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**STUDIES**  
**IN THE**  
**SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

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# STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### *21. The Spirit Convicting (Part 1)*

Though man in his natural estate is spiritually dead, that is, entirely destitute of any spark of *true holiness*, yet is he still a rational being and has a conscience by which he is capable of perceiving the difference between good and evil, and of discerning and feeling the force of moral obligation (Rom 1:32; 2:15). By having his sins clearly brought to his mind and conscience, he can be made to realize what his true condition is as a transgressor of the holy law of God. This sight and sense of sin, when aroused from moral stupor, under the common operations of the Holy Spirit, is usually termed “conviction of sin,” and there can be no doubt that the views and feelings of men may be very clear and strong even while they are in an *unregenerate* state. Indeed, they do not differ in *kind* (though they do in degree), from what men will experience in the day of judgment, when their own consciences shall condemn them, and they shall stand guilty before God (Rom 3:19).

But there is nothing whatever in the kind of conviction of sin mentioned above which has any tendency to *change the heart* or make it better. No matter how clear or how strong such convictions be, there is nothing in them which approximates to those that the Spirit produces in them whom He quickens. Such convictions may be accompanied by the most alarming apprehensions of danger, the imagination may be filled with the most frightful images of terror, and hell may seem almost uncovered to their terrified view. Very often, under the sound of the faithful preaching of eternal punishment, some are aroused from their lethargy and feelings of the utmost terror awakened in their souls, while there is no real *spiritual* conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. On the other hand, there may be deep and permanent spiritual convictions where the passions and the imagination are very little excited.

Solemn is it to realize that there are now in hell multitudes of men and women who on earth were visited with deep conviction of sin, whose awakened conscience made them conscious of their rebellion against their Maker, who were made to feel something of the reality of the everlasting burnings, and the *justice* of God meeting out such punishment to those who spurn His authority and trample His laws beneath their feet. How solemn to realize that many of those who experienced such convictions were aroused to flee from the wrath to come, and became very zealous and diligent in seeking to escape the torments of hell, and who under the instincts of self-preservation, took up with "religion" as offering the desired means of escape. And how unspeakably solemn to realize that many of those poor souls fell victims to men who spoke "smooth things," assuring them that they were the objects of God's love, and that nothing more was needed than to "receive Christ as your personal Saviour." How unspeakably solemn, we say, that such souls look to Christ merely as a *fire-escape*, who never—from a supernatural work of the Spirit in their hearts—surrendered to Christ as *Lord*.

Does the reader say, Such statements as the above are most unsettling, and if dwelt upon would destroy my peace. We answer, O that *it may* please God to use these pages to disturb some who have long enjoyed a *false* peace. Better far, dear reader, to be upset, yea, searched and terrified *now*, than die in the *false* comfort produced by Satan, and weep and wail for all eternity. If you are unwilling to be tested and searched that is clear proof that you *lack* an "honest heart." An "honest" heart desires to know the truth. An "honest" heart hates pretense. An "honest" heart is fearful of being deceived. An "honest" heart welcomes the most searching diagnosis of its condition. An "honest" heart is humble and tractable, not proud, presumptuous, and self-confident. O how very few there are who *really* possess an "honest heart."

The "honest" heart will say, If it is possible for an *unregenerate* soul to experience the convictions of sin you have depicted above, if one who is dead in trespasses and sins may, nevertheless, have a vivid and frightful anticipation of the wrath to come, and engage in such sincere and earnest endeavours to escape from the same, then how am I to ascertain whether *my* convictions have been of a different kind from theirs? A very pertinent and a most important question, dear friend. In answering the same, let us first point out that, *soul terrors of hell* are not, in themselves any proof of a supernatural work of God having been wrought in the heart. It is not horrifying alarms of the everlasting burnings felt in the heart which distinguishes the experience of quickened souls from that of the unquickened, though such alarms *are* felt (in varying degrees) by both classes.

In His particular saving work of conviction, the Holy Spirit occupies the soul more with *sin itself*, than with punishment. This is an exercise of the mind to which fallen men are exceedingly averse. They had rather meditate on almost anything than upon their own wickedness—neither argument, entreaty, nor warning, will induce them so to do. Nor will Satan suffer one of his captives—till a mightier One comes and frees him—to dwell upon sin, its nature, and vileness. No, he constantly employs all his subtle arts to keep his victim from such occupation, and his temptations and delusions are mixed with the natural darkness and vanity of men's hearts so as to fortify them against convictions, so that he may keep "his goods are *in peace*" (Luk 11:21).

It is by the exceeding greatness of His power that the Holy Spirit fixes the mind of a quickened and enlightened soul upon the due consideration of sin. Then it is that the subject of this experience cries, "My sin is ever before me" (Psa 51:3), for God now reproves him and "sets his sins in order" before his eyes see Psa 50:21. Now he is forced to behold them, no matter which way he turns himself. Feign would he cast them out of his thoughts, but he cannot. The "arrows" of God stick in his heart (Job 6:4), and he cannot get rid of them. He now realizes that his sins are more in number than the hairs of his head (Psa 40:12). Now it is that "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: *because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it*" (Isa 40:7).

The Spirit occupies the quickened and enlightened soul with the exceeding *sinfulness of sin*. He unmasks its evil character, and shows that all our self-pleasing and self-gratification was but a species of continued insubjection to God, of enmity against Him—against His person, His attributes, His government. The Spirit makes the convicted soul feel how grievously he has turned his back upon God (Jer 32:33), lifted up his heel against Him, and trampled His laws underfoot. The Spirit causes him to see and *feel* that he has forsaken the pure fountain for the foul stream, preferred the filthy creature above the ineffable Creator, a base lust to the Lord of glory.

The Spirit convicts the quickened soul of the *multitude of his sins*. He realizes now that all his thoughts, desires, and imaginations, are corrupt and perverse. Conscience now accuses him of a thousand things which hitherto never occasioned him a pang. Under the Spirit's illumination the soul discovers that his very righteousness are as "filthy rags," for the motives which prompted even his best performances were unacceptable unto Him who "weigheth the spirits." He now sees that his very prayers are polluted, through lack of pure affections prompting them. In short, he sees that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores" (Isa 1:6).

The Spirit brings before the heart of the convicted one the *character and claims of God*. Sin is now viewed in the light of the divine countenance, and he is made to feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God. The pure light of God shining in the conscience over against vile darkness horrifies the soul. The convicted one both sees and feels that God is holy and that he is completely unholy, that He is good and we are vile, that there is a most awful disparity between Him and us. He is made to feelingly cry, "How can such a corrupt wretch like me ever stand before such a holy God, whose majesty I have so often slighted?" Now it is that the soul is made to realize how it has treated God with the basest ingratitude, abusing His goodness, perverting His mercies, scorning his best Friend. Reader, has this been your experience?

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### *81. The Pinnacle of Faith (11:37-38)*

There has been no greater instance of the degeneracy of human nature and its likeness to the devil than in the fearful fact that so many who have occupied prominent positions—magistrates, ecclesiastical dignitaries, kings and emperors—were not content to take the bare lives of true worshippers of God by the sword, but invented the most fiendish methods of torture to destroy them. That educated men and women in high places, that those professing the name of Christ, should conduct themselves like savages, that their rage against the excellent of the earth should express itself in such villainy and inhumanity, is a most dreadful demonstration of human depravity when the hand of God is withdrawn. With what infinite patience does the Most High bear with the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction!

But why should God allow many of His dear children to encounter such terrible experiences? Among other answers, the following may be suggested. First, for the more thorough trial of His champions, that their faith, courage, patience, and other graces, might be more manifest. Second, to seal or ratify more plainly the truth which they profess. Third, to encourage and strengthen the faith of their weaker brethren. Fourth, to give them more sensible evidence of what Christ endured for them. Fifth, to cause them to perceive the better the torments of hell—if those whom God loves are permitted to endure such grievous and painful trials, what must we understand of those torments which the wrath of God inflicts upon those whom He hates!

The teaching of Scripture upon the various reasons why God calls upon His children to suffer at the hands of the openly wicked, or as is more often the case, from those professing to be His people, is full of valuable instruction and calls for prayerful pondering. One of the advantages gained from such an exercise is the plainer perception of the very real and radical difference there is between that spiritual and supernatural faith which is possessed by God's elect, and that notional and natural faith which is all that millions of empty professors have. Should it please God to remove His restraining hand and permit open and fierce persecution to once more break forth upon the true followers of the Lamb, the difference just mentioned would be made apparent, for "When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word," the stony-ground hearer is soon "offended" (Mat 13:21) or as Luke 8:13 expresses it, "fall away." But different far is it with the good-ground hearer.

"The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1Pe 1:7). That faith which is the gift of God *endures to the end*. The testing of that faith, the fiery trial thereof serves the better to make manifest the divine origin of it—only that faith which has come from God is able to endure the testing of God. Just as it is in *the furnace* that genuine gold is most quickly distinguished from tinsel, so it is under sore trials that the difference between spiritual and natural faith becomes the more apparent. Like much of the *imitation* jewelry of the day, the creature-faith of empty

professors may look more glittering, be more bulky, and have more attraction for the outward eye, and be better calculated to adorn its possessor than does the genuine faith of God's elect, which is often small in size, dull in appearance, and lacking in attractiveness to the human beholder.

Yes, dear reader, it is *the fiery trial* which puts to the proof the kind of faith we really possess. Let the two faiths—that natural faith which man originates and exercises by an act of his own will, and that spiritual faith which is the gift of God and which man can no more exercise of himself than he can create a world—be placed side by side in the crucible. Let the burning flame try which is the genuine metal. Let the hot fire play around them both, and the false faith (like imitation gold) will soon melt away into a shapeless mass of base metal, but the true faith will come forth uninjured by the fire, having lost nothing but what it could well spare—the dross with which it has been mixed. See that fact strikingly and solemnly adumbrated in Daniel 3—the furnace of Babylon harmed not the three Hebrews who were cast into it—it merely destroyed their bonds, but it *consumed* the Babylonians (Dan 3:22)!

Let it be duly noted that in 1 Peter 1:7, the apostle, when comparing faith with gold, accredits to the former a higher value—it is “much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” Gold, though its genuineness may be proved by enduring the test of fire, is yet a perishing thing—a thing of the earth, a thing of time. That gold, for which men toil so labouriously and sell their souls to acquire, is of no avail on a deathbed, still less will it stand any in good stead in the day of judgment! At death it has to be left behind, for none can take it with him into the next life. Then how much more precious is that *faith* which, instead of, like gold, leaving its possessor under the wrath of God, will be “found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (1Pe 1:7)

But the point to which we would now direct special attention is that it is not so much the faith itself as “the *trial* of faith” which is more precious than of gold which perisheth. This is clear to the spiritual mind—trials and temptations are the means which God employs to make manifest to the soul the reality and strength of that faith which He bestows, for there is in every trial and temptation an opposition made to the faith which is in the heart, and trial and temptation, so to speak, threatens the life of faith. How so? Because under the trial, God, for the most part, *hides* Himself—the light of His countenance is no longer visible, His smile is overcast by a dark providence. Nevertheless, He puts forth a secret power which upholds the soul, otherwise it would sink into utter despair, be swallowed up by the power of unbelief. Here, then, is the conflict—the trial fighting against faith, and that faith against the trial.

Now when in this trial, under this sharp conflict, in this hot furnace, the spiritual and supernatural faith is not burned or destroyed, but instead, grips firmly the promise and the faithfulness of Him who has given it. And thus trial of faith becomes exceedingly *precious*. It is “precious” to its possessor when its genuineness is made the more manifest to him. It is “precious” in the sight of God's people, who discern it, and derive strength and comfort from what they witness in the experience of a fellow-saint, who is thus tried and blessed. It is “precious” in the sight of God Himself, who crowns it with His own manifest approbation and puts upon it the seal of His approving smile. But above all things it will be

found “precious” at the final appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory, for then He will “be admired in all them that believe” (2Th 1:10).

To suffer the hardest things as well as to do the greatest, is all one to faith. It is equally ready for both when God shall require and it is equally effectual in both, as God shall strengthen. The performing of spectacular exploits and the enduring of terrible affliction, differ almost as much to the flesh as do heaven and hell, but they are one to faith when duty calls. This is very evident from the section of Hebrews 11 which is now before us (vv. 33-38), the closing portion of which is about to engage our attention. At the beginning of this section, we are furnished with a list of the marvels which were wrought by a God-given faith. At the close thereof, we are given a list of fearful sufferings and privations which were patiently and courageously borne by a God-sustained faith. The latter, as much as the former, demonstrates the supernatural character of that faith which is in view throughout our chapter, yea, forms a most glorious climax thereto.

We say that the fearful sufferings experienced by God’s people form a blessed climax in the Spirit’s unfolding of the life of faith—those sufferings mark, in fact, the pinnacle of its attainments. Why so? Because they make manifest a heart that is completely subject to God, that bows submissively to whatever He is pleased to send, which has been so completely won to Him that torture and death are deliberately chosen and gladly preferred to apostasy from Him. A “meek and quiet spirit” is of “great price” in the sight of God (1Pe 3:4), and nothing more plainly evidences the *meekness* of the Christian—his lying passive as clay in the hands of the Potter—as faith’s willing acceptance of whatever lot our Father sees fit to appoint us. To be faithful unto death, to have unshakable confidence in the Lord, though He suffers us to be slain, to trust Him when to sight and sense it seems He has deserted us, is the highest exercise of all of faith.

Ere closing these introductory paragraphs, let us seek to point out the various *actings of faith* in times of danger, trial, and persecution. First, faith recognizes that “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev 19:6), that He is on the throne of the universe, and “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand” (Dan 4:35). Yes, dear reader, a spiritual faith perceives that things do not happen by chance, but that everything is regulated by the Lord God. Second, faith recognizes that everything which enters our lives is ordered by Him who is our Father, and that our enemies can do nothing whatever against us without His direct permission—the devil could not touch Job nor sift Peter until he first obtained leave from the Lord! Oh what a sure resting place is there here for the troubled and trembling heart. Third, faith recognizes that, no matter how fiercely Satan may be permitted to rage against us, or how sorely men persecute, their malicious efforts will be made to work together for *our good* (Rom 8:28).

Fourth, by mixing itself with God’s promises, faith obtains present help, strength, and consolation from God. It derives peace and comfort from that sure word, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa 43:2). It counts upon the assurance, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also



make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1Co 10:13). Finally faith looks away from the present conflict and views the promised rest. It anticipates the future reward, and as it does so, is assured that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Such are some of the workings of faith when God’s children are called upon to pass through the furnace.

“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:37-38). These verses continue the list of sufferings begun in verse 35. They enumerate the various kinds of persecution to which many of the Old Testament saints were subjected. They are of two types: first, such as fell under the utmost rage of their enemies, enduring a martyr’s death; second, such as to escape death, exposed themselves to great miseries which were undergone in this life.

It may be helpful at this point for us to raise the question, how are such dreadful sufferings to be harmonized with the divine promises of *temporal* blessings on those whose ways please the Lord. Dispensationalists are very fond of emphasizing the *temporal* character of the Old Testament promises, imagining that the promises of the New Testament are of a greatly superior character. In this they err seriously. On the one hand, the verses which are now under consideration describe the temporal experiences of some of the most eminent of the *Old* Testament saints. On the other hand, the *New* Testament expressly affirms godliness has “promise of the life *that now is*, and of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8). The answer to our opening query is very simple—such promises as those in Deuteronomy 28:1-6 (which still hold good to *faith*!) are to be understood with two exceptions—unless our sins call down divine chastisements, or unless God is pleased to make trial of our graces by afflictions.

“They were stoned” (Heb 11:37). This form of death was appointed by God Himself to be inflicted upon notorious malefactors, Leviticus 20:2, Joshua 7:24, 25. But our text has reference to the Satanic perversion of this divine institution, for here it is the enemies of God inflicting this punishment upon His beloved and faithful people. “The devil is never more a devil nor more outrageous, than when he gets a pretense of God’s weapons into his own hands” (John Owen, 1616-1683). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, suffered death in this form. It is touching to remember that the one who first penned our text, himself “consented” to the stoning of Stephen (Act 8:1) and later he himself was stoned at Lystra.

“They were sawn asunder” (Heb 11:37). This was a barbarous method of execution which the later Jews seemed to have learned from the heathen. There is no record in Scripture of anyone being put to death in this way, though tradition says Isaiah ended his earthly career in this manner. That some of the heroes of faith perished in this way is clear from our text, evidencing the malice of the devil and the brutal rage of persecution. Their endurance of such torture demonstrates the reality and power of the Spirit’s support, enabling them to remain true to God, and in the midst of their agonies sweetly commit their spirits into His hands, to the astonishment of their murderers. How this should stir us up to bear patiently the far smaller trials we may be called upon to encounter.

“Were tempted” (Heb 11:37). This may be considered two ways, as pointing to an *aggravation* of their sufferings, or as referring to a *separate* trial of faith. We will take it in both respects. First, as signifying an intensification of their other trials, the reference would be to their persecutors setting before them the promise of relief upon their repudiation of the truth—liberty at the price of perfidy. The baits of immunity and advancement were offered to them on the condition that they would abandon their strictness and join the ranks of the loose livers of that day. We believe that our text also includes *the temptings of Satan*, seeking to fill their minds with doubts as to God’s goodness and power, urging them to recede from the stand they have taken. Because they remained resolute, refusing to yield to the insidious demands of their persecutors, they were cruelly butchered.

“Were tempted” may in the second place, be contemplated as referring to that life of ease and pleasure which worldly advancement and riches might provide. History solemnly records that numbers of those who courageously endured long and cruel imprisonment (and other sore trials) for the truth’s sake during the reign of the papist and bloody queen Mary of England, yet upon the accession of queen Elizabeth were freed, elevated to high places, and obtaining much wealth and power, denied the power of godliness and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. But those in our text were possessed of a faith like unto that of Moses (Heb 11:24-26), and therefore were enabled to withstand the powerful temptations of the world. Poverty, dear reader, is often sent by God upon His people as a merciful means of delivering them from the dangerous snares which wealth entails.

“Were slain with the sword” (Heb 11:37). There is probably a double reference here. First, to the sword of *violence*, when persecutors in their fury fell upon the servants and people of God, butchering them for their fidelity, see 1 Samuel 22:18, 21, 1 Kings 19:10. Second, the sword of *justice*, or rather injustice, the law being enforced against the saints. Probably this form of death is mentioned last to signify the *multitude* of martyrs who by their blood sealed up the truth. Literally rendered our text reads, “they died in the slaughter of the sword,” which denotes the insatiable thirst of the persecutors and the large number which they felled. Papists have exceeded pagans herein—witness their cruel massacres in France and other places. Well may the Holy Spirit represent the whore Babylon as being “drunken with the blood of the saints” (Rev 17:6).

“They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins” (Heb 11:37-38), which means they were hounded out of their homes, and forced to go forth and exist as they might, without any settled habitation. “They were driven out to share the lot of wild animals, and were reduced to wear their skins, instead of clothes woven by man. This form of suffering is mentioned here to show, on the one hand, the cruelty of religious persecution, and on the other hand, the mighty sustaining power of faith. What power indeed is this! It was not merely the compulsion such as that which enforced the wandering of society’s outlaws. It was rather the deliberate choice like that of Moses (Heb 24-26). Any day, any one of these wanderers could have rejoined their fellowmen, enjoyed their society, and shared their comforts, but they preferred this lot to apostasy” (E. W. Bullinger, 1837-1913)

“Being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb 11:37-38). These terms set forth the variety and intensity of the sufferings experienced by the homeless saints. “Destitute”

means they were deprived of the ordinary necessities of life, and further signifies they were denied the kind assistance of relatives and friends. They were driven forth without the means of subsistence and were beyond the reach of succour from all who cared for them. "Afflicted" probably has reference to their state of mind. They were not emotionless stoics, but felt acutely their sad condition. No doubt the enemy took full advantage of their state and injected many unbelieving and harassing thoughts into their minds. "Tormented" is rather too strong a word here. We understand the reference to be unto the ill-treatment they met with from the unfriendly strangers encountered in their wanderings, who regarded them without any pity and evilly treated them.

"Of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb 11:38). This parenthetical clause is brought in here for the purpose of removing an objection. Many might suppose that these despised wanderers were only receiving their just due, as not being fit to live in decent society. To remove this scandal the apostle put the blame where it rightly belonged, affirming that it was society which was unworthy of having the saints of God in their midst. In its wider aspect, the "world" here takes in the whole company of the ungodly, but in its narrower sense (that of the context), it has reference to the apostate "world"—all history, sacred and secular—is harmonious on this point—the most merciless, conscienceless, cruel, and inveterate persecutors of God's elect have been *religious* people!

"Of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb 11:38). Here we see the difference between God's estimate and that of unregenerate religionists concerning the children of faith. God regards them as "the excellent" of the earth in whom is His "delight" (Psa 16:3). "A true believer by reason of his union with Christ, and of the abode of the Spirit of sanctification in him, is worth more than a million worlds; as a rich and precious jewel is more worth than many loads of filthy mud" (William Gouge, 1617-1679). The excellency of saints appears also in the benefit and blessings which they bring to the places where they reside. They are the "salt of the earth," though the corrupt multitude around them realize it not. Their presence stays the hand of divine judgment (Gen 19:22), brings down blessing (Gen 30:27), and their prayers secure divine healing (Gen 20:17). How little does the world realize how much it owes to those whom they hate so bitterly!

"They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb 11:38). Not only were they without a settled habitation, but they were compelled to resort to desolate places and the dens of wild beasts in order to escape the fury of their foes. The word for "wandering" here is different from the one used in the previous verse. There it signifies to go up and down from house to house, or town to town, in hope of finding succour, but in which they were disappointed. Here the term denotes a wandering in unknown territory, going (like a blind man) they knew not whither. It is the term used of Abraham in Heb 11:8, and of Hagar in Genesis 16:6, and of wandering sheep in Matthew 18:12. What a commentary upon fallen human nature. These saints of God were safer among the beasts of the field than in the religious world inflamed by the devil! While these lines are being read, there are probably some of God's children in foreign lands suffering these very experiences.

Seeing that faith in the living God will alone support the soul under manifold trials, how necessary it is that we labour in the fear of the Lord to get our hearts rooted and

grounded in the truth, so that when afflictions or persecutions come we may be enabled to show forth the power and fruits of this spiritual grace. Faith has to overcome the fear of man as well as the love of the world! Whatever sufferings God may appoint in the path of duty, they are to be patiently borne as seeing Him who is invisible. Their enemies clothed death in the most hideous and horrible forms that hatred could devise, yet the faith of those saints boldly met and endured it. How thankful *we* should be that God's restraining hand is still upon the reprobate, for human nature has not improved any.

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### *33. His Coronation*

Inasmuch as it is not our design to write a verse by verse commentary on the books of Samuel, but rather to study the life of David, we pass over what is found in the remainder of 2 Samuel 3 and 4 and come to the opening verses of chapter five. In the interval between what was before us in our last article and the incident we are now to contemplate, the providence of God has been working on David's behalf. His principal opponents had met with a summary and tragic end, and the way was now cleared for the purpose of God concerning our hero, to receive its accomplishment. Viewing him typically, it is indeed striking to observe how that David's path to the throne was marked by *blood shedding*. From the human side, Saul, Jonathan, and later, Ishbosheth, stood in the way, and none of them died a natural death, by the hand of violence was each one removed!

We cannot regard as accidental or as a trivial detail, what has just been pointed out above. There is nothing trivial in the imperishable Word of God. Everything recorded therein has a profound significance, if only we have eyes to see it. Here, the deeper meaning of these details is not hard to discern. David, in all the essential features of his history (his failures excepted), foreshadowed the Lord Jesus, and as we know, *His* path to the throne was along one of blood shedding. True, the Lord Jesus was "born King of the Jews" (Joh 19:19), as David also had been born into the royal tribe of Judah. True, Christ had been "anointed" (Mat 3; Act 10:38), prophet, priest, and king, years before His coronation, as David also had been "anointed" to the royal office (1Sa 16:13). Yet, it was not until after His precious blood was shed at Calvary, that God exalted Christ to be a "Prince" unto the *spiritual* "Israel" (Act 2:36; 5:31), as it was not until after the blood shedding of Saul, Jonathan, and Ishbosheth, that David became king.

Upon the death of Abner and Ishbosheth, the tribes of Israel were left without a leader. Having had more than sufficient of the rule of Saul and Ishbosheth over them, they had no inclination to make a further experiment by setting another of Saul's family on the throne, and having observed the prosperous state of Judah under the wise and benign government of David, they began to entertain higher and more honourable thoughts of the "man after God's own heart." That illustrates an important principle in God's dealings with those whom He has marked out for salvation. There has to be a turning from Satan unto God,

from the service of sin unto subjection to Christ. *That* is what true conversion is—it is a change of masters. It is a saying from the heart, “O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by *thee only* will we make mention of thy name” (Isa 26:13).

But conversion is preceded by conviction. There is wrought in the soul a dissatisfaction with the old master, before there is begotten desires towards the new Master. Sin is made to be realized as a bitter thing, before there is an hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The cruel bonds of Satan must be felt before there is any longing to be made free by Christ. The prodigal son was made to feel the wretchedness of the far country before he had any thought of journeying toward the Father’s house. Clearly is this principle exemplified and illustrated in the case of these men who now sought unto David, desiring that he should be king over them. They had had more than enough of what the prophet Samuel had faithfully warned them (1Sa 8:11-18)! They had no desire for any other of the house of Saul to reign over them, but were now desirous of submitting themselves to *David’s* scepter.

Unspeakably blessed, then, is the typical picture here presented to our view. In the voluntary coming unto David of those men of the different tribes, following their unhappy lot under the reigns of Saul and Ishbosheth, we have adumbrated the outcome of the Holy Spirit’s operations in the hearts of God’s elect when He draws them to Christ. He first makes them discontented with their present lot. He gives them to realize there is no real and lasting satisfaction to be found in the service of sin and in continuing to follow a course of opposition to God and His Christ. He creates within the soul an aching void, before He reveals the One who alone can fill it. In short, He makes us thoroughly discontented with our present portion before He moves us to seek the true riches. The Hebrews must be made to groan under their merciless taskmasters in Egypt, before they were ready to start out for the promised land.

“Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel” (2Sa 5:1-3). Ah, note well the opening word, “Then,” after a period of no less than seven and a half years since the death of Saul, verse 5.

After the death of the apostate king, and following David’s recognition by the royal tribe, “It might have been expected that all Israel would have been ready to welcome him. Had it not long ago been declared by the lips of Samuel that God had forsaken the house of Saul? Had not this been acknowledged by Saul himself? Had not God by the destruction on Gilboa, finally set His seal to the truth of His denunciations? And was it not evident that the strength and blessing that had departed from Saul had accompanied the dishonoured sojourn of David in the wilderness? The might of Israel was there. There were they who were able to break through the host of the Philistines, and to draw from the well of Bethlehem, when Bethlehem and its waters were in the grasp of the enemy. There too, was

the Psalmody of Israel. And yet, despite every indication that God had given—careless alike of the tokens of His favour towards David and of His displeasure towards themselves—the tribes of Israel continued to reject the chosen servant of God and Judah only welcomed him.

“The son of Saul, though feeble and unknown, was preferred to David and David left the wilderness, only to be engaged in a long and destructive struggle with those who should have welcomed him as the gift of God for their blessing. So slowly does the hand of God effectuate its purpose—so resolute are men in refusing to recognize any thing save that which gratifies the tendencies of their nature, or approve itself to the calculation of their self-interest. For seven years and six months, Abner and all the tribes of Israel fiercely assailed David, and yet afterwards, they were not ashamed to confess that they knew that David was he whom God had destined to be the deliverer of Israel. They knew this and yet for seven years they sought to destroy him, and no doubt, all the while, spoke of themselves, and were spoken of by others, as conscientious men fulfilling an apprehended duty in adhering to the house of Saul. So easy is it to speak well of evil and to encourage iniquity by smooth words of falsehood.

“At last, however, God accomplished the long cherished desire of His servant’s heart—the desire that He had Himself implanted—and David became the head and governor of Israel” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899). Yes, at last the hearts of these rebels were subdued. At last they were willing to submit themselves unto David’s scepter. Ah, note well dear reader, *the particular character* in which David was owned by them, “Thou shalt be a *captain over Israel*” (2Sa 5:2). As we have pointed out in the introductory paragraphs, the surrender of the men of the eleven tribes unto David, was a type of the sinner’s *conversion*. This presents to us a vital and fundamental aspect of salvation which has well-nigh disappeared from modern “evangelism.” What is conversion? true and saving conversion, we mean. It is far, far more than a believing that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, and that He made an atonement for our sins. Thousands believe that who are yet dead in trespasses and sins!

Conversion consists not in a believing certain facts or truths made known in Holy Writ, but lies in the complete surrender of the heart and life to a divine Person. It consists in a throwing down of the weapons of our rebellion against Him. It is the total disowning of allegiance to the old master—Satan, sin, self, and a declaring “We *will*...have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14). It is owning the claims of Christ and bowing to His rights of absolute dominion over us. It is taking His yoke upon us, submitting unto His scepter, yielding to His blessed will. In a word, it is receiving Christ Jesus *the Lord* (Col 2:6), giving Him the throne of our hearts, turning over to Him the control and regulation of our lives. And my reader, nothing short of this is a Scriptural *conversion*—anything else is a make-believe, a lying substitute, a fatal deception.

In the passage now before us, these Israelites, who had for so long resisted the claims of David, serving under the banner of his adversary instead, now desired the king of Judah to be *their* king. It is evident that a great change had been *wrought in them*—wrought in them by God, though He was pleased to use circumstances to incline toward or prepare for that change. We purposely qualify our terms, for it should be quite obvious that no mere

“circumstances” could have wrought *such* a change in their attitude toward the ruler of God’s appointment, unless He had *so* “used” or influenced them by the same. So it is in connection with conversion. The distressing “circumstances” of a sinner may be used of the Spirit to convict him of the vanity of everything beneath the sun, and to teach him that no real heart satisfaction is to be found in mere *things*—even though those “things” may be an earthly mansion, with everything in it that the flesh craves, but He must perform a miracle of grace within the soul before any descendant of Adam is willing to pay full allegiance to Christ as *King*!

“Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh” (2Sa 5:1). What a precious line in our typical picture is this! After conviction and conversion follows spiritual illumination. The Holy Spirit is given to glorify Christ, to take of the things concerning Him and reveal them to those whom He draws to the Saviour (Joh 14:16). After a soul has been brought from death unto life by His mighty and sovereign operations, the Spirit of God *instructs* him, shows him the marvelous relation which divine grace has given him to the Redeemer. He discovers to him the glorious fact of his *spiritual union* with Christ, for “he that is *joined unto the Lord* is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). He reveals to the quickened children of God’s family the amazing truth that they are members of that mystical Body of which Christ is the Head, and thus we are “members of his body, of his flesh, and *of his bones*” (Eph 5:30).

It is precious to see that these words of all the tribes of Israel, “we are thy bone and thy flesh,” were used by them *as a plea*. They had long ignored his rights and resisted his claims. They had been in open revolt against him, and deserved nought but judgment at his hands. But now they humbled themselves before him, and pleaded their near relation to him as a reason why he should forgive their ill-usage of him. They were his brethren and on that ground they sought his clemency. And *this* is the very ground on which the Spirit-instructed believer sues for mercy from God in Christ. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same...Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb 2:14, 17). What confidence does the apprehension of this impart to the penitent heart of the Satan-harassed and sin-distressed saint!

O dear Christian reader, beg God to make this transcendent and precious fact more real and moving to thy heart. The Saviour is not one who, like the cherubim and seraphim, is far removed from thee in the scale of being. True, He *is* very God of very God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the King of kings and Lord of lords, but He is *also* one who was born of woman, who became man, who is bone of thy bone, and flesh of thy flesh, and therefore “He is not ashamed to call them *brethren*” (Heb 2:11). And for the same reason He can “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15), and “in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). Then hesitate not to approach Him with the utmost freedom and pour out thy heart unreservedly before Him. He will not reprove thee any more than David did his erring brethren. Take full encouragement from this endearing relation. We are the *brethren* of Christ. He is our *kinsman* Redeemer!

“Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel” (2Sa 5:2). This too is very blessed when we look through the type to the antitype. These humbled revolvers now praise David for his *former* services, which before they had overlooked, and now acknowledged the Lord’s appointment of him, which before they had resisted. So it is in the experience of the converted. While in the service of Saul (Satan), we have no appreciation of the work Christ has done and no apprehension of the position of honour to which God has elevated Him. The depths of humiliation into which the Beloved of the Father entered and the unspeakable suffering which He endured on behalf of His people, melted not our hearts, nor did the scepter which He now wields bring us into loving subjection to Him. But conversion alters all this!

But more, “The LORD said to thee, thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel” (2Sa 5:2). They not only praised David for his former services, but recognizing him as the divinely appointed *shepherd* of Israel they determined to put themselves under his protection, desiring that he would rule over them in tenderness and righteousness, for their safety and comfort, and that he would lead them forth to victory over his enemies. This too finds its counterpart in the history of those who are truly converted. They realize they have many foes, both within and without, which are far too powerful for them to conquer, and therefore do they “commit the keeping of their souls to *him*” (1Pe 4:19), assured that “He is able to...against that day” (2Ti 1:12). Yes, He who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh is “*mighty* to save,” “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25).

1 Chronicles 12:23-40 supplies fuller light upon the opening verses of 2 Samuel 5. There we are shown not only the numbers which came unto David from each tribe, and with what zeal and sincerity they came, but also *the gracious reception they met with*. The one whom they had so grievously wronged did not refuse to accept them, but instead gave them a hearty and royal welcome, “And there they were with David three days (typically, now on *resurrection* ground), eating and drinking” (v. 39)—at perfect ease in his presence, “for there was *joy* in Israel” (v. 40). Blessed be God, the Saviour of sinners has declared, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). Hallelujah!

## THE DIVINE COVENANTS

### 2. *The Everlasting Covenant (Part 2)*

The Everlasting Covenant or Covenant of Grace is that mutual agreement into which the Father entered with His Son before the foundation of the world respecting the salvation of His elect, Christ being appointed the Mediator, He willingly consenting to be their Head and Representative. That there *is* a divine covenant to which Christ stands related, and that the great work which He performed here on earth was the discharge of His covenant-



office, is very plain from many Scriptures, first of all, from the covenant-*titles* which He bears. In Isaiah 42:6, we hear the Father saying to the Son, "I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee *for a covenant* of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." As a covenantee in it, Christ is thus "given" unto His people, as the pledge of all its blessings (cf. Rom 8:32). He is the Representative of His people in it. He is, in His own Person and work, the sum and substance of it. He has fulfilled all its terms and now dispenses its rewards.

In Malachi 3:1, Christ is designated "the *messenger* of the covenant," because He came here to make known its contents and proclaim its glad tidings. He came forth from the Father to reveal and publish His amazing grace for lost sinners. In Hebrews 7:22, Christ is denominated "a *surety* of a better testament [covenant]." A "surety" is one who is legally constituted the representative of others, and thereby comes under an engagement to fulfill certain obligations in their name and for their benefit. There is not a single legal obligation which the elect owed unto God but what Christ has fully and perfectly discharged. He has paid the whole debt of His insolvent people, settling all their liabilities. In Hebrews 9:16, Christ is called "the *testator*" of the covenant or testament, and this, because to Him belong its riches, to Him pertain its privileges, and because He has, in His unbounded goodness, bequeathed them as so many inestimable legacies unto His people.

Once more, in Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24, Christ is styled "the *mediator* of the new covenant," because it is by His efficacious satisfaction and prevailing intercession that all its blessings are now imparted to its beneficiaries. Christ now stands between God and His people, advocating their cause (1Jo 2:1) and speaking a word in season to him that is weary (Isa 50:4). But how could Christ sustain such offices as these unless the covenant had been made with Him (Gal 3:17) and the execution of it had been undertaken by Him (Heb 10:5-7)? "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*" (Heb 13:20)—that one phrase is quite sufficient to establish the fact that an organic connection existed between the Covenant of Grace and the sacrifice of Christ. In response to Christ's execution of its terms, the Father now says to Him, "by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth *thy prisoners* [those given to Him before the foundation of the world, but in Adam fallen under condemnation] out of the pit wherein is no water" (Zec 9:11).

The covenant-*relationship* which the God-man Mediator sustains unto God Himself is that which alone accounts for and explains the fact that He so frequently addressed Him as, "My God." Every time our blessed Redeemer uttered the words, "My God," He gave expression to His *covenant* standing before the Godhead. It must be so, for considering Him as the second Person of the Trinity, He *was* God, equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are well aware that we are now plunging into deep waters, yet if we hold fast to the very words of Scripture we shall be safely borne through them, even though our finite minds will never be able to sound their infinite depths. "Thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa 22:10) declared the Saviour. From the cross He said, "My God." On the resurrection-morning, He spoke of "My God" (Joh 20:17). While in the compass of a single verse (Rev 3:12), we find the glorified Redeemer saying, "My God," no less than four times.

What has been pointed out in the above paragraph receives confirmation in many other Scriptures. When renewing His covenant with Abraham, Jehovah said, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee*, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen 17:7). *That* is the great covenant promise—to be a "God" unto any one signifies that He will supply all their need (Phi 4:19), spiritual, temporal, and eternal. It is true that God is the *God* of all men, inasmuch as He is their Creator, Governor, and Judge, but He is the "God" of His people in a much more blessed sense. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and *I will be to them a God*, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb 8:10). Here again we are shown that it is with respect unto *the covenant* that, in a special way, God is *the God* of His people.

Before leaving Hebrews 8:10, let us note the blessed tenor of the covenant as expressed in the words immediately following, "And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (vv. 11-12)—what *conditions* are there there? What terms of fulfillment are required from impotent men? None at all, it is all *promise* from beginning to end. So too in Acts 3:25, we find Peter saying, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers." Here *the* covenant (not "covenants") is referred to generally, then it is specified particularly, "saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth"—be laid under "conditions"? No, be required to perform certain works? No, but "*shall be* blessed," without any regard to qualifications or deeds of their own—entitled by virtue of their interest in what was performed for them by their Covenant-Head.

Let us consider now the various features of the Everlasting Covenant. 1. The Father covenanted with Christ that He should be the federal Head of His people, undertaking for them, freeing them from that dreadful condemnation wherein God foresaw from eternity they would fall in Adam—this alone explains why Christ is denominated the "last Adam," the "second man" (1Co 15:45, 47). Let it be very carefully noted that in Ephesians 5:23, we are expressly told, "Christ is the *head* of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." He could not have been the "Saviour" unless He had *first* been the "head," that is, unless He had voluntarily entered into the work of suretyship by divine appointment, serving as the Representative of His people, taking upon Him all their responsibilities and agreeing to discharge all their legal obligations, putting Himself in the stead of His insolvent people, paying all their debts, working out for them a perfect righteousness, and legally meriting for them the reward or blessing of the fulfilled law.

It is to that eternal compact the apostle makes reference when he speaks of a certain "covenant, that was confirmed before of God in (or "to") Christ," in Galatians 3:17. There we behold the covenant *Parties*—on the one side, "God," in the Trinity of His Persons and on the other side, "Christ," that is, the Son viewed as the God-man Mediator. There we learn of an *agreement* between Them, a "covenant" or contract, and that "confirmed" or solemnly agreed upon and ratified. There too, in the immediate context, we are shown that Christ is here viewed not only as the *Executor* of a testament bequeathed to the saints by

God, or that salvation was promised to us through Christ, but there twice over we are specifically told (v. 16) that the *promises* were made to Abraham's "seed, which is *Christ*"! Thus we have the clearest possible scriptural proof that the Everlasting Covenant contained something which is promised by God to Christ Himself.

Most blessedly were several features of the Everlasting Covenant typed out in Eden. First, Christ was "set up" (Pro 8:23) in the eternal counsels of the three-one JEHOVAH as the Head over and Heir of all things. The figure of His headship is seen in the Creator's words to Adam, "have *dominion* over the fish of the sea," etc. (Gen 1:28). There we behold him as the lord of all creation and head of all mankind. But second, Adam was *alone*—among all the creatures he ruled, there was not found a help-meet for him. He was solitary in the world over which he was king, so Christ was alone when "set up" by God in a past eternity. Third, a help-meet was provided for Adam, who was one in nature with himself, as pure and holy as he was, in every way suitable to him—Eve became his wife and companion (Gen 2:21-24). Beautifully did that set forth *the eternal marriage* between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:29-32). Let it be carefully noted that Eve was married to Adam, and was pure and holy, *before* she fell—so it was with the Church (Eph 1:3-6). For much in this paragraph we are indebted to a sermon by James K. Popham (1847-1937).

2. In order to the execution of His covenant-engagement, it was necessary for Christ to assume human nature and be made in all things like unto His brethren, so that He might enter their place, be made under the law, and serve in their stead. He must have a soul and body in which He was capable of suffering and being paid the just wages of His people's sins. This it is which explains to us that marvelous passage in Hebrews 10:5-9, the language of which is most obviously couched in covenant-terms—the whole displaying so blessedly the voluntary engagement of the Son, His perfect readiness and willingness in acquiescing to the Father's pleasure. It was at the incarnation Christ fulfilled that precious type of Himself in Exodus 21:5—out of love to His Lord, the Father, and to His Spouse the Church, and His spiritual children, He subjected Himself to a place of perpetual servitude.

3. Having voluntarily undertaken the terms of the Everlasting Covenant, a special economical *relationship* was now established between the Father and the Son—the Father considered as the Appointer of the Everlasting Covenant, the Son as the God-man Mediator, the Head and Surety of His people. Now it was that the Father became Christ's "Lord" (Psa 16:2, as is evident from vv. 9, 11; Micah 5:4), and now it was that the Son became the Father's "Servant" (Isa 42:1 and cf. Phi 2:7), undertaking the work appointed—observe that the clause "took upon him the form of a servant" *precedes* "and was made in the likeness of men"! This it is which explains His own utterance, "as the Father *gave me commandment*, even so I do" (Joh 14:31 and cf. 10:18, 12:49). This it is which accounts for His declaration, "My Father is greater than I" (Joh 14:28), wherein our Saviour was speaking with reference to the covenant-engagement which existed between the Father and Himself.

4. Christ died in fulfillment of the covenant's requirements. It was absolutely impossible that an innocent person, absolutely considered as such, should suffer under the sentence and curse of the law, for the law denounced no punishment on any such person. Guilt and punishment are related, and where the former is not, the latter cannot be. It was

because the Holy One of God was *relatively* guilty, by the sins of the elect being imputed to Him, that He could righteously be smitten in their stead. Yet even that had not been possible unless the spotless Substitute had first assumed the office of the Suretyship, and that, in turn, was only legally valid because of Christ's federal Headship with His people. The sacrifice of Christ owes all its validity from the covenant—the holy and blessed Trinity, by counsel and oath, having appointed it to be the true and only propitiation for sin.

So too it is utterly impossible for us to form any clear and adequate idea of what the Lord of Glory died to achieve if we have no real knowledge of the agreement in fulfillment of which His death took place. What is popularly taught upon the subject today is that the atonement of Christ has merely *provided an opportunity* for men to be saved, that it has opened the way for God to justly pardon any and all who avail themselves of His gracious provisions. But that is only a part of the truth, and by no means the most important and blessed part of it. The grand fact is that Christ's death was the *completion* of His agreement with the Father, which guarantees the salvation of all who were named in it—not one for whom He died can possibly miss heaven, John 6:39. This leads us to consider:

5. That on the ground of Christ's willingness to perform the work stipulated in the Covenant, certain *promises* were made to Him by the Father. First, promises concerning Himself and second, promises concerning His people. The promises which concerned the Mediator Himself may be summarized thus. First, He was assured of divine endowment for this discharge of all the specifications of the covenant, Isaiah 11:1-3; 61:1 and cf. John 8:29. Second, He was guaranteed the divine protection under the execution of His work, Isaiah 42:6, Zechariah 3:8-9 and cf. John 10:18. Third, He was promised the divine assistance unto a successful conclusion, Isaiah 42:4; 49:8-10 and cf. John 17:4. Fourth, those promises were given to Christ for the stay of His heart, to be pleaded by Him, Psalms 89:26; 2:8; and this He did, Isaiah 50:8-10 and cf. Hebrews 2:13. Fifth, Christ was assured of success of His undertaking and a reward for the same, Isaiah 53:10-11, Psalms 89:27-29, 110:1-3 and cf. Philippians 2:9-11. Christ also received promises concerning His people. First, that He should receive gifts for them, Psalm 68:18 and cf. Ephesians 4:10-11. Second, that God would make them willing to receive Him as their Lord, Psalm 110:3 and cf. John 6:44. Third, that eternal life should be theirs, Psalm 133:3 and cf. Titus 1:2. Fourth, that a seed should serve Him, proclaim His righteousness, and declare what He had done for them, Psalm 22:30-31. Fifth, that kings and princes should worship Him, Isaiah 49:7.

Finally, let it be pointed out that this compact made between the Father and the Son on behalf of the whole election of grace is variously designated. It is called an "*everlasting covenant*" (Isa 55:3) to denote the perpetuity of it, and because the blessings in it devised in eternity past will endure forever. It is called a "*covenant of peace*" (Eze 34:25; 37:26) because it secures reconciliation with God, for Adam's transgression produced enmity, but by Christ the enmity has been removed (Eph 2:16), and therefore He is denominated the "Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6). It is called the "*covenant of life*" (Mal 2:5), in contrast from the covenant of works which issued in death, and because life is the principal thing pledged in it, Titus 1:2. It is called the "*holy covenant*" (Luk 1:72), not only because it was made by and between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but also because it secures the

holiness of the divine character and provides for the holiness of God's people. It is called a "*better* testament" (Heb 7:22) in contrast from the Siniatic arrangement, wherein the national prosperity of Israel was left contingent on *their own* works.

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

### *Carson on Esther (Part Nine)*

This history, that has been thought by some unworthy of a place among the inspired writings, discovers, when attentively considered, the most surprising series of events brought about without a miracle, that ever was exhibited to the consideration of the human mind. Among the most admired works of genius, of all ages and countries, we will not find that the invention of man has been able to form a story, and connect a series of surprising events, like this true history. Homer, and Virgil, and Milton, and all the writers of epic poetry, have been obliged to use supernatural agency upon all critical occasions. To interest their readers, they must depart from the ordinary course of nature, and employ means that never really existed. Gods, and demons, and muses, are so necessary to the poet, that they still have their impression on the phraseology of poetry. If you prevent him from invoking the inspirations of his muse, from conversing familiarly with Apollo and the nine, from mounting to the top of Parnassus, and from drinking of the Pierian spring, you deprive him of the chief resources of his art.

But the book of Esther presents us with the most interesting and surprising narrative. It gives us a series of wonders in producing danger and deliverance, yet the means employed are so much in the ordinary course of nature, that a careless reader scarcely perceives the hand of the Lord. Every event appears the natural and obvious result of the situation in which it is produced, but to create and combine these situations is as truly a work of divine wisdom and power, as to create the world or to fix the laws of nature. It is *thus* God rules the world. He is continually working, yet blind men perceive Him not. Nature or chance is worshipped instead of Him, whose power is necessary to the life, motion, and existence of every being.

This book, then, whose inspiration has lately been called into question by ignorance, speaking from the chair of learning, commends its claims to me, in the most convincing manner, by its own internal evidence. No human pen could have produced it. The characteristic feature which I have pointed out proves it to be a child of God. Had man been its author, it would have been crowded with miracles. I challenge the world to produce anything resembling it in this point, from the writings of uninspired men.

There is another feature in this history that proves it to be of heavenly birth. *There is no instance in which it gratifies mere curiosity.* While it informs us of facts, it informs us no farther than they contribute to the design of the Holy Spirit, and are important for instruction. In this feature, it shows its resemblance to the teaching of our Lord, and to the

writings of the apostles. So far from gratifying idle curiosity, our Lord declined compliance with respect to some points in which human wisdom would think it important to be informed. His communications manifest a striking reserve, and even when pressed, He could not be induced to reply to any curious questions. In the writings of the evangelists and the apostles, how often do we wish that they had been a little more communicative. And, assuredly, had they spoken from their own wisdom, they would have made a larger Bible.

Now, with this in his view, let anyone read the book of Esther. In how many points do we wish more information! Facts are stated simply, where we would wish to see them standing in connection with their origin. To see this argument illustrated in a striking light, let anyone cast his eye over Gill's Commentary on this book, that he may see, from the Talmuds and Rabbinical writings, the additional information that human wisdom seeks in vain in the Book of God. There is not one point interesting to curiosity but what is supplied by their traditions or their conjectures. Had the book of Esther been written by the wisdom of men, it would have manifested its origin by gratifying curiosity in a similar way. Let us illustrate this remark by a reference to a few particulars in this history. The first I shall mention is the account of Mordecai's conduct in reference to the marriage of Esther. How human wisdom endeavours to justify or excuse him in this business, may be seen by looking into almost any of the commentaries. But this history relates the fact, without any observation either in justification or condemnation of him. We are left to acquit or blame him, according to the light of the Scriptures.

With respect to the conspiracy against the life of the king, who is it that would not wish a little more information? What uninspired writer would not have given us at least a sketch of the cause of the discontent of the conspirators, and of the means by which it was discovered to Mordecai? What a human author would have done on this subject, we may see from what human wisdom has actually supplied. Dr. Gill tells us that the Jewish writers say that the two conspirators were Tarsians, and spake in the Tarsian language, supposing that Mordecai did not understand it, but that he being skilled in languages, understood what they were saying. According to Josephus, it was discovered to Mordecai by Barnabazus, a servant of one of the chamberlains. The latter Targum says that it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit of God speaking by the writer of the book of Esther, deigns not to inform us how Mordecai came to know the matter. He only declares that the thing was known to Mordecai.

The account of the rise of Haman affords us another specimen of this divine wisdom. In giving an account of the rise of a favourite, every historian informs us of the ground of his acceptance with his sovereign, but not one word on this heard here. We are merely told, "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him" (Est 3:1).

Whether the conduct of Mordecai, in refusing to reverence Haman, was blamable or justifiable, and the grounds on which he acted, are things that no human author would have overlooked. But whether he was right or wrong, or what was the principle on which he refused obedience, in this instance, to the royal mandate, this book says nothing. It merely

states the fact, "But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence" (Est 3:2). In order to justify him, the Targum and Aben Ezra say that Haman had a statue erected to himself and had images painted on his clothes. Dr. Gill, who does not rely on this, strains hard to make out a good case for his client from the passage itself, and from conjecture. He thinks Haman claimed divine honours, because they were given to the Persian kings, and *might have been given to their favourites*. But this 'might have been' is a very bad foundation for an argument, though it is sufficient to remove a difficulty in a case that is attested by other credible testimony. This disposition to acquit the hero in an interesting narrative, in every part of his conduct, whatever may be its success in this instance, proves clearly that if the writer had not been guided by divine wisdom, he would have given us a few remarks in justification of Mordecai.

The last instance to which I shall allude is the account of the affair that brought Mordecai into royal notice. We are not told what diverted the monarch from sleeping, nor what induced him to call for the book of the chronicles of his kingdom, nor what led to the reading of one passage more than another. Human wisdom would have gratified us on all these points, but the Spirit of God says no more than, "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus" (Est 6:1-2).

But though I perceive internal evidence in this book, confirming its authenticity and inspiration, I do not submit to the dogma on which some modern critics seem to act, that the authority of the canon is not sufficient to entitle a book to be admitted to the rank of inspiration, and that it is necessary for each book to be separately tried on the independent evidence from its own contents. Modern critics, in acting on this principle, resemble the lawyers who excite litigation in order to obtain clients. They have an opportunity of displaying the treasures of their learning, and the reach of their ingenuity, in defending the claims of Scripture without the authority of the canon. In judging of this internal evidence, they lay down first principles that are not entitled to that rank, and overlook first principles that demand universal respect. A first principle of the latter description is that testimony is a sound source of evidence, and that the books of Scripture are to be received on the authority of the canon. In ascertaining whether the book of Esther, among other books, is inspired, we have to inquire, Was it in the collection called Scripture in the days of our Lord? If it was, its inspiration is past dispute. Jesus Christ recognized the Jewish Scripture as the Word of God. The apostle Paul represents it as one of the chief privileges of the Jews, that they are the depositories to whom were entrusted the oracles of God, and neither the apostles nor their Master charged them with unfaithfulness in their trust. Now, the book of Esther, as Dr. Gill observes, has been generally received as canonical, both by Jews and Christians. "It stands," he says, "in Origen's catalogue of the books of the Old Testament; nor is it any material objection, that it appears not in the catalogue of Melita, since in that list is comprehended under Ezra, not Nehemiah only, but Esther also, which Jerome mentions along with it."

As in rejecting the inspiration of this book, some modern theologians disclaim a first principle entitled to the most confident reception, so they admit some first principles that

are mere fragments of the imagination. Why is the book of Esther denied as a book of Scripture? Because it has not the name of God in its whole compass. Here it is taken as a first principle, that no book can be inspired, that does not contain the name of God. But where have they got this axiom? It is not self-evident, nor asserted by any portion of Scripture, and is therefore entitled to no respect. Whether a book may be inspired, though the name of God is not mentioned in it, depends not on any self-evident first principles, but on matter of fact. And matter of fact determines in this instance, that a book may be inspired, although it does not express the name of God.

This objection, though it affects an appearance of wisdom, manifests a very inadequate conception of the nature of the Word of God. It considers every book in the collection as an independent whole, standing unconnected with the other books. But the Bible is like the human body, all the books together form one whole and there is no reason that one book should serve the place of another more than that the hand or the foot should perform the duty of the eye or of the ear. It is enough if the whole will of God is learned from the Book as a whole. If it is contended that every book of Scripture *must* contain the name of God, a like demand may be made with respect to every chapter, or any small division. The prophecy of Obadiah contains but one chapter—must it prove its divine origin by containing a whole body of divinity? Let the Christian form his views of the characteristics of Scripture from itself, and not from the arbitrary conceits of his own mind.

But if God is not expressly named in this book, He is most evidently referred to by periphrasis, and the strongest confidence in Him is manifested by Mordecai. The faith of that illustrious servant of God is among the most distinguished examples that Scripture affords. “Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:13-14). Is not this a reference to God and confidence in Him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? “*From another place.*” Can there be any doubt as to the place from which he expected deliverance? Is not this an obvious reference *to God*? Does not this reasoning to persuade Esther express the fullest confidence that the Jews would be eventually delivered, though the danger was so great and so inevitable, that no human eye could discern the means of preservation, should not Esther undertake the intercession? As Abraham counted Him faithful who had promised, and believed that though Isaac should die on the altar, he should by him be the father of the Messiah, so Mordecai believed that when every apparent means of safety failed, God would on this occasion be the Deliverer of Israel. Is it not from the retributive justice of God that he threatens destruction to Esther and her father’s house, should she decline the intercession through unbelief? The very Providence that is illustrated in this book is exhibited in the faith of Mordecai. He looked for deliverance through means, and if all apparent means should fail, still he believed that Providence would raise up means.

How clearly and strongly is this view of Providence expressed in the question to Esther, “And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” He justly concluded, from the occurrence of such a danger, that the reason why Providence



had raised her to the rank of queen, was to be the deliverer of her people. Mordecai's view of Providence is that which is inculcated in all the wonderful events of this singular narrative. It is the view of Providence which I wish to press on all my brethren in Christ. If times of trouble are before us, what better preparation for it, than the study of the book of Esther? If the great Antichrist, under any form, is yet to mediate the destruction of the whole Israel of God—if there is any just apprehension from the prophecies of Scripture that great calamities are still before the Church of Christ, ought not every Christian to be nourishing his faith with this wonderful display of Providence, as the Deliverer of those who put their trust in Him? Surely there can be no harm in watchfulness and apprehension, when the enemies of the cross are so rapidly increasing, and when indecision and lukewarmness so fearfully characterize the great body of the people of God. All the other symptoms of danger are not so dreadfully alarming as that spurious liberality that begins to look with complaisance on the enemies of Christ, an affectation of that love of man that manifests disaffection to some parts of the character of God.

Esther also manifests confidence in God, and a resolution to die for His people, if that should be the result of her application in their favour. She approaches the king, not confiding in her charms, nor hoping to escape destruction from the love or pity of a husband, but in the way of *divine appointment*, in the time of danger, by *much fasting and prayer*. This is an exhibition of a true servant of God. The power of Jehovah, and the love of His people, are strongly manifested in the conduct of these two illustrious Israelites. If God is not mentioned by name, He is seen in all their conduct.

In the exhibition of the conduct of Esther on this occasion, we have a strong internal evidence of inspiration. Had human wisdom formed a heroine, it would have been likely to represent her from the first moment as intrepid and ready to encounter the greatest dangers with more than masculine bravery. But Esther is not presented to us in this light by this history. She comes before us in the usual character of her sex, and as in the ordinary attainments in the divine life. She at first declines the hazardous undertaking for fear of losing her life. Her timidity is overcome by such arguments as ought to influence a believer in the God of Abraham, and she finally displays resignation and confidence though not altogether unmixed with fear. Such is the usual conduct, such is the usual confidence, of the people of God.

## THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

### 7. *Its Objects*

We have now reached a point in our discussion of this mighty theme where it is timely for us to ask the question, *Who are the ones* that God justifies? The answer to that question will necessarily vary according to the mental position we occupy. From the standpoint of God's eternal decrees the reply must be, *God's elect*, Romans 8:33. From the standpoint of the effects produced by quickening operations of the Holy Spirit the reply must be, *those*

*who believe*, Acts 13:39. But from the standpoint of what they are, considered in themselves, the reply must be, *the ungodly*, Romans 4:5. The persons are the same, yet contemplated in three different relations. But here a difficulty presents itself—If faith be essential in order to justification and if a fallen sinner must be quickened by the Holy Spirit before he can believe, then with what propriety can a regenerated person, with the spiritual grace of faith already in his heart, be described as “ungodly”?

The difficulty pointed out above is self-created. It issues from confounding things which differ radically. It is the result of bringing in the *experimental* state of the person justified, when justification has to do only with his *judicial* status. We would emphasize once more the vital importance of keeping quite distinct in our minds the objective and subjective aspects of truth, the legal and the experimental—unless this be steadily done, nought but confusion and mistakes can mark our thinking. When contemplating what he is *in himself*, considered alone, even the Christian mournfully cries, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom 8:24), but when he views himself *in Christ*, as justified from all things, he triumphantly exclaims, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect!” (Rom 8:33).

Above, we have pointed out that from the viewpoint of God’s eternal decrees the question, “Who are the ones whom God justifies?” must be “the elect.” And this brings us to a point on which some eminent Calvinists have erred, or at least, have expressed themselves faultily. Some of the older theologians, when expounding this doctrine, contended for the *eternal justification* of the elect, affirming that God pronounced them righteous before the foundation of the world, and that their justification was then actual and complete, remaining so throughout their history in time, even during the days of their unregeneracy and unbelief, and that the only difference their faith made was in *making manifest* God’s eternal justification in their consciences. This is a serious mistake, resulting (again) from failure to distinguish between things which differ.

As an *immanent* act of God’s mind, in which *all* things (which are to us past, present, and future) were cognized by Him, the elect might be said to be justified from all eternity. And as an *immutable* act of God’s will, which cannot be frustrated, the same may be predicated again. But as an actual, formal, historical sentence, pronounced by God upon us, not so. We must distinguish between God’s looking upon the elect in the *purpose* of his grace, and the objects of justification lying under the sentence of the law. In the former, He *loved* His people with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3), in the latter, we were “by nature the children of *wrath*, even as others” (Eph 2:3). Until they believe, every descendant of Adam is “condemned already” (Joh 3:18) and to be under God’s condemnation is the very opposite of being justified.

In his ponderous treatise on justification, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), made clear some vital distinctions, which if carefully observed will preserve us from error on this point. “1. In the everlasting covenant. We may say of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ Himself, that their ‘goings forth are from everlasting’ (Mic 5:2). Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head (Eph 1:3). 2. There is a farther act of justifying us, which passed from God towards us in Christ, upon His payment and performance at His resurrection (Rom 4:25, 1Ti 3:16). 3. But these two acts of justification are wholly out of us, immanent acts in God, and

though they concern us and are *towards* us, yet not acts of God *upon* us, they being performed towards us not as actually existing in ourselves, but only as existing in our Head, who covenanted for us and represented us: so as though by those acts we are *estimated* into a right and title to justification, yet the benefit and possession of that estate we have not without a farther act being passed upon us."

Before regeneration we are justified by existing in our Head only, as a feoffee, held in trust for us, as children under age. In addition to which, we "are to be in our own persons, though still through Christ, possessed of it, and to have all the deeds and evidences of it committed to the custody and apprehension of our faith. We are in our own persons made true owners and enjoyers of it, which is immediately done at that instant when we first believe; which act (of God) is the completion and accomplishment of the former two, and is that grand and famous justification by faith which the Scripture so much inculcates—note the 'now' in Romans 5:9, 11; 8:1!...God doth judge and pronounce His elect ungodly and unjustified till they believe" (Ibid.)

God's elect enter this world in precisely the same condition and circumstances as do the non-elect. They are "by nature the children of wrath, *even as others*" (Eph 2:3), that is, they are under the condemnation of their original sin in Adam (Rom 5:12, 18-19), and they are under the curse of God's law because of their own constant transgressions of it (Gal 3:10). The sword of divine justice is suspended over their heads and the Scriptures denounce them as rebels against the Most High. As yet, there is nothing whatever to distinguish them from those who are "fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22). Their state is woeful to the last degree, their situation perilous beyond words, and when the Holy Spirit awakens them from the sleep of death, the first message which falls upon their ears is, "Flee from the wrath to come" (Luk 3:7). But how and whither, they, as yet, know not. Then it is they are ready for the message of the Gospel.

Let us turn now to the more immediate answer to our opening inquiry, Who are the ones that God justifies? A definite reply is given in Romans 4:5, "Him that justifieth the"—whom? the holy, the faithful, the fruitful? no, the very reverse: "Him that justifieth *the ungodly*." What a strong, bold, and startling word is this! It becomes yet more emphatic when we observe what precedes:

"But to him *that worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). The subjects of justification, then, are viewed in themselves, apart from Christ, as not only destitute of a perfect righteousness, but as having *no* acceptable works to their account. They are denominated, and considered as *ungodly* when the sentence of justification is pronounced upon them. The mere *sinner* is the subject on which grace is magnified, toward which grace reigns in justification!

"To say, he who *worketh not* is justified through believing, is to say that his works, whatever they be, have *no* influence in his justification, nor hath God, in justifying him, any respect unto them. Wherefore he *alone* who worketh not, is the subject of justification, the person to be justified. That is, God considereth no man's works, no man's duties of obedience, in his justification; seeing we are justified *freely* by His grace" (John Owen, 1616-1683). Those whom God, in His transcendent mercy, justifies, are not the obedient, but the disobedient—not those who have been loyal and loving subjects of His righteous

government, but they who have stoutly defied Him and trampled His laws beneath their feet. Those whom God justifies are lost sinners, lying in a state of defection from Him, under a loss of original righteousness (in Adam) and by their own transgressions brought in guilty before His tribunal (Rom 3:19). They are those who by character and conduct have *no* claim upon divine blessing, and deserve nought but unsparing judgment at God's hand.

"Him that justifieth *the ungodly*" (Rom 4:5). It is deplorable to see how many able commentators have weakened the force of this by affirming that, while the subject of justification *is* "ungodly" up to the time of his justification, he is *not* so at the moment of justification itself. They argue that, inasmuch as the subject of justification is *a believer* at the moment of his justification and that believing presupposes regeneration—a work of divine grace wrought in the heart—he could not be designated "ungodly." This seeming difficulty is at once removed by calling to mind that justification is entirely a *law* matter and not an experimental thing at all. In the sight of God's law, *every* one whom God justifies *is* "ungodly" until Christ's righteousness is made over to him. The awful sentence "ungodly" rests as truly upon the purest virgin as much as it does upon the foulest prostitute until God imputes Christ's obedience to her.

"Him that justifieth the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). These words cannot mean less than that God, in the act of justification, has no regard whatever to any thing good resting to the credit of the person He justifies. They declare, emphatically, that immediately prior to that divine act, God beholds the subject *only* as unrighteous, ungodly, wicked, so that no good, either in or by the person justified, can possibly be the ground on which or the reason for which He justifies him. This is further evident from the words, "to him that worketh not"—that this includes not only works which the ceremonial law required, but *all works* of morality and godliness, appear from the fact that the same person who is said to "work not" is designated "ungodly." Finally, seeing that the faith which belongs to justification is here said to be "counted for [or "*unto*"] righteousness," it is clear that the person to whom "righteousness" *is* imputed, is *destitute* of righteousness in himself.

A parallel passage to the one which has just been before us is found in Isaiah 43. There we hear God saying, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa 43:25). And to whom does God say this? To those who had sincerely endeavoured to please Him? To those who, though they had occasionally been overtaken in a fault, had, in the main, served Him faithfully? No, indeed, very far from it. Instead, in the immediate context we find Him saying to them, "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel...Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast *wearied me with thine iniquities*" (Isa 43:22, 24). They were, then, thoroughly "ungodly," yet *to them* the Lord declared, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions"—why? Because of something good in them or from them? No, "for mine own sake" (Isa 43:25).

Further confirmation of what has been before us in Romans 4:5 is found in both what immediately precedes and what follows. In verses 1-3, the case of Abraham is considered, and the proof given that *he* was *not* "justified by works," but on the ground of

righteousness being imputed to him on his believing. "Now if a person of such victorious faith, exalted piety, and amazing obedience as his was, did not obtain acceptance with God on account of his own duties, but by an imputed righteousness; who shall pretend to an interest in the heavenly blessing, in virtue of his own sincere endeavors, or pious performances?—performances not fit to be named, in comparison with those that adorned the conduct and character of *JEHOVAH's friend*" (Abraham Booth, 1734-1806).

Having shown that the father of all believers was regarded by the Lord as an "ungodly" person, having no good works to his credit at the moment of his justification, the apostle next cited David's description of the truly blessed man. "And how does the royal Psalmist describe him? To what does he attribute his acceptance with God? To an inherent or to an imputed righteousness? Does he represent him as attaining the happy state, and as enjoying the precious privilege, in consequence of performing sincere obedience and of keeping the law to the best of his power? No such thing. His words are, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin' (Rom 4:7-9). The blessed man is here described as one who is, in himself, a polluted creature, and a guilty criminal. As one who, before grace made the difference, was on a level with the rest of mankind; equally unworthy, and equally wretched: and the sacred penman informs us that all his blessedness arises from an *imputed* righteousness" (A. Booth).

"Him that justifieth the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). Here is the very heart of the Gospel. Many have argued that God can only pronounce just, and treat as such, those who are inherently righteous, but if this was so, what good news would there be for sinful men? Enemies of the truth insist that for God to pronounce just those whom His law condemns would be a judicial fiction. But Romans 4:5 makes known a divine *miracle*, something only God could have achieved. The miracle announced by the Gospel is that God comes to the ungodly with a mercy that is righteous, and in spite of all their depravity and rebellion, enables them through faith (on the ground of *Christ's* righteousness) to enter into a new and blessed relation with Himself.

The Scriptures speak of mercy, but it is not mercy coming in to make up the deficiencies and forgive the slips of the virtuous, but mercy extended *through Christ* to the *chief of sinners*. The Gospel which proclaims mercy through the atonement of the Lord Jesus is distinguished from every religious system of man, by holding out salvation to *the guiltiest* of the human race, through faith in the blood of the Redeemer. God's Son came into this world not only to save sinners, but even *the chief of sinners*, the worst of His enemies. Mercy is extended freely to the most violent and determined rebel. Here, and here only, is a refuge for the *guilty*. Is the trembling reader conscious that he is a *great* sinner, then *that* is the very reason why you should come to Christ—the greater your sins, the greater your need of the Saviour.

There are some who appear to think that Christ is a Physician who can cure only such patients as are not dangerously ill, that there are some cases so desperate as to be incurable, beyond His skill. What an affront to His power, what a denial of His sufficiency! Where can a more extreme case be found than that of the thief on the cross? He was at the very point of death, on the very brink of hell! A guilty criminal, an incorrigible outlaw, justly

condemned even by men. He had reviled the Saviour suffering by his side. Yet, at the end, he turned to Him and said, "Lord, remember me." Was his plea refused? Did the Physician of souls regard him as a hopeless case? No, blessed be His name, He at once responded "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." *Only unbelief* shuts the vilest out of heaven.

"Him that justifieth *the ungodly*" (Rom 4:5). And how can the thrice holy God *righteously* do such a thing? Because "*Christ died for the UNGODLY*" (Rom 5:6). God's righteous grace comes to us through the law-honouring, justice-satisfying, sin-atoning work of the Lord Jesus! Here, then, is the very essence of the Gospel—the proclamation of God's amazing *grace*, the declaration of divine *bounty*, altogether irrespective of human worth or merit. In the great satisfaction of His Son, God has "*brought near HIS righteousness*" see Isa 46:13. "We do not need to go up to heaven for it, that would imply Christ had never come down. Nor do we need to go down to the depths of the earth for it, that would say Christ had never been buried and had never risen. It is *near*. We do not need to exert ourselves to bring it near, nor do anything to attract it towards us. It is *near*...The office of faith is not to work, but to *cease working*, not to do anything, but to own that *all is done*" (Andrew Bonar, 1810-1892).

Faith is the one link between the sinner and the Saviour. Not faith as a work, which must be properly performed to qualify us for pardon. Not faith as a religious duty, which must be gone through according to certain rules in order to induce Christ to give us the benefits of His finished work. No, but faith simply extended *as an empty hand*, to receive everything from Christ for nothing. Reader, you may be the very "*chief of sinners*," yet is your case not hopeless. You may have sinned against much light, great privileges, exceptional opportunities. You may have broken every one of the Ten Commandments in thought, word, and deed. Your body may be filled with disease from wickedness, your head white with the winter of old age. You may already have one foot in hell and yet even now, if you but take your place alongside of the dying thief, and trust in the *divine efficacy* of the precious blood of the Lamb, *you* shall be plucked as a brand from the burning. God "*justifieth the ungodly*." Hallelujah! If He did not, the writer had been in hell long ago.

## DIVINE GUIDANCE

It is well for those who are sensible of their own weakness and fallibility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide His people with His eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when they are in danger of turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. For this purpose He has given us the written Word to be a lamp to our feet and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of His Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have His warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing

to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The Scriptures cannot deceive us if rightly understood, but they may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under His influence, but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honour of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly (closely) concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted. I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some persons, when two or more things have been in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer, have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have proceeded to cast lots—taking it for granted, that after such a solemn appeal, the turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the Scripture, and indeed, right reason assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot, and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by divine appointment. But I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the land of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again, namely, the choice of an apostle, who would not have been on a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless He had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way, and all these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time. Under the New Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to make our request known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon Him, but we have neither precept or promise respecting the use of lots, and to have recourse to them *without* His appointment, seems to be tempting Him rather than honouring Him, and to savour more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient have often been unhappy and hurtful. A sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to their practice, that the heathens who knew not the Bible, used some of their favourite books in the same way, and grounded their persuasions of what they ought to do, or what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions, which gave rise to the well-known expression of the *Sortes Virgilinae*. And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquiries in this way, as the Bible itself, for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the Word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagancies, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the Word of God on their side. Can the opening upon 2 Samuel 7:3, when Nathan

said unto David, "Do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Mat 15:28), amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that matters, big with important consequences, have been engaged in, and the most sanguine expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of Scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them. Or on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and disquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being more out of their power than their former method, have been generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive. It is allowed that such impressions of a precept or a promise, as humble, animate, may comfort the soul by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, and are both profitable and pleasant, and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by His Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be inwardly misled into great evils, and gross delusions, and many have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with Scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some persons judge of the nature and event of their designs by the freedom which they find in prayer. They say they commit their ways to God, seek His direction, and are favoured with much enlargement of spirit, and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet without other corroborating evidence I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not always easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God. In such a disposition, we are ready to catch at everything that may seem to favour our darling scheme, and the Lord, for the detecting and chastisement of our hypocrisy (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves), may answer us according to our idols, see Ezekiel 14:3-4. Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus, I may have a friend in a distant country. I hope he is alive, I pray for him, and it is my duty to do so. The Lord, by His Spirit, assists His people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him. And if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.



Once more, a remarkable dream has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow, but though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct our expectations upon them, is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who *dream*, but to those who *watch*.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some persons, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way, yet expressly to look for and seek His direction in such things as I have mentioned is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the courts of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God's service while acting in contradiction to His express commands. I have known others infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass, and when at length disappointed, Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offences against the Gospel multiplied, and the way of truth evil spoken of.

But how, then, may the Lord's guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, He guides and directs His people by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of His Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and to live the Scriptures. The Word of God is not to be used as a lottery, nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached from their proper places, have no determined import, but it is to furnish us with just *principles*, right *apprehensions*, to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and regulate our conduct. They who study the Scriptures in an humble dependence upon divine teaching, are convinced of their own weakness, are taught to make a true estimate of everything around them, are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God, discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The Word of God dwelling richly in them is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture in their minds, and daily comparing them with the rule by which they walk, they grow into an habitual frame of spiritual wisdom, and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds, and they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which are the great objects they have in view.

In particular cases the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of His providence. They know that their concerns are in His hands. They are willing to follow whither and when He leads, but are afraid of going before Him. Therefore they are not impatient. Because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon Him in prayer, especially when they find their hearts most

engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most jealous of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther or faster than they can perceive His light shining upon their paths. I express at least their *desire*, if not their *attainment*. Thus they *would be*. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition, and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations: He leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that He is and will be their Guide even unto death.—John Newton (1770).

We heartily commend the above article to the careful attention of those who are exercised about the matter of divine guidance. Its exposure of the foolish, fanatical, and superstitious devices employed by not a few today, when they are undecided as to their line of duty, is timely. The positive side of the subject is capable of and probably needs some amplification, and we hope to write an article thereon for the next issue. The general rule or principle may be stated thus, if *we* are daily concerned in seeking to *please* God in all the details, great and small, of our lives, *He* will not leave us in ignorance of His will concerning us. But if we are accustomed to gratify self and only turn unto God for help in times of difficulty and emergency, then we must not be surprised if He mocks us, and allows us to reap the fruits of our own folly. Our business is to walk in obedient subjection to Christ, and His sure promise is, “He that followeth me *shall not walk in darkness*” (Joh 8:12). Make sure you are sincerely endeavoring to “follow” the “example” Christ has left us, and He will not leave you in ignorance or uncertainty as to which step you should take when you come to the parting of the ways.

## A PERSONAL WORD

It seems strange that just as the above article is about to be printed, the final paragraph of which was written by us many weeks ago, that we ourselves appear to be now at the “parting of the ways” again. We are not sure at the moment of penning these lines (late in July), but the providential dealings of God with us at this time seem to indicate that He will soon call upon us to strike our tent once more. We are endeavouring to wait upon the Lord, for Him to work in us “both to will and to do his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13), and we shall greatly value the prayer-help of His people that He may be pleased to make *His* way very plain before our face, and mercifully preserve us from being deceived by Satan, or acting from any self-will. God willing, we hope to inform our readers of the sequel. Please earnestly supplicate the God of all grace on our behalf.—A.W.P.

