

Vol. XXIII

July, 1944

No. 7

STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

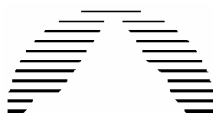
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE PATH OF DUTY

Part C

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8). This is a most blessed though little-understood prophecy and promise. The figure used in the first part of the verse is simple and should occasion no difficulty. It is that of a specially-made road through a wild country or trackless desert, provided for the use of pilgrims and travelers. The making known of the will of God unto us is here likened to the casting up of a clearly defined highway through a strange land. The reference is to the state of the Gentile world at the time the Israelitish seer made this prediction. During the days of the Jewish theocracy, the heathen nations were in spiritual darkness and ignorance, being without any written revelation from God. But the incarnation of Christ would entirely alter that awful state of affairs. The people which sat in darkness would see “great light” (Isa 42:6, 7; Mat 4:15, 16). The glorious Gospel would be preached to all nations and the Highway of salvation—the Way which leadeth unto Life, the “way of peace have they not known” (Rom 3:17)—would be clearly revealed unto them.

This Divinely-provided highway through the world is here denominated “the way of holiness.” It is so designated because it is appointed by a holy God and brings us to a holy Heaven. It is so designated because it stands out in sharp contrast and separation from all the by-ways of sin. It is expressly said, “the unclean shall not pass over it” (Isa 35:8): the unconverted, the impenitent, the unbelieving have no access to it. Only those who have been cleansed by the atoning blood of Christ have any title to walk in this way, as they are the only ones with any desire to tread the same. Those who traverse this “way of holiness” are termed the “wayfaring men.” The Hebrew for this compound “wayfaring” is literally “to go on in the way,” which is more informative than the English rendition. It tells us that only those persons who are possessed with a true desire and firm determination will walk therein. The grand requirement for its treader, and that which ensures success therein, is a *heart* for this “way”—that is, the possession of a love of holiness.

The “wayfaring man” is here termed a “fool.” It is generally considered that two things are connoted thereby. First, what he is in himself naturally considered. We are expressly told that among those called of God, there are “not many wise men after the flesh,” and if it be inquired why this is so, the inspired answer is, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;” and His reason for that is, “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1Co 1:26, 27, 29). In order to magnify the riches of His sovereign grace, God has singled out from among men the weak, the base, mere “nonentities” or “nobodies” (as is the force of the Greek rendered “things which are not” in 1 Corinthians 1:28) to be the recipients of His highest favours. The great majority of His people are “the poor of this world” (Jam 2:5): poor in its material riches, poor in mental equipment, poor in what the world terms, “natural advantages.” Second, the term “fool” describes the wayfaring man as he appears unto the unregenerate, because of his spirituality: the one who seeks to please God rather than self, to live for eternity, rather than time, is a madman in their eyes.

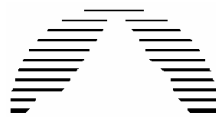
“The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8). The two significations given above of the term, “fool,” do not in our judgment exhaust or reach its principal meaning here. There is many a natural dolt who deems himself very wise, many a man of one talent who considers himself fully qualified to hold a position which calls for a person of five talents. Ignorance by no means excludes egotism. The “fool” in the verse before us is not necessarily one whose mentality is of poor quality, nor one who is crazy in the esteem of his fellows; rather, is it a person who has been made a fool in his *own eyes*. When a miracle of grace is wrought in the soul, that person is humbled into the dust, his self-complacency and self-sufficiency receives its death wound, he is stripped of his peacock feathers. Not only does he perceive that his righteousness or best performances are “filthy rags” in the sight of God, not only does he feel himself to be “without strength” when it comes to doing what God requires of him, but his wisdom appears folly, and all his education and erudition worthless—so far as obtaining a knowledge of Divine things is concerned.

While it be true that “not many wise men after the flesh” (1Co 1:26) are called by God out of darkness into His marvelous light, yet it does not say “not *any*.” There are a few of great natural abilities, of eminent mental endowments, of keen intellectual acumen, who are snatched as brands from the burning. And the change produced in them by regeneration is as radical and marked as it is in the conversion of the most dissolute character. Such an one was Saul of Tarsus, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and blessed with most remarkable intellectuality. Yet, he became as “a little child,” acknowledging he was not sufficient of himself “to think any thing as of himself” (2Co 3:5). In other words, he became a “fool” in his own estima-

tion (1Co 3:18), and therefore, one who deeply realised his need of being taught of God. And that is true in every case where regeneration takes place. Its subjects are made conscious of their ignorance. Concerning spiritual things, they feel themselves to be utter dunces, and therefore, their earnest cry to the Lord is, "That which I see not teach Thou me" (Job 34:32).

Here, then, is the Divinely-defined character of the man who treads "The way of holiness" (Isa 35:8). He is a "wayfaring man," one who has been given a *heart* for this way, who *desires* to tread it. And second, he is a "fool" in his own estimation and valuation: who feels himself totally insufficient to make any progress in this way. Consequently, he is the one who instinctively and sincerely turns constantly to his Guidebook for instruction. He dare not move a pace until he has received directions therefrom. His daily prayer is, "Order my steps in Thy Word" and "make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa 119:133, 35). So stupid does he feel himself to be, yes, even though he has a M.A. or D.D. degree—that he cries, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes" (Psa 119:33). It is not light *on* the Word he needs, for God's Word is itself light (Psa 119:105), but light *from* the Word, and therefore, does he beg God, "Give me understanding" (Psa 119:73) and illuminate my sin-darkened heart. Thus and thus only does he perceive and walk in the path of duty.

"The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*" (Isa 35:8). Note well, it is something else and something better than "*need not* err therein" as so frequently misquoted: namely, "shall not." Just so long as he remains a "fool" in his own esteem, and no longer, will he be kept from making mistakes or wandering off into the by-paths of folly. So long as he is conscious that he "lacks wisdom," he will "ask of God" (Jam 1:5). So long as he is conscious of his ignorance, will he value his Guidebook and seek counsel therefrom. So long as he is kept aware of his stupidity, will he pray for enlightenment. And so long as *that* be the case, he *will* progress in the way of holiness. But as soon as pride is allowed to work, a spirit of independency and self-sufficiency will take possession of his heart, and though he may still "read the Bible" perfunctorily or as a duty, he will no longer consult it anxious for light on his path, and soon he *will* "err therein," for "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam 4:6). —AWP



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THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

7. *Romans 16:25-27*

Perhaps by this time, some of our readers are feeling rather disappointed at the method we have followed in the previous articles, considering it had been more profitable had we made it our principal concern to show in more detail how these breathings of the apostles' souls bear upon, or should bear upon, the prayer life of believers today. Yet judging from letters so far to hand, others are grateful that we are endeavouring—in keeping with the title of this magazine—to give an interpretation, as well as an application, of these precious portions of Holy Writ: we shall try to pay attention to both. The more closely we examine the wide range of the recorded prayers of the apostles, the more are we impressed by their deep importance—doctrinally, as well as experimentally—their great variety, their extensive scope: and the more do we feel convinced that they need to be approached and dealt with *expositionally*, as well as devotionally and practically. There has been far too much lazy generalizing of the Truth, and far too little painstaking and detailed instruction.

The passage before us is a case in point, though we admit it is rather an exceptional one, occurring as it does in what many regard as the profoundest epistle in the New Testament. We wonder how many of our readers will obtain, even after a careful reading and re-reading of our present passage, any clear-cut and intelligent conception of the contents of this prayer: its scope or its subject. We wonder how many of them could supply satisfactory answers to the following questions: 1. Why is the Deity here addressed as, “Him that is *of power* to stablish you”? 2. What is the force of “according to *my Gospel*”? 3. What is signified by “the *preaching* of Jesus Christ”? 4. What is this “mystery” which “was kept secret since the world began”? 5. How harmonise “kept secret” with “but now is made manifest by the Scriptures of the *prophets*”? 6. Why “according to the commandment of the *everlasting God*”? 7. What is the special force of “to God *only wise*”? Is there not a real need here for the *teacher*!

One has but to honestly face and carefully ponder those questions to at once be conscious of his dire need of wisdom from Above. At any rate, that is the feeling of this writer. That the central subject of these verses is something especially profound seems very obvious. That they contain Truth of the deepest importance which reader and writer alike should be sensible of. But if their meaning be not apparent from a cursory perusal, neither can it be conveyed to others through a hurriedly prepared article. Prayer and study, study and prayer, are called for, and *they* demand the exercise of faith and patience—graces in which the present generation of Christians are sadly deficient. While we believe it has pleased God to grant us some insight into the contents of this portion of His Word (of which the reader must be the judge), yet we are far from concluding we shall ever plumb such depths in this life. May it please the gracious Spirit to now shine upon our benighted understandings, that in His light, we may see light.

In his repeated studyings of our passage, this writer has long felt that before he was ready to work out its details, he must first ascertain what is its principal subject. Before he is prepared to weigh or even consider what is the burden of this prayer, he must seek to discover what is its leading theme. In setting about that task, full consideration has to be given unto the particular Epistle in which it is found and the distinctive subject of that Epistle. Each separation detail has to be pondered in its relation to the whole; after which parallel passages have to be sought and their aid made use of. That calls for impartial investigation, focused attention, laborious and persevering effort, and above all, humbly seeking wisdom from God. The task of the expositor is no light one, which is why there are so few such, for probably never a generation more detested hard work and mental toil than ours.

In his commentary upon this epistle, John Brown summarised his remarks on these verses by saying, they are “one of the most magnificent doxologies in the New Testament—a worthy devotional peroration to such a doctrinal discussion.” This is not only a sublime prayer, but it is also one of the greatest doctrinal passages contained in Holy Writ. If on the one hand it rises to unsurpassed heights of devotion, on the other, it conducts us to the profoundest subject of Divine revelation. This is more or less evident from the terms used in our passage. It speaks not only of a “mystery,” but of “the mystery”—that which includes and is the sum of all others. The principal theme of the epistle is here epitomised as affording the special ground for the praise not offered to God. In Romans, the Gospel is expounded (see Rom 1:1, 9, 16) in a more formal and systematic form than elsewhere in the Word: in the body of the epistle, we are shown the blessings it conveys to those who believe it; in this doxology, we are taught how the Gospel originated.

"Now to Him that is of power to stablish you" (Rom 16:25). This is not a petitionary prayer, but an adoration of Deity. No request is made for the saints, but God is exalted before them. The apostle begins reminding us of the excellency and sufficiency of the Divine power. He had concluded his introduction to this epistle by affirming "the Gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom 1:16), and now he points out that the believer is equally dependent upon God's power for his establishment. Christians cannot establish themselves, nor can their ministers establish them. The one and the other may use the appointed means, but they cannot ensure success—God alone can make them effectual unto any of us. But blessed be His name, HE *can* do so, for "God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in *all* things, may abound to every good work" (2Co 9:8). It is to be duly noted that the word "able" includes disposition, as well as capacity: He *can*, He *will*—cf. Rom 4:21; Eph 3:20, etc.

The Greek word translated "stablish" (*sterizo*) is rendered, "set steadfastly" in Luke 9:51 and "strengthen" in Luke 22:32 and Revelation 3:2. It means to thoroughly establish, to make us rooted, grounded, and settled in the faith (Col 1:23; 2:7), both in our hearts (1Th 3:12) and walk (2Th 2:17). This is a duty incumbent upon us, for we are expressly bidden "stablish your hearts" (Jam 5:8). But because we are not sufficient for the performance of such a task, God has most graciously made promise: "But the Lord is faithful (though we are unfaithful), who shall stablish you and keep *you* from evil" (2Th 3:3). Though it be our privilege and obligation to study the Word, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, yet so strongly are our hearts influenced by sin, so dull our understanding, and feeble our love, it requires the working of God's power to preserve us. Not only were we unable to bring ourselves into the Faith, we cannot continue in it without Divine strength. Because of our proneness to apostatise, the subtlety and strength of our spiritual enemies, the world in which we live, God's power alone can keep us—cf. Jud 24.

"According to my Gospel" (Rom 16:25). Here we are shown *what it is* in which Christians are "stablished" or "established," namely the Gospel. Romanists are established in human tradition; thousands of so-called Protestants are established in errors equally fatal; but God's own people are established in the Truth—an inestimable favour, especially in such a day as this, when God has given up the vast majority in Christendom to "believe a lie" (2Th 2:11). But more: this clause not only makes known unto us the spiritual sphere in which Christians are established, but also the *means* which the Holy Spirit employs in this gracious work. Only as our hearts are Divinely enabled to cleave unto the grand substance of the Gospel are we kept from being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:14). Third, this clause signifies: established according to this Divine rule—brought into accord with it both inwardly and outwardly, so that there is no swerving from it in belief or practice: cf. Rom 6:17 margin.

"According to my Gospel" (Rom 16:25). First, this is to be regarded as a discriminative expression: the Gospel I have proclaimed in contradistinction from the false gospel of the Judaizers. None of the other apostles makes any reference to a spurious gospel, but Paul particularly warned the Corinthians against "another gospel" (2Co 11:4) and to the Galatians he wrote, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8)—my Gospel, then, in opposition to all counterfeits, for none other can avail for the salvation of the soul. Second, because Paul was the pre-eminent expounder of it, his first epistle being devoted to an unfolding of its grand contents. The term "Gospel" occurs scores of times in his writings, yet excepting 1st Peter, it is found nowhere else in the Epistles. Third, because a special dispensation of the Gospel was committed unto him for the Gentiles (Gal 2:7; Eph 3:2). Finally, it accords with the special fervour which marked him: "*my* God shall" (Phi 4:19), "Christ Jesus *my* Lord" (Phi 3:8).

"And the preaching of Jesus Christ" (Rom 16:25). As Robert Haldane pointed out, "This phrase is not the mere repetition of the same thing—as the former. It is indeed the same truth, but from a different point of view. In the one it is considered as good news, in the other as the publication of the truth about Jesus Christ: we are to be established according to what the apostle taught concerning *Him*." Perhaps it would be more to the point to say, this clause is subjoined to the former in order to inform us what is the substance and contents of the Gospel. Jesus Christ is the grand Object and theme of all true evangelical ministry. The "*preaching* of Jesus Christ" is very much more than making a frequent use of His name in our discourses, or even telling of His wondrous love and work for sinners. It is first and foremost the magnifying of His unique Person, the making known of who He is—the God-man. Second, it is the opening up of His mediatorial office, in which He serves as Prophet, Priest and Potentate. Third, it is a proclamation of His

wondrous redemption. Fourth, it is the enforcing of His claims and the holding up of the perfect example He has left us.

“According to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom 16:25). This is both an explanation and amplification of the foregoing. The glorious Gospel of Christ is no invention of human wit, but is the wondrous product of the consummate wisdom of God. As J. Evans (Matthew Henry’s commentary) well said of the Gospel: “It has in it an inconceivable height and such an unfathomable depth as passes knowledge. It is a mystery, which the angels desire to look into and cannot find the bottom of. And yet, blessed be God, there is as much of this mystery made plain as will suffice to bring us to heaven, if we do not wilfully neglect so great salvation.” The Gospel not only infinitely surpasses man’s skill to originate, but he could have no knowledge whatever of it, until God was pleased to publish the same. Nor was it any provision of His, devised in time, to meet some unforeseen calamity, no mere improvised remedy for sin, but that which engaged the Divine mind before heaven and earth was created.

Mention is made in the N. T. of “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 13:11) and of “the mysteries of God” (1Co 4:1). It refers to the yet future restoration and salvation of Israel as a “mystery” (Rom 11:25) and of the resurrection and bodily transformation of the saints as a “mystery” (1Co 15:51). We read also of “the mystery of iniquity” (2Th 2:7), which is in horrible contrast from “the mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3:16). There is also “the mystery of the seven stars” in the right hand of Christ and “the seven golden candlesticks” among which He walks (Rev 1:20 and 2:1), by which we understand His local churches; “the mystery of God” (Rev 10:7), which many regard as His ways in Providence, particularly His governance of this world; and “mystery Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, etc.” (Rev 17:5), which the Puritans viewed as Romanism. That which is before us in Romans 16:25 is, we believe, elsewhere termed “the mystery of His will” (Eph 1:9), the “great mystery” of Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32), “the mystery of the Gospel” (Eph 6:19), “the mystery of God (the Spirit), and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col 2:2).

According to the usage of this word in the New Testament, a “mystery” is a concealed truth over which a veil was cast. It concerns something which transcended the powers of man to conceive, and therefore beyond his ability to invent. It related to something, which was undiscoverable by the human mind, beyond human knowledge until Divinely revealed. In recent years, those known as dispensationalists have substituted the term “secret,” but we deem it a faulty alternative. It is true these “mysteries” were “secrets” impenetrable by finite sagacity till brought to light by God, but they are still designated “mysteries” after their revelation! Even now they are made known to us there remains a *mysterious* element, which is beyond our ken. “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep” (1Co 15:51 and cf. 1Th 4:17)—before the Holy Spirit made such disclosures, who ever imagined a whole generation of God’s people would enter Heaven without passing through the portals of death! “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in flesh” (1Ti 3:16)—yet now the miracle of the virgin birth has been recorded, there remains about the Divine incarnation that which is beyond our understanding. The Divine mysteries, therefore, are addressed to *faith* and not to reason.

In seeking to frame a definition of the grand “mystery” of our passage, we will first appropriate the help supplied by the clauses, which have already been before us. It is something “according to” which the God of power is to stablish His people. Contributory thereto, or as the means He employs in connection therewith, is what Paul styles “my Gospel”—i.e. that which he had expounded at length in this very epistle, the heart or central object of which is, “the preaching of Jesus Christ.” Next, we observe, this mystery “was kept secret since the world began,” by which we understand that it was: hidden from all the wise men of this world (1Co 2:8), that the O.T. saints had not such light upon it as Christians are now favoured with (1Pe 1:10; Col 1:26), and that even the holy angels were not permitted to enter into its wondrous contents until the same was actualised historically (1Pe 1:11; Eph 3:10). Further, we are told that this mystery is now “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26)—for Jew and Gentile alike to give up themselves to Christ to be accepted (by God) through Him, to be ruled by Him.

Turning now to parallel passages, we find that this mystery has to do with that which “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for the that love Him. But God *hath revealed them* unto us (especially in the N.T.) by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things (proof of His omniscience), yea, the deep things of God” (1Co 2:7-10). This intimates the transcendent sublimity of its contents. “The mystery of His will” (Eph 1:9) declares its origin and hints

at its selective nature. “The mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4) signifies Christ *mystical*, for it is His Body in which believing Jews and Gentiles are made “fellowheirs” (Eph 3:6), which tells of its international scope. Colossians 1:26,27 speaks of “the riches of the glory of this mystery,” which announces the plenitude of its bestowments. 1 Timothy 3:16 shows us the outworking of it centered around the incarnation, justification, and exaltation of God the Son.

This grand mystery was, we believe, what is designated in other passages “the Everlasting Covenant” (Heb 13:20), which concerned the Divine plan of redemption or the amazing scheme, whereby lost and depraved sinners might be everlastingly saved to the glory of God. This seems clear not only from the other passages referred to above, but more especially from the whole of 1 Corinthians 2. There, Paul affirmed that his paramount concern was to preach “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Cor 2:2), disdaining the devices of rhetoric in so doing, yet “speak[ing] the wisdom of God in a mystery” (1Cor 2:7): a message so unworldly, so incredible, so exacting that none but the Holy Spirit could open human hearts to savingly receive it. And here, for the moment, we must pause. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

19. Eleventh Miracle

The eleventh miracle of Elisha is so closely connected, and so intimately bound up with the tenth, that it will scarcely be out of place for us to bring forward the final division of the foregoing and use it as the introduction to this one. Though we dwelt at more than customary length on the healing of Naaman, and pointed out much as we went along that was typical in connection with the same, yet there still remains several details of interest which deserve separate notice, and unto them we now turn. First, the cleansing of Naaman supplied a striking display of *the sovereignty of God*. This was emphasised by the Lord Jesus in His first public discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth, when He reminded His hearers, "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus (Elisha) the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luk 4:27). It is ever thus with Him whose thoughts are so different from and whose ways are so high above ours that, when acting in the freeness of His grace, He passes by others and singles out the most unlikely to be the recipients of His high favours (1Co 1:26-29).

Second, the cleansing of Naaman afforded a blessed foreshadowment of the Divine mercy reaching out unto *the Gentiles*, for Naaman was not an Israelite, but a Syrian; nevertheless, he was made to learn the humbling lesson that if Divine grace was to be extended to him, such grace proceeds from the God of Abraham. That was why he must wash in the Jordan: the waters of "Abana and Pharpar" (2Ki 5:12) were of no avail—he must wash in one of *Israel's* streams! This truth is written large across the pages of Holy Writ. The harlot of Jericho was to be spared when her city was destroyed, but it could only be by her heeding the instructions of the two Hebrew spies. The widow of Zarephath was preserved through the famine, but it was by receiving Elijah into her home. The Ninevites were delivered from impending wrath, but at the preaching of Jonah. The king of Babylon received a dream from God, but for its interpretation, he must turn to Daniel. To the Samaritan adulteress, Christ declared "salvation is of the Jews" (Joh 4:22). Then let us heed the warning of Romans 11:18, 25.

Third, the cleansing of Naaman provided a full adumbration of "the way of salvation" or what is *required of the sinner* in order to his cleansing. First, we have a picture of how fallen man appears in the eyes of the thrice holy God—a leper, one condemned by His Law, a loathsome object, unfit for the Divine presence, a menace to his fellows. Then we behold his self-righteousness and self-importance, as he came expecting to purchase his healing, and was angry at the prophet's refusal to show him deference. Next, we learn of the demand made upon him: he must descend from his chariot, and go and wash seven times in the Jordan. There must be the setting aside of his own thoughts and desires, the humbling of proud self, the acknowledgement of his total depravity, full surrender to God's authority and faith's laying hold of the promise "and the flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean" (2Ki 5:10). Finally, we behold the immediate and complete transformation: "and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child" (2Ki 5:14) with a corresponding change of heart and conduct toward Elisha and his God.

Ere passing from this most fascinating incident, one further word on the particular waters into which Naaman was required to dip. It was not in the river Kishon, nor the pool of Bethesda, but the Jordan. Why? The answer to that question reveals the striking accuracy of our type. As leprosy (emblem of sin) was in question, the *curse* must be witnessed to. Sin has called down the curse of the One against whom it has raised its defiant head (Gen 3). The curse is God's judgment upon sin, and that judgment is *death*. It is this, of which the Jordan ever speaks. It was not because its waters possessed any magical properties or healing virtue: the very name Jordan means "judgment." Those who heeded our Lord's forerunner "were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their SINS" (Mar 1:5)—immersion beneath its waters was the acknowledgement that death was their due. Therefore did the Saviour allude to His death as a "baptism" (Luk 12:50), for at the cross, He was overwhelmed by the judgments of God (Psa 42:7; 88:7), and when a sinner believes the Gospel and appropriates Christ as his Substitute, God regards him as having passed through His judgment of sin, so that he can now say, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20), and in his baptism as a believer, there is a symbolical showing forth of that fact.

The miracle which is to now to engage our attention is of quite another order, the differences between them being most striking. We will, therefore consider, first, its *contrasts*. The subject of the foregoing

miracle was a heathen idolater, now it is the prophet's own servant. The one sought unto the prophet for relief; the other pursued the relieved one and virtually demanded tribute from him. There we behold Elisha teaching Naaman the grand truth of the freeness of Divine grace, here we see Gehazi casting a dark cloud over the same. In the one, Naaman is represented as expressing deep gratitude for his recovery and urging the man of God to receive a present at his hands; in the other, the avaricious Gehazi is portrayed as coveting that which his master so nobly refused. There it was a poor creature healed of his leprosy; here it is one being smitten with that dread disease. There we behold the goodness of God acting in a way of mercy; here we see His severity acting in holy justice. The former closes with the recipient of Divine grace returning home as a devout worshipper; the latter ends with a pronouncement of God's cure on the transgressor and on his seed forever.

Second, its *subject*. The one on whom this solemn miracle was wrought is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. He has come before us several times previously, and nowhere was he seen to advantage. First, when the woman of Shunem sought unto the man of God on behalf of her dead son and cast herself at his feet, "Gehazi came near to thrust her away" (2Ki 4:27) and his master bade him, "Let her alone." Then the prophet instructed his servant to go before him and lay his staff upon the face of the child (2Ki 4:29). Elisha could successfully smite the waters of Jordan with Elijah's mantle because "the spirit of Elijah" rested upon him (2Ki 2:15), but being devoid of the Spirit, the prophet's staff was of no avail in the prayerless hands of Gehazi (2Ki 4:31). In 2 Kings 4:43, we behold his selfishness and unbelief: "What, should I set this before an hundred men?" when Elisha was counting upon God to multiply the loaves. Thus, his character and conduct is all of a piece and in keeping with his name, which significantly enough means, "Denier."

Third, its *occasion*. "But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him" (2Ki 5:20). It will be remembered that before Naaman left Syria for the land of Samaria that he provided himself with a costly treasure, consisting of "ten talents of silver and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (2Ki 5:5). No doubt, a part of this was designed for travelling expenses for the retinue of servants who accompanied him, but the major portion of it, he evidently intended to bestow upon his benefactor. But Elisha had firmly refused to receive anything (2Ki 5:15, 16), and so he was now returning home with his horses still laden with the treasure. This was more than the covetous heart of Gehazi could endure, and he determined to secure a portion of it for himself. The honour of Jehovah and the glory of His grace counted nothing with him.

Every word in the above verse repays careful attention. It opens not with the usual "And," but the ominous "But," intimating the solemn contrast between the two miracles. Gehazi is here termed not only "the servant of Elisha," but "of Elisha the man of God"—the added words bring out the enormity of his sin. First, they call attention to the greatness of the privilege he had enjoyed being in close attendance on so pious a master. This rendered the more excuseless his wicked conduct, for it was not the act of an ignorant person, but of one well instructed in the ways of righteousness. Second, it emphasises the enormity of his offence, for it reflected seriously on the official character of the one who employed him. The sins of those in the sacred office, or of those associated with them therein are far graver than those of others. But Gehazi had no concern for the glory of God, so he cared nothing for the reputation of Elisha.

What has just been pointed out above definitely refutes one of the widespread delusions of our day, namely, that it is their unfavourable surrounding which is responsible for the degenerate conduct of so many of the present generation: social improvement can only be effected by improving the wage and homes of the poor. And is the behaviour of the rich any better? Is there less immorality in the west-end of London than in the east? It is drunken and thriftless people who makes the slums, and not the slums which ruin the people. God's Word teaches it is "out of the heart" of fallen man (Mar 7:21-23), and not from his faulty environment that proceeds all which defiles human nature. Nor it is any more warrantable for any person to attempt throwing the blame for his downfall on being obliged to mingle with evil characters. Gehazi was isolated from all bad companions placed in the most favourable circumstances, dwelling with a "man of God," but his soul was depraved! While "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc 8:11), the Gospel and not better "social amenities" is their only remedy.

Neither his close association with the man of God nor the witnessing of the miracles performed by him effected any change within Gehazi. The state of his heart is revealed by each expression recorded in 2 Kings 5:20, "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman." Incapable of appreciating the motives, which had actuated Elisha, he felt that he had foolishly missed a golden opportunity. Gehazi regarded Naaman as le-

gitimate prey, as a bird to be plucked. Contemptuously, he refers to him as “*this* Syrian.” There was no pity for the one who had been such a sufferer, and no thankfulness that God had healed him. He was determined to make capital out of the situation: “I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.” His awful sin was deliberately premeditated. What was worse, he made use of an impious oath: “*as* the LORD liveth, I will run after him.” There was no fear of God before his eyes: instead, he defiantly took His holy name in vain.

“So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw *him* running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is* all well?” (2Ki 5:21). It is solemn to observe that God put no hindrance in the ways of him who had devised evil. He could have moved Naaman to quicken his pace and so out-distance Gehazi. But He did not: an indication that He had given him up to his heart’s lusts. It is ever a signal mark of Divine mercy when the Lord deigns to interfere with our plans and thwart our carnal designs. When we purpose doing anything wrong and a providential obstacle blocks us, it is a sign that God has not yet abandoned us to our madness. The graciousness of Naaman in alighting from his chariot and the question he asked gave further evidence of the change, which had been wrought in him.

Fourth, its *aggravation*. “And he said, All *is* well. My master hath sent me saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments” (2Ki 5:22). Here we see the wicked Gehazi adding sin to sin, thereby treasuring up to himself “wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5). First, his greedy heart cherished a covetous desire, then he deliberately and eagerly (as his “running” shows) proceeded to realise the same, and now he resorts to falsehoods. Liars can tell a plausible tale, especially when asking for charity. The thievish knave pretended it was not for himself, but for others in need that he was seeking relief—ever a favourite device employed by the unscrupulous when seeking to take advantage of unwary victims. Worse still, he compromised his master by saying *he* had sent him. To what fearful lengths will a covetous heart carry its subjects!

“And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid *them* upon two of his servants; and they bare *them* before him” (2Ki 5:23). Naaman was quite unsuspecting. He not only complied with Gehazi’s request, but gave him more than he asked for. After the prophet’s firm and repeated refusals to accept ought at his hands, he should have been more on his guard. There is a warning here for us to beware of crediting every beggar we encounter, even though he be a religious one. There have ever been religious leeches who consider the righteous are legitimate prey for them to fatten upon. Whilst it is a Christian duty to relieve the genuinely poor, and there are few such today, yet we are not to encourage idleness, nor suffer ourselves to be deceived by those with a smooth tongue: *investigate* their case.

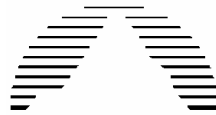
“And when he came to the tower he took *them* from their hand and bestowed *them* in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed” (2Ki 5:24). He took pains to carefully conceal his ill-gotten gains in a “secret place” (margin), no doubt congratulating himself of his shrewdness—reminding us of the hiding themselves of our first parents (Gen 3:8) and of Achan (Jos 7:21). “But he went in, and stood before his master” (2Ki 5:25). Pretending to be a faithful and dutiful servant, he now appeared before Elisha to await his orders—the most untruthful and dishonest often assume a pious pose in the company of the saints! “And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” An opportunity was thus given him to confess his sins, but instead of so doing, he added lie to lie: “And he said, Thy servant went no whither.” There was no repentance, but a daring brazening of it out.

Fifth, its *justice*. “And he said unto him, Went not mine heart *with thee* when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it* a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white as snow*” (2Ki 5:26, 27). Though Christians are not endowed with the extraordinary powers of the prophets, yet if they be truly walking with God, they will discern a liar when he confronts them (1Co 2:15). Elisha put his finger on the worst feature of the offence, “*Is it* a time to receive money”! and thus, sully God’s free grace. From the words that follow, Elisha indicated that he knew how Gehazi designed to use the money—intending to leave his service and set up as a farmer. His punishment was a condign one: he had coveted something of Naaman’s—he should have that which would henceforth symbolically portray the polluted state of his soul.

Sixth, its *significance*. Space obliges us to abbreviate. That Gehazi fully deserved the frightful punishment which was visited upon him, and that the form it took was a case of what is termed ‘poetic justice’

will be evident to every spiritual mind: nevertheless, there was a severity of dealing with him which is more noticeable than in other cases. Nor is the reason far to seek. God was incensed at his having so grievously compromised the display of His free grace. The Lord is very jealous of His types. Observe how He moved Joseph to restore the money to the sacks of his brethren when they came to obtain food from Egypt (Gen 42:25): because he was there foreshadowing Christ as the Bread of life—given to us “without money and without price” (Isa 55:1). The failure of Moses was far more than a losing of his temper: it was a marring of a blessed type. Note “smite the rock” in Exodus 17:6, but only “*speak*” to it in Numbers 20:8—Christ was to be “smitten” (Isa 53:4) but once! As Moses suffered premature death for his fault, so Gehazi was smitten with leprosy for his.

Seventh, its *lessons*. We can but mention three. First, there is a sharply-pointed example here of the bitter fruits borne by the nourishing of a covetous spirit, and a fearful exemplification of that word, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1Tim 6:10). How we need to pray, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity (Psa 119:37). Second, there is a most solemn warning against putting a stumbling block in the way of a babe in Christ. Naaman had only recently come to know Jehovah as “the God of all grace” and that was another reason why He dealt so severely with Gehazi, *see* Matthew 18:6! Third, there is a searching test for those of us who are engaged exclusively in God’s service, though delivered from the love of money, we may *seek* the good opinion and praise of men.—A.W.P.



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THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

4. *Its Author*

This doctrine of Reconciliation presents to our view that which is both indescribably horrible, and also, that which is inexpressibly blessed. The background of it is formed by the fearful calamity of Eden, when the entrance of sin into the world involved the ruination of our race and its alienation from God. The sin of Adam (and of ours in him) was a revolt against God's authority, a contempt of His government, a declaration of war against Him. Man is a rebel, an outlaw, an enemy of God, cut off from access to Him. This has already been before us in previous articles. Now we turn to contemplate the blessed contrast wherein God determined to deliver a part of Adam's descendants from the effects of the fall, and this in such a way that His absolute sovereignty, His free grace, His inexorable justice, unsearchable wisdom, ineffable holiness, all-mighty power, infinite goodness and rich mercy, might be equally honoured. This is actually accomplished in the saving of His elect by Jesus Christ.

The Author of reconciliation is God. More distinctly, it is God the Father, for there is an *order* of the Divine Persons in this work, as in all others. "But to us there is but one God, the Father, *of* whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ [the alone Mediator] *by* whom are all things, and we by him" (1Co 8:6). "God [the Father], who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:9): as that was the order of their operation in connection with the old creation, so it is with regard to the new creation—the Father has effected reconciliation by the death of His Son (Rom 5:10). Distinct offices are ascribed to each of the Eternal Three. The Father is the Deviser, the Son transacts the part of Mediator, being the One by whom the work of reconciliation is performed; the Holy Spirit is the Recorder of the Father's plan, and of the satisfaction offered by the Son and of the peace He has made, and is also the One who sheds abroad Their love in the hearts of the redeemed.

The order pointed out above is still more observable in connection with our approach to God: it is *through* Christ and *by* the Holy Spirit that we have access *unto* the Father (Eph 2:18). All the spiritual blessings we have in Christ are expressly attributed unto the Father (Eph 1:3), by no means the least of which is reconciliation. Our election is ascribed particularly unto the Father (Eph 1:3, 4) and so is our regeneration (Jam 1:17, 18). It is the Father who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, having delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13). In accord with this Divine order, we find the opening salutation in the Epistles is, "Grace unto you and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Hence the Father is due the same honour and love from us for the sending of His Son, as the Son is for His willingness in being sent. Scripture represents the Father as the One directly wronged by sin, for we are told that Jesus Christ is "an Advocate with the Father" (1Jo 2:1).

1. *His will.* When accountable creatures rebel against their Maker and King, they cut themselves off from all right to claim any blessing or benefit at His hands, for they deserve nothing from Him but wrath and punishment. If they be recovered from the ruin which they have brought upon themselves, and are made partakers of Divine salvation, it is solely from the good pleasure of His will, and must be in a way that does not injure any of His perfections; but if they be left to suffer the direful consequences of their apostasy, God is in no wise unjust, for He inflicts no more upon them than they deserve. When a large company of the angels and their chiefs, under Satan's lead, conspired against the Most High, proudly aspiring to a higher position than had been allotted them, God promptly cast them down from their exalted estate, banished them from His presence, and doomed them to suffer everlasting woe (2Pe 2:4). He had not a thought of mercy toward those celestial creatures when they revolted against Him.

In view of that unspeakably solemn example, it ought to be unmistakeably clear to each of us that God might, without the slightest stain upon His own honour, without any unbecoming severity, have left the whole of Adam's guilty race to suffer eternal destruction, for certainly they had no more clarity upon His favour than had the fallen angels. That He did not immediately consign the entire family of fallen mankind to irremediable woe, was due alone to His imperial will: that He was pleased to appoint a remnant of them to obtain salvation and eternal glory, is to be attributed solely to His sovereign and amazing grace. That such a concept is no invention of harsh theologians: but is plainly taught in the Word of God, is clear from His own declarations, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph 1:5, 6); "Who hath

saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace." (2Ti 1:9).

"Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself" (Eph 1:9). The "mystery" refers to "the everlasting covenant" in which God arranged and provided for the recovery and salvation of His people who fell in Adam. In proof of which assertion, we cite 1 Corinthians 2:7: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory," amplified in 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10. Now that which is germane to our present design is, that God "purposed in Himself" or resolved to reconcile some of the sons of men to Himself, even though they had become guilty rebels against Him, and this purpose He purposed "before the world began" (2Ti 1:9). One portion or aspect of that purpose is expressly stated in what immediately follows: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times [this Christian era] He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, *even* in Him" (Eph 1:10). Sin alienates and separates, but the putting away of sin by Christ healed the breach between God and man, between believing Jews and Gentiles, and between them and the holy angels. *Now* "the whole family in heaven and in earth (Eph 3:15) is one—see Revelation 5:11, 12.

The restoration and reconciliation of His guilty and alienated people is attributed to God's "good pleasure," whereof no reason is given save that He "purposed [it] in Himself"—which means that the idea was suggested by none other, and that no external motive influenced Him. There was necessity put upon Him for this resolution: without the least dishonour to Himself, He might have destroyed the entire apostate race, yea, and have been glorified in their destruction. He who was able out of stones "to raise up children unto Abraham" (Mat 3:9), could have consigned Adam and Eve to eternal woe before they produced any children, and have made a new pair from the dust of the ground. There was nothing whatever in the creature that moved God to show mercy unto him. But there is another concept conveyed by this expression—namely, the certainty and powerful efficacy of what He has decided upon, God cannot possibly be disappointed in the accomplishment of His purpose, for none can overthrow it; nor will He ever alter it. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa 46:10); "For I am the Lord, I change not (Mal 3:6).

Here is sure and solid comfort for the spiritually-awakened sinner. That simple fact that God is merciful in His nature is not sufficient: Satan knows *that*, but such knowledge affords him no peace! But the Divine assurance *will* "shew mercy" (Exo 33:19) opens a real door of hope. Suppose that Christ had died, and there had been no Gospel revelation and proclamation of the Divine purpose of His death? The mere knowledge of His crucifixion avails me nothing, unless I am assured that it was the will of God to accept Christ's death in lieu of the death of believing sinners: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*" (Heb 10:10). The "will" of God is not only the foundation of the "mystery" or plan of redemption, but it is also its *blessedness*. This is the very pith and preciousness of the Gospel: that it is the revealed will of God to save and accept every sinner who puts his or her trust in the atoning blood of Christ. "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from [the corruption and doom of] this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal 1:4).

2. *His love*. A few may be surprised that we should distinguish between the will and love of God, but probably a far greater number will wonder why any explanation should be required from us for so doing. Yet John Owen in his "Arguments against Universal Redemption" (chapter 8, paragraph 5) said, "The eternal love of God towards His elect is nothing but His purpose and good pleasure—a pure act of His will, whereby He determines to do such and such things for them in His own time and way." And again, in his "Vindiciae Evangelicae" (chapter 29), after referring to John 3:16 and other passages, "Now the love of God is an eternal free act of His will, His purpose." Such a cold and bare definition may suit philosophers and metaphysicians, but it will scarcely appeal to the hearts of the regenerate. When Scripture affirms that Christ is the "Son of His love" (Col 1:13, see margin), we are surely to understand something more than that the Son is merely the Object on which the Divine will is set. Rather do we believe, with many others, that the Son is the Darling of the Father's heart. How, too, are we to understand the Saviour's representation of the Father in His welcome of the returning prodigal: He "ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luk 15:20)!

While we are far from believing that God's unfathomable love in anywise resembles ours, as an emotion or passion, subject to fluctuation, yet we refuse to regard it as a mere principle. When the voice of the Father audibly declared, "this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," He gave expression to the language of deep and warm affection. When the Lord Jesus affirmed, "The only-begotten Son (a term of

endearment) which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (Joh 1:18), we grant that He employed an anthropomorphism (ascribing to God what pertains properly to man); nevertheless, we cannot allow that it was a mere figure of speech devoid of real meaning. "God *is* love" (1Jo 4:8), and no refinements of the most eminent theologians must be suffered to rob us of the blessedness and preciousness of that fundamental truth. All things issue from the will of God (Eph 1:11), but Scripture nowhere tells us that all things proceed from God's love. The non-elect are the subjects of His will, but they are not the objects of His love. Thus there is a clear distinction between the two things.

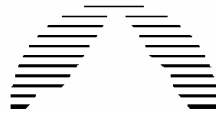
We greatly prefer the statement of Thomas Goodwin. Near the beginning of his massive work on "Christ the Mediator," he shows what was done by God the Father from all eternity in connection with our salvation. First, He points out His eternal purpose and grace, and then enquires, "If you would further know, What should be the reason of this strange *affection* in our God (i.e. exercised unto those who had rebelled against Him): why the Scripture gives it: our God being *love*, even love itself." Love is an essential perfection in God's very nature, and as it has pleased Him, to exercise the same unto His elect. It is an act of His will, yet not of His will absolutely considered, but of "the good pleasure of His will" toward them. All the acts of God unto His people in Christ, all the blessings which He has bestowed upon them in Christ, all His thoughts concerning them, all the operations of His grace in them, and the workings of His providence for them, all the manifestations of His kindness and mercy unto them, proceed from His *love* for them. Love is the fountain from which flows every stream of His goodness unto them.

The wondrous love of God for His people can only be known by its blessed manifestations toward them. As the effects which it produces discovers to us the nature of the cause which produces them, so the love which God bears unto His elect is revealed by His acts unto them and bestowments upon them. God's love for us does not commence when we first respond to His gracious overtures unto us through the Gospel, nor even when He capacitates us to respond by first quickening us into newness of life, for His very calling of us out of darkness into His own marvellous light proceeds from His love for us. Nor did God's love for the Church begin when Christ died for her and put away her sins, for it was because God so loved her that He gave up His beloved Son to die in her room and stead. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3) is God's own ringing declaration. Therefore it was in love that He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself" (Eph 1: 4, 5), which is the foundation of all our blessings. Nor did our fall in Adam produce the slightest change of God's love unto His elect.

Though our sin in Eden did not quench God's love for His people, nor even chill it to the slightest degree, yet that horrible disobedience of theirs raised such formidable obstacles from the holiness of His nature and the righteousness of His government, yea opposed such a barrier against us as appeared to all finite intelligences an insuperable one to prevent the exercise of God's compassion unto His guilty and corrupted people. In a word, the Law of God with its inexorable demand for satisfaction, seemed to effectually prevent the operation and manifestation of His love toward its transgressors. Consider carefully an example on the human plane. Darius was induced to sign a decree that if any person asked a petition during the next thirty days from any save himself, he should forfeit his life (Dan 6). Daniel himself defied that decree, making supplication of his God as aforetime. His watchful enemies promptly reported this to the king and demanded that Daniel should be cast into the den of lions. Darius was displeased with himself "and *set* his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him" (Dan 6:14). But in vain: the honour of his law barred the outflow of his love; justice triumphed over mercy.

Consider still another case. Absalom committed a grievous offence against his father, for he sought to rob him of his sceptre and wrest the kingdom from his hands, and furthermore, murdered another of his sons. His attempt to gain the kingdom failed, and he fled the country, and remained an exile for three years. David mourned for his son every day and "longed to go forth unto Absalom" (2Sa 13:39), but the honour of his throne clearly prohibited such an action. When Joab perceived "that the king's heart *was* toward Absalom" (2Sa 14:1) and that he knew not how to make an advance toward him without disgracing his character and government, he decided to further his own plans. Accordingly, the unscrupulous Joab resorted to guile and employed a woman to speak to David, pleading that Absalom's crime might be pardoned, his attainder reversed, and be released from banishment. Strangely enough, she reminded the king that God "*doth* He *devise means*, that His banished be not expelled from Him" (2Sa 14:14). But such a task of restoring his son without sullyng his own honour was quite beyond David. The best he could devise was, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face" (2Sa 14:24).

3. *His wisdom.* Where the wit of Darius completely failed before the requirements of human law, the wisdom of God gloriously triumphed over the obstacles interposed by the Divine Law. Where the wit of David could contrive nothing better than a wretched compromise, for which he later paid dearly, the omniscience of Deity found a way whereby His banished sons are restored and which redounds unto His everlasting honour. In pursuance of His gracious design to recover and reconcile His elect from their fall and alienation, the love of God set His consummate wisdom to work in contriving the fittest means for accomplishing the same. Hence, it is that we read in connection with God's grand purpose concerning our salvation, that He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). "He works all by counsel to effect and bring to pass what His will is pitched upon, and the stronger His will is in a thing, the deeper are His counsels as to it" (Thomas Goodwin). —AWP



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SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

4c. Its Nature

In our last we sought to show the principles from which spiritual growth issues and the main lines along which Christian progress advances, pointing out that spiritual growth is the development of the spiritual life communicated at regeneration. In this, we shall proceed from the general to the particular, seeking to set out in some detail what that development actually consists of.

1. Spiritual growth consists of an increase in spiritual knowledge.

God works in us as rational creatures, according to our intelligent nature, so that nothing is wrought in us unless knowledge paves the way. We cannot speak a language, unless we have some understanding of the same. We cannot do work with an implement or machine, nor play on a musical instrument, until we have a knowledge of them. The same obtains in connection with spiritual things. We cannot worship intelligently or acceptably an unknown God. He must first reveal Himself and be known by us, for we could not love or trust One with whom we had no acquaintance. Therefore, does God's Word declare, "They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee" (Psa 9:10). It cannot be otherwise: once God is revealed to us as living reality, the heart at once confides itself to Him, as being infinitely worthy of its fullest reliance and dependence. It is spiritual ignorance of God, which lies at the foundation of all our distrust of Him, and therefore, of all our doubts and fears: "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace" (Job 22:21).

The Christian life begins in knowledge, for "the new *man* is renewed in knowledge" (Col 3:10). "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (Joh 17:3). There has been much difference of opinion among commentators as to the scope of those words. When we wrote thereon some twenty years ago, we adopted the view of the majority of Christian writers, namely, a declaration of the way and means by which eternal life is obtained: just as the words that follow "this is the condemnation" in John 3:19 do not define the character of that condemnation, but rather tell us the *cause* of it. While we still believe in the legitimacy and soundness of the interpretation we gave formerly, yet mature reflection would not restrict the meaning of John 17:3 to that explanation, but would also understand it to signify that "eternal life" (of which we now have, but the promise and earnest) or everlasting bliss and glory will consist of an ever-increasing knowledge of the Triune God, as revealed in the person of the Mediator.

This knowledge does not consist in theological thoughts or metaphysical speculations about the God-head, but in such a spiritual understanding of Him as causes us to believe in the Lord God, to cast our souls upon Him, and be centered in Him as our everlasting Portion. "The renewed understanding is raised up and enlightened with a supernatural life, so that what we know of the Lord is by intuitive knowledge, which the Holy Spirit is most graciously pleased to give. Hence, believers are said to be called out of darkness into marvellous light, and Paul says, 'ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' As the knowledge of the Father, Son and Spirit, is reflected upon the renewed mind in the person of Christ, so it is received into the heart" (S. E. Pierce). This spiritual apprehension of God is such as no outward means can of themselves convey: no not even the reading of the Word or hearing it preached. In addition thereto, God by His own light and power conveys to the human spirit such an effectual discovery of Himself as radically affects the understanding, conscience, affections and will, reforming the life.

As the Christian life begins in spiritual knowledge, so it is increased thereby: "But grow in grace and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18), upon which we quote again from the excellent Pierce, "I conceive that by *grace* here all those faculties, graces, habits and dispositions, which are wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, are to be understood. And to have our spiritual faculties, graces, habits and dispositions exercised distinctively and supernaturally on their proper objects and subjects *is* to 'grow in grace.' What follows in the text is explanatory: 'and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' He is the Object on which all our graces are to be exercised. He is the life of all our graces. Therefore, growing into a greater knowledge of Him, and the Father's love in Him, is to 'grow in grace,' for hereby all our graces are quickened, strengthened, exercised and drawn forth to the praise of God." While we do not think that exhausts the meaning of 2 Peter 3:18, yet such an interpretation is borne out by the second verse of the epistle: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you *through* the knowledge of God, and of

Jesus our Lord"—not by the knowledge of God alone, nor of the Lord Jesus alone, but of God in Christ the Mediator, which is also the force of John 17:3.

One of the ways by which we may ascertain what spiritual growth consist of is by attending to the recorded prayers of the apostles, and noting what it was they made request for. Being very eminent themselves in grace and holiness, it was their earnest desire that the churches and particular individuals to whom their epistles were addressed, might increase and greatly flourish in those Divine bestowments. Accordingly, in his prayer for the Ephesians, we find Paul petitioning that the Father of glory would give unto them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened that they might know what is the hope of His calling (Eph 1:17, 18). It should be obvious that in asking for successful favours for those saints, there was no implication that they were entirely devoid of them, or that he sought the initial bestowment of them—any more than John 20:31 signifies the Fourth Gospel was addressed to unbelievers (Eph 1:16 proves otherwise), or that his first Epistle was sent to Christians lacking in assurance: rather does 1 John 5:13 connote "that ye may have a clearer and fuller knowledge that eternal life is yours."

No, in making those petitions on behalf of the Ephesian saints, Paul requested that a larger degree of heavenly light might be furnished unto their minds, that they might have a more spiritual apprehension of the One with whom they had to do, of His wondrous perfections according to the revelation He has made of Himself in the Word, and of his varied relationships to them. It was that they might discern the wonders of His grace and power toward, in, and for them. It was that they might have an enlarged conception and perception of their vivification when they were in a state of death in sin. In like manner, he prayed that the love of the Philippian saints might "abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment" (Phi 1:9). So for the Colossians, that they might be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10), which is to be taken in its fullest sense: increasing in the knowledge of God in the manifestation He has made of Himself in creation, in providence, in grace; the knowledge of God in His three Persons, in His Christ the Mediator, in His Law, in His Gospel; in the knowledge of His holy will.

This knowledge of God, which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate, which the apostle solicited on behalf of his converts, and which is the basic element in all real Christian progress, is something vastly different from and superior to the mere possession of a correct opinion about God or any speculative view concerning Him. It is a supernatural and saving knowledge. A merely theoretical knowledge of God is inoperative and ineffectual, but an experimental acquaintance with Him is dynamical and transforming. It is a knowledge, which deeply affects the heart, producing reverential awe, for "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Pro 9:10). It is such a knowledge as strengthens the Christian's graces and calls them forth into lively exercise. Since that Divine light and power is communicated to the saint by the Spirit through the Scriptures, it causes him to search and ponder them as he never did previously, and to mix faith with what he reads and takes in. It is such a knowledge as promotes holiness in the heart and piety in the life. It is a knowledge which produces obedience to the Divine commandments, as 1 John 2:3, 4 plainly teaches. Yet there can be no such knowledge of God except as He is apprehended through Christ (2Co 4:6).

Such a knowledge of God lies at the foundation of every thing else in the spiritual life, being both essential and introductory. Without such a knowledge of God, we cannot know ourselves, how to order our lives in this world, nor what awaits us in the world to come: until made acquainted with Him who is light (1Jo 1:5), we are in complete darkness. Calvin evinced the profundity of his spiritual insight by commencing his renowned "Institutes" in saying, "True and substantial wisdom primarily consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves." Without a spiritual and personal knowledge of God, we cannot perceive the infinite evil of sin and the fearful havoc it has wrought in us: it is only in His light that we "see light" (Psa 36:9) and discover the horribleness and totality of our depravity. Then it is that we both behold and feel ourselves to be just as God has described us in His Word. Equally so it is only by such a knowledge of God that we can appreciate the Divinely-provided remedy: either in discovering wherein it consists or realising our dire need of the same. "The way of the wicked *is* as darkness" (Pro 4:19).

From all that has been pointed out above, we may see how completely dependent the Christian is upon God: no spiritual progress is possible, except as He continues to shine upon us. Neither a powerful intellect, the artificial aids of philosophy, nor a thorough training in logic, can contribute one iota unto a spiritual apprehension of Divine things. True, they are of use in enabling the teacher to discourse thereon, to express himself more readily and fluently than the illiterate, but as to discovering to him Divine truth, they are of no

value whatever. The reason of this is evident: celestial things are high above the reach of carnal reason, and therefore, it can never attain unto an acquaintance with their true nature. Heavenly grace is required for an entrance into heavenly things, and the meanest capacity is as susceptible to heavenly grace as the most capacious mind. Moreover, the things of God are addressed to *faith*, and that is a grace of which the unregenerate, be he the most accomplished savant, is utterly devoid. Divine mysteries are hidden from the naturally wise and prudent, but they are supernaturally revealed to spiritual babes (Mat 11:25)—revealed by the Holy Spirit through a Divinely-imparted faith.

An uneducated Christian may not be able to enter into the subtle niceties of theological metaphysics, he may not be competent to debate the Truth with ingenious objectors, but he is capable of understanding the character and perfections of God, the person and work of Christ, the mysteries and wonders of redemption, so as to obtain such a gracious view thereof as to excite in his mind a holy adoration of the Father and a love for and joy in the Redeemer. And such a knowledge, and that alone, will stand us in stead in a time of trial, the hour of temptation, or the article of death. Yet it is only as the Holy Spirit is pleased to give fresh light and life to the believer's mind by bringing home anew by His own unction and efficacy, what is already known, that he can increase in the spiritual knowledge thereof. What God has revealed in His Word must be applied again and again by the Spirit if it is to be operative in us and bear fruit through us. The believer is as much dependent upon God for an increase of spiritual knowledge as he was for the first reception of it, and constantly does he need to bear in mind that humbling word, "without Me ye can do nothing" (Joh 15:5).

If we added nothing to the last paragraph, we should present a most unbalanced view of this point, conveying the impression that we had no responsibility in the matter. As there is a radical difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, so there is between our first spiritual knowledge of God and our increase in the same. "But grow in grace and *in* the knowledge of Our Lord" (2Pe 3:18) is a Divine exhortation, intimating both our privilege and our duty. We are required to make a diligent use of the means God has provided, for He places no premium on slothfulness. Though we are dependent upon the Spirit to apply the Truth to us, yet that does not signify it will make no difference whether or not we keep the things of God fresh in our minds by daily meditation upon them. Only God can bring His Word home to our hearts in living power, nevertheless we must pray, "quicken Thou me according to Thy Word" (Psa 119:25). Moreover, it is our obligation to abstain from whatever would grieve the Spirit and thereby weaken the assurance, which enables us to say "*my* Father" and "*my* Redeemer." If we increase not in the knowledge of God, the fault is ours.

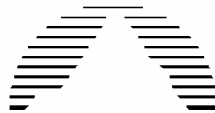
2. *Spiritual growth consists of a deeper delight in spiritual things and objects.*

This is ever the accompaniment and effect of spiritual knowledge—affording us another criterion by which we may test the kind of knowledge we have. A merely speculative knowledge of Divine things is cold and lifeless, but a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with them affects the heart and moves the affections. One may accept much of God's Word (through early training) in a traditional way, and even be prepared to contend for the same against those who oppose it, yet it will avail nothing when the Devil assails him. Hence, we are told that when the Wicked one is revealed, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and living wonders, God permits him to work "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish," and His reason for this is stated to be: "because they received not *the love of* the Truth that they might be saved" (2Th 2:10). At best, they had only a letter acquaintance with the Truth: it was never enshrined in their affections. But different far is it with the regenerate: each of them can say with the Psalmist, "O how love I Thy Law! it *is* my meditation all the day" (Psa 119:97).

Spiritual delight necessarily follows spiritual knowledge, for an object cannot be appreciated any further than it is apprehended and known. Spiritual knowledge of spiritual things imparts not only a conviction of their verity and a certainty of their reality, but it also produces the soul's adherence to them, the cleaving of the affections unto them, a holy joy in them, so that they appear inexpressibly blessed and glorious unto those granted a discovery of the same. But not having been admitted into the secret thereof, the unregenerate can form no true concept or estimate of the Christian's experience, and when he hears him exclaiming of the things of God, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psa 19:10), he can but regard such language as wild enthusiasm or fanaticism. The natural man lacks both the power to discern the beauty of spiritual things and a palate to taste their sweetness. Nor is the believer's relish for God's Word confined unto the promises and comforting portions: he also declares, "I will delight myself in Thy *commandments*, which I have loved" (Psa 119:47).

The more the believer advances in a spiritual acquaintance with the excellency and beauty of heavenly things, the more solid satisfaction do they afford his mind. The more the Christian enters into the importance and value of God's eternal Truth, the more his heart is drawn out unto the glorious objects revealed therein. The more he actually tastes that the Lord is gracious (1Pe 2:3), the more will he delight himself in Him. The more light he is granted upon the sublime mysteries of the Faith, the more will he admire the wondrous wisdom which devised them, the power which executed them, the grace which conveyed them. The more he realises the Scriptures are the very Word of God Himself, the more he is awed by their solemnity and impressed with their weightiness. The more the ineffable perfections of Deity are revealed to his spirit, the more will he exclaim, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods [or "mighty ones"]? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exo 15:11). And the more his heart is occupied with the person, the office, and the work of the Redeemer, the more will he enter into the experience of him who said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phi 3:7, 8).

It is true that, through slackness and folly, the believer may to a considerable extent lose his relish for spiritual things, so that his reading of the Word affords him little satisfaction and delight. One who eats and drinks unwise upsets his stomach, and then the palate no longer finds the choicest food agreeable to him. It is thus spiritually. If the believer be out of communion with God and turns to the world for satisfaction, he loses his appetite for the heavenly manna. Wherefore we are bidden to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word" (Jam 1:21), there must be this "laying apart" before there can be an appreciative reception of the Word. So again, 1 Peter 2:1 shows us there are certain lusts which have to be mortified if we are to "as newborn babes, *desire* the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:2). If such exhortations be duly heeded, and the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, then shall we be found "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16) with an ever-deepening joy in Him. —AWP



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WELCOME TIDINGS

The time has again come round when, according to our custom for many years past, we seek to give some account of our stewardship unto those who send us gifts to be used in this written ministry, and to encourage our prayer helpers to continue their support at the Throne of Grace. Their supplication have not been in vain, and as we survey the pile of appreciative letters before us, we can but exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" (Num 23:23), for certain none but *He* could multiply our poor loaves and fishes in such a day as this. It is good to recognise His hand as it works in providence; it is still better when our hearts are duly affected thereby, and we are brought to bow before Him in wonderment and worship. More words of cheer have been received than formerly, and we can but make a brief selection here and there.

"I read with trembling heart your treatment of Matthew 7:21-23. I do not at all think that you are too exacting or severe: you could not be faithful were you less so. I feel so much the hypocrisy of my soul that I need continual such warnings" (*Victoria*).

"Thank you for the valuable Biblical expositions in your paper, which have been very helpful to me personally and to the members of the 'Bible Study Class'" (*New South Wales*).

"We have received great help and blessing from the Studies, and I give the Lord all the glory and thank and pray daily for you both that He will bless and keep you" (*South Australia*).

"I am again grateful for the Studies which have come to hand satisfactorily. They are particularly searching and for that reason most profitable" (*New Zealand*).

"I look upon it as a special favour shown me from the Most High that ever the Studies came into my hands, and that I am still receiving them. I hope you will long be able to send forth the good Seed, and that it may bring forth fruit to the glory of God, and that in ministering to others, you may be blessed" (*New Zealand*).

"Only eternity will reveal what Studies have meant to me. They have strengthened my faith and been a real spiritual blessing during the past years of fellowship with you in the deep things of God. So many times I find I am savourless salt and a cumberer of the ground, and then sitting with you at the feet of our Lord, my heart is encouraged as you lead me on to know Him and to rejoice in God my Saviour" (*Canada*).

"I always look forward for the Studies to arrive: they are a source of great comfort and consolation to me in this barren wilderness. How sad that so few in this day appreciate anything of this nature" (*Canada*).

"It is a very precious magazine to me, and has been so helpful in many ways. In a day of such confusion it is good to hear a voice proclaiming what *the Lord* says" (*Canada*).

"I wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks to God for the blessings received through your written ministry. It has not only helped me in my preaching, but especially so in my own personal life. How thankful I am that you have been led to deal with the practical side of the Scriptures. In no one else's works that I have ever read am I so exercised and probed by the Word as by yours" (*U.S. Pastor*).

"We are grateful to Almighty God for sparing you thus far to carry on the work of the Studies" (*Canadian Pastor*).

"The Lord bless your witness. It is greatly needed: but it cannot fail of His blessing" (*English Pastor*).

"Again I write to thank you for your Studies, which are most valuable as expositions of God's Word, and most helpful spiritually. They are strong meat, which is a vital need in these days" (*English Rector*).

"Your Studies in the Scriptures have been blessed greatly to my soul, and through my dark days have been a great comfort to me. So do not think it amiss for you, as God's servant, to know that many a refreshing drink has been received through the furtherance of God's Word by your labours" (*Helpless shut-in*).

"Your Studies come to me regular. I receive much help in reading them. I used to think old age was a time of rest and freedom from temptations and trials. I now find my mistake: I am in the furnace of afflictions as much as I ever was. God shows me where I am, and I am so glad He does. I have no fault to find: His goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life" (*Very aged Pilgrim*).

"We have enjoyed every article and especially those on the Sermon on the Mount, which have been very instructive as well as searching, and they must be if we are to get any real benefit from them. In these trying times, one needs messages that *lead* to heart searching and deeper piety" (*California*).

"We are indeed thankful to Him that by His enabling grace, you were able to complete, and to read, yet another year of the Studies. They have provided, as always, most of the spiritual food and drink outside of the Word itself. Not only do we ourselves owe much to the Studies, but delight in seeing others to whom we have introduced it grow in the knowledge of Him" (*Pennsylvania*).

"I can't tell you how much some of the articles, I think I might say, most of them, have meant to me. They have been a source of strengthening, refreshing and reviving in the midst of these distressing times. What a mercy to have our minds directed to One above and beyond it all, and our affections centered upon Him who controls all. Surely He is worthy of our highest praise" (*North Carolina*).

"The ever blessed things set forth in the Studies are the choicest things I get. Your comments on 'Dagon Destroyed' speak my mind exactly. May God's good blessings continue with you and direct you in the fullness of His will" (*Montana*).

"The Studies have again been of great benefit to my soul. The series on the Sermon on the Mount have been especially illuminating, very searching; and I hope that after I have applied them to my own heart and mastered them in some degree, to be able to give them to the believers here" (*San Salvador*).

"I want to thank you for sending me 'Studies in the Scriptures,' which I have received at irregular intervals during the past year. They have been very helpful to me. I was particularly edified by the balance of truth in the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. I had the privilege of introducing my friend—to the magazine and I know he, too, rejoiced in the sound teaching contained therein" (*One in the Middle East Forces*).

"Long may you both be spared to carry on with the publication of the Studies: they bring comfort to many a starved heart" (*Scotland*).

"I feel the Studies humble me and trust they will prove a blessing. They always give a sense of the greatness and holiness of God" (*Scotland*).

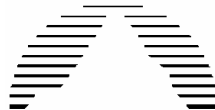
"Thanks for the magazines. I never but feel refreshed reading them. How very thankful we should be in the midst of a dark generation that such is written and studied in our day" (*Scotland*).

"I find the articles as profitable as at any time during the last sixteen years, and take it as an outstanding mercy of God that such help is afforded to His people in such dark days as these. I thank you personally for your 'labour of love,' and may God's blessing rest upon you and the magazine" (*Itinerant preacher*).

"You are enabled to go deep into the subjects, and they search me very much; in fact, I have to leave off sometimes to pray. I feel that I come very short of being what I should be. But what a blessing to have a Throne of Grace to go to!" (*England*).

"Your magazines come like a breath from another world" (*New reader*).

"I thank our God that both you and your dear wife have been enabled to carry on this great work for another year: may you be spared, strengthened and guided to continue this ministry for many years. I say this sincerely my dear Christian friend: your writings are most stimulating, your solemn warnings and frequent spurs are also just the kind of spiritual medicine one needs to continually take lest we neglect and come short" (*England*).



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