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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

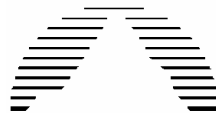
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE PATH OF DUTY

Part B

In our last we pointed out (1) that God's will for us is revealed in His Word; (2) that His Word is to regulate all our ways and control all our conduct; (3) that no matter what situation we be in or what emergency may arise, God's Word is all-sufficient as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path; (4) that it therefore follows, the path of duty is defined for us in the Divine commandments. Yet there are some who say that they find it more difficult to *discern* their duty than to actually *perform* it once their duty is clearly perceived. But this should not be. That is tantamount to saying they have no light on their path, that they are in darkness, and surely that is a sad acknowledgement from anyone who professes to be a "child of light" (Eph. 5:8). Did not the Savior declare "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). If then I find myself in darkness, must not the fault be entirely mine? Then should I not examine myself and seek to discover the reason of it?—"is there not a cause"! Was it because I yielded to the pleasing of self and ceased to "follow" Him who is the Light? If so, my duty is plain I must humbly and penitently confess my failure to God and have the wrong put right, or my darkness will deepen.

Perhaps some reader replies, What you have said above hardly covers my case. The perplexity which confronts me is this: I find myself at the parting of the ways, and I am not clear whether I should turn to the right hand or to the left. My situation has drastically changed: the death of a loved one, the calling-up of my employer, or some other war emergency, has suddenly altered my circumstances. I have to make a decision, and what is for the best I am at a loss to discover. What am I to do? "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5,6). Confer not with flesh and blood, for if you consult your Christian friends the probability is that no two will offer the same counsel, and you will be more perplexed than ever. Go to the Lord Himself, acknowledge His Proprietorship over you, mix faith with this promise of His, turn it into definite and earnest prayer and *expect* an answer of peace from Him, trusting Him for the same.

Consider the case of Eliezer in Genesis 24. His master bade him journey from Canaan to Mesopotamia in search for a wife for his son Isaac. If ever a man was assigned a difficult task it was this one. But his duty was clear, for obedience to his master required him to enter upon this quest. Accordingly we find him setting out on his mission. But observe how he acted. When he arrived at the outskirts of the city of Nahor, he made his camels to kneel down by the well, and then he said "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I beseech Thee send me good speed this day" (v. 12). It was the hour when the maidens came to draw water from the well, so Eliezer asked the Lord to give him a sign whereby he might "know" which of them was the appointed wife for Isaac (v. 14). And the Lord did not fail him, but honored his faith. In the sequel we find Eliezer bowed in worship and saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being *in the way* [of duty] the Lord *led* me" (v. 27). And that is recorded for our instruction and encouragement.

Do not act hastily or impulsively, for God says "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). But some reader may reply "I am obliged to make a prompt decision in the matter before me." Even so, if you have been living as becometh a child of God, there ought to be no difficulty: "the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22). That is a figurative way of saying, if you have an undivided heart, if your dominant aim be the pleasing of God, then your mind will be illumined and able to perceive clearly the path of duty. Perplexity is occasioned by conflicting interests swaying me, when opposing motives seek to actuate me, when the pleasing of self comes into competition with the glorifying of God. Keep steadily in view that the thing you have to decide is not which is the easier or most congenial path—the right hand or the left—but which is my *duty*?

Perhaps you reply, but that is my difficulty: how am I to decide *what is* my duty? Well, ponder the *negative* side: it is never right to do wrong, and therefore it can never be the Christian's duty to do anything which God's Word forbids, nor can it ever be his duty to enter into any position which would prevent him doing what Scripture enjoins. For example, if one alternative be going into debt my duty is plain, for Scripture says "Owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8); or if it be to enter into a partnership or any other union with an unbeliever, God's Word forbids it: "Be ye not unequally yoked together" (2 Cor. 6:14); or if a worldly employer requires me to do work on the Sabbath day, then he is asking me *to sin* by breaking the fourth

commandment; or if a Christian mother be ordered to enter a position wherein she could no longer care for her little ones, her duty would be clear, for "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6) is a privilege and responsibility which she cannot delegate unto others.

But suppose the *Government* should demand from me what is against my conscience, as the performing of manual labor on the Sabbath, does not Scripture itself bid me "be subject unto the higher powers?" God's people most certainly ought to be models of law-abiding citizens: righteous and merciful in all dealings with their fellows, doing unto others as they would be done by. They are Divinely enjoined to "render tribute to whom tribute is due," and thus to pay their taxes promptly and uncomplainingly. Nevertheless they must ever remember *God's* claims upon them, and never allow the fear of man to prevent their meeting His claims. We are to submit unto the Government so long as its requirements do not clash with the demands of God, but no further. When the king of Babylon issued a decree that all in his dominions should fall down and worship the golden image he had set up, the three Hebrews rightly refused to do so; and when a later king issued an idolatrous edict, Daniel disregarded it; and in each case God vindicated their fidelity to Him. It is never right to do wrong, no matter who commands it, or what may be the emergency.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13:1,2). Is that an exhortation which requires *unqualified* submission to the governing power of a country? Does it signify that it is not permissible for the Christian to make any resistance unto magistrates, no matter what may be the nature of the laws they enact? Some have insisted this inspired injunction is to be taken without any modification. They point out it was given to Christians in the days of Nero, requiring them to be fully obedient unto the Roman emperors even though their edicts were destructive of Christianity itself. But such an understanding of these verses is quite untenable, failing as it does to leave any place for the superior claims of *God*. Children are commanded "obey your parents in *all* things" (Col. 3:20), yet if they ordered to *steal* it would be the child's duty to disobey them!

The duty of obedience to those in authority is enforced by Holy Writ: see 1 Peter 2:13, 14. The civil government (whatever its form) is a Divine institution, and therefore to resist magistrates in the exercise of their lawful authority is disobedience to God. Yet since their authority is only a delegated one, delegated by God Himself, then they *transcend* their rights if they require anything which is inconsistent with our obedience to God; and when such a case arises it becomes the Christian's duty to disobey them. The "power" to which Christians are bidden to be subject is a righteous and benevolent one, and not an iniquitous and malevolent one: "he is the minister of God to thee *for good*" (Rom. 13:4), but he ceases to be "the minister of God to thee" if he demands what is evil. Wives are Divinely ordered to be "subject to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:24), yet if they forbade their wives to read the Scriptures it would be their duty to disobey them. Wherever human law conflicts with the Divine "we must obey *God* rather than men" clearly defines our duty. (*D. V. to be continued*). —AWP

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

6. *Romans 15:33*

“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” The “God of peace”: contrary to the general run of the commentators, we regard this Divine title as expressing, first of all, what God is *in Himself*, that is, as abstracted from relationship with His creatures and apart from His operations and bestowments. He is Himself the Fountain of peace. Perfect tranquility reigns in His whole Being. He is never ruffled in the smallest measure, never perturbed by anything, either within or without Himself. How could He be? Nothing can possibly take Him by surprise, for “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). Nothing can ever disappoint Him, for “of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things” (Rom. 11:36). Nothing can to the slightest degree disturb His perfect equanimity, for He is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Consequently perfect security ever fills Him: that is one component element of His essential glory. Ineffable peace is one of the jewels in the diadem of Deity.

Living as we now are in a war-torn and war-weary world, let us for a season gird up the loins of our minds and endeavor to contemplate something vastly different, something infinitely more excellent, namely, the One who is a total Stranger to unrest and disquietude, One who enjoys undisturbed calm, “the God of peace.” It seems strange that this glorious excellency of the Divine character is so little dwelt upon by Christian writers. The sovereignty of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, the immutability of God, have frequently been made the theme of devout pens; but the peace of God Himself has received scarcely any attention. Numerous sermons have been preached upon “the God of Love” and “the God of all grace,” but where shall we find any on “the God of peace,” except it be as the reconciled God? Yet only once in all the Scriptures is He specifically designated “the God of love,” and only once “the God of all grace,” yet five times over is He addressed or referred to as “the God of peace.” As such a perpetual calm characterises His whole Being: He is infinitely blessed in Himself.

The names and titles of God make known to us His Being and character, and it is by meditating upon each one of them in turn, by mixing faith therewith, by giving all of them a place in our hearts and minds, that we are enabled to form a better and fuller concept of who He is and what He is in Himself, His relationship unto and His attitude toward us. God is the Fountain of all good, the Sum of all excellency. Every grace and virtue we perceive in the saints are but so many scattered rays which have emanated from Him who is Light. We not only do Him a great injustice but we are largely the losers ourselves if we habitually think and speak of God according to *only one* of His titles, be it “the Most High” on the one hand, or “our Father” on the other. Just as we need to read and ponder *every* part of the Word if we are to become acquainted with God’s revealed will and be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” so we need to meditate upon and make use of *all* the Divine titles if we are to form a well-rounded and duly-balanced concept of His perfections and realise what a God is ours—His absolute sufficiency for us.

“The God of peace.” According to the usage of this expression in the New Testament and in view of the teaching of Scripture as a whole concerning the Triune Jehovah and peace, we believe it will be best opened up to the reader if we make use of the following outline. This title “the God of peace” tells us, first of all, what He is essentially, namely, the Fountain of peace. Second, it announces what He is economically or dispensationally, namely, the Ordainer or Covenantor of peace. Third, it reveals what He is judicially, namely, the Provider of peace—a reconciled God. Fourth, it declares what He is paternally, namely, the Giver of peace to His children. Fifth, it proclaims what He is governmentally, namely, the Orderer of peace in the churches, and in the world. The meaning of these terms will become plainer and simpler, we trust, as we fill in our outline.

First, “the God of peace” tells us what He is *essentially*, that is, what God is in Himself. As pointed out above, peace is one of grand perfections of the Divine nature and character. We regard this title as referring not so much to what God is absolutely, nor only to the Father, but to the *Triune* Jehovah. First, because there is nothing in the context or in the remainder of the verse which requires us to limit this prayer to any particular person in the Godhead. Second, because we should ever take the terms of Scripture in their widest latitude and most comprehensive meaning when there is nothing obliging us to restrict their scope. Third, because it is a fact, a Divinely-revealed truth, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are alike “the God of peace.” Nor could there be any force to the objection that since *prayer* is here made unto “the

God of peace” we are obliged to regard the reference as being to the Father, for in Scripture prayer is also made to the Son and to the Spirit. True, the reference in Hebrews 13:20 is to the Father, for He is there distinguished from “our Lord Jesus,” but since no such distinction is made here, we decline to make any.

That this title belongs to the Father scarcely needs any arguing, for the opening words of the salutation found at the beginning of most of the New Testament epistles will readily occur to the reader: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3 etc.)—“grace” from Him as He is “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10), “peace” from Him as “the God of peace.” The added words of that salutation “and the Lord Jesus Christ” establishes the same fact concerning the Son, for grace and peace could not proceed from Him unless He were also the Fountain of both. It will be remembered that in Isaiah 9:6 He is expressly denominated “the Prince of peace,” which coming immediately after His other titles there,—“The mighty God, The everlasting Father”—shows that He is “the Prince of peace” in His essential Person. In 2 Thessalonians 3:16 Christ is designated “the Lord of peace,” Hebrews 7:2 tells us He is the “King of peace,” typed out as such by Melchizedek the priest-king. In Romans 16:20 the apostle announced, “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” and in the light of Genesis 3:15 there can be no doubt that the reference is immediately unto the incarnate Son.

Less is explicitly revealed in Scripture concerning the Person of the Holy Spirit, because He is not presented to us objectively, like the Father and the Son, inasmuch as He works within and indwells the saints. Nevertheless, clear and full proof is given in the Sacred Oracles that He is *God*, co-essential, coequal, and co-glorious with the Father and the Son. It is a most serious mistake to conclude from theologians referring to Him as “the third Person” of the Godhead that He is in any wise inferior to the other Two, as a careful examination of Scripture and a comparison of one passage with another will demonstrate. If in Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 He is mentioned after the Father and Son, in Revelation 1:4, 5 He is named (as “the seven Spirits,”—the Spirit in His fullness) before Jesus Christ, while in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 and Ephesians 4:4-6 He is named *before* both the Son and the Father—such variation of order manifesting Their co-equality. Thus, as co-equal with the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit must also be “the God of peace,” which is evidenced by His communicating Divine peace to the hearts of the redeemed. When He descended from heaven on our baptized Savior, it was in the form of a “dove” (Matt. 3:16)—the bird of peace.

Second, “the God of peace” announces what He is *dispensationally*, in the economy of redemption, namely, the Ordainer or Covenantor of peace. This is clear from Hebrews 13:20, 21 where the apostle prays, “Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will.” It was specifically as “the God of peace” that the Father delivered our Surety from the tomb, “through the blood of the everlasting covenant,” that is, on the ground of that blood which ratified and sealed the great Compact which had been made between Them before the foundation of the world. Reference is made to that Compact in Psalm 89:3, where the allusion is to the antitypical David or “Beloved,” as verses 27, 28 conclusively prove. In His foreviews of the entrance of sin into the world, with the fall of His elect in Adam, and the breach that made between Him and them, alienating the One from the other, God graciously purposed to effect a reconciliation and secure a permanent peace on a righteous basis, a basis which paid homage to His authority and honored His Law.

A “covenant” is a mutual agreement between two parties, wherein a certain work is proposed and a suitable reward promised in return. In the Everlasting Covenant the two parties were the Father and the Son. The task assigned the Son was that He should become incarnate, render unto the Law a perfect obedience in thought and word and deed, and then endure its penalty on behalf of His guilty people, thereby offering unto the offended God (considered as Governor and Judge) an adequate atonement, satisfying His justice, magnifying His holiness, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness. The reward promised was that God would raise from the dead the Surety and Shepherd of His people, exalting Him to His own right hand high above all creatures, conforming them unto the image of His Son, and having them with Himself in glory forever and ever. The Son’s voluntary compliance with the proposal appears in His “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,” and all that He did and suffered was in fulfillment of His covenant agreement. The Father’s fulfillment of His part of the contract, in bestowing the promised reward, is fully revealed in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit was the Witness and Recorder of that Covenant.

Now that everlasting Compact is expressly designated “the Covenant of *peace*” in Isaiah 54:10, Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26. In that Covenant Christ stood as the Representative of His people, transacting in their

name and on their behalf, holding all their interests dear to His heart. In that Covenant, in compliance with the Father's will and from His wondrous love for them, Christ agreed to enter upon the most exacting engagement and to undergo the most fearful suffering, in order that they might be delivered from the judicial wrath of God and have peace with Him, that there might be perfect amity and concord between God and them. That engagement was faithfully discharged by Christ and the peace which God eternally ordained has been effected, and in due course the Father brings each of His elect into the good of it. It is to that same Eternal compact that Zechariah 6:12, 13 alludes: "the counsel of peace shall be between them Both" (v. 13). That "counsel of peace" or mutual good-will was this "Covenant of peace," and the "between Them Both," between "The Man whose name is the Branch" and Jehovah "the Lord of hosts" (v. 12); and the "counsel" concerned Christ's building of the Church (Eph. 2:21) and His exaltation to the throne of glory.

Third, "The God of peace" reveals what He is *judicially*, namely, the Provider of peace, a reconciled God. That which is to here engage our attention is the actual outworking and accomplishment of what has been before us in the last division. Of old God said concerning His people "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord: thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11). Yes, despite their apostasy from Him in the Adam Fall, despite the guilt that rested upon them for their legal participation therein, and despite their own multiplied transgressions against Him, there had been no change in His everlasting love for them. A real and fearful breach had been made, and as the Moral Governor of the universe God would not ignore it; nay, as the Judge of all the earth His condemnation and curse rested upon them. Nevertheless His heart was toward them and His wisdom found a way whereby the horrible breach might be healed and His banished people restored to Himself, and that not only without compromising His holiness and justice but by glorifying the one and satisfying the other. God determined to put away their sins and secure reconciliation.

"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law" (Gal. 4:4,5). It was in order to carry out what had been agreed upon in the Everlasting Covenant that God sent forth His Son. It was in order to provide an adequate compensation to His Law that God's Son was made of a woman, that in our nature He should satisfy the requirements of the Law, put away our sins and bring in everlasting righteousness. It was in order to redeem His people from the curse of the Law that the Son lived and died and rose again. It was in order to make peace with God, to placate His wrath, to secure an equitable and stable peace that Christ obeyed and suffered. In the redemptive work of His Son, God provided peace. At His birth, the heavenly hosts, by anticipation, praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). And at His death, Christ "made peace [between God and His people] through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20), reconciling God (as the Judge) to them, establishing perfect and abiding amity and concord between them.

Fourth, "the God of peace" declares what He is *paternally*, namely, the Giver of peace unto His children. This goes beyond what has been pointed out above. Before the foundation of the world God ordained there should be mutual peace between Himself and His people. As the immediate result of Christ's mediatorial work, peace was made with God and *provided* for His people. Now we are to consider how the God of peace makes them the actual participants of this inestimable blessing. By nature they are utter strangers to it, for "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. 57:21). How could there be when they are engaged continually in active hostility against God? They are without peace, in their conscience, in their minds, or in their hearts. As God has indissolubly united holiness and happiness, so sin and wretchedness are inseparably connected. Just so long as men are found fighting against God, breaking His Law, and being lords unto themselves, it has to be said "The way of peace have they not known" (Rom. 3:17).

Before the sinner can be reconciled to God and enter into participation of the peace which Christ has made with Him, he must cease his rebellion, throw down the weapons of his warfare, and yield to His rightful authority. But for that a miracle of grace must be wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. As the Father ordained peace, as the incarnate Son made peace, so the Holy Spirit brings us into the same. He convicts us of our awful sins, and makes us willing to forsake them. He communicates faith to the heart whereby we savingly believe in Christ: then "being justified by faith we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1) objectively—we are brought into His favor. But more: we enjoy peace subjectively. The intolerable burden of guilt is removed from the conscience and we "find rest unto our souls." Then it is we know the meaning of that word "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). By His Spirit, through Christ, the Father has now actually bestowed peace upon His be-

lieving child, and in proportion as his mind is stayed on Him, by trusting in Him, he will be kept in perfect peace (Isa. 26:3).

Fifth, "The God of peace" proclaims what He is *governmentally*, namely, the Orderer of peace in the churches and in the world. Though each Christian has peace with God, yet he is left in a world which lieth in the Wicked one. Though the Christian has the peace of God in his heart, yet the flesh remains, causing a continual conflict within, and, unless restrained, breaking forth into strife with his brethren. Therefore unless God was pleased to put forth His restraining power upon that which seeks to disturb and disrupt the believer's calm, he would enjoy little or no tranquillity within or rest from without. Our responsibility is "as much as lieth in" us to "live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18); God's gracious interventions—so far as He deems it to be for His own glory and our good—is to make all men live peaceably with us. For illustrations of this aspect of the Divine administration see Genesis 35:5; Exodus 34:24; Leviticus 26:6; 1 Chronicles 22:9; 2 Chronicles 17:10; Psalm 147:14; Proverbs 16:7; 1 Corinthians 14:33.

"Now the God of peace *be with you all*. Amen." By that petition we understand the apostle made request that God would, in this particular character or excellency make Himself *manifest* among them, that His felt presence should thus be known in their midst. Were it not for the overruling providence of the Lord, His people would have no rest at any time in this world. But He rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2) and gives them a considerable measure of peace from their foes. This shows us that we ought to be constantly looking to God for His peace. If we seek it not, but grow self-confident and secure, trials and assaults are likely to arise from every quarter. Our only security is in God, and our duty is constantly to ask peace of Him in the midst of a world of trouble. Peace is a blessing which the churches greatly need, for without it there can be neither spiritual prosperity nor happiness. Thus we ought to regularly beseech God to maintain peace not only in the Christian circle with which we may be connected, but with companies of the redeemed all over the world. We ought to "pray for the peace of [the spiritual] Jerusalem" as our chief joy (condensed from R. Haldane).

By clear implication this prayer "Now the God of peace *be with you all*" implies that the saints must conduct themselves in harmony therewith, that amity and concord must prevail among them, so that there be no such grievous failure on their part as would offend God and cause Him to withdraw such a beneficent manifestation of His presence from them. Philippians 4:9 makes known the conditions of our enjoying the manifested presence of the God of peace: "these things which ye have both learned and received, and heard, and seen in me, DO, *and* the God of peace shall be with you." That is, the leading of a holy life and the faithful performance of duty are the necessary prerequisites. As the individual believer experimentally enjoys the peace of God in proportion as he casts every care upon Him and maintains a spirit of thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6,7), so a corporate company of believers must be in subjection to Divine authority and maintain a Scriptural discipline if they would enjoy the God of peace in their midst.

A parallel passage is, "Be perfect [sincere and upright], be of good comfort, be of one mind, *live in peace*, and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). Upon which C. Hodge well said, "The existence of love and peace is the condition of the presence of the God of love and peace. He withdraws the manifestations of His presence from the soul disturbed by angry passion, and from a community torn by dissension. We have here the familiar Christian paradox. God's presence produces love and peace, and we must have love and peace in order to have His presence. God gives what He commands. God gives, but we must cherish His gifts. His agency does not supersede ours, but mingles with it, and becomes one in our consciousness. We work out our own salvation, while God works in us. Our duty is to yield ourselves to the operation of God. ...It is vain for us to pray for the presence of the God of love and peace unless we strive to free our hearts from all evil passions." AWP

We thank our friends who responded to the request at the foot of page 4 of the February issue: God has graciously answered and raised up many new readers. But our circulation is still much below what it was a few years ago.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

18. Tenth Miracle - part 5

That to which we devoted much of our attention in previous meditations was *the requirement* made upon Naaman, because that demand and his compliance therewith is the hinge on which this miracle turns, as the response made by the sinner to the call of the Gospel settles whether or not he is to be cleansed from his sin. This does not denote that the success or failure of the Gospel is left contingent upon the will of men, but rather announces that *order of things* which God has instituted: an order in which He acts as Moral Governor and in which man is dealt with as a moral agent. In consequence of the fall, man is filled with enmity against God and is blind to his eternal interests. His will is opposed to God's and the depravity of his heart causes him to forsake his own mercies. Nevertheless, he is still a responsible creature, and God treats him as such. As His Moral Governor, God requires obedience from him, and in the case of His elect He obtains it, not by physical compulsion but by moral persuasion, not by mere force but by inclining them to free concurrence. He does not overwhelm by Divine might, but declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4).

What has just been pointed out above receives striking illustration in the incident before us. When God's requirement was made to Naaman, it pleased him not: he was angry at the prophet and rebellious against the instructions given him. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" was a definite test of obedience, calling for the surrender of his will unto the Lord. Everything was narrowed down to that one thing: would he bow before and submit to the authoritative Word of God? In like manner every person who hears it is tested by the Gospel to-day. The Gospel is no mere "invitation" to be heeded or not as men please, and grossly dishonoring to God is it if we consider it only as such. The Gospel is a Divine proclamation, demanding the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against Heaven. God "now *commandeth* all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). And again we are told, "And this is His *commandment*: that ye believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23). The Gospel is "for faith obedience" (Rom. 1:5) and Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9). To those "that *obey not* the Gospel" the Lord Jesus will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance (2 Thess. 1:7-8). If men will not bow to Christ's scepter, they shall be made His footstool.

It was this very obedience that Naaman was reluctant to render: so much so that he was on the point of returning to Syria unhealed. Yet that could not be. In the Divine decree he was marked out to be the recipient of God's sovereign grace. As yet Naaman might be averse from receiving grace in the way of God's appointing, and the Devil might put forth a supreme effort to retain his victim; but whatever be the devices of the human heart or the malice of his Enemy, the counsel of the Lord must stand. When God has designs of mercy toward a soul, He sets in operation certain agencies which issue in the accomplishment of His purpose. The flesh may resist and Satan may oppose, but it stands written "Thy people *shall* be willing in the day of Thy power" (Ps. 110:3). That "day" had now arrived for Naaman, and speedily was this made manifest. It pleased God to exercise His "power" by moving the Syrian's servants to remonstrate with him and by making effectual their expostulation. "My father" they said, "if the prophet had bade thee do some great thing, wouldst not thou have done it? how much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean. *Then* went he down" and did as Elisha ordered.

"Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God" (2 Kings 5:14). "Then went he *down*": that was something which *he* had to do, and until he did it there was no cleansing for him. The sinner is not passive in connection with God's blotting out his iniquities, but active. He has to repent (Acts 3:19), and believe in Christ (Acts 10:43) in order to obtain forgiveness of his sins. It was a *voluntary* act on the part of Naaman. Previously he had been unwilling to comply with the Divine demand, but the secret power of God had wrought in him—by means of the pleading of his attendants—overcoming his reluctance. It was an act of *self-abasement*. "He went down and dipped" signifies three things: he descended from his chariot, he waded into the waters, he was submerged beneath them, and thus did he own his vileness before God. No less than "seven times" must he plunge into that dark stream, thereby acknowledging his *total* uncleanness. A person only slightly soiled may be cleansed by a single washing, but Naaman must dip seven times to make evident how great was his defile-

ment. The “seven times” also intimated that God required *complete* submission to His will: nothing short of full surrender to Him is of any avail.

“Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God.” It is of deep importance that we grasp the exact purport of this second clause, otherwise we shall miss one of the principal lines in this Gospel picture. Note well then that it was *not* “according to the pleading of his attendants”—the last thing mentioned in the context. Had Naaman acted simply to please *them*, he might have dipped himself in Jordan seventy times and been no better off for it. Nor does it read “according to the saying of *Elisha*,” for it looks infinitely higher than that. “According to the saying of the man of God” signifies, according to the declaration of God Himself through His prophet. Naaman heeded the Word of God and rendered “faith obedience” (Rom. 1:5) to it. Repentance is not sufficient to procure cleansing: the sinner must also believe. And this is what Naaman now did: his heart laid hold of the Divine promise, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh *shall* come again to thee and thou *shalt* be clean.” He believed that “shalt” and acted upon it. Have you done similarly, my reader? Has your faith definitely appropriated the Gospel promise “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”? If not, you will never be saved until it has. Faith is the indispensable requirement, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (v. 14). Of course it did: it could not be otherwise, for “He is *faithful* that promised” (Heb. 10:23). None has ever laid hold of a Divine promise and found it to fail him, and none ever will. That which has been spoken through the prophets and apostles is the Word of Him “that cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). He cannot falsify His Word. He cannot depart from it, alter it, or break it. “Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89). Forever, too, is it settled on earth: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of My lips” (Ps. 89:34). God has *promised* to receive, welcome, own, justify, preserve, and bring to Heaven, all who will take Him at His simple Word: who will rely upon it unconditionally and without reservation, setting to their seal that He is true. The warrant for us to believe lies in the promise itself, as it did for Naaman. The promise says, “you *may*,” the promise says, “you *must*,” the promise says, “you are shut up to me” (Gal. 3:23). And I—I say, “Lord, I believe.” Faith is a taking God at His Word—His undeceiving and infallible Word—and trusting in Jesus Christ as my Savior. If you have not already done so, delay no longer, but trust Him now, and wash in that “Fountain” which has been opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child and he was clean.” Let it be duly noted that there was no lengthy interval between the faith-obedience of Naaman and his healing, in fact no interval at all. There was no placing of him upon probation before his disease was removed: his cleansing was instantaneous. Nor was his cleansing partial and effected only by degrees: he was fully and perfectly healed there and then, so that not a single spot of his leprosy remained. And that is exactly what the glorious gospel of God announces and promises: “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from *all* sin” (1 John 1:7). The moment a sinner claims Christ as His own, His perfect righteousness is placed to his account. The moment any sinner really takes God at His Word and appropriates the Gospel promise, he is—without having to wait for anything further to be done for him or in him—entitled to and fit for Heaven, just as was the dying thief. If he be left here another hundred years he may indeed enter into a fuller understanding of the riches of Divine grace, but he will not become one iota fitter for Glory. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath* made us meet [not is now doing so] to be partakers of the Inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him—and he said, Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant” (v. 15). When a work of grace is wrought upon a person it is soon made evident by him. Mark the radical and blessed transformation which had been produced in Naaman’s heart as well as in his body. He might have hastened back at once to Syria, but he did not. Previously he had turned his back upon Elisha in a rage, but now he sought his face in gratitude. Formerly he had despised the “waters of Israel” (v. 12), now he acknowledged the God of Israel. All was completely changed. The proud and haughty Syrian was humbled, terming himself the prophet’s “servant.” The bitterness of his legalistic heart which had resented a way of deliverance that placed him on the same level as paupers had received its death wound. The enmity of his carnal mind against God and his hatred of His prophet, together with his leprosy, were all left beneath Jordan’s flood, and he emerged a new creature—cleansed and lowly in heart. No

longer does he expect the prophet to seek him out and pay deference to him: instead he at once betook himself to Elisha and honored him as God's servant—a lovely figure of a saved sinner desiring fellowship with the people of God.

Sixth, *its sequel*. Let us look more closely at the actions of the cleansed Naaman. First, he “returned to the man of God.” Nor did he seek him in vain: this time he came forth in person, there being no longer any occasion to communicate through his servant. Second, Naaman was the first to speak, and he bore testimony to the true and living God: “Behold, now *I know* there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.” He had listened to no lectures on evidences of the Divine existence, nor did he need to; effectively is a soul taught when it is made partaker of saving grace. Naaman was as sure now as Elisha himself that Jehovah is God, and He alone. Third, this testimony of Naaman's was not given in private to the prophet, but openly before “all his company.” Have you, my reader, made public profession of your faith? “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16): does a like witness issue from your lips, or are you attempting to be a “secret disciple” of His? Fourth, Naaman now wished to bestow a present on Elisha as an expression of his gratitude: are you ministering to the temporal needs of God's servants?

Yes, my reader, where a work of Divine grace has been wrought its subject soon makes the same evident to those around him. One who has fully surrendered to God cannot hide the fact from his fellows; nor will he wish to. A new life within cannot but be made manifest in a new life without. When Zaccheus was made a partaker of God's so-great salvation he gave half his goods to the poor and made fourfold restitution to those he had robbed (Luke 19:8). When Saul of Tarsus was converted he at once said, “Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?” and henceforth a walk of loving obedience unto Him marked the grand transformation. No sooner was the Philippian jailor made savingly acquainted with Christ than he who had made fast in the stocks the feet of the sorely-beaten apostles “washed their stripes” and, after being baptised “brought them into his house and set meat before them” (Acts 16). Is it thus with you? Does your everyday conduct testify what Christ has done for you? or is your profession only like unto a leafy tree without any fruit on it?

“But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused” (v. 16). Naaman was now taught the *freeness* of God's grace—just as Joseph (type of Christ as the Bread of Life) gave orders for the sacks of his brethren to be filled with corn and their money to be returned and placed in their sacks (Gen. 42:25). When God gives to sinners, He gives freely. It was for a truly noble reason then that Elisha declined the blessing from Naaman's hand: he would not sully or compromise the blessed truth of Divine grace. “He would have Naaman return to Syria with this testimony, that the God of Israel had taken nothing from him but his leprosy! He would have him go back and declare that his gold and silver were useless in dealing with One who gave all for nothing” (Things New and Old). God delights in being the Giver: if you wish to please Him, continue coming before Him as a receiver. Listen to David, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits? I will *take* the cup of salvation and *call* upon His name” (Ps. 116:12,13)—in other words, he would “render” to Him by receiving more!

By his response Elisha showed Naaman that the servant of God looks upon the wealth of this world with holy contempt. “Gratitude to the Lord will dictate liberality to the instruments of His mercies. But different circumstances will render it necessary for them to adopt different measures. The ‘man of God’ will never allow himself to covet any one's gold or silver, or apparel; but be content with daily bread, and learn to trust for tomorrow. Yet sometimes he will understand that the proffered kindness is the Lord's method of supplying his necessities, that it will be fruit abounding to the benefit of the donor, and that there is a propriety in accepting it as a token of love; but as others, the gift will be looked on as a temptation, and he will perceive that the acceptance of it would degrade his character and office, dishonor God, and tend exceeding to the injury of the giver. In this case he will decidedly refuse it. This is particularly to be adverted to in the case of the great, when they first turn their thoughts to religious subjects. From knowledge of the world, they are apt to suspect all their inferiors of mercenary designs, and naturally suppose that ministers are only carrying on a trade like other men; while the conduct of too many so-called confirms them in the sentiment. There is but one way of counteracting this prejudice, and that is by evidencing a disinterested spirit, and not asking anything, and in some cases refusing to accept favors from them, until they have attained a further establishment in the faith; and by always persevering in an indifference to every personal interest” (T. Scott).

“And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the

Lord" (v. 17). Once the true God is known (v. 15) all false ones are repudiated. Observe carefully his "be given" and "thy servant." He does not offer to purchase this soil, nor does he as "captain of the hosts" of Syria's victorious army demand it as a right. Grace had now taught him to be a *recipient* and conduct himself as a *servant*. Beautiful is it to see the purpose for which he wanted this earth: it was not from a superstitious veneration of the soil, but that he might honor God. This exhibits, once more, the great and grand change which had been wrought in Naaman. His chief concern now was to be a worshiper of the God of all grace, the God of Israel, and to this end he requests permission to take home with him sufficient soil of the land of Israel to build an altar. And is not the application of this unto ourselves quite apparent. When a soul has tasted that the Lord is gracious, the spirit of worship possesses him, and he will reverently pour out his heart's adoration unto Him.

The order of Truth we have been considering is deeply instructive. First, we have a cleansed leper, a sinner saved by grace, (v. 14). Then an assured saint: "I know" (v. 15), and now a voluntary worshiper (v. 17). That is the unchanging order of Scripture. No one that ignores the cleansing blood of Christ or "the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26) can obtain any access to the thrice holy God. And none who doubts his acceptance in the Beloved can offer unto the Father that praise and thanksgiving which are His due, and therefore believers are bidden to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22). As we have passed from one detail to another we have sought to make definite application unto ourselves. Let us do so here. Naaman was determined to erect an altar unto the Lord in his own land. Reader, are you the head of a household? and do you claim to be a Christian? Then suffer this question: Have you erected an "altar" in your home? Do you gather the family around you each day and conduct worship? If not, you have good reason to call into question the genuineness of your profession. If God has His due place in your *heart*, He will have it in your *home*.

"In this the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon the Lord forgive thy servant in this thing" (v. 18). This presents a real difficulty, for as the verse reads it quite mars the typical picture and seems utterly foreign to all that precedes. It is true that Naaman was a converted heathen, yet he had himself acknowledged that "there is no God in all the earth but in Israel," so however great his previous ignorance, he was now enlightened. His desire to erect an altar unto Jehovah would appear to quite preclude the idea that he should in the next breath suggest that he play the part of a temporiser and compromiser and then presumptuously count on the Lord's forgiveness. One who is fully surrendered to the Lord makes no reservation: he cannot, for His requirement is "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and *Him only* shalt thou serve"; and again, "touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." And still more difficult is it for us to understand Elisha's "Go in peace" (v. 19) if he had just been asked to grant a dispensation for what Naaman himself evidently felt to be wrong.

Is there then any legitimate method of removing this difficulty? Though he does not adopt it himself, Thomas Scott states that many learned men have sought to establish an alternative translation: "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant: that when my master *went* into the house of Rimmon to bow down himself there, that I bowed down myself there—the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." We do not possess sufficient scholarship to be able to pass judgment on this rendition, but from what little we do know of the Hebrew verb (which has no present tense) it strikes us as likely. In this case, Naaman's words look backward, evidencing a quickened conscience, confessing a past offense; rather than forward and seeking a dispensation for a future sin. But if that translation be a cutting of the knot rather than an untying of it, then we must suppose that Elisha perceived that Naaman was convinced that the thing he anticipated was not right, and so instead of rebuking him, left that conviction to produce its proper effect, assured that in due course when his faith and judgment matured he would take a more decided stand against idolatry.

Space prevents our taking up, seventh, the *meaning* of this miracle, so we must postpone it for the next.
—AWP

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

3b. *Its Need*

In our last, we dwelt chiefly upon the fearful breach which the entrance of sin made between the thrice Holy One and His fallen and rebellious creatures. In this we must point out some of the consequences and evidences of that breach, thereby showing in more detail the urgency of the sinner's case. By his act of disobedience in Eden, man invaded God's right of sovereignty, spurning as he did His authority, throwing off the yoke of submission, determining to be his own lord. The outcome of such revolt we are not left to guess at: it is plainly made known in the Scriptures: by his fearful offence man lost the favor and friendship of God and incurred His holy displeasure and righteous indignation. The Creator became the punishing Judge. Our first parents were promptly arraigned and sentence was passed upon the guilty culprits. Man had fallen into sin and the Divine wrath now fell upon him. God drove man out of Paradise and unsheathed the flaming sword (Gen. 3:24), thereby making it manifest that Heaven and earth were at variance. As the result of the fall sin became man's delight and henceforth he was an enemy to all holiness and consequently of the Holy One.

1. Fallen man became separated from God. It is easy to write or read those words, but who is competent to fathom their fearful import! Separated from God, the Fountain and Giver of all blessedness! Cast out of His favor. Severed from communion with Him. Cut off from the enjoyment of Him. Devoid of His life, of His holiness, of His love. Such is the terrible and inevitable consequence of sin. Sin snapped the golden cord which had united man to his Maker. Sin broke the happy relationship which originally existed between man and his rightful Lord. Sin made a breach between its committer and the Holy One. Not only did sin conduct man to a guilty distance from God, but sin necessarily placed God at a holy distance from man. God will not suffer those who are hostile to Him and offensive to His absolute purity to dwell in His presence. Therefore do we read that "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). They were banished from Heaven, excluded from the company of the Most High, imprisoned in the place of unutterable woe.

God had plainly made known unto our federal head the penalty of his disobedience: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Thus at the very beginning of human history the Lawgiver announced that "the wages of sin is death"—death spiritual, death judicial, death eternal if pardon be not obtained. And death is not annihilation but separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, expulsion from this earth. So spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, expulsion from His favor. In that tragic yet hope-inspiring parable of the prodigal son our Lord represented the sinner as being in "the far country," a "great way off" from the Father's house (Luke 15:13,20), and when he returned in penitence the Father said, "this My son was dead [separated from Me] and is alive again [restored to Me]; he was lost and is found." When Christ as the Substitute and Surety of His people bore their sins in His own body on the Tree (1 Peter 2:24) He received the wages of sin, crying to God "why hast Thou *forsaken* Me!"

But the death inflicted upon Adam and all whom he represented was also judicial. Fallen man is a malefactor, dead in Law, lying under its sentence, a criminal in chains of guilt, held fast in fetters until the day of execution, unless he obtains a pardon from God. If no pardon be obtained, then he shall be cast into "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," and that is expressly denominated "the second death" (Rev. 21:8), because it is a being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9). Man then, every man while unregenerate, is living "without God in the world," "far off" from Him (Eph. 2:12,13). Being "dead in trespasses and sins" he is cut off from God, having no access to Him. He is a "castaway" from the Divine presence. God will have no commerce with him, nor receive any offering at his hands. He is outside the kingdom of God, and cannot enter it save by the new birth (John 3:5). He is born into the world "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18). When the Lord came down upon Sinai Israel was not suffered to draw near Him (Ex. 19): sin had imposed an effectual barrier.

2. Fallen man became an object of abhorrence to God. Once more we use language the meaning of which no mortal is capable of fully entering into. It is not that we have employed terms which the case does not warrant, for we have but paraphrased the words of Holy Writ. Nor can it be otherwise if God be what Scripture affirms and if man has become what he is represented therein. God is light (1 John 1:5) and man is "darkness" (Eph. 5:8). God is holy, man totally depraved. God is our rightful Lord and King, man is an

insurrectionist, a defiant rebel. God is immaculately pure, man a loathsome leper. If man saw himself as he appears to the Divine eye or even as he is portrayed by the Divine pencil, it would be evident that he *must be* an object of repugnance unto Him who sits enthroned on high. "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil" (Isa. 1:6). What a repulsive object! yet that is precisely what you and I (by nature) look like unto the eye of God.

"Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:5). In this Psalm God's alienation from and detestation of the wicked is set forth in six steps. First, He has no delight in them: "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness" (v. 4). Second, they cannot reside in His presence "neither shall evil dwell with Thee" (v. 4). Third, they have no status before Him: "the foolish shall not stand in Thy sight" (v. 5). Fourth, they are obnoxious to Him: "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (v. 5). Fifth, He will pour upon them the fury of His indignation: "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing" or "lies" (v. 6). Sixth, they will for all eternity be abhorred by Him: "The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (v. 6). None would be shocked at such frightful declarations as these if he had anything like an adequate conception of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of the infinite holiness of God. Though they are scarcely ever heard from any pulpit to-day, whether we believe them or not, they are the words of Him who cannot lie and throughout eternity their verity will be borne amply witness to.

"Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." Not merely their evil works, but the workers themselves; not some of the most notorious of the workers but *all* of them. My reader, if you are out of Christ, still unregenerate, whether you be a Britisher, an American, or an Australian, you are an object of God's hatred. Rightly did C. H. Spurgeon point out from these words, "It is not a little dislike, but thorough hatred which God bears to workers of iniquity. To be hated of God is an awful thing. O let us be very faithful in warning the wicked around us, for it will be a terrible thing for them to fall into the hands of an angry God...How forcible is the word 'abhor' (in the next verse). Does it not show us how powerful and deep-seated is the hatred of the Lord against the workers of iniquity!" It is the very nature of righteousness to hate unrighteousness. Those who are so corrupt and abominable *must* be loathed by One who is ineffably holy. It is the very perfection of the Divine character to hate the totally depraved.

3. Fallen man came under the condemnation and curse of the Divine Law. "It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Those words are a quotation from Deuteronomy 17:26—a verse which contains the conclusion of the maledictions pronounced upon the disobedient of the context, being really the sum and substance of them all. It is the solemn declaration that those who have despised God's authority and trampled His commandments beneath their feet are exposed to the Divine displeasure and to condign punishment as the expression of that displeasure. The "curse of the Law" is that sentence and penalty which is due unto sin. Sin and the curse are inseparable; wherever the one is, the other must be. Hence the unrestricted "every one" and that not only for multiplied transgressions but for a single offence. The Divine Law is perfect, and demands perfect and perpetual conformity to it. A single transgression brings down upon its perpetrator the Divine curse, as was evidenced in Eden, and in consequence of our representative participation therein, all of us entered this world under the maledictions of God's Law.

"Cursed is every one..." Those solemn words, so little known, so faintly apprehended even by those who are acquainted with them, reveal the fearful situation of every soul out of Christ: they are under sentence of execution. Their position is identical with the convicted murderer in the condemned cell, awaiting the dread summons of vindictive justice. If you be unregenerate, my reader, at this very moment you are under sentence of death: "condemned already." Since the curse of the Law falls upon men for a single sin, then what must be the punishment that will be meted out upon those with multiplied transgressions to their account! "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked" (Prov. 3:33). That unspeakable malediction rests upon all that he has and all that he does. "Cursed shalt thou be in the city and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shalt be thy basket and thy store," (Deut. 28:17). Nay, God has said "I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already" (Mal. 2:2). To those out of Christ He will yet say "Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire" (Matt. 25:41).

4. Fallen man came under the wrath of God. This follows inevitably from what has already been pointed out. Since a rebel against the Divine government is necessarily an object of abhorrence unto his holy Lord, since he has come beneath the curse and condemnation of the Divine Law, justice cries aloud for vengeance. The Maker of heaven and earth is no indifferent Spectator of the conduct of His creatures.

He was not of Adam's. The father and head of the race was summoned before His judgment bar, fairly tried, justly condemned, and made to experience the beginnings of God's wrath, for the full measure thereof is reserved for the transgressor in the next life. As the consequence of their sin and fall in the person of their representative all of Adam's posterity are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3)—not only defiled and corrupt, but the objects of God's judicial indignation. "The children of wrath": those words should be to the ungodly reader as the handwriting on Belshazzar's wall (Dan. 5:5, 6)—they should blanch his countenance, trouble his thoughts, and make his knees smite together.

This fearful expression "the children of wrath" is more forceful than many conclude. In the previous verse we read of "children of disobedience," which means more than disobedient children, for such may the regenerate be. It means such as are addicted to disobedience, who make a trade of it. So "children of wrath" signifies more than to be liable to wrath: it connotes the objects of God's wrath, wholly devoted thereto, born to it as their portion and heritage—the corruptions of their nature being its fuel. When the angels sinned the wrath of God was visited upon them (2 Peter 2:4), thereby evidencing that no natural excellence in the creature can exempt it from the judgment of God. Further demonstrations of His wrath were given when the flood was sent to drown the antediluvian world, when fire and brimstone destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and when Pharaoh and his hosts were overwhelmed at the Red Sea. And the execution of God's wrath upon you, my unsaved reader, is hourly drawn nearer. Ignorance cannot shield you from it. Outward privileges will not save you from it. Nor will a mere profession of religion. The only way of deliverance is for you to "*flee from the wrath to come*" by betaking yourself to Christ for refuge.

"God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11), on which Spurgeon remarked: "He not only detests sin, but is angry with those who continue to indulge in it. We have no insensible and stolid God to deal with. He can be angry, nay, He is angry to-day and every day with you, ye ungodly and impenitent sinners. The best day that ever dawned on a sinner brings a curse with it. Sinners may have many feast days, but not safe days. From the beginning of the year even to its ending, there is not an hour in which God's oven is not hot and burning in readiness for the wicked, who shall be as stubble." And on the words of the verse which immediately follows—"If He turn not, He will whet His sword"—that faithful preacher declared: "What blows are those which will be dealt by that long uplifted arm! God's sword has been sharpening upon the revolving stone of our daily wickedness, and if we will not repent, it will speedily cut us to pieces. Turn or burn is the sinner's alternative."

5. Fallen man is the subject and slave of Satan, under a more terrible bondage than ever the Hebrews were to Pharaoh, for it is a bondage of the soul. Yet this is justly inflicted. At the beginning our first parents preferred Satan's lie to God's truth, and therefore did He allow Satan to obtain dominion over them. Yet with each of his descendants it is a willing bondage therein: as the Jews desired Barabbas rather than Christ, so we entered this world with a nature that is in harmony with Satan's. Yes, without a single exception, every member of our race is born so depraved that he voluntarily serves and obeys the arch-enemy of God. There are but two spiritual kingdoms in this world: that of Christ's (Col. 1:13) and that of Satan's (Matt. 12:26), and every human being is a subject of the one or the other. Those who have not come to Christ and surrendered to His sceptre are ruled by Satan and are fighting under his banner against God. Therefore when Paul was sent forth to preach the Gospel it was in order to open the eyes of men "to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18).

The Devil is the sinner's master, as he was the Christian's before Divine grace regenerated him: "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1,2). He not only tempts from without but dominates them from within. As God worketh in His people "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13) so the devil operates in the hearts of his subjects to perform his fiendish pleasure. He "put into the heart" of Judas to betray Christ (John 13:2). He made Pilate and Herod condemn Him to death, for it was "their hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). He "filled the heart" of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Yet each of them acted freely and according to the inclinations of his own evil nature. Satan's subjects render him a voluntary and cordial obedience: "ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts [desires] of your father ye will [determine to] do" (John 8:44).

6. Fallen man is under the reigning power of sin. This "abominable thing" which God hates has entered the human constitution like a deadly poison that has completely corrupted our whole being. Sin has full dominion and undisputed sway over the human soul. The mind makes no opposition to it, for it is sin's

“servant” (John 8:34) and not “captive.” It exerts a determining power on the will. Sin so reigns in the heart of the unregenerate that it directs their affections and controls all the motives and springs of their actions, causing them to walk after their own evil imaginations and devisings. As the air is the native element of the birds, so sin is the natural element of fallen man. “Abominable and filthy is man, who drinketh in iniquity like water” (Job 15:16). Like a parched traveler in the desert who craves water, seeks after it, and greedily swallows it when found, so is iniquity unto the sinner.

The course of the natural man is described as “serving divers lusts and pleasures” (Titus 3:3), as “bringing forth evil fruits” (Matt. 7:17), as yielding his members “servants to uncleanness and to iniquity” (Rom. 6:19). The service rendered by the unregenerate to sin is a whole-hearted one, voluntary, and cordial. Man is in love with sin, preferring darkness to light, this world to Heaven. His lusts are his idols. Therefore does he persist in sin despite all pleadings, warnings, threatenings, chastisements. While he is unregenerate he does nothing but sin in thought and word and deed. Solemn it is to think that every one is in continual remembrance with God, set in the light of His countenance, recorded in that book which will be opened in the day of judgment. Not one of them is pardoned, or can be, while he is out of Christ. So much guilt lies upon his soul as is sufficient to sink it into the lowest Hell, and *will* do so unless blotted out by atoning blood.

7. Fallen man hates God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the Law of God”—and so inveterate is that “enmity” it is at once added—“neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). We may not believe it, or be conscious of it, but there is the Divinely-revealed fact. God is an Object of aversion unto the natural man. The language of the hearts of sinners unto the Almighty is, “Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways” (Job 21:14). They do not hate Him as their Provider and Preserver, but as a Being who is infinitely holy and who therefore hates sin and is “angry with the wicked every day.” They detest Him as a sovereign Being, who dispenses His favors according to His absolute pleasure. They abominate Him as the Moral Governor of the world, demanding obedience to His Law, and pronouncing cursed all who break it. They abhor Him as the Judge, who shall yet cast all His enemies into the Lake of Fire. Proof of this was furnished when God became incarnate and was manifested unto men: they *crucified* Him!

“Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Obviously not; then how much less could rebels dwell together with a holy God for all eternity! For *that* reconciliation must be effected. But how is peace possible? How are alienated sinners to be restored to friendship with God without Him denying His own perfections? Some grand provision must be made whereby the wrath of God is appeased, whereby His Law is magnified, His honor vindicated, His justice satisfied. Some wondrous redemption is imperative if sinners are to be delivered from that dreadful state of enmity, darkness, and slavery into which the Fall conducted them. Some marvel of wisdom and miracle of grace is necessary if those so “far off” are to be “made nigh,” if the unholy are to be made holy, if those dead in sin are to be quickened into newness of life. Some unique Mediator is indispensable if the breach between an offended God and offended creatures is to be healed: a Mediator who is capable of conserving the interests and promoting the glory of God, and who also can win the hearts of those in revolt. The *needs-be* for reconciliation is crystal clear; the *effectuation of it* is the grand subject of the Gospel, the wonder of angels, and will be the theme of the song of the redeemed throughout the unending ages of the future. —AWP

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4b. Its Nature

All sound teaching, like the safest method of reasoning, proceeds from the general to the particular, and therefore we shall attempt to show the principles from which spiritual growth issues and the main lines along which Christian progress advances, before we enter into a detailed analysis of the same. God first gave Israel His Law, and then because "His commandment is exceeding broad" (Ps. 119:96)—supplied amplification through the Prophets and a still more specific explication of its contents through Christ and His apostles. Spiritual growth is the development of spiritual life, and spiritual life is communicated to a sinner at the new birth, so the more clearly we are enabled to understand the nature of regeneration, the better prepared shall we be to perceive the character of spiritual growth. Admittedly regeneration is profoundly mysterious, but there are at least two things which afford help thereon: the fact that it is a "renewing" (Titus 3:5), and that it is a real and radical (though not complete or final) reversal of what happened to us at the fall. The old creation gives us some idea of the new creation, and the order in which the former was wrecked prepares us to grasp the order in which the latter is effected.

The natural man is a composite being, made up of spirit and soul and body. The "spirit" seems to be the highest part of his nature, being that which capacitates for God-consciousness or the knowledge of God—He being "spirit": John 4:24. The "soul" or ego appears to be that which, expressing itself through the body, constitutes what is termed our "personality," and is the seat of self-consciousness, and by it man has communion with his fellows. The body or physical organism is that which provides the soul with a habitation in this world, and it is the seat of sense-consciousness, being that through which man has contact with material things. The order of Scripture is "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23), but man with his customary perversity invariably reverses it and speaks of "body, and soul and spirit." How that reveals what fallen man has degenerated into: the body, which he can see and feel, and which occupies most of his concern, comes first in his consideration and estimation! His "soul" receives little thought and still less care, and as to his "spirit" he is unaware that he has any.

"And God said, Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, after *Our* likeness" (Gen. 1:26). God is tri-une, there being three persons in one and indivisible Divine essence. And it was in the image of the Triune God that man was made, as the plural pronouns plainly connote. Thus man was made a tri-une creature. His "spirit" which is the intellectual principle and highest part, was capacitated for communion with God and was designed to regulate (by its wisdom) the soul, in which resides the emotional nature or the "affections." The soul in turn was to regulate the body, as it received through the physical senses information of the external world. But at the fall man reversed the order of his creation: making a "god" of his belly, he henceforth became enslaved to the lower world, and the soul instead of directing the physical mechanism became to a large extent the lackey of its senses and demands. Communion with God being severed, the spirit no longer functioned according to its distinctive nature, and though not extinguished, was dragged down to the level of the soul.

What has just been pointed out should be clearer to the reader by pondering it in the light of Genesis 3. In assailing Eve, Satan made his attack upon her *spirit*—the principle which receives from God—for he first called into question the Divine prohibition (v. 2) and then, replying to her objection, assured her "ye shall not surely die," and added as an inducement "in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4,5)—thereby seeking to weaken her faith, and flatter her ambition by promising greater wisdom. Harkening to his lies, the woman was "deceived" (1 Tim. 2:14). Her judgment became beclouded through doubting God's threat, and once the light of God in her spirit was lost, all was lost. Her affections became corrupted, so that she now "desired" or lusted after the forbidden fruit—not by the prompting of her spirit, but by the solicitation of her physical senses: and her will became depraved, so that she "took" thereof.

Now, from the experimental side of things, regeneration is the initial work of God in reversing the effects of the fall, for its favored subject is then "renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him" (Col. 3:10): that is to say, spiritual perception is restored to him, so that he now has again what he lost in Adam—a vital, powerful, direct knowledge of God. In consequence of this he is brought back again into

communion with God, restored to a conscious fellowship with Him. One aspect of this mysterious but blessed work is brought before us in Hebrews 4:12, where we are told “the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” We understand that last clause to signify that the regenerated person’s “spirit” is now freed from its immersion into the soul and is raised to its own superior level, being placed *en rapport* (brought into harmony with) God Himself. Thus Paul declares “I serve [God] with my *spirit*” (Rom. 1:9)—not “soul”; and “my spirit prayeth” (1 Cor. 14:14). In distinction therefrom “purified your *souls* [affections] in obeying the Truth” (1 Peter 1:22).

Though the above may sound recondite and, being new to our readers, somewhat difficult to grasp, yet it should we think be more or less clear that in order for us to answer to what God has wrought in us, in order to live as becometh Christians, the body should take second place to the soul, and be ruled thereby: and the soul in turn be subordinated to the spirit, which is to be enlightened and controlled by God. Unless the body be made subservient to the soul, man lives his life on the same level as the animals; and unless the Christian’s “affections” and emotions be regulated by wisdom from the spirit, he lives on the same plane as the unregenerate. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). That means, make the things of the spirit your paramount concern, and your lower interests will be automatically subserved. If the mind or spirit be “stayed on God,” the soul will enjoy perfect peace, and the soul at rest will act beneficently on the body. Thus, in proportion as our lives accord with what took place in us at the new birth will be our spiritual growth and prosperity.

Nothing but a knowledge of God can satisfy the spirit of man, as nought but His love can content the soul. Man’s supreme happiness consists in the exercise of his noblest parts and faculties on their proper objects, and the more excellent those objects be, the more real and lasting pleasure do they give us in the knowledge and love of them. Thus it is that, when God has designs of mercy toward an individual, He begins by shining upon his understanding and attracting his heart unto Himself. As that work of grace proceeds, that individual is enabled to perceive something of “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13), how it has deluded him into vainly imagining that the things of time and sense could afford him satisfaction, until he discovers that (to use the figurative language of the prophet) he has “spent his money for that which is not bread” and labored for that which satisfieth not (Isa. 55:2). Therefore does God say unto him, “hearken unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” Until God becomes our “Portion” the soul is left with an aching void.

Here, then, is what occurs at regeneration: God “hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true” (1 John 5:20)—and this He does by quickening the “spirit” in us. And again we read “For God who [in connection with the first creation: Gen. 1:3] commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath [in His work of the new creation] 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). Thus, Christian progress must consist in our advancing in a personal and experimental knowledge of God, and consequently when the apostle prayed for the spiritual growth of the Colossians he made request that they might be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10). Simultaneously with this communication of a supernatural knowledge of Himself, the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5) and therefore spiritual growth consists of a deeper apprehension and fuller enjoyment of that love with a more complete response thereto; and hence, when making request for the same on behalf of the Ephesians, Paul prayed that they might “know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (3:19).

It is not our immediate design to give as full a description as our present light affords of the precise nature of regeneration, but only to point out those of its principal elements which the better enables us to grasp what spiritual growth consists of. We will therefore mention but one other feature of the new birth, or that which is at least an inseparable adjunct of it, namely, the impartation of *faith*. Nor shall we now attempt to define what faith is: sufficient for the moment to acknowledge it is a blessed “gift of God” (Eph. 2:8), in nowise originating in the exercise of the human will, but communicated by “the operation of God” (Col. 2:12), and therefore it is a supernatural principle, active in its favored recipient, bringing forth fruit after its own kind, and thereby evidencing its Divine source. It is “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) the Christian walks: as said the apostle “the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God [He being its Object], who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). This it is which distinguishes all the regenerate from the unregenerate, for the latter are “children in whom is no faith” (Deut. 32:20 and cf. 2 Thess. 3:2,3).

The Christian life begins by the exercise of a God-given faith, namely, an act whereby we receive Christ as our own personal Saviour (John 1:12). We are "justified by faith," and by Christ "have access by faith into this grace [i.e. accepted into God's favor] wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:1,2). We are "sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18), that is, made actual participants of the ineffable purity of Christ. Through the Spirit we "wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. 5:5 and cf. 2 Tim. 4:8). It is by "the shield of faith," and that alone, we are "able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16). It is "through faith and patience" that we "inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). It was by faith that the Old Testament saints "obtained a good report" (Heb. 11:2) and wrought such wonders, as the remainder of that chapter demonstrates. It is by faith we successfully resist the Devil (1 Peter 5:9) and overcome the world (1 John 5:4). From all of which it is very evident that the measure of our Christian progress will be very largely determined by the extent to which this principle be kept healthy and remains operating in us.

To sum up what has been pointed out above: regeneration is both a "renewing" and a "new creation." As a "renewing" it is a continual process, as 2 Corinthians 4:16 clearly shows. This aspect of it is a partial reversal of and recovery from what happened to us at the fall. It is a Divine quickening, which necessarily presupposes an entity or faculty already existing, though in need of being made alive or revived. This "renewing" is of the inner man, which includes both spirit and soul or "the mind" and "heart." It is an initial and radical act, followed by a repeated but imperceptible process whereby the nobler or immaterial parts of our beings are elevated or refined. This does not mean that "the flesh" or evil principle in us undergoes any improvement, but that our faculties are spiritualised; and thus spiritual growth will consist of the mind being more and more engaged with Divine objects, the affections being increasingly set upon things above, the conscience becoming more tender, and the human will made more amenable to the Divine, and thereby the inner man more and more conformed to the holy image of Christ.

But regeneration is something more than a "renewing" or quickening of parts and faculties already in existence: it is also a "new creation," the bringing into existence of something which did not exist before, the actual bestowment of something to the sinner in addition to all that he had as a natural man. That "something" is variously designated in Scripture (and by theologians) according to its different relations and aspects. It is termed "life" (1 John 5:12), yea life "more abundantly" (John 10:10) than unfallen Adam enjoyed. It is named "spirit" because "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6) and therefore is to be distinguished from our natural spirit; and "the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). It is called "the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 1:22), being a token or firstfruits of what will be ours when glorified; and "grace" (Eph. 4:7) as an inward principle. Theologians designate it "the new nature," and many allude to it under the composite term of "the Christian's graces," which is warranted by John 1:16, and is probably the easiest for us to comprehend. Considered thus, spiritual growth may be said to be the development of our graces: the strengthening of faith, the enlarging of hope, the increasing of love, the abounding of peace and joy: see 2 Peter 1:3 and carefully note verses 5-8.

Thus far we have been dwelling almost entirely upon the internal aspect of our theme, so we will now quote one verse which directs attention to the external side. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Here is the response which we are required to make unto the new birth. God's purpose in our new creation or regeneration is that we should "walk in good works," that we may make manifest the spiritual root which He then implanted by bearing spiritual fruit. Such was the design of Christ in dying for us: to "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). From which it plainly follows that, the more zealous we are of good works and the more steadfastly we walk in them, the more do we rightly answer to what God has wrought in us. Now the performance of our daily duties are so many "good works," if they be done from faith's obedience to God's requirements and with an eye to His approbation and glory. Hence the more faithfully and conscientiously we discharge our obligations toward God and toward our fellows, the more true Christian progress are we making.

All that has been before us above receives simplification when it is viewed in the light of *conversion* and its proper sequel. Regeneration is entirely the work of God, wherein we are passive, but conversion is an act of ours; the one being the effect and consequence of the other. The word "conversion" means to turn around, it is a right-about-face. It is a turning from the world unto God, from Satan unto Christ, from sin unto holiness, from being absorbed with the things of time unto devotion to our eternal interests. At regeneration we received a super-natural knowledge of God, and as the consequence, in His light we see ourselves as depraved, lost and undone. At regeneration we received a nature which is "created in right-

eousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24), and as a consequence we now hate all unrighteousness and sin. At regeneration we were given an understanding that we might know Him that is true (1 John 5:20) and our response is to yield ourselves unto His dominion and trust in His atoning blood. At regeneration we received Divine "grace" as an indwelling principle, and the effect is to make us willing to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Christ. The proper sequel to such a conversion is that we steadfastly adhere to the surrender we then made of ourselves unto the Lord Jesus, and the more we do so, such will be our spiritual progress. —AWP

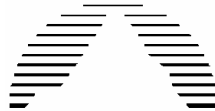
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