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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR, Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR, Arthur W. Pink

THE HOLY SPIRIT

23. The Spirit Comforting (Part 1)

The saving work of the Spirit in the heart of God’s elect is a gradual and progressive one, conducting the soul step by step in the due method and order of the Gospel to Christ. Where there is no self-condemnation and humiliation there can be no saving faith in the Lord Jesus, “Ye...repented not afterward, *that ye might believe him*” (Mat 21:32) was His own express affirmation. It is the burdensome sense of sin which prepares the soul for the Saviour, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are *heavy laden*” (Mat 11:28). Without conviction there can be no contrition and compunction. He that sees not his wickedness and guilt never mourns for it. He that feels not his filthiness and wretchedness never bewails it.

Never was there one tear of true repentance seen to drop from the eye of an unconvicted sinner. Equally true is it that without illumination there can be no conviction, for what is conviction but the application to the heart and conscience of the light which the Spirit has communicated to the mind and understanding, Acts 2:37. So, likewise, there can be no effectual illumination until there has been a divine quickening, for a dead soul can neither see nor feel in a spiritual manner. In this order, then, the Spirit draws souls to Christ, He brings them from death unto life, shines into their minds, applies the light to their consciences by effectual conviction, wounds and breaks their hearts for sin in compunction, and then moves the will to embrace Christ in the way of faith for salvation.

These several steps are more distinctly discerned in some Christians than in others. They are more clearly to be traced in the *adult* convert, than in those who are brought to Christ in their youth. So too they are more easily perceived in such as are drawn to Him out of a state of *profaneness* than those who had the advantage of a pious education. Yet in

them, too, after conversion, the exercises of their hearts—following a period of declension and backsliding—correspond thereto. But *in this order* the work of the Spirit is carried on, ordinarily, in all, however it may differ in point of clearness in the one and in the other. God is a God of order both in nature and in grace, though He be tied down to no hard and fast rules.

By His mighty work of illumination and conviction, with the humiliation which is wrought in the soul, the Spirit effectually weans the heart forever from the comfort, pleasure, satisfaction, or joy that is to be found in sin, or in any creature, so that his soul can never be quiet and contented, happy or satisfied, till it finds the comfort of God in Christ. Once the soul is made to feel that sin is the greatest of all evils, it sours for him the things of the world, he has lost his deep relish for them forever, and nothing is now so desirable unto him as the favour of God. All creature comforts have been everlastingly marred and spoiled, and unless he finds comfort in the Lord there is none for him anywhere.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hos 2:14). When God would win His Church’s heart to Him, what doeth He? He brings her into “*the wilderness*,” that is, into a place which is barren or devoid of all comforts and delights, and then and there He “speaks comfort to her.” Thus too He deals with the individual. A man who has been effectually convicted by the Spirit is like a man condemned to die, what pleasure would be derived from the beautiful flowers as a murderer was led through a lovely garden to the place of execution! Nor can any Spirit-convicted sinner find contentment in anything till he be assured of the favour of Him whom he has so grievously offended. And none but *God* can “speak comfortably” to one so stricken.

Though God acts as a sovereign, and does not always shine in the same conspicuous way into the hearts of all His children, nevertheless, He brings them all to *see light* in His light, to know and feel that there can be no salvation for them but in the Lord alone. By the Spirit’s powerful illuminating and convicting operations, the sinner is made to realize the awful disparity there is between God and himself, so that he feebly cries, “How can a poor wretch like me ever stand before such a holy God, whose righteous law I have broken in so many ways, and whose ineffable majesty I have so often insulted?” By that light, the convicted soul eventually is made to feel its utter inability to help itself, or take one step toward the obtainment of holiness and happiness. By that light, the quickened soul both sees and feels there can be no access to God, no acceptance with Him, save through the Person and blood of Christ, but how to get at Christ the stricken soul knows not.

“And I will give her her vineyards *from thence*, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope” (Hos 2:15), such is the comforting promise of God to the one whom He proposes to “allure” or win unto Himself. First, He hedges up the sinner’s way with “thorns” (Hos 2:6), piercing his conscience with the sharp arrows of conviction. Second, He effectually battles all his attempts to drown his sorrows and find satisfaction again in his former lovers (v. 7). Third, He discovers his spiritual nakedness and makes all his mirth to cease (vv. 10-11). Fourth, He brings him into the “wilderness” (v. 14), making him feel his case is desperate indeed. And then, when all hope is gone, when the poor sinner feels there is no salvation

for him, “a door of hope” is opened for him even in “the valley of Achor” or “trouble,” and what is that “door of hope” but the *mercy* of God!

It is by putting into his mind thoughts of God’s mercy that the Spirit supports the fainting heart of the convicted sinner from sinking beneath abject despair. Now it is that the blessed Spirit helps his infirmities with “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26) and in the midst of a thousand fears he is moved to cry, “God be merciful *to me* a sinner” (Luk 18:13) But “we must through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22)—true alike of the initial entrance into the kingdom of grace and the ultimate entrance into the kingdom of glory. The Lord heard the “groaning” of the poor Hebrews in Egypt, and “had respect unto them” (Exo. 2:23-25), nevertheless, He saw it was good for them to pass through yet sorer trials before He delivered them. The deliverer was presented to them and hope was kindled in their hearts (Exo. 4:29-31), yet the time appointed for their exodus from the house of bondage had not yet arrived.

And *why was* the deliverance of the Hebrews delayed after Moses had been made manifest before them? Why were they caused to experience yet more sorely the enmity of Pharaoh? Ah, the Lord would make them to feel their *impotency* as well as their wretchedness, and would exhibit more fully *His* power over the enemy. So it is very often (if not always) in the experience of the quickened soul. Satan is now permitted to rage against him with increased violence and fury (Zec 3:1). The devil accuses him of his innumerable iniquities, intensifies his remorse, seeks to persuade him that he has committed the unpardonable sin, assures him he has transgressed beyond all possibility of divine mercy, and tells him his case is hopeless. And, my reader, were the poor sinner left to himself, the devil would surely succeed in making him do as Judas did!

But, blessed be His name, the Holy Spirit does not desert the convicted soul, even in its darkest hour, He secretly upholds it and grants at least temporary respites, as the Lord did the Hebrews in Egypt. The poor Satan-harassed soul is enabled “*against* hope” to “believe *in* hope” (Rom 4:18) and to cry, “Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die” (Psa 79:11). Yet before deliverance is actually experienced, before that peace which passeth all understanding is communicated to his heart, before the redemption “which is in Christ Jesus” becomes his conscious portion, the soul is made to feel its complete impotency to advance one step toward the same, that it is entirely dependent upon the Spirit for that faith which will enable him to lay hold of Christ.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

83. The Demands of Faith (12:1)

Our present verse is a call to constancy in the Christian profession. It is an exhortation unto steadfastness in the Christian life. It is a pressing appeal for making personal holiness our supreme business and quest. In substance our text is parallel with such verses as

Matthew 16:24, Romans 6:13, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:12-14, Titus 2:12, 1 Peter 2:9-12. This summarization of the Christian's twofold duty is given again and again in the Scriptures, the duty of mortification and of vivification, the putting off of the "old man" and the putting on of the "new man" (Eph 4:22-24). Analyzing the particular terms of our text, we find there is, first, the duty enjoined, to "run the race that is set before us." Second, the obstacles to be overcome, "lay aside every weight" etc. Third, the essential grace which is requisite thereto, "patience." Fourth, the encouragement given, the "great cloud of witnesses."

The opening "Wherefore" in our text looks back to 10:35-36, where the apostle had urged, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." That exhortation had been followed by a lengthy proof of the efficacy of persevering faith to enable its possessors to do whatever God commands, however difficult; to endure whatever God appoints, however severe; to obtain what He promises, however seemingly unattainable. All of this had been copiously illustrated in Chapter 11, by a review of the history of God's people in the past, who had exemplified so strikingly and so blessedly the nature, the trials, and the triumphs of a spiritual faith. Having affirmed the *unity* of the family of God, the oneness of the Old and New Testament saints, assuring the latter that God has provided some better thing for us, the apostle now repeats the exhortation unto steadfast perseverance in the path of faith and obedience.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us*" (Heb 12:1). Here the apostle applies the various illustrations given in the preceding chapter, making use of them as a grand motive to perseverance in the Christian faith and state. "If all the saints of God lived, suffered, endured, and conquered by faith, shall not we also? If the saints who lived before the incarnation, before the redemption was accomplished, before the High Priest entered the heavenly sanctuary, trusted in the midst of discouragements and trials, how much more ought we who know the name of Jesus, who have received the beginning, the installment of the great Messianic promise?" (Adolph Saphir, 1831-1891). Herein we are shown that only then do we read the Old Testament narratives unto profit when we draw from them the incentives to practical godliness.

In Hebrews 11, we have had described at length many aspects and characteristics of *the life of faith*. There we saw that a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than day-dreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. By faith, Noah built an ark, Abraham separated from his idolatrous neighbors and gained a rich inheritance, Moses forsook Egypt and became leader of Israel's hosts. By faith, the Red Sea was crossed, Jericho captured, Goliath slain, the mouths of lions were closed, the violence of fire was quenched. A spiritual faith, then, is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one. The *same* line of thought is continued in the passage which is now before us, the *same* branch of truth is there in view again, only under a figure—a figure very emphatic and graphic.

"Let us *run* with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). Here the Christian is likened unto an athlete and his life unto the running of a race. This is one of a number of

figures used in the New Testament to describe the Christian life. Believers are likened to shining lights, branches of the vine, soldiers, strangers and pilgrims. The last-mentioned more closely resembling the figure employed in our text, but with this difference, travelers may rest for awhile and refresh themselves, but the racer must *continue* running or he ceases to be a "racer." The figure of the race occurs frequently, both in the Old and New Testament, Psalm 119:32, Song of Solomon 1:4, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7. Very solemn is that word in Galatians 5:7, "ye *did* run well." The Lord, in His mercy, grant that *that* may never be said of writer or reader.

The principal thoughts suggested by the figure of the "race" are rigorous self-denial and discipline, vigorous exertion, persevering endurance. The Christian life is not a thing of passive luxuriation, but of active "*fighting* the good fight of faith!" (1Ti 6:12). The Christian is not called to lie down on flowery beds of ease, but to run a race, and athletics are strenuous, demanding self-sacrifice, hard training, the putting forth of every ounce of energy possessed. I am afraid that in this work-hating and pleasure-loving age, we do not keep this aspect of the truth sufficiently before us, we take things too placidly and lazily. The charge which God brought against Israel of old applies very largely to Christendom today, "Woe to them that are *at ease* in Zion" (Amos 6:1), to be "at ease" is the very opposite of "running the race."

The "race" is that life of faith and obedience, that pursuit of personal holiness to which the Christian is called by God. Turning from sin and the world in penitence and trust to Christ is not the finishing-post, but only the starting-point. The Christian race begins at the new birth and ends not till we are summoned to leave this world. The prize to be run for is heavenly glory. The ground to be covered is our journey through this life. The track itself is "set before us," marked out in the Word. The rules to be observed, the path which is to be traversed, the difficulties to be overcome, the dangers to be avoided, the source and secret of needed strength, are all plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures. If we lose, the blame is entirely ours—if we succeed, the glory belongs to God alone.

The prime thought suggested in the figure of running the race set before us is not that of speed, but of self-discipline, whole-hearted endeavour, the calling into action of every spiritual faculty possessed by the new man. In his helpful commentary, John Brown (1784-1858) pointed out that a race is *vigorous* exercise. Christianity consists not in abstract speculations, enthusiastic feelings, or specious talk, but in directing all our energies into holy actions. It is a *laborious* exertion, the flesh, the world, the devil are like a fierce gale blowing against us, and only intense effort can overcome them. It is a *regulated* exertion, to run around in a circle is strenuous activity, but it will not bring us to the goal. We must follow strictly the prescribed course. It is *progressive* exertion, there is to be a growth in grace, an adding to faith of virtue, etc. (2Pe 1:5-7), a reaching forth unto those things which are before.

"Let us *run* with patience the race that is set before us." We only "run" when we are very anxious to get to a certain place, when there is some attraction stimulating us. That word "run," then, presupposes the heart eagerly set upon the goal. That "goal" is complete deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, perfect conformity to the lovely image of Christ, entrance into the promised rest and bliss on High. It is only as *that* is kept steadily

in view, only as faith and hope are in real and daily exercise, that we shall progress along the path of obedience. To look back will cause us to halt or stumble. To look down at the roughness and difficulties of the way will discourage and produce slackening, but to keep the prize in view will nerve to steady endeavour. It was thus our great Exemplar ran, "Who for the JOY *that was set before him*" (Heb 12:2).

But let us now consider, secondly, the means prescribed, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." That might be tersely expressed in several different forms, let us relinquish those things which would impede our spiritual progress. Let us endeavour with might and main to overcome every hindering obstacle. Let us attend diligently unto the way or method which will enable us to make the best speed. While sitting at our ease, we are hardly conscious of the weight of our clothes, the articles held in our hands, or the cumbersome objects we may have in our pockets. But let us be aroused by the howlings of fierce animals, let us be pursued by hungry wolves, and methinks that none of us would have much difficulty in understanding the meaning of those words, "Let us lay aside every *weight!*" (Heb 12:1).

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1). While no doubt each of these expressions has a definite and separate force, yet we are satisfied that a certain school of writers err in drawing too sharp and broad a line of distinction between them, for a careful examination of their contention will show that the very things they consider to be merely "weights," are, in reality, *sins*. The fact is that in most quarters there has been, for many years past, a deplorable lowering of the standard of divine holiness, and numerous infractions of God's righteous laws have been wrongly termed "failures," "mistakes," and "minor blemishes," etc. Anything which minimizes the reality and enormity of sin is to be steadfastly resisted. Anything which tends to excuse human "weaknesses" is to be rejected. Anything which reduces that standard of absolute perfection which God requires us to constantly aim at—*every* missing of which is a *sin*—is to be shunned.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1) is parallel with, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross" (Mat 16:24), and "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2Co 7:1). In other words, this dehortation is a calling upon the Christian to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13), to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11). There are two things which racers discard, all unnecessary burdens and long flowing garments which would entangle them. Probably there is a reference to both of these in our text, the former being considered under "weights," or those things we voluntarily encumber ourselves with, but which should be dropped. The latter, "the sin which doth so easily beset us" referring to inward depravity.

"Let us lay aside every weight" is a call to the sedulous and daily mortification of our hearts to all that would mar communion with Christ, it is parallel with "*denying* ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Ti 2:12). Everything which requires us to take time and strength away from God-appointed duties, everything which tends to bind the mind to earthly things and hinders our affections from being set upon things above, is to be cheerfully relinquished for Christ's sake. Everything which impedes my progress in

running the race which God has set before me is to be dropped. But let it be carefully recognized that our text makes *no* reference to the dropping of *duties* which we have no right to lay aside. The performing of real and legitimate duty is never a hindrance to the spiritual life, though from a wrong attitude of mind and the allowance of the spirit of *discontent*, they often become so.

Many make a great mistake in entertaining the thought that their spiritual life is being much hindered by the very things which should, by divine grace, be a real help to them. Opposition in the home from ungodly relatives, trials in connection with their daily work, the immediate presence of the wicked in the shop or office, *are* real trials (and God intends they *should* be—to remind us we are still in a world which lieth in the wicked one, to exercise our graces, to prove the sufficiency of His strength), but they need not be hindrances or “weights.” Many erroneously suppose they would make much more progress spiritually if only their “circumstances” were altered. This is a serious mistake and a murmuring against God’s providential dealings with us. *He* shapes our “circumstances” as a helpful discipline to the soul, and only as we learn to rise above circumstances, and walk with God in them, are we running “the race that is set before *us*” (Heb 12:1). The *person* is the same no matter what “circumstances” he may be in!

While the “weights” in our text have no reference to those duties which God requires us to discharge—for *He* never calls us to anything which would draw us away from communion with Himself, yet they *do* apply in a very real sense unto a multitude of cares which many of God’s people *impose upon themselves*—cares which are a grievous drag upon the soul. The artificial state in which many people now live, which custom, society, the world, imposes, *does* indeed bind many heavy burdens on the backs of their silly victims. If we accept that scale of “duties” which the fashion of this world imposes, we *shall* find them “weights” which seriously impede our spiritual progress, spending valuable time in reading newspapers and other secular literature in order to “keep up with the times,” exchanging “social calls” with worldlings, spending money on all sorts of unnecessary things so as to be abreast of our neighbors, are “weights” burdening many, and those “weights” are *sins*.

By “weights” then, may be understood every form of intemperance or the immoderate and hurtful use made of any of those things which God has given us “richly to *enjoy*” see 1Ti 6:17. Yes, to “enjoy” be it noted, and not only to *use*. The Creator has placed many things in this world—like the beautiful flowers and the singing birds—for our pleasure, as well as for the bare supply of our bodily needs. This should be borne in mind, for there is a danger here, as every where, of lopsidedness. We are well aware that in this age of fleshly indulgence the majority are greatly in danger of erring on the side of laxity, yet in avoiding this sin, others are in danger of swinging to the other extreme and being “righteous over much” (Ecc 7:16), adopting a form of monastic austerity, totally abstaining from things which Scripture in nowise prohibits.

Each Christian has to decide for himself, by an honest searching of Scripture and an earnest seeking of wisdom from God, *what* are the “weights” which hinder *him*. While on the one hand, it is wrong to assume an haughty and independent attitude, refusing to weigh in the balances of the sanctuary the conscientious scruples and prejudices of fellow-

Christians, on the other hand, it is equally wrong to suffer any to lord it over our consciences and deprive us of our Christian liberty. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." It is not the lawful use of God's creatures, but the intemperate abuse of them which Scripture condemns. More die from over eating than over drinking. Some constitutions are injured as much by coffee as by whisky. Some are undermining their health by a constant round of exertions. Others enervate themselves by spending too much time in bed.

The Greek word for "weights" is "tumor or swelling," so that an excrescence, a superfluity, is what is in view. A "weight" is something which we are at liberty to cast aside, but which instead we choose to retain. It is anything which retards our progress, anything which unfits us for the discharge of our God-assigned duties, anything which dulls the conscience, blunts the edge of our spiritual appetite, or chokes the spirit of prayer. The "cares of this world" weigh down the soul just as effectually as does a greedy grasping after the things of earth. The allowance of the spirit of envy will be as injurious spiritually as would an attendance at the movies. Fellowshiping a Christ-dishonouring "church" quenches the Spirit as quickly as would seeking diversion at the dance hall. The habit of gossiping may do more damage to the spiritual life than the excessive smoking of tobacco.

One of the best indications that I *have* entered the race is the discovery that certain things, which previously never exercised my conscience are a hindrance to me, and the further I "run," the more conscious shall I be of the "weights." And the more determined I am, by God's grace, to reach the winning post, the more readily shall I drop them. So many professing Christians never seem to have any "weights," and we never see them *drop* anything. Ah, the fact is, they have never entered the race. O to be able to say with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phi 3:8). When this is true of us, we shall not find it difficult, but rather easy to obey that injunction, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, [or woman] when thou perceivest not in him the *lips* of knowledge" (Pro 14:7), and so with many other Scriptural exhortations.

"And the sin which doth so easily beset [Greek, "encompass"] us" (Heb 12:1). As we have already pointed out, the writer regards the "weights" as external temptations which have to be resisted, evil habits which are to be dropped, and "the sin" as referring to indwelling corruption, with a special reference (as the whole context suggests) to the workings of *unbelief*, compare Hebrews 3:13. It is true that each of us has some special form of sin to which we are most prone, and that he is more sorely tempted from one direction than another, but we think it is very clear from all which precedes our text that what the apostle has particularly in mind here is that which most seeks to hinder the exercise of *faith*. Let the reader ponder John 16:8-9.

"This is confirmed by the experience of all who have been exercised in this case, who have met with great difficulties in, and have been called to suffer for, the profession of the Gospel. Ask of them what they have found in such cases to be their most dangerous enemy, what hath had the most easy and frequent access unto their minds, to disturb and dishearten them, of the power thereof they have been most afraid. They will all answer with one voice, it is the evil of their own unbelieving hearts. This hath continually attempted to entangle them, to betray them, in taking part with all outward temptations.

When this is conquered, all things are plain and easy unto them. It may be some of them have had their particular temptations which they may reflect upon, but any other evil by sin, which is *common unto them all*, as this *is*, they can fix on none" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

But *how* is the Christian to "lay aside" indwelling sin and its particular workings of unbelief? This injunction is parallel with Ephesians 4:22, "That ye put *off* concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." And how is *that* to be done? By heeding the exhortation of Romans 6:11-12, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." In other words, by faith's recognition of my legal oneness with Christ and by drawing from His fullness. Indwelling sin is to be "laid aside" by daily mortification (Rom 8:13), by seeking grace to resist its solicitations (Ti 2:11-12), by repenting, confessing, and forsaking the effects of its activities (Pro 28:13), by diligently using the means which God has provided for holy living, Galatians 5:16.

"Run *with patience* the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). Perseverance or endurance is the prime prerequisite for the discharge of this duty. The good-ground hearer brought forth fruit "with patience" (Luk 8:15). We are bidden to be "followers of them who through faith *and patience* inherit the promises" (Heb 6:12). The "race" appointed is a lengthy one, for it extends throughout the whole of our earthly pilgrimage. The course is narrow, and to the flesh, rough. The racer often becomes disheartened by the difficulties encountered. But "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).

But how is this needed "patience" to be acquired? A twofold answer is given, the second part of which will be before us in the next article. First, by heeding the encouragement which is here set before us, "*Wherefore* seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us* lay aside....*let us* run." The reference is to the heroes of faith mentioned in the previous chapter, they depose a testimony for God, and speak unto future generations to be constant as they were. They witness to how noble a thing life may be when it is lived by faith. They witness to the faithfulness of God who sustained them, and enabled them to triumph over their foes, and overcome their difficulties. In likening these numerous witnesses unto a "cloud," there is no doubt a reference unto the cloud which guided Israel in the wilderness, they *followed* it all the way to Canaan! So must we follow the noble example of the Old Testament saints in their faith, obedience, and perseverance.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us*" (Heb 12:1). This is mentioned as an incentive, to console and assure us we are not alone. As we look around at the empty profession on every side, and behold the looseness and laxity of so many who bear the name of Christ, Satan seeks to make us believe that we are wrong, too "strict," and rebukes us for our "singularity." No doubt he employed the same tactics with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, but they heeded him not. Nor should we. We are *not* "singular", if faithful to Christ we are following "the footsteps of the flock" (Song 1:8). Others before us have trod the same path, met with the same hindrances,

fought the same fight. *They* persevered, conquered, and won the crown, then “*let us* run.” That is the thought and force of the opening words of our text.

“We who have still to walk in the narrow path which alone leads to glory are encouraged and instructed by the cloud of witnesses, the innumerable company of saints, who testified amid the most varied circumstances of suffering and temptation, that the just live by *faith*, and that faith is the victory which overcometh the world. The memory of those children of God, whose lives are recorded for our learning and consolation, animates us, and we feel upheld as it were by their sympathy and by the consciousness, that although few and weak, strangers and pilgrims on earth, we belong to a great and mighty, nay, a victorious army, part of which has already entered into the land of peace” (Adolph Saphir).

THE LIFE OF DAVID

35. His Capturing Zion

In 2 Samuel 5:6-9, a brief record is given of David wresting the stronghold of Zion out of the hands of the Canaanites, and of his making it the capital of his kingdom. This, it is to be noted, is the first thing recorded of our hero after all the tribes of Israel had made him their king. By noting that order we obtain the key to the typical significance of the incident which is now to be considered by us. In the previous article, we pointed out that the coronation of David, after the season of his humiliation, was a beautiful foreshadowing of the exaltation of his Son and Lord, the enthronement on high of that blessed One who had been, in the main, despised and rejected by men on the earth. It therefore follows that the noble exploits of David after he came to the throne, strikingly prefigured the work and triumphs of our ascended and glorified Redeemer. It is thus, by looking beneath the mere historical upon the pages of the Old Testament, that we discover “in the volume of the book” it is written of *Christ*.

The long-cherished desire of David’s heart—implanted there by God Himself—had been accomplished, and he was now the head and governor of Israel. His real work had only just commenced, his most glorious achievements were still to be accomplished. His being crowned king over all Israel was but preparatory unto the royal conquests he was to make. His previous exploits only served to manifest his qualification for the honoured position and the important work which God had appointed him. So it was with the Antitype. The enthronement of the Mediator at the right hand of the Majesty on high was but the introduction to the stupendous undertaking which God had assigned Him, “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (1Co 15:25)—a very plain intimation that His “reign” has already commenced. The life-work, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, simply laid the foundation upon which His royal conquests are now being achieved.

It is a great and serious mistake made by many to suppose that the Lord Jesus is now *inactive*, and to regard His being “seated” as denoting a state of inertia—such Scriptures as Acts 7:55 and Revelation 2:1 ought at once to correct such an idea. The word “sat” in Scripture marks an end *and a beginning*, the process of preparation is ended, and the established order is begun—cf. Genesis 2:2, Acts 2:3. We say again that the real work of Christ (His atonement but laying the foundation thereof) began only after He was invested with “all power [i.e. “authority”] in heaven and in earth” see Mat 28:18. This was plainly announced in the Messianic Psalms, after God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion, He was to ask of Him and the heathen would be given Him for His inheritance, and He would reign over them with a “rod of iron” (Psa 2). “*Rule* thou in the midst of thine enemies,” was the Father’s word to Him (Psa 110).

To His chosen servants the Lord Jesus declared “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:20). On the day of Pentecost Peter declared, “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, *he* [Jesus] hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Act 2:33). Later, we are told, “they went forth, and preached every where, *the Lord working with them*, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mar 16:20). There is much in the book of Revelation which makes known to us the various activities in which the ascended Saviour is engaged, into which we cannot enter. But sufficient has here been produced to show that the King of saints is now wielding His mighty scepter to good effect.

Most blessedly was that which has been before us above typed out by the crowned David. Upon his ascension to the throne, he was far from indulging in ease or self-luxuriation. It was now that his best achievements were accomplished. In that section of 2 Samuel, which we are entering, we behold David capturing the stronghold of Zion, vanquishing the Philistines, providing a resting-place for the holy ark, and being concerned in building a temple for the worship of JEHOVAH. So blessed is each of these incidents, so rich is their typical and spiritual import, that we purpose, the Lord enabling, to devote an article unto the separate consideration of each of them. May the Spirit of truth graciously undertake for both writer and reader, giving us eyes to see and hearts to appreciate the “wondrous things” hidden away in this portion of God’s Holy Word.

“And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites” (2Sa 5:6). “If Salem, the place which Melchizedek was king of, was Jerusalem (as seems probable from Psalm 76:2), it was famous in Abraham’s time; Joshua in his times found it the chief city of the south part of Canaan, Joshua 10:1, 3. It fell to Benjamin’s lot (Jos 18:28), but joined close to Judah’s (Jos 15:8). The children of Judah had taken it (Jdg 1:8), but the children of Benjamin suffered the Jebusites to dwell among them (Jdg 1:21); and they grew so upon them that it became a city of Jebusites (Jdg 19:11). Now the very first exploit David did after he was anointed king over all Israel, was to gain Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jebusites; which, because it belonged to Benjamin, he could not well attempt till that tribe, which long adhered to Saul’s house, submitted to him” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither” (2Sa 5:6). The wording of

the second half of this verse appears rather ambiguous, and we believe the translation given in the "Companion Bible" is to be preferred, "thou shalt not come in hither, for the blind and the lame shall drive thee away." It was the language of utter contempt. The Jebusites were so assured of the impregnability of their stronghold that they considered the feeblest of their men would be quite sufficient to defend it against any attack of David and his army.

The "Jebusites" were Canaanites who inhabited the country surrounding Jerusalem, and who occupied the fortress of Zion. The tribe of Judah had once failed to drive them out (Jos 15:63), and later the children of Benjamin met with no more success (Jdg 1:21). So secure did they now deem themselves that when David purposed its capture, they met him with insulting ridicule. In this we have an illustration of the fact that the enemies of God are often most confident of their strength when the day of their fall is most imminent. Thus also it frequently appears in the history of the salvation of God's elect, their case seems to be most hopeless immediately before the hand of divine mercy snatches them as brands from the burning. Thus it was with the dying thief, delivered at the eleventh hour; with Saul of Tarsus, as he was persecuting the church; with the Philippian jailor, as he was on the point of committing suicide. Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

"Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (2Sa 5:7). The literal or material "Zion" was a steep hill which lay just outside Jerusalem, to the south west, on which had been built a fortress to protect the city. It had two heads or peaks, Moriah, on which the temple was afterwards erected, and the other on which was built the future residence of the kings of Israel. So steep and inaccessible was Zion that, like a smaller Gibraltar, it had remained in the hands of Israel's foes. But undeterred by the natural difficulties and unmoved by the contemptuous confidence of the Jebusites, David succeeded in wresting it from the enemy, and became the founder of that Jerusalem which existed from that time onwards.

"Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (2Sa 5:7). Previously, he had reigned for seven years over Judah "in Hebron" (2Sa 5:5), but now that he had been anointed king over all Israel he cast his eyes toward Jerusalem, as a preferable metropolis, and a more suitable seat of his extending empire. But as long as the hill of Zion was occupied by the military Jebusites, they would retain their command of the lower city. His first step, therefore, was, by the help of God, to dispossess the enemy of their stronghold. There David henceforth dwelt, as a conqueror, as in a castle (1Ch 11:7). There he fixed his royal abode, and there he swayed his scepter over the whole land of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba.

"So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward" (2Sa 5:9). Millo seems to have been the town hall, or statehouse, a place of public convention, compare 2 Kings 12:20, 2 Chronicles 32:5. Around Millo, David erected such buildings as became his capital or seat of government, for the reception of the court which he kept. "And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him" (2Sa 5:10). The tide of fortune had turned, and the once despised fugitive now waxed great in power and reputation, in wealth and honour, subduing his enemies, and enlarging his dominion. But all his success and prosperity was

entirely owing to JEHOVAH showing Himself strong on his behalf, without His enablement, none of us can accomplish anything good, John 15:5.

Now there would be little or no difficulty in our perceiving the typical significance of the above were it not that so many of our minds have been blinded by the errors of modern “dispensationalism.” A careful study of the connections in which “Zion” is found in the Psalms and Prophets makes it clear that “Zion” was the name by which the Old Testament church was usually called. “For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed” (Psa 132:13-17). Let the dubious (and also the interested) reader ponder such verses as Psalms 74:2; 87:5; 102:13; 133:3; Isaiah 51:16.

The Old Testament church was designated “Zion” after the mount on which the Temple was built, whither the tribes of Israel went up to worship JEHOVAH, who dwelt between the cherubim. This name was duly transferred to the New Testament church, which is grafted into the Old, as the teaching upon the “olive” tree in Romans 11 shows, and as the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 2:19-22 and 3:6 expressly states. Such passages as Romans 11:26 (note carefully it is “out of Sion” and *not* “unto Sion”), Hebrews 12:22, 1 Peter 2:6, Revelation 14:1, make it plain that the New Testament church is denominated “Sion,” for the church is now God’s abode upon earth, His “temple” (2Co 6:16), His “city” (Eph 2:19), His “Jerusalem” (Gal 4:26—“which is above” is not to be understood astronomically, but means “which *excels*”). Thus, all that is spoken of “Zion,” of “the city of God,” of “Jerusalem” in the Old Testament in a *spiritual* way belongs unto Christians now, and is for their faith to appropriate and enjoy.

The history of Jerusalem and Zion (for they are inseparably connected) accurately foreshadowed what is found spiritually in the antitype. The first reference to the same in Scripture presents that city as being under the benign sceptre of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), so, originally, the church was blest with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:3). But, next, we see this city no longer in subjection to the servant of God, but fallen into the hands of the heathen, so the church apostatised in Adam, God’s elect sinking to the natural level of the non-elect. Zion now became inhabited by a race who were under the curse of God (Gen 9:25), so, in consequence of the Fall, God’s elect were by nature “the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3). For centuries Zion refused to be subject unto the people of God (Jdg 1:21), so the Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” etc. (Eph 2:11-12).

But eventually, Zion was subdued and captured by David, and made his royal residence, the Temple also being erected upon one of its mounts. Thus the stronghold of the enemy was converted into a habitation of God and became the throne of His government upon earth. Wondrous figure was this of Christ’s conquest of the *Gentile church* (Act 15:14) unto Himself, wresting it out of the hand of the enemy, bringing it into subjection unto Himself, and setting up His throne in the hearts of its individual members. Announcement to this effect was made by the Saviour when He declared, in view of His

immediate death (Joh 12:32), “Now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (Joh 12:31). Satan was to be dethroned and driven from his dominion, so that Christ would “draw” unto Himself many of those over whom the devil had reigned (Eph 2:2). It is to be noted that the tense of the verb there denotes that the “casting out” of Satan would be as *gradual* as the “drawing” (Alford).

At the cross, the Lord Jesus “spoiled principalities and powers,” and at His ascension He “made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15 and cf. Eph 4:8). At Calvary, Satan’s hold over the world was broken, “the prince of this world is judged” (Joh 16:11). Then it was that the “strong man” (the devil) was “overcome” by One stronger than himself, his armour being taken from him, and his “spoils” (captives) divided (Luk 11:21-22). And a *manifestation* of this fact is made every time an elect soul is delivered “from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13). Christ’s frequent casting out of demons from the bodies of men during the days of His flesh presaged His delivering the souls of His redeemed from the dominion of Satan during this Gospel era.

That which our present type sets forth is not the Lord Jesus paying the ransom-price for the purchase of His people (particularly, those among the *Gentiles*), but His actual redeeming or delivering them from the power of the enemy. As David’s capture of Zion *followed* his coronation, so that work his conquest prefigured pointed to the victorious activities of Christ *after* His ascension. It is that which was foretold in Psalm 110:1-3. First, “Sit thou at my right hand.” Second, “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength [the Gospel in the power of the Spirit] out of Zion.” Third, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” One by one those whom the Father gave to Christ are subdued by His grace, made willing to throw down the weapons of their warfare against His Son, and His throne is set up in their hearts, 2 Corinthians 10:5.

It is beautiful to note that the meaning of the word Zion is “sunny” or “shone upon,” as facing the south, basking in the rays of the warm sun. So the spiritual Zion, delivered by Christ (through His post-ascension activities) from the dominion of Satan, has been brought into the unclouded favour of God. The type is completed by what we read of in 2 Samuel 5:11, “And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house.” In the sending of those messengers to David by *Hiram*, proffering to build him a house, we have the foreshadowment of Christ’s being acknowledged by the *Gentiles* (cf. Isa 60:3), and their being built into His spiritual house (Eph 2:22; 1Pe 2:5).

THE COVENANTS OF GOD

3b. The Adamic (Continued)

In the preceding article, we pointed out at some length that when Adam stood in Eden as a responsible being before his Creator, he stood there as the *Federal Head* of our race,

that he legally transacted on the behalf of all his posterity, that in the sight of the divine law we were all so absolutely identified with him as to be accounted “in Adam.” Hence what he did, all are regarded as having done—when he sinned, we sinned—when he fell, we fell—when he died, we died. The language of Romans 5:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 is so plain and positive on this point as to leave no valid room for any uncertainty. Having viewed, then, the *representative* office or position which Adam occupied, we turn to consider the covenant which God made with him at that time. But before so doing, let us observe how admirably equipped Adam was to fill that eminent office and transact for all his race.

It is exceedingly difficult, if not altogether impossible in our present state for us to form any adequate conception of the most excellent and glorious endowment of man in his first estate. Negatively, he was entirely free from sin and misery. Adam had no evil ancestry behind him, no corruption within him, nothing in his body to distress him. Positively, he was made in the image and likeness of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, endued with a wisdom and holiness to which Christians are as yet, in themselves, strangers. He was blest with unclouded communion with God, placed in the fairest of environments, given dominion over all creatures here below, and graciously provided with a suitable helpmate. Fair as the morning was that blissful heritage into which Adam was estated. Made “upright” (Ecc 7:29) and endowed with full ability to serve, delight in, and glorify his Creator.

Though pronounced by God Himself, “very good” (Gen 1:31) on the day of his creation, Adam was, nevertheless, a *creature*, and as such, subject unto the authority of the One who had given him being. God governs all rational beings by law, as the rule of their obedience to Him. To that principle there is no exception, and in the very nature of things cannot be, for God must enforce His rights as Lord over all. Angels (Psa 103:20), unfallen man, fallen men, redeemed men, are subject to the moral government of God. Even the beloved Son, when He became incarnate, was “made under the law” (Gal 4:4). Moreover, in the case of Adam his character was not yet *confirmed*, and therefore, like the angels, he must be placed on probation, subjected to trial, to see whether or no he would render allegiance to the Lord his Maker.

Now the law which God gave to Adam, under which He placed him, was threefold, natural, moral, and positive. By the first, we mean that subjection to his Creator—acting for His honour and glory—was constituted the very law of his being. Being created in the image and likeness of God, it was his very *nature* to delight himself in the Lord, and reproduce (in his creature measure) God’s righteousness and holiness. Just as the animals are endowed with a nature of instinct which prompts them to choose and do that which makes for their well-being, so man in his pristine glory was endued with a nature which prompted him to do that which is pleasing unto God, and that which promoted his own highest interests—the remains of which appear in fallen man’s rationality and conscience.

By the “moral” law which was given to Adam by God, we mean that he was placed under the requirements of the ten commandments, the summary of which is “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.” Nothing less than that was due unto Adam’s Maker, and nothing

short of it became him as an upright creature. By “positive” law, we mean that God also placed certain restrictions upon Adam which had never occurred to him from either the light of nature or from any moral considerations, instead, they were sovereignly appointed by God and were designed as a special *test* of Adam’s subjection to the imperial will of his King. The term “positive law” is employed by theologians not as antithetical to “negative,” but in contrast from those laws which are addressed to our *moral* nature, prayer is a “moral” duty, baptism is a “positive” ordinance.

This threefold law under which Adam was placed may be clearly discerned in the brief records of Genesis 1 and 2. The marriage between Adam and Eve illustrates the first, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:24), any infraction of the marital relationship is a violation of the very law of *nature*. The institution and consecration of the Sabbath exemplifies the second, “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work” (Gen 2:3), a procedure that would be inexplicable except as furnishing the ground for a like procedure on the part of man, for otherwise the hallowing and benediction spoken of must have lacked both a proper subject and a definite aim—in every age man’s observance of the holy Sabbath has been made the supreme test of his *moral* relation to the Lord. The command for Adam to care for the garden (“dress it and keep it,” Gen 2:15) demonstrates the third, even in the unfallen state man was not to be idle and shiftless.

From the above it is plainly evident that there was the distinct recognition of and outward revelation to Adam of those three great branches of duty which appertain to man in every possible condition of mortal existence, and which unitedly comprehend every obligation upon man in this life, namely, what he owes to God, what he owes to his neighbor, and what he owes to himself—those three embrace everything. The sanctification of the Sabbath, the institution of marriage, and the command to dress and keep the garden were revealed as outward ordinances, covering the three classes of duties, each of supreme importance in its own sphere, the spiritual, the moral, and the natural. Those intrinsic elements of divine law are immutable, they preceded the covenant of works, and would have remained had the covenant been kept—as they have survived its breach.

But there was need for something of a still more specific kind to test man’s adherence to the perfect rectitude incumbent upon him, for in Adam humanity was on trial, the whole race not only having been potentially created in him, but being federally represented by him. “The question, therefore, as to its proper decisiveness, must be made to turn on conformity to an ordinance at once reasonable in its nature and specific in its requirements—an ordinance which the simplest should understand and respecting which no uncertainty could exist whether it had been broken or not. Such in the highest degree was the appointment respecting the tree of knowledge of good and evil, forbidden of God to be eaten on pain of death—an appointment positive in its character, in a certain sense arbitrary, yet withal perfectly natural” (Patrick Fairbairn, 1805-1874, “The Revelation of Law in Scripture”).

Adam was now subjected to a simple and specific test as to whether the will of God was sacred in his eyes. Nothing less than perfect conformity of heart and unremitting obedience in act to the whole revealed will of God could be required of man. The command not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree was now made the decisive test of his general obedience. The prohibitory statute was a “positive” precept. It was not sinful *per se* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but only so because God had forbidden it. It was, therefore, a more suitable test of faith and obedience than a “moral” statute would have been, submission being required for no other reason than the sovereign will of God. At the same time let it be clearly observed that disobedience of that “positive” precept certainly involved defiance of the “moral” law, for it was a failure to love God with all the heart, it was contempt of divine authority, it was coveting that which God had forbidden.

On the basis of the threefold constitution under which God had placed Adam—amenable to natural, moral, and positive law; on the basis of his threefold responsibility—to perform the duty which he owed unto God, unto his neighbour, unto himself; and on the basis of the threefold equipment with which he had been endowed—created in the image of God, pronounced “very good,” indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and thus fully furnished to discharge his responsibility, God entered into a solemn compact with him. Clothed in dignity, intelligence, and moral excellence, Adam was surrounded on every side by exquisite beauty and loveliness. The occupant of Eden was more a being of heaven, than of earth, an embodiment of wisdom, purity, and uprightness. God Himself deigned to visit and cheer him with His presence and blessing. In body perfectly sound, in soul completely holy, in circumstances blissfully happy.

The ideal fitness of Adam to act as the head of his race, and the ideal circumstances under which the decisive test was to be made must forever shut every fair and honest mouth against objecting to the arrangement God proposed to Adam, and the fearful consequences which his sad failure have brought down upon us. It has been well said, “Had we been present—had we and all the human race been brought into existence at once—and had God proposed to us that we should choose one of our number to be our representative that he might enter into covenant with him on our behalf—should we not, with one voice, have chosen our first parent for this responsible office? Should we not have said, ‘He is a perfect man and bears the image and likeness of God,—if any one is to stand for us let him be the man.’ Now,—since the angels who stood for themselves, fell—why should we wish to stand for ourselves. And if it be reasonable that one stand for us—why should we complain, when God has chosen the same person for this office, that we would have chosen, had we been in existence, and capable of choosing ourselves?” (George Sayles Bishop, 1836-1914).

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). The contracting parties in this covenant were God and Adam. First, God as supreme Lord, prescribing what was equitable. God as *goodness* itself, promising communion with Himself—in which man’s happiness principally lies—while treading the path of obedience and doing that which was well-pleasing to his Maker. But God also as *justice* itself, threatening death upon rebellion. Second, Adam considered both as man and as the head and representative of his posterity.

As man, he was a rational and responsible being, endowed with sufficient powers to fulfill all righteousness, standing not as a feeble babe, but a fully developed man—a fit and fully qualified subject for God to enter into covenant with him. As head of the race, he was now called upon to transact in the nature and strength with which the Creator had so richly furnished him.

Yet it is clear that the covenant of works proceeded on the assumption that man in his original condition—though “made upright”—was *capable of* falling, just as the covenant of grace proceeds on the assumption that man, though fallen and depraved, is—through Christ—capable of being restored. “God made man male and female, with righteousness and true holiness, having the law of God in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their will, which was subject to change” (Westminster Confessions of Faith). In the closing words of that quotation some light is cast upon that mysterious question, How could a sinless creature *first sin*? How could one made “upright” fall? How could one whom God Himself had pronounced “very good” give ear to the devil, apostatize, and drag down himself and his posterity to utter ruin?

While in our present state perhaps it is not possible for us to fully solve this profound problem, yet it is our conviction that we may perceive the direction in which the solution lies. In the first place, Adam was *mutable* or subject to change. Necessarily so, for mutability and creaturehood are correlative terms. There is only One “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17). The essential attributes of God are incommunicable, for the Deity to bestow omniscience, omnipotence, or immutability on others would not be to bring into existence creatures, but would be raising up *Gods*, equal with Himself. Therefore, while Adam was a perfect creature, he was but a *creature*, mutable and not immutable. And being mutable, he was subject to change either for the better or for the worse, and hence, liable to fall.

In the second place, Adam was constituted a *responsible* being, a moral agent, being endowed with a free will, and therefore he was capable both of obedience and disobedience. Moreover, though the first man was endowed with both natural and spiritual wisdom amply sufficient for all his needs, leaving him entirely without excuse if he made a false and foolish choice, nevertheless, he was but *fallible*, for infallibility pertains unto God alone, as Job 4:18 more than hints. And therefore being fallible, Adam was capable of erring, though to do so was culpable to the highest degree. Mutability and fallibility are the conditions of existence of every *creature*, and while they are not blemishes, yet they are potential dangers, which can only be prevented from working ruin by the creature constantly looking to the Creator for His upholding grace.

In the third place, as a responsible being, as a moral agent, as one who was endowed with free will, Adam had necessarily to be *placed on probation*, submitted to a real test of his fealty unto God, before he was *confirmed*, or given an abiding standing in his creature perfections. Because Adam was a *creature*, mutable and fallible, he was entirely *dependent* upon his Creator, and therefore he must be put upon trial to show whether or no he would assert his *independency*, which would be open revolt against his Maker and the repudiation of his creaturehood. Every creature must necessarily come under the moral government of

God, and for free agents that necessarily implies and involves two possible alternatives—subjection or insubordination. The absolute dominion of God over the creature, and the complete dependence and subjection of the creature to God, holds good in every part of the universe and throughout all ages. The inherent poison in every error and evil is the rejection of God's dominion, of man's dependence upon his Maker, or the assertion of his independency.

Being but mutable, fallible and dependent, the noblest and highest creature of all is *liable* to fall from his fair estate, and can only be preserved therein by the sovereign power of his Creator. Being endowed with free will, man was capable both of obedience and disobedience. Had He so pleased, God could have upheld Adam, and that *without* destroying his accountability or infringing upon his liberty, but unless Adam had been left to *his own* creature wisdom and strength there had been no *trial* of his responsibility and powers. Instead, God offered to man the opportunity of being confirmed as a holy and happy creature, secured on the condition of his own personal choice, so that his probation being successfully closed, he had been granted a firm standing before God. But God permitted Adam to disobey, to make way for the more glorious obedience of Christ—suffered the covenant of works to be broken that the far better covenant of grace might be administered.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Carson on Esther (Part Eleven)

If times of trouble are before us—if God is about to call His people to suffer for His sake, let us in the book of Esther alleviate our sorrow with the consideration that God rules in the storm. He can disperse the darkest clouds. He can preserve us in the midst of the thunderbolts. So He can give us peace and joy in the most violent death. Is it not consolation that persecution is by *His* appointment, and that in the end it will turn out for His glory as well as our good?

Even persecution may be commissioned to benefit the Church of God. It may effect what prosperity has kept far away. It may bring Christians into one body, as they have the one Lord. Their common sufferings will tend to unite them and the afflictions of the house of God will tend to its purification. The millions who are Christians only in name, and who now by their union with the people of God defile the temple, and cramp the exertions of believers, may then take their proper place. The interests, the prejudices, and the habits of Christians combine to keep them in ignorance of the nature of Christ's kingdom, and of the laws and institutions with which He has furnished them. When worldly temptations seek to deceive, Christians may become more tractable, and what they did not learn in the time of their peace, they may soon learn in a time of danger. A man may learn at the stake what he could not see in the pulpit.

The consideration that the whole course of affairs on earth is directed by the overruling hand of Providence, as it is kept so conspicuously before our eyes in this book, may be highly useful to Christians in regulating their zeal in the cause of God. The mountains that lie in the way of the Gospel appear so impassable that any means that promise to facilitate the passage is sometimes eagerly employed, *without reference to the authority of divine appointments*. The end is made to sanctify the means. Evil is done that good may come. Means are employed that God hath not ordained—that God hath forbidden. Any means are supposed warrantable, if it appears that the thing cannot otherwise be effected. It is to this baneful principle that the union of the church with the world owes its origin. The nations of the earth, in all their sins, are made a sort of Christians by name, and the enjoyment of the ordinances appointed only for the people of God. In all the worshipping assemblies in Christendom, separate the disciples, and what a poor figure will they make in the eyes of the world! How would they support the Gospel! To act on this principle would, in the opinion of many, be to banish Christianity from the earth. However reluctant some may be to desecrate the ordinances of Christ, they think they *must* do it, or suffer Satan to triumph over Christ. They complain of the decay of religion—they pray for better times—they strive to breathe life into the dry bones—they warn sinners of their danger, but still they give *them* the ordinances of Christ, for they cannot work without them. Numbers *are necessary for the existence of a sect*, and Christ's ordinances must be misapplied *in order to promote the system*.

Now I intreat Christians who act on this principle, to consider what an affront it casts on the Head of the Church. Who is it that governs the world? Has the Lord Jesus given up to the devil the power He received from His Father after His resurrection? Does He not still hold all power in heaven and on earth? Does not the book of Esther show that His providence extends to all events? May they not learn here that their Lord directs the actions even of His enemies to fulfill His will? Look here, and behold a few scattered Jews defending themselves, and destroying their enemies in all the provinces of the Persian empire. In the cause of God, then, *let them employ no means but such* as are sanctioned by the appointment of Christ. Let the ark of God itself fall, rather than put a hand to it contrary to divine authority.

It is from the same principle that such an eagerness is always discovered to enlist the authority of kings and rulers in the cause of Christ, although they themselves may give all the weight of their example to the kingdom of Satan. Christians in general seem to think that there is no hope of protection for Christianity from civil rulers unless they are nominally embodied in their ranks. For the sanction of power they barter the ordinances of Christ. In the book of Esther let them learn that their Lord is the King of kings, and Lord of lords—that *He rules in the midst of His enemies* (Psa 110:2)—and that He can make the most tyrannical princes the protectors of His people when He pleases. Ahasuerus, who had by an irreversible decree doomed to destruction the whole people of God, was, *without* any conversion to God, *without any proselytism to Judaism*, made the most zealous friend that ever appeared in favour of the house of Abraham. He not only with the utmost zeal co-operated for their deliverance from the intended destruction, but gave up to them, to the immense injury of his kingdom, all their enemies in his dominions. He gave them unlimited authority to kill their enemies and spoil their substance. The kings of the earth

are the ministers of God, as such they ought to be honored, *but give them not the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ*. If they are not Christians by being born again through faith in the great propitiation made on the *cross*, and walk in newness of life, *let them not be called Christians*—give them not the ordinances of the house of God.

In the book of Esther, the conductors of the various religious societies ought to take a lesson. I am afraid there are few of them that do not need it. The craft, the management, the bartering of the Christian name with Neologians and heretics for co-operation, money, and countenance, that some of them have employed, would induce one to think that *they consider the Lord Jesus Christ to be dethroned*, and that His friends must work without Him till the restoration. I rejoice in all the good done by any of them. I wish I could convince them that they will do the more good *the more closely they abide by* the means afforded by the Head of the Church. Jesus rules on the earth as well as in heaven, and those who honour Him He will honour to do His will. What have the Samaritans to do in building the temple of God? Has Christ lost command over the treasures of the earth, that we must have recourse to the bounty of Satan? He will give us his contribution, no doubt, but he will have a niche in the edifice in which a statue must be worshipped. It would be more pleasant for me to be bandying compliments with the religious world, than to incur their displeasure by acting as their censor. But wholesome admonition is better than praise. Though the generality may despise it, some Christians may receive benefit. They may be led to see that in the propagation of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus has no need of the countenance or co-operation of His enemies. The book of Esther will teach them that He can effect His purposes, even through those ignorant of Him, without embodying them among His disciples.

In the book of Esther, the Christian may see the union of two things apparently irreconcilable—the free agency of man and the overruling appointment of God. Philosophers have exhausted their ingenuity in endeavouring to fathom this abyss, but their line has proved too short. Some have erred with respect to both sides of the question. They have held that actions are not free, and that they are necessary in such a sense as to render man inexcusable in guilt. On this foundation some ground the duty of charity. If a man sins under a necessity of this kind, there is no propriety in blaming him for his conduct. In the book of Esther, we may see that man's actions are his own, yet that they are, in another point of view, the appointment of God. We see here that man is accountable and blamable when he sins, yet we see that these very sinful actions are the appointment of God to effect His own purposes.

The philosophers who contend for the freedom of human actions, generally deny the eternal decrees of God, because their wisdom cannot reconcile these two things with one another. And must not the penetration of philosophers fathom the deep things of God? Proud worms! can nothing be true of God, but what your minds can penetrate?

In reading the writings of philosophers on this subject, nothing can be more evident than that one party has proved that men act freely, and that the other proves as clearly that the foreknowledge of God implies the certainty of all actions as they are foreknown. In so far each is right on his own side, but wrong as to the other. They will fight as long as the devil has use for the discussion, for on their own principle, the dispute can never be settled.

The human mind is not able to fathom the subject. They are struggling to grasp infinity. They are both right, and both wrong. Truth lies between them, each of them has a hold of its skirt, but neither of them entirely possesses it. It cannot be seized, except it is believed without being comprehended. This removes it altogether out of the road of the philosopher, for he cannot receive anything for which he cannot account.

While the philosophers dispute, and under the specious name of lovers of wisdom, prove themselves fools, let the Christian, from the book of Esther behold *the freedom of human actions in union with divine appointment*. Let him not affect to strut in the buskins of the schools and pretend to explain what on this subject he receives *on the authority of God*. Let him receive it because the Word of God exhibits it, not because his wisdom can fathom the depth of the divine counsels. The most illiterate man of God, who receives with meekness what the Scriptures lay before him, is, with respect to the deepest subjects of philosophy, a greater philosopher than any of the mere sons of science. They may seize truth by the garment and tear away a shred, but the Christian, believing the divine testimony, possesses the substance.

I am sorry to be obliged to remark that Christians too generally affect the philosopher on this subject. They have separated what God has joined together because they could not comprehend the union, and, from prepossession in favour of one part of truth, have been led to give up or explain away the other. Some, out of zeal for the doctrine of the freedom of the human will, have, in opposition to the clearest testimony of Scripture, denied the decrees of God. While others, from a false zeal for the honour of the divine counsels, have denied the freedom of human action. Both of them, inconsistently with their character as Christians, act on the same principle of unbelief with the philosopher. *They deny what they cannot comprehend*. Like infidels, they assume it as a first principle, that nothing is to be received as truth that is not comprehensible to the mind of man.

When will Christians cease from their own wisdom? when will they in all things submit to the testimony of God? when will they practically admit that God may know, and therefore call upon them to believe what *they* cannot comprehend? Will man never cease to make himself equal with God? will the Christian never learn that he is nothing? Disciple of Jesus, go to the book of Esther and acquaint yourself with the deepest point of philosophy. There see the solution of the question that has occupied the wise from the very cradle of philosophy, but which philosophy has never solved—which it is not capable of solving, or any other principle than submission to the testimony of God. Degrade not your Master, my fellow Christians, by modeling His doctrine according to the profane speculations of the schools. If any man will be really wise, let him become a fool in the estimation of the world, that he may be wise in the estimation of his God.

Let us read the book of Esther, and in the view of the overruling government of God, let us console ourselves in contemplating the melancholy prospect of this world in which the counsels of nations in every age are conducted by the enemies of God. We hear much of Christian nations and Christian rulers, but where is the nation in which the counsels of the ungodly do not prevail? where is the government that is conducted strictly on Christian principles? Statesmen, it is true, seek to manage Christianity like every other state engine, and therefore affect to support it. But where is the assembly of legislators, in which it is

visible that the Lord God is feared as He ought to be feared? This is a gloomy subject for the contemplation of the man of God. But let him turn his eye to the book of Esther, and behold the Lord God Omnipotent reigning and working His will by the very instruments employed by Satan to defeat His purposes. God rules even in the counsels of the ungodly. God will glorify Himself even by the very empire of Satan.

It is a heart-rending thing to reflect on the sin and misery that prevail in this world. Let us relieve ourselves, in some measure, by this consideration, that God has done all things according to the counsel of His own will. Is the Almighty disappointed in His work of creation? has Satan prevailed over Him because of his strength? or will any real dishonour attach to God by the rebellion of men and angels? Impossible—away with the accursed thought! These clouds before my eyes are dark and lowering—I cannot penetrate that gloom—I see nothing but confusion and wretchedness. The very glory of this world is vanity. Its highest enjoyments are unsatisfying. But though I cannot see through this dreadful darkness, I will look beyond it by the eye of faith. *God reigns and all things therefore must issue in the glory of His name and the happiness of His people.*—Alexander Carson, 1853.

N.B. We highly commend the above series of articles (which began in the January issue) to the attention of thoughtful readers, and would urge the student to re-read them. Mr. Carson preserved the balance of truth to an extent that very few writers did, happily he was not bound by any human system or creed, nor was he the slave of any sect or party. Much in these articles is highly illuminating, and all is most timely for the day in which our lot is cast. They honour God by giving Him His rightful place, may His blessing rest upon them.

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

9. Its Evidence

In Romans 3:28, the apostle Paul declared, “that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” and then produces the case of Abraham to prove his assertion. But the apostle James, from the case of the same Abraham, draws quite another conclusion, saying, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam 2:24). This is one of the “contradictions in the Bible” to which infidels appeal in support of their unbelief. But the Christian, however difficult he finds it to harmonize passages apparently opposite, knows there cannot be any contradiction in the Word of *God*. Faith has unshaken confidence in the inerrancy of Holy Writ. Faith is humble too and prays, “That which I see not teach thou me” (Job 34:32). Nor is faith lazy. It prompts its possessor unto a reverent examination and diligent investigation of that which puzzles and perplexes, seeking to discover the subject of each separate book, the scope of each writer, the connections of each passage.

Now the design of the apostle Paul in Romans 3:28 may be clearly perceived from its context. He is treating of the great matter of a sinner's justification before God. He shows that it cannot be by works of the law, because by the law all men are condemned, and also because if men were justified on the ground of their own doings, then boasting could not be excluded. Positively he affirms that justification is by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. His reasoning will appear the more conclusive if the whole passage (Rom 3:19-28) be read attentively. Because the Jews had a high regard of Abraham, the apostle proceeded to show in the fourth chapter of Romans that Abraham was justified in that very way—apart from any works of his own, by faith alone. By such a method of justification the pride of the creature is strained and the grace of God is magnified.

Now the scope of the apostle James is very different, his epistle was written to counteract quite another error. Fallen men are creatures of extremes, no sooner are they driven out of the false refuge of trusting to their own righteousness, than they fly to the opposite, and no less dangerous error of supposing that, since they cannot be justified by their own works, that there is no *necessity* whatever for good works, and no *danger* from ungodly living and unholy practice. It is very clear from the New Testament itself that very soon after the Gospel was freely proclaimed, there arose many who turned the grace of God into "lasciviousness," that this was not only quickly espoused in theory, but soon had free course in practice. It was therefore the chief design of the apostle James to show the great wickedness and awful danger of unholy practice and to assert the imperative necessity of good works.

The apostle James devoted much of his epistle to the exposing of any empty profession. In his second chapter, particularly, he addresses himself unto those who rested in a *notion* which they called "faith," accounting an intellectual assent to the truth of the Gospel sufficient for their salvation, though it had no spiritual influence upon their hearts, tempers, or conduct. The apostle shows their hope was a vain one, and that *their* "faith" was not a whit superior to that possessed by the demons. From the example of Abraham he proves that justifying faith is a very different thing from the "faith" of empty professors, because it enabled him to perform the hardest and most painful act of obedience, even the offering up of his only son upon the altar, which act took place many years after he had been justified by God, and which act *manifested* the reality and nature of his faith.

From what has been said above, it should be very evident that the "justification" of which Paul treats is entirely different from the "justification" with which James deals. The doctrine of the former is that nothing renders any sinner acceptable to God but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the latter is that such a faith is not solitary, but accompanied with every good work, and that where good works are absent, justifying faith cannot exist. James is insistent that it is not enough to *say* I have justifying faith, I must *give proof* of the same by exhibiting those fruits which love toward God and love toward men necessarily produce. Paul writes of our justification before God, James of our justification before men. Paul treats of the justification of *persons*—James, of the justification of our *profession*. The one is by faith alone, the other is by a faith which worketh by love and produces obedience.

Now it is of first importance that the above-mentioned distinctions should be clearly grasped. When Christian theologians affirm that the sinner is justified by faith *alone*, they do not mean that faith *exists alone* in the person justified, for justifying faith is always *accompanied* by all the other graces which the Spirit imparts at our regeneration. Nor do they mean that nothing else is required in order to our receiving forgiveness from God, for He requires repentance and conversion as well as faith (Act 3:19). No, rather do they mean that there is nothing else in sinners themselves to which their justification is in Scripture ascribed, nothing else is required of them or exists in them which stands in *the same relation* to justification as their faith does, or which exerts any casual influence or any efficacy of instrumentality *in producing* the result of their being justified (Condensed from William Cunningham, 1810-1861).

On the other hand, that faith which justifies is not an idle and inoperative principle, but one that purifies the heart (Act 15:9) and works by love (Gal 5:6). It is faith which can easily be distinguished from that mental faith of the empty professor. It is *this* which the apostle James insists so emphatically upon. The *subject* of this epistle is not salvation by grace and justification by faith, but the *testing* of those who claim to have faith. His design is not to show the *ground* on which sinners are accepted before God, but to make known that which *evidences* a sinner's having been justified. He insists that the tree is known by its fruits, that a righteous person is one who walks in the paths of righteousness. He declares that the man who is not a *doer* of the Word, but a "hearer *only*," is self-deceived, deluded. When God justifies a man, He sanctifies him too, the two blessings are inseparable, never found apart.

Unless the subject and scope of James' epistle be clearly seen, the apprehension of many of its statements can only issue in God-dishonouring, grace-repudiating, soul-destroying error. To this portion of the Word of God, more than any other, have legalists appealed in their opposition to the grand truth of justification by grace, through faith, without works. To the declarations of this epistle have they turned to find support for their Christ-insulting, man-exalting, Gospel-repudiating error of justification by human works. Merit-mongers of all descriptions cite James 2 for the purpose of setting aside all that is taught elsewhere in Scripture on the subject of justification. Romanists, and their half-brothers the Arminians, quote, "Ye see then how that *by works* a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jam 2:24), and suppose that ends all argument.

We propose now to take up James 2:14-26 and offer a few comments thereon. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (Jam 2:14). Observe carefully that the apostle does not here ask, "What doth it profit a man though he *hath faith* and have not works?"—such a supposition is nowhere countenanced by the Word of God, it were to suppose the impossibility for wherever *real* faith exists, good works necessarily follow. No, instead he asks, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man (*not* "one of you"!) *say* he hath faith?" Professing to be a Christian when a man is not one, may secure a standing among men, improve his moral and social prestige, obtain membership in a "church," and promote his commercial interests, but can it *save* his soul?

It is not that those empty professors who call themselves Christians are all (though many probably are) conscious hypocrites, rather are they deceived souls, and the tragic thing is that in most places there is nothing in the preaching which is at all calculated to *un-deceive* them. Instead, there is only that which bolsters them up in their delusion. There is a large class in Christendom today who are satisfied with a bare profession. They have heard expounded some of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and have given an intellectual assent thereto, and they mistake *that* for a saving knowledge of the truth. Their minds are instructed, but their hearts are not reached, nor their lives transformed. They are still worldly in their affections and ways. There is no real subjection to God, no holiness of walk, no fruit to Christ's glory. Their "faith" is of no value at all, their profession is vain.

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (Jam 2:14). By noting the emphasis upon the word "say," we perceive at once that James is arguing against those who substituted a theoretical belief of the Gospel for the whole of evangelical religion, and who replied to all exhortations and reproofs by saying, "We are not justified by our works, but by faith alone." He therefore begins by asking what profit is there in professing to be a believer, when a man is devoid of true piety? The answer is, none whatever. To merely *say* I have faith when I am unable to appeal to any good works and spiritual fruits as the *evidence* of it, profits neither the speaker nor those who listen to his empty talk. Ability to prate in an orthodox manner about the doctrines of Christianity is a vastly different thing from justifying faith.

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (Jam 2:15-16). Here the apostle shows by an opposite illustration the utter worthlessness of fair talking which is unaccompanied by practical deeds, notice the "*say* unto them, depart in peace" etc. What is the use and value of feigning to be charitable when the *works* of charity are withheld? None whatever, empty bellies are not filled by benevolent words, nor are naked backs clothed by good wishes. Nor is the soul saved by a bare profession of the Gospel.

"Faith which worketh by *love*" (Gal 5:6). The first "fruit of the spirit," that is of the new nature in the regenerated soul, is "*love*" (Gal 5:22). When faith has truly been wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, that faith is manifested in *love*—love toward God, love toward His commandments (Joh 14:23), love toward the brethren, love toward our fellow-creatures. Therefore in *testing* the "faith" of the empty professor, the apostle at once *puts to the proof* his love. In showing the pretense of his *love*, he proves the worthlessness of his "faith." "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1Jo 3:17)! Genuine love is *operative*, so is genuine faith.

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (Jam 2:17). Here the apostle applies the illustration he has employed to the case before him, proving the worthlessness of a lifeless and inoperative "faith." Even our fellow-men would promptly denounce as valueless a "love" which was gushing in words but lacking in works. Unregenerate people are not deceived by those who talk benignly to the indigent, but who refuse to minister unto their needs. And think you, my reader, that the omniscient God is to be imposed upon

by an empty profession? Has He not said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?" (Luk 6:46).

That "faith" which is only of the lips and is not confirmed by evidence in the life is useless. No matter how clear and sound may be my head-knowledge of the truth, no matter how good a talker upon divine things I am, if my walk is not controlled by the precepts of God, then I am but "sounding brass and a tinkling symbol." "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." It is not a living and fruitful faith, like the faith of God's elect, but a thing which is utterly worthless—"dead." It is "alone," that is, divorced from love to God and men and every holy affection. How could our holy Lord approve of *such* a "faith"! As works without faith are "dead" (Heb 9:14), so a "faith" which is without "works" is a dead one.

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works, show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works" (Jam 2:18). Here the true Christian challenges the empty professor, You claim to be a believer, but disgrace the name of Christ by your worldly walk, so do not expect the real saints to regard you as a brother till you display your faith in the good works of a holy life. The emphatic word in this verse is "show"—proof is demanded, demonstrate your faith to be genuine. Actions speak louder than words, unless our profession can endure *that* test, it is worthless. Only true holiness of heart and life vindicates a profession of being justified by faith.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jam 2:19). Here the apostle anticipates an objection, I do *actually* believe in the Lord! Very well, so also do the demons, but what is the fruit of their "believing"? does it influence their hearts and lives, does it transform their conduct Godward and manward? It does not. Then what is their "believing" worth! "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (Jam 2:20), "vain" signifies "empty," exposing the *hollowness* of one who claims to be justified by faith yet lacks the evidence of an obedient walk.

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (Jam 2:21-22). The faith which reposes on Christ is not an idle, but an active and fruitful principle. Abraham had been justified many years before (Gen 15:6), the offering up of Isaac (Gen 22) was the open attestation of his faith and the manifestation of the sincerity of his profession. "By works was faith *made perfect*" means, in actual obedience it reaches its designed end, the purpose for which it was given is realized. "Made perfect" also signifies *revealed* or made known.

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (Jam 2:23). The "Scripture" here is God's testimony to Abraham in Genesis 15:6, that testimony was "fulfilled" or verified when Abraham gave the supreme demonstration of his obedience to God. Our being informed *here* that Abraham was "called the *friend* of God" is in beautiful accord with the tenor of the whole of this passage, as is clear from a comparison with John 15:14, "Ye are my friends, *if ye do* whatsoever I command you."

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jam 2:24). In the "ye see then," the apostle draws his "conclusion" from the foregoing. It is by "works,"

by acts of implicit obedience to the divine command, such as Abraham exercised—and not by a mere “faith” of the brain and the lips—that we *justify* our profession of being believers, that we *prove* our right to be regarded as Christians.

“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” (Jam 2:25). Why bring in the case of Rahab? Was not the example of Abraham conclusive and sufficient? First, because “*two* witnesses” are required for the truth to be “established”—cf. Romans 4:3, 6. Second, because, it might be objected Abraham’s case was so exceptional that *it* could be no criterion to measure others by. Very well, Rahab was a poor Gentile, a heathen, a harlot, yet she too was justified by faith (Heb 11:31), and later *demonstrated* her faith by “works”—receiving the spies at the imminent risk of her own life.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam 2:26). Here is the summing up, a breathless carcass and a worthless faith are alike useless as unto all the ends of natural and spiritual life. Thus the apostle has conclusively shown the worthlessness of the garb of orthodoxy when worn by lifeless professors. He has fully exposed the error of those who rest in a bare profession of the Gospel—as if *that* could save them, when the temper of their minds and the tenor of their lives was diametrically opposed to the holy religion they professed. A holy heart and an obedient walk are the scriptural *evidence* of our having been justified by God.

“Being justified freely by his *grace*” (Rom 3:24), “being now justified by his *blood*” (Rom 5:9).

DIVINE GUIDANCE

Part One

In the September issue we published an article upon “Divine Guidance” by the late John Newton, which dwelt more upon the negative side of the subject. In a footnote we suggested there was a need for an amplification of the positive aspect, and expressed our purpose of writing thereon. We here take up our pen to redeem that promise, as the Holy Spirit may be graciously pleased to help us therein. There are few subjects, bearing upon the practical side of the Christian life, that believers are more exercised about than that they may be “led of the Lord” in all their ways, yet when some important decision has to be made, they are often at a stand to know *how* “the Lord’s mind” is to be obtained. We have read quite a number of tracts and booklets on this subject, but they were so general and vague that we obtained little or no light and help from them. This we find has been the experience of many others, and there certainly exists a real need today for some clear and definite article thereon.

For some years past the writer has been convinced that one thing which has contributed not a little unto the shrouding of this subject in mystery in the minds of many is the loose and misleading terms which are generally employed by those referring thereto. While expressions are used as, "Is this according to God's will?" "Do I have the prompting of the Holy Spirit?" "Were you led of the Lord in that?" Simple minds will continue to be perplexed and never arrive at any certainty. So commonly are these expressions now used in religious circles, that probably quite a number of our readers will be surprised at our challenging of them. Let it be said that we certainly do not condemn such expressions as erroneous, rather do we wish to point out that they are too intangible for most people until they are more definitely defined.

What alternative, then, have we to suggest? This, in connection with every decision we make, every plan we form, every action we execute, let the question be put, *Is this in harmony with God's Word?* Is it what the Scriptures enjoin? Does it square with the Rule which God has given us to walk by? Is it in accord with the "example" which Christ has left us to follow? If it be in harmony with God's Word, then it *must* be "according to God's will," for His will is revealed *in* His Word. If I am doing that which the Scriptures enjoin, then I *must be* "prompted by the Holy Spirit," for He never moves any one to act contrary thereto. If my conduct squares with the Rule of Righteousness (the precepts and commands of the Word), then I *must be* "led of the Lord," for He leads only into the "paths of righteousness" (Psa 23:1, 3). A great deal of mystical vagueness and puzzling uncertainty will be removed if the reader substitutes for, "Is this according to God's will?" the simpler and more tangible "Is this according to God's Word?"

God, in His infinite condescension and transcendent grace, has given us His Word for this very purpose, that we need not stumble along blindly, ignorant of what is pleasing or displeasing to Him, but that we might *know* His "mind." That divine Word is given to us not simply for information, but for the regulation of our conduct, to enlighten our minds, to mold our hearts, to direct all our conduct. That divine Word supplies us with an unerring *chart* by which to steer through the dangerous sea of life, which if we sincerely and diligently follow, will deliver us from disastrous rocks and submerged reefs, and direct us safely to the heavenly harbour. In that Word is all the instructions we can need for every problem, every emergency we may be called upon to face. That Word has been given to us "That the man of God may be perfect, *thoroughly* furnished unto *all* good works" (2Ti 3:17). O how thankful and joyful we should be that the Triune God has favoured us with such a Word!

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa 119:105). The metaphor which is here used is taken from a man walking along a difficult and dangerous road on a dark night, in urgent need of a lantern to show him where to plant his feet, so that he may be able to journey along safely and comfortably, avoiding injury and destruction. The same figure is used again in the New Testament. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place" (2Pe 1:19). The "dark place" is this world, and it is only as we *take heed* to the Word, to the "light" God has given us that we shall be enabled to perceive and avoid the broad road which leadeth to destruction, and discern that narrow way which alone leadeth unto life.

It is to be duly observed that the above verse plainly intimates that God has placed His Word in our hands for an intensely practical purpose, namely, for the directing of our *walk*, the regulating of our deportment. This at once shows us what is to be the first and principal use we are to make of this divine gift. It would do a traveler little good to diligently scrutinize the mechanism of a lamp, or stand admiring its beautiful design, rather he is to take it up and make a practical *use* of the same. Many today are zealous in reading “the letter of Scripture,” and many are charmed with the evidences of its divine authorship, but how few appear to realize the primary purpose for which God has given the Scriptures, how few are making a *practical use* of them—ordering the details of their lives by its rules and regulations. They eulogize the Lamp, but they walk not by its light.

Our first need and task as little children was to learn to walk. The milk we received from our mothers was but a means to an end, to nourish the infant’s life, to strengthen its limbs so that they should be put to a practical use. So it is spiritually. When we have been born again and fed by the Spirit on the pure milk of the Word, our first need and task is to *learn to walk*, to walk as becometh the children of God, and this can be learned only as we ascertain our Father’s will as it is revealed in Holy Writ. By nature we are in total ignorance of His will for us and of what promotes our highest interests. It is a solemn and very humbling fact that man is the only creature born into this world devoid of intelligence as to how to act, and needing to be taught what is evil and what is good for him.

All the lower orders of creation are endowed with an instinct which moves them to act discreetly, to avoid that which is harmful, and to follow that which is good. But not so man. Animals and birds require not to be taught which herbs and berries are poisonous and which are not, they need no curb placed upon them not to over eat or over drink—you cannot even force a horse or a cow to gorge and make itself sick. Even plants turn their faces to the light and open their mouths to catch the falling rain. But fallen man has not even the instinct of the brutes, and usually has to learn by painful experience what is harmful and injurious. And as it has been well said, “Experience keeps an expensive school”—her fees are high. Alas that so many only discover this when it is too late, when they have wrecked their constitutions beyond repair, life’s temporal interest beyond recovery.

It may be said in the answer to the above, But man is endowed with a *conscience*. True, and how far does it serve him till enlightened by the Word and convicted by the Spirit! Man’s understanding has been so darkened by sin, and folly is so bound up in his heart from childhood (Pro 22:15), that until he is instructed he knows not what God requires of him, nor what makes for his own highest good. That is why God has given us His Word, to make known what He justly demands of us, to inform us of those things which destroy the soul, to reveal the baits which Satan uses to capture and slay so many, to point out the highway of holiness which alone leadeth unto heaven (Heb 12:14), to acquaint us with those rules which *must* be observed if we are to enter and walk that highway.

Our first duty, then, and our first aim, must be to take up the Scriptures so as to ascertain what is God’s revealed will for us, what are the paths He forbids us to walk in, what are the ways which are pleasing in His sight. Many things are prohibited in the Word which neither our reason nor our conscience would discover. For example, we learn that

“that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luk 16:15); that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (Jam 4:4); that “he that hasteth with his feet sinneth” (Pro 19:2). Many things are also there commanded which can only be known by acquainting ourselves with its contents. For example, “Lean not unto thine own understanding” (Pro 3:5); “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psa 146:3); “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Mat 5:44).

The above are but samples of hundreds of others. Now it is obvious that God’s Word cannot be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path unless we are familiar with its contents, and particularly, until we are informed upon the *practical rules* which God has given us to walk by. Hence it should be equally obvious that the first need of the Christian is not to delve into the intricacies and mysteries of Scripture, study the prophecies, nor even entertain himself with the wonderful types therein, but rather to concentrate on that which will instruct him as to the kind of conduct which will be *pleasing to the Lord*. The Holy Scriptures are given us, primarily, not for our intellectual gratification, nor for emotional admiration, but for life’s regulation. Nor are the precepts and commands, the warnings and encouragements contained therein, simply for our information, they are to be reduced to practice, they require *unqualified obedience*.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt *meditate* therein day and night, that thou mayest observe *to do* according to all that is written therein: for *then* thou shalt make thy way *prosperous*, and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:8). God will be no man’s debtor, in keeping His commands there is “great reward” (Psa 19:11). Part of that “reward” is a deliverance from being deceived by the false appearances of things, from forming erroneous estimates, from pursuing a foolish policy. Part of that “reward” is the acquiring of wisdom so that we choose that which is good, act prudently, and follow those paths which make for righteousness, peace, and joy. He who treasures up in his heart the divine precepts and diligently seeks to walk by their rule will escape those evils which destroy his fellows.

“If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world” (Joh 11:9). To “walk in the day” means to be in communion with Him who is light, to conduct ourselves according to His revealed will. Just so far as the Christian walks in the path of duty as it is defined for him in the Word, will he walk surely and comfortably, by the light of that Word the way is plain before him, and he is preserved from falling over the obstacles by which Satan seeks to trip him up. “But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him” (Joh 11:10). Here is the solemn contrast, he who walks according to the dictates of his lusts, following the counsel and example of the ungodly, falls into the snares of the devil, and perishes. There is “no light” in such an one, for he is not regulated by the Sun of Righteousness.

“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Joh 8:12). It is one thing to have “life,” it is another thing to enjoy the “*light of life*”—that is only obtained by *following Christ*. Notice carefully the tense of the verb, it is not “he that follows me,” occasionally and spasmodically, but “he that

followeth me,” which signifies a steady and continuous course of action. And the promise to *such* a one is, “he shall not walk in darkness.” But what does it mean to “follow” Christ? First and foremost, to be *emptied of self-will*, for “even Christ pleased not himself” (Rom 15:3). This is absolutely essential—self-will and self-pleasing *must be mortified* if I am to be delivered from walking in darkness.

The unchanging order is made known by Christ in Matthew 16:24, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Christ cannot be followed until self is denied and the cross accepted as the distinguishing mark of discipleship. What does it mean to “deny self”? It means to repudiate our own goodness, to renounce our own wisdom, to have no confidence in our own strength, to completely set aside our own will and wishes, that we “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them” (2Co 5:15). What does it mean to “take up our cross”? It signifies a readiness to endure the world’s hatred and scorn, to voluntarily surrender our lives unto God, to use all our faculties unto His glory. The “cross” stands for unreserved and loving obedience to the Lord, for of Him it is written that “He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It is only as self with all its lustings and interests is denied, and as the heart is dominated by the spirit of Calvary, that we are prepared *to* “follow” Christ.

And what is signified *by* “follow” Christ? This, to take His “yoke” upon us (Mat 11:29) and live in complete subjection to Him. It is to yield fully to His Lordship, to obey His commands, and thus truly *serve* Him. It is seeking to do only those things which are pleasing in His sight. It is to emulate the “example” which He has left us, and *He* was in *all things* subject to the Scriptures. And as we “follow” Him, we “shall not walk in darkness”, no, we shall be in happy fellowship with Him who is the “true light.” For our encouragement—for they were men of like passions with us—it is recorded of Caleb and Joshua “they have *wholly* followed the LORD” (Num 32:12), having put their hand to the plow, they looked not back. Consequently, instead of perishing in the wilderness with their disobedient fellows, they entered the promised land.

Thus the great business, the life-task of the Christian, is to regulate his life by and conform his conduct to the precepts of the written Word and the example left us by the incarnate Word. As he does so, in proportion as he does so, he is emancipated from the darkness of his natural mind, freed from the follies of his corrupt heart, delivered from the mad course of this world, and escapes the snares of the devil. “Through knowledge shall the just be delivered” (Pro 11:9). Yes, great is the “reward” of keeping God’s commandments, “*Then* shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. *When* wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; *Discretion shall preserve thee*, understanding shall keep thee” (Pro 2:9-11).

(Continued in the December issue).

