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

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

# CONTENTS

The Holy Spirit.....	1
22. <i>The Spirit Convicting (Part 2)</i>	
The Epistle to the Hebrews .....	3
82. <i>The Family of Faith (11:39-40)</i>	
The Life of David.....	10
34. <i>His Coronation</i>	
The Covenants of God .....	14
3a. <i>The Adamic</i>	
The Providence of God .....	18
<i>Carson On Esther (Part Ten)</i>	
The Doctrine of Justification.....	23
8. <i>Its Instrument</i>	
To a Stricken Soul.....	28
Over-Righteous .....	31

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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

#### *22. The Spirit Convicting (Part 2)*

In the preceding article, we sought to point out something of the real and radical difference which exists between that conviction of sin, which many of the unregenerate experience under the common operations of the Spirit, and that conviction of sin which follows His work of quickening and enlightening the hearts of God’s elect. We pointed out that in the case of the latter, the conscience is occupied more with sin itself, than with its punishment—with the real *nature* of sin, as rebellion against God—with its exceeding sinfulness, as enmity against God—with the multitude of sins, every action being polluted—with the character and claims of God, as showing the awful disparity there is between Him and us. Where the soul has not only been made to perceive, but also to *feel*—to have a heart-horror and anguish over the same—there is good reason to believe that the work of divine grace has been begun in the soul.

Many other contrasts may be given between that conviction which issues from the common operations of the Spirit in the unregenerate and His special work in the regenerate. The convictions of the former are generally light and uncertain, and of short duration, they are sudden frights which soon subside, whereas those of the latter are deep, pungent, and lasting, being *repeated* more or less frequently throughout life. The former work is more upon the emotions, the latter upon the judgment. The former diminishes in its clarity and efficacy, the latter grows in its intensity and power. The former arises from a consideration of God’s justice, the latter are more intense when the heart is occupied with God’s goodness. The former springs from a horrified sense of God’s power, the latter issues from a reverent view of His holiness.

Unregenerate souls regard eternal punishment as the greatest evil, but the regenerate look upon *sin* as the worst thing there is. The former groan under conscience's presages of damnation. The latter mourn from a sense of their lack of holiness. The greatest longing of the one is to be assured of escape from the wrath to come. The supreme desire of the other is to be delivered from the burden of sin and conformed to the image of Christ. The former, while he may be convicted of many sins, still cherishes the conceit that he has some good points. The latter is painfully conscious that in his flesh there dwelleth *no* good thing and that his best performances are defiled. The former greedily snatches at comfort, for assurance and peace are now regarded as the highest good. The latter fears that he has sinned beyond the hope of forgiveness and is slow to believe the glad tidings of God's grace. The convictions of the former harden, those of the latter melt and lead to submission. (The above two paragraphs are condensed from the Puritan, Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

The great instrument which the Holy Spirit uses in this special work of conviction is *the law*, for that is the one rule which God has given whereby we are to judge of the moral good or evil of actions, and conviction is nothing more or less than the formal impression of sin by the law upon the conscience. Clear proof of this is found in the passages that follow. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20). It is the design of all laws to impress the understanding with what is to be done, and consequently with man's deviation from them, and so absolutely necessary is the law for this discernment, the Apostle Paul declared, "I had not known sin, but by the law" (Rom 7:7)—its real nature, as opposition to God, its inveterate enmity against Him, its unsuspected lustings within. "The law entered, that the offence [sin] might abound" (Rom 5:20) by deepening and widening the conviction of sin upon the conscience.

Now it is that God holds court in the human conscience and a reckoning is required of the sinner. God will no longer be trifled with, and sin can no longer be scoffed at. Thus a solemn trial begins. The law condemns and the conscience is obliged to acknowledge its guilt. God appears as holy and just and good, but as awfully insulted, and with a dark frown upon His brow. The sinner is made to feel how dreadfully he has sinned against both the justice and goodness of God, and that his evil ways will no longer be tolerated. If the sinner was never solemn before, he is solemn now. Fear and dismay fills his soul, death and destruction seem his inevitable and certain doom. When the Lord Almighty Himself appears in the court of conscience to vindicate His honour, the poor criminal trembles, sighs for mercy, but fears that pardoning mercy cannot justly be granted such a wretch.

Now it is that the Holy Spirit brings to light the hidden things of darkness. The whole past life is made to pass in review before the convicted soul. Now it is that he is made to experimentally realize that "the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb 4:12). Secret things are uncovered, forgotten deeds are recalled—sins of the eyes and sins of the lips, sins against God and sins against man, sins of commission and sins of omission, sins of ignorance and sins against light, are brought before the startled gaze of the enlightened understanding. Sin is now seen in all its excuselessness, filthiness, heinousness, and the soul is overwhelmed with horror and terror.

Whatever step the sinner now takes, all things appear to be against him. His guilt abounds and his soul tremblingly sinks under it, until he feels obliged, in the presence of a heart-searching God, to sign his own death-warrant, or in other words, freely acknowledge that his condemnation is just. This is one of “the solemnities of Zion” see Isa 33:20. As to whether this conviction is experienced at the beginning of the Christian life (which is often, though not always the case), or at a later stage, as to how long the sinner remains under the spirit of bondage see Rom 8:15, as to what extent he feels his wretchedness and ruin, or how deeply he sinks into the mire of despair, varies in different cases. God is absolute sovereign and here too He acts as He sees good. But to this point every quickened soul is brought—to see the spirituality of God’s law, to hear its condemning sentence, to feel his case is hopeless so far as all self-help is concerned.

Here is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30:6, “The LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart.” The blessed Spirit uses the sharp knife of the law, pierces the conscience, and convicts of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. By this divine operation the hardness of the heart is removed, and the iniquity of it laid open, the plague and corruption of it discovered, and all is made naked to the soul’s view. The sinner is now exceedingly pained over his rebellions against God, is broken down before Him, and is filled with shame, and loathes and abhors himself. “Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it” (Jer 30:6, 7)—such is, sooner or later, the experience of all God’s quickened people.

Of ourselves, we could never be truly convicted of our wretched state, for “the heart is deceitful above all things,” and God alone can search it (Jer 17:9). O the amazing grace of the Holy Spirit that *He* should rake into such foul and filthy hearts, amid the dunghill of putrid lusts, of enmity against God, of wickedness unspeakable! What a loathsome work it must be for the *Holy* Spirit to perform! If God the Son humbled Himself to enter the virgin’s womb and be born in Bethlehem’s manger, does not God the Spirit humble Himself to enter our depraved hearts and stir up their vile contents in order that we may be made conscious thereof! And if praise is due unto the One for the immeasurable humiliation which He endured on our behalf, is not distinctive praise equally due unto the Other for His amazing condescension in undertaking to convict us of *sin*! Thanksgiving, honour and glory forever be ascribed unto Him who operates as “the spirit of judgment” and “the spirit of burning” (Isa 4:4).

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### *82. The Family of Faith (11:39-40)*

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made

perfect” (vv. 39-40). Several details in these verses call for careful consideration. First, to what does “the promise” here refer to? Second, in what sense had the Old Testament saints “not received” the promise? Third, what is the “better thing” which God provided for us. Fourth, what is here meant by “be made perfect”? Widely different answers have been returned to these questions, and even the most reliable of the commentators are by no means agreed. Therefore it would ill-become us to speak dogmatically, where men of God differ. Instead of wearying the reader with their diverse views, we will expound out text according to what measure of light God has granted us upon it.

As we approach our task, there are several considerations which need to be borne in mind, the observing of which should aid us not a little. First, ascertaining the relation of our text to that which precedes. Second, discovering the exact relation of its several clauses. Third, studying it in the light of the distinctive and dominant theme of the particular epistle in which it occurs. Fourth, weighing its leading terms in connection with their usage in parallel passages. If these four things be duly attended to we ought not to go far wrong in our interpretation. Our purpose in enumerating them is principally to indicate to your preachers the methods which should be followed in the critical examination of any difficult passage.

As to the connection between our present verses and those which precede, there is no difficulty. The Apostle, having so forcibly and largely set out the virtue and vigour of faith by the admirable workings and fruits thereof, both in doing and in suffering, now gives a general summary—they all “obtained a good report.” The relation of the several clauses of our text to each other may be set out thus—“and these all” refer to the entire company which has been before us in the previous verses—a “good report” is ascribed to them, yet they had not “received the promise”, because God had provided something “better” for the New Testament saints. The dominant theme of Hebrews is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The leading terms in our text will be pondered in what follows.

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith” (Heb 11:39). Two things are here in view—the persons spoken of and that which is predicated of them. The reference is to all spoken of in the previous parts of the chapter, and by necessary inference, to all believers before the incarnation of Christ who exhibited a true faith. The words “*these* all” is restrictive, excluding others who had not the faith here mentioned. “Many more than these lived before Christ was exhibited, yea, lived in the time and place that some of these did, yet received no good report. Cain lived and offered a sacrifice with Abel, yet was none of these. Ham was in the ark with Shem, Ishmael in Abraham’s family with Isaac, Esau in the same womb with Jacob, Dathan and Abiram came through the Red Sea with Caleb and Joshua. Many other wicked unbelievers were mixed with believers, yet they obtained not any such good report. Though their outward condition was alike, yet their inward disposition was much different” (William Gouge, 1575-1653).

Thus it is today. There are two widely different classes of people who come under the sound of the Word—those who believe it and those who believe it not. And those of the former class have also to be divided, for while there are a few in whom that Word works effectually in a spiritual way, many have nothing more than a natural faith in its letter. This latter faith—which so many today mistake for a saving one—is merely an intellectual

assent to the divine authority of the Bible and to the verities of its contents—like that possessed by most of the Jews of Christ's day, and which though good so far as it goes, changes not the heart nor issues in a godly life. A supernatural faith, which is wrought in the soul by the operations of the Holy Spirit, issues in supernatural works, such as those attributed unto the men and women mentioned in our chapter. It is a divine principle which enables its possessor to overcome the world, patiently endure the sorest afflictions, and love God and His truth more than life itself.

“Having obtained a good report through faith” (Heb 11:39). Because of their trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and because of their walking in subjection to His revealed will, they received approbation. There is probably a threefold reference in the words now before us. First, unto God's own testimony which He bore to them. This is found in His Word, where their names receive honourable mention, and where the fruits of their faith are imperishably preserved. Second, to the Spirit's bearing witness with their spirit that they were the children of God (Rom 8:16), the rejoicing which they had from the testimony of a good conscience (2Co 1:12), this in blessed contrast from the world's estimate of them, who regarded and treated them as the offscouring of all things. Third, to the esteem in which they were held by the church, their fellow-saints testifying to the unworldliness of their lives. This shows our faith should be evidenced by such good works that it is justified before men.

“Received not the promise” (Heb 11:39). The singular number here implies some pre-eminent excellent thing promised, and this is Jesus Christ, the divine Saviour. He is said to be given according to “the promise” (Act 13:23). God's “promise” was declared to be fulfilled when He brought Christ forth (Act 13:32-33). In Acts 2:39 and 26:6, Christ is set forth under this term “promise.” Christ Himself is the prime promise, not only because He was the substance of the first promise given after the Fall (Gen 3:15), but also because He is the complement or accomplishment of all the promises (2Co 1:20). The great promise of God to send His Son, born of a woman, to save His people from their sins, was the object of faith of the church throughout all the generations of the Old Testament era. Therein we may discern the rich grace of God in providing for the spiritual needs of His saints from earliest times.

“Received not the promise” (Heb 11:39). As several times before in the epistle, “promise” is here used metonymically for the thing promised, and this it is which explains the “received not.” As John Owen (1616-1683) expressed it, “The promise as a faithful engagement of future good, they received, but the good thing itself was not in their days exhibited.” They did not live to see historically accomplished that which their faith specifically embraced. As the Lord Jesus declared to His disciples, “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Mat 13:17). Herein we behold the strength and perseverance of faith, that they continued to look, unwaveringly, for so many centuries for Him that should come, and came not in their lifetime.

“God having provided some better thing for us” (Heb 11:40) The verb here looks back to the eternal counsels of divine grace, to the Everlasting Covenant. It is a word which denotes God's determination, designation, and appointment of Christ to be the propitiatory

sacrifice, and the exact season for His advent. "When the fulness of the time was come [the season ordained by heaven], God sent forth his Son" (Gal 4:4). Thus it should be clear that the contrast which is pointed in the sentence before us, is that between "the promise" *given* and "the promise" *performed*. It is at that point, and no other, we find the essential difference between the faith of the Old Testament saints and the faith of the New Testament saints—the one looked forward to a Saviour that *was* to come, the other looks back to a Saviour who *has* come.

It seems strange that what is really so obvious and simple should have been regarded by many as obscure and difficult. In his "Great Cloud of Witnesses" E. W. Bullinger (1837-1913) began his comments on this passage by saying, "These verses must be among those to which Peter referred when he said, speaking of Paul's epistles, there are 'some things hard to be understood.' For they confessedly present no small difficulty." But what is there here which is "hard to be understood"? The very epistle in which this verse occurs supplies a sure key to its correct interpretation. As we have said above, the great theme of it is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and those of our readers who have followed us through this series of expositions, will recall how many illustrations of this have been before us. Another one is present in 11:39-40, *they* "received not the [fulfillment of] promise," *we* have—"God having provided some better thing for us," cf. Heb 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34 for the word "better."

It is really pathetic and deplorable to see what most of the moderns make of our present verse. In their anxiety to magnify the contrast between the Mosaic and Christian economies, and in their ignorance of much of the contents of the Old Testament Scriptures, they have seized upon these words "God having provided some better thing for us" (Heb 11:40) to bolster up one of their chief errors, and have read into them that which anyone having even a superficial acquaintance with the Psalms and Prophets should have no difficulty in perceiving to be utterly untenable. Some have said that "better thing" which we Christians have is eternal life, others that it is regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit, others that it is membership in the body of Christ with the heavenly calling that entails—denying that these blessings were enjoyed by any of the Old Testament saints. Such is a fair sample of the rubbish which is now to be found in most of the "ministry," oral and written, of this degenerate age.

In their crude and arbitrary attempts to rightly divide the word of truth, those calling themselves "dispensationalists" have wrongly divided the family of God. The entire election of grace have God for their Father, Christ for their Saviour, the Holy Spirit for their Comforter. All who are saved, from the beginning to the end of earth's history, are the objects of God's everlasting love, share alike in the benefits of Christ's atonement, and are begotten by the Spirit unto the same inheritance. God communicated to Able the same kind of faith as He does to His children today. Abraham was justified in precisely the same manner as Christians are now (Rom 4). Moses bore the "reproach of Christ," and had respect unto the identical "recompense of the reward" (Heb 11:26) as is set before us. David was as truly a stranger and pilgrim on earth as we are (Psa 119:19), and looked unto the same eternal pleasures at God's right hand as we do (Psa 16:11; 23:6).



The worst mistakes made by the “dispensationalists” grow out of their failures at the following points. First, to see the organic union between the Mosaic and Christian economies. Second, to perceive that the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” were but two different administrations under which the blessings of the “Everlasting Covenant” are imparted. Third, to distinguish between the spiritual remnant and the nation itself. The relation between the patriarchal and the Mosaic dispensations and this Christian era may be stated thus—they stood to each other, partly as the beginning does to the end, and partly as the shell does to the kernel. The former were preparatory, the latter is the full development—first the blade (in the patriarchal dispensation), then the ear (the Mosaic), and now the full corn in the ear, in this Christian era. In the former we have the type and shadow. In the latter, the antitype and substance. Christianity is but the full development of what existed in former ages, or a grander exemplification of the truths and principles which were then revealed.

The great fact that the Everlasting Covenant which God made with Christ as the Head of His church formed the basis of all His dealings with His people, and that the terms and blessings of that eternal Charter were being administered by Him under the “old” and “new” covenants, may be illustrated from secular history. In practically every country there are two chief political parties. The policy, and particularly the methods followed, by these rival factions, differ radically, yet though the one may succeed the other in power, and though great changes mark their alternative regimes, and though many diverse laws may be enacted or cancelled from time to time, yet *the fundamental constitution* of the country remains unchanged. Thus it is under the Mosaic and Christian economies. Widely different as they are in many incidental details, nevertheless, God’s moral government is always according to the same fundamental principles of grace and righteousness, mercy and justice, truth and faithfulness, in the one era equally as much as in the other.

The distinction between the regenerated remnant and the unregenerate nation during Old Testament times, is as real and radical as that which now exists between real Christians and the multitude of empty professors with which Christendom abounds. Yea, one is the type of the other. Just as empty professors now possess a “form of godliness,” (2Ti 3:5), but are destitute of its “power,” so the great bulk of the lineal descendants of Abraham were occupied only with the externals of Judaism—witness the scribes and Pharisees of Christ’s day. And just as the lifeless religionists of our time are taken up with the “letter” of the Word and have no experimental acquaintance with its spiritual realities, so the unquickened Israelites of old were engaged with the outward shell of their ritual, but never penetrated to its kernel. There was an election within an election, a remnant who were Jews “inwardly” (Rom 2:29), among the great company surrounding them who were Jews only in name, outwardly.

The spiritual portion of that Old Testament remnant of God’s saints was identically the same as that of the Christian’s now. They were the recipients of the free gift of grace in Christ (Gen 6:8), as we are. They possessed eternal life (Psa 133:3), as truly as we do. They rejoiced in the knowledge of sins forgiven (Psa 32:1-2), as heartily as we do. They were as really instructed by the Spirit (Neh 9:20), as we are. Nor were they left in total ignorance of the glorious future awaiting them. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and

embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb 11:13-14). The word for "country" there is not the ordinary one "chora," but "patris," which signifies Homeland or Fatherland—*such* a "country" as one's father dwells in.

The question, then, returns upon us: Seeing the Old Testament saints enjoyed all the essential spiritual blessings of which Christians now partake, *exactly what is* the "better thing" which God "provides for us"? The answer is a *superior administration* of the Everlasting Covenant, (Heb 7:22). In what particular respects? Chiefly in these. First we now have a better view of Christ than the Old Testament saints had. They saw Him, chiefly through types and promises, whereas we view Him in the accomplishments and fulfillment of them. Second, there is now a broader foundation for faith to rest upon. They looked for a Christ who was to come and who would put away their sins. We look at a Christ who has come and who has put away our sins. Third, they were as minors, under teachers and governors, whereas we are in the position, dispensationally, of those who have attained their majority, Galatians 4:1-7. Fourth, there is now a wider outpouring of God's grace. It is no longer confined to an elect remnant in one nation, but reaches out to His favoured people scattered among all nations.

"That they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb 11:26). "The law [or Mosaic economy] made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did" (Heb 7:19). The "perfecting" of a thing consists in the well-finishing of it, and a full accomplishment of all things appertaining thereto. There is no doubt that the ultimate reference of our text is to the eternal glory of the whole family of faith in heaven, yet we believe it also includes the various *degrees* by which that perfection is attained, and the *means* thereunto. They are, first, the taking away of sin—which makes man most imperfect—and the clothing him with the robe of righteousness, in which he may appear perfect before God. These were secured by the life and death of Jesus Christ. In that, the Old Testament saints were not "made perfect *without us*," for their sins and our sins were expiated by the *same* sacrifice, and their persons and our persons are justified by the *same* righteousness.

Second, the subduing of the power of indwelling sin, enabling those justified to walk in the paths of righteousness, which is through the enabling of the Spirit. In this too the Old Testament saints were not (relatively) "made perfect *without us*," as is clear from Psalm 23:4; 51:11 etc. Third, the Spirit enabling those who are united to Christ to stand up against all assaults, and to persevere in a spiritual growth. In this also the Old Testament saints were not "made perfect *without us*," as is evident by a comparison of Psalm 97:10 with 1 Peter 1:5. Fourth, the receiving of the soul to glory, when it leaves the body—this also was common to Old and New Testament saints alike—we are not unmindful of the carnal theory held by some who imagine that prior to the death of Christ, the souls of saints went only to some imaginary Paradise "in the heart of the earth" (Mat 12:40). but this is much too near akin to the subterranean *limbus* of Romanism to merit any refutation.

Fifth, the resurrection of the body. In this the whole family of faith shall share alike, and at the same time, "In Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward *they that are Christ's* at his coming" (1Co 15:22-23). And *who are* "Christ's"? why, *all* that the Father gave to Him, *all* that He purchased with His

blood. God's Word knows nothing of His people being raised in sections at intervals. Sixth, the reunion between the soul and body, which takes place at Christ's appearing. In Hebrews 12:23, the Old Testament saints are referred to as "the *spirits* of just men made perfect," but they are still "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23). In this too all the redeemed shall share alike, being "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1Th 4:17).

Seventh, the entrance into eternal glory, when Old and New Testament saints alike shall, all together, "ever be with the Lord" (1Th 4:17). Then shall be completely realized that ancient oracle concerning Shiloh "unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen 49:10). Then shall be fulfilled that mystical word, "I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 8:11). As the Lord Jesus declared, "I lay down my life for the [Old Testament] sheep. And other [New Testament] sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be *one fold* [Greek and R.V.], and one shepherd" (Joh 10:15-16). Then it shall be that Christ will "gather *together in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad" (Joh 11:52)—not only among all nations, but through all dispensations.

In all of these seven degrees mentioned above are the elect of God "made perfect" (Heb 11:40). In all of them shall the Old Testament and New Testament saints share alike. All shall come "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). God deferred the resurrection and final glorification of the Old Testament saints until the saints of this New Testament era should be called out and gathered into the one Body, "God has so arranged matters, that the complete accomplishment of the promise, both to the Old and New Testament believers, shall *take place together*; 'they' shall be made perfect, but not without 'us'; we and they shall attain perfection together" (John Brown, 1784-1858). Thus to "be made perfect" is here the equivalent of *receiving* (the full accomplishment of) the promise, or enjoying together the complete realization of the "better thing." Verses 39 and 40 are inseparably linked together, and the language used in the one serves to interpret that employed in the other, both being coloured by the dominant theme of this epistle.

Thus our understanding of these two verses which have occasioned so much trouble to many of the commentators, is as follows. First, though the Old Testament saints lived under an inferior administration of the Everlasting Covenant than we do, nevertheless, they "obtained a good report" (Heb 11:39) and went to heaven at death. Second, the "better thing" which God has provided for the New Testament saints is a superior administration of the Everlasting Covenant, that is, we enjoy superior *means of* grace to what they had. Spiritual and heavenly blessings were presented unto the church in the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations under temporal and earthly images—Canaan being a figure of heaven, Christ and His atonement being set forth under symbolic ceremonies and obscure ordinances. As the substance exceeds the shadows, so is the state of the church under the "new" covenant superior to its state under the "old." Third, God has ordered that the entire family of faith shall be "perfected" by the same sacrifice, and shall together enjoy its purchased blessings throughout an endless eternity.

The *practical application* of the whole of the above unto our hearts, was well put by John Calvin, "If they on whom the light of grace had not as yet so brightly shone, displayed so great a constancy in and during evils, what ought the full brightness of the Gospel to produce in us! A small spark of light led them to heaven; when the sun of righteousness shines over us, with what pretense can we excuse ourselves if we still cleave to the earth?"

## THE LIFE OF DAVID

### *34. His Coronation*

The long-hunted exile has now been elevated to the throne. His principal enemies are in their graves and David is exalted over the kingdom of Israel. There is not a little in the opening chapters of 2 Samuel which we have passed over, as being outside the scope of this series of papers, yet they record several details that present some lovely traits in the character of our hero. As we have previously pointed out, the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan was received by David with no carnal joy, but instead with magnanimous grief (2Sa 1:17). He had never regarded the apostate king and his favourite son as standing between him and the kingdom, and his first feeling on their fall was not—as it had been in a less generous heart—a flush of gladness at the thought of the empty throne, but instead a sharp pang of pain that the anointed of God had been grievously dishonoured and degraded by the enemies of Israel (2Sa 1:20).

Even when we begin to contemplate his new prospects, there was no hurried taking of matters into his own hands, but instead, a calm and reverent inquiring of the Lord (2Sa 2:1). He would do nothing in this crisis of his fortunes, when all which had been so long a hope seemed to be nearing its realization, until his Shepherd should lead him. Curbing his naturally impetuous disposition, refusing to take swift action and subdue his remaining opponents, holding in check the impatient ambitions of his own loyal followers, he waited to hear what *God* had to say. Few men have exercised such admirable self-restraint as David did under the circumstances which confronted him when his long-persecuting oppressor was no longer there to contest the field with him. Blessedly did he fulfill the vow of earlier years, "my strength! upon thee will I wait" see Psa 59:9.

Even before the death of Saul, the strength of David's forces had been rapidly increased by a constant stream of fugitives from the confusion and misery into which the kingdom had fallen. Even Benjamin, Saul's own tribe, sent him some of its famous archers—a sure token of the king's waning fortunes. The hardy men of Manasseh and Gad, "whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains" (1Ch 12:8) sought his standard. While from his own tribe, recruits "day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God" (1Ch 12:22). With such forces, it is evident that he could easily and quickly have subdued any scattered troops of the former dynasty. But he made no such attempt and took no measures

whatever to advance any claims to the crown. He preferred God to work out things *for* him, instead of *by* him!

When he was settled at Hebron, he followed the same trustful and patient policy, not merely for a few days or weeks, but for a period of upwards of seven years. The language of the history seems to denote a disbanding of his army, or at least to their settling down to domestic life in the villages around Hebron, without any thought of winning the kingdom by force of arms. His elevation to the partial monarchy which he at first possessed was not from his own initiative, but was from the spontaneous act of "the men of Judah" (2Sa 2:4). Then followed a feeble but lingering opposition to David, headed by Saul's cousin Abner, rallying around the late king's incompetent son Ishbosheth, whose name significantly means "man of shame."

The brief narrative which we have of the seven years spent by the still youthful David at Hebron, presents him in a very loveable light. The same gracious temper which had marked his first acts after Saul's death is strikingly brought out in 2 Samuel 2:2-4. "He seems to have left the conducting of the (defensive) war altogether to Joab, as though he shrank from striking any personal blow for his own advancement. When he did interfere, it was on the side of peace, to curb and chastise ferocious vengeance and dastardly assassination. The incidents recorded all go to make up a picture of rare generosity, of patiently waiting for God to fulfill His purposes, of longing that the miserable strife between the tribes of God's inheritance should end. He sends grateful messages to Jabesh-Gilead. He will not begin the conflict with the insurgents. The only actual fight recorded is provoked by Abner and managed with unwonted mildness by Joab.

"The generosity of his nature shines out again in his indignation at Joab's murder of Abner, though he was too meek to avenge it. There is no more beautiful picture in his life than that of his following the bier where lay the bloody corpse of the man who had been his enemy ever since he had known him, and sealing the reconciliation which death even makes in noble souls, by the pathetic dirge he chanted over Abner's grave (2Sa 3:31). We have a glimpse of his people's unbounded confidence in him, given incidentally when we are told that his sorrow pleased them, 'as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people' (2Sa 3:36). We have a glimpse of the feebleness of his new monarchy as against the fierce soldier who had done so much to make it, in his acknowledgment that he was yet weak (2Sa 3:39)" (Alexander MacLaren, 1826-1929).

The final incident of David's reign over Judah in Hebron was his execution of summary justice upon the murderers of the poor puppet-king Ishbosheth (2Sa 4:12), upon whose death the whole resistance to David's power collapsed. Immediately after, the elders of all the tribes came up to Hebron, with the tender of the crown (2Sa 5:1-3). They offered it upon the triple grounds of kinship, of his military service in Saul's reign, and of the divine promise of the throne. A solemn pact was made, and David was "anointed" in Hebron "king over Israel"—a king not only by divine right, but also a constitutional monarch, chosen by popular election, and limited in his powers. The *evangelical* significance of this event we considered in the preceding article. Other points of interest connected therewith are now to engage our attention.

This crowning of David king over all Israel was, first, the fulfillment of one of the great prophecies of Scripture. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee" (Gen 49:8). Let it be carefully noted that the clause, "thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies" is placed *between* "thy brethren shall praise thee" and "thy father's children shall bow down before thee," and that immediately following this, Judah's victories over the enemies of God's people is again pointed out, "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up" (Gen 49:9).

The above prophecy intimated the exalted position which Judah, when compared with the other tribes, was to occupy. Judah was to be the fore-champion in Israel's warfare against their enemies, God having empowered him with conquering power over the foes of His kingdom. The commencement of this in the life of David is plainly intimated in 2 Samuel 5:1-3. David's hand had been "in the neck of Israel's enemies," seen in his memorable victory over Goliath, the Philistine giant. Following which we observe the begun-fulfillment of "thy brethren shall praise thee" in the song of the women, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1Sa 18:7). So also here in 2 Samuel 5, the elders of the eleven tribes "bowed down before him" when they nominated him their king, and that, specifically, in view of the fact that he had triumphantly led out and brought in Israel's army in times past (2Sa 5:2)!

This leads us, in the second place, to contemplate the coronation of David as a blessed foreshadowment of the exaltation of his greater Son and Lord. This is so obvious that there is little need for us to amplify it at much length—though the interested reader would find it profitable to prayerfully trace out for himself other details in it. The life and activities of David are plainly divided into two main parts, though the second part was of very much longer duration than the first. Thus it is also in the mediatorial work of Him whom he pointed to. In the first section of his career, he who was born at Bethlehem (1Sa 16:1) and "anointed" of God (1Sa 16:13), wrought some mighty works (1Sa 17:34-36, 49) which clearly demonstrated that the Lord was with him. For the antitype, see Luke 2:11, Acts 10:38. The fame of David was sung by many, which stirred up the jealousy and enmity of the ruling power (1Sa 18:7-8), for the antitype see Matthew 21:15!

The enmity of Saul against David was exceeding bitter, so that he thirsted for his blood (1Sa 18:29), compare Matthew 12:14. From that time forth, David became an homeless wanderer (1Sa 22:1), compare Matthew 8:20. A little company of devoted souls gathered around him (1Sa 22:2), but the nation as a whole despised and rejected him, compare John 1:11-12. This was the period of his *humiliation*, when the anointed of God suffered privation and persecution at the hands of his enemies. True, he could (as we have seen above) have taken matters into his own hands, and grasped the kingdom by force of arms, but he steadily refused to do so, preferring to meekly and patiently wait *God's* time for him to ascend the throne, compare Matthew 26:52. In these and many other respects, our hero blessedly foreshadowed the character and career of his suffering but greater Son and Lord.

But the time had now arrived when the season of David's humiliation was over, and when he entered into that position of *honour and glory* which God had long before ordained for him, "They anointed David king over Israel" (2Sa 5:3). In his coronation, we

have a precious adumbration of the ascension of Christ, and His exaltation unto “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3), when He “took upon him the form of a servant” and “made himself of no reputation” was “highly exalted” and given “a name which is above every name” (Phi 2:7-10). As we are told in Acts 5:31, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a *Prince* and a Saviour, for to give repentance to [the spiritual] Israel.” The recorded deeds of David after he came to the throne, which will come before us (D.V.) in the articles to follow, also strikingly prefigured the work and triumphs of our exalted and glorified Redeemer.

And now, in the third place, let us inquire, How did the fugitive bear this sudden change of fortune? What were the thoughts of David, what the exercises of his heart, now that this great dignity, which he never sought, became his? The answer to our question is supplied by Psalm 18, which (see the superscription) he spoke “In the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul,” that is, when the Lord brought to an end the opposition of Saul’s house and followers. In this Psalm, the Holy Spirit has recorded the breathings of David’s spirit and graciously permits us to learn of the first freshness of thankfulness and praise which filled the soul of the young king upon his ascension to the throne. Here we are shown the bright spiritual beginnings of the new monarchy, and are given to see how faithfully the king remembered the vows which as an exile had been mingled with his tears.

“It is one long outpouring of rapturous thankfulness and triumphant adoration, which streams from a full heart in buoyant waves of song. Nowhere else, even in the Psalms—and if not there, certainly nowhere else—is there such a continuous tide of unmingled praise, such magnificence of imagery, such passion of love to the delivering God, such joyous energy of conquering trust. It throbs throughout with the life-blood of devotion. All the terror, and pains, and dangers of the weary years—the black fuel for the ruddy glow—melt into warmth too great for smoke, too equable to blaze. The plaintive notes that had so often wailed from his heart, sad as if the night wind had been wandering among its chords, have all led up to the rushing burst of full-toned gladness. The very blessedness of heaven is anticipated, when sorrows gone by are understood and seen in their connection with the joy to which they have led, and are felt to be the theme for deepest thankfulness” (A. MacLaren).

It is blessed to note that this 18th Psalm is entitled, “A Psalm of David, the *servant* of the LORD,” upon which C. H. Spurgeon remarked, “David, although at this time a king, calls himself ‘the servant of the Lord,’ but makes no mention of his royalty: hence we gather that he counted it a higher honour to be the Lord’s servant than to be Judah’s king. Right wisely did he judge. Being possessed of poetical genius, he *served* the Lord by composing this Psalm for the use of the Lord’s house.” We cannot here attempt a full analysis of its contents, but must glance at one or two of its more prominent features.

The first clause strikes the keynote, “I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.” “That personal attachment to God, which is so characteristic of David’s religion, can no longer be pent up in silence, but gushes forth like some imprisoned stream, broad and full even from its well-head” (A. MacLaren). Scholars have pointed out that the intensity of David’s adoration on this occasion moved him to employ a word which is never used elsewhere to

express man's emotions towards God, a word so strong that its force is but feebly expressed if we render it "*from my heart* do I love thee." The same exalted spiritual fervour is seen again in the loving accumulation of divine names which follows—no less than eight are used in verse 2!—as if he would heap together in a great pile all the rich experiences of that *God* (which all names utterly fail to express) which he had garnered up in his distresses and deliverances.

In verses 3 and 4, David recalls pathetically the past experiences when, like an animal caught in the nets, those who hunted him so relentlessly were ready to close in upon and seize their prey. In his distress, he says, "I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God" (Psa 18:6). Though it was but the call of one weak solitary voice, unheard on earth, it reached heaven, and the answer shook all creation, "He heard my voice out of his temple....Then the earth shook and trembled" (Psa 18:6-7, etc.). One saint in his extremity put in motion the mighty power of Omnipotence, overwhelming is the contrast between cause and effect. Wonderful as the greatness, equally marvelous is the swiftness of the answer, "*Then the earth shook.*"

It is blessed to note how David ascribes *all* to the power and grace of the Lord. "For *by thee* I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall...It is *God* that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect...Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great...It is *God* that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me...Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore" (vv. 29, 32, 35, 47, 49, 50).

## THE COVENANTS OF GOD

### *3a. The Adamic*

It is of vital importance for a right understanding of much in God's Word to observe the relation which Adam sustained to his posterity. Adam was not only the common parent of mankind, but he was also their federal head and representative. The whole human race was placed on probation or trial in Eden. Adam acted not for himself alone, but he transacted for all who were to spring from him. Unless this basic fact be definitely apprehended, much that ought to be relatively clear to us will be shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Yea, we go further, and affirm that, until the federal headship of Adam and God's covenant with him in that office be actually perceived, we are without the key to God's dealings with the human race, we are unable to discern man's relation to the divine law, and we appreciate not the fundamental principles upon which the atonement of Christ proceeded.

"Federal headship" is a term which has almost entirely disappeared from current religious literature—so much the worse for our moderns. It is true that the expression itself



does not verbally occur in the Scriptures, yet like the words “Trinity” and “the divine incarnation,” it is a necessity in theological parlance and doctrinal exposition. The principle or fact which is embodied in the term “federal headship” is that of *representation*. There have been but two federal heads—Adam and Christ, with each of whom God entered into a “covenant.” Each of them acted on behalf of others, each legally represented a definite people, so much so that all whom they represented were regarded by God as being *in* them. Adam represented the whole human race. Christ represented all those whom the Father had, in His eternal counsels, given to Him.

When Adam stood in Eden as a responsible being before God, he stood there as a federal head, as the legal representative of all his posterity. Hence, when Adam sinned, all for whom he was standing are accounted as having sinned. When he fell, all whom he represented fell. When he died, they died. So too was it with Christ. When He came to this earth, He too, stood in a federal relationship to His own people, and when He became obedient unto death, all for whom He was acting were accounted righteous. When He rose again from the dead, all whom He represented rose with Him. When He ascended on high, they were regarded as ascending with Him. “For as *in* Adam all die, even so *in* Christ shall all be made alive” (1Co 15:22).

The relationship of our race to Adam or Christ divides men into two classes, each receiving nature and destiny from its respective head. All the individuals who comprise these two classes are so identified with their heads that it has justly been said, “There have been but two men in the world and two facts in history.” These two men are Adam and Christ. The two facts are the disobedience of the former, by which many were made sinners, and the obedience of the latter, by which many were made righteous. By the former came *ruin*, by the latter came *redemption*, and neither ruin nor redemption can be Scripturally apprehended except as they are seen to be accomplished by those representatives, and except we understand the relationships expressed by being “*in* Adam” and “*in* Christ.”

Let it be expressly and emphatically affirmed that what we are here treating of is purely a matter of *divine revelation*. Nowhere but in Holy Scripture do we know anything about Adam or of our relation to him. If it be asked how the federal constitution of the race can be reconciled with the dictates of human reason, the first answer must be, it is not for us *to reconcile* them. The initial inquiry is not whether federal headship be reasonable or just, but is it a fact revealed in the Word of God? If it is, then reason must bow to it and faith humbly receive it. To the child of God the question of its *justice* is easily settled. We know it to be just, because it is a part of the ways of the infinitely holy and righteous God.

Now the fact that Adam *was* the federal head of the human race, that he *did* act and transact in a representative capacity, and that the judicial consequences of his actings *were* imputed to all those for whom he stood, is clearly revealed in God’s Word. In Romans 5, we read, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (v. 12); “through the offence of one many be dead” (v. 15); “the judgment was by one to condemnation” (v. 16); “by one man’s offence death reigned” (v. 17); “by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (v. 18); “by one man’s disobedience many were made [legally constituted]

sinners" (v. 19). The meaning of these declarations is far too plain for any unprejudiced mind to misunderstand. It pleased God to deal with the human race *as represented in and by Adam*.

Let us borrow a simple illustration. God did not deal with mankind as with a field of corn, where each stalk stands upon its own individual root, but He dealt with it as *a tree*, all the branches of which have one common root and trunk. If you strike with an axe at the root of a tree, the *whole* tree falls—not only the trunk, but also the branches, and even the twigs upon the branches, all wither and die. So it was when Adam fell. God permitted Satan to lay the axe at the root of the tree, and when Adam fell, all his posterity fell with him. At one fatal stroke, Adam was severed from communion with his Maker, and as the result "death passed upon all men." Here, then, we learn what is the formal ground of man's judicial condemnation before God. The popular idea of *what* it is which renders man a sinner in the sight of heaven is altogether inadequate and false. The prevailing conception is that a sinner is one who commits and practices sin. It is true that this is the *character* of a sinner, but it certainly is not that which primarily *constitutes* him a sinner. The truth is that every member of our race enters this world a guilty sinner before he ever commits a single transgression. It is not only that he possesses a sinful nature, but he is directly "under condemnation." We are legally-constituted sinners neither by what we are nor by what we are doing, but by the disobedience of our federal head, Adam. Adam acted not for himself alone, but for all who were to spring from him.

On this point, the teaching of the Apostle Paul is plain and unambiguous. The terms of Romans 5:12-19, as we have shown above, are too varied and distinct to admit of any misconception—that it is on account of their sin in Adam, men, in the first instance, are accounted guilty and treated as such, as well as partake of a depraved nature. The language of 1 Corinthians 15:22 is equally unintelligible except on the supposition that both Adam and Christ sustained a *representative* character, in virtue of which the one involved the race in guilt and ruin, and the other, by His obedience unto death, secured the justification and salvation of all that believe in Him. The actual condition of the human race, throughout its history, confirms the same. The apostle's doctrine supplies the only adequate explanation of the universal prevalence of sin.

The human race is suffering now for the sin of Adam, or it is suffering for nothing at all. This earth is the scene of a grim and awful tragedy. In it we see misery and wretchedness, pain and poverty, decay and death, on every side. None escape. That "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" is an indisputable fact. But what is the explanation of it? Every effect must have a previous cause. If we *are not* being punished for Adam's sin, then, coming into this world, we are "children of wrath" alienated from God, corrupt and depraved, and on the Broad Road which leadeth to destruction *for nothing at all!* Who would contend that this was better, more satisfactory, than the Scriptural explanation of our ruin?

But it will be said, It was unjust to make Adam our federal head. How so? Is not the principle of representation a fundamental one in human society? The father is the legal head of his children during their minority, what he does, binds the family. A business house is held responsible for the transactions of its agents. The heads of a state are vested

with such authority that the treaties they make are binding upon the whole nation. This principle is so basic it cannot be set aside. Every popular election illustrates the fact that a constituency will act through a representative and be bound by his acts. Human affairs could not continue, nor society exist without it. Why, then, be staggered at finding it inaugurated in Eden?

Consider the alternative. "The race must have either stood in a full grown man, with a full-orbed intellect, or stood as babies, each entering his probation in the twilight of self-consciousness, each deciding his destiny before his eyes were half-opened to what it all meant. How much better would that have been? How much more just? But could it not have been some other way? There was no other way. It was either the baby or it was the perfect, well-equipped, all-calculating man—the man who saw and comprehended everything. That man was Adam" (George Sayles Bishop, 1836-1914). Yes, Adam, fresh from the hands of his Creator, with no sinful ancestry behind him, with no depraved nature within. A man made in the image and likeness of God, pronounced by Him "very good," in fellowship with heaven. Who could have been a more suitable representative for us?

This has been the principle on which and the method by which God has acted all through. The posterity of Canaan were cursed for the single transgression of their parent (Gen 9). The Egyptians perished at the Red Sea as the result of Pharaoh's wickedness. When Israel became God's witness in the earth it was the same. The sins of the fathers were to be visited upon the children. In consequence of Achan's one sin, the whole of his family were stoned to death. The high priest acted on behalf of the whole nation. Later, the king was held accountable for the conduct of his subjects. One acting on the behalf of others, the one responsible for the many, is a basic principle both of human and divine government. We cannot get away from it. Wherever we look it stares us in the face.

Finally, let it be pointed out that the sinner's salvation is made to depend upon the same principle. Beware, my reader, of quarreling with the justice of this law of representation. This principle wrecked us and this principle alone can rescue us. The disobedience of the first Adam was the judicial ground of our condemnation. The obedience of the last Adam is the legal ground on which God alone can justify the sinner. The substitution of Christ in the place of His people, the imputation of their sins to Him and of His righteousness to them, is the cardinal fact of the Gospel. But the principle of being saved by what another has done is only possible on the ground that we are lost through what another did. The two stand or fall together. If there had been no covenant of works there could have been no covenant of grace. If there had been no death *in* Adam, there could have been no life *in* Christ.

"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19). Here is cause for humiliation which few think about. We are members of a cursed race, the fallen children of a fallen parent, and as such we enter this world "*alienated* from the life of God" (Eph 4:18), with nothing in us to prompt unto holy living. O that God may reveal to you, dear reader, your connection with the first Adam, that you may realize your deep need of clinging to the last Adam. The world may deride this doctrine of representation and imputation, but that only evidences it to be of God. If the Gospel (the *genuine* Gospel) were welcomed by all, that would prove it was of human manufacture, for only that is

acceptable to fallen man which is invented by fallen man. That the wise of this world scoff at the truth of federal headship, when it is faithfully presented, only goes to manifest its divine origin.

“By the offence of one judgment came upon all men *to condemnation*” (Rom 5:18). In the day that Adam fell, the frown of God came upon all his children. The holy nature of God abhorred the apostate race. The curse of the broken law descended upon all Adam’s posterity. It is only thus we can account for the *universality* of depravity and suffering. The corruption which we inherit from our parents is a great evil, for it is the source of all personal sins. For God to allow this transmission of depravity, is to inflict a *punishment*. But how could God punish all, unless *all* were guilty? The fact that all *do* share in this common punishment proves that *all* sinned and fell in Adam. Our depravity and misery are not, as such, the appointment of the Creator, but are instead the retribution of the Judge.

“By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom 5:19). The word “made” in that verse calls for a definition and explanation. It does *not* refer directly and primarily to the fact that we inherit from Adam a corrupt and sinful nature—that we learn from other Scriptures. The term “were made sinners” is a forensic one, and refers to our being *constituted guilty* in the sight of God. A parallel case is found in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He hath *made* him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Clearly those words “made Christ to be sin” cannot refer to any change which our Lord underwent in His nature or character. No, rather the blessed Saviour so took His people’s place before God that He was treated and dealt with as *guilty*, their sins were *not imparted*, but *imputed* to Him.

Again, in Galatians 3:13, we read that Christ was “*made* a curse for us,” as the substitute of God’s elect, He was judicially regarded as beneath the condemnation of the law. Our guilt was legally transferred to Christ. The sins we committed, He was regarded as responsible for—what *we* deserved, He endured. In like manner, Adam’s offspring were “*made* sinners” by their head’s disobedience—the legal consequences of their representative’s transgression were charged to their account. They were judicially constituted guilty, because the guilt of Adam’s sin was charged to them. Hence we enter this world not only with the heritage of a corrupt nature, but “under condemnation.” We are by nature “children of *wrath*” (Eph 2:3), for “the wicked are *estranged* from the womb” (Psa 58:3)—separated from God and exposed to His judicial displeasure.

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

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

This book, then, that exhibits the providence of God, is composed in a manner suited to its subject. God is everywhere seen in it, though He is not named. Just so God is every moment manifesting Himself in the works of His providence, though He works unseen to all but the eye of faith. He supports and moves the heavenly bodies, while His name is not

expressly written on the sun, moon, or stars, and though no herald voice proclaims Him in the execution of His office. The Christian also has many ways of acknowledging God, without expressly naming Him. The sun, from the time he rises till he sets in silence, preaches the God that made and upholds him. The book of Esther, from the beginning to the end, proclaims the providence of God, though it does not expressly name Him.

But not only is the objection invalid, but every one of the same class is utterly unworthy of respect. A book may disprove its divine origin by what it contains, but in no case by what it does not contain. What is to be expressed in any divine communication, is not for man presumptuously to determine by his own wisdom, but lies entirely with a sovereign God. We may as well say that God would not make the sun or moon without writing His name on it, as that He could not inspire a book that did not contain His name. Vain man will be wise, though he is born as the wild ass's colt. Even in the things of God he must, by his own maxims of wisdom, pronounce on the authenticity of the inspiration of the All-wise!

Another objection alleged to the inspiration of this book is that it is not quoted in the New Testament. Now, who made this a first principle? What authority establishes the dogma that a book of the Old Testament cannot be inspired unless it is quoted in the New? Is it a self-evident truth? By no means. Does the New Testament teach this doctrine? No such thing. Where then has it obtained its authority? In the presumption of man. To be quoted in the New Testament is indeed proof of the inspiration of a book of the Old, and may therefore be used very properly as a confirmation, but not to be quoted is no proof of a want of inspiration. The inspiration of the Old Testament is independent even in the existence of the New. Many books of the Old Testament, indeed, are quoted in the New, but this does not discredit such as are not quoted. To make quotations by the New Testament essential to the recognition of the inspiration of the books of the Old Testament is as unreasonable as to demand the quotation of every chapter and of every verse. It is perfectly sufficient that there is nothing in the book of Esther that contradicts the New Testament. As far as they teach on the same things, they perfectly agree. To the inspiration of the book of Esther there is not one objection that deserves a minute's consideration, and it bears in every page the impression of the finger of God.

The opinion that the settling of the canon is a matter of criticism, and lies fairly open to discussion, is a wicked and pernicious error. It is the suggestion of Satan to upset the authority of the whole Scriptures. It is impossible to deny the inspiration of one book of Scripture on principles that will not overturn any other. If the book of Esther is to be rejected because it does not express the name of God, then any person is equally at liberty to reject any other book, because it wants something that his wisdom thinks an inspired book ought to contain. That an inspired book must express the name of God, is a principle as arbitrary, and as far from self-evident, as any conceit that the human mind may entertain. If, then, its authority is acknowledged, equal indulgence must be granted to every other demand of human wisdom. If the book of Esther is to be rejected because it is not quoted in the New Testament, then there is not a book in the New Testament that must not be rejected, because there is no inspired authority quoting them, and by consequence, every book of the Old must also be rejected, because the recognition of it in the New will in that case be of no authority. If the books of the New Testament can on sufficient grounds be

received as inspired, although the canon is not settled by the quotations of inspired authority, then may the books of the Old Testament likewise. To reject one book, then, must admit principles that will overturn the inspiration of all. The settling of the canon is not a matter of criticism, but of testimony, and however mortifying it may be to the pride of the learned, they must receive it on the same grounds with the illiterate. The man of literature may indeed go a step or two beyond the unlearned. He may examine the books in which the testimony is contained, and with his own eyes he may read the catalogues of Origen and Melito, with any other accessible evidence. But even here he must rest on testimony. He has not seen the original manuscripts, and though he possess the very autographs of the apostles, he must depend on testimony that they *are* really such. The canon of Scripture, then, the critic is not to ascertain by the rules of his art, but he must take it on the authority of testimony, and commence with it as a first principle.

It may appear surprising to some that the Christian public has not been more shocked with the late attempts to shake the authority of the canon, and to displace so great a portion of the Word of God from its high rank. But the reason is obvious, from the quarter from which these attempts have proceeded. Had the reasons that some have alleged for rejecting the book of Esther, the two books of Chronicles, and the Song of Solomon, been urged by professed infidels or noted heretics, they would have been rejected with horror. But when they have been ushered into the world from the pens of reputedly orthodox divines, and for anything I know to the contrary, men of real godliness, the sinfulness of the attempt and the danger of the principle, on which the opinion is founded, have been concealed from general notice. The very grounds of rejection have a show not only of wisdom, but of concern for the honour of God and His Word. Satan appears as an angel of light when he teaches that the book of Esther should be rejected, because it does not express the name of God, and because it is not quoted by the New Testament. What zeal does this manifest for the honour of God! what a high regard for the authority of the New Testament! Baxter says that the Jews were in the habit of casting the book of Esther to the ground before reading it, to express their sense of its deficiency in wanting the name of God, and the thought is quite in the style of Jewish piety, and of the human wisdom of Christians. It is just such a thought as Satan will likely to suggest to mistaken piety. But Satan conceals from them that by their zeal for the honour of God they rob themselves of all the advantages of that book. They do not see that they give up to him all the treasures of the knowledge of Providence that are contained in that precious record. He gives them a bauble, as the Europeans have done to barbarians, and he takes from them the most valuable diamonds. Satan suggests that the book of Esther cannot be a book of Scripture, because it is not quoted in the New Testament. Who would think that the infernal spirit of darkness has such a respect for the writing of the apostles? Arch deceiver! thy respect is affected for the purpose of overturning the writings for which thou dost profess this respect. Though the dupes who are deceived by thee perceive it not, thy keen eye discerns that this principle will overturn the Bible. When thou deceivest the profane and the ungodly, thou wilt employ a Carlisle or a Taylor, but when the children of God are to be robbed of a part of His Word, thou dost prefer an evangelical divine as the deceiver.

It is on this very principle that the grand deceiver has overturned the foundation of all knowledge through the affected wisdom of the philosopher. Perceiving that false first

principles lead to every error, Des Cartes resolved to take nothing for granted but the existence of his thoughts. He did not admit even his own existence as a first principle. This must be proved from his thinking. Here he imagined he had a foundation for all knowledge. But in rejecting his own existence as a first principle, and other first principles equally entitled to respect, he laid the grounds of universal skepticism on which Mr. Hume afterwards built with such success. If nothing is self-evident but the existence of individual thoughts, no man has any evidence of the existence of anything but himself. Some of his followers never advanced farther than this. The Egoists believed in their own individual existence, but with matchless fortitude, each of them refused to believe that there is any being in creation but himself.

Now this is just the spirit of modern efforts to rest the authority of the books of Scripture, not on the canon ascertained by testimony, but on their internal evidence. For the authority of a book of Scripture they seek a surer foundation than testimony, however unexceptionally ascertained. They reject the solid foundation on which God Himself has rested the authority of the canon, and have adopted a foundation that sinks from under the whole building. Like Des Cartes, they may themselves adopt many truths, notwithstanding their foundation will not bear them, but others, like the Egoists, may reject almost any part of the divine Word. This wisdom, then, is both dangerous and foolish. In pretending to add strength to the bulwarks of God, it takes away their foundation. To reject a sound first principle is equally injurious to truth as to admit a false one. Either of them lays a foundation for error.

The book of Esther abounds with valuable instructions. To rob the Christian of the edification and comfort which it affords, is to do him the most serious injury. When critics find themselves at a loss in a field in which to exercise their ingenuity, let them indulge their vanity on the writings of the ancient Greeks. Here let them gamble with the many fanatic movements, and approach as near as they choose to the opposite boundaries of credulity and skepticism, but let them cease from the Word of God. Let them not dare to put their unhallowed hand on the ark of JEHOVAH. Let the children of the Most High possess His Word in the utmost extent. Let them possess it without addition. The curse of God is for both him that adds and him that diminishes.

One of the most conspicuous advantages afforded to the Christian by this book is that it gives him a commentary to all the events recorded in history, with respect to the rise and fall of empires, the prosperity and adversity of nations, the progress and persecution of the church of Christ, and the exaltation and degradation of individuals. In reading history, people in general look no farther than to the motives, designs, and tendencies of human action. Some are contented with the knowledge of facts, without attempting to discover their source or to trace the connection of events. But in the book of Esther the Christian may learn to refer every occurrence in the world to the counsels of God, and to behold Him ruling with absolute sway, amidst all the confusion of human agency, over all the purposes and actions of men and devils.

In the afflictions of virtue, in the oppression of the righteous, in the prosperity of the wicked, in the insolence of power, in the persecution of truth, the philosopher finds it difficult to defend his god, and cannot defend him without making him different from the

God of the Scriptures. He excuses His supineness by bringing Him forward to reward virtue in another state, by the unavoidable necessity imposed on Omnipotency through the establishment of general laws, from which it is impossible to deviate. But the book of Esther teaches the Christian that the rise, and progress, and triumph of the man of sin, as well as his decline and fall, are according to the purpose of the Almighty—the All-Wise—the eternal. His glory is secured by the exertions of His enemies, as well as by those of His friends. He raises up Haman and Pharaoh, as well as Esther and Moses.

Such a God is too wonderful for the discovery or the approbation of human wisdom. This is too dazzling a light in which to view the divine character, for any who are not taught of God, and who are not accustomed to submit in the most absolute manner to the decisions of His Word. It is only the eagle can gaze on the sun. Many of those who, in some measure, are taught of God, are too weak-sighted to look on Him in this blaze of light. They prefer to view Him through the dark glasses of some human system of theology. My fellow Christians! I entreat you, as you value the authority of God, as you regard your own edification, study the book of Esther, and see your God *ruling even over sin*. Behold Him in all the wars of conquerors—in all the intrigues of courts—in all the changes of empires—in all the caprices of monarchs—in all the persecutions of truth—as well as in all the progress of the Gospel.

The book of Esther teaches us to see the hand of God, not only in the great events of the world, but in all the transactions of men. It calls on us to see Him in every occurrence of every day in our lives, and to trust in Him for provision, protection, health, comfort, peace, and all the blessings of life. Innumerable dangers are around us every moment. It is only the arm of God can ward them off from us. The most trifling accident might destroy us, as well as an earthquake. It is the watchfulness of Providence, must guarantee our safety. How then is this book calculated to nourish our gratitude, increase our dependence on God, and invigorate our confidence! As we need the All-mighty protection in all things, even when we see no danger, so even when the most terrible disasters threaten, He can defend. From how many evils has He delivered us in the course of our lives! How many wonders of Providence may we recount in our own escapes! Christians, study the book of Esther, and view God on your right hand, and on your left all the day long. See His watchful eye upon you, and His guardian hand around you, both night and day. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore” (Psa. 121:3-8).

In Esther’s success we find encouragement to undertake the most dangerous service to which duty calls us. We are indeed to count the cost, and be willing to serve the cause of God at the expense even of life. But in this example, let us see that God is able to preserve us in doing His will, even when danger is most appalling. There may be safety in the midst of danger, when we go forward in the path of duty, but death itself is preferable to disobedience. *If I perish, I perish*, is the spirit in which the people of God ought to



encounter the most appalling dangers in doing His will. In this spirit we can die in triumph, or live with joy, and a good conscience.

## THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

### 8. *Its Instrument*

“Being justified freely by his *grace*” (Rom 3:24); “being now justified by his *blood*” (Rom 5:9); “being justified by *faith*” (Rom 5:1). A full exposition of the doctrine of justification requires that each of these propositions should be interpreted in their Scriptural sense, and that they be combined together in their true relations as to form one harmonious whole. Unless these three propositions be carefully distinguished there is sure to be confusion. Unless all the three are steadily borne in mind we are sure to land in error. Each must be given its due weight, yet none must be understood in such a way as to make its force annul that of the others. Nor is this by any means a simple task, in fact none but a real teacher (that is, a spiritual theologian) who has devoted a lifetime to the undivided study of Scriptures is qualified for it.

“The righteousness of God which is *by faith* of Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22); “A man is justified *by faith* without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28); “even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified *by* the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law” (Ga. 2:16). What is the precise place and influence which faith has in the important affairs of justification? What is the exact nature or character of justifying faith? In what particular sense are we to understand this proposition that we are “justified *by faith*”? and what is the connection between that proposition and the postulates that we are “justified *by grace*” and “justified by Christ’s *blood*”? These are matters which call for the utmost care. The nature of justifying faith requires to be closely defined so that its particular agency is correctly viewed, for it is easy to make a mistake here to the prejudice of Christ’s honour and glory, which must not be given to another—no, not to faith itself.

Many would-be teachers have erred at this point, for the common tendency of human nature is to arrogate to itself the glory which belongs alone to God. While there have been those who rejected the unscriptural notion that we can be justified before God by our own works, yet not a few of these very men virtually make a saviour of their own faith. Not only have some spoken of faith as though it were a contribution which God requires the sinner to make toward his own salvation—the last mite which was necessary to make up the price of his redemption. But others (who sneered at theologians and boasted of their superior understanding of the things of God) have insisted that faith itself is what constitutes us righteous before God, He regarding faith as righteousness.

A deplorable example of what we have just mentioned is to be found in the comments made upon Romans 4 by Mr. J. N. Darby (1800-1882), the father of the Plymouth Brethren, “This was Abraham’s faith. He believed the promise that he should be the father

of many nations, because God had spoken, counting on the power of God, thus glorifying Him, without calling in question anything that He had said by looking at circumstances; therefore *this* also was counted to him for righteousness. He glorified God according to what God was. Now this was not written for his sake alone—the same *faith* shall be imputed to us also *for righteousness*” (“Synopsis,” vol. 4, p. 133—italics ours). The Christ-dishonouring error contained in those statements will be exposed later on in this article.

“How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God? Answer: Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, nor of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for justification; *but only as it is an instrument* by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and His righteousness” (Westminster Confession of Faith). Though this definition was framed upwards of two hundred and fifty years ago, it is far superior to almost anything found in current literature on the subject. It is more accurate to speak of faith as the “instrument” rather than as the *condition*, for a “condition” is generally used to signify that for the sake whereof a benefit is conferred. Faith is neither the ground nor the substance of our justification, but simply *the hand* which receives the divine gift proffered to us in the Gospel.

What is the precise place and influence which faith has in the important affair of justification? Romanist answer, It justifies us *formally*, not relatively—that is, upon the account of its own intrinsic value. They point out that faith is never alone, but “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), and therefore its own excellency merits acceptance at God’s hand. But the faith of the best is weak and deficient (Luk 17:5), and so could never satisfy the law, which requires a flawless perfection. If righteousness was given as a reward for faith, its possessor would have cause for boasting, expressly contrary to the apostle in Romans 3:26-27. Moreover, such a method of justification would entirely frustrate the life and death of Christ, making His great sacrifice unnecessary. It is not faith as a spiritual *grace* which justifies us, but as an instrument—the *hand* which lays hold of Christ.

In connection with justification, faith is *not* to be considered as a virtuous exercise of the heart, nor as a principle of holy obedience, “Because faith, as concerned in our justification, does not regard Christ as King, enacting laws, requiring obedience, and subduing depravity, but as a Substitute, answering the requirements of the divine law, and as a Priest expiating sin by His own death on the cross. Hence, in justification we read of ‘precious faith...through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2Pe 1:1) and of ‘faith in His blood’ (Rom 3:25), and believers are described as ‘*receiving* the atonement’ and ‘*receiving* the gift of righteousness’ see Rom 5:11, 17. Therefore it is evident that faith is represented as having an immediate regard to the vicarious work of Christ, and that it is considered *not* under the notion of exercising virtue or of performing a duty, but of receiving a free gift” (Abraham Booth, 1734-1806).

What is the relation of faith to justification? The Arminian answer to the question, refined somewhat by the Plymouth Brethren, is, that the *act* of believing is imputed to us for righteousness. One error leads to another. Mr. Darby denied that Gentiles were ever under the law, hence he denied also that Christ obeyed the law in His people’s stead, and therefore as Christ’s vicarious obedience is not reckoned to their account, he had to seek

elsewhere for their righteousness. This he claimed to find in the Christian's own faith, insisting that their act of believing is imputed to them "for righteousness." To give his theory respectability, he clothed it in the language of several expressions found in Romans 4, though he knew quite well that the Greek afforded no foundation whatever for that which he built upon it.

In Romans 4 we read "his faith is counted *for* righteousness" (v. 5), "faith was reckoned to Abraham *for* righteousness" (v. 9), "it was imputed to him *for* righteousness" (v. 22). Now in each of these verses, the Greek preposition is "eis" which *never* means "in the stead of," but always signifies "towards, in order to, with a view to." It has the uniform force of "unto." Its exact meaning and force is unequivocally plain in Romans 10:10, "with the heart man believeth *unto* ("eis") righteousness," that is, the believing heart reaches out toward and lays hold of Christ Himself. "This passage (Rom 10:10) may help us to understand what justification by faith is, for it shows that righteousness there comes to us when we embrace God's goodness offered to us in the Gospel. We are then, for this reason, made just, because we believe that God is propitious to us through Christ" (John Calvin, 1509-1564).

The Holy Spirit has used the Greek prepositions with unerring precision. Never do we find Him employing "eis" in connection with Christ's satisfaction and sacrifice in our room and stead, but only "anti" or "huper," which means *in lieu of*. On the other hand, "anti" and "huper" are *never* used in connection with our believing, for faith *is not* accepted by God *in lieu of* perfect obedience. Faith must either be the ground of our acceptance with God, or the means or instrument of our becoming interested in the true meritorious ground, namely, the righteousness of Christ. It *cannot* stand in *both* relations to our justification. "God justifieth, not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ" (Westminster Catechism).

That faith itself cannot be the substance or ground of our justification is clear from many considerations. The "righteousness of God (i.e., the satisfaction which Christ rendered to the law) is revealed from faith *to* faith" (Rom 1:17) and so cannot be faith itself. Romans 10:10 declares, "with the heart man believeth *unto* righteousness," so that righteousness must be a distinct thing from believing. In Jeremiah 23:6, we read "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," so faith cannot be our righteousness. Let not Christ be dethroned in order to exalt faith. Set not the servant above the master. "We acknowledge no righteousness but what the obedience and satisfaction of Christ yields us. His blood, not our faith. His satisfaction, not our believing it, is the matter of justification before God" (John Flavel, 1630-1691). What alterations are there in our faith! what minglings of unbelief at all times! Is *this* a foundation to build our justification and hope upon?

Perhaps some will say, Are not the words of Scripture expressly on Mr. Darby's side? Does not Romans 4:5 affirm "faith is counted for righteousness"? We answer, Is the *sense* of Scripture on his side? Suppose I should undertake to prove that David was cleansed from guilt by the "hyssop" which grows on the wall—*that* would sound ridiculous. Yes, nevertheless, I should have the express *words* of Scripture to support me, "Purge me *with* hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Psa 51:7). Yet clear as those words read, they would not afford me the least countenance imaginable from *the sense* and spirit of God's Word. Has

the *hyssop*—a worthless shrub—any kind of fitness to stand in the stead of the sacrificial blood and make an atonement for sin? No more fitness has *faith* to stand in the stead of Christ's perfect obedience, to act as our justifying righteousness, or procure our acceptance with God!

An apology is really due many of our readers, for wasting their time with such puerilities, but we ask them to kindly bear with us. This magazine goes to quite a number of the followers of Mr. Darby, and we hope it may please God to use this article to expose one of his many grievous errors. For "grievous" *this* error most certainly is. His teaching that the Christian's faith, instead of the vicarious obedience of Christ, is reckoned for righteousness (Mr. W. Kelly, his chief lieutenant, wrote "his [Abraham's] faith in God's word as that which he exercised and which was accounted *as* righteousness"—see article 5) makes God guilty of a downright lie, for it represents Him as giving to faith a *fictitious* value—the believer has no righteousness, so God regards his poor faith *as* "righteousness."

"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). The one point to be decided here is, was it Abraham's faith itself which was in God's account taken for righteousness (horrible idea!), or was it the righteousness of God in Christ which Abraham's faith prospectively laid hold of? The comments of the apostle in Romans 4:18-22 settle the point decisively. In these verses, Paul emphasizes the natural impossibilities which stood in the way of God's promise of a numerous offspring to Abraham being fulfilled (the genital deadness both of his own body and Sarah's), and on the implicit confidence he had (notwithstanding the difficulties) in the power and faithfulness of God that He *would* perform what He promised. Hence, when the apostle adds, "therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" (v. 22), that "therefore" can only mean, Because through faith he completely *lost sight of nature and self*, and realized with undoubting assurance the sufficiency of the divine arm and the certainty of its working.

Abraham's faith, dear reader, was nothing more and nothing else than *the renunciation of all virtue and strength in himself*, and a hanging in childlike trust upon God for what *He* was able and willing to do. Far, very far, indeed, was his faith from being a mere substitute for a "righteousness" which he lacked. Far, very far was God from accepting his faith in lieu of a perfect obedience to His law. Rather was Abraham's faith the acting of a soul which found *its* life, its hope, its all *in the Lord Himself*. And *that* is what justifying faith is—it is "simply the instrument by which Christ and His righteousness are received in order to justification. It is emptiness filled with Christ's fulness—impotency lying down upon Christ's strength" (John L. Girardeau, 1825-1898)).

"The best obedience of my hands  
Dares not appear before *Thy* throne;  
But faith can answer Thy demands,  
*By pleading what my Lord has done.*"

What is the relation of faith to justification? Antinomians and hyper-Calvinists answer, Merely that of comfort or assurance. Their theory is that the elect were actually justified by God before the foundation of the world, and all that faith does now is to make this *manifest* in their conscience. This error was advocated by such men as W. Gadsby, J. Irons, James

Wells, J.C. Philpot. That it originated not with these men is clear from the fact that the Puritans refuted it in their day. "By faith alone we obtain and receive the forgiveness of sins; for notwithstanding any antecedent act of God concerning us in and for Christ, *we do not actually receive* a complete soul-freeing discharge until we believe" (John Owen, 1616-1683). "It is vain to say I am justified only in respect to the court of mine own conscience. The faith that Paul and the other apostles were justified by, was their believing on Christ that they *might be* justified (Gal 2:15-16), and not a believing they were justified already; and therefore it was not an act of assurance" (Thomas Goodwin, vol. 8, 1600-1680).

*How* are we justified by faith? Having given a threefold negative answer—not by faith as a joint cause with works (Romanists), not by faith as an act of grace in us (Arminians), not by faith as it receives the Spirit's witness (Antinomians). We now turn to the positive answer. Faith justifies only as an instrument which God has appointed to the apprehension and application of Christ's righteousness. When we say that faith is the "instrument" of our justification, let it be clearly understood that we do not mean faith is the instrument *wherewith* God justifies, but the instrument *whereby* we receive Christ. Christ has merited righteousness for us, and faith in Christ is that which renders it meet in God's sight the purchased blessing be assigned. *Faith unites to Christ*, and being united to Him we are possessed of all that is in Christ, so far as is consistent with our capacity of receiving and God's appointment in giving. Having been made one with Christ in spirit, God now considers us as one with Him in law.

We are justified *by* faith, and not *for* faith—not because of what faith *is*, but because of what it *receives*. "It hath no efficacy of itself, but as it is the band of our union with Christ. The whole virtue of cleansing proceeds from Christ the object. We receive the water with our hands, but the cleansing virtue is not in our hands, but in the water, yet the water cannot cleanse us without our receiving it. Our receiving it unites the water to us and is a means whereby we are cleansed. And therefore is it observed that our justification by faith is always expressed in *the passive*, not in the active. We are *justified* by faith, not that faith *justifies* us. The efficacy is in Christ's blood, the reception of it is in our faith" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

Scripture knows no such thing as a justified unbeliever. There is nothing meritorious about believing, yet it is necessary in order to justification. It is not only the righteousness of Christ *as imputed* which justifies, but also *as received* (Rom 5:11, 17). The righteousness of Christ is not mine until I accept it as the Father's gift. "The believing sinner is 'justified by faith' only instrumentally, as he 'lives by eating' only instrumentally. Eating is the particular act by which he receives and appropriates food. Strictly speaking, he lives by bread alone, not by eating or the act of masticating. And strictly speaking, the sinner is justified by Christ's sacrifice alone, not by his act of believing in it" (William Shedd, 1820-1894). In the application of justification faith is not a builder, but a beholder, not an agent, but an instrument. It has nothing to do, but all to believe, nothing to give, but all to receive.

God has not selected faith to be the instrument of justification because there is some peculiar virtue in faith, but rather because there is *no merit* in it—faith is self-emptying—

“Therefore it is of faith, *that it might be by grace*” (Rom 4:16). A gift is seen to be a gift when nothing is required or accepted of the recipient, but simply that he *receive* it. Whatever other properties faith may possess, it is simply *as receiving Christ* that it justifies. Were we said to be justified by repentance, by love, or by any other spiritual grace, it would convey the idea of something good in us being the consideration on which the blessing was bestowed, but justification *by faith* (correctly understood) conveys no such idea.

“Faith justifies in no other way than as it introduces us into a participation of the righteousness of Christ” (John Calvin). Justifying faith is a looking away from self, a renouncing of my own righteousness, a laying hold of Christ. Justifying faith consists, first, of a knowledge and belief of the truth revealed in Scripture thereon. Second, in an abandonment of all pretense, claim, or confidence in our own righteousness. Third, in a trust in and reliance upon the righteousness of Christ, laying hold of the blessing which He purchased for us. It is the heart’s approval and approbation of the method of justification proposed in the Gospel—by Christ alone, proceeding from the pure grace of God, and excluding all human merits. “*In the LORD* have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24).

None will experimentally appreciate the righteousness of Christ until they have been experimentally stripped by the Spirit. Not until the Lord puts us in the fire and burns off our filthy rags, and makes us stand naked before Him, trembling from head to foot as we view the sword of His justice suspended over our heads, will any truly value “the best robe.” Not until the condemning sentence of the law has been applied by the Spirit to the conscience does the guilty soul cry, “Lost, lost!” see Rom 7:9-10. Not until there is a personal apprehension of the requirements of God’s law, a feeling sense of our total inability to perform its righteous demands, and an honest realization that God would be just in banishing us from His presence forever, is the necessity for a precious Christ perceived by the soul.

## TO A STRICKEN SOUL

My dear Brother: Greetings in the precious name of Him who, in the supreme crisis of His life said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11). Those words were uttered by the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal—the cross and all it entailed was fully before His view. This sublime utterance of the Saviour’s exhibits His absolute submission unto His Father’s will, the total absence of resistance and murmuring. The words He uttered on that dark, dark night have been placed on record for our instruction, for He has left us “an example” that we should “follow his steps” (1Pe 2:21). As we read these words “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” they should be turned into humble and earnest prayer, that we may be permitted to enter more into the spirit of Christ, that divine grace may be given us so that we shall be enabled to meekly acquiesce unto whatever our all-wise God may appoint.

It is in *heart-submission* to God's providential dealings with us that true religion largely consists. By nature, man is born "like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12). He wants his own way in everything, and chafes and kicks when his will is crossed and his plans are thwarted. But where a divine work of grace is wrought in the soul, this spirit of rebellion against God is subdued and the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. It is true the old spirit of insubordination is not entirely cast out, yea, it often makes its evil presence felt, for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit" (Gal 5:17). But the Christian strives against that hostile influence, turns to the Lord for help, and begs Him *to still* the storm going on within, and to bring him into submission.

Yours of April 30 to hand. My heart goes out to you in sympathy in this dark hour, and I feel my helplessness to comfort you. The loss you have sustained is far greater than any human creature can make up—your suffering too acute for any fellow-mortal to alleviate. I may endeavour to pour into your sorely-wounded heart something of "the balm of Gilead" (Jer 8:22), but only the great Physician can give any efficacy to the same. I can do little more than point you to Him who alone can "bind up the broken-hearted" (Isa 61:1). Now is the time for you to *make free with Him*, for He is a "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Pro 18:24). "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7). Unburden yourself to Him, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). Observe well, dear Brother, the words, "With thanksgiving"—that should never be absent from our prayers even amid our acutest sorrows. *You* have much cause for "thanksgiving," even amid your sobs and groans it is your privilege and duty to own God's great goodness to you. First, in having favoured you with one who was such a faithful wife and devoted mother to your children—that was "of the LORD," and *His* hand should be duly acknowledged. It was purely of His distinguishing mercy that you were not plagued with a contentious, nagging, undutiful wife, such as thousands of men have. Own, then, unto the God of all grace His goodness, for a "prudent wife is from the LORD" (Pro 19:14).

Second, you should present unfeigned "thanksgiving" unto God that He spared your beloved wife unto you for so many years. This, too, is entirely of His good pleasure. A parent, a wife, a child, is *loaned* to us for a season, and the One who gives decides for how long. Often the wife is removed from the husband quite early, often her life is taken in child-bearing. *You* have been highly favoured, and instead of dwelling exclusively on her *removal* from you, seek, dear Brother, to praise God for *sparing* her to you for so many years! It was a signal mercy and blessing that she remained until her children attained their majority. God might have called her years ago and left you with motherless babes on your hands!

Third, if as your letter denotes, you have good ground to conclude your dear wife was one of the high favourites of heaven—an elect, regenerated, and redeemed soul, trusting only in the merits of Christ for her acceptance with God—then you have abundant cause for "thanksgiving" that she has been removed from this wilderness of woe and translated to

the Paradise of bliss! Think, then, not only of *your great loss*, but of *her immeasurable gain*! She is now done with sin and suffering forever. She is with the spirits of just men made perfect. She is in the immediate presence of the Lamb! Would you, if you could, call her back from heaven itself to this sad world?

Fourth, what “thanksgiving” should ascend from your heart in the assurance that you have *not* parted to meet no more! It was thus that David found comfort when his dear child was taken from him, “I shall go to him” (2Sa 12:23). Only for a brief season at most will you be separated from your loved one. Ere long the call will come for you to join her in that place where partings are no more. You shall be united with her again, not a few brief years, but *forever*! Let, then, this blissful prospect cheer your drooping heart. Dwell not on the *brief* period of separation, but on the *eternal* dwelling together on High.

But you are not in heaven yet. No, God sees fit to leave you on earth a little longer. Why? To teach your heart some needed lessons, to bring good out of apparent evil, to make this sorrowful loss a real enrichment to your soul. *This* too is among the “all things” which work together for good to them that love God. If the Spirit of God is pleased to *sanctify* this affliction unto you, it will prove a real blessing in disguise. It is your duty and privilege to *ask* Him so to do—to beg Him to *bless* to you the chastening rod. May I suggest one or two lines of meditation which, if pursued by you and blessed to you by God, *will* enable you to improve this experience.

1. Learn anew *the terribleness of sin*. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Yes, had sin never entered this world, no graves had ever been dug in it. Every funeral should be a forceful reminder to us of what the Fall has brought in! Every funeral ought to beget in us a deeper hatred of sin. It was *sin* which necessitated the death of God’s beloved Son. Then how we should loathe it, seek grace to resist its evil solicitations, and follow hard after its opposite—holiness.

2. See now the great importance of *holding with a light hand* all God’s temporal mercies. The best of them are only loaned us for a season and we know not how early we shall be called to relinquish them. It is the part of wisdom for us to recognize and remember this while they *are* in our hands, not to grasp them too tightly, nor to look upon them as ours to enjoy forever down here. Holy Writ bids us to “rejoice with trembling” (Psa 2:11), for that which delights my heart this morning may be taken from me before the shades of night fall. The more I live with this fact before me, the less shall I feel the loss when it comes!

3. Endeavour to get your heart *more weaned from this perishing world*. “Set your affection on things above, *not on things on the earth*” (Col 3:2). But we are slow to heed this exhortation and often God has to use drastic means to bring us to a compliance with it. It is for our own good as well as His glory that we do so. It is only the heavenly things that abide, then let us seek grace to have our hearts more and more set upon *them*.

“Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”



4. Seek to demonstrate now to your fellows *the reality of true religion*. The test of a soldier is not while he is on parade, but when he enters the battle. So it is spiritually. In seasons of prosperity even the worldling is contented and happy, but in times of adversity it becomes evident that he knows nothing of the source of real and lasting joy. Only the real child of God is enabled to say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; *blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21). Earnestly seek supernatural help from above, dear Brother, that you may be enabled to manifest before your fellows the *sufficiency* of divine grace to strengthen and support—to show you *do* have a peace and comfort which the Christless are strangers to.

Now, dear Brother, I have snatched several hours from a busy life to try and send you a few lines both of comfort and counsel. May it please the God of all grace to bless them to you. Read, and re-read what I have written, and above all turn it into definite prayer. Write me again when you feel like so doing. Sorrow not as others who have no hope. Doubt not the Lord's goodness. Look forward to the future and it will nerve you for the duties of the present. Assuring you again of my heart-felt sympathy, and of my poor prayers, I am, Yours by God's abounding mercy, A.W. Pink. Psalm 55:22.

The above is a copy of a letter which was sent to one who had suddenly been plunged into the deep waters of bereavement. We felt that perhaps its contents might be pertinent to the cases of others of our readers who have lately been called on by God to give up loved ones. May it also speak to those Christian husbands who still have their wives with them, and move them to treat their partners with that love, sympathy, patience, gentleness, considerateness, which is their due.

## OVER-RIGHTEOUS

"Be not righteous over much" (Ecc 7:16). Some of our readers may be surprised to discover that there *is* such a statement as this in Holy Writ, and at first glance consider it an exhortation we do not need. Yet on second thought they should perceive that their hasty conclusion was wrong, for there can be nothing in the imperishable Word of God which is superfluous, and no precept which we can dispense with without suffering loss. Even in this day of abounding lawlessness, of rapidly increasing moral laxity, when there is such an urgent need for pressing the righteous claims of God upon one another, the Christian requires to give careful heed to this word, "Be not righteous over much." It is a question of sound interpretation, of rightly understanding the meaning and application of this divine injunction. First, let us briefly point out what our text does not mean.

"Be not righteous over much" (Ecc 7:16). Those words have often been quoted in the past by empty professors against those children of God whose conscientiousness and piety condemned their looseness. They have said, "I do not feel that such carefulness and preciseness are required of us. You are altogether too punctilious over trifles. Why make yourself, and all you come into contact with, miserable? what need is there for so much

denying of self, separation from the world, and acting differently from other people?" They argue, "Christ did everything *for* us which God requires of us." Anything which made real demands upon them, which called for the mortification of the flesh, for the laying aside of "every weight" which would hinder from running the race God has set before His people, they counted as "fanaticism," "puritanic," being "righteous over much." And *their* tribe is not extinct! But such is obviously a perversion of our text. We cannot love God too much, nor keep His precepts too diligently.

What, then, is the force of these words, "Be not righteous over much"? First, let it be duly observed that our text occurs in the *Old Testament*. The Lord God knew the temper of the Jews, their proneness to lean upon their own works and trust in the sufficiency of them to secure their acceptance before Him. Therefore did He place this word on record to warn them against indulging in the spirit of self-destruction, against pretending unto a greater righteousness than they actually had. In this very same chapter, only two or three verses later, He tells them plainly, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (v. 20). Thus the righteousness of Another is absolutely indispensable if any sinner is to find acceptance with the thrice Holy God. Beware, then, of thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think and being proud in your own conceits. The need for such a word, and their utter disregard of it, was plainly evidenced by the self-righteous Pharisees of Christ's day, who trusted in their own performances and despised and rejected Him.

But the truly regenerated soul has been delivered from this fatal tendency of the unrenewed heart. He has been supernaturally enlightened and convicted by the Spirit of Truth. He has been shown how impossible it is *for him* to meet the high requirements of God, and has been made to feel that his best doings are but "filthy rags" in God's sight. What, then, is the legitimate application of this exhortation unto himself, "Be not righteous over much"? Answer—by assuming duties to which *God* has not called us, by undertaking austerities which *God* has not enjoined. We read of "the commandments and doctrines *of men*" with *their* "touch not; taste not; handle not" (Col 2:21-22), and to be brought under bondage to *them*, is being "righteous *over much*," for it is going beyond what God Himself has prescribed for us.

The Jewish rabbis and scribes invented a vast number of traditions and ceremonies over and above what God commanded, supposing that by observing the same they were *holier* than others and even condemned the Lord Jesus because He declined to observe their rules, see Mark 7:2, 5—and let it be duly observed that Christ and His disciples refused to heed *their* scruples, though He knew they would be "offended" or hurt! The same principle is operative among the poor Papists, with their invention of "works of supererogation," the "celibacy" of their "priests," their "Lenten fasts," etc. are examples. Nor is the same evil absent among Protestants. Many of them have invented laws and rules, demanding that Christians totally abstain from some of the "all things" which God has given us richly "to *enjoy*" (1Ti 6:17), though not to abuse, compliance therewith is being "righteous" *over much*!

"Be not righteous over much" (Ecc 7:16). This word has a manifold application to Christians today. Be not too rigorous in standing up for your "rights," but "in love *serve*

one another.” Refuse not to help the beast out of the pit, simply because he falls into one on the Sabbath day! Let your zeal in “service” be regulated by the rules of Holy Writ. Insist not upon your full “pound of flesh,” having received mercy of God, exercise mercy towards others. Beware of paying more attention to the outward forms of religion than to the cultivation of the heart. “There may be overdoing in well doing” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Some have wrecked their constitutions by over-study, over-fasting, and by refusing lawful means. Nothing is required of us but what *God* has enjoined in *His Word*

