admonish another, Who am I to cast stones at others? It should be remembered that John 8:7 was not spoken to conscientious saints, jealous of the honour of the Lord, anxious to promote the good of others, but to hypocritical pharisees, who were deliberately seeking to ensnare Christ.

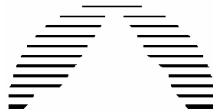
Is it possible to be too critical of Christians? It is certainly possible to expect too much from them and then be irritated because they fail to produce what we look for. If our thoughts be governed by Scripture, which declares “in many things we all offend” (James 3:2), if we bear in mind the frailties—some of them glaring ones—of the most eminent characters mentioned in the Word, if we constantly remind ourselves of how far short we come of the standard God has set before us, then we ought to be preserved from looking for anything approaching perfection in Christians. They too are men and women of “like passions” as ourselves. Hence the force of “*forbearing* one another in love” (Eph 4:2): yet that must not be twisted into “winking at one another’s faults” or condoning sin under the pretence of love.

No, we cannot “always tell” whether a professing Christian be a regenerate or unregenerate person, and therefore it behoves us to be cautious and conservative, lest we be guilty of giving that which is holy unto dogs (Matt 7:6). It is a very serious and solemn matter to encourage a deluded soul in his deception, as we *do* when we lead him to believe we regard him as a Christian. But how is this to be avoided? By a withholding the tokens of fellowship—for example, refusing to address as “Brother” or “Sister”—from all whom we stand in doubt of, especially from those whose walk is manifestly worldly and contrary to the precepts of Scripture. While we cannot read the hearts of those we mix with, we can test their outward life by the Word, and if its general tenor be opposed to the requirements of holiness and be contrary to the example of Christ, we certainly are not warranted in regarding them as children of God.

Certainly we should be “loving in rebuking sin.” It is in love God chastens His people, that they “might be partakers of His holiness” (Heb 12:6,10). We are bidden to “speak the Truth in love,” and Christ was

doing so as truly when denouncing the pharisees in Matthew 23 as when He was comforting His disciples in John 14, but does that mean His countenance, the tone of His voice, or His general bearing was the same? He ever spoke the Truth in love, but if some would re-read the four Gospels with this particular thought in mind it might cause them to revise, or at least modify their present conception of what speaking “in love” really is. Something depends upon the fault committed: mole-hills are not to be magnified into mountains. There are times when it is fitting to rebuke “sharply” (Titus 1:13), as Christ did in Luke 24:25, but for the most part it should be done in “the spirit of meekness” (Gal 6:1). There is a happy medium between harshness and firmness, as there is between sentimentality and tenderness.

We know of a small church, far removed from these parts, the pastor and members of which are seeking to act one toward another in a spirit and manner which we deem highly commendable. Its minister tells us “I have never seen a congregation more pliable to the Word of God, more willing to rectify wrongs,—endeavouring to walk as Christ would have them walk. Each member is interviewed by the joint-elders-group concerning their position listed in the church discipline; and further, each one applying for membership specifies that it is his desire to have a pastor who will deal with the sin problems of that member as a shepherd would the problems of the sheep.” That admirably expresses our own convictions: love ministering to the needy as a shepherd to the sheep. —AWP



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