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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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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE HOLY SPIRIT

11. The Advent of the Spirit (Part 3)

“There are few incidents more illuminating than that recorded in ‘the last day of the feast’ in John 7:37-39. The feast was that of Tabernacles. The feast proper lasted seven days, during which all Israel dwelt in booths. Special sacrifices were offered and special rites observed. Every morning one of the priests brought water from the pool of Siloam, and amidst the sounding of trumpets and other demonstrations of joy, the water was poured upon the altar. The rite was a celebration and a prophecy. It commemorated the miraculous supply of water in the wilderness and it bore witness to the expectation of the coming of the Spirit. On the seventh day the ceremony of the poured water ceased, but the eighth was a day of holy convocation, the greatest day of all.

“On that day there was no water poured on the altar and it was on the waterless day that Jesus stood on the spot and cried, ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.’ Then He added those words, ‘He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water’ (Joh 7:38). The apostle adds the interpretative comment, ‘But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.’ ‘As the scripture hath said.’ There is no such passage in the Scripture as that quoted, but the prophetic part of the water ceremony was based upon certain Old Testament symbols and prophecies in which water flowed forth from Zion to cleanse, renew, and fructify the world. A study of Joel 3:18 and Ezekiel 47 will supply the key to the meaning both of the rite and our Lord’s promise. The Holy Spirit was ‘not yet given,’ but He was promised and His coming should be from the place of blood, the altar of sacrifice. Calvary opened the

fountain from which was poured forth the blessing of Pentecost.” (Samuel Chadwick, 1860-1932).

In our last article, we considered *the meaning* of the Spirit’s descent and pointed out that it was the fulfillment of divine promise, the accomplishment of Old Testament types, and the beginning of a new dispensation. It was also *the grace of God flowing forth unto the Gentiles*. But first let us observe and admire the marvelous grace of God extended unto the Jews themselves. In His charge unto the apostles, the Lord Jesus gave orders that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*” (Luk 24:47), not because the Jews had any longer a covenant standing before God—for the nation was abandoned by Him before the crucifixion—see Matthew 21:43—but in order to display His matchless mercy and sovereign benignity. Accordingly, in the Acts we see His love shining forth in the midst of the rebellious city. In the very place where the Lord Jesus had been slain, the full Gospel was now preached and three thousand were quickened by the Holy Spirit.

But the Gospel was to be restricted to the Jews no longer. Though the apostles were to commence their testimony in Jerusalem, yet Christ’s glorious and all-efficacious Name was to be proclaimed “among all nations.” The earnest of this was given when “devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Act 2:5) exclaimed, “And how hear we every man in our own tongue?” (Act 2:8). It was an entirely new thing. Until this time, God had used Hebrew or a modification of it. Thus Bullinger’s view that a new “Jewish” dispensation (the “Pentecostal”) was then inaugurated is divinely set aside. What occurred in Acts 2 was a part reversal and in blessed contrast from what is recorded in Genesis 11. There we find “the tongues were divided to destroy an *evil* unity, and to show God’s holy hatred of Babylon’s iniquity. In Acts 2, we have grace at Jerusalem and a new and precious unity, suggestive of another building (Mat 16:18), with living *stones*—contrast the ‘bricks’ of Genesis 11:3 and its tower” (Percy W. Heward, 1882-1948). In Genesis 11 the dividing of tongues was *in judgment*. In Acts 2, the cloven tongues were *in grace* and in Revelation 7:9-10, we see men of all tongues *in glory*.

We next consider *the purpose* of the Spirit’s descent. 1. *To witness unto Christ’s exaltation*. Pentecost was God’s seal upon the Messiahship of Jesus. In proof of His pleasure in and acceptance of the sacrificial work of His Son, God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him to His own right hand, and gave Him the Spirit to bestow upon His church (Act 2:33). It has been beautifully pointed out by another that, on the hem of the ephod worn by the high priest of Israel were golden bells and pomegranates (Exo 28:33-34). The sound of the bells (and that which gave them sound was their *tongues*) furnished evidence that he was alive while serving in the sanctuary. The high priest was a type of Christ (Heb 8:1); the holy place was a figure of heaven (Heb 9:24); the “sound from heaven” and the speaking “in tongues” (Act 2:2, 4) were a witness that our Lord was alive in heaven, ministering there as the High Priest of His people.

2. *To take Christ’s place*. This is clear from His own words to the apostles, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Joh 14:16). Until then, Christ had been their “Comforter,” but He was soon to return to heaven. Nevertheless, as He went on to assure them, “I will not leave you orphans: I will

come to you” (marginal rendering of Joh 14:18). He did “come” to them corporately after His resurrection, but He “came” to them spiritually and abidingly in the person of His deputy on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit, then, fills the place on earth of our absent Lord in heaven, with this additional advantage, that during the days of His flesh the Saviour’s body confined Him unto one location, whereas the Holy Spirit—not having assumed a body as the mode of His incarnation—is equally and everywhere resident in and abiding with every believer.

3. *To further Christ’s cause.* This is plain from His declaration concerning the Comforter, “He shall glorify me” (Joh 16:14). The word “Paraclete” (translated “Comforter” all through the Gospel) is also rendered “Advocate” in 1 John 2:1, and an “advocate” is one who appears as *the representative* of another. The Holy Spirit is here to interpret and vindicate Christ, to administer for Christ in His church and kingdom. He is here to accomplish His redeeming purpose in the world. He fills the mystical Body of Christ, directing its movements, controlling its members, inspiring its wisdom, supplying its strength. The Holy Spirit becomes to the believer individually and the church collectively all that Christ would have been had He remained on earth. Moreover, He seeks out each one of those for whom Christ died, quickens them into newness of life, convicts them of sin, gives them faith to lay hold of Christ, and causes them to grow in grace and become fruitful.

It is important to see that the mission of the Spirit is for the purpose of continuing and completing that of Christ’s. The Lord Jesus declared, “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luk 12:49-50). The preaching of the Gospel was to be like “fire on the earth,” giving light and warmth to human hearts. It was “kindled” then, but would spread much more rapidly later. Until His death Christ was “straitened.” It did not consist with God’s purpose for the Gospel to be preached more openly and extensively, but after Christ’s resurrection, it went forth unto all nations. Following the ascension, Christ was no longer “straitened” and the Spirit was poured forth in the plenitude of His power.

4. *To endue Christ’s servants.* “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high,” (Luk 24:49) had been the word of Christ to His apostles. Sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master. *He* had waited, waited till He was thirty, ere He was “anointed to preach good tidings” (Isa 61:1). The servant is not above his Lord. If He was indebted to the Spirit for the power of His ministry, the apostles must not attempt their work without the Spirit’s unction. Accordingly they waited and the Spirit came upon them. All was changed. Boldness supplanted fear, strength came instead of weakness, ignorance gave place to wisdom, and mighty wonders were wrought through them.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

71. *The Faith of Moses (11:24-27)*

“The apostle, as we showed before, takes his instances from the three states of the church under the Old Testament. The first was that which was constituted in the giving of the first promise, continuing to the call of Abraham. Herein his first instance is that of Abel, in whose sacrifice the faith of that state of the church was first publicly confessed and by whose martyrdom it was confirmed. The next state had its beginning and confirmation in the call of Abraham, with the covenant made with him and the token thereof. He therefore is the second great instance on the roll of testimonies. The constitution and consecration of the third state of the church was in giving of the law and herein an instance is given in the law-giver himself. All to manifest, that whatever outward variations the church was liable to, and pass under, yet faith and the promises were the same, of the same efficacy and power under them all” (John Owen, 1616-1683).

In approaching the careful study of our present verses, it is of great importance to observe that they begin *a new section* of Hebrews 11. If this be not seen, they cannot be interpreted aright. The opening verse of each section of this chapter takes us back to *the beginning* of the life of faith, and each one presents a different aspect of the nature or character of saving faith. The first three verses of Hebrews 11 are introductory, the fourth beginning the first division. There, in the example of Abel, we see where the life of faith begins (at conversion), namely, with the conscience being awakened to a consciousness of our lost condition, with the soul making a complete surrender to God, and with the heart resting upon the perfect satisfaction made by Christ our Surety. That which is chiefly emphasized there is *faith in the blood*. But placing his faith in the blood of Christ *is not all* that is done by a sinner when he passes from death unto life.

The second section of Hebrews 11 commences at verse 8, where we have set before us another aspect of conversion, or the starting-point of the life of faith. Conversion is the reflex action or effect from a soul which has received an effectual call from God. This is illustrated by the case of Abraham, who was, originally, an idolater, as we all were in our unregenerate state. The Lord of glory appeared unto him, quickened him into newness of life, delivered him from his former manner of existence, and gave him the promise of a future inheritance. The response of Abraham was radical and revolutionary. He set aside his natural inclinations, crucified his fleshly affections, and entered upon an entirely new path. That which is central in *his* case was, *implicit obedience*, the setting aside of his own will and the becoming completely subject to the will of God. But even that *is not all* that is done by the sinner when he passes from death unto life.

The case of Moses brings before us yet another side of conversion, or the beginning of the life of faith, a side which is sadly ignored in most of the “evangelism” of our day. It describes a leading characteristic of *saving* faith, which few professing Christians now hear (still less know) anything about. It shows us that saving faith does something more than “believe” or “accept Christ as a personal Saviour.” It exhibits faith as a definite decision of the mind, as an act of the will, as a personal and studied *choice*. It reveals the fundamental

fact that saving faith includes, yea, begins with, a deliberate renunciation or turning away from all that is opposed to God, a determination to utterly *deny self*, and an electing to submit unto whatever trials may be incident to a life of piety. It shows us that a saving faith causes its possessor to turn away from godless companions and henceforth to seek fellowship with the despised saints of God.

There is much more involved in the act of saving faith than is generally supposed. "We mistake it if we think it *only to be* a strong confidence. It is so indeed, but there are other things also. It is such an appreciative esteem of our Christ and His benefits, that all other things are lessened in our opinion, estimation, and affection. The nature of faith is set forth by the apostle when he saith, 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death' (Phi 3:7-10). And therefore, true faith makes us dead to the world, and all the interests and honours thereof, and is to be known not so much by our confidence, as *by our mortification and weanedness*—when we carry all our comforts in our hands, as ready to part with them, if the Lord called us to leave them" (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb 11:24-25). Here we see the nature and influence of a saving faith. Two things are to be particularly noted—in it there is an act of relinquishment and an act of embracing. In conversion, there is a turning from and also a turning unto. Hence, before the sinner is invited to "return unto the Lord," he is first bidden to "*forsake* his way," yes, *his* way—having "his *own* way." So too we are called on to "repent" first, and then "be converted," that our sins may be "blotted out" (Act 3:19).

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself" (Mat 16:24). What is meant by the *denying* of "self"? This, the abridging ourselves of those things which are pleasing to the flesh. There are three things which are chiefly prized by the natural man—life, wealth, and honour, and so in the verses which immediately follow, Christ propounded three maxims to counter them. First, He says, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Mat 16:25). That is, he who thinks first and foremost of his own life, whose great aim is to minister unto "number one," shall perish. Second, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mat 16:26), showing us the comparative worthlessness of earthly riches. Third, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Mat 16:27). *That* is the honour we should seek.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb 11:24). Here was a notable case of self-denial. Moses deliberately renounced the privileges and pleasures of a royal palace. It was not that he was now

disowned and cast out by the woman who had adopted him, but that he voluntarily relinquished a position of affluence and ease, disdaining both its wealth and dignities. Nor was this the rash impulse of an inexperienced youth, but the studied decision of one who had now reached the age of forty (Act 7:23). The disciples said, "We have forsaken all, and followed thee" (Mat 19:27). Their "all" was a net and fishing-tack, but Moses abandoned a principality!

The denying of self is absolutely essential and where it exists not, grace is absent. The first article in the covenant is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exo 20:3). *He* must have the pre-eminence in our hearts and lives. God has not the glory of *God* unless we honour Him thus. Now God does not have the uppermost place in our hearts until *His* favour be esteemed above all things and until we dread above everything the offending of *Him*. As long as we can break with God in order to preserve any worldly interest of ours, we prefer that interest above God. If we are content to offend God rather than displease our friends or relatives, then we are greatly deceived if we regard ourselves as genuine Christians. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mat 10:37).

"Faith is a grace that will teach a man to openly renounce all worldly honors, advantages, and preferments, with the advantage annexed thereto. When God calls us from them, we cannot enjoy them with a good conscience" (Thomas Manton). We are often put to the test of having to choose between God and things, duty and pleasure, heeding our conscience or gratifying the flesh. The presence and vigour of faith is to be proved by our *self-denial!* It is easy to speak contemptuously of the world and earthly things, but what is my *first care*? Is it to *seek* God or temporal prosperity? To *please* Him or self? If I am hankering after an increase in wages or a better position, and am fretful because of disappointment, it is a sure proof that a worldly spirit governs me. What is my *chief delight*? earthly riches, honours, comforts, or communion with God? Can I truly say, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand" (Psa 84:10)?

"All believers are not called to make the same sacrifices, or to endure the same trials for righteousness' sake, nor have all the same measure of faith. Yet, without some experience and consciousness of *this* kind, we are not warranted to conclude that we are of Moses' religion, for a common walking stick more resembles Aaron's fruitful rod, than the faith of many modern professors of evangelical truth does the self-denying faith of Moses or Abraham" (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). The faith of God's elect is a faith which "overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4) and not one which suffers its possessor to be overcome! "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24), not ought to, but *have* done so—in some real measure at least!

The great *refusal* of Moses consisted in a firm resolution of mind not to remain in that state wherein he had been brought up. This was not attained, we may be sure, without a hard fight, without the exercise of faith in prayer and trust in God. He knew full well all that his decision involved, yet by grace, made it unhesitatingly. His resolution was made known not by a formal avowal, but by deeds, for actions ever speak louder than words. There is no hint in the sacred record that Moses verbally acquainted his foster-mother with his decision, but his converse with his brethren (Exo 2:11, etc.) revealed where his heart

was and identified him with their religion and covenant. Ah, dear reader, it is one thing to *talk* well about the things of God, but it is quite another to *walk* accordingly, as it is one thing to pen articles and deliver sermons, and quite another to *practice* what we preach!

Not only was Moses' renunciation of his favoured position a grand triumph over the lusts of the flesh, but it was also a notable victory over carnal reason. First of all, his action would seem to indicate the height of *ingratitude* against his foster-mother. Pharaoh's daughter had spared his life as an infant, brought him into her own home, reared him as her son, and had him educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. For him to turn his back upon her now would appear as though he was devoid of appreciation—so little is the natural man able to understand the motives which regulate the workings of faith. The truth is that the commandments of the second table are binding upon us no further than our compliance with them is agreeable to our obedience unto the commandments of the first table. The saint is neither to accept favours from the world, nor to express gratitude for the same, if such be contrary to the fear of God and the maintenance of a good conscience.

We are never to be dutiful to man at the expense of being undutiful to God. All relations must give way before preserving a clear conscience toward Him. His rights are paramount, and must be recognized and responded to, no matter how much the doing so may clash with our seeming obligations unto our fellows. A friend or kinsman may be entertaining me in his home and show me much kindness through the week, but that will not justify or require me to join him on a picnic or frolic on the Sabbath day. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he *cannot* be my disciple" (Luk 14:26). The language of the Christian ought ever to be, "Wist ye not that I must be about *my Father's* business?" (Luk 2:49).

To enjoy worldly honours is not evil in itself, for good men have lived in bad courts. Daniel is a clear case in point. Most of his life was spent in high civic office. When divine providence has given worldly riches or worldly prestige to us, they are to be entertained and enjoyed, yet with a holy jealousy and prayerful watchfulness that we be not puffed up by them, remembering that, "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Pro 16:19). But such things are to be renounced when they are sinful in themselves or when they cannot be retained with a clear conscience. Against his conscience, Pilate preferred to condemn Christ than lose Caesar's friendship and stands before us in Holy Writ as a lasting warning. "Watch and pray, that *ye* enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mat 26:41).

Again: not only did Moses' great refusal seem like gross ingratitude unto her who had adopted him, but it also looked like flying in the face of Providence. It was God who had placed him where he was, why, then, should he forsake such an advantageous position? Had Moses leaned unto his own understanding and listened to the dictates of carnal reason, he had found many pretexts for remaining where he then was. Why not stay there and seek to reform Egypt? Why not use his great influence with the king on behalf of the oppressed Hebrews? Had he remained in the court of Pharaoh, he would escape much affliction. Yes, and miss too the "recompense of the reward." Ah, my reader, unbelief is very fertile,

argues very plausibly, and can suggest many logical reasons why we *should not* practice self-denial!

What was it, then, which prompted Moses to make this noble sacrifice? A patriotic impulse? a fanatical love for his brethren? No, he was guided neither by reason nor sentiment. It was “by *faith*” that Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. It was the clinging of his heart to the divine promise, the apprehension of things not seen by the outward eye, the confident expectation of future reward. Ah, it is faith which imparts to the heart a true estimate of things, which views objects in their real light, and which discerns the comparative worthlessness of what the poor worldling prizes so highly, and through his mad quest after which he loses his soul. Faith views the eternity to come, and when faith is in healthy exercise, its possessor finds it easy to relinquish the baubles of time and sense. Then it is the saint exclaims, “Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them” (Psa 39:6).

What a truly remarkable thing that one in Egypt’s court *should have* such a “faith”! Moses had been brought up in a heathen palace, where there was no knowledge of the true God, yea, nothing but idolatry, wantonness, and profanity. Yes, some of Christ’s sheep are situated in queer and unexpected places, nevertheless, the Shepherd seeks them out and either delivers them from or sustains them in it. The wife of “Herod’s steward” (Luk 8:3), the saints in Nero’s “household” (Phi 4:22) are notable examples. What illustrations are these of “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies” (Psa 110:2)! However His enemies may rage, seek to blot out His name, and root out His kingdom, Christ shall preserve a remnant according to the election of grace “even where Satan’s seat is” (Rev 2:13).

Someone may object, “But Joseph had faith as well as Moses, yet he did not leave the court, but continued there till his death.” Circumstances alter cases! Their occasions and conditions were not alike. “God raised up Joseph to feed His people in Egypt, therefore his abode in the court was necessary under kings that favoured them. But Moses was called not to feed his people in Egypt, but to lead them out of Egypt and the king of Egypt was now become their enemy, and kept them under bitter bondage. To remain in an idolatrous court of a pagan prince is one thing, but to remain in a persecuting court, where he must be accessory to their persecutions, is another thing” (Thomas Manton).

“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25). This gives us the positive side of Moses’ glorious decision. There is both a negative and a positive side to faith. First, a *refusing* and then a *choosing*, and that order is unchanging. There must be a “cease to do evil” before there can be a “learning to do well” (Isa 1:16-17). There must be a “hate the evil” before there is a “love the good” (Amo 5:15). There must be a “confessing *and forsaking*” of sin before there is “mercy” (See Pro 28:13). The prodigal must *leave* the far country before he can go to the Father (See Luk 15). The sinner must abandon his idols before he can take up the cross and follow Christ (Mar 10:21). There must be a turning to God “*from* idols” before there can be a serving “the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). The heart must turn its back upon the world before it can receive Christ as Lord and Saviour.

“Moses gave up the *world*; and ambition had the prospect of honour and greatness; the culture of the most civilized state was fascinating to the mind; treasure and wealth held out potent allurements. And all this—and does it not comprise ‘all that is in the world,’ and in its most attractive and elevated manner?—Moses gave up. And on the other side what awaited him? To join a down-trodden nation of slaves, whose only riches were the promises of the invisible God” (Adolph Saphir, 1831-1891). A man is known by his *choice*. Do you do evil for a little profit? Do you avoid duty because of some trifling inconvenience? Are you turned out of the way because of reproach?

Moses preferred to *suffer* affliction with the people of God than to *enjoy* the pleasures of sin for a brief season. Do you? He judged it the greatest misery of all to live in sin. Do you? Here is an important test—which gives you greater grief, sin or bodily affliction? Which troubles you the more—suffering loss in the world, or displeasing God? There are thousands of professing Christians who complain of their physical aches and pains, but how rarely do we hear any groaning over the body of sin and death! When you are afflicted in the body, which is your dominant desire—to be freed from the suffering or for God to *sanctify* the suffering unto the good of your soul? Ah, my reader, what *real and supernatural* difference is there between you and the moral worldling? Is it only in your creed, what you believe with the intellect? “The demons believe.”

Yes, it is our *refusal* and our *choice* which identifies us, which makes it manifest whether we are children of the devil or children of God. It is the property of a gracious heart to prefer the greatest suffering—physical, mental, or social—to the least sin. And when sin is committed, it is repudiated, sorrowed over, confessed, and forsaken. When “suffering” is inflicted upon saints by persecutors, the offense is done unto us, but “sin” is committed against God! “Sin” separates from God (Isa 59:2), “suffering” drives the Christian nearer to God. “Affliction” only affects the body, “sin” injures the soul. “Affliction” is from God, but “sin” is from the devil. But naught save a real, spiritual, supernatural faith will prefer suffering affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

“None of the exemplifications of the importance of believing, brought forth by the apostle, is better fitted to serve his purpose than that which we have been considering. The Hebrew Christians were called on to part with an honour which they were accustomed to value above all other dignities. They were excommunicated by their unbelieving brethren and denied the name of true children of Abraham. Their unbelieving countrymen were enjoying wealth and honour. The little flock they were called on to join were suffering affliction and reproach. Now, how is this to be done? Look at Moses. Believe as Moses believed and you will find it easy to judge, choose, and act as Moses did. If you believe what Christ has plainly revealed that ‘It is His Father’s good pleasure to give’ His little flock, after passing through much tribulation, ‘the kingdom,’ (See Luk 12:32) if you are persuaded that, according to His declaration, wrath is coming to the uttermost on their oppressors, you will not hesitate to separate yourselves completely from your unbelieving country-men.

“The practical bearing of the passage is not confined to the Hebrew converts or to the Christians of the primitive age. In every country and in every age, Jesus proclaims, ‘If any

man would be my disciple he must deny himself, he must take up the cross, and follow me.' The power of the present world can only be put down by 'the power of the world to come' and as it is through *sense* that the first power operates on our minds, it is through *faith* alone that the second power can operate on our minds. Some find it impossible to make the sacrifices Christianity requires, because they have no faith. They must be made, otherwise our Christianity is but a name, our faith is but a pretense, and our hope a delusion" (John Brown, 1784-1858).

THE LIFE OF DAVID

23. *His Stay at Ziklag*

One of the chief differences between the Holy Spirit's description of biblical characters and the delineations in human biographies is that the former has faithfully presented their failures and falls, showing us that they were indeed men of "like passions with us." Whereas the latter (with very rare exceptions) record little else than the fair and favourable side of their subjects, leaving the impression they were more angelic than human. Biographies need to be read sparingly, especially modern ones, and then with due caution (remembering that there is much "between the lines" not related), lest a false estimate of the life of a Christian be formed, and the *honest* reader be driven to despair. But God has painted the features of biblical characters in the colours of reality and truth, and thus we find that "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Pro 27:19).

The *practical* importance (and it is *that* which should ever be our first and chief quest as we read and ponder the Scriptures) of what has just been pointed out should preserve both preacher and hearer from a one-sided idea of Christian experience. A saint on earth is not a sinless being, nor on the other hand, does sin have complete dominion over him. In consequence of both the "flesh" and the "spirit" still indwelling him, in "*many* things" he offends (See Jam 3:2), and in many things he pleases God. The "old man" is not only still alive (though the Christian is to "reckon" it as being *judicially* dead before God, Romans 6:11), but is constantly active. And though divine grace restrain it from breaking forth into much outward evil, yet it defiles all our inner being and pollutes our best endeavours both Godward and manward, Romans 7:14-25. Nevertheless, the "new man" is also active, producing that which is glorifying to God.

It is because of this *dual* experience of the Christian that we are ever in danger of concentrating too much on the one aspect, to the ignoring of the other. Those with a pessimistic turn of mind or whose body suffers from a torpid liver, need to watch against dwelling too much on the gloomy side of the Christian life and spending too much time in Job and the Lamentations, to the neglect of the later Psalms and the epistle to the Philippians. In the past, a certain class of writers occupied themselves almost exclusively with the contemplation of human depravity and its fearful workings in the saint, conveying the idea that a constant mourning over indwelling sin and groaning over its activities was

the only mark of high spiritual experience. Such people are only happy when they are miserable. We counsel those who have been strongly influenced by such teaching to turn frequently to John's Gospel, chapters 14 to 17, and turn each verse into prayer *and praise*.

On the other side, those with a buoyant temperament and optimistic turn of mind need to watch against the tendency to appropriate and meditate upon the promises to the almost total ignoring of the precepts of Scripture, to strive against lightness and superficiality, and to be careful they do not mistake exuberance of natural spirits for the steadier and deeper flow of spiritual joy. To be all the time dwelling upon the Christian's standing, his privileges and blessings, to the neglect of his state, obligations, and failures, will beget pride and self-righteousness. Such people need to prayerfully ponder Romans 7, the first half of Hebrews 12, and much in 1 Peter. Sinful self and all its wretched failures should be sufficiently noticed so as to keep us in the dust before God. Christ and His great salvation should be contemplated so as to lift us above self and fill the soul with thanksgiving.

The above meditations have been suggested by that portion of David's life which is now to engage our attention. The more it be carefully pondered, the more should we be delivered from entertaining an erroneous conception of the experience and history of a saint. Not that we are to seize upon these sad blemishes in David to *excuse* our own faults—no indeed, that would be wickedness of the worst kind, but we are to be *humbled* by the realization that the same evil nature indwells *us*, and produces works in you and me equally vile. Those who are *surprised* that the Psalmist should act as he here did must be woefully ignorant of the "plague" of their own hearts and blind unto sins in their own lives which are just as abominable in the sight of the Holy One as were those of David's.

In our last article, we saw that unbelief and fear so gained the upper hand over David that he exclaimed, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1Sa 27:1). And yet, probably only a short while before, this same David had declared, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" (Psa 27:3). Yes, and has not the reader, when in close communion with the Lord, and when the sails of faith were fully spread and filled with the breeze of the Spirit, said or felt the same? And alas that it should be so, has not this confidence waned, and then disappeared before some fresh trial! How these sad lapses should show us *ourselves* and produce real humility and self-abasement. How often expressions from our own lips in the past condemn us in the present!

Then we pointed out that, "under the pressure of trial, *relief* is what the flesh most desires." Perhaps the reader may ask, "but is not that natural?" Yes indeed, but is it *spiritual*? Our first desire in trial, as in everything else, should be that *God* may be honoured and for this we should earnestly seek grace to so conduct ourselves that we may "glorify ye the LORD in the fires" (Isa 24:15). Our next concern should be that our *soul* may profit from the painful experience and for this we should beg the Lord to graciously *sanctify* it unto our lasting good. But alas, when unbelief dominates us, *God* is forgotten and deliverance, our own ease, obsess the mind, and hence it is that—unless divine grace interposes—we seek relief in the wrong quarter and by unspiritual means. Thus it was here with David. He and his men passed over unto Achish, the king of Gath.

“And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household” (1Sa 27:3). From these words, it seems that Achish, the Philistine, made no demur against David and his men entering his territory, rather does it look as though he met with a friendly and kindly reception. Thus, from present appearances—the obtaining, at last, of a quiet dwelling place—it seemed that the fleshly plan of David was meeting with real success, that Providence was smiling upon him. Yes, it is often this way *at first* when a Christian takes things into his own hands—to carnal reason the sequel shows he did the right thing. Ah, but later on, he discovers otherwise. One false step is followed by another, just as the telling of a lie is usually succeeded by other lies to cover it. So it was now with David. He went from bad to worse.

“And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him” (1Sa 27:4). This too would seem to confirm the thought that David had acted wisely and that God was blessing his worldly scheme, for his family and people now rested safely from the approaches of their dreaded foe. But when everything is going smoothly with the Christian and the enemy ceases to harass him, then is the time, generally speaking, when he needs to suspect that something is wrong with his testimony, and beg God to show him what it is. Nor was Saul’s cessation of hostility due to any improvement of character, but because he dared not to come where David now was. “Thus many seem to leave their sin, but really their sins leave them; they would persist in them if they could” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?” (1Sa 27:5). David knew from experience how jealous were kings and their favourites, so to prevent the envy of Achish’s courtiers, he deemed it well not to remain too near and receive too many favours at his hands. Probably the idolatry and corruption which abounded in the royal city made David desirous of getting his family and people removed therefrom. But in the light of the sequel, it seems that the principal motive which prompted him to make this request was that he might have a better opportunity to fall upon some of the enemies of Israel without the king of Gath being aware of it. The practical lesson for us is that, when we forsake the path of God’s appointment, a spirit of restlessness and discontent is sure to possess us.

David presented his request to Achish very modestly, “Give me a place in *some* town in the country, that I may dwell there,” where they could enjoy greater privacy and more freedom from the idolatry of the land. Six hundred men and their families would crowd the royal city, and might prove quite a burden, while there was always the danger of the subjects of Achish regarding David as a *rival* in state and dignity. But to what a low level had God’s anointed descended when he speaks of himself as the “servant” of Achish! How far from communion with the Lord was he, when one of the uncircumcised is to choose his dwelling-place for him! A child of God is “the Lord’s *freeman*” (1Co 7:22). Yes, but to maintain this in a practical way, he must walk in faith and obedience to Him, otherwise he will be brought in bondage to the creature, as David was.

“Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day” (1Sa 27:6). Originally this city had been given to the tribe of Judah, (Jos 15:31), then to Simeon (Jos 19:5), though it seems that neither of

them possessed it, but that it came into the hands of the Philistines. “Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day” (1Sa 27:6). Being given unto David, who shortly after became king, this section was annexed to the crown-lands, and ever after it was part of the portion of the kings of Judah. So that it was given to David not as a temporary possession, but under God, as a permanent one for his descendants. Truly, the ways of the Lord are past finding out.

“And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months” (1Sa 27:7). “But rest reached by self-will or disobedience is anything rather than peace to the heart that fears God and loves His service. David could not forget that Israel, whom he had forsaken, was God’s people, nor that the Philistines, whom he had joined were God’s enemies. He could not but remember his own peculiar relation to God and to His people—for Samuel had anointed him and even Saul had blessed him as the destined king of Israel. His conscience, therefore, must have been ill at ease, and the stillness and rest of Ziklag would only cause him to be more sensible of its disquietude” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899).

“And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: for those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land” (1Sa 27:8). “When the consciences of God’s servants tell them that their position is wrong, one of their devices not unfrequently is, to give themselves, with fresh energy, to the attainment of some right end, as if rightly directed or successful energy could atone for committed evil, and satisfy the misgivings of a disquieted heart. Accordingly, David, still retaining the self-gained rest of Ziklag, resolved that it should not be the rest of inactivity, but that he would thence put forth fresh energies against the enemies of God and of His people. The Amalekites were nigh. The Amalekites were they of whom the Lord had sworn that He would have war with Amalek from generation to generation. David therefore went up against them and triumphed” (Benjamin W. Newton).

Those which David and his men invaded were some of the original tribes which inhabited Canaan, and were such as had escaped the sword of Saul and had fled to more distant parts. His attack upon them was not an act of cruelty, for those people had long before been divinely sentenced to destruction. Yet though they were the enemies of the Lord and His people, David’s attack upon them was ill-timed, and more likely than not the chief motive which prompted him was the obtaining of food and plunder for his forces. “Nothing could be more complete than his success—‘David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel.’ (1Sa 27:9). Ziklag was enriched with spoil and that the spoil of the enemies of the Lord. What prosperity then could be greater—what apparently more immediately from God”? (Benjamin W. Newton).

A solemn warning, which we do well to take to heart, is pointed out for us in verses 1 Samuel 27:8-9, namely, not to measure the right or wrong of a course of conduct by the *success* which appears to attend it. This principle is now being flagrantly disregarded, the scripturalness or unscripturalness of an action concerns few professing Christians today, so long as it seems to produce good results, this is all that matters. Women are tolerated in the pulpit, worldly devices are brought into the “church,” fleshly and high-pressure methods

are adopted by “evangelists,” and so long as crowds are drawn, the young people “held,” and “converts” made, it is argued that the end justifies the means. If “souls are being saved,” the great majority are prepared to wink at almost anything today, supposing that the “blessing of God” (?) is a sure proof that nothing serious is wrong. So the children of Israel might have reasoned when the waters flowed from the rock which Moses disobediently smote in his anger. So David might have concluded when such success attended his attack upon the Amalekites! To judge by visible results is walking by sight. To measure everything by Holy Writ and reject all that is out of harmony therewith is walking by faith.

“And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish” (1Sa 27:9). Mark well the closing words of this verse. One had thought that Achish was the last man whom David would wish to see at this time. It had been far more prudent had he returned quietly to Ziklag, but as we pointed out in a previous article, when a saint is out of communion with God and controlled by unbelief, he no longer acts according to the dictates of common sense. A striking and solemn illustration of that fact is here before us. O that writer and reader may lay this well to heart—*faith and wisdom* are inseparably linked together. Nothing but folly can issue from an unbelieving heart, that is, from a heart which has not been won by divine grace.

“And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to day?” (1Sa 27:10). No doubt the king of Gath was surprised, as he had reason to be, when he saw David and his men so heavily laden with their booty, and therefore does he inquire where they had been. Sad indeed is it to hear the reply given, “And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites.” Though not a downright lie, yet it was an equivocation, made with the design of deceiving, and therefore cannot be defended, nor is it to be imitated by us. David was not willing that Achish should know the truth. He did not now play the part of a madman, as he had on a former occasion, but fearful of losing his self-chosen place of protection, he dissembles unto the king. The Amalekites were fellow-Canaanites with the Philistines, and if not in league with them, Achish and his people would probably be apprehensive of danger by harbouring such a powerful foe in their midst and would want to expel them. To avoid this, David resorted to deception. O what need has writer and reader to pray daily, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

HEART WORK

Part Five

“God is not the author of confusion” (1Co 14:33). No, the devil causes that, and he has succeeded in creating much in the thinking of many, by confounding the “heart” with the “nature.” People say, “I was born with an evil heart and I cannot help it.” It would be more

correct to say, "I was born with an evil nature, which I am responsible to subdue." The Christian needs to clearly recognize that *in addition to* his two "natures"—the flesh and the spirit—he has a heart which God requires him to "keep." We have already touched upon this point, but deem it advisable to add a further word thereon. I cannot change or better my "nature," but I may and must my "heart." For example, "nature" is slothful and loves ease, but the Christian is to redeem the time and be zealous of good works. Nature hates the thought of death, but the Christian should bring his heart to desire to depart and be with Christ.

The popular religion of the day is either a head or a hand one, that is to say, the labouring to acquire a larger and fuller intellectual grasp of the things of God, or a constant round of activities called "service for the Lord." But the *heart* is neglected! Thousands are reading, studying, taking "Bible-courses," but for all the *spiritual* benefits their souls derive, they might as well be engaged in breaking stones. Lest it be thought that such a stricture is too severe, we quote a sentence from a letter recently received from one who has completed no less than eight of these "Bible-study courses," "There was nothing in that 'hard work' which ever called for self-examination, which led me to really know God, and appropriate the Scriptures to my deep need." No, of course there was not. Their compilers—like nearly all the speakers at the big "Bible conferences"—*studiously* avoid all that is unpalatable to the flesh, all that condemns the natural man, all that pierces and searches the conscience. O the tragedy of this *head* "Christianity."

Equally pitiable is the *hand* religion of the day, when young "converts" are put to teaching a Sunday school class, urged to "speak" in the open air, or take up "personal work." How many thousands of beardless youths and young girls are now engaged in what is called "winning souls for Christ," when *their own* souls are spiritually starved! They may "memorize" two or three verses of Scripture a day, but that does not mean their souls are being fed. How many are giving their evenings to helping in some "mission," who need to be spending time in "the secret place of the Most High" (Psa 91:1)! And how many bewildered souls are using the major part of the Lord's day in rushing from one meeting to another, instead of seeking from God that which will fortify them against temptations of the week. O the tragedy of this *hand* "Christianity"!

How subtle the devil is! Under the guise of promoting growth in "the knowledge of the Lord," he gets people to attend a ceaseless round of meetings, reading an almost endless number of religious periodicals and books, or under the pretense of "honouring the Lord" by all this so-called "service." He induces the one or the other to *neglect* the great task which GOD has set before us—"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Pro 4:23). Ah, it is far easier to speak to others, than it is to constantly use and improve all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain it in sweet and free communion with God. It is far easier to spend an hour reading a sensational article upon "the signs of the time," than it is to spend an hour in agonizing before God for purifying and rectifying grace!

This work of keeping the heart is *of supreme importance*. The total disregard of it means that we are mere formalists. "My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26). Until *that* be done, God will accept nothing from us. The prayers and praises of our lips, the labour of

our hands, yea, and a correct outward walk, are things of no value in *His* sight, while the heart be estranged from Him. As the inspired apostle declared, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [*love*], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [*love*], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [*love*], it profiteth me nothing" (1Co 13:1-3). If the heart be not right with God, we cannot *worship* Him, though we may go through the form of it. Watch diligently, then, your love for Him.

God cannot be imposed upon and he that takes *no* care to order his heart aright before Him is a hypocrite. "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, *but their heart* goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument" (Eze 33:31-32). Here are a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from the words, "as my people." Like them, but not of them! And what constituted them impostors? Their outside was very fair—high professions, reverent postures, much seeming delight in the means of grace. Ah, but their *hearts* were not set on God, but were commanded by their lusts and went after covetousness.

But lest a real Christian should infer from the above that *he* is a hypocrite too, because many times his heart wanders, and he finds—strive all he may—that he cannot keep his mind stayed upon God either when praying, reading His Word, or engaged in public worship, to him we answer, the objection carries its own refutation. Thou sayest, "strive all I may." Ah, if you *have*, then the blessing of the upright is yours, even though God sees well to exercise you over the affliction of a wandering mind. There remains still much in the understanding and affections to humble thee, but if you are *exercised* over them, *strive against* them, and *sorrow over* your very imperfect success, then that is quite enough to clear thee of the charge of reigning hypocrisy.

The keeping of the heart is supremely important because "out of it are the issues of life" (Pro 4:23). It is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. The heart is the warehouse, the hand and tongue but the shops. What is in *these* comes from *thence*—the heart contrives and the members execute. It is in the heart the principles of the spiritual life are formed, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil" (Luk 6:45). Then let us diligently see to it that the heart be well stored with pious instruction, seeking to increase in grateful love, reverential fear, hatred of sin, and benevolence in all its exercises, that from within these holy springs may flow and fructify our whole conduct and conversation.

This work of keeping the heart is *the hardest of all*. "To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains, but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon Him—this will cost something! To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy, but to get thy heart broken for sin whilst

thou are confessing it, be melted with free grace, whilst thou art blessing God for it, be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to *keep* thy heart in *this* frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pain of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin and compose the external acts of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter—even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this. But to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up a holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is *not* easy" (John Flavel, 1630-1691).

Ah, dear reader, it is far, far easier to speak in the open air than to uproot pride from thy soul. It calls for much less toil to go out and distribute tracts, than it does to cast out of your mind unholy thoughts. One can speak to the unsaved much more readily than he can deny self, take up his cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of obedience. And one can teach a class in the Sunday school with far less trouble than he can teach himself how to strengthen his own spiritual graces. To keep the heart with all diligence calls for frequent examination of its frames and dispositions, the observing of its attitude toward God, and the prevailing directions of its affections, and that is something which no empty professor can be brought to do! To give liberally to religious enterprises he may, but to give himself unto the searching, purifying, and keeping of his heart, he will not.

This work of keeping the heart is *a constant one*. "The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done. This labour and our life end together. It is with a Christian in his business as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea. If they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard and we are weary. There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses' hands, whilst Israel and Amalek were fighting below (Exo 17:12). No sooner do Moses' hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes" (John Flavel).

As long as we are in this world, we must exercise the greatest diligence in protecting the heart. A significant type for the need of this is found in Numbers 19, "This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean" (Num 19:14-15). How many of our readers have sufficient discernment to perceive the *spiritual* meaning of this? Ponder it a moment before you read further. The "tent" into which "death" has entered, is this world (Rom 5:12). The "vessel" is the human heart (Mat 25:4; 2Co 4:7). The vessel which hath "no covering bound upon it" is an *unkept* heart and this is *defiled* by the presence of death! It is a striking illustration of the world's corrupting influence entering as soon as the heart be unguarded. But if the heart be "covered"—protected, vigilantly kept—then the world cannot harm it.

Having sought to show that the keeping of the heart is the great work assigned the Christian, in which the very soul and life of true religion consists, and without the performance of which all other duties are unacceptable to God, let us now point out some of the corollaries and consequences which necessarily follow from this fact:

1. The labours which many have taken in religion are lost. Many great services have been performed, many wonderful works wrought by men, which have been utterly rejected of God, and shall receive no recognition in the day of rewards. Why? Because they took no pains to keep their hearts with God in those duties. This is the fatal rock upon which thousands of vain professors have wrecked to their eternal undoing—they were diligent about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. O how many hours have professors spent in hearing, reading, conferring, and praying! and yet as to the supreme task God has assigned, did nothing. Tell me, thou vain professor, when didst thou shed tears for the coldness, deadness, and worldliness of thy heart? When didst thou spend five minutes in a serious effort to keep, purge, improve it? Thinkest thou that such an easy religion can save thee? If so, we must *inverse* the words of Christ and say, “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth unto life, and many there be that go in thereat.”

2. If the keeping of the heart be the great work of the Christian, then how few *real* Christians are there in the world! If everyone who has learned the dialect of Christianity and can talk like a Christian, if everyone who has natural gifts and abilities, and who is helped by the common assisting presence of the Spirit to pray and teach like a Christian, if all who associate themselves with the people of God, contribute of their means to His cause, take delight in public ordinances, and pass as Christians, were real ones, then the number of the saints would be considerable. But alas, to what a little flock do they shrink when measured by *this* rule. How few make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, judging their motives. Ah, there is no human applause to induce men to engage in this difficult work, and were hypocrites *to* do so, they would quickly discover what they do not care to know. This heart-work is left in the hands of a few hidden ones. Reader, are *you* one of them?

3. Unless real Christians spend more time and pains about their hearts than they have done, they are never likely to grow in grace, be of much use to God or be possessors of much comfort in this world. You say, “But my heart seems so listless and dead”—do you wonder at it, when you keep it not in daily communion with Him who is the fountain of life? If your body had received no more concern and attention than your soul, what state would it now be in? O my brother or sister, has not your zeal run in the wrong channels? God may be enjoyed even in the midst of earthly employments, “Enoch walked with God...and begat sons and daughters” (Gen 5:22)—he did not retire into a monastery, nor is there any need for you to.

4. It is high time the Christian reader set to this heart-work in real earnest. Do not you have to lament, “They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (Song 1:6)? Then away with fruitless controversies and idle questions. Away with empty names and vain shows. Away with harsh censuring of others—turn upon thyself. You have been a stranger long enough to this work. You have trifled about the borders of religion too long. The world has deterred you from this vitally necessary work too long. Will you not now resolve to look better after thy heart? Haste thee to thy closet.

5. He that *will* keep his heart must take heed against plunging himself into a multiplicity of earthly business (either in his worldly calling or so-called religious “service”) so that he is unable to make his spiritual and eternal interests his chief concern.

You say, "But I must live," yes, and you must die! Put the claims of God and your heart first, and He will not suffer thy body to starve! Then take heed lest you neglect your soul by gratifying the immoderate clamouring of the flesh. Christ rebuked Martha because she was troubled about "many things," and assured her that but *one* thing was "needful." O say with David, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I *seek after*; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple" (Psa 27:4).

DISPENSATIONALISM

5. *The Zion of God*

"I have been brought up, since my conversion, under dispensational teaching—pre-millennial. Now just where does the kingdom, as they teach it, come in? Does the Word of God teach a literal kingdom? It seems to, at least in the prophets and the Revelation. I realize that there is too much sensational preaching and not enough practical godliness being taught or lived." Our main purpose in giving this extract from a letter recently to hand, is because it supplies an illustration of a mistake which is commonly made today. There is a certain class of preachers whose boast it is that they understand and interpret the Bible *literally* and their hearers are made to believe that this is one of the principal tests of orthodoxy. It is greatly to be feared that such men unwittingly condemn themselves, for in their ignorance they use a term concerning which few of them seem to know its meaning.

The best dictionaries tell us the word "literal" signifies, "according to the letter." Now in the New Testament, there are a number of verses which present some pungent contrasts between the "letter" and the "spirit." In Romans 2:27, the Holy Spirit asks, "Shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?" The Jews supposed that a *literal* compliance with the law of circumcision fully met God's requirement, overlooking Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6. Hence, he is told, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom 2:29). "That of the heart, in the spirit" signifies that which penetrates to the roots of the soul, that which is inwardly efficacious. "Not in the letter" means, not that which was merely outward, according to the *literal* commandment.

Again, in 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul said of Christ's servants, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." "These words therefore express concisely the characteristic difference between the law and the Gospel. The one was external, the other spiritual. The one was an outward precept, the other an inward power. In the one case, the law was written on stone, in the other on the heart. The one therefore was *letter*, the other *spirit*" (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878). The Pharisees of Christ's day were "literalists" and quite incapable of perceiving the *mystery* (like a kernel inside the shell) contained beneath the

letter. Alas that so much of modern "Christianity" is little better than a revival of the principles of Judaism. Alas that "dispensationalists" are as blind to the *spiritual* purport of Scripture as the Pharisees were when Christ said, "Whither I go, ye cannot come," and they answered, "Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come" (Joh 8:21-22)!

Infidels have often alleged the Bible is full of contradictions. A charge which the well-meaning friends of the Bible have promptly denied. It is true there are not, and cannot be, any *real* contradictions in *God's* Word, yet it is also a fact that there are numbers of *verbal* contradictions. For example, we are told in 1 Samuel 28:6, "Saul inquired of the LORD," whereas in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, we read that Saul died because he "inquired not of the Lord." Again, in Proverbs 15:29, we are told, "The LORD is far from the wicked," whereas in Acts 17:27, we read that the Lord is "*not far* from every one of us." Again, in Romans 10:13, we are told, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," whereas in Proverbs 1:28, we read, "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." Again, in Matthew 5:8, we read, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," whereas in 1 Timothy 6:16, it is said of God, "whom no man hath seen, nor can see." Our purpose in citing these passages is not to stumble the faith of the weak, but to stain the pride of those who are wise in their own conceits.

The passages referred to above ought to make it plain unto every candid mind that something more than a slavish adherence to the letter of the Scriptures is required if we are to understand them aright. Those who confine themselves to the principle of literalism will find it a hopeless task to reconcile such verses, but they who are not misled by the mere sound of words and their apparent surface meaning, should have no difficulty with them. Saul's inquiry of the Lord was a hypocritical one and therefore not regarded by Him as a real inquiry at all. The wicked are far from God in a moral and spiritual sense, though as the Preserver of their beings, His hand daily holdeth their souls in life (Psa 66:9). It is only the calling upon the Lord from a penitent and contrite heart which brings salvation. The glorified will "see" or apprehend God to a far greater degree than they do now, but the finite creature will never be able to fully comprehend the Infinite.

In view of all that has been said above, it is scarcely surprising that the "literalists" of our day, the carnal "dispensationalists," are completely at sea upon what the Scriptures have to say about "Zion," for they see in it nothing more than a mountain located in Palestine. And thus one of the most blessed subjects treated of in the pages of Holy Writ is virtually reduced to an absurdity by these gross materialists. Nor has the writer any hope that *he* can convert them from their errors. It requires just as truly a miracle of grace to deliver one who has been caught fast in *this* snare, as it does to deliver a victim of Romanism, for the former is just as certain that he is "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15), as the latter is sure he belongs to "the only real church of Christ on earth." But we do trust it will please God to use these articles to purge out of some of His own people the poison they have unconsciously imbibed from present-day leaders.

"But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved" (Psa 78:68). "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall

establish her" (Psa 87:5). "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come" (Psa 102:13). Now is it not apparent to any spiritual mind that to insist that "Zion" in these verses refers to some material mountain in Palestine is to reduce the Word of God unto a meaningless absurdity? How pitiable such a gross and carnal concept is may further be seen by this passage, "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (Psa 132:13-14).

Now there are a number of plain passages in the Old Testament which show that "Zion" is another name for the people of God. For example, "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt" (Psa 74:2). "Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD" (Psa 97:8). "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" (Isa 40:9). "And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, *Thou art my people*" (Isa 51:16).

The key to our present subject, though, is found in the New Testament, namely, Hebrews 12:22-23, "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly *and church of the Firstborn*." Let us look closely at this. First of all, let us note attentively the particular epistle in which this blessed declaration is made. It is found in the epistle to the Hebrews, being addressed unto "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1). The great theme of that epistle is, The immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. That theme is unfolded in several chapters. It comes out prominently in the twelfth Let the interested reader turn to ponder carefully Hebrews 12:18-24, where Sinai is the *symbol* of Judaism and Sion is the *symbol* of Christianity.

It will be observed that the above passage abounds in striking and solemn contrasts—other antitheses not there specified are equally noteworthy. Everything is in sharp opposition between them. Sinai is located in one of the driest and dreariest places on earth—in a "howling desert," fitly representing the law which can afford neither succour nor refreshment. Mount Zion was situated in the midst of that land which "flowed with milk and honey," meet emblem of the Gospel. Sinai means "cliff," an object which is forbidding, barren, desolate. Zion signifies "sunny or shone upon," as facing the south, ever basking in the warm rays of the sun. God came down on Sinai for only a brief season. He dwells in Zion forever. On the one, He appeared in terrible majesty. In the other, He is manifested in grace and blessing. At Sinai, the typical mediator trembled, saying, "I exceedingly fear and quake." On Zion, Christ is crowned with glory and honour. The former, we are "*not* come unto" (Heb 12:18)—the latter, we *are* "come unto" (Heb 12:22).

It may be pointed out that the material mount Zion, figure of the spiritual Zion, was one of the mountains belonging to the range of Hermon (Deu 4:48)—the interested reader will find it profitable to look up the references to "Hermon" and ponder their *spiritual* significance. It lay to the southwest of Jerusalem, being the oldest and highest part of that

ancient city. It was outside the city itself and separate from it, though frequently identified with it. Mount Zion had two heads or peaks—Moriah, on which the temple was built, the seat of the *worship* of God and the other, whereon the palace of David was built, the *royal* residence of the kings of Judah—a striking figure of the priestly and kingly offices of Christ, owned by the church! Thus, Zion was situated in the best part of the world—Canaan, the land which flowed with milk and honey, in the best part of that land—in Judah's portion, in the best part of his heritage—Jerusalem, and in the best part of the metropolis—the city of David, 2 Samuel 6:12.

It is deeply interesting and instructive to trace the *history* of mount Zion. Originally it was the habitation of the Jebusites, a company of the idolatrous and cursed Canaanites, "The Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Jos 15:63). How that reminds us of, "Remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh...without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph 2:11-12). David was the one who wrested it from them, "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites...Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (2Sa 5:6-7). So Christ secured His elect by His victory over Satan. David fortified Zion for his own use, 1 Chronicles 11:7-9. Thus we see how suited it was to be the figure of the church of God. Many other Scriptures bear this out.

1. Zion was the object of God's choice, "For the LORD hath chosen Zion" (Psa 132:13). 2. It was the place of His habitation, "Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion" (Psa 9:11), compare 1 Timothy 3:15; 2 Corinthians 6:16. 3. It was a mighty fortress, "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever" (Psa 125:1), compare "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat 16:18). 4. It was the most excellent of all cities, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Psa 48:2), "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Psa 50:2). 5. It was the special object of God's love, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Psa 87:2), compare Ephesians 5:25. 6. It was the place where God's elect are born, "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her" (Psa 87:5).

7. It was the place of salvation, "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come *out of Zion!* when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people," that is, when He grants them a revival (Psa 14:7). 8. It was the place of divine blessing, "The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion" (Psa 128:5). Yea, it was the place of eternal life, "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for *there* the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa 133:3). 9. It was the object of divine promises, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness" (Isa 1:27), "The Redeemer shall come to Zion" (Isa 59:20), "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified" (Isa 61:3). 10. It was the place of His throne, "The LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever" (Mic 4:7).

Thus, "Zion" was very frequently a name given by God to His true church in Old Testament times and therefore was it also a blessed *type* of His church in New Testament

times. As Hebrews 12:22 declares, *we* “are come unto mount Zion” which means that Christians are interested in (have a title to) all the privileges which God made to her. Now it is obvious that we have *not* come unto any earthly or material “Zion,” but we *have* unto those *spiritual* realities and blessings of which she was the emblem. How unspeakably solemn that *this* is the very thing which the “dispensationalists” so emphatically deny, yea, hold up to ridicule. They, in their blindness, see nothing more in all those Old Testament passages than something which is *Jewish*. 1 Peter 2:5-6 plainly bursts their empty bubble, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, *I lay in Zion* a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.”

Before passing from Hebrews 12:22-23, let it be pointed out that “mount Zion,” the “city of the living God,” and “the heavenly Jerusalem,” are three names for the same thing. In Psalm 46:4, we read, “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High,” and Psalm 48:1-2 identifies “the city of God” with “Zion,” “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion.” So also does Psalm 87:2-3, “The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, *O city of God*.” This figure of the “city” is also contrastive from Israel at Sinai, *in the wilderness*, where they had neither rest nor refuge. In a city there is order, defense, safety.

The church is called the “City of God,” first, because He is its Builder. Second, because He indwells it. Third, because it is under His sovereign rule. It is there He disposes of His children into a spiritual society. Carefully note how this same figure is used in Ephesians 2:19, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but *fellowcitizens* with the saints.” The church is called the “heavenly Jerusalem,” first, because its concerns are not of this world. Second, because most of its inhabitants are already there. Third, because our citizenship (Phi 3:20) and inheritance is there. Let the reader grasp firmly this fact that, whatever is spoken of the “city of God” or of “Jerusalem” in the Old Testament *that is spiritual*, that contains in it the love and free favour of God, is *all* made OURS, and is for faith to appropriate and enjoy.

A FAITHFUL WORD

The present article is a letter which was written by a minister of the gospel to a gentleman of high repute in religion at New York:

Dear Sir. As you in your letter manifest a great deal of candour and openness of mind, I, in making a reply, will use great plainness of speech and will, at the same time, hope that the Lord may seal instruction on your heart. It may be you are all that you say you are and a great deal more. You may also perform all that you say you do and yet fall vastly short of

being a Christian in heart. You may, as it seems you are, be a member of a church; be in high esteem among professors of religion, concerning which you speak with emphasis; be thought well of by your minister, which you appear to glory in; be much applauded for your zeal and diligence, which seems a sweet morsel to you; possess a good talent for exhortation, respecting which you throw out some broad hints; but alas! know you not, my good sir, that all of the above things may be true, and yet you remain a total stranger to the *power of God* and to a *radical change of heart*. Believe me when I say that you may attend public service constantly, pray frequently, and read continually, and yet, as to spiritual things, be as blind as a bat and as dead as a stone. Real religion, sir, and vital godliness, are something more than all this and I am sorry to find your letter savours so much of the former, and nothing of the latter.

You seem to make a great bustle and noise, but what does it all amount to, when properly dissected and squared by the Word of God? Why, to me it appears like a puff of empty air. I do not write these lines, sir, to discourage you, but to correct you wherein I conceive you miss the mark in matters of the highest importance. I hope I shall not be thought to trespass when I say, if you have not had the fountain of sin in your heart broken up; if you have not discovered and felt the wrath of God in His holy law going out against you as a sinner; if you have not found yourself under the arrests of divine justice and thereby exposed to eternal ruin; if you have not had that sound sense of your lost condition which has made you flee from the wrath to come; if you have not had the knowledge of salvation, by the forgiveness of your sins, communicated by the Holy Spirit; if Christ has not been formed in your heart the hope of glory; if you have not laid hold on eternal life; if you have not hungered and thirsted after divine instruction, under a feeling sense of gross darkness upon you, and be desirous of knowing more of Christ Jesus by the Spirit's testimony of Him, whom to know is life eternal; if you have not been made, in some degree, sick of sin, sick of self, sick of this world, and willing to part with and leave all for Christ; if these things, I say, have not in some measure taken place and been experimentally known by you, your hope is fallacious, your peace is a false peace, your faith is fantastical, your joy is delusive, your knowledge is speculative, your love of God is feigned, your fear is servile, your change of heart is mere notion, your religion is vain, and you are yet in your sins, notwithstanding all the great outcry you are now making about religion.

Real Christianity, sir, consists in something more than mere notion or whim. It is not what a man may think he is, but what God has actually made him to be, by an act of mere mercy and grace that constitutes him a true disciple of Christ. Not a few in this our day are, it is to be feared, setting themselves down satisfied, as I fear you are, under an impression that all is right between God and their souls, merely because they are well enough thought of to be taken into church fellowship and some other outside things, such, I mean, as you lay so much stress upon in your letter. O sad mistake! A most awful delusion is this, which a day that is quickly coming will disclose and make known, and then how grievously will they be surprised and astonished who have made lies their refuge, falsehood their covering, and an arm of flesh their support. I wish that you, dear sir, may not prove to be one of this sort. I shall, however, have just cause to fear it until you can give a better account of yourself than you have hitherto done.

Your state, sir, in the sight of God, is not bettered by you joining a church, though you fondly imagine it is. Permit me to say, that if your heart is not right in the sight of God, which it cannot be unless God Himself sets it right, it matters not what outward show you may make, or what people may think or say of you. *It is Christ in the heart*, "the hope of glory," that constitutes a real Christian, whereas, the name of Christ in a mere notion of Him will avail nothing at all in the day of trial or on a death-bed. Many have known enough of Christ, of themselves, of the law of God, and the Gospel of His Son, of the plan of salvation, and of the stability of the covenant of grace, *in the theory*, to get themselves a great name among men and a high station in a church for many years. And yet, when they have been summoned to appear in another world, have found themselves totally destitute of that which alone can make a dying bed easy. There was but one leper out of ten that returned to give glory to God and he was a stranger, a poor Samaritan (Luk 17:18). And so it often happens among the great crowd who make a profession of religion and become members of churches. It is only now and then a poor stranger that comes in for the blessings of the Gospel and he is generally looked upon by graceless professors as a Samaritan, and as one in nowise friendly to them. When the Lord singles out one for Himself from the company of graceless professors, and opens his ears to discipline, opens his heart to receive the truth, opens his eyes to see wondrous things out of His law, and opens his mouth to show forth His praise, such a one will speak of what he has known, felt, handled, and tasted of the Word of Life, and as he can very generally tell a hypocrite from a real saint, he will take the liberty of pointing him out. And as he also knows truth from error, he will receive the former, and reject the latter, though the latter proceed from a clergyman. But as such proceedings will be sure to prove very offensive to those who have only a name to live, *his* name will soon be cast out as evil, and he will be viewed as a pestilent fellow, and as one who is trying to turn their churches upside down, whereas he is only endeavouring to undeceive those who are deceiving themselves and others.

I do not write thus, sir, with a view of discouraging you from attending to that which is good, but to caution you against wolves in sheep's' clothing and against trusting in a name to live, while, it may be you are dead. Man is naturally prone to fly to a false refuge and to content himself with a false peace. This is like Zoar, "near to flee to," (See Gen 19:20-22) and it is one of the hardest things in the world to persuade a man that *his* hope is delusive. And yet I am convinced if God should stir up his wrath against a man who is in a delusion, however confident he may be of the safety of his state, it would cause his beauty to fade like a leaf. And if this, sir, should take place in your experience, it is more than twenty to one with me that you would cut a very different figure from what you now expect. O sir, try to think how astonished you would stand in case your present certainty of salvation were overturned and brought to nought, and your confidence rejected! It is surprising to think, and impossible to tell, how the burning wrath of God revealed in a broken law, and sent home with full force to the conscience, does scorch, wither, consume, and burn up a man's false faith, false hope, false joy, and false peace. It is evident from the oracles of God that none will be able to stand with peace and composure in the day of the Lord's wrath, but those who have their anchorage in Christ Jesus, having fled for refuge to lay hold of that blessed hope set before us in the Gospel. All false props, sir, will in that day totter, sink, and fall under the man who leans upon them and the guilty soul thus left will

be exposed to all the curses contained in the Book of the law. A mere form of religion, an outward show in the flesh, will then put off its flattering charms, and appear in its true garb. O if men were duly sensible of this, they would not dream of taking rest in such outside things as they now do.

Believe me, dear sir, it is not an outward profession of religion, but an inward possession of the grace of God, that constitutes a Christian. Not knowledge in the head, but the root of the matter in the soul that ensures eternal life to us. Not what a man says, but what he feels that proves that he has got divine life in his inward part. Not what he does for God, but what God has done for him that makes him meet for heaven. It is not fancy, but faith, which purifies the heart. Not a vain confidence, but a good hope through grace, which keeps and bears up the soul in the day of evil. Not the esteem of men, but the approbation of God, which brings peace to the troubled conscience. Not being united to a church here below, but being one with Christ, the true and living vine, that makes our standing eternally secure. Not the natural passions stirred up, but the oil of joy poured into the soul, that makes a man forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Not partaking of bread and wine at the Lord's table, but feeding on Christ by faith, that makes him thrive and grow. It is not a blind zeal, but a zeal according to knowledge derived from the Spirit's teaching and testimony of Christ in a man's understanding and conscience that makes him approved of God. It is not what we may be thought of by those around us, but what God's thoughts toward us are that will be the turning point and decide our case when death comes. These things, it may be, will greatly astonish you, but as sure as there is a God, they are the things on which eternal salvation hangs. Look to it, therefore, and do not trifle with or think lightly of things of such vast moment. For if you do, it may prove to your cost in a day yet to come. If our names are not found written among the living in the spiritual Jerusalem, we shall be cast out as withered branches, let us attain to what place of honour and greatness we may in the church below. As to your being in good standing among professors, that is but a small matter when compared with some other things, and how a man of your sense and reading can be so exalted and enthusiastically carried away with such little things, I cannot account for in any other way than by this rule, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Co 2:14). Should God be pleased, in the multitude of His tender mercies, to open your eyes and bring you to see things as they really are, you will look back on your present state with amazement and horror, seeing it to be as perilous as I now conceive it to be.

Dear sir, do turn these things over in your mind and search closely into your standing before the Lord, and be not deceived, for God is not mocked. I would advise you to read the Bible very attentively and earnestly to beg of God to set you right if you are wrong, as it is greatly to be feared you are. Pay less regard to the good opinion that men may have of you, as they will not be your judges in the great day of account. Remember, God will be the righteous Judge at that day and that by *His* decision you will stand or fall. Consider also how many have been deceived in the end about the business of salvation and the goodness of their state, though they seem to before possess an unshaken confidence of their being right. Examine well the ground of your present hope, the foundation of your faith, and what authority you have to draw a determined conclusion that your heart is right

in the sight of God. Bear with me while I once more say that I stand in doubt of you and that I can see no just reason on the face of your letter for you to conclude, as you now do, that your condition in the sight of God is good. This, however, I know, God is able to do great things for you and I know not but He will, and perhaps He is at work with you now. If this should be the case, the work will go on and be brought to perfection, and you will have cause to admire His grace and to be thankful for His unspeakable mercy. Seek for these things, my dear sir, with all diligence and God grant you a successful issue. With regard to myself, I must needs say, that the esteem and good will of men, even of spiritual men, have but little weight with me. Yea, no weight at all in reference to my standing before God. I am constrained to look to a much higher source for a foundation on which to venture my immortal part. Nothing short of a believing view of Christ as crucified for me and the witness of the Holy Spirit with my spirit that I am a child of God, will carry me ascendant over fears and doubts whether all is right or not. And inasmuch as nothing short of these things will satisfy my own soul, I must still doubt the safety of those who are contenting themselves with such things of so trifling a nature as you appear to do. It may be that my great plainness will give offence, but I must risk that. Write again, sir, whenever you think proper. Adieu. J. Osbourne, 1843.

VILE!

We are rather afraid that its title will deter some from reading this article. We hope it will not be so. True, it does not treat of a popular theme, nay, one which is now very rarely heard in the pulpit, nevertheless, it is a scriptural one. Fallen man *is* “vile,” *so* vile that it has been rightly said, “He is half brute, half devil.” Nor does such a description exceed the truth. Man is “born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12) and he is “taken captive by him [the devil] at his will” (2Ti 2:26). Perhaps the reader is ready to reply, “Ah, that is man in his unregenerate state, but it is far otherwise with the regenerate.” From one viewpoint that is true; from another, it is not so.

Did not the Psalmist acknowledge, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was *as a beast* before thee” (Psa 73:22)—unteachable, untractable, kicking against God’s providential dealings, not behaving like a man, much less like a saint! Again, did not Agur confess, “Surely I am *more brutish* than any man” (Pro 30:2). True, we never hear such lamentations as these from those who claim to have received their “Pentecost” or “second blessing,” nor from those who boast they are living “the victorious life.” But to those who are painfully conscious of the “plague” of their own heart, such words may often describe their case. Only recently we received a letter from a dear brother in Christ, saying, “The vanity and corruption that I find within, which refuses to be kept in subjection, is so strong at times that it makes me cry out ‘my wounds do stink and are corrupt’.”

Does the reader object against *our* appropriation of the Psalms and Proverbs, and say, “We in this New Testament dispensation occupy much higher ground than those did.”

Probably you have often been told so by men, but are you sure of it from the Word of God? Listen, then, to the groan of an eminent Christian, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom 7:14). Do you never feel *thus*, my reader? Then we are sincerely sorry for you. As to the other part of the description of fallen man, "half devil," did not Christ say to regenerate Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me" (Mat 16:23)? And are there not times when writer and reader fully merit the same reproof? Speaking for myself, I bow my head with shame, and say, "Alas there is."

"Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4). This was not said by Cain in a remorseful moment after his murder of Abel, nor by Judas after he had betrayed the Saviour into the hands of His enemies. Instead, it was the utterance of one of whom God said, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect [sincere] and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8). Was Job's language the effect of extreme melancholy, induced by his terrible afflictions? If not, was he justified in using such strong language of self-deprecation? If he was, are Christians today warranted in echoing the same?

In order to arrive at the correct answer to the above questions, let us ask another. *When was it* that Job said, "Behold, I am vile"? Was it when he first received tidings of his heavy losses? No, for then he exclaimed, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Was it when his friends reasoned with and reproved him? No, for then he vindicated himself and boasted of his goodness. Then *when* was it that Job declared, "Behold, I am vile"? It was when the Lord appeared to him and gave him a startling revelation of His own wondrous perfections! It was when he stood in the all-penetrating light of God's immaculate holiness and was made to realize something of His mighty power.

Ah, when a soul is truly brought into the presence of the living God, boasting ceases, our comeliness is turned into corruption (Dan 10:8), and we cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa 6:5). When God makes to the soul a personal revelation of His wondrous perfections, that individual is effectually convinced of his own wretchedness. The more we are given to discern the ineffable glory of the Lord, the more will our self-complacency wither. It is in God's light, and in that only, "We see light" (Psa 36:9). When He shines into our understandings and hearts, and brings to light "the hidden things of darkness" (1Co 4:5), we perceive the utter corruption of our nature and are abominable in our own eyes. While we measure ourselves by our fellows, we shall, most likely, think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom 12:3), but when we measure ourselves by the holy requirements of God's nature, we cry I "am but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). True repentance changes a man's opinion of himself.

Is, then, a Christian today warranted in saying, "Behold, I am vile"? Not as faith views himself united to the One who is "altogether lovely," but as faith discerns, in the light of the Word, what he is by nature, what he is in and of himself, he may. Not that he is to hypocritically adopt such language in order to gain the reputation of great humility. Nay, such an utterance is *only* to be found upon our lips as it is *the feeling expression* of our hearts, particularly is it to be owned before God, when we come to Him in contrition and in confession. Yet is it also to be acknowledged before the saints, even as the apostle Paul

cried publicly, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24). It is part of our testimony to own (before those who fear the Lord) what God has revealed to us.

"Behold, I am vile." Such is the candid and sorrowful confession of the writer. I am vile *in my imaginations*. O what scum rises to the surface when lusts boil within me. What filthy pictures are visioned in "the chambers of his imagery" (Eze 8:12). What unlawful desires run riot within. Yes, even when engaged in meditating upon the holy things of God, the mind wanders and the fancy becomes engaged with what is foul and fetid. How often does the writer have to acknowledge before God that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" in him, "but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa 1:6). Nightly does he avail himself of that fountain which has been opened "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec 13:1).

2. I am vile *in my self-will*. How fretful am I when God blows upon my plans and thwarts my desires. What surgings of rebellion within my wicked breast when God's providences displease. Instead of lying placidly as clay in the Potter's hand, how often do I act like the restive colt, which rears and kicks, refusing to be held in with bit and bridle, determined to have my own way. Alas, alas, how very little have I learned of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart" (Mat 11:29). Instead of "the flesh" in me being purified, it has putrefied. Instead of its resistance to the spirit weakening, it appears to be stronger each year. O that I had the wings of a dove, that I could fly away *from myself*.

3. I am vile *in my religious pretences*. How often I am anxious to make "a fair show in the flesh" and be thought highly of by others. What hypocrisies have I been guilty of in seeking to gain a reputation for spirituality. How frequently have I conveyed false impressions to others, making them suppose it was far otherwise within me, than was actually the case. What pride and self-righteousness have swayed me. And of what insincerity have I, at times, been guilty of in the pulpit. Praying to the ears of the congregation instead of to God, pretending to have liberty when my own spirit was bound, speaking of those things which I had not first felt and handled for myself. Much, very much cause has the writer to take the leper's place, cover his lips, and cry "Unclean, unclean"!

4. I am vile *in my unbelief*. How often am I still filled with doubts and misgivings. How often do I lean unto my own understanding instead of upon the Lord. How often do I fail to expect from God (Mar 11:24) the things for which I ask Him. When the hour of testing comes, only too frequently are past deliverances forgotten. When troubles assail, instead of looking off unto the things unseen, I am occupied with the difficulties before me. Instead of remembering that with God all things are possible, I am ready to say, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Psa 78:19). True it is not always thus, for the Holy Spirit graciously keeps alive the faith which He has placed within, but when *He* ceases to work, and a trial is faced, how often did I give my Master occasion to say, "How is it that ye have no faith?" (Mar 4:40).

Reader, how closely does your experience correspond with the above? Is it true that, "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Pro 27:19)? Have we been describing some of the symptoms of your diseased heart? Have you ever owned before God, "Behold I am vile"? Do you bear witness to the humbling fact before your

brethren and sisters in Christ? It is comparatively easy to *utter* such words, but do you *feel* them? Does the realization of this truth make you “blush” (Ezr 9:6) and groan in secret? Have you such a personal and painful sense of your vileness that, often, you feel thoroughly unfit to draw nigh unto a holy God? If so:

1. You have abundant cause *to be thankful to God* that His Holy Spirit has shown you something of your wretched self, that He has not kept you in ignorance of your woeful state, that He has not left you in that gross spiritual darkness that enshrouds millions of professing Christians. Ah my stricken brother, if you are groaning over the ocean of corruption within and feel utterly unworthy to take the sacred name of Christ upon your polluted lips, then you should be unfeignedly thankful that you belong not to that great multitude of self-complacent and self-righteous religionists of whom it is written, “They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down” (Jer 8:12). Much cause have you to praise the God of all grace that He anointed *your* sin-blinded eyes, and that now, in His sight, you are able to see a little of your hideous deformities, and cry “I am black” (Song 1:5).

2. You have abundant cause *to walk softly before God*. Must not the realization of our vileness truly humble us before Him, make us smite upon our breast, and cry, “God be merciful to me, the sinner!” Yes, such a prayer is as suited to the maturest saint as it was when first convicted of his lost estate, for he is *to continue as he began*, Colossians 2:6, Revelation 2:5. But alas, how quickly does the apprehension of our vileness leave us! How frequently does pride again dominate us. For this reason we are bidden to, “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to *the hole of the pit* whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). Beg God to daily show you your vileness that you may walk humbly before Him.

3. You have abundant cause *to marvel at the surpassing love of the Triune God* toward you. That the Eternal Three should have set Their heart upon such a wretch is indeed the wonder of all wonders. That God the Father should foreknow and foresee every sin of which you would be guilty in thought and word and deed, and yet have loved thee “with an everlasting love” must indeed fill you with astonishment. That God the Son should have laid aside the robes of His glory and be made in the likeness of sin’s flesh, in order to redeem one so foul and filthy as I, was truly a love “that passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:19). That God the Holy Spirit should take up His residence and dwell in the heart of one so vile, only proves that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

PRACTICAL GODLINESS

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jam 1:22). It is much, very much to be thankful for, when the Holy Spirit has illumined a man’s

understanding, dispersed the mists of error, and established him in the truth. Yet *that* is only the beginning. The Holy Scriptures are “profitable” not only for “doctrine,” but also “for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Ti 3:16). Observe well the order there. Before we are ready to be instructed “in righteousness” (right doing), there is much in our lives that God “reproves,” and which *we* must “correct.” Necessarily so, for before conversion, *everything* in our lives *was wrong!* For all we did was for the gratifying of self, with no thought or concern for God’s honour and glory. Therefore, the first great need and the primary duty of every young convert is *not* to study the Old Testament types or puzzle his brains over prophecy, but to diligently search the Scriptures in order to find out what is pleasing and displeasing to God, what He forbids, and what He commands.

If you have been genuinely converted, then your first concern must be to form all the details of your life—in the home, in the church, in the world—*so as to please God*. And in the actual bringing of this to pass, the order will be “cease to do evil; learn to do well” (Isa 1:16-17); “Depart from evil, and do good” (Psa 34:14 and cf. 37:27). There has to be a breaking down, before there can be a building up (Ecc 3:3). There has to be an emptying of self, before there is the filling of the Spirit. There has to be an unlearning, before there is a true learning. And there has to be a hating the “evil,” before there is loving of the “good” (Amo 5:15 and cf. Rom 12:9).

Now the extent the young Christian *does* use the Holy Scriptures in a practical way, regulating his thoughts, desires, and actions by their warnings and encouragements, their prohibitions and precepts, will very largely determine the measure in which he will enjoy God’s *blessing* on his life. As the moral Governor of this world, God takes note of our conduct and sooner or later manifests His displeasure against our sins, and His approval of a righteous walk, by granting that measure of prosperity which is most for our good and His glory. In the keeping of His commandments “there is great reward” (Psa 19:11), in *this* life (1Ti 4:8). O how much spiritual and temporal blessing most Christians miss through careless and disobedient conduct, see Isaiah 48:18!

The tragic thing is that instead of the average young Christian diligently studying God’s word so as to discover all the details of the divine will for him, he does almost anything and everything else. Many a one engages in “personal work” or some form of Christian “service,” while *his own* life remains full of things *displeasing to God!* The presence of those displeasing things in his life hinders God’s blessing upon his soul, body, and temporal affairs, and to him it has to be said, “Your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer 5:25). God’s word to His people is, “Work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12). But O how little of this “fear and trembling” is to be found anywhere today! Instead, there is self-esteem, self-confidence, boasting, and carnal security.

There are others who give themselves unto the diligent study of doctrine, but generally, they fail to realize that the doctrine of Scripture is not a series of intellectual propositions, but is “the doctrine which is *according to godliness*” (1Ti 6:3). The “doctrine” or “teaching” of God’s holy Word is given not for the instruction of our brains, but for the regulation of all the details of our daily lives, and this in order that we “may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Ti 2:10). But *that* can only be realized by a

constant reading of the Word with one dominant purpose—to discover *what* God forbids and *what* He commands, by our meditating frequently on what we have read, and by fervent prayer for supernatural grace to enable us to obey.

If the young convert does not early form the habit of treading the path of practical obedience to God, then he will not have His ear when he prays! 1 John 3:22 states plainly one of the main conditions which we must constantly seek grace to heed, if our petitions are to meet with acceptance, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” But if instead of submitting unto God’s holy requirements, we follow our own inclinations, then it will be said, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa 59:2). This is unspeakably solemn. O what a difference it makes whether or not we have experimental access to God!

Not only does the young Christian, by following a course of self-pleasing, reduce his prayers to empty words, but he brings down upon himself the rod of God and everything goes wrong in his life. That is one reason why, in these hard times, many Christians are suffering just as sorely as the poor worldlings are. *God is displeased with their ways* and does not show Himself strong on their behalf (2Ch 16:9). In this connection, reread “Sound the Alarm” and “Not Ashamed” in the March and April issues. There we have sought to point out the remedy, which calls for *real* heart-humbling before the Lord, godly sorrow, true repentance, unsparing confession, the firm determination to reform our ways, and *then* (and not before) faith’s counting on God’s mercy and a patient expectation that He will work wonders for us if we now tread the path of full submission to Him.

(The above is the substance of a letter [revised] recently sent to a young brother, who [alas] has had no teaching along the lines of practical godliness, and who is now in sore straits.)

REPENTANCE

To His servants Christ gave commandment “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luk 24:47). “Beginning at Jerusalem” not because of any dispensational reason, but because grace would commence with the most unlikely and unworthy ones. But O how little repentance is being preached today, even by those claiming to be the true servants of God. “Believe, believe, only believe” is being sounded forth widely, but where is the voice now being lifted up in the wilderness crying, “Repent ye”? Are not the claims of God to be pressed upon men, and their utter and awful failure to meet those claims, *before* we tell them of His grace? And what are the claims of God upon every human creature? Are they not summed up in, “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart.” Is He not entitled to this? Can He ever demand less? Is He not infinitely worthy of being loved? And is not that love to be expressed by obedience, by complete subjection to Him, by seeking to please Him in

all things? And is not the failure of fallen man to meet this righteous demand of God that which constitutes the very “sinfulness of sin”? Is it not that, so far from having been in subjection to God’s will and having sought His pleasure, man has turned aside to his own way and sought only to please himself? And is it not the first duty of God’s servants to expound and explain this solemn fact, pressing it on the consciences of their hearers?

Does not the Old Testament precede the New? Does not the ministry of John the Baptist precede that of Christ? Does not Romans 1:18 to 3:20 precede Romans 3:21-26? Does not repentance toward God precede faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ? Certainly it does, but where does it do so in the preaching of present-day evangelists? None can truly believe in Christ till their hearts are broken before God through a deep realization of the awfulness of their condition in His sight. The ground must be plowed before it can receive the seed. To preach the finished work of Christ to those who have little or no realization of their awful condition before Him—that is, the consciousness that the whole of their life has consisted of self-pleasing, to the utterly ignoring of God—is only to cast pearls before swine. And what will be the effect? What *is* the effect the world over? This—those who have never been convicted by the Holy Spirit will cordially assent to the letter of the Gospel, receive the Word with joy, accept Christ as their personal Saviour, and go to swell the crowd of those having a form of godliness, but who are total strangers to a supernatural, conscience-plowing, contrite heart-giving, and transforming power. Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 55:7, Acts 3:19 are just as much a part of God’s Word as is John 3:16, yet none would ever discover it from what he now hears, even in the Gospel halls. O my brethren in the ministry, preach *repentance* if you would honor God, discharge your responsibility, and be faithful unto the souls of your hearers. Suppose it makes you to be unpopular? What of that if you receive *Christ’s* well done in that day!

There is no way left but this; fair means, as we say, will not do; good words, a glorious gospel, entreatings, beseeching with blood and tears, will not do. Men are resolved to put God to the utmost of it; if He will have them, He must fetch them, follow them, catch them, lame them; yea, break their bones, or else He will not save them. Some men think an invitation, an outward call, a rational discourse will do; but they are much deceived. There must be a Power, an exceeding great and mighty Power attending the Word, or it works not effectually to the salvation of the soul. I know that these things leave men without excuse; but they are not enough to bring men home to God. Sin has hold of them; they have sold themselves to it; the power of the devil has hold of them, they are his captives at his will; yea, and more than all this, their will is one with sin, and with the devil, to be held captive thereby; and if God gives not contrition, repentance, or a broken heart for sin, there will not be, no, not so much as a mind in man, to forsake this so horrible a confederacy and plot against his soul (John Bunyan, 1628-1688).

