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STUDIES

IN THE

SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

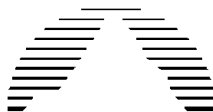
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE CHRISTIAN INLOOK

There are those who teach that the Christian should never look within, but instead, be constantly occupied with Christ. To the superficial, that may sound very spiritual, yet in reality, it is most absurd and certainly will not stand the test of Holy Writ. To declare that I must never look within is only another way of telling me that I must never *examine myself*. When I look in a mirror, I do not see *myself*, but merely my body: that body is but the house in which the real me dwells. That distinction is drawn by the Holy Spirit Himself in a passage, which at once, makes known to us the relative importance of attending to the outward or to the inner man. Bidding Christian wives to be winsome to their unbelieving husbands, He says, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be *the hidden man of the heart*, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1Pe 3:1-4).

With rare exceptions, it will be found that those men and women who spend so much money and devote so much time to their clothes and personal appearance are very empty-headed—like some shops which make a big display in their windows, but have little on their shelves. The same holds good religiously and spiritually. The Pharisees were most punctilious in seeing to it that their hands were clean from ceremonial defilement, yet within were "full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Mat 23:27). And in Christendom today, there are thousands of professors against whom little or nothing could be brought so far as their outward lives are concerned, but whose hearts are totally neglected and an abomination unto the eyes of the Holy One. To bring our external deportment into harmony with the revealed will of God is not sufficient. He holds us accountable for what goes on *inside*, and requires us to keep check upon the springs of our actions, the motives which inspire, and the principles which regulate us. "Behold [give attention], thou desirest truth in the *inward parts*" (Psa 51:6).

It is true that we are bidden to run the race set before us "looking unto Jesus" (Heb 12:1-2), yet that presents only one angle and aspect of our duty. We are also required to "commune with" our own hearts (Psa 4:4), to keep our hearts "with all diligence" (Pro 4:23). Christ has enjoined us, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your *hearts* be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and *cares* of this life" (Luk 21:34). Not look within!—how else can we make conscience of coldness of affection, the swellings of pride, the risings of rebellion, wandering thoughts while engaged in holy duties, evil imaginations which defile the mind? Not look within!—then how shall we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2Co 7:1), or even discover our need of such cleansing? Look within!—how then shall I be able to ascertain whether I possess that poverty of spirit, mourning for unholiness, meekness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and purity of heart, upon which the Saviour pronounces His benediction?

It is also true that the Christian needs to be on his guard against becoming too introspective. The secret of a sound and healthy spiritual life lies in preserving the balance between its subjective and objective sides. Salvation indeed comes to the soul by looking outside and away from one's self unto "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29). Yet the soul will not look unto Him until it has been made sensible of its depravity and lost condition: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Luk 5:31). And let it not be forgotten that salvation itself is both objective and subjective, for it consists not only of what Christ did *for* His people, but also of what He (by His Spirit) does *in* them; and in fact, the former can only be discovered by us personally through the latter. I have no evidence whatever of my justification apart from my regeneration and sanctification. The one who can say, "I am crucified with Christ" (judicially) can also add, "Christ liveth *in* me" (experimentally); and living by faith in Him is the proof that He "loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

The privilege and duty of the believer is, first, to look unto Christ without him and draw from His fullness; and second, to attend unto matters within so that his heart is a meet abode for Him. Thus, in the Song of Solomon, we find Him saying, "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse"—God's people collectively; and therefore, each of them individually; and then, He goes on to speak of the plants and fruits growing therein, which to Him are "pleasant" (Song 4:12-16). It is a figure of the regenerate soul, in contrast from that of the unregenerate, whose *heart* is likened unto a vineyard utterly neglected and "all grown over with thorns, and nettles" (Pro 24:30-31). Now, a garden needs much care and attention; and so does *the heart*, if Christ is to dwell in it by faith. Accordingly, we find the believer praying to the Spirit (under the figure of the wind—compare John 3:8) for His help: of the "north wind" to kill the pests, and of the "south" to ripen

the fruits. Then he invites his Beloved to “come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits” (Song 4:16)—an invitation to which He graciously responds (Song 5:1).

In the Song of Solomon 6:13, a further figure is employed: “What will ye see in the Shulamite? [the Spouse on earth]. As it were the company of two armies.” That is what the Christian sees as he looks within and searches himself, there are two opposing forces: Indwelling depravity and implanted holiness; native corruption and communicated grace; the flesh and the spirit; as weeds and flowers, pests and fruits, in the garden. At first, the believer is horrified and terrified by the strong predominance of the former, and is made to doubt whether a miracle of grace has been wrought within him. But if he apprehends what is so plainly taught in passages like Romans 7:15-25, Galatians 5:17, and Philippians 3:12-13, he will neither be surprised nor dismayed; and if he duly ponders such injunctions as Romans 12:16, 2 Corinthians 7:1, and Colossians 3:5, his duty will be clear. Self must be denied, the cross taken up, sin resisted, lusts mortified—as weeds must be pulled up (again and again!), pests fought—and the graces of the new man tended, nourished, and developed, if the garden of his heart is to be fit for an honoured Guest to be invited into and regaled.

This inward looking, this self-examination and self-discipline accomplish two chief ends: First, it *humbles* the believer into the dust before God—a most salutary experience and necessary daily, if pride and self-righteousness are to be subdued. As the believer makes an increasing discovery of the original corruptions of his soul, as he traces the subtle workings of sin, as he sees it defiling all his best efforts, he cannot but cry, “Unclean, unclean”! (Lev 13:45) and groan, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24). Second, it deepens his *assurance* and draws out his soul in praise. For as he looks into the mirror of God’s Word and sees himself both naturally and spiritually, as he compares each of his features with the portrait which the Spirit has drawn of both the sinner and the saint, he discovers his identity therewith. As he finds within himself a loathing of sin and self, a hunger and thirst after righteousness, pantings after God and conformity to Christ, he perceives these are what the Spirit has wrought in him; and as he traces the workings (feeble and spasmodic though they be) of faith, hope, love, meekness, perseverance, he learns that the root of the matter is within him, and he exclaims, “I thank God through Jesus Christ” (Rom 7:25).

Thus, as the Christian looks within, two principal things will be beheld. First, his *fallen nature*—and the more he examines it in the light of Scripture and by the enabling of the Spirit, the more will he perceive its vileness, recognise to what a fearful extent it influences his character and conduct, until he loathes himself and marvels that a holy God has not long since banished him to Hell. And my reader, if *you* are a stranger to such feelings or sentiments, then it is clear you are yet *dead* in trespasses and sins. Second, his *new nature*—and the more he examines his inner man in the light of Scripture and by the power of the Spirit, the more should he be assured that God has “begun a good work” (Phi 1:6) within him. The very fact that he perceives his corruptions and laments over them is proof that he is no longer dead in sin. The consciousness and evidence he has that there is now within that which causes him (though often unsuccessfully) to strive against sin and confess his failures to God; and that he sincerely desires and diligently endeavours to please God in all things is sure evidence that a principle of grace has been communicated to his soul.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

28. *Ephesians 3:14-21, Part 4*

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17). For one to dwell in the heart of another is the same thing as for that one to be the object of the intense affection of the other. For Christ to dwell in the heart is for Him to have the chief place in our thoughts and affections. Alas, how many other objects plead our notice, claim our attention, and absorb us? How spasmodically is faith occupied with its grand Object! This shows the urgent need we have for praying that we may be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, for the believer cannot put forth a single act of spiritual life, but by His agency. It is not sufficiently realised that the Christian is as wholly dependent upon the Spirit’s operations within him, as he is upon Christ’s work without him; that he has no more power of his own separate from the Spirit, than he has righteousness of his own apart from Christ. As then he looks outside of himself for the latter, so he must for the former. The Spirit alone gives us strength to act grace, grow in grace, and bring forth the fruits of grace: “For thou also hast wrought all our works in us” (Isa 26:12).

As the Spirit graciously renews the soul of the saint, his heart is drawn out afresh unto Christ, and he exercises faith upon Him; and as his thoughts are occupied with Him, Christ obtains an *objective* entrance into his heart. He is received by us as our Lord and Saviour, welcomed as the Sovereign of all our affections and actions, the Source of all our holiness and joy. If we have been sorely wounded by sin, we welcome Him as our Physician to heal, for if faith be in exercise, instead of listening unto Satan’s lies, we shall turn unto Him that hath the balm of Gilead. On the other hand, when the smile of God be enjoyed, and His peace possesses our souls, if faith be in exercise instead of looking within and being occupied with our graces and comforts, we shall look unto Him who is the Author and Finisher of faith, seeking a closer communion with and delighting ourselves in Him (Psa 34:4). Thus will He “dwell” in us as a Guest to be entertained by us. As one well said, “A single eye is needed to discern Him, and a single heart to hold Him fast.”

As faith is engaged with Christ, He receives not only an objective, but also an *influential* entrance into our hearts—as an admitting of the sun’s rays into the room brings light, warmth, and comfort. The more Christ becomes the supreme and constant Object of our hearts, the more shall we experience His gracious influences and sanctifying consolations; and they, in turn, will issue in more devotedness unto His service; for as Matthew Henry (1662-1714) rightly pointed out, “Faith both admits and submits to Him.” Christ is then in us, as the vine is in its branches—its vitalizing and fructifying life or energy. “Abide in me, and I in you” (Joh 15:4)—the “abiding” there is identical with the “dwelling” here in Ephesians 3:17. To abide in Christ is to cleave unto and commune with Him in the exercise of faith, the consequence of which is His influential abiding in us—vivifying, comforting, assuring. As Christ indwells us, we become more conformed to His image, and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. As Christ indwells us, we “shew forth” His virtues (1Pe 2:9).

As faith is engaged with Christ, as we cultivate frequent and devout meditations on His surpassing glories, immeasurable will be the benefit gained by the soul. The more the mind is thus preoccupied and filled with Him, the stronger will be its resistance to the insidious advances and entangling encroachments of the world. Carnal enjoyments will then lose their attractions. A spiritual sight of Immanuel will abase self; sorrows will the less weigh down; afflictions will press less hard upon us. The more our spiritual minds are exercised upon the eternal Lover of our souls, the more fervent and constant will be our love to Him, which brings us to examine the next clause of this wondrous prayer. The words “that ye” in the middle of verse 17 in our English Bibles are—in the judgment of many competent expositors—out of their proper place, and should rather be attached to the petition which follows, i.e. should begin verse 18. We quite agree, for that is certainly the order of the Greek: “For to dwell the Christ, through faith in your hearts, in love being rooted and founded; that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all saints what (is) the breadth” etc. (Bagster’s Interlinear).

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). One of the principal effects of faith is to establish our souls in love—[but is it] of Christ’s love to us, or ours to Him? Both; though here, principally the latter. Our consciousness of Christ’s love for His people produces an answering love in our hearts for Him. There should be no difficulty raised in the mind of the reader by our defining this clause as the Christian’s love: The more I recognise and feed upon Christ’s love

to me, the more will there be a response of mine to His. "Rooted and grounded": Each of those words has its own peculiar force and beauty. A double metaphor is there used—that of a tree, and that of a building. The idea of the former is of its striking deeper and spreading wider into the soil; that of the latter, of the firm and solid basis on which the building rests. Just so far as faith is daily acted upon Him, and Christ occupies the central place in my affections will love for Him be the soil in which my Christian life is rooted and grounded.

"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). There we have three things: The present life of the Christian in the body; a life sustained and energized by acting faith upon the Divine Redeemer; and the heart engrossed with His love as expressed in His great sacrifice. Love to Christ is the motive of all genuine obedience and the ground of all spiritual fruitfulness. When he is rooted in love, the progress of the believer's life will not be the result of self-effort, but the spontaneous effect of an inherent power drawn from its nourishing soil. That is blessedness indeed; that is a real foretaste of Heaven: Love, the spring of worship. Again, where Christ dwells in the heart, love will be the foundation on which the Christian life is erected, steadfast, and sure. The blessed consciousness of His love, and the joyful answer of our hearts unto it, become the base on which the soul rests—that which gives stability, security, serenity. Consciously grounded upon Him, I shall be strong and "unmoveable" (1Co 15:58).

"Being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17). Since that expression is in nowise qualified, it should be taken in its widest latitude, and understood as including the whole scope of that love which flows from faith—of which, not only God in Christ, but His people also, are the objects. So Matthew Henry regarded it: "Steadfastly fixed in your love to God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to all the saints, the beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ." The same did Thomas Scott (1747-1821): "Fixed by their supreme love to Christ and His salvation, cause, and people; and thus be secured from turning aside or growing negligent, and be rendered stable and fruitful in their profession." Faith and love enlarge the heart, until it embraces the whole family of God: "Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1Jo 5:1). As Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, our affections are widened, as well as deepened, so that we become sharers of His affections, which embrace the entire Church; and thereby, we obtain sure evidence that we have "passed from death unto life" (1Jo 3:14).

"That ye...may be able [Greek "fully able" or "have full power"] to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:18-19). Above, we have sought to show the relation—which the last clause of verse 17 has—to the petition preceding it; let us now consider the bearing which those words, "rooted and grounded in love," have upon this third petition. First, Christ Himself must be laid hold of by faith, for a doubting spirit is incapable of comprehending any thing but the fact of its own wretchedness. As another has pointed out, "A purged conscience is the first lesson that the Spirit of grace imparts to our souls as the Revealer of Jesus. *Then*—and not earlier—are we enabled (by the power of the same Spirit) to enter, with all saints, on the study of that which is the "children's portion"; or, as we would prefer to express it, enter upon the joyful contemplation of the children's portion—namely, the infinite and amazing love of Christ. By Christ's indwelling the heart, its capacity to comprehend is enlarged and expanded.

But since the second petition was "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph 3:17), which signifies His being steadfastly enshrined in our affections, it may seem that this third request is almost a repetition of the former. It *would be* if the "rooted and grounded in love" meant our apprehension of His love to us; and this is the chief reason why we feel obliged to understand it of ours to Him. If the tree be not well rooted and the building securely based, the higher it rises, the greater will be its danger of falling. What, then, is the preventative and preservative? This: A knowledge of the character of Christ and His love. One would be greatly pleased with a stranger who—at fearful cost to himself—saved his life, and think he would be happy to take him permanently into his home; but as he came to know him better, he might regret his action and find it was impossible for them to dwell happily together: he would esteem him as a deliverer, but dislike him as a close companion. But in the case of the believer, the more he knows of Christ and His love, the more he longs for him to constantly abide in his heart: thus is he "rooted and grounded in love" to Him.

If, on the one hand, it be true that we must have an experimental knowledge of Christ and of His love to us, it is equally true that we must exercise love to Christ in order the better to know Him and His love. There is a knowledge of Christ and His love which evokes no answering love in the heart of its possessor.

There are many in Christendom today who have as clear an intellectual understanding of the person, work, and love of Christ for sinners—as has the saint who enjoys the most intimate fellowship with Him—yet it kindles not a single spark of love within them unto Him. Nor can any one feelingly realise the difference between an intellectual knowledge of Christ and His love and a personal acquaintance with the same, unless he has actually *experienced* it. Experience is the only teacher of feelings and emotions, as it is in the lower sphere of taste and sense. A man knows nothing of the real pangs of hunger, until he is at the point of starving. One must actually partake of wormwood or honey, before he can know from taste the bitterness or the sweetness of them. One cannot know sorrow, but by feeling its ache; and one must love, before he can know what love is.

A deaf man can read a treatise on acoustics, but that will convey to him no notion of what it is to hear the harmonies and melodies of real music. So we must *have* love to Christ, before we can know what love to Christ *is*; and we must consciously experience the love *of* Christ, ere we can know what the love of Christ *is*. We must have a warm and steady love to Christ, in order to have a deep and living possession of the love of Christ; though reciprocally, it is also to love Him back again. “In all the play and counterplay of love between Christ and us, and in all the reaction of knowledge and love, this remains true, that we must be rooted and grounded in love ere we can know love, and must have Christ dwelling in our hearts in order to that deep and living possession, which, when it is conscious of itself, is *knowledge*, and is forever alien to the loveless heart. If you want to know the blessedness of the love of Christ, *love Him*, and open your hearts for the entrance of His love to you” (Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1910).

As our “being rooted and grounded in love” is the *consequence* of Christ’s dwelling in our hearts by faith, so also is it the necessary *preparation* for our being able to “comprehend” and to “know” the surpassing love of Christ (Eph 3:17-19). Do we not see that blessedly illustrated and exemplified in the case of the one who has appropriately been designated, “the apostle of love,” the one who was chief of the three nearest unto the Lord who was privileged to lean upon His breast? Of all the disciples, none were so loving as him, and therefore, he—rather than James or Peter or Jude—was the one selected (because so well-qualified experimentally) to write so largely upon the *love* of God and of Jesus our Lord. Yes, the more intensely and steadily we love Christ, the more capacitated are we to comprehend His love to us. Even in the natural, it is only the loving heart which really knows and appreciates love. As faith is the medium of understanding, so love is the avenue for receiving love. “We may talk of everlasting love, and fancy ourselves to have a deep insight into the doctrines of the Gospel, but if Christ’s name be not dearer to us than life, it will be little or nothing more than talk” (Ambrose Serle, 1742-1812).

“That ye may be able to comprehend” (Eph 3:18). The Greek word (“*katalambano*”) is rendered “comprehend” in John 1:5 and here; “apprehend” in Philippians 3:12-13; “take” (in the sense of “grasped”) in Mark 9:18 and John 8:3-4; “attain” in Romans 9:30; “obtain” in 1 Corinthians 9:24; and “overtake” (“cometh upon”) in 1 Thessalonians 5:4. Young’s concordance defines it as, “to receive fully.” Perhaps John 1:5 helps us most to perceive its force: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” The reference there is to the Lord of glory as He tabernacled among men. The unregenerate are designated “the darkness” (compare Ephesians 5:8!), which tells of the fearful effects of the Fall. The natural man is “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18), and therefore, from His love and light. So far from desiring the Light, the darkness repelled and repulsed it. Men despised and rejected the Light, hating Him without a cause. Here in our text is the direct antithesis. Since the regenerate both believe in and love the One who is the Light, they are “*able* to comprehend” His love.

It is also to be carefully noted that this “comprehend” is distinguished from the “and to know” at the beginning of verse 19, and that it precedes rather than follows it—as we had probably thought. The difference between the two is that the former is more a matter of effort, the latter of intuition; the one, pertaining more distinctly to the mind, the other to the heart. Yet the former is something far more than a mere intellectual or speculative and notional thing, namely, that which is obtained by the renewed understanding. Nor is the one to be so sharply distinguished from the other, as though there was no definite relation between them—the “and” at the beginning of verse 19 clearly shows the contrary. No, rather is there a most intimate connection between the two: In all spiritual exercises, the mind is largely influenced by the heart; and in turn, the affections are regulated by the understanding. The action of the spiritual understanding is always in sympathy with the affections of the heart. In one sense, we must comprehend before we truly love, yet love thus awakened becomes in turn the fountain of desires which nothing can satisfy, but *perfect* know-

ledge—hence the force of “I shall be satisfied, when I awake [on the resurrection morn], with *thy* likeness” (Psa 17:15).

Light and love, understanding and affection, are mutual handmaids. The mind has its part to play in leading the heart to love, as is indicated in the passage before us—the “able to comprehend” (Eph 3:18) coming before the “to know”! The heart must needs first be informed about its Object before our affections are fixed upon Him. First, faith’s apprehension of Christ as He is made known to us in the Word of Truth, then the clear perception of His excellency and the heart’s being enraptured with His perfections. First, the understanding’s “comprehension” of the dimensions (manifestations) of His love; and then the affection’s experience of its blessedness. “O taste *and see* that the LORD is good” (Psa 34:8) expresses what we are here striving to convey to the reader. First, the personal appropriation of the Lord and the soul feeding upon Him; and then the fuller discernment of His loveliness. “Taste and see...”—perceive, realise, know—“...that the LORD is good.” It is thus that we obtain an experimental knowledge of Him. It is by means of this faculty of spiritual comprehension that the believer is enabled to explore the dimensions of Christ’s love (as also the whole boundless field of Divine Revelation), but it is by means of his affections that he obtains an experimental realization and appreciation of the same.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

8. *His Response (1:9-10)*

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Jos 1:9). This was the concluding part of the charge which Jehovah there laid upon His servant. For the third time, Joshua was bidden to be courageous. The natural inference to draw from such repetition would be that he was a timid and cowardly man; but his previous record effectively disposes of such a conclusion. He was one of the twelve selected by Moses to spy out the Land. In his bold dissent from the gloomy report of ten of his fellows, and in his fighting of Amalek (Exo 17), he had manifested himself as one possessed of valour. Yet God saw fit to press this injunction upon him repeatedly: as Matthew Henry (1662-1714) pointed out, “Those that have grace, have need to be called upon again and again to exercise grace and improve it.” Though that precept did not imply that Joshua was faint-hearted, it did import he would be faced with situations which called for the exercise of sterling qualities.

But let it be pointed out that there is a moral courage, as well as a physical; and not all possessing the latter are endowed with the former. How many who flinched not in the face of the enemy’s fire were afraid to be seen reading God’s Word! There is also strength of mind and will, which refuses to be daunted by difficulties and dismayed by failures. Let it also be noted that that three-fold call to act valiantly was not a mere repetition. In verse 6, Joshua was bidden to be strong and of a good courage in view of the task before him—which demanded physical prowess. In verse 7, it was an injunction unto personal and moral courage: “That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law” (Jos 1:7)—to seek not counsel from his fellows, nor fear their criticisms, but to order all his actions by “the Book.” It requires more courage to keep to the old paths than it does to follow after novelties. A stout heart is indispensable in order to tread the path of God’s commandments.

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage” (Jos 1:9). It seems to us this was more distinctly a call to the exercise of spiritual courage. In proportion, as the child of God becomes aware of his own weakness and insufficiency, he is very apt to be cast down; instead, it should make him look outside himself and lay hold of the strength of Another. Was it not as though the Lord said to His servant: It is indeed unto a great undertaking I have commissioned thee, but let not a sense of thine own infirmities deter thee, for “have not I commanded thee”? It would be a great help unto Joshua if he kept his eye on the Divine warrant. The same One who had issued the precept must be looked unto for enablement to the performance thereof. Christ Himself was borne up under His suffering by a regard to the Divine will: “As the Father gave me *commandment*, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence” (Joh 14:31).

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage.” It is not sufficiently realised that God’s commandments—equally with His promises—are addressed unto *faith*, yet a little reflection ought to convince us that such is the case. That which we are required to believe and take for our Rule is the Word of God as a whole; and a heart which has been turned unto the Lord and brought into loving subjection to Him does not delight in one part of it and despise another. The fact is we do not believingly receive God’s Word at all, unless we heartily receive *everything* in it: There are precisely the same reasons for our embracing the precepts as the promises. Yea, in one sense, it should be easier for us to be convinced of our present duty, than to be assured of the future things promised us. It is by our obedience to the Divine precepts that our faith is to be tested and measured. Faith without works is dead. Faith “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6); and how can I express my love than by doing what God bids me: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (Joh 14:21).

“I have *believed* thy commandments” (Psa 119:66). Have we? Do we clearly understand what is signified and included in that statement? To “believe God’s commandments” is to have a ready alacrity to hear God’s voice in them, for the heart to be suitably impressed, and for our actions to be regulated by them. Faith always has to do with God Himself. It is the work of faith to acquaint us with the character of God and His attributes, and to be duly influenced in our souls by a sense of the same. Faith looks to His majesty as truly as it does to His love, and submits to His authority as truly as it delights in His grace. The precepts—as much as the promises—bind us to trust in God: the one issues from His lips and requires a response from us, as much as does the other. The commandments are an expression of God’s will, binding

us to our duty; and since they are not addressed unto sense, they must be given unto faith. There can, in fact, be no acceptable obedience, unless it proceeds from faith—Hebrews 11:8.

Faith views the commandments as what God demands of me; and therefore, submits to His authority. As the promises are not really esteemed and embraced by us, unless they are received as from *God*, so the precepts do not awe our consciences, nor bring the will into subjection to them, unless we accept them as Divine fiats binding upon us. If we actually believe God's promises with a living faith, then our hearts are drawn off from carnal vanities, to see our happiness in what they pledge us. In like manner, when we actually believe God's precepts with a lively faith, then our hearts are drawn off from a course of self-will, for we accept them as the only Rule to guide and govern us in the obtaining of that happiness; and thereby, we submit ourselves to the Divine authority and conduct ourselves "as obedient children" (1Pe 1:14). Nothing produces a real submission of soul, but a conscious subjection to a "thus saith the LORD."

Faith receives the commandments as coming from an all-mighty Lawgiver, and therefore, as One who is not to be trifled with, knowing "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy" (Jam 4:12). It is because the unregenerate do not believe in the majesty, authority, righteousness, and power of God that they so lightly regard and despise His commandments. But faith realises there is a Day of accounting, a Day of Judgment ahead, and keeps before it the penalty of disobedience. Hebrews 2:1-4 makes it clear that we ought to be as solemnly affected by the Divine Law and the majesty of its Promulgator as though we had been personally present at Sinai. But faith not only recognises the authority of the Divine precepts, but their excellency too. It sets, too, its seal that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12). Nay more, it says with the apostle, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22).

When the apostle declared, "I consent unto the law that it is good" (Rom 7:16), he expressed his willingness and desire to be ruled by a perfect Law. A bare assent is not sufficient: There must be a consent too—a readiness to obey. "Consent" is a mixed act, in which the judgment and the will concur. The commandments are not only received as God's, but they are highly valued and embraced as such. The more we are convinced of their excellency, the easier it is to obey them. "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, *for our good always*" (Deu 6:24). Satan would fain have us think God's Law is a severe and harsh one; but the Spirit assures us "his commandments are *not* grievous" (1Jo 5:3). God has made an inseparable connection between the precepts and the promises: The latter cannot benefit us if we disregard the former—our peace and happiness depend on complying with the one as much as it does with the other. Our assurance of acceptance with God cannot be greater than the diligence of our obedience: *see* 1 John 2:4.

"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed" (Jos 1:9). Let it be duly noted that the Divine precepts are to govern our *inner* man, as well as our actions. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Psa 51:6). God's commands require more than external conformity, including also the state of our hearts, and the spirit in which we obey. Covetousness is as sinful as lying, anxiety as theft, despair as murder, for each is a disobeying of *God*. The above command is addressed to us as truly as it was to Joshua, and so too is the promise that accompanies it: "For the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Jos 1:9)—with us as "a very present help" (Psa 46:1). How that should encourage us to turn the precepts into believing prayer, looking to the Lord to work in us that which He requireth, and counting upon Him to do so! Then can we, in the fullest sense, say: "I have *believed* thy commandments" (Psa 119:66).

Here then was an additional reason why the Lord should, three times over, bid Joshua, "Be strong and of a good courage" (Jos 1:6, 9, 18). "Now it was not written [not spoken] for his sake alone...but for us also" (Rom 4:23-24)—and that is why we have spent so much time upon these particular verses. The directions given to Joshua for the conquering of Canaan and enjoyment of the promised heritage are the instructions *we* must needs follow, if success is to be ours in the warfare to which we are called. It is the "good fight of faith" (1Ti 6:12) in which we are to engage; and a life of faith consists first and foremost in a life of *obedience* to the Divine statutes, submitting ourselves to the authority of an invisible God, ordering our lives by the Rule He has given us. It consists in a trustful seeking of strength from Him that we may be enabled to do those things which are pleasing in His sight. It consists in a laying hold of His promises as the incentive of our task.

But a life of faith calls for a stout heart, that we may not be daunted by either the difficulties or the dangers of the way. The flesh, the world, and the Devil are arrayed against us, seeking our destruction. Nor

are we called upon to engage them for a season only—it is a lifelong battle. Nor can we expect to avoid hardship, or escape being wounded in such a conflict. Let the young Christian realise, then, that if he is to be “a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2Ti 2:3), he must “be strong and of a good courage” (Jos 1:9) and faint not, though the march wearies; and be not dismayed when the enemy gains an advantage over him. He may be bested in the preliminary skirmishes, he may be hard put to it so much so as hold his ground for days together, but if he “endureth to the end” (Mat 10:22)—and for *that*, fortitude, resoluteness, perseverance, as well as trusting in the Lord, are indispensable—victory is certain.

“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people” (Jos 1:10), giving to them their orders. Observe that he did not call a conference of the heads of the tribes to ascertain how many of them he could count upon for co-operation, nor to seek their counsel and advice. No, like the apostle, when the Lord’s will was made known to him, he could say, “I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16). Nor did he, like vacillating Felix, defer the performance of duty unto a more “convenient season” (Act 24:25). There is an old but wise adage: “Strike while the iron’s hot”—act at once in response to the convictions of conscience or the promptings of the Spirit. Or better, perform your duty immediately when it is clear to you. The longer we delay, the more reluctant we are to comply with God’s requirements. Delay itself is disobedience. Procrastination evidences a lack of heart for the Divine precepts, and an absence of concern for the Divine glory.

It is nothing but a species of hypocrisy for me to tell myself that I am willing to obey God while I delay in doing so, for nothing hinders me but want of heart—where there’s a will, there’s always a way. When there is an earnest bent of heart, we shall not linger. When the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem proceeded apace, we are told, “*for the people had a mind to work*” (Neh 4:6). Once a duty is discovered, it should be discharged. Peril attends the neglect of any acknowledged obligation. “*Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people*” (Jos 1:10): He not only complied with God’s order, but he did so promptly. There was an absorption with the difficulties confronting him: no inventing of excuses for the non-performing of his task, no tardiness of action—but prompt obedience. That is another important secret of success, which each of us needs to take to heart.

“*Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people*” (Jos 1:10). That was his response to the commission he had received: an immediate tackling of the duty nearest to hand. He could say with David, “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (Psa 119:60). He resolved upon a course of instant obedience, and promptly put it into execution. He considered that the One who was vested with such sovereignty and power, and who had given him such blessed assurances, was worthy of being loved and served with all his heart and might. Is that the case with you?—with me? “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord” (Col 3:23); and where there is heartiness, there will be no delay. Is it not evident then, my reader, that the readiness or tardiness of our obedience is a good index to the state of our hearts? When we stand debating, instead of doing, reasoning instead of “running” (Psa 119:32), something is seriously wrong.

Alas, how different is our obedience from our praying under the pressure of need. When at our wit’s end, or sorely afflicted, and we cry for relief or deliverance, is not our language that of David’s: “Incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily” (Psa 102:2)? And how disappointed and fretful we are, if His answer does not come swiftly. Ah, may we not perceive from what has been before us, why it is that His answers are often delayed! If we be so slow in responding to His calls of duty, what right have we to expect the Holy One to be early in responding to our calls for favour? The One who has reason to ask, “How long?” (Rev 6:10) is not myself, but God. A holy alacrity in God’s service is much to be desired. “We are too often in haste to sin; O that we may be in a greater hurry to obey God” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892). Have we not much lost time to make up?

“*Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people*” (Jos 1:10). In so doing, he did not act officiously, but was rightly exerting the authority with which God had endowed him. As the servant of Jehovah, he was himself subject to the will of his Master; but as the leader of God’s people, it was both meet and necessary that he should exercise his power and control over them. Therein, he has left an example, which each genuine minister of the Gospel would do well to emulate. While it be true that they today do not occupy a position which is in all respects analogous to that of Joshua’s, yet as those who have been called and commissioned by Christ to preach in His name (Joh 13:20) and “rule over” His assemblies (Heb 13:17), it behoves them to conduct themselves with becoming dignity and decorum, so as to command the respect of those they address.

The true minister of the Gospel is neither a pope, nor a mere figure-head. He is to behave neither as a Diotrophes lording it over God's heritage (3Jo :9), nor as a sycophant who is subservient to others. There is a happy medium between conducting himself as a blatant dictator and a servile flatterer. There are far too many preachers today who act as though they are begging their hearers to do Christ and His cause a favour, who are so apologetic, fawning, and effeminate, that they have forfeited the respect of real men. "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all *authority*. Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:15). "The most effectual way for ministers to secure themselves from contempt, is to keep close to the doctrine of Christ and imitate Him" (M. Henry), and He taught "as one having *authority*" (Mat 7:29).

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

11d. Its Recovery

The reviving of one in a spiritual decline, and the restoration of a religious backslider: We have dwelt upon the necessity, the desirability, the possibility, and the difficulty of recovery; we turn now to consider *its conditionality*, or those things on which it is suspended. That is another term which will hardly please some of our readers, yet it is the correct one to use in this connection; but since various writers have used the term in different ways, it is requisite that we explain the sense in which we have employed it. When we say there are certain conditions which an erring saint must fulfil before he can be restored to fellowship with God, we do not use the term in a legalistic sense, or mean that there is anything meritorious in his performances. It is not that God strikes a bargain, offering to bestow certain blessings in return for things done by us, but rather that He has appointed a certain order, a *connection* between one thing and another; and that, for the maintaining of His honour, the holiness of His government, and the enforcing of our responsibility. In all His dealings with us, God acts in grace, but His grace ever reigns "through righteousness" (Rom 5:21), and never at the expense of it.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13). Now, there is nothing meritorious in confessing and forsaking sins—nothing which gives title unto mercy—but God requires them from us, and we have no warrant to expect mercy without them. That verse expresses the *order* of things which God has established—a *holy* order, so that Divine mercy is exercised without any connivance at sin, exercised in a way wherein we take sides with Him in the hatred of our sins. As health of body is conditioned or suspended upon the eating of suitable food, or the healing of it upon partaking of certain remedies, so it is with the soul. There is a definite connection between the two things—food and strength: the one must be received in order to the other. In like manner, forgiveness of sins is promised only to those who repent and believe. Whether you term repenting and believing "conditions," "means," "instruments," or "the way of," it amounts to the same thing, for they simply signify they are what God requires from us before He bestows forgiveness—requires *not* as a price at our hands, but by way of congruity.

Some may ask, But has not God promised, "I *will* heal their backsliding" (Hos 14:4)? To which we reply, "Yes, yet that promise is not an absolute or unconditional one as the context plainly shows." In the verses preceding, God calls upon them to "return" unto Him, because they had fallen by their iniquity (Hos 14:1). He bids them, "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity" (Hos 14:2). Moreover, they pledge themselves unto reformation of conduct: "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods" (Hos 14:3). Thus, it is unto penitent and confessing souls—who abandon their idols—that promise is made. God does indeed heal our backslidings—yet *not* without our concurrence, not without the humbling of ourselves before Him, not without our complying with His holy requirements. God does indispensably demand certain things of us in order to the enjoyment of certain blessings. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9): That "if" expresses the condition, or reveals the connection, which God has appointed between our defilement and His removal of it.

We are therefore going to point out what are the "conditions" of recovery from a spiritual decline, or what are the "means" of restoration for a backslider, or what is the "way of" deliverance for one who is departed from God. Before turning to specific cases recorded in Scripture, let us again call attention to Proverbs 28:13. First, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." To "cover" our sins is a refusing to bring them out into the light by an honest confessing of them unto God; or to hide them from our fellows, or refuse to acknowledge offences unto those we have wronged. While such be the case, there can be no prosperity of soul, no communion with God or His people. Second, "but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13). To "confess" means to freely, frankly, and penitently own them unto God, and unto our fellows, if our sins have been against them. To "forsake" our sins is a voluntary and deliberate act: It signifies to loathe and abandon them in our affections, to repudiate them by our wills, to refuse to dwell upon them in our minds and imaginations with any pleasure or satisfaction.

But suppose the believer *does not* promptly thus confess and forsake his sins? In such case, not only will he “not prosper,” not only can there now be no further spiritual growth, but peace of conscience and joy of heart will depart from him. The Holy Spirit is “grieved,” and He will withhold his comforts. And suppose *that* does not bring him to his senses, then what? Let the case of David furnish answer: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Psa 32:3-4). The “bones” are the strength and upholders of the bodily frame; and when used figuratively, the “waxing of them old” signifies that vigour and support of the soul is gone, so that it sinks into anguish and despair. Sin is a pestilential thing which saps our vitality. Though David was silent as to confession, he was not so as to sorrow. God’s hand smote his conscience and afflicted his spirit so that he was made to groan under His rod. He had no rest by day or night: Sin haunted him in his dreams, and he awoke unrefreshed. Like one in a drought, he was barren and fruitless. Not until he turned to the Lord in contrite confession was there any relief for him.

Let us turn now to an experience suffered by Abraham that illustrates our present subject, though few perhaps have considered it as a case of spiritual relapse. We dealt with the same in the 1929 issues in a series on “The Life of Abram;” but since many of our present readers do not have access to them, we will here give very briefly the substance of the same. Following upon his full response to the Lord’s call to enter the land of Canaan, we are told that “the LORD *appeared unto* Abram” (Gen 12:7). So it is now: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest myself* to him” (Joh 14:21). It is not to the self-willed and self-pleasing, but to the obedient one that the Lord draws near in the intimacies of His love and makes Himself a reality and satisfying portion. The “manifestation” of Christ to the soul should be a daily experience; and if it be not, then our hearts ought to be deeply exercised before Him. If there be not the regular “appearing of the Lord,” it must be because we have wandered from the path of obedience.

Next, we are told of the patriarch’s response to the Lord’s “appearing” and the precious promise He then made him: “And there he built an altar unto the LORD” (1Sa 7:17). The altar speaks of worship—the heart’s pouring of itself forth in adoration and praise. That order is unchanging: Occupation of the soul with Christ—beholding (with the eyes of faith) the King in His beauty—is what alone will bow us before Him in true worship. Next, “And he removed from thence unto a mountain” (Gen 12:8). Spiritually speaking, the “mountain” is a figure of elevation of spirit, soaring above the level in which the world lies, the affections being set upon things above. It tells of a heart detached from this scene—attracted to and absorbed by Him who has passed within the veil. Is it not written, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall *mount up* with wings as eagles” (Isa 40:31). And how may this “mountain” experience be *maintained*? Is such a thing possible? We believe it is, and with it we should constantly aim, not being content with anything that falls short of it. The answer is revealed in what immediately follows.

“And pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east” (Gen 12:8). The “tent” is the symbol of the stranger, of one who has no home or abiding-place in the scene which cast out of it the Lord of glory. We never read that Abram built him any “house” in Canaan (as Lot occupied one in Sodom!); no, he was but a “sojourner,” and his tent was the sign and demonstration of this character. “And *there* he builded an altar unto the LORD”: From this point onwards, two things characterised him—his “tent” and his “altar” (Gen 12:8; 13:3-4; 13:18). In each of those passages, the “tent” is mentioned first, for we cannot truly and acceptably worship God on high, unless we maintain our character as sojourners here below. That is why the exhortation is made, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you *as strangers and pilgrims*, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11); and so quench the spirit of worship. Are we conducting ourselves as those who are “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1)?—do our manners, our dress, our speech evidence the same unto others?

Ah, dear reader, do we not find right there the explanation of *why* it is that a “mountain” experience is so little enjoyed, and still less maintained by us! Is it not because we descended to the plains, came down to the level of empty professors and white-washed worldlings, set our affection upon things below, and in consequence, became “conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2)? If we really be Christ’s, He has delivered us (judicially) “from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4); and therefore, our hearts and lives should be separated from it in a *practical* way. Our Home is on high, and that fact ought to mould every detail of our lives. Of Abram and his fellow-saints, it is recorded, they “*confessed* that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb 11:13)—“confessed” it by their lives, as well as lips—and it is added, “*wherefore* God is not ashamed to be called their God” (Heb 11:16). But alas, too many now are afraid to be considered “pecu-

liar"; and to escape criticism and ostracism, they compromise, hide their light under a bushel, and come down to the level of the world.

The young Christian might well suppose that one who was in the path of obedience, who was going on whole-heartedly with God, who was a man of the "tent" and the "altar" would be quite immune from any fall. So he will be, while he maintains that relationship and attitude: But it is, alas, very easy for him to relax a little and gradually depart from it. Not that such a departure is to be expected—or excused—on the ground that since the flesh remains in the believer, it is only to be looked for; that it will not be long ere it unmistakably manifests itself. Not so: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1Jo 2:6). Full provision has been made by God for him to do so. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom 6:12). But Abram *did* suffer a relapse—a serious one—and as it is profitable for us to observe and take to heart the various steps which preceded Peter's open denial of Christ, so it is to ponder and turn into earnest supplication that which befell the patriarch, before he "went down into Egypt" (Gen 12:10).

First, we are told, "and Abram journeyed" (Gen 12:9); nor is it said that he had received any order from God to move his tent from the place where he was in communion with Him. That by itself would not be conclusive; but in the light of what follows, it seems to indicate plainly that a spirit of *restlessness* had now seized him—and restlessness, my reader, indicates we are no longer content with our lot. The solemn thing to observe is that the starting point in the path of Abram's decline was that he left Bethel; and Bethel means, "the house of God"—the place of fellowship with Him. All that follows is recorded as a warning of what we may expect, if we leave "Bethel." Abram's leaving Bethel was the root of his failures; and in the sequel, we are shown the bitter fruit which sprang from it. That was the place which Peter left, for he followed Christ "afar off" (Mat 26:58). That was the place which the Ephesian backslider forsook: "Thou hast left thy first love" (Rev 2:4). The day we become lax in maintaining communion with God, the door is opened for many evils to enter the soul.

"And Abram journeyed" (Gen 12:9). The Hebrew is more expressive and emphatic. Literally, it reads, "And Abram journeyed, in going and journeying." A restless spirit possessed him, which was a sure sign that communion with God was broken. I am bidden to "rest in the LORD" (Psa 37:7), but I can only do so, as long as I "delight" myself "also in the LORD" (Psa 37:4). But, second, it is recorded of Abram: "Going on still toward the south" (Gen 12:9)—and southward was *Egyptward*! Most suggestive and solemnly accurate is that line in the picture. Turning Egyptward is ever the logical outcome of leaving Bethel and becoming possessed of a restless spirit—for in the Old Testament, Egypt is the outstanding symbol of *the world*. If the believer's heart be right with his Redeemer, he can say, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find." But if Christ no longer fully absorbs him, then some other object will be sought. No Christian gets right back into the world at a single step. Nor did Abram: He "journeyed...toward the south"—before he entered Egypt!

Third, "and there was a famine in the land" (Gen 12:10). Highly significant was that! A trial of his faith, says someone. Not at all; rather, a showing of the red light—God's danger-signal of what lay ahead. It was a searching call for the patriarch to pause and "consider his ways." Faith needs no trials when it is in normal and healthy exercise: It is when it has become encrusted with dross that the fire is necessary to purge it. There was no famine at *Bethel*. Of course not: There is always fulness of provision there. The analogy of Scripture is quite against a "famine" being sent for the testing of faith—see Genesis 26:1, Ruth 1:1; 2 Samuel 21:1; etc. In each case, the famine was a Divine judgment. Christ is the Bread of Life, and to wander from Him necessarily brings famine to the soul. It was when the restless son went into a "far country" that "he began to be in want" (Luk 15:13-14). This famine, then, was a message of providence that God was displeased with Abram. So we should regard unfavourable providences: They are a call from God to examine ourselves and try our ways.

"And Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen 12:10); and thus it is with many of his children. Instead of being "exercised" by God's chastenings (Heb 12:11)—as they should be—they treat them as a matter of course, as part of the inevitable troubles which man is born unto; and thus "despise" them (Heb 12:5) and derive no good from them. Alas, the average Christian instead of being "*exercised*" (in conscience and mind) under God's rod, rather does he ask, "How may I most easily and quickly get from under it?" If illness come upon me, instead of turning to the Lord and asking, "Shew me *wherefore* thou contendest with me" (Job 10:2), they send for the doctor, which is seeking relief from Egypt. Abram had left Bethel, and one who is out of communion with God cannot trust Him with his temporal affairs, but

turns instead to an arm of flesh. Observe well the “Woe” which God has denounced upon those who go down into Egypt—turn to the world—for help (Isa 30:1-2).

We cannot now dwell upon what is recorded in Genesis 12:11-13, though it is unspeakably tragic. As soon as Abram drew near to Egypt, he began to be afraid. The dark shadows of that land fell across his soul before he actually entered it. He was sadly occupied with self. Said he to his wife, “they will kill *me*... Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well *with me*” (Gen 12:12-13). How true it is that “the backslider in heart shall be filled with his *own ways*” (Pro 14:14)! Fearful of his own safety, Abram asked his wife to repudiate her marriage to him. Abram was afraid to avow his *true relationship*. This is always what follows when a saint goes down into Egypt: He at once begins to equivocate. When he fellowships with the world, he dare not fly his true colours, but compromises. So far from Abram being made a blessing to the Egyptians, he became a “great plague” to them (Gen 12:17); and in the end, they “sent him away” (Gen 12:20). What a humiliation!

“And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south” (Gen 13:1). Did he remain in that dangerous district? No, for “he went on his journeys *from* the south” (Gen 13:3). Observe that he received no directions so to act. They were not necessary: His conscience told him what to do! “And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the *beginning*... Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the *first*; and there, Abram called on the name of the LORD” (Gen 13:3-4). He again turned his back upon the world: He retraced his steps; he returned to his pilgrim character, and his altar. And note well, dear reader, it was “*there* Abram called on the name of the LORD” (Gen 13:4). It had been a waste of time, a horrible mockery for him to have done so, while he was “down in Egypt” (Gen 12:10). The Holy One will not hearken to us while we are sullying His name by our carnal walk. It is “holy hands” (1Ti 2:8)—or at least penitent ones—which must be “lifted up” if we are to receive spiritual things from Him.

The case of Abram then sets before us, in clear and simple language, the way of recovery for a backslider. Those words, “unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning” (Gen 13:3), inculcate the same requirement as, “teach you *again* which be the *first* principles of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12), and “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the *first works*” (Rev 2:5). Our sinful failure must be judged by us: We must condemn ourselves unsparingly for the same; we must contritely confess it to God; we must “forsake” it, resolving to have nothing further to do with those persons or things which occasioned our lapse. Yet something more than that is included in the “do the first works”: There must be renewed actings of faith on Christ—typified by Abram’s return to “the altar” (Gen 13:4). We must come to the Saviour as we first came to Him—as sinners, as believing sinners, trusting in the merits of His sacrifice, and the cleansing efficacy of His blood. We must doubt not His willingness to receive and pardon us.

It is one of the devices of Satan that—after he has succeeded in drawing a soul away from God and entangled him in the net of his corruptions—to persuade him that the prayer of faith, in *his* circumstances, would be highly presumptuous, and that it is much more modest for him to stand aloof from God and His people. Now, if by “faith” were meant—as some would seem to understand—a persuading of ourselves that having trusted in the finished work of Christ all is well with us forever, that would indeed be presumptuous. But sorrow for sin and betaking ourselves unto that Fountain, which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zec 13:1), is never out of season: Coming to Christ in our wretchedness and acting faith upon Him to heal our loathsome diseases, both becomes us and honours Him. The greater our sin has been, the greater reason is there that we should confess it to God and seek forgiveness in the name of the Mediator. If our case be such that we feel we cannot do so as saints, we certainly ought to do so as sinners, as David did in Psalm 51—a Psalm which has been recorded to furnish believers with instruction when *they* get into such a plight.

This is the only way in which it is possible to find rest unto our souls. As “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Act 4:12), so neither is there any other by which a backsliding saint can be restored. Whatever be the nature or the extent of our departure from God, there is no other way of return to Him, but by the Mediator. Whatever be the wounds of sin has inflicted upon our souls, there is no other remedy for them, but the precious Blood of the Lamb. If we have no heart to repent and return unto God by Jesus Christ, then we are yet in our sins, and may expect to reap the fruits of them. Scripture has no counsel short of that. We have many encouragements to do so. God is of exceeding great and tender mercy, and willing to forgive all who return to Him in the name of His Son: Though

our sins be as scarlet (Isa 1:18), the atoning blood of Christ is able to cleanse them. There is “plenteous redemption” (Psa 130:7) with Him. As Abram, David, Jonah, and Peter were restored, so may I; so may you be.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

9d. Its Reception

There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2); and the ecclesiastical history of the last three centuries supplies many sad examples of the same. In opposing the Papist fiction of human merits, some went too far in the opposite direction and failed to enforce the necessity of good works. In protesting against a general or indefinite atonement, and in contending for particular redemption, not a few hyper-Calvinists repudiated the free offer of the Gospel. Many handled the total depravity and spiritual inability of the natural man in such a manner that his responsibility was completely undermined. In their ardour to magnify the sovereign grace of God, men often lost sight of the moral requirements of His righteousness. There has been a lamentable lack of balance in presenting the inseparable truths of justification and sanctification, and the privileges and duties of believers. The perseverance of the saints in faith and holiness has not received nearly so much emphasis among Calvinists as has the Divine preservation of them; nor have they said one-tenth as much on repentance as on faith. The same grievous defect appears in many of the sermons preached on *the Covenant*. The Puritans were thoroughly sound and symmetrical thereon, but some who followed them—though posing as the champions of Truth—were very lopsided.

“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psa 50:5). This is still another verse which has been greatly, if not totally, neglected by those against whose partiality we complain. It also deals with the human side of things: There *is* a human side in connection with the Covenant. It is just as true that men must enter into covenant with God, as it is that He deigns to enter into covenant with them. In this verse, we learn that one of the distinguishing marks of God’s saints is that they have made a covenant with Him: *That* speaks of human action, and not of Divine operations. The saints make a covenant with God “by sacrifice,” for no valid pact can be entered into with Him apart from the intervention of a sacrifice. At the beginning of their national history, Israel entered into a solemn covenant with Jehovah; and they did so by sacrifice. A graphic account of the same is furnished in Exodus 24. There is much there of outstanding interest and importance, which we cannot now dwell upon; only a bare notice of the salient features will here be in order.

After Moses had received the ten commandments from the Lord, he returned and “told the people all the words of the LORD” (Exo 24:3)—that obedience which He required from them. Their response was prompt and proper: “All the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.” Moses then gave orders for oxen to be sacrificed unto the Lord: Half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar, half he put into basins. Having written the words of the Lord in what is specifically called, “the book of the covenant,” he then read it unto the whole of the congregation; and they again vowed to “be obedient” (Exo 24:7). Next, Moses “took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant” (Exo 24:8). Thus was the covenant formally ratified: God binding Himself to the fulfilling of His promises; and they binding themselves to His precepts, that they might avoid the penalty threatened, and obtain the blessings promised. To that transaction, the apostle refers in Hebrews 9:19-20—“testament” should be “covenant.” Those slain oxen prefigured the sacrifice of Christ and the benefits accruing therefrom. The congregation represented “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16); and their compact with the Lord adumbrated the full surrender which believers make of themselves unto God, when they respond to the call of the Gospel.

Christians also make a covenant with God; and they do so “by sacrifice” (Psa 50:5; see also Rom 12:1-2). Christ’s death was a real and true sacrifice—see Ephesians 5:2. In all the sacrifices, there was a shedding of blood without which there was no remission of sins; and as their antitype, Christ’s blood was poured out. Christ’s death was a mediatory sacrifice, a propitiatory sacrifice, an accepted sacrifice, and therefore, an effectual one. It hath all the virtues of a sacrifice. As the Rector and Judge of the universe, God was pacified—as the party offended—by Christ’s oblation. Christ made His soul an offering for sin; and God accepted the same as a full satisfaction to His justice. So too His blood expiates the offences of His people: “When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). When rightly appropriated, His blood removes both the guilt and pollution of sin. So too it is adequate for the sinner himself, the offending party. When he avails himself of the proffered remedy and trusts in Christ’s atonement, he is reconciled to God. No other sacrifice is needed by God, nor is it by the sinner.

By His sacrifice, Christ made and confirmed the new covenant. By virtue of His oblation, Christ is authorised to offer the terms and dispense the benefits of it. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb 13:20). Observe carefully that the "blood of the everlasting covenant" has a double reference there. First, to God, *as* "the God of peace"—that is, to God as pacified: His wrath appeased and His justice satisfied by a full recompense being made for our offences. Second, to Christ Himself: Having satisfied to the uttermost farthing, God brought Him back from the dead and invested Him with His office of the "great shepherd of the sheep"—that is, as the One who had the right to rescue His strayed sheep out of the power of the roaring lion, and bring them into the fold to enjoy the privileges of the flock. And by Christ's sacrifice, the benefits of the covenant are ratified and conveyed to us. That is evident from His own words at the institution of the Lord's Supper: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat 26:28)—the principal blessing. It is by the blood of the covenant we are pardoned, sanctified, and perfected forever.

As Thomas Manton (1628-1688) showed, our manner of entering into covenant with God is by the same moral acts, as which Israel of old were conversant about the sacrifices and what they imported. Those sacrifices represented the defilement they had contracted by sin: By the killing of the beast, they owned that they deserved to die themselves. The oblations they brought to the tabernacle or temple were public testifications of their guilt and pollution, an acknowledgement that their life was forfeit to God. As the apostle informs us, "in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins" (Heb 10:3); they kept before their offers what they were as violators of the Law. Now the same obligation lies upon us if we would make a covenant with God by virtue of the great sacrifice of Christ. There must be the recognition that the curse of the law binds us over to eternal wrath, and a subscription to that solemn fact by our conscience. There must be an acknowledgement of our guilt and pollution; and that, with broken heartedness. Unless we be deeply affected by our sinfulness and ruin, Christ will be little valued by us.

The sacrifices appointed by God in the Old Testament era told forth His abundant mercy—that God had no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather, that he turn from his wickedness and live (Eze 18:32; 33:11). And in order that His mercy might be on a righteous basis, His love provided that which His justice demanded. That has been lost sight of by the dispensationalists, who erroneously represent the Mosaic economy as a stern regime of unrelieved justice. But it should ever be remembered that side by side with the moral law was the ceremonial with its oblations and ablutions, where forgiveness and cleansing were obtainable for those who availed themselves of it. All through the Old Testament era, "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (Jam 2:13) —ponder Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 103:8, Isaiah 1:18. That "the LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy" (Psa 145:8) was shown and believed in David's time, for those blessed attributes were clearly revealed in the sacrifices—types as they were of Christ. So today, the sinner who would enter into covenant with God should realise that He is merciful, and in Christ, has made full provision for his deep need. This is to be acknowledged by us with thankfulness and joy.

Those Old Testament sacrifices were also so many obligations unto duty, for they instructed the offerer of that worship and obedience, which he owed unto God. Since God required propitiation for sin, they were shown the need for conforming to His law; and whereas His mercy made provision for their past failure, gratitude should prompt them unto future subjection. Moreover, by offering a ram or an ox unto the Lord, the one who brought it did, in effect, devote himself with all his strength unto Him: Thereby the offerer was taught to yield himself unto His service. And so, unto those who would make or renew a covenant with God, the New Testament word is: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). That—as we showed at some length in a recent article—supplies an interpretation of the rites of the Law and of the "reasonable" part of the Old Testament order of things. Thus, he who would make a covenant with God is required to give up himself wholly unto God with a sincere and firm resolution unto a new life of obedience to Him. If there be any reservation, the covenant is marred in the making of it: "For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant" (Psa 78:37).

As the Puritan William Gurnall (1617-1679) so faithfully remarked upon Psalm 50:5: "We are not Christians till we have subscribed this covenant, and that without any reservation. When we take upon us the profession of Christ's name, we enlist ourselves in His muster-roll and by it, do promise that we will live and die with Him in opposition to all His enemies. He will not entertain us till we resign up ourselves

freely to His disposal, that there may be no disputing with His commands afterwards, but as one under authority, go and come at His word." So too T. Manton: "You have no benefit by the covenant till you personally enter into the bond of it. It is true, God being pacified by Christ offereth pardon and acceptance on the condition of the covenant, but we do not actually partake of the benefits till we perform those conditions. Though the price be paid by Christ, accepted by the Father, yet we have not an actual interest, through our own default, for not accepting God's covenant. What shall we do? Bless God for His grace. Own Christ as the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, and the Fountain of our life and peace. Devote yourselves to God, to serve and please Him."

Not only are we required to take hold of God's covenant (Isa 56:4, 6), to make a covenant with God by sacrifice (Psa 50:5), and to "join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant" (Jer 50:5), but we are enjoined: "Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God" (Deu 4:23) and "Be ye *mindful always* of his covenant" (1Ch 16:15). We are required to abide faithfully by the promises we made, and the agreement we entered into when we chose Him to be our God and gave up ourselves unreservedly unto Him, for the promises of the covenant are made only unto such: "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as *keep* his covenant and his testimonies" (Psa 25:10). Of old, the Lord complained: "This people hath transgressed my covenant" (Jdg 2:20), "Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant" (Jer 11:10). They themselves acknowledged: "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant" (1Ki 19:10), "They kept not the covenant of God" (Psa 78:10). So it is with the Christian when he departs from the Lord and enters upon a course of self-pleasing. Hence, in order for a backslider to be restored, he must needs *renew* his covenant with God, for the recovery of such an one is a new "conversion" (Luk 22:32). And therefore, he is required to "do the first works" (Rev 2:5).

Now, cannot certain of our readers see for themselves how unfair and unfaithful it is for preachers and writers to make so much of—and quote so frequently—such verses as 2 Samuel 23:5, Jeremiah 31:33-34; 32:40-41; and utterly ignore Isaiah 56:4-6, Jeremiah 50:5, Psalm 50:5, and those cited in the preceding paragraph? Cannot they perceive that it is handling God's Word deceitfully, and utterly misleading unto souls to be constantly comforting them with the "I wills" of God—yet remaining silent upon the "Be ye," "ye shalls," and failing to press such exhortations? Cannot they see how dishonest it is to treat only of that covenant which God enters into with the elect before time began—in the person of their Head—and say nothing of the covenant which we must make with God during this time-state? We ourselves should be guilty of the very partiality against which we inveigh, were we to publish in booklet form the last four of our articles on Reconciliation in the 1944 volume and the first four in 1945, entitling them, "The Covenant of Grace," if we *failed to add* to them what has been adduced in this article and the three preceding it, wherein we have set before the reader the human side of things—what God requires from us.

God has appointed a "due order" or *connection*—a moral and righteous one—between the blessings purchased by Christ and the actual conveyance of them unto us, in which our responsibility is enforced. To quote from yet another of the able and godly Puritans: "*Holiness* is God's signature upon all heavenly doctrines, which distinguishes them from all carnal inventions: they have a direct tendency to promote His glory and the real benefit of the rational creature. Thus the way of salvation by Christ is most fit to reconcile God to man by securing His honour, and to reconcile man to God by encouraging his hope... The grace of the Gospel is so far from indulging sin that it gives the most deadly wound to it, especially since the tenour of the new covenant is that the condemned creature, in order to receive pardon and the benefits that are purchased, must receive the Benefactor with the most entire consent for his Prince and Saviour. Thus the Divine wisdom has so ordered the way of salvation that, as mercy and justice in God, so holiness and comfort may be perfectly united in the reasonable creature" (William Bates, 1625-1699, "the Harmony of the Divine Attributes," 1660). The death of Christ is not only the surest ground of comfort, but the strongest incentive to obedience.

We are advocating no new or strange doctrine when we insist that the Everlasting Covenant and the Gospel *requires from us* repentance and faith, full surrender unto God, and the steadfast performance of obedience unto the end of our lives. "The obligation on us unto holiness is *equal* as unto what it was under the Law, though a relief be provided, where unavoidably we come short of it. There is, therefore, nothing more certain than that there is no relaxation given us as unto any duty of holiness by the Gospel, nor any indulgence unto the least sin. But yet upon the supposition of the acceptance of *sincerity*, and a perfection of parts instead of degrees, with mercy provided for our failings and sins, there is an argument to be taken from the command unto indispensable necessity of holiness, including in it the highest encouragement to

endeavour after it. For together with the command, there is also grace administered, enabling us unto the obedience which God will accept. Nothing therefore can avoid or evacuate the power of this command and argument from it, but a stubborn contempt of God arising from the love of sin" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

Probably there is another class of our readers who have never heard anything on the subject—as well as those who are acquainted only with the Divine side of it—who are ready to exclaim: "If it be an imperative condition of salvation that man enters into a definite covenant with God, then that cuts me off entirely, for I have never made one with Him!" Alas, it is sadly true that, through the laziness or unfaithfulness of the preachers they have sat under, many of the Lord's people know nothing, or next to nothing, about the Covenant of Grace. On the other hand, it is blessedly true that, in the mercy of God, though all unconscious to themselves, they have been led to *comply with* the terms of the Covenant. Though they knew not that they were truly (though not formally) entering into Covenant with God when they repented, believed the Gospel, and received Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, yet such *was* the case. Each one who has really responded to the call in Isaiah 55:3 with Him, God has made "an everlasting covenant"; nevertheless, his ignorance of that fact does not excuse the Christian's failure to have learned from the Scriptures what they teach thereon.

Let us now seek to remove one or two difficulties, which may have been raised in the minds of our friends. When we affirm that God's ministers are to make a free offer of the Gospel to every creature, and that they are to call upon all who hear it, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20), that *does not* imply that the results of Christ's death are rendered uncertain, that the success of His redemptive work is suspended on the caprice of man's will. Not at all. It has been far too little recognised that God has more than one design in sending forth the Gospel. First, it is for the glory of Christ—a worldwide proclamation of His excellencies. God intends that a universal testimony shall be borne to the person and work of the One who so superlatively honoured Him. Second, the preaching of the Gospel is made a further test of corrupt nature, demonstrating that men love darkness rather than light. Third, God uses the Gospel as a remedial agency in curbing the wickedness of the world, for many are reformed by it who are never savingly transformed thereby, making this scene a safer place for His people to pass through. It is also the means whereby He calls out His elect: the sieve wherein the wheat is separated from the chaff.

But if Christ be the Head and Representative of His people—and as their Surety, fulfilled every requirement of the Law in their stead and earned its reward—*must not* every one of them be made partakers of that reward? Most assuredly, yet still in the *order* or way God has appointed: We must have the requisite qualification to make us meet for that reward. "This qualification is faith. As grace in God qualified God (if I may use the expression) for effecting reconciliation, so faith in us qualifies us for applying and enjoying it. Though Christ be the Purchaser, yet faith is the means of instating us in it. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 5:1): not a man hath peace with God till justified by faith. This inestimable favour is not conferred but upon men of good will, that value and consent to it. We must lay our hands upon the head of the sacrifice and own Him for ours. This is the bond which unites us to Christ the Purchaser, and by Him to God as the Author of reconciliation: it gives us a right to this peace, and at the last the comfort of it" (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

But does not God's requirement of faith from us leave the outcome of Christ's redemption uncertain? In no wise. Why not? Because (see the closing paragraphs of our December 1944 article), Christ by His merits procured the Holy Spirit *to work in His people* what God requires from them to meet the terms of His covenant, and to fulfill the conditions of the Gospel. "The purchase was made by Christ alone upon the cross, without any qualification in us; the application is not wrought without something in us concurring with it, though that also is wrought by the grace of God. God has ordained peace for us: but there is a work to be wrought within us for the enjoyment of that peace: 'LORD, thou wilt ordain peace *for* us: for thou also hast wrought all our works *in* us' (Isa 26:12). The one is grace in the spring, the other is grace in the vessel; the one is the act of God in Christ, the other is the act of God by the Spirit. Though the fire burn, if I would be warmed, I must not run from it, but approach it" (S. Charnock). It is that work of Christ's Spirit within the elect which capacitates and causes them to abandon their idols, put forth faith, and makes them willing to be wholly devoted to God.

That was admirably set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith—the joint and studied production of many of the ablest of the Puritans. "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by the first covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, whereby He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, *requiring* of them faith in Him that they

might be saved, and *promising* to give unto all those who are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe." The grand change in our legal relation to God, secured by Christ's satisfaction, is infallibly followed by the great change in our experimental relation to God, as that is wrought in us by the Spirit's work of regeneration and sanctification, the one being the fruit of the other—the reward assured the Surety on behalf of those He represented. Our reconciliation to God (through the renewing of the Spirit) is the sure consequence of His reconciliation to us, and a faith which worketh by love, which goes out in acts of holy obedience, is the evidence of our new birth and of our having entered into covenant with God.

"We also joy in God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom 5:11). It is through Him—by the working of His Spirit—that we have, by faith, been enabled to "*receive* the reconciliation" which the Mediator wrought out for us. From the Divine side of things, the evangelist goes forth on no uncertain errand, for by the invincible operations of the Spirit, God makes the Gospel effectual unto each hearer chosen unto salvation. Yet from the human side of things, the evangelist is required to enforce the responsibility of his hearers, calling on them to "be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20), to "repent...and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15), to make a covenant with God, and so far from assuring them that God will work in their hearts what He requires of them (which would encourage them to remain in a state of inertia), he is to enforce God's righteous demands, press upon them the claims of Christ, and bid them flee for refuge to the Hope set before them.

