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Studies in the Scriptures
The Spirit Interceding.

If left to himself, the believer would never see (by faith) the all-wise hand of God in his afflictions, still less would his heart ever honestly say concerning them “*Thy will be done.*” If left to himself, he would never seek grace to patiently endure the trial, still less would he hope that afterwards, it would produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). If left to himself, he would continue to chafe and kick like “a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jer. 31:18) and would curse the day of his birth (Job 3:1). If left to himself, he would have no faith that his sufferings were among the “all things” working together for his ultimate good, still less would he “glory in his infirmity that the power of Christ might rest upon him” (2 Cor. 12:9). No, dear reader, such holy exercises of heart are not the product of poor fallen human nature; instead, they are nothing less than the immediate, gracious, and lovely fruits of the Holy Spirit—brought forth amid such uncongenial soil. What a marvel!

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom. 8:26). At no one point is the Christian made more conscious of his “infirmities” than in connection with his prayer-life. The effects of indwelling corruption are such that often prayer becomes an irksome task, rather than the felt delight of a precious privilege; and strive as he may, he cannot always overcome this fearful spirit. Even when he endeavours *to* pray, he is handicapped by wanderings of mind, coldness of heart, the intrusion of carnal cares; while he is painfully conscious of the *unreality* of his petitions and *unfelt* confessions. How cold are the effusions of our hearts in secret devotions, how feeble our supplications, how little solemnity of mind, brokenness of heart. How often the prayer exercises of our souls seem a mass of confusion and contradiction.

“But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). It is particularly the help which the blessed Comforter gives the Christian in his prayer-life, in the counteracting of his “infirmities,” which is now to engage our attention. In Zechariah 12:10 He is emphatically styled “The Spirit of grace and of supplications,” for He is the Author of every spiritual desire, every holy aspiration, every outgoing of the heart after God. Prayer has rightly been termed “the breathing of the newborn soul,” yet we must carefully bear in mind that its respiration is wholly determined by the stirrings of the Holy Spirit within us. As the Person, work and intercession of Christ are the foundation of all our confidence in approaching the Father, so every spiritual exercise in prayer is the fruit of the Spirit’s operations and intercession.

First, when the believer is most oppressed by outward trials and is most depressed by a sense of his inward vileness, when he is at his wit’s end and ready to wring his hands in despair, or is most conscious of his spiritual deadness and inability to express the sinfulness of his case, the Spirit stirs him in the depths of his being: “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” There has been some difference of opinion as to whether this refers directly to groanings of the Spirit Himself, or indirectly to the spiritual groanings of the Christian, which are prompted and produced by Him. But surely there is no room for uncertainty: the words “*cannot be uttered*” could not apply to a Divine person. That which He *produces* in and through the believer, is *ascribed to the Spirit*—the “fruit” of Galatians 5:22, and Galatians 4:6 compared with Romans 8:15!

As it is the Spirit who illumines and gives us to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the depravity of our hearts, so He is the One who causes us to groan over the same. The conscience is pierced, the heart is searched, the soul is made to *feel* something of its fearful state. The conscious realisation of “the plague of our hearts” (1 Kings 8:38) and its “putrifying sores” (Isa. 1:6), produces unutterable anguish. The painful realisation of our remaining enmity against God, the rebellion of our wills, the woeful lack of heart-conformity to His holy Law, so casts down the soul that it is temporarily paralysed. Then it is that the Spirit puts forth His quickening operations, and we “groan” so deeply that we cannot express our feelings, articulate our woe, or unburden our hearts. All that we can do is to sigh and sob inwardly. But such tears of the heart are precious in the sight of God (Psa. 56:8) because they are produced by His blessed Spirit.

Second, when the soul is so sorely oppressed and deeply distressed, the Spirit reveals to the mind *what* should be prayed for. He it is who pours oil on the troubled waters, quiets in some measure the storm within, spiritualises the mind, and enables us to perceive the nature of our particular need. It is the Spirit who makes us conscious of our *lack* of faith, submissiveness, obedience, courage, or whatever it may be. He it is who gives us to see and feel our spiritual wants, and then to make them known before the Throne of Grace. The Spirit helps our infirmities by subduing our fears, increasing our faith, strengthening our hope, and drawing out our hearts unto God. He grants us a renewed sense of the greatness of God’s mercy, the changelessness of His love, and the infinite merits of Christ’s sacrifice before Him on our behalf.

Third, the Spirit reveals to cast-down saints that the *supplies of grace* for their varied needs are all expressed in the *promises* of God. It is those promises which are the measures of prayer, and contain the matter of it; for what God has promised, all that He has promised, but nothing else are we to ask for. “There is nothing that we really stand in need of, but God hath promised the supply of it, in such a way and under such limitations as may make it good and useful unto us. And there is nothing that God hath promised but we stand in need of it, or are some way or other concerned in it as members of the mystical body of Christ” (John Owen). But at this point also the help of the Spirit is imperative, “that we might *know* the things that *are* freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

It is *thus* that the Spirit bears up the distressed minds of Christians: *by* directing their thoughts to those promises most suited to their present case, by impressing a sense of them upon their hearts, by giving them to discern that those precious promises contain in them the fruits of Christ’s mediation, by renewing their faith so that they are enabled to lay hold of and plead them before God. Real prayer is in faith: faith necessarily respects God’s promises: therefore if we understand not the *spiritual import* of the promises, the suitability of them to our varied cases, and reverently urge the actual fulfillment of them to us, then we have not *prayed* at all. But for *that* sight and sense of the promises, and the appropriation of them, we are entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the Spirit helps the Christian to direct his petitions *unto right ends*. Many prayers remain unanswered because of our failure at this point: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). The “ask amiss” in that passage means to ask for something with a wrong end in view, and were we left entirely to ourselves, this would *always* be the case with us. Only three ends are permissible: that God may be glorified, that our spirituality may be promoted, that our brethren may be blessed. Now none but the Spirit can enable us to subordinate all our

desires and petitions unto God's glory. None but the Spirit can bring us to make our *advancement in holiness* our end—the reason why we ask God *to* grant our requests. This He does by putting into our minds a high valuation of conformity to God, a deep longing in the heart that His image may be more manifestly stamped upon us, a strong inclination of will to diligently seek the same by the use of all appointed means.

It is by the Spirit the sin-troubled Christian is helped to apprehend God as his Father, and his heart is emboldened to approach Him as such. It is by the Spirit we are granted a conscious access to the Throne of Grace. He it is who moves us to plead the infinite merits of Christ. He it is who strengthens us to pray in a holy manner, rather than from carnal motives and sentiments. He it is who imparts any measure of fervour to our hearts so that we “cry” unto God—which respects not the loudness of our voices, but the earnestness of our supplications. He it is who gives us a spirit of importunity, so that we are enabled (at times) to say with Jacob, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26). And He it is who *prepares the heart* to receive God's answer, so that what is bestowed is a real blessing to us and not a curse.

In conclusion let it be pointed out that the motions of the Spirit in the saint are a “help” *to* prayer, but *not* the rule or reason of prayer. There are some who say that they never attempt to pray unless conscious that the Spirit moves them to do so. But this is wrong: the Spirit is given to help us in the performance of duty, and not in the neglect of it! God commands us to pray: *that* is our “rule”—“always to pray” (Luke 18:1), “in everything by prayer and supplication” (Phil. 4:6). For many years past, the editor had made it a practice of beginning his prayers by definitely and trustfully *seeking* the Spirit's aid: see Luke 11:13. Do not conclude that lack of words and suitable expressions is a proof that the Spirit is withholding His help. Finally, remember that He is Sovereign: “the wind bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8).—A.W.P.

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

105. The Final Warning: 12:28, 29.

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29). A brief analysis of these verses reveal the following weighty points. First, the inestimable blessing which believers have been made the recipients of: a kingdom which is eternal. Second, the obligation devolving upon them: to serve God with true veneration and pious devotedness. Third, the warning by which this is pointed: because there can be no escape from the Divine wrath which overtakes apostates. In his helpful commentary, J. Brown pointed out that “to receive an immovable kingdom is but another mode of expressing what is meant by ‘ye are come to mount Zion’ (v. 22). It is another descriptive figurative mode of expressing that the privileges and honours under the new covenant men obtain by the faith of the truth as it is in Jesus.” In support of this: “they that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever” (Psa. 125:1).

Now there is a twofold “kingdom” which believers have “received”: a kingdom of grace, which is set up in the heart of the saint, where Christ reigns as supreme Sovereign, and a kingdom of glory, prepared for us in Heaven, where we shall reign as kings with Christ forever. John Owen insisted that the former only is here intended, Ezekiel Hopkins threw the emphasis almost entirely upon the latter; personally we believe that *both* are included, and shall expound it accordingly, condensing the main points from each of these writers.

Christians are already possessors of the kingdom of *grace*, for Christ has established His dominion over them. Though He sits personally upon the Throne of Heaven, yet He rules in believers by His Spirit (who has received commission from Him), and also by His Word energized in them by the Spirit. The *interest* of believers in this kingdom is called their “receiving” it, because they have it by gift or grant from their Father: Luke 12:32. First, they receive its doctrine, truth, and law: they own its reality and submit to its authority: Romans 6:17. Second, they receive it in the light, grace, and spiritual benefits of it: they enjoy its privileges of righteousness, peace, and joy: Romans 14:17. Third, they receive it in its dignities and securities: they are kings and priests unto God (Rev. 1:6), and so safe are they as to be “kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Peter 1:5). Fourth, they receive it by a supernatural initiation into its spiritual mysteries (1 Cor. 4:20), the glory of which is immediate access to God and heart enjoyment of Him.

The privileges which Christians receive by their believing the Gospel are inconceivably grand. They are in the kingdom, the kingdom of God and Christ, a spiritual and heavenly kingdom; enriched with the inexhaustible treasures of spiritual and celestial blessings. Christians are not to be measured by their outward appearance or worldly circumstances, but rather by the interest they have in that kingdom which it was their Father’s good pleasure to give them. It is therefore their privilege and duty to conduct themselves and behave as those who have received such wondrous privileges and high dignities from God Himself: far should they be from envying poor millionaires and the godless potentates of this earth. *Our* portion is infinitely superior to the baubles of time and sense. Though the world knows us not, unto God we are “the excellent of the earth” (Psa. 16:3), the crown-jewels of His Son, those whom angels serve or minister unto. O for grace to conduct ourselves as the sons and daughters of the Almighty.

In what sense or senses has the believer “received” the kingdom of *glory*? First, by the immutable Word of Promise. To the believer the promise of God is as good security as the actual possession. The poor worldling cannot understand this, and he regards the confidence of the Christian as naught but fanaticism. But the simple trusting soul already possesses the kingdom of glory because God has infallibly assured him “in black and white” of the possession of it. It is the immutable Word of Promise which gives him the right and title *to* the inheritance, and therefore as it now belongs to him by right and title, he may well call it *his*. When God has promised any thing, it is all the same to a believer whether He saith it *is* done or it shall be done.

Second, the believer has “received” the kingdom of glory by grace giving him the *earnest* and *firstfruits* of it. The comforts and graces of the Spirit are referred to again and again under these figures: appropriately so, for an “earnest” is a part (an installment) of what is agreed upon, and the “firstfruits” are a sample and pledge of the coming harvest. Now grace and glory are one and the same in essence, differing only in degree: grace is Heaven brought down into the soul, glory is the soul conducted to Heaven. Grace is glory commenced, glory is grace consummated. Probably one of the meanings of “Light is sown for the righteous” (Psa. 97:11) is, the “light” of everlasting life and bliss are now in the graces of regenerated souls as in their seed, and they shall certainly bud and blossom forth into perfect fruitage.

Third, the believer has “received” the kingdom of glory by the *realisation of faith*. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Here is a spiritual grace which brings distant things near and gives to the future present reality. Faith brings into the soul what lies altogether outside the reach of our natural senses. It is a supernatural faculty which is quite beyond the ken of natural man. Faith beholds what the eye cannot see, it grasps that made without hands; it supplies demonstration of proof of that which the infidel scoffs at.

Fourth, the believer has “received” the kingdom of glory by *the embraces of hope*. In Scripture, the grace of “hope” is something far better than a vague longing for something we do not yet possess: it is a sure expectation, a definite assurance of what God has promised. Hope supplies a present anticipation of the future realisation. Faith believes, hope enjoys those things which God has prepared for them that love Him. Therefore hope is called the “anchor of the soul . . . which entereth into that within the veil” (Heb. 6:19), for it lays hold on that glory which is there laid up for us. Hope is *the taster* of our comforts, and excites the same delight and complacency as the fruition itself will impart—the same kind, though not in degree.

The particular property of this kingdom which is here emphasised by the Holy Spirit (in accordance with the thought of the context) is, that it “cannot be moved”: therein does it differ from all the other kingdoms—here, as everywhere, does our blessed Redeemer have the “pre-eminence.” Owen pointed out that, “No dominion ever so dreamed of eternity, as did the Roman Empire; but it hath not only been shaken, but broken to pieces and scattered like chaff before the wind: see Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 27”—so terribly so, that to-day, the closest students of history are unable to agree as to its actual boundaries. But nothing like that shall ever happen to the Saviour’s dominion: therefore do we read of “the *everlasting* kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11). No internal decays can ruin it; no external opposition shall overthrow it. Yet the language of our verse goes even further than that: *God Himself* will not remove it.

“That which is here peculiarly intended is that it is not obnoxious unto such a shaking and removal as the church-state was under the old covenant; that is, God Himself would never make any alteration in it, nor ever introduce another church-state or worship. God hath put the last hand, the hand of His only Son, unto all revelations and institutions. No addition shall be made unto what *He* hath done, nor alteration in it: no other way of calling, sanctifying, ruling, and saving of the church, shall ever be appointed or admitted; for it is here called an immovable kingdom, in opposition unto that church-state of the Jews which God Himself first shook, and then took away—for it was ordained only for a season” (John Owen). Here again we perceive the superiority of Christianity over Judaism: the one was mutable, the other immutable; the one was evanescent, the other eternal; the one was founded by Moses, the other is established by Him who is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

The fact that Christ’s kingdom is an “everlasting” one (2 Peter 1:11), that it “cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28), and that “of His kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:33), has occasioned difficulty to some, in the light of “then cometh the end, when He shall have *delivered up* the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24). But the difficulty is at once removed if we bear in mind the distinctions pointed out in our last article. The sovereign dominion which Christ has over all creatures as a Divine Person, is something of which He can never divest Himself. Likewise, that dominion over His own people which belongs to Him as the incarnate Son, is also eternal: He will remain forever the Head and Husband of the Church; nor can He relinquish the Mediatorial office. But that dominion to which He was exalted after His resurrection, and which extends over all principalities and powers (John 17:2, Matt. 28:18), *will be* relinquished when its design is accomplished: this is clearly seen in the remaining words of 1 Corinthians 15:24, 25, “When He shall have *put down* all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet.” Thus, the “kingdom” which Christ delivers up to the Father is that rule of His over His *enemies*.

The immovability and eternity of Christ’s kingdom holds good of it equally whether we consider it in its present grace aspect or its future glory aspect, for we have received “a kingdom which cannot be moved.” The kingdom of grace is so Divinely fixed in the hearts of believers that all the efforts of sin and all the attacks of Satan are unable to overthrow it: “the foundation of God standeth sure” (2 Tim. 2:19); “being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you *will* perform it” (Phil. 1:6). It is absolutely impossible that one of Christ’s sheep should perish: in the day to come He will exclaim, “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me” (Heb. 2:13). If this be true of the kingdom of grace, then much more so of the kingdom of glory, when sin shall be no more and Satan shall never again tempt the redeemed.

Now from the glorious nature of this “kingdom” the Apostle proceeds to draw an inference or point a practical conclusion: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably” (Heb. 12:28). As J. Brown pointed out, to “receive a kingdom” is to be *invested with royalty*, to be “made kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6). Since, then, royalty is the most exalted form of human life, the most dignified honour known upon earth, how it behooves us to seek from God that aid which shall enable us to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.” Once again we are reminded of the inseparable connection between privilege and duty, and the greater the privilege the stronger the obligation to express our

gratitude in a suitable and becoming manner: not merely in emotional ecstasies or fulsome words, but by obedience and worship, that we may “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

The commentators differ considerably as to what is denoted by “let us have grace,” yet it seems to us its meaning is quite simple and obvious. Its signification may be ascertained by three considerations involved in what immediately follows. First, this “grace” is essential unto the serving of God “acceptably” and, as we shall see, this “service” has a principal reference to our worshipping of Him. Second, this “grace” is the root from which proceeds, “reverence and godly fear,” so that it must point to something more than simple *gratitude* for what God has already done for us—which is how many of the writers limit it. Third, this “grace” is imperative if we are not to be consumed by Divine wrath—the “consuming fire” of verse 29. We therefore understand this expression to mean, let us *persevere* in the faith and duties of the Gospel, whereby we are alone enabled to offer acceptable worship to God; let us endeavour after an *increase* of Divine aid and succour; let us strive after a continual *exercise* of the grace He has given us; let us seek to bring our hearts more and more under its sanctifying power.

We believe the key to our present passage is found in Exodus 19:10, 11, 15. Under the old covenant the way and means in which Israel was to make a solemn approach unto God in worship was specifically defined: they were to reverently prepare themselves by purification from uncleanness and separation from fleshly indulgences. That was an outward adumbration of the *spiritual* purity which God now requires from us both internally and externally. Because God has revealed Himself in Christ in a far more glorious manner to us than He manifested Himself before Israel at Sinai, we ought to earnestly endeavour after a more eminent preparation of heart and sanctification of our whole persons in all our approaches to the Most High. There must be in us the spiritual counterpart of what was shadowed out in them ceremonially. The fear of God was wrought in Israel by the terrors of His Law: though our fear be of another kind, it ought to be none the less real and effectual in us to its proper ends.

The great end in view is, that “we may serve God acceptably.” In this particular Epistle the Greek word used here signifies that service unto God which consists in His *worship*, in prayer and praise, and the observance of all the institutions of Divine worship. For example, “in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did *the service* perfect, as pertaining to the conscience” (Heb. 9:9); and again, “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which *serve* the tabernacle” (13:10); while in 10:2 the word is actually rendered “worshippers.” Nor is the meaning in the Greek word peculiar to the Hebrews Epistle: “She was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but *served* God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:37); “who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). The specific reference, then, is had unto the worship of God according to the Gospel, as superseding the institutions under the old economy. Needless to say, such worship cannot proceed from any who are not walking in Gospel obedience.

Now it is in order to our being fitted for the Divine service that we may worship God “*acceptably*,” that the exhortation comes, “let us have grace.” There is a double reference: that our persons may be acceptable, and that our worship may be pleasing in His sight. An intimation is hereby given that there may be a performance of the duties of Di-

vine worship when neither the persons who perform them, nor the duties themselves, *are* accepted by Him. So it was with Cain and his sacrifice, as it is with all hypocrites always. The principal things required unto this acceptance are, first, that the persons of the worshippers be accepted in the Beloved. Second, that the actual performance of worship must, in all the duties of it, be in strict accord with what God (and none other) has appointed. Third, that our spiritual graces be in actual exercise, for it is in and by *this*, in the discharge of all our religious duties, that we give glory unto God. How can our worship be pleasing unto Him if we be in a backslidden state.

That which is here specifically singled out as necessary unto our worship being acceptable is that we serve God “with reverence and godly fear.” As J. Owen wisely pointed out, these “may be learned best from what they are *opposed unto*. For they are prescribed as contrary unto some such defects and faults of Divine worship, as from which we ought to be deterred, by the consideration of the holiness and severity of God, as is manifest from the next verse, ‘for our God is a consuming fire.’” The sins from which we ought to be deterred by a consideration of these Divine perfections are, first, the want of a due sense of the awe-inspiring majesty of Him with whom we have to do. God provided against this evil under the old economy by the terror wrought in the people at the giving of the Law, by the many restrictions interposed against their approaches to Him (none being allowed to enter the holy of holies), and by all the outward ceremonies appointed; and though all these are now removed; yet a deep spiritual sense of God’s holiness and greatness should be retained in the mind of all who draw nigh to Him in worship.

Second, the lack of a due sense of our own vileness, and our infinite distance from God both in nature and state, which is always required to be in us. The Lord will never accept the worship of a Pharisee: while we are puffed up with a sense of our own importance and filled with self-righteousness or self-complacency, He will not accept our approaches unto Him. And nothing is more calculated to hide pride from us and fill our hearts with a sense of our utter insignificance as a sight and realisation of the ineffable purity and high sovereignty of God. When Isaiah beheld Him “high and lifted up,” he exclaimed “Woe is me! For I am undone” (Isa. 6:5); when Job beheld the Almighty, he cried, “Behold, I am vile” (40:4).

Third, carnal boldness in a formal performance of sacred duties, while neglecting an earnest endeavour to exercise grace in them, which is something which God abhors. O the daring impiety of worldly professors taking upon their polluted lips the ineffable name of God, and offering unto Him “the sacrifice of fools” (Eccl. 5:1). What a marvel it is that He does not strike dead those blatant and presumptuous souls who vainly attempt to deceive Him with their lip service while their hearts are far from Him. It is to prevent these, and other like evils, that we are here exhorted to worship God “with reverence and godly fear,” that is, with a holy abasement of soul, having our minds awed by a sense of the infinite majesty of God, our hearts humbled by a consciousness of our vileness and with our creature nothingness.

No exhortation in this Epistle is more needed by our perverse generation than this one. How this imperative requirement “with reverence and godly fear” rebukes the cheap, flippant “worship” (?) of the day. O what unholy lightness and ungodly familiarity now marks the religion of Christendom: many address the great Deity as though they were His equals, and conduct themselves with far less decorum than they would show in the pres-

ence of an earthly monarch. The omission of bowing the head in silent prayer when we take our place in the congregation, the vulgar glancing around, the unseemingly whispering and chattering, the readiness to smile or laugh at any remarks of the preacher's which may be wrested, are all so many instances of this glaring and growing evil. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him" (Psa. 89:7).

The Greek word for "reverence" is rendered "shamefacedness" in 1 Timothy 2:9. This, in extraordinary instances, is called a "blushing," a "being ashamed," a "confusion of face" (Ezra 9:6; Dan. 9:7); yet, the essence of it ought always to accompany us in the whole worship of God. "Godly fear" is a holy awe on the soul when engaged in sacred duties, and this from a consideration of the great danger there is of our sinful miscarriages in the worship of God, and of His severity against such heinous offences. God will not be mocked. A serious soul is hereby moved unto watchfulness and diligence not to provoke so great, so holy, so jealous a God, by a neglect of that reverence and godly fear which He requires in His service, and which is due unto Him on account of His glorious perfections. If the seraphim veil their faces before Him (Isa. 6:2), how much more should we do so!

"For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). This is the reason given why we must serve God with reverence and fear. The words are taken from Deuteronomy 4:24 where they are used to deter Israel from idolatry, for that is a sin God will not tolerate. The same description of God is here applied by the Apostle unto those lacking grace to worship Him with the humility and awe which He demands. If we are graceless in our persons, and devoid of reverence in our worship, God will deal with us accordingly. As a fire consumes combustible matter cast into it, so God will destroy sinners. The title "our God" denotes a *covenant* relationship, yet though Christians are firmly assured of their interest in the Everlasting Covenant, God requires them to have holy apprehensions of His majesty and terror: see 2 Corinthians 5:10, 11.

The twin graces of love and fear, fear and love, should be *jointly* active in the believer, and it is in preserving a balance between them that his spiritual health largely consists. So it is here: observe the remarkable conjunction: "our God," in covenant relationship, our Father; and yet "a consuming fire," to be trembled at! The first is to prevent despair from considering God's ineffable purity and inflexible justice; the latter is to check a presumptuous irreverence unto which a one-sided occupation with His grace and love might embolden us. Thus, the principal exhortation "let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably" is urged by two widely different motives: because we have "received a kingdom" and because God is "a consuming fire." Carnal reason would ask, If we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved, why should we fear? But if God be such "a consuming fire" how can we ever expect such a kingdom, since we are but as stubble? But the Spirit-taught have no difficulty in perceiving why the Apostle joined together these two things.

The Christian's interest in His favour is no warrant for casting off a solemn fear of God: though He has laid down His enmity against him, He has not cast off His majesty and sovereignty over him. "Even those who stand highest in the love and favour of God, and have the fullest assurance thereof and of their interest in Him as *their* God, ought, notwithstanding, to fear Him as a sin-avenging God and a consuming fire" (Ezekiel Hopkins, 1680). Though God has taken His redeemed into intimate nearness to Himself, yet

He requires that they always retain a due apprehension of the majesty of His Person, the holiness of His nature, the severity of His justice, and the ardent jealousy of His worship. If we truly dread falling under the guilt of this awful sin of irreverence, our minds will be influenced unto godly fear. The grace of *fear* is in nowise inconsistent with or an impediment to a spirit of adoption, holy boldness, or godly rejoicing: See Psalm 2:11, Matthew 28:8, Philippians 2:12.

“Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably,” (Heb. 12:28), for without it there will be neither “reverence” nor “godly fear.” Without Divine aid and unction we cannot serve God at all, for He accounts not that *worship* which is offered by graceless persons. Without grace in actual operation we cannot serve God acceptably, for it is in the *exercise* of faith and fear, love and awe, that the very life and soul of spiritual worship consists. O how earnestly do we need to seek an increase of Divine “grace” (2 Cor. 9:8; 12:9), and keep it operative in all duties of the worship of God: that in view of His awful wrath, we may have a dread of displeasing Him; in view of His majesty our hearts may be humbled; and in view of His love, we may seek to honour, please and adore Him. “Sanctify the LORD of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread” (Isa. 8:13 and cf. Matt. 10:28).—A.W.P.

The Life of David.

57. *His Chastenings.*

It may strike some readers as strange that our last article upon David's *forgiveness* should be immediately followed by one upon his *chastenings*: surely if God had pardoned his transgressions we would not expect to hear of His rod now being laid upon him. But there will be no difficulty if we carefully distinguish between two of the principal offices which God sustains, namely, the character of moral *Ruler* of the world, and that of the *Judge* of His creatures: the one relating to His dealings with us in time, the other pertaining to His passing formal sentence upon our eternal destiny; the one concerning His governmental actions, the other His penal verdict. Unless this distinction be plainly recognised and given a constant place in our thoughts, not only will our minds be closed with confusion, but our peace will be seriously undermined and our hearts brought into bondage; worst of all, we shall entertain erroneous ideas of God and sadly misinterpret His dealings with us in providence. How we need to pray that our "love may abound yet more and more *in knowledge* and in all judgment; that we may try things *that differ*" (Phil. 1:9, 10 margin).

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:13, 14). Here are the two things to which we have just called attention, and placed moreover in immediate juxtaposition. The first exhibits to us the Lord in His character as *Judge*, declaring that David had been pardoned for his great transgression—such a word (spoken now by the Spirit in power to the conscience of a penitent believer) is *anticipatory* of God's verdict at the Great Assize. The second manifests the Lord in His character of *Ruler*, declaring that His holiness required Him to take governmental notice of David's wickedness, so that demonstration might be made that His laws cannot be broken with impunity. Let us proceed to follow out this double thought a little further.

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psa. 103:10). Here is a verse which no believer will hesitate to set to his seal that it is true, for he has abundant evidence thereof in his own personal experience, and therefore will he positively affirm, If I received my just deserts, I had been cast into Hell long ago. Rightly did Spurgeon say on this passage, "We ought to praise the Lord for what He has *not done*, as well as for what He has wrought for us." O what cause has each Christian to marvel that his perverseness and sottishness have not utterly exhausted God's patience. Alas that our hearts are so little affected by the infinite forbearance of God: O that His goodness may lead us to repentance.

Have we not abundant reason to conclude, because of our base ingratitude and vile behaviour, that God would withhold from us the communications of His Spirit and the blessings of His providence, cause us to find the means of grace profitless, and allow us to sink into a state of settled backsliding? Is it not a wonder that He does not so deal with us? Truly "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." And why? Because He dealt with Another "after our sins" and exacted from Him full satisfaction to His justice. And payment God cannot *twice* demand: first at my bleeding Surety's hand, and then again at mine. God rewarded Christ according to our iniquities, and now He rewards us according to Christ's merits. Hallelujah. Heaven be

praised for such a Gospel. May this old, old truth come with new power and sweetness into our souls.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psa. 103:10). This is true *penally* (i.e. God’s dealings with us as Judge) and with respect to the *eternal* consequences of our sins. Yet this does *not* mean that the sins believers commit are ignored by God as the moral Ruler of this world, that He refrains from dealings with us governmentally. The whole of His dealings with His people Israel (who were in covenant relationship with Him) shows otherwise. The New Testament also forbids such a conclusion: See Galatians 6:7, 1 Corinthians 11:29, 30! Yet it must be remembered that God exercises His sovereignty in this, as in all things: the extent to which and the manner in which God makes His people smart for their “inventions” is determined by His own mere good pleasure.

Though God forgives His people their sins, yet He frequently gives them plain proof of His holy abhorrence of the same, and causes them to taste something of the bitter fruits which they bring forth. Another Scripture which brings out this dual truth is, “Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions” (Psa. 99:8). What could possibly be plainer than this: God pardoning His people yet also manifesting His sore displeasure against their transgressions. A striking case in point—obviously included in Psalm 99:6-8—is recorded in Exodus 32. There we see Israel worshipping the golden calf in the lascivious manner of the heathen. In response to the intercession of Moses, they were forgiven: “The LORD repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people” (v. 14). Nevertheless, God took vengeance of their inventions, “And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made” (v. 35).

Another example is seen in the case of the unbelief of Moses and Aaron at Meribah: though God pardoned the guilt of their anger as to eternal death, yet He took vengeance by not suffering them to conduct Israel into the promised land: see Numbers 10:12, 24. And so it is still, as many a Christian discovers from sorrowful experience when God takes him to task for his sinful “inventions” and visits upon him His Governmental displeasure. Yet this in nowise clashes with the fact that “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psa. 103:10). There is *mercy* in our chastenings, and no matter how heavily the rod may smite, we have good cause to say, “And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us *less* than our iniquities deserve” (Ezra 9:13).

Ere passing on, let us anticipate the objection of some tried saints, whose case may be quite extreme. There are some who are smarting so severely beneath the chastening rod of God that to them it certainly seems that He *is* dealing with them “after their sins” and rewarding them “according to their iniquities.” The light of His countenance is withheld from them, His providential dealings wear only a dark frown, and it appears very much as though He has “forgotten to be gracious.” Ah, dear friend, if your heart is in any measure truly exercised before God, then your case is far from being hopeless, and to you apply those words “Know therefore that God exacteth of thee *less* than thine iniquity deserveth” (Job 11:6). My dear brothers and sisters, even your present *sufferings* are far, very far from being as great as your *sins*.

Now what we have sought to bring out above receives striking exemplification in the case of David. In a very real sense God did not deal with him after his sins, nor reward

him according to his iniquities; yet in another sense, He did. God sent a Prophet to faithfully rebuke him, He wrought conviction and repentance in David, He heard his cry, blotted out his transgressions, as the 32nd Psalm so blessedly shows. Yet though God pardoned David, as to the guilt of eternal death, saved his soul, and spared his life, yet He “took vengeance on his inventions.” There was a needs-be why sore afflictions came upon him: the Divine holiness must be vindicated, His governmental righteousness must be manifested, as solemn warning must be given to wrongdoers, and David himself must learn that “the way of the transgressor is hard.” O that writer and reader may lay this to heart and profit therefrom.

Through Nathan God said to David, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun” (2 Sam. 12:9-11). What a solemn exhibition of God’s governmental righteousness. David must reap as he had sown. He had caused Uriah to be slain by the sword, and now God tells him “the sword shall never depart from thine house”; he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and now he hears that his own wives shall be defiled. How true are those words “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:2)!

God hath declared that “to the froward He will show Himself froward” (Psa. 18:26), and frequently does He punish sin *in its own kind*. Upon the burning lusts of the Sodomites He rained down fire and brimstone from Heaven (Gen. 19:24). Jacob deceived his father by means of the skin of a kid (Gen. 27:16), and he in turn was thus deceived by his sons, who brought him Joseph’s coat dipped in the blood of a kid (Gen. 37:31), saying he had been devoured by a wild beast. Because Pharaoh had cruelly ordered that the male infants of the Hebrews should be drowned (Exo. 1:22), the Egyptian king and all his hosts were swallowed up by the Red Sea (Exo. 14:28). Nadab and Abihu sinned grievously by offering “strange fire” unto the Lord, and accordingly they were consumed by fire from Heaven (Lev. 10:1, 2). Adonibezek cut off the thumbs and toes of the kings he took in battle, and in like manner the Lord rewarded him (Judges 1:6, 7). Agag’s sword made women childless, and so his own mother was made childless by his being torn to pieces before the Lord (1 Sam. 15:33).

What proofs are these that “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). What evidences are these of the inflexible justice of God: none need fear but what the Judge of all the earth will “do right.” What solemn intimations are they that in the Day to come each one shall be judged “according to his works.” What warnings are these that God is not to be mocked. But let it not be forgotten that if it is written “He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption,” it is also added (though not nearly so frequently quoted) that “he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:8). The same principle of God’s granting an exact quid pro quo applies to the service of His ministers: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor.

9:6)—the harvest shall not only be answerable to the seed and the reward to the work, but it will be greater or less according to the quantity and quality of the work.

Nor does the last-quoted passage mean that God is going to reward His ministers according to the fruit and success of their work, but rather according to the labour itself, be it little or much, better or worse: “Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1 Cor. 3:8). God in His sovereignty may set His servant over a blind and perverse people (as He did Ezekiel), who so far from profiting from his ministry, add iniquity to their iniquity; nevertheless his work is with God (Isa. 49:4). So too with the rank and file of Christians—the more bountifully they sow the seeds of good works, the more shall they reap; and the more sparingly they sow, the less will be the harvest: “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord” (Eph. 6:8). What an incentive and stimulus should that be unto all of us: “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we *shall* reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

But to return to David. “And Nathan departed unto his house” (2 Sam. 12:15). The Prophet had faithfully delivered his message, and now he withdrew from the court. It is very striking and blessed to see how God *honoured* His servant: He moved David to name one of his sons “Nathan” (1 Chron. 3:5), and it was from *him* that Christ, according to the flesh, descended (Luke 3:31). “And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick” (2 Sam. 12:15). The Prophet’s words now began to receive their tragic fulfillment. Behold here the sovereignty of God: the parents lived, the child must die. See here too, God’s respect for His Law: David had broken it, but He executes it, by visiting the sins of the father upon the son.

“David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth” (v. 16). It is touching to see this seasoned warrior so affected by the suffering of his little one—proof of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, for the penitent are pitiful. It is true that the Prophet had said, “The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (v. 14), yet David seems to have cherished the hope that his threat was but a *conditional* one, as in the case of Hezekiah: his words “While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?” (v. 22) strongly appear to bear this out. In his fasting and lying all night upon the ground David humbled himself before the Lord, and evidenced both the sincerity of his repentance and the earnestness of his supplication. What is recorded in verse 17 illustrates the fact that the natural man is quite incapable of understanding the motives which regulate the conduct of believers.

“And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died” (2 Sam. 12:18). It was on the eighth day that the male children of the Israelites were to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12, etc.), thus in the death of his son before it could receive the sign of the covenant a further proof was given David of God’s governmental displeasure! Though it was a mercy to all concerned that the infant was removed from this world, yet inasmuch as its death had been publicly announced as a rebuke for their sin (v. 14), its decease was a manifest chastening from God upon David and Bathsheba.

“Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat” (v. 20). This is very beautiful, reminding us of Job’s bowing beneath God’s chastening rod and worshipping Him when he received tidings of the death of his children. How different was this

from the disconsolate grief and rebellion against God which is so often displayed by worldlings when *their* loved ones are snatched away from them. Weeping should never hinder worshipping: "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray" (James 5:13). How the terms of this verse rebuke the personal untidiness of some who attend public worship!

"And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him" (2 Sam. 12:24). Having meekly bowed before God's rod, humbled himself beneath His mighty hand, and publicly owned Him in worship, David now received a token of God's favour: "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days" (1 Chron. 22:9). The birth and name given to Solomon was an evidence that God was *reconciled* to David, as it was also an earnest of the tranquility which would obtain in Israel during his reign. Solomon was also named "Jedidiah" which signifies "beloved of the Lord"—signal demonstration of the *sovereignty* of Divine grace!

The chapter closes (vv. 26-31) with a brief account of Israel's capture of Rabbah, the royal city of the Ammonites. Further proof was this of God's grace unto David; he prospered his arms notwithstanding his aggravated sins. The additional chastisements which came upon him under the governmental dealings with God will be considered by us (D.V.) in the articles which follow.—A.W.P.

The Providence of God.

3. Jacob deceiving his father.

How many providential circumstances are linked into one chain to confer the blessing of his father of Jacob! Among these we may recognise the blindness of Isaac. Had he not been afflicted with great dimness of sight, the scheme by which Jacob succeeded could never have taken place. We have no account of any such blindness in Abraham, when he had arrived at a much greater age. Why did not God prevent Jacob's sin by continuing strength of eye-sight to his father? Why did a Sovereign Providence make way for this scheme, by inflicting on Isaac? God did not approve this scheme, and yet in His sovereignty it fulfilled His purpose. Who can comprehend this mystery? Who can fathom the depth of this wisdom? Silence, ye prating philosophers! You cannot by searching find out God. *Your* line cannot measure *His* conduct.

Another providential circumstance in this matter is that Isaac, though eminently a man of God, and, by Divine revelation, sufficiently informed of God's preference of Jacob, yet attended not to this intimation so as to ask consent of the Lord before he acted. He either remained ignorant of what he might have known, or from partiality neglected to attend to it. The ignorance of the Lord's people often fulfills the purposes of His will, as well as their knowledge. Yet, in all such cases, it is to *their* guilt and injury. Isaac did not add to his own happiness, or to that of his family, by his inattention to the revelation of the Divine will with respect to his two sons. It would have been much better for all parties that he had asked counsel at the mouth of the Lord, before he had attempted to transfer the blessing. His intention did not succeed, and he added to the guilt of Esau, by laying before him the occasion of intentional murder.

The coupling of the eating of the savoury meat with the conveying of the blessing, whether it was whim or wisdom, is another providential circumstance that was necessary as a foundation for the scheme of Jacob's mother. Had Isaac given the blessing without this previous step, the artifice of Rebekah could have had no place.

Another link in this chain is that Rebekah overheard Isaac when he addressed Esau about bringing him the savoury meat from the field. Had she not heard this, her plot could not have been formed. What placed her within hearing at that particular time? Why did not Isaac use precaution, and whisper the matter to his son? The thing must be heard by Rebekah. The accident that placed her within hearing was a link in Providence.

As was observed before, in order to transfer the blessing to Jacob, it was necessary that he should be the favourite son of his mother. This is another link in the chain. To the formation of this scheme, by which the blessing was transferred to Jacob, it was necessary that Rebekah and her son, both of whom were true servants of God, should be ignorant or regardless of their duty in an astonishing degree. Every feature of the plot is vile and wicked. Yet this mother, this servant of the Lord, invents that hypocritical device, which her son, so eminent a man of God, was base enough to execute. How is it that they combined to practice so shameful a deception? This conduct was not influenced by the faith of Abraham, but was the result of unbelief. Not relying on the power and wisdom of God to give effect to His own purposes, they foolishly, as well as impiously, took the accomplishment of the Divine counsels into their own hands, and brought about the Divine appointment by sinful means. Here we see that God can fulfill His will through the means even of the sins of His own people. Here is sovereignty. Here is the depth of Divine wisdom. The result of the conduct of Jacob and his mother was a fulfillment of God's eternal

purpose; yet their conduct is not the less sinful. A child may see the justness of this observation; but can an angel of God fathom this abyss? Be silent, proud Philosophy; and thou, vain Theology, who lovest to lisp in the phraseology of science. Can ye show the harmony of these two apparently opposite truths? God ordains what men's sin effects: yet man is guilty, and God is just!

The sovereignty of God, with respect to Jacob and Esau is so offensive to the human mind, that it is not unusual, on the subject, to take revenge on the Divine conduct, under the colour of lashing the misconduct of this favourite. A comparison of Esau with Jacob is made at great length, and greatly to the advantage of the elder brother. Esau is a plain, blunt, honest man, of great virtue and integrity; while Jacob is a deep, designing hypocrite. God says, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated," but the language of their heart is, Esau have I loved, and Jacob have I hated. And *why* do they love Esau; why do they hate Jacob? Just because they hate that Divine Sovereignty which preferred the younger to the elder. There is no reason to hide or palliate the sins of Jacob in this matter. By his misconduct we see that it is not on account of works of our own righteousness that God chooses or saves us. The ground of God's preference of His people is His own free and sovereign good-will. We should not hide this by endeavouring to justify or excuse anything that is wrong in Jacob. But nothing but disaffection to God will prefer the character of Esau to that of Jacob. With all his faults, Jacob was a man of God; with all that the most partial affection can claim for Esau, he was a man who profanely undervalued his birthright. He was a carnal man, who had all his happiness in this world. When he was roused, he showed what was in his heart. He purposed to take revenge by murdering his brother. *This* is the virtue of the reprobate, who is so great a favourite with the enemies of God.

With all the ingenuity of Rebekah, her scheme would have been frustrated, had it not been assisted by an addition from the prudence of Jacob. The savoury meat might have been brought to Isaac by Jacob in the room of Esau; but though the blindness of the Patriarch might not have been able to detect the imposture, his *hand* would have discovered the deceit. Here, then, there is another link added to the chain which connects Jacob with the blessing. Jacob thinks of the danger of detection, and his mother, by another contrivance, guards effectively against it! She covered his hands and his neck with the skins of the kids, and the smooth Jacob passes for the hairy Esau.

But, after all, what a hair's breadth escape from detection! Though Isaac was so dim of sight that he could not discover the difference between his sons by their external appearance, yet his ear is not so deficient but that it still recognises the difference between their voices: "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." What prevents the whole plot from now being broken up? What makes Isaac, the guarded, suspicious Isaac, overlook this symptom? Why did he not put the matter to a further proof? Was any thing more easy? Why did he not demand that both his sons should come into his presence? But the blessing is to be transferred to Jacob. This was God's eternal, unchangeable purpose. Isaac, then, with all his wariness, overcomes his wellfounded suspicions, and boldly confers the blessing, when both affection and prudence cried out for delay. Men's wisdom and men's weakness both equally fulfill God's purposes!

Here is wisdom. Let those who are truly wise study and admire it. The language in which Isaac conferred the blessing was, no doubt, the immediate dictation of the Holy Spirit; and therefore, we cannot properly speak of this as a providential circumstance. But

in this, inspiration is quite in keeping with the Providence exhibited in this matter. In conferring the blessing the Holy Spirit puts nothing into the mouth of the Patriarch by which he could see that Jacob was the person to whom he was speaking. The blessing was conferred in language so general that there is no allusion whatever to any thing peculiar in Jacob. Here is the wisdom of the manner of inspiration. It speaks suitably to the character and situations of the persons by whom it speaks. This fact, instead of being discovered by human wisdom, is so little understood by many Christians, that they have been led by it to invent theories of inspiration which made the Scriptures in a great measure the mere word of man, and virtually divest them of inspiration.

After all the preparations of hypocrisy and prudence, after all his hardy falsehoods and acting, with his venison and kid's skins, and garments of Esau, Jacob was on the very point of being detected in time to disappoint him of the blessing. What a wonderful, what a providential escape! Jacob is scarcely gone out with the blessing when Esau comes in to receive it! "And it came to pass, *as soon as* Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting" (Gen. 27:30). Who is so blind as not to see the hand of Providence here? Had Esau been a few minutes *sooner*, Jacob's scheme would have been frustrated! The sovereign God in His providence prospers the plan which was to fulfill His purposes, while His holy law utterly disdains that plan. Every link in this chain is inserted by an overruling Providence, while Jacob and his mother are solely the authors of their guilty conduct.

The transaction is finished; Jacob is blessed, and blessed he *must* be. But the Lord of Providence must continually *protect* him, and preserve him for the promised blessing. That Providence is immediately at work to watch over him and defend him from his brother's malice. "And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). What can prevent him from executing his wicked purpose? What then becomes of the blessing? When Esau made this purpose, why did he not *keep it to himself*? He said this in his heart: why did he not keep it there? Why did he put it in words? *Why* did he make a confident, or speak so as to be overheard?

Yet he did so. Some person was made aware of Esau's intention; and that person discovered the intention to Esau's mother. Was he entrusted with it by Esau? Why then was he not true to his trust? Did he merely learn the intention of Esau by overhearing him speaking to himself? In every light the thing is *overruled by Providence*. What a consolation does this afford to the Lord's people when they are threatened in life or property. God by His Providence discovered and disappointed the murderous intention of Esau, even though the conduct of Israel, in provoking the wrath of his brother, was greatly to be blamed. Shall not the Lord be the Protector of His people when by obedience to His will they subject themselves and fortunes to danger? The wicked are not permitted to execute the thousandth part of the mischief which they design against the Lord's people. His Providence watches over His children, and in due season manifests the plots of their enemies, or in one way or other prevents their execution.

In this wicked purpose of Esau, we see the hand of Divine Providence also, in sending Israel to the land of his fathers, where God provided for him a wife; and where his life, in the house of Laban, might afford a fit emblem of Jesus, of whom this man of sorrows was

an eminent type. Afflictive dispensations of Providence are designed for the good of the Lord's people, as well as events that are direct blessings. All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose.—Alexander Carson.

“But O my soul, if truth so bright,
Should dazzle and confound they sight,
Yet still His written Word obey,
And wait the great decisive day.” Watts.

Union and Communion.

8. *Experimental.*

“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways” (Prov. 14:14). What a sad case is that of the Christian who has lost touch with the Lord, whose sins and iniquities have hidden His face from him (Isa. 59:2)! Formerly, he walked in happy fellowship with Christ, but the light of His countenance no longer shines upon him. Once he was in possession of that peace which passeth all understanding, but now the joy of salvation is no more his portion. One who has “left his first love” has, of course, grieved the Holy Spirit, and hence He *withholds* His comforts from his heart, and consequently he is full of darkness, doubts, and fears as to his state, and can find no rest unto his soul. He has given place to the Devil, only to find him as merciless as the Egyptian taskmasters. He has returned for a season to the pleasures of sin, and now he lies by the wayside, robbed, stripped, wounded, half-dead.

There is no sorrier object in this world than a backslidden believer. His communion with Christ is broken, he has lost his relish for the Word, the spirit of prayer in him is quenched. On the other hand, he has been spoilt for the world, and cannot find that measure of satisfaction in carnal things which the ungodly do. Is, then, his case hopeless? Yes, so far as self-recovery is concerned, for a strayed sheep never finds its own way back again to the fold. The work of restoring backsliders from their spiritual decays is an act of sovereign grace, wrought in them by Him who is of infinite patience and abundant in mercy. When God designs to heal the backsliding of His people, He does so by giving them an effectual call to repentance, and by moving them to use and by blessing unto them those means which He has appointed for their recovery.

To the backslider himself his case appears, at first, desperate, for it is (alas) very much easier to depart from the Lord than it is to return to Him. Having turned his back upon God, it is difficult for him to now seek His face. Why so? Because his heart is so heavily oppressed, his conscience under such a load of guilt, his whole soul filled with shame, while a spiritual deadness seems to paralyse all his faculties. Moreover severed as he is from communion with the Lord, unbelief is dominant within him, so that he is unable to apprehend the plentitude of Divine grace and the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning blood. In such a state he is fully prepared to listen to Satan’s lies, telling him that his case is hopeless, that it is quite useless to seek God’s forgiveness. Memory, too, will remind him that he has so often in the past confessed his miserable failure to God, that to do so now would be worse than a mockery.

But presently, under the renewing operations of the blessed Spirit, a fresh hope is born within him, and he is made to feel that all is not irretrievably lost. Yet at this stage, it is of deep importance that no means of recovery from spiritual decays be sought unto save those which, for the matter and manner of them, are of *Divine* institution. Alas that so many are misled here. As is often the case with newly awakened souls—who betake themselves to physicians of no value and unto cisterns which hold no water—so not a few convicted backsliders enter upon a course which affords no remedy. It is at this point that Romanism so often gains power over souls who are seeking a relief from a conscience which gives them no respite, for unless the transgressor be under the actual guidance of *evangelical* light, he is easily imposed upon: his distress is so great, his burden so intolerable, that he is ready to listen to almost any comforter, be he a true or a false one.

There are numerous priests and preachers at hand who will counsel those whose conscience is causing them sore anguish to enter upon a course of duties which *God* has nowhere commanded—the confessional, bodily lacerations, pilgrimages, parting with large sums of money for charitable or religious enterprises, are advocated as sure sources of relief; while Protestant quacks will tell the suffering soul that he must quit this habit and give up that form of recreation, etc., etc., if he would obtain the ear of God. This same principle is illustrated in “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for my transgression*, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6:6, 7)—by such means they hoped to make reparation for their sins and be restored to their former condition. Let great care be taken, then, that the means used for recovery from backsliding be those prescribed *in the Scriptures*.

At no point does the amazing grace of our God appear more conspicuous than is His attitude toward His wayward and wandering children. Their base ingratitude against the inestimable favours they have already received, their wicked unfaithfulness in allowing the worthless things of time and sense to draw their hearts away from the Lord, and the grievous dishonour brought upon His name by their excuseless conduct, instead of causing Him to cast them off in utter disgust, only serve to bring out the changelessness, faithfulness, and abundancy of *His* love. O the superabounding mercies and lovingkindnesses of our blessed Lord unto such worthless wretches as we are. Because God knew how prone His people are unto grievous declensions and spiritual decays, He has graciously recorded in His Word “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4) which are exactly suited to their case: “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:22); “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him” (Hosea 14:4).

Such promises are made good to us by faith’s appropriation and by our use of the duly appointed means. But right here a further word of counsel and warning is needed if the exercised backslider is not to miss the goal of his desires: beware of attempting to use those means, and discharge those duties which God requires, in *your own strength*. When backsliders perceive clearly that certain duties are appointed them by God, and they are convinced that they must perform them, they are very apt to act as though such duties were to be executed in their own might. Convicted of carelessness, realising their sinful neglect of prayer, the reading of the Word, the mortifying of their members, and other spiritual exercises, and knowing it was their failure to use these means of grace which brought them into their present woeful state, they are now inclined to rush ahead and perform with a will those outward works wherein the duties consist.

Alas, what ignorant, erring creatures we are: how intractable and self-sufficient. When we should be using the strength God has given us we pretend to have “no prompting of the Spirit,” and so rest on our oars. When we should be waiting on the Lord for fresh supplies of grace, we feverishly attempt to act in the energy of the flesh. How slow we are to really believe that humbling word of Christ’s “without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Ah, that does not accord with the pride of our hearts, does it, and hence God suffers us to experience many painful failures ere we are willing to receive its truth. Let us, then, seek to be much upon our guard against rushing ahead to perform the duties required unto our restoration, and *leaving the Lord out of* the whole of our efforts. Only

God can “heal” us (Exo. 15:26), only He can “restore” the soul (Psa. 23:3). Faith, then, must humbly engage the assistance of Christ and His grace both unto and in those duties, otherwise no matter how earnestly we perform them or how zealously they be multiplied, they will not be effectual unto our recovery.

But it is time for us now to consider those duties which our blessed Lord has appointed for the recovery of His people. “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love: remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:4, 5). Having in the previous article dwelt upon what is signified by “leaving our first love,” we will now turn to the remedy here specified. This, it will be seen, is threefold, addressing the principal centres of our inner being: “remember” is a word for the understanding and conscience; “repent” is spoken to the affections; while “do the first works” is a call to the will: the whole man is guilty when we backslide, and the whole man (all the faculties of the soul) must be operative in returning to our Lord and Saviour. The way of recovery is here clearly defined, and though it involves that which is distasteful to the flesh, namely, the humbling of our proud hearts, yet there will be no restoration to real experimental communion with Christ, and no consequent peace, assurance and joy, until he submits thereto.

First, “*Remember from whence thou art fallen*”: this is a call to the backslider to seriously consider his condition, particularly to contrast his present sad case with his former happy one. Recollect what a difference there is between thee and thyself: thyself living and acting in the consciousness and power of the love of Christ, and thyself now in bondage to the power of some worldly or fleshly lust. Call to remembrance that while communion with Christ was maintained that the “joy of the LORD” was thy “strength” (Neh. 8:10), but now that communion is broken, you have neither joy nor strength. Consider what an advantage thou once hadst against the temptations of the Devil and the solicitations of the flesh and the world when your love for Christ was fresh and vigorous, and how much the case is altered with thee now—how feeble thy present resistance of any sin. Surely you have cause to bemoan “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; and when His candle shined upon my head” (Job 29:2, 3).

“Remember from whence thou art fallen.” Recall the “mount of myrrh” and the “hill of frankincense” which once were trodden in fellowship with the eternal Lover of your soul. “In our returning we should have such thoughts as these: I was wont to spend some time every day with God; it was a delight to me to think of Him, or speak of Him, or to Him; now I have no heart to pray or meditate. It was the joy of my soul to wait upon His ordinances; the return of the Sabbath was welcome unto me, but now what a weariness is it! Time was when my heart did rise up in arms against sin, when a vain thought was a grief to my soul; why is it so different with me now? Is sin grown less odious, or God less lovely?” (Thomas Manton).

Second, “*and repent*.” What is evangelical repentance? Its leading elements are conviction, contrition, and confession. Where real repentance is present in the heart there is a true sense of sin, a sincere sorrow for sin, a hearty loathing of sin, and a holy shame for sin. It is called by many names in Scripture: such as, the afflicting of our souls (Lev. 16:29), humbling ourselves (2 Chron. 7:14), a broken heart (Psa. 51:17), a contrite spirit (Isa. 66:2), a smiting upon the thigh (Jer. 31:19), mourning (Zech. 12:10), weeping bitterly (Matt. 26:75). “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom. 2:4), which means, first, it is *by* His goodness that repentance is wrought in us by the gracious opera-

tions of His Spirit; and second, that it is *a sense of* His goodness which melts and breaks our hard and stubborn hearts.

The convicted conscience is made to feel how vilely I have requited God for His great goodness to me, and thus sin is embittered to my soul. Thereby I am brought to take sides with God against myself and condemn my wicked wanderings from Him: so far from excusing my iniquities, I now accuse them. The heart is deeply affected by the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and grieves for having offended my loving Lord, for disregarding and opposing my blessed Benefactor, for having so evilly repaid Him, for having so little concern for His pleasure and honour. The soul will now sincerely confess its transgressions, not in a cold and formal way, but out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will now speak. "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee" (Ezra 9:6) will be my language.

True Christian repentance is the heart turning from sin and returning to God. In the hour of penitence sin is hated and self is loathed. The deeper the repentance, the fuller will be the confession: there will be a detailed acknowledgment of our wicked conduct, an emphasising of the enormity of the evil course we have followed. As examples of this let the reader turn to Daniel 9:5, 6 and Acts 26:9-11, and observe *how many aggravations* of the sinning is there mentioned! Further, genuine repentance is always attended with sincere desires and earnest endeavours after reformation of life: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth *and forsaketh them* shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13)—as sin is a forsaking of God, so repentance is a forsaking of sin. The language of a contrite soul is, "What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hosea 14:8).

Deeply humbling though the work of repentance be unto us, it is *glorifying to God*. "And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto Him" (Josh. 7:19); "And if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto My name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you" (Mal. 2:2); "And they repented not to give Him glory" (Rev. 16:9). It must be so, for repentance is taking sides with God against sin. O how each of us needs to pray for a deeper repentance. Painful though the work of repentance be, yet it issues in pleasant fruits. As one of the Puritans said, "Groans unutterable make way for joys unspeakable." If we sorrowed more for sin, we would rejoice more in the Lord. But let us add that, in cases where true penitents are so bound up within that they cannot pour out their souls in heart-melting confessions before the Lord, yet they can mourn over the hardness of their hearts, and grieve because their sorrow is so shallow.

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?
What peaceful hours I then enjoy'd;
How sweet their memory still;
But now I find an aching void
The world can never fill.

Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,

And drove Thee from my breast.
 The dearest idol I have known,
 Whate'er that idol be;
 Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
 And worship only Thee."—(Cowper).

Third, "And do the first works." Negatively this means, turn your back upon the world, re-enter the lists against Satan, resume the task of denying self and mortifying your members which are upon the earth. Positively it means, return unto the One from whom you so grievously departed, surrender yourself afresh to His lordship, render to Him that whole-hearted obedience which He requires. Make the pleasing of Christ your chief concern, walking with Him your daily business, communing with Him your supreme joy. Re-engage in the fight of faith, take unto you the armour which God has appointed, and give no quarter to your foes. Be diligent in using the means of grace: prayer, the reading of the Word, spiritual meditation thereon, and communing with God's people. Express your gratitude for the Lord's pardoning mercy and restoring grace by now being out and out for Him. "He restoreth my soul" is at once followed by "He leadeth me *in the paths of righteousness* for His name's sake" (Psa. 23:3)!

"And do the first works," then, signifies return to God in Christ. As our departure from the Lord was the cause of all our woes, so our case admits of no remedy till we repent and turn again unto Him. It is blessedly true that Christ purchased grace and pardon for His people, yet these are communicated to them in a way which is becoming to His holiness and wisdom. It would not be for His honour that we should be pardoned and restored without a penitent confession of past sins and an honest resolution of future obedience. Our case is not compassionate without it: who will pity those in misery that are unwilling to come out of it! The sincerity of our repentance is to be evidenced by a hearty determination for the future to live in obedience. In other words, it is not enough that we "cease to do evil," we are also required to "learn to do well" (Isa. 1:16, 17).

"And do the first works." It is not sufficient to bemoan the follies of the past: time present must be redeemed. As there are some sensible of their backslidings who do not actually repent thereof, so there are others who bemoan their sad case yet languish in idle complaints for their lack of love, and make no efforts to recover the same by serious endeavours. Those who are guilty of spiritual decays must not rest until they regain their former mindfulness of God and devotedness to Christ. Spare no efforts in so yielding up thyself to the Lord that *His* interests may again prevail in your heart above all sinful solicitations and vile inclinations. Engage your heart afresh to Christ, make no reservation; let your work be sin-aborring and sin-resisting each day.

"And do the first works." When a Nazarite had broken his vow, he had to start all over again (Num. 6:12). When we have forsaken the narrow way of obedience to and communion with Christ, God requires us to return to the point from which we wandered. Thus it was with the father of all who believe. Abraham's descent into Egypt was a divergence from the path of faith and duty. And what was the consequence? This, the time he spent there was lost, and he had to return to the point from whence he swerved and begin over again: "And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been *at the beginning*, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar which he had made there *at the first*" (Gen. 13:3, 4).

Observe well *the order* which God has specified for the recovery of those who had left their first love. Perhaps we may grasp the force of it better if we transpose it. “Do the first works”: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Col. 2:6). Ah, but do not overlook the fact that “repent” must precede this renewed activity in the Lord’s service: *the past must be put right* before we can again enjoy real communion with Him! God will not gloss over our sins, nor will He suffer *us* to do so: they are to be judged, confessed, forsaken, before new obedience is acceptable to Him. And “repent” is, in turn, preceded by “remember therefore from whence thou art fallen”: the more we heed *this* injunction the quicker will our conscience be convicted and the deeper will be our contritions. O that it may please the Lord to bless this article to the recovery of some backsliders.—A.W.P.

The Doctrine of Sanctification.

10. *Its Rule. (Continued).*

It has been pointed out in earlier articles that our practical sanctification by the Spirit is but His continuing and completing of the work which He began in us at regeneration and conversion. Now saving conversion consists in our being delivered from our depravity and sinfulness to the moral image of God, or, which is the same thing, to a real conformity unto the moral Law. And a conformity to the moral Law (as we showed in our last article), consists in a *disposition* to love God supremely, live to Him ultimately, and delight in Him superlatively; and to love our neighbours as ourselves, with a *practice* agreeing thereto. Therefore a saving conversion consists in our being recovered from what we are by nature *to such* a disposition and practice.

In order to this blessed recovery of us to God, Christ, by His Spirit, applies the Law in power to the sinner's understanding and heart, for "the Law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" (Psa. 19:7). That effectual application of the Law causes the sinner to see clearly and to feel acutely *how* he had lived—in utter defiance of it; *what* he is—a foul leper; what he *deserves*—eternal punishment; and how he is in the hands of a sovereign God, entirely at *His* disposal (see Rom. 9:18). This experience is unerringly described in, "For without (the Spirit's application of) the Law sin was dead (we had no perception or feeling of its heinousness). I was alive once without the law (deeming myself as good as any one else, and able to win God's approval by my religious performances), but when the commandment came (in power to my conscience), sin revived (became a fearful reality as I discovered the plague of my heart), and I died" (to my self-righteousness)—Romans 7:8, 9.

It is then, for the first time, that the soul perceives "the Law is *spiritual*" (Rom. 7:14), that it requires not only outward works of piety, but holy thoughts and godly affections, from whence all good works must proceed, or else they are unacceptable to God. The Law is "exceeding broad" (Psa. 119:96), taking notice not only of our outward conduct but also of our inward state; "love" is its demand, and *that* is essentially a thing of the *heart*. As the Law requires love, and nothing but love (to God and our neighbour), so all sin consists in that which is contrary to what the Law requires, and therefore every exercise of the heart which is not agreeable to the Law, which is not prompted by holy love, is opposed to it and *is sinful*. Therefore did Christ plainly declare, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

God requires far more than a correct outward deportment: "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the *inward* parts" (Psa. 51:6). The Law takes cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart, saying "thou shalt not *covet*," which is an act of the soul rather than of the body. When a sinner is brought to realise *what* the high and holy demands of the Law really are, and how utterly he has failed to meet them, he begins to perceive something of the new awfulness of his condition, for "by the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Now it is that the awakened sinner realises how justly the Law condemns and curses him as an inveterate and excuseless transgressor of it. Now it is that he has a lively sense in his own soul of the dreadfulness of eternal damnation. Now it is he discovers that he is *lost*, utterly and hopelessly lost so far as any self-help is concerned.

This it is which prepares him to see his dire need of Christ, for they that are whole (in their self-complacency and self-righteousness) betake not themselves to the great Physi-

cian. Thus the Law (in the hands of the Spirit) is the handmaid of the Gospel. Was not this the Divine order even at Sinai? The moral law was given first, and then the ceremonial law, with its priesthood and sacrifices: the one to convict of Israel's need of a Saviour, the other setting forth the Saviour under various types and figures! It is not until sin "abounds" in the stricken conscience of the Spirit-convicted transgressor that grace will "much more abound" in the estimation and appreciation of his Scripture-opened heart. In exact proportion as we really perceive the justice, dignity, and excellency of the Law, will be our realization of the infinite evil of sin; and in exact proportion to our sense of the exceedingly sinfulness of sin will be our wonderment at the riches of Divine grace.

Then it is that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). As an experimental sense of the glory of God's *righteousness* in the Law and of His *grace* in the Gospel is imparted to the soul by the Spirit, the sinner is moved to return home to God, through the Mediator, to venture his soul and its eternal concerns upon His free grace, and to give up himself to be *His* forever—to love Him supremely, live to Him entirely, and delight in Him superlatively. Hereby his heart begins to be habitually framed to love his neighbour as himself, with a disinterested impartiality; and thus an effectual foundation is laid in his heart for universal external obedience, for nothing but a spontaneous and *cheerful* obedience can be acceptable to God, an obedience which is rendered without repining or grudging, as though it were a grievous burden to us.

It is *thus* that Christ, by His Spirit, conforms us to God's Law. First, by enlightening our understanding, so that we perceive the spirituality of the Law, in its high and meet demands upon our hearts. Second, by bringing us to perceive the holiness and justice of its requirements. Third, by convicting us of our lifelong trampling of the Law beneath our feet. Fourth, by casing us to mourn over our wicked defiance of its authority. And fifth, by imparting to us a new nature or principle of holiness. Now it is that the Lord puts His laws into our minds and writes them in our hearts (Heb. 8:10). Thus, so far from the grace of the Gospel "making void the Law," it "*establishes*" it (Rom. 3:31) in our consciences and affections. A spiritual and universal obedience is what the Law demands.

The principal duties of love to God above all, and to our neighbours for His sake, are not only required by the sovereign will of God, but are in their own nature "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12), and therefore meet for us to perform. These are the two main roots from which issue all other spiritual fruits, and apart from them there can be no *holiness* of heart and life. And the powerful and effectual means by which this end is attained is the grand work of the Scripture in *sanctifying* us, for by *that* our hearts and lives are conformed to the Law. He must bestow upon us an inclination and disposition of heart *to* the duties of the Law, so as to fit and enable us unto the practice of them. For these duties are of such a nature as cannot possibly be performed while we have a disinclination from them.

As the Divine life is thus begun, so it is *carried on* in the soul much after the same order. The Spirit of God shows the believer, more and more, what a sinful, worthless, Hell-deserving wretch he is in himself, and so makes him increasingly sensible of his imperative need of free grace through Jesus Christ, to pardon and sanctify him. He has an ever-deepening sense of those two things all his days, and thereby his heart is kept humble, and Christ and free grace made increasingly precious. The Spirit of God shows the be-

liever more and more the infinite glory and excellency of God, whereby he is influenced to love Him, live to Him, and delight in Him with all his heart; and thereby his heart is framed more and more to love his neighbour as himself. Thus “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18).

The last paragraph needs the following qualifications: the Spirit’s operations *after* conversion are attended with two differences, arising from two causes. First, *the different state* the subject is in. The believer, being no longer under the Law as a covenant, is not, by the Spirit, filled with those legal *terrors* arising from the fears of Hell, as he formerly was (Rom. 8:15); rather is he now made increasingly sensible of his *corruptions*, of the sinfulness of sin, of his base ingratitude against such a gracious God; and hereby the heart is broken. Second, from *the different nature* of the subject wrought upon. The believer, no longer being under the full power of sin nor completely at enmity against God, does not resist the Spirit’s operation as he once did, but has a genuine disposition to join with Him against sin in himself; saying, Lord, correct, chasten me, do with me as Thou wilt, only subdue my iniquities and conform me more and more unto Thy image.

A few words now upon *the relation of the Gospel*. First, the grace of the Gospel is *not* granted to counterbalance the rigour of the Law, or to render God’s plan of government justifiable so as to sweeten the minds of His embittered enemies. The Law is “holy, just, and good” in itself, and was so before Christ became incarnate. God is not a tyrant, nor did His Son die a sacrifice to tyranny, to recover His injured people from the severity of a cruel Law. It is utterly impossible that the Son of God should die to answer the demands of an unrighteous Law. Second, the Law, as it is applied by the Spirit, prepares the heart for the Gospel; the one giving me a real knowledge of sin, the other revealing how I may obtain deliverance from its guilt and power. Third, *the Law*, and not the Gospel, is the rule of our sanctification: the one makes known what it is that God requires from me, the other supplies means and motives for complying therewith.

Fourth, the Law and the Gospel are not in opposition, but in apposition, the one being the handmaid of the other: they exist and work simultaneously and harmoniously in the experience of the believer. Fifth, the high and holy demands of the Law are *not* modified to the slightest degree by the Gospel: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48); “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15) is *the standard* set before us. Sixth, thus the Christian’s rule of righteousness is the Law, but in the hands of the Mediator: “Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21)—beautifully typed out in the Law being given to Israel at Sinai after their redemption from Egypt, through Moses *the typical Mediator* (Gal. 3:19). Seventh, herein we may see the seriousness of the God-dishonouring error of all those who repudiate the moral law as the Christian’s rule of life.

“The holy Law of God and the Gospel of His grace reflect the Divine glory, the one upon the other reciprocally, and both will shine forth with joint glory eternally in Heaven. The Law setting forth, in the brightest light, the beauty of holiness, and the vileness and fearful demerit of sin, will show the abounding grace that hath brought the children of wrath thither, with the infinite lustre and glory; and Grace will do honour to the Law, by showing in sinners, formerly very vile and polluted, the purity and holiness of the Law fully exemplified in their present sanctification; and Christ, the Lamb that was slain, by whom the interests of the Law and of Grace have been happily reconciled and insepara-

bly united, will be glorified in His saints and admired by them who believe" (James Frazer, "The Scriptural doctrine of Sanctification," 1760).

It is, then by the regenerating and sanctifying work of His Spirit that Christ brings His people to a conformity unto the Law and to a compliance with the Gospel. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). The "glory of the Lord" is beheld by us, first, as it shines in the glass *of the Law*—the glory of His justice and holiness, the glory of His governmental majesty and authority, the glory of His goodness in framing such a Law, which requires that we love Him with all our hearts, and, for His sake, as *His* creatures, our neighbours as ourselves. The "glory of the Lord" is beheld by us, second, as it shines forth in the glass *of the Gospel*—the glory of His redeeming love, the glory of His amazing grace, the glory of His abounding mercy. And, as renewed creatures, beholding this, we are "*changed* (the Greek word is the same as Christ being "transfigured") *into the same image*, from glory to glory (progressively, from one degree of it to another) by the Spirit of the Lord": that is, into a real conformity to the Law, and a real compliance with the Gospel.

The Gospel calls upon us to *repent*, but there can be no genuine repentance until we see and feel ourselves to be guilty transgressors of the Law, and until we are brought by the Spirit to realise that *we* are *wholly* to blame for not having lived in perfect conformity to it. Then it is we clearly realise that we thoroughly deserve to be damned, and that, notwithstanding all our doings and religious performances. Yes, then it is that we perceive that all our previous religious performances were done not from any love for God, or with

any real concern for His glory, but formally and hypocritically, out of self-love, from fear of Hell, and with a mercenary hope of gaining Heaven thereby. Then it is that our mouth is stopped, all excuses and extenuations silenced, and the curse of the Law upon us is acknowledged as just. Then it is that seeing God to be so lovely and glorious a Being, we are stricken to the heart for our vile enmity against Him, and condemn ourselves as incorrigible wretches. *Such* are some of the elements of *genuine* repentance.

The Gospel calls upon us to *believe*, to receive upon Divine authority its amazing good news: that a grievously insulted God has designs of mercy upon His enemies; that the Governor of the world, whose Law has been so flagrantly, persistently, and awfully trampled upon by us, in His infinite wisdom, devised a way whereby we can be pardoned, without His holy Law being dishonoured or its righteous claims set aside; that such is His wondrous love for us that He gave His only begotten Son to be made under the Law, to personally and perfectly keep its precepts, and then endure its awful penalty and die beneath its fearful curse. But when a sinner has been awakened and quickened by the Holy Spirit, *such* a revelation of pure grace is "too good to be true." To him it appears that *his* case is utterly hopeless, that he has transgressed beyond the reach of mercy, that he has committed the unpardonable sin. One in *this* state (and we sincerely pity the reader if he or she has never passed through it) can no more receive the Gospel into his heart than he can create the world. Only the Holy Spirit can bestow saving faith.

The Gospel calls upon us to *obey*, to surrender ourselves fully to the Lordship of Christ, to take His yoke upon us, to walk even as He walked. Now the yoke which Christ wore was unreserved submission to the will of God, and the rule by which He walked was being regulated in all things by the Divine Law. Therefore does Christ declare, "If

any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24), for He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. It is their refusal to comply with this demand of the Gospel which seals the doom of all who disregard its claims. As it is written, “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that *obey not* the Gospel” (2 Thess. 1:7, 8); and again, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that *obey not* the Gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17). But such obedience as the Gospel requires can only be rendered by the sanctifying operations of the gracious Holy Spirit.

Marvelous indeed is the change which the poor sinner passes through under the regenerating and converting operations of the Spirit in his soul: he is made a new creature in Christ, and is brought into quite new circumstances. Perhaps the closest analogy to it may be found in the experience of orphan children, left without any guardian or guide, running wild and indulging themselves in all folly and riot; then being taken into the family of a wise and good man and adopted as his children. These lawless waifs are brought into new surroundings and influences: love’s care for them wins their hearts, new principles are instilled into their minds, a new temper is theirs, and a new discipline regulates them; old things have passed away, all things have become new to them. So it is with the Christian: from being without God and hope in the world, from running to eternal ruin, they are delivered from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ. A new nature has been communicated to them, the Spirit Himself indwells them, and a reconciled God now bestows upon them a Father’s care, feeding, guiding, protecting them, and ultimately conducting them into everlasting glory.—A.W.P.

Oil in the Vessel.

Recently a brother in the Lord wrote calling our attention to the comparisons and contrasts between the wise and foolish virgins of Matthew 25. The substance of his remarks was as follows. They have seven things in common. First, all the virgins were in "the kingdom of heaven": by which we understand, the sphere of Christian profession. Second, they were all of them "virgins": not five virgins and five harlots: by which we understand, they all claimed to belong unto Christ. Third, they all "went forth to meet the Bridegroom": they were one in purpose, having a single end in view. Fourth, they all had "lamps," the same sort of lamps. Fifth, they all "slumbered and slept." Sixth, they all heard the cry "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." Seventh, they all "arose and trimmed their lamps."

There are six points of difference between them. First, five of them were "wise" and five of them were "foolish." Second, the wise "took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (v. 4), but the foolish ones did not do so. Third, at the crucial moment the foolish virgins had to acknowledge "our lamps are (slowly but surely) gone out" (v. 8 margin). Fourth, the foolish virgins "went to buy" oil (v. 10), the wise ones had no need to do so. Fifth, the wise were shut in with the Bridegroom, but the foolish were shut out (v. 10.) Sixth, the foolish virgins were disowned by the Lord (vv. 11, 12).

Commenting upon the above our friend pointed out that, "There is a certain class to-day who differ not from the children of God as to their testimony: its purity, its orthodoxy, its sincerity. These are not Spiritists, Russellites, or the daughters of the Mother of Harlots, but 'virgins'—*doctrinally they are pure*. They are pictured as going forth 'to meet the Bridegroom,' not one to the 'desert' and another to the 'secret chambers' (Matt. 24:26), seeking a false Christ. The Object of their service was the same Person which the wise virgins were occupied with. The vital point in their 'foolishness' was not that they 'slumbered and slept' but that they had *no oil in their VESSELS*. Their was oil in their 'lamps'—the testimony or doctrine—but none in their vessels or souls."

The above has deeply impressed the editor once more with the great importance of making sure individually whether there be oil in *my* vessel: the "vessel" is the soul, the "oil" is Divine grace in it. Whatever may be the precise signification of "behold the Bridegroom cometh"—whether it refer to the hour of death, the "premillennial return of Christ," or the Day of Judgment—one thing is clear: it points to the crucial testing time. As our friend further points out: Balaam had oil in his "lamp," as also had Judas when Christ sent him forth with the other Apostles to "preach" (Matt. 10:5-7), yet their hearts were destitute of the saving grace of God! What a terrible discovery for the foolish virgins to make: "our lamps are gone out"—a discovery *made too late* to do them any good.

This parable of the "virgins" is indeed a searching and solemn one. It has deeply exercised many a sincere soul. It has caused not a few genuine saints to wonder if, after all, the "root of the matter" were in them. It has given real point to that exhortation "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5). On the other hand, vast numbers of professing Christians are quite unmoved by its pointed message, complacently assuming that they *are* numbered among the "wise" virgins, and taking no trouble to seek *proof* that the oil is in their vessels. Strangest of all, perhaps, some of the Lord's own people scarcely know *how* to set about the task of ascertaining their state, and are so suspicious of themselves they readily conclude that their vessels are devoid of the vital oil.

The key passage for the significance of this Scriptural figure is, “Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Psa. 45:7), where the reference is to the Mediator, for God “giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him” (John 3:34); in consequence thereof, He is “fairer than the children of men: *grace is poured* into Thy lips” (Psa. 45:2). The holy “oil” was first poured upon the antitypical Aaron, and then it runs down to all the “skirts of His garments” (Psa. 133:2), that is, to the meanest and feeblest Christians. Just as the little finger or toe is animated by the same life and vitality as actuates the head and heart of a person, so every Christian is vitalized by the same Spirit as was given to Christ, the Head. As the Spirit sanctified the human nature of Christ by fitting and enriching it with all grace, so His grace is communicated to all His members.

The “oil,” then, in the vessels of the wise virgins refers to the life of the Spirit in the soul of a Christian. It is the presence of Divine grace in the heart—in contrast from knowledge in the head or correctness of outward deportment—which distinguishes the actual possessor from the empty professor. How important then is it that we spare no efforts to ascertain whether or not that Divine grace resides *in us*! Yet at this very point Christians encounter a real difficulty: as they honestly and diligently look within they perceive such a sea of corruption, ever casting up mire and dirt, they are greatly distressed, and ready to conclude that Divine grace surely cannot be present in such hearts as theirs. But this is a serious mistake; as genuine oil is distinguishable from counterfeits by its *properties*, so grace in the soul may be known by its characteristics and effects.

But the exercised soul should begin his search for indwelling grace with it definitely settled in his mind, that, in every heart where grace resides there is also an ocean of sin; and just as oil and water will not mix, but continue to preserve their distinct properties even when placed together in the same vessel, so the flesh and spirit will not combine in the Christian, but remain in opposition to each other unto the end. Admitting, then, a sea of depravity within, my object is to find out if there be any “oil” at all which the surgings of sin are unable to destroy. When I see smoke, I must infer fire (however flickering), and if I can discern in my heart any spiritual grace (however feeble) I *must* infer the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Be not unduly discouraged, then, dear Christian friend, because you discover so much filthy water in your “vessel” (the editor does the same), but rather confine your attention unto searching for the “oil” within you, and remember that the presence of the same is to be determined *by its properties and effects*. Let us name a few of these. First, oil *illuminates*, therefore are the blinded Laodiceans bidden to go to Christ for eyesalve (anointing oil) that they may see (Rev. 3:18). Now where Divine grace has been bestowed that soul is enlightened. True, says a serious reader, but the point which exercises me so much is, Is my enlightenment a spiritual and supernatural one, or merely a natural and intellectual one, acquired by the mind being instructed through sitting under sound teaching? Those mentioned in Hebrews 6:4 were “once enlightened,” yet no saving work of grace had been wrought in them!

Some of our readers may be total strangers to all such distressing experiences, and wonder why any real Christian should call into question the exact character of his or her illumination, troubling themselves not at all whether *their* enlightenment be natural or supernatural. Poor souls, it is greatly to be feared that a rude awakening is awaiting them from their Satan-induced sleep. But what shall we say to those who *are* awake and deeply concerned about their eternal interests? How are such to determine the matter? We an-

swer, *test* the point. Was there not a time when you “saw no beauty in Christ that you should *desire* Him?” Is it so with you now? Or has He become in your eyes the “altogether lovely” One? You may be afraid to call Him *yours*, yet if your heart truly yearns for Him, then you *must* have been spiritually enlightened—the “oil” *is* in your vessel.

Second, oil *softens*. Oil was much used by the ancients for medicinal purposes, and we moderns might well take a leaf out of their books. It will melt caked wax in the ear; make tender a calloused bunion. It is very useful for tumours: repeated applications softening, then causing to burst, and then healing. Thus it is in the operation of the Holy Spirit. He finds the elect hard and obdurate by nature, and swollen with pride and self-conceit; but Divine grace softens them, melting their flinty hearts, bursting the tumours of self-righteousness, and imparting a contrite spirit. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Eze. 36:26).

When Divine grace has been imparted the heart is supernaturally softened. But right here the sincere soul experiences still greater difficulty, and is ready to exclaim emphatically, Then I must still be in an unregenerate state, for *my* heart is “as hard as the nether millstone.” Wait a moment, dear friend, and *test* the matter. What are *the marks* of a “hard heart” as given in Scripture? Are they not a total absence of a *feeling* sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, an utter unconcern whether God be pleased or displeased with my conduct, no mourning in secret when Christ has been dishonoured by me? Is that true of *you*, who are so ready to conclude you are still in a state of nature? If it is not, if sin is your burden and your soul grieves over your lack of conformity to Christ, then your heart *must* have been spiritually softened—the “oil” *is* in your vessel.

Third, oil *heals*. Hence we find the great Physician, under the figure of the good Samaritan, having compassion on the assaulted traveler, binding up his wounds and “pouring in *oil* and wine” (Luke 10:34); and He is still caring thus for His people through the gracious ministry of the Spirit. How often the blessed Comforter applies “the balm of Gilead” to the sin-afflicted people of God. What horrible bruises and putrifying sores do sin and Satan inflict upon the souls of the saints, yet how frequently and tenderly does the Spirit mollify and relieve them. First, He works repentance in the heart, which is a purging grace, carrying away the foul and poisonous love of sin; and then He strengthens hope, which is a comforting grace so that the joy of the Lord once more becomes his strength. Divine grace removes the load of guilt from the conscience, applies the cordial of the promises, and gives the weary pilgrim a lift by the way—“set him on His own beast” (Luke 10:34).

Here, then, is another property and effect of Divine grace: it heals the soul. We can well imagine some fearful reader exclaiming, Alas, that cuts off my hope, for there is no soundness in me. Listen, dear friend, no Christian is completely and perfectly healed from the disease of sin in this life, but he *is* delivered from the most fearful and fatal effects of it; and it is at *this* point you are to examine yourself. What are the *worst* things which the Fall has produced in man? Enmity against God, the love of sin, the idolizing of self. *Test* yourself by these things. Do you still hate God?—if so, would you repine because you love Him so feebly! Are you still in love with sin?—if so, why do you grieve over its workings! Is self now your idol?—if so, why do you, at times, loath yourself! Sin has not been eradicated, but its wounds are being healed—the “oil” *is* in your vessel.

The limited space now at our disposal prevents us doing more than barely mentioning a number of other features. Oil makes the joints flexible and nimble, and therefore was much used by athletes; so grace enables the Christian to “serve in newness of spirit” (Rom. 7:6) and run the race set before him. It is an excellent thing for those who have stiff joints, for it penetrates to the bones (Psa. 109:18). It makes the countenance fresh and comely (Psa. 104:15); what is more attractive to the spiritual eye than a gracious character. It sweetens our persons, so that we are unto God a “sweet savour of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:15), whereas the wicked are a “smoke in His nostrils” (Isa. 65:5). It gladdens, and thus we read of “the oil of joy” (Isa. 61:3); the heart is exhilarated when grace is active. It is an aid to digestion; so, only as grace is active within us, can we assimilate our spiritual food.

Oil and water will not intermingle: the old man is not bettered by the new, nor is the new corrupted by the old. Oil cannot be made to sink beneath the water, but always floats on top; so grace in the believer is indestructible, and at the end it will be seen to have fully triumphed over sin. Oil is a super-eminent liquid, for it will not incorporate itself with anything lighter; it will have the highest place above all other liquids. So the graces of the Spirit are of a superior character—as far above the gifts of nature as spiritual blessings excel earthly things. Oil quietens troubled waters, giving relief to a ship in a storm: so grace often subdues the turbulent workings of sin. What a blessed promise is that in Psalm 92:10, “But my horn shalt Thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with *fresh* oil”: new supplies of grace, blessed revivings are granted God’s tried people. Yes, there *is* “oil in the dwellings of the *wise*”—virgins (Prov. 21:20. The Lord be pleased to add *His* blessing to this little meditation.—A.W.P.

N.B. This short article is not designed for the searching and exposing of empty professors, but for the establishing and comforting of “the living in Jerusalem.” If the latter will prayerfully re-read its paragraphs and honestly measure themselves by their contents, they should be able to “prove” themselves (2 Cor. 13:5). It is not the absence of sin, nor the decreasing of its power within, which evidences regeneration, but the presence of a contrary and holy principle, which is known by its spiritual longings and efforts.

